

Review Article

Authors beware! Publishing in predatory journals is harmful

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ABSTRACT

Predatory publishing is now rapidly growing and becoming a global challenge to scientific communities. Predatory publications pose a danger that could undermine the quality, integrity, and reliability of published scientific research works. They harm the career of those authors who published on them. The researchers should be aware of the quality of journals while publishing their research results. In this review, we briefly summarize the ways to spot out predatory publications, their harmful effects, and strategies to stop them. Authors should know the lists of predatory journals/publishers which are available on Beall's list on the internet. Predatory journals take advantage of authors by asking them to publish for a fee without providing peer-review or editing services. The young and inexperienced authors are easy victims of predatory publications. The predatory publications are worthless, just a waste of time, resources, money, and efforts. The objective of this review paper was to create awareness about predatory journals among researchers and scholars.

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INTRODUCTION

Predatory publishers charge authors to publish their works, but do not provide a bonafide peer-review process. Predatory publications approve, not, or do fewer peer review submissions (Stratford, 2012). Without peer review, they publish the paper. These predatory journals are not indexed, generally do not have an Impact Factor, and typically have poor reputations in the community (Cress & Sarwer, 2019). Predatory journals also have misleading and flawed index (<https://predatoryjournals.com/metrics>). They have low or non-existent impact factors, are not indexed in any of the major databases, and some of the journals also publish plagiarized articles. The Copernicus Meaning index is announced through its website. Young scientists and scholars are easy victims of the predatory publications (Shrestha et al., 2020). Predatory journals are often targeted at getting researchers perplexed by having metric names very similar to real metrics. Predatory publishers retain bogus methodologies

on its website, which includes SCIJOURNAL.ORG (International Scientific Institute), Directory of Journal Quality Factor and Scientific Indexing Services (SIS), Cite Factor, Journals Impact Factor (JIFACTOR), Science Journal Factor Impact Factor, Global Impact Factor (GIFACTOR), Universal Impact factor.

Predatory publishers pledge that submitted papers will be published within one week or so within a very brief period. Regularly, they accomplish spam emails to authors, requesting them to confirm their manuscripts. The publication fee is not accessible on the website. Predatory journals will, without their authorization, construct fake scholars or list scholars. Junior researchers from developing countries (Kramer, 2020) are also predator journals' reviewers. Predatory publishers have editorial team, kept without their consent (Elliott, 2012; Neumann, 2012). Predatory publications have more than one editor-in-chief on several journals. In their journal names, words such as International; European, New, British, American, etc. are included by predatory journals (Elliott, 2012). Predatory journals also assert their offices are in one country, whereas contact information is in another. The website's connections and phone numbers are not operating. Several predatory journals have their offices in the US, the UK, Australia, or Canada, however, derives originally from Nigeria or India, Pakistan (Naidu & Dell, 2019). In the editing and correction of mistakes, the predatory journals are so incompetent that they contain grammar errors (Mehrpour & Khajavi, 2014). In predatory journals, technical editing mistakes are evident. They publish several issues per volume as well as the number of publications tends to cover each issue.

Authors must be aware of these predatory journals for several reasons (Hunziker, 2017; Rydholm, 2017), not the least of which is their unethical nature, promotion of counterfeit science, and the “watering down” and devaluation of solid scientific research (Culley, 2018). The papers you publish in predatory journals are unlikely to be cited, which will affect the impact of your research. By publishing in predatory journals, authors can harm themselves for their career and damage the reputation of their works. All authors, reviewers, and editors must remain vigilant about the predatory journals and publishers and should work together to discourage predatory publishing practices. The educational and research institutions should set the rules for publication in the journals that must be indexed in Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports (JCR, Clarivate Analytics, formerly Thomson-Reuters), or other famous scientific databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and MEDLINE.

Ways to spot out predatory publications

The characteristics of predatory publishing include: Publish unrelated topics; Accepting articles quickly with little or no peer review; Aggressively campaigning for authors to submit articles or serve on editorial boards; Listing reputed academics as editorial board members without their permission, and not allowing them to resign from editorial boards; Appointing fake academics to editorial boards; Mimicking the web site style and name of more established journals; Notifying authors the article fees only after papers are accepted; Contact information may or may not be readily available for publisher; Making misleading claims about the publishing operation, such as a false location; Citing fake or non-existent impact factors and; Using ISSN numbers improperly (ODU, 2020). Scientists must learn how to comprehend

predatory journals and not extend their study or research findings in those journals (Shrestha *et al.*, 2018a).

