

## Editorial

# Protecting the integrity of scientific research-unmasking predatory publications

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The advent of online scientific content and the increasing demand for academic publications for promotions and grants have paved the way for an alarming phenomenon in the world of scientific research – the “predatory publications.” This editorial aims to shed light on the impact of predatory publications, emphasising the need for awareness, vigilance and collaborative efforts to combat this pervasive problem.

## DEFINING PREDATORY PUBLICATIONS

According to the dictionary, “Predatory” means “anything that is inclined or intended to injure or exploit others for personal gain or profit.”<sup>[1]</sup> Predatory publications are essentially low-quality, usually non-peer-reviewed, journals that prioritise profit over scientific research. They exploit the open-access publishing model and charge exorbitant fees for publishing.<sup>[2]</sup> They often make false claims about their indexation, impact factor and reputation, leading innocent unsuspecting researchers to submit their work under the false assumption of credibility. These journals provide little or no editorial oversight, peer review or quality control.

## WARNING SIGNS

One of the most significant challenges in tackling predatory publications is identifying them. Some key warning signs that should raise suspicion about the journal’s predatory nature include:<sup>[3]</sup>

### Mimickers

Many of these publications present themselves as legitimate scientific journals using deceptive names, logos and similar other tactics to mislead researchers.

### Transparency

Predatory journals often lack transparency in their publication processes, providing minimal or vague information about their peer-review practices, editorial boards and indexing databases. They often use spam email campaigns to solicit submissions from authors.

### Excessive article processing charges

Predatory publishers charge hefty fees for publishing articles, often without providing any substantial editorial services or rigorous peer-review processes.

### Misleading metrics

Predatory publications frequently misrepresent or fabricate metrics such as impact factors or indexing.

### Poor quality presentations

Predatory journals usually have low-quality websites, grammatical errors in their emails and website content and unprofessional layouts.

### Rapid turnovers

Predatory journals have an extremely short acceptance and publication timeframe, sometimes acceptance being received within hours of submission which signifies poor or absent review process.

## IMPACT ON SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY AND PROGRESS

### Erosion of scholarly integrity

When non-peer-reviewed research is published, it can mislead other researchers and the community and lead

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to dissemination of flawed information. This not only erodes trust in the scientific community but also hinders advancement of knowledge and innovation.

### Financial exploitation

Predatory publishers charge hefty article processing fees without providing any quality control measures. These exploitative practices can financially burden researchers while delivering little to no academic value.

### Academic Career and funding implications

Researchers who publish in predatory journals can face reputational damage with an impact on their career prospects, funding opportunities and collaborations. The research work itself may have been original and meritorious but will be looked at with doubts and questions.<sup>[4]</sup> Occasionally, articles published in predatory journals may later become undiscoverable online if the journal stops functioning which can be a source of great disappointment and academic loss.

## COMBATING PREDATORY PUBLICATIONS

Fighting predatory publications requires a collective effort from researchers, institutions and the scientific community at large.<sup>[5]</sup>

- Researchers should educate themselves about predatory publications and learn to identify warning signs
- The authors should resist publishing in such journals and refrain from citing articles published in predatory journals
- Institutions should provide training to researchers on ethical publishing practices
- The authors should be cautious when receiving unsolicited emails or invitations to submit to journals they are not familiar with. They should also check the reputation of the journal before submitting their work by reviewing its editorial board, publication ethics and review process. All websites, links and indexing should be cross verified
- Academic institutions should develop clear policies and guidelines to discourage publication in predatory journals
- Institutions and funding agencies should prioritise research published only in genuine and reputable journals

- Initiatives like the directory of open access journals and Beall's List (now archived) have attempted to identify predatory publishers and promote trustworthy open-access journals. Databases should identify and remove illegitimate journals and publishers from their listings. Researchers should consult such lists before submission
- For career advancements, emphasis should be laid on the quality and authenticity of publications rather than their quantity
- Libraries should avoid listing predatory publishers in their catalogues
- International bodies such as the Committee on Publication Ethics should develop and enforce ethical guidelines to protect the integrity of scientific research.

## CONCLUSION

Predatory publications represent a serious threat to the integrity of scientific research and academic publishing. The threat will continue to exist as long as the number of publications produced remains a criterion for professional advancement and the "publish or perish" culture continues to prevail. Identifying and avoiding these publications requires collaboration between authors, institutions and publishers and a commitment to upholding high standards of quality and transparency.

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