

Uncovering the reasons and Ethical concerns behind Publishing in a Predatory journal

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the ethical concerns related to these journals and publishing in them. These concerns are poor editorial standards with lack of proper editorial board, editorial offices, academic fraud, deception and misinterpretations, trust deficit in research literature and lack of archiving policy. It is of utmost importance that the scholarly groups, researchers, academicians, editors, editorials boards, institutions, publishers should be aware of these predatory journals, and avoid supporting these journals by not publishing in them, or being a part of their editorial board members. Faculty members should also be discouraged for knowingly publishing in them. Scholarly community should support the legitimate and valid scholarly research enterprises.

Keywords: Predatory journals, Publication ethics, Scholarly research, Article processing charge, Legitimate journals, Pseudo-journals

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INTRODUCTION

As internet use gets increased there is a bulk of spam emails and kind invitations researchers receive by predatory journals. Although these unsolicited emails are annoying for scientific community but yet they have been the most attractive way of capturing their prey. Researchers especially in developing countries need to understand that publication numbers is now an obsolete concept for establishing an academic reputation. What matters most is what is published and where it is published^{1,2}.

Predatory journals have badly troubled the scientific community although measures have been taken to shake off the effect of these journals by formulating guidelines and publishing research on highlighting the deceptive tactics and common traits of these

journals. Researchers have also proposed a very novel criterion called “Predatory Rate” (PR) to detect these journals. This rate is based on Beall’s criteria of ranking predatory journals. It is calculated by assigning a value to criteria groups including Editorial section (emails, affiliations and numbers of editors), Review process and publishing (review time, under review process, papers in each issue and special issues), announcements (availability of journal full address, using bogus index and metrics and sending spam emails for receiving papers) and publication policies and charges.

Research departments and institutional libraries should have an access to guidelines by organizations like Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)^{3,4}.

Search Strategy for Literature:

For this literature review databases including Embase, ERIC, Web of Science, Medline, Google scholar, PsycINFO and EBSCOhost was searched using the MeSH keywords of predatory, junk, illegitimate, spam publishing, open access and pseudo journals. Boolean operators (AND/OR) were also used to combine these key words for extensive retrieval of literature. This search was performed from 2013 to date.

DISCUSSION

Predatory journals are those journals which are abusing the author pay model. They forego peer review and the sole purpose is to earn money^{5,6}. Jeffery Beall published his first blacklist of “predatory open-access journals and publishers on the Postorous blog platform. Initially there were 20 publishers in the list in 2010 and now they are more than 300. He estimated that

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25% of open-access journals that comprise of almost 4000 journals are predatory. The three most important pillars of scholarly publications that are research ethics, publication ethics and business ethics are very easily compromised for profits and personal gains. Soon after the launch of predatory publishers they became the first choice of authors needing quick and number of publications^{1,3}.

These “pay to publish journals” must be a source of PhD and master’s degrees for a number of people adding a number of certificates, promotions and credentials to their credit. Before the launch of open access journals the scholarly publishing community had a “gentleman’s agreement” on maintaining the high levels of research and publications⁴.

Some open access journals follow gold (authors pay) model leading to conflict of interest. The more research papers they accept and publish the more money they get and more revenue they generate.^{5,6} The scholarly publishing industry is also responsible for its own decline because of poor quality control and regulating system⁷⁻¹⁰.

Ethical concerns:

There are many ethical concerns related to publishing in predatory journals and authors should not waste their scholarly work by choosing to publish in predatory journals^{11,12}.