The Code of Conduct of the COPE (the Committee on Publication Ethics) should serve as guidelines for evaluating journals whether a legitimate or predatory (Elliott, 2012). Similarly, INSAP (<https://www.inasp.info>), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), and Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) can be accompanied for publication by good rules of accountability and protocols. To be a reliable journal, it must have crossref (<https://www.crossref.org>) papers that have specific Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs), renowned editorial team, Copyright, International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), and also must be an OASPA member. The rights to use must also be transparent, for instance, the Creative Commons License (CC by License). Clarivate Analytics Web of Science, the International Social Sciences Bibliography, Scopus, the Norwegian Registry for Scholarly Journals (Level 2) (Naidu & Dell, 2019) are the reputed indices. If the journal does not appear in the DOAJ, it should cause suspicion in double review before publications are submitted (Agrawal, 2020). If the Bethesda’s National Library of Medicine (NLM) Catalog indicates “Not indexed for MEDLINE currently,” it implies the journal could be ambiguous (Agrawal, 2020). There are a number of scientific organizations, such as the COPE, the DOAJ, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP), the OASPA, and the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) that might generate new approaches to stop the growth of predatory journals (Forero *et al.*, 2018). The COPE-registered journals and publishers are legitimate.

Table 1. Differences between mainstream and predatory open access journals

Characteristics	Mainstream journals	Predatory journals
Publication cost	High	Low
Acceptance to publication time	Peer review time is from weeks to months; once accepted, publication time is from months to years	Once accepted, immediate Publication
Manuscript acceptance rate	Low acceptance rate	High acceptance rate
Peer review	Strict	Uncertain or absent
Plagiarism	Strict or low	Unchecked, high
Location of publishers	Mainly in developed countries	Mainly in developing countries
Copyright ownership	Author may retain or assign to publisher	Publisher bypasses process (ownership may not be assigned)
Abstracting and Indexing	Recognized and with high qualifications	With less strict criteria or without indexing
Impact factor	Real impact factor	Lucrative
Editorial team	Reputable scientists with numerous publications	Often fictitious names or names used without permission
Impact factor	Real impact factor	Low or absent, fake impact factor
Financial target	Lucrative or with high costs to be open access	Lucrative

Forero et al. (2018); Masten and Ashcraft (2016).

The authors should closely check whether journals are registered in these trustworthy websites or not before submitting their articles. Major trustworthy websites such as ALPSP, INSAP, United Kingdom Serials Group (UKSG), and Scientific Technical Medical Journal (STM).

There is an international initiative called “Think. Check. Submit.” (<http://thinkchecksubmit.org>) that provides several recommendations to potential authors. *Think. CheckSubmit* is a site to help researchers identify trusted journals for their research. It contains a simple *checklist* researchers can use to assess the credentials of a journal or publisher. Authors should look at the journal website some of the articles published in the journals to assess their quality; this quick review may be all that is needed to identify predatory journals (Forero *et al.*, 2018).

Articles accepted by predatory publishers are considered to be “previously published,” whereas the legitimate publishers may not be able to accept them for publication in one of their journals, assuming that the predatory publisher releases them for publication elsewhere (Dadkhah & Darbani 2016). Before submitting manuscripts, the authors should know the characteristics of mainstream journals and predatory journals (Table 1). The mainstream journals are those journals which publish excellent research and are typically indexed by the citation databases Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus (Vessuri *et al.*, 2014).

The titles of authentic publishers are De Gruyter, Nature, BioMed Central, Taylor and Francis, Bentham Science, Brill, F1000 Research Ltd, Springer Nature, AIMS Press, Informa Healthcare, Sage Publications, Wiley, CSIRO Publishing, Plos one, Frontiers, PeerJ, MDPI, Oxford University Press, MIT Press and University of Chicago Press, Universities and colleges, registered societies, Cambridge University Press, Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer, CABI emerald publishing and Hindawi.

Harmful effects of predatory publications

Often, the universities require their faculty members and students to publish regularly and this “pressure to publish” may lead to a variety of unethical practices (Al-Adawi & Al-Zakwani, 2016). In developed nations, scholars are much more inclined to publish in predatory journals (Xia *et al.*, 2015). Young academics (MS, Ph.D. students) from universities and young researchers from scientific organizations, regardless of the persuasive criteria of their degree, career advancement, etc., are attempting to publish in predatory journals. In a relatively short period, they want to publish several papers that will boost their intellectual reputation or the influence of their curriculum vitae. If they have published in predatory journals, authors face several challenges. Publishing in a predatory journal can be detrimental to a researcher’s career because institutions are now recognizing their low quality. Specically, articles in illegitimate journals are increasingly being discounted from the publication record of scientists seeking employment or promotion (Culley, 2018). Predatory publisher is a problem because it does little or no peer review, perpetuates bad research, limits ability to publish with reputable publishers (sign away copy right), and can impact career; science may be good but where published hurts.

