

Predatory Journals: Think Before You Publish

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Publication in Scientific journals has been a source of immense satisfaction and pride for the medical community. Although initial motivation to publish in was primarily academic to upgrade scientific knowledge and ones resume, this motivation has seen tremendous change in this millennium. (1) This has been also witnessed in India, with MCI (medical council of India) making it mandatory to publish for appointment and promotions. Although it aimed at improving standards of medical education and research, with time this assumed a "publish and perish syndrome" with mad rush to publish even by paying hefty amounts in a short time of span of time. (2)

This scenario also appeared in other parts of the world, ultimately leading to the birth of murky world of "predatory journals". Predatory journals (a term first coined by librarian, Jeffrey Beall) are bogus or scam journals that send phishing emails offering "open access" publication in exchange for payment, without providing robust editorial or publishing services. They are characterized by their behavior, aggressive recruitment emails, unrealistic promises publication and worthless peer review. They are not indexed in standard databases any research published in them is effectively lost. Their motive is financial gain, and their modus operandi is a corruption of the business model of legitimate open access publishing. (2)

In their recent editorial in journal "Headache",. Roberts JL, have discussed obvious signs that show that journal is potentially predatory journal. (2) These are as follows

1. The most common denominator is the persistent flooding of Email inboxes with rather vague requests for typically encouraged emailing manuscripts to the editorial office.

2. Usually contain a title that could be classed as overly similar or overlapping with a pre-existing title.

3. Numerous errors related to spelling, grammar and syntax on the homepage.

4. These homepages often contained fuzzy or very low-resolution graphics.

5. Frequent mention of inclusion in indexing databases that are bogus; boasts of a citation score that is not in fact the Thomson Reuters Impact Factor.

6. Editorial board often made up of fake names or, when investigated, many editorial board "members" did not mention their "appointment" on their institutional homepages without any knowledge of editors that their name was even included on the editorial board.

7. Only 2% appeared to use a known submission system (such as Scholar One, Editorial Manager, e Journal Press, or even just a homebuilt system).

8. Typical Open Access fee of roughly \$100, compared to a median average of \$1865 for our comparative sample of legitimate journals and \$3000 for traditional subscription journals offering a service to render an article free from access restrictions.

Roberts further goes on to endorse the useful 5-point program to protect yourself from predator journals proposed by Jocalyn Clark in a recent BMJ blog (2, 3) To summarize these points are -

1. Is the journal or publisher listed in Beall's List? If so, it should be avoided, as this "blacklist" is regularly updated and specifies criteria for identifying predatory journals and publishers. (latest update is in 2016).

2. If claiming to be an open access journal, is the journal in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)? This is a sort of "white list," and journals here must meet specific criteria.

3. Is the publisher a member of recognized professional organizations that commit to best practices in publishing, such as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE); the International Association of Scientific, Technical, & Medical Publishers (STM); or the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)

4. Is the journal indexed? Do not accept the journal's claims about being indexed. Instead verify these claims by searching for the journal in databases such as PubMed Central or the Web of Science.

5. Does the journal make efforts towards transparency,

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such as clearly describing its peer review and publication processes, providing contact details of the journal and its staff. Before we conclude, it would be highly unprofessional for us not to discuss and detail some important issues. Beall's list of predatory journals: Jeffrey Beall, librarian at Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver, USA started writing about predatory publishers in 2009 and coined the term predatory publisher in 2010. He publishes a blog called Scholarly Open Access (<http://scholarlyoa.com>) that includes four lists. It is continually updated with latest update in 2016, containing 1117 predator publishers, 1211 standalone predatory journals, 51 Misleading companies that "calculate" and publish counterfeit impact factors and 114 The Hijacked journals. All these can be accessed free of cost at :- <https://scholarlyoa.com/2016/01/05/bealls-list-of-predatory-publishers-2016/>.

I. Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers: <https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>

II. Potential, possible, or probable predatory or questionable standalone scholarly open-access journals: These are low-quality or predatory journals that exist alone on the Internet, with no named publisher. <https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/>

III. The Misleading metrics list includes companies that "calculate" and publish counterfeit impact factors (or some similar measure). <https://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/misleading-metrics/>

IV. The Hijacked journal's list includes journals for which someone has created a counterfeit website, stealing the journal's identity and soliciting articles submissions. <https://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/hijacked-journals/>

Thompson Reuters Journal Citation Reports® and Impact Factor: It is the primary main recognized authority for evaluating journals and authentic source of impact factor. It is a systematic, objective means to critically evaluate the world's leading journals, with quantifiable, statistical information based on citation data. By compiling articles' cited references, JCR helps to measure research influence and impact at the journal and category levels, and shows the relationship between citing and cited journals. The latest Journal Citation Reports of 2016 can be accessed at <http://scientific.thomsonreuters.com/imgblast/JCRFullCovlist-2016.pdf>

Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ): While attempting to define predatory journals it is important to clarify one common misperception: while predatory journals are almost always Open Access, most Open Access journals are far from predatory. Indeed, the majority of Open Access titles are either owned by, or published by, respectable academic societies and legitimate. Hence there is need to understand DOAJ. DOAJ is a community-curated online directory that indexes and provides access to high quality, open access, peer-reviewed journals. The idea for the DOAJ came out of discussions at the first Nordic Conference on Scholarly Communication in 2002, Lund University became the organization to set up and maintain the DOAJ. In 2013, Infrastructure Services for Open Access (IS4OA) took over and is maintaining it. As of September 2016, the database now contains 9,216 journals and 2,323,234 Articles. Can be accessed at: - <https://doaj.org/subjects#>

To conclude, predatory journals is a serious threat, polluting the scientific literature and cheating the authors, wasting their intellect, research, time and money of the victim authors (4). The gravity of the situation can be well judged by latest news in Canadian medical association journal by Carolyn Brown which highlights the plight where a giant open access publisher and conference organizer in southern India is facing charges from the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for "deceiving academics and researchers about the nature of its publications and hiding publication fees ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars," (5). So beware before you publish. Check, cross check and consult before you publish.

References

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