1. **Misrepresentation:** They misrepresent regarding the services they offer and what actually they are. They don’t provide their indexing, editing and peer reviewing services. They often lack their contact information and websites addresses. The information regarding editorial board members, their academic appointments and exact locations are lacking. Individuals listed in their editorial board sometimes don’t even know that they are in their editorial board.
2. **Lack of Editorial and publishing policy:** There are certain standards and practices set by scholarly publishing committees for improving the quality of published work. These predatory journals lack these standards. Submitted work is not screened for plagiarized content. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and Council of Science Editors (CSE) have formulated certain codes of conduct and professionalism that help educate editors about their roles and responsibilities¹³⁻¹⁵. Journal Publishers and owners also have ethical responsibilities mentioned in COPE’s Code of Conduct for Journal Publishers¹⁶. Legitimate and genuine journals never promise and guarantee publications and selectively contact the authors but predatory journals contact people from unrelated fields and guarantee fast publications.
3. **Academic dishonesty:** Authors submitting to predatory journals are in fact supporting these journals through their APCs and encouraging publishing malpractices. Such authors just want to enhance the number of their publications no matter if they are published in predatory journals. Although it is difficult to establish that whether an author is intentionally publishing in a predatory journal or not however a trend and series of publishing in such journals may raise certain suspicions¹⁶.
4. **Wasting the research work:** Authors who have published in such journals should either try to retract their work from predatory journals or try to get it submitted in a legitimate journal. But if that is not possible he should admit that his work, efforts and funding all is wasted out¹⁰.
5. **Trust deficit in research work:** Mostly bogus research is published in these journals which creates trust deficit among the readers regarding research work.
6. **Inaccessible in archive:** Research work published in these journals may not be visible and approachable in future and might be disappeared from the site.
7. **Lacking the screening processes:** There is a possibility of publishing plagiarized work since they don’t have any plagiarism policy. If any such thing happens and a legitimate author of a research tries to take any legal action against this journal for publishing his work under someone else’s name, he will not be able to get contact to its editorial office or any other responsible person of this journal. It will be difficult to take any legal actions because no one knows who owns the journal.

There are a number of reasons behind publishing in the predatory journals. Some of the reasons are summarized in table-I¹⁷⁻²¹.

How to avoid predatory journals?

This phenomenon caught attention of one of the well-regarded and reputed scientific journals named Nature. A checklist was included by Nature on “how to perform due diligence before submitting to a journal or a publisher¹.”

Institutions need to educate their students and faculty regarding these journals. They should be taught of code of research conduct and professionalism and also the consequences of submitting in these journals. Certain tools need to be taught regarding how to suspect any journal as predatory. Simple steps of “think. Check. Submit” allow authors to identify predatory journals²². On behalf of WAME Lane and Winker has developed a tool that provides authors an algorithm comprising of a list of warning signs to identify any suspicious predatory journals^{17, 23-25}.

One way to curb predatory journals is to take legal actions against them²⁶. Most of the Journals from countries like Pakistan may not meet the criteria for indexation and may inadvertently fall into the category of predatory journals²⁷.

What if a manuscript is sent to a journal without realizing its predatory nature?

The author must immediately write to journal to withdraw his manuscript for he really wants to get it published in a reputable journal which would have been impossible if his work is already under consideration by some other journal. He should write letters to editors, managing editors and all the possible addresses giving reference to his previous communications. He might never get any response from the predatory journal. In this scenario should author submit his work to some other journal? He can but should give proper disclosure regarding his previous submission and withdrawal to a predatory journal²⁸⁻³⁰.

Table-I: Reasons behind publishing in predatory journals:

	Reason	Elaboration
1.	Knowingly	Some authors choose to submit in these journals intentionally, however it's difficult to find out but the pattern of submission and publications in similar journals gives a fair idea about deliberate selection of these journals.
2.	Unknowingly	Sometimes authors make submissions to these journals unknowingly without realizing the nature of the journal.
3.	Need a promotion	Some authors publish in these journals for getting promotions in their fields.
4.	Increasing number of publications	Fast track publications and getting a number of publications to the credit in a short time make these journals favorable for publishing a poor quality or plagiarized research work.
5.	Improving CV	For improving the credentials and CV authors are interested to publish in predatory journals.
6.	Proving worth as a researcher	For enhancing the rapport and showing a number of publications to their credit.
7.	Quick & speedy publications on credit	Less time is required to get any research work published in these journals as compared to a legitimate journal with a tedious peer review and screening process.
8.	An urge to publish in International journals	Authors tend to get inspired by the term "International" with the journal's name. They are inclined to get their work published in international journals to earn more credit
9.	Poor publishing standards of journals	Poor publishing standards make it possible to get published even a poor quality work that encourages authors to select this journal for lax publishing policies.
10.	Unrealistic expectations of institutions from employees	Institutions having unrealistic and undue expectations from their employees and driving them towards achieving those target number of publications, indirectly force them towards the quantity and not the quality of research work.

CONCLUSION

To enhance quality research and scholarly publishing, the scholarly groups, researchers, academicians, editors, editorials boards, institutions, and publishers should be aware of these predatory journals, and avoid supporting these journals by not publishing in them, or being a part of their editorial board members either. Faculty members should also be discouraged for knowingly publishing in them. Scholarly community should support the legitimate and valid scholarly research enterprises^{7, 29-34}.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Sughra U: Conceived idea, Designed research methodology, Manuscript writing

Imran M: Literature search, Manuscript drafting

Kausar S: Literature review, Final critical review of manuscript

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