The publication of predatory content violates scholarly science integrity. The proliferation of predatory journals are endangering the reputation of legitimate journals. Predatory publications may be a source of plagiarized content or manipulated data. The author's works will vanish if the predatory publisher leaves the business. Nicoll and Chinn (2015) observed that if the researchers try to expunge their articles after publishing from the predatory journals, they either seek a refund or fail to return the article. Authors must not publish or cite in predatory journals articles, even though one specific research seems to be reliable, in an attempt to deter predatory publications from growing. If scholars cite papers in scientifically ambiguous publications, the reputation of them may be undermined as much as authors (Severin & Poor, 2019). Publishing in predatory journals degrades or deteriorates scholarly reputations. Shrestha *et al.* (2018a, 2018b) mentioned that authors must avoid to publish their scholarly articles in such journals, which are lacking of reputable journals indexes such as web journal of science's Journal Citation Reports (Clarivate Analytics, JCR, formerly Thomson-Reuters) or other popular scientific databases such as DOAJ, Scopus, MEDLINE, and PubMed. It is assumed that predatory publications are not indexed in well-known scholarly search engines and citations.

Strategies to stop predatory publishing

The novice writers and scientists from the developing countries are victims of predatory publishers (Xia *et al.*, 2015). The overall scheme of the predatory journal may be less detrimental to senior scholars with a range of publications – although it is especially harmful to those who are trying to gain legitimacy, such as masters and students in graduate studies and early technical academics (Clark & Thompson, 2016). Academic administrators and subordinates have a significant role to play in raising the consciousness of predatory journal activities and accusations, risk of getting published, and resources which journals may classify as predatory by a limited amount of effort (Clark & Thompson, 2016). Since predatory publishing undermines the quality, integrity, and reliability of published scientific research works, such practices must be avoided.

Approaches to avoid publication of predatory contents include; (a) Google could contribute to avoid predatory publications. The invitation for authors to publish papers in predatory journals must avoid submitting them. Identifying predatory publications or interrupting predatory publication citations should be done by Google scholar; (b) The international scientific community needs to be established to be able to debate concerns at a high level on predatory publishers. The final list must be filtered and keep the separate mark for predatory publishers, (c) The collection and connection of possibly predatory journals with their websites should include all authorized journals. Sensitivity toward predatory publications must be established; (d) The list and connection of potential predatory publications must be eliminated as quickly as possible for scientific journal storage depositories (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, etc.). A database of Predatory bogus / Hijacked articles / Publishers on your websites must be showcased; (e) The list of predatory journals/publishers must be published through their own websites, by each university and academic organization. Information about principles of scientific reporting and adverse consequences of reporting in falsified publications must be given to all academic students and researchers; (f) Donor organizations

must avoid financing such agencies and initiatives in the fabricated publications that print their research. They must prohibit scholars from publishing in predatory journals; (g) Researchers/scholars more frequently publish bogus articles in comparison to other articles because of low costs for publication. Funding organizations/universities should endorse publishing costs even though scientists / academic students don't have any publishing funds. Financing organizations need to initiate a program to allow a scholar to apply for funding to write a research paper; (h) For the publication of plagiarized research papers, each journal must prohibit, this must report the plagiarism score as Altmetric. The accumulated plagiarism score with all published papers and the impact factor must be focused on every journal; (i) Rating agencies at universities shall cease consideration of academic papers written in bogus university journals. These predatory articles must contain derogatory points; (j) Science journals, therefore, need to establish a more reliable website. The journal name of the domain/website must not be transferable. Regulation must be implemented to prohibit others from possessing a similar domain name.

CONCLUSION

The predatory publications are valueless just a waste of time, resources, money, and efforts. The students, academics, and researchers should be careful to avoid predatory publications to maintain their credentials. The only way to stop predatory publishing practices is for all authors, publishers, and universities to work together to improve the transparency and integrity of science. Universities should educate researchers, especially juniors, about the existence of predatory journals, the dangers they pose, and ways to avoid them. The educational and research institutions should set the rules for publication in the journals that must be indexed in Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports (JCR, Clarivate Analytics, formerly Thomson-Reuters), or other famous scientific databases such as Scopus, DOAJ, PubMed, and MEDLINE. Citation of articles from predatory journals should be discouraged.

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J. Shrestha wrote the whole article.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding publication of this manuscript.

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