

EDITORIAL

Predatory Journals – Publishing Pirates of the 21st Century

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Keywords

Predatory Journals

Abbreviations

None

All author(s) made substantive intellectual contributions to this study by making substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and giving final approval of the version to be published.

Accepted for publication:

Feb 11th 2022

Chief Editor:

Dr Claire Parkin. Current affiliation is: Kent and Medway Medical School, Canterbury, Kent. CT2 7NT. UK.

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W: <https://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/ajpp/index>

ISSN Number:

Online 2059-3198. Copyright © 2015 by the University of Kent, UK.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE:

The authors have indicated that they have no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose.



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The internet has provided much improved access to knowledge for all members of the population and has enabled easier access to publications. It has transformed academic publication. Prior to the advent of the internet and email, all academic publications were submitted to publishers by post in hard copy and all communications with publishers were either by post or, in some instances by telephone calls. Journals were invariably owned by “learned societies” and funded by membership subscriptions. As a result, there were usually no direct publishing costs for authors. With the advent of online publishing, this situation changed. Subscription journals still exist. However, the model in which authors have to pay fees, to have their papers published, has grown, as has the need

to provide open access to publications. Subscription journals now charge a fee if authors wish their publications to be available on open access, which is a condition for most publicly or charity funded research.

There has also been increased pressure on academics to publish their work. Promotion and the acquisition of research funding depend to a large extent on an excellent publication record. This situation has provided fertile ground for unscrupulous individuals to exploit, by claiming to provide easy and rapid publication in newly established journals for a fee. Such journals are referred to as predatory journals. They are run to make money for their owners and not to maintain high standards of academic quality.

Authors should avoid predatory journals. The website www.predatoryjournals.com defines them as *“Journals that publish work without proper peer review and which sometimes charge large fees for publication. These journals and publishers cheapen intellectual work by misleading scholars, preying particularly on early career*

researchers. The credibility of scholars duped into publishing in these journals can be seriously damaged by doing so.”

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has produced a discussion document on the topic (COPE, 2019) and in December 2021, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) included advice on predatory journals in their updated guidance for editors and writers (ICMJE, 2021). This advice was: *A growing number of entities are advertising themselves as “scholarly medical journals” yet do not function as such. These journals (“predatory” or “pseudo-journals”) accept and publish almost all submissions and charge article processing (or publication) fees, often informing authors about this after a paper's acceptance for publication. They often claim to perform peer review but do not and may purposefully use names similar to well-established journals. They may state that they are members of ICMJE but are not (see www.icmje.org for current members of the ICMJE) and that they follow the recommendations of organisations such as the ICMJE,*

COPE, and World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). Researchers must be aware of the existence of such entities and avoid submitting research to them for publication. Authors have a responsibility to evaluate the integrity, history, practices, and reputation of the journals to which they submit manuscripts. Guidance from various organizations is available to help identify the characteristics of reputable peer-reviewed journals (www.wame.org/identifying-predatory-or-pseudojournals and www.wame.org/principles-of-transparencyand-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing). Seeking the assistance of scientific mentors, senior colleagues, and others with many years of scholarly publishing experience may also be helpful. Authors should avoid citing articles in predatory or pseudo-journals (ICJME, 2021, p. 4)

Over the last four years, the volume of emails, sent to academics by unknown journals, which solicit manuscript submission or editorial board membership or invite the recipient to speak at conferences, run by

previously unknown organisations, have increased. In January 2022, the author of this editorial receives over 50 such emails!

COPE have listed 16 warning signs to help authors identify predatory journals (COPE, 2019, pp. 6-7) The website www.predatoryjournals.com lists ten unethical practices which predatory journals may be guilty of. They are:

1. *Charging exorbitant rates for publication of articles in conjunction with a lack of peer-review or editorial oversight.*
2. *Notifying authors of fees only after acceptance.*
3. *Targeting scholars through mass-email spamming in attempts to get them to publish or serve on editorial boards.*
4. *Quick acceptance of low-quality papers, including hoax papers.*
5. *Listing scholars as members of editorial boards without their permission or not allowing them to resign.*
6. *Listing fake scholars as members of editorial boards or authors.*
7. *Copying the visual design and language of the marketing*

- materials and websites of legitimate, established journals.*
8. *Fraudulent or improper use of International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs).*
 9. *Giving false information about the location of the publishing operation.*
 10. *Fake, non-existent, or misrepresented impact factors.*

COPE reviewed the literature to gain insights into which scholars publish in predatory journals and why they do so. They found evidence that they frequently come from countries in Africa and Asia (Shen and Björk, 2015). When acting as an Editor of two PubMed listed journals, the author of this editorial received a high proportion of manuscripts from authors, who were postgraduates or staff members at one of the over 300 dental schools in India. They were of variable quality and the majority were not accepted. He is also aware that in 2014 fewer than 15% of manuscripts submitted to the Indian Journal of Dental Research were accepted (Eaton, 2014). It is therefore not surprising that the authors of the rejected manuscripts were attracted to predatory journals. It has also been

suggested that the pressure on academic staff to publish leads some authors to predatory journals which promise a very short intervals from the date of submission to the date of publication and a very high acceptance rate (COPE, 2019).

The problem is not unique to medicine. So, in summary the warning to all academic authors and particularly to new authors is beware of predators when selecting a journal to submit a manuscript to or when receiving invitations to join editorial boards of speak at conferences. It is pertinent to remind readers that the Advanced Journal of Professional Practice (AJPP) is an open access journal, with a strict double peer-review policy and that those who publish are not charged a fee.

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