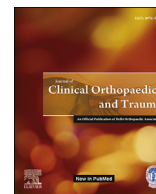




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## Predatory journals – Alarming danger to the society

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## ABSTRACT

Research and publications have taken the driver's seat in the last decade, especially amongst the Orthopaedic surgeons of India (Vaishya and Lal, 2016 Oct-Dec)<sup>1</sup>. Doing research and publishing scientific papers is crucial to practice evidence-based medicine and keep updated on the latest developments. It is also a quick method to get recognized in your field by your peers and colleagues. Sometimes, publishing literature is vital to gain positions in the profession and achieve promotions (Patralekh et al., 2021)<sup>2</sup>. As a result, there is a sudden upsurge in printed literature that is inaccurate or up to the mark. It has become tough to believe the conclusions provided and alter one's clinical practice based on these facts. Hence, before reading a paper, one must learn to assess the journal's quality and its publications. In recent times, there is an upsurge in the number of predatory journals causing harm to the entire research world.

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According to Webster's dictionary, a predator means 'one who injures or exploits others for personal gain or profit'.<sup>2</sup> Predatory journals work on the same principle because they are deceptive and adopt an exploitative academic publishing model based on the publishers' business benefits. These involve charging a publication fee to the authors without checking the contents of the manuscripts for quality and legitimacy. It is in contrast to the recognized journals that have an open-access model of publishing. Here the articles are processed as per established scientific and ethical norms, but the authors are required to pay a declared article processing charges (APC) to the journal. The APC charged by these reputed open-access journals is usually high and is a major barrier to the researchers from the low or low-middle-income countries, who often do not have any available research funding.<sup>3</sup> The researchers are tricked into publishing with them, although some authors may also be aware of their predatory nature when submitting their research. The younger generation of researchers, especially from developing countries, is at higher risk of being misled by predatory publishers.<sup>4</sup>

The predatory journals are not concerned about the quality of work presented<sup>4,5,6</sup>. Their primary interest lies in obtaining the money from authors in the name of APC or registration charges for publication. However, they do not follow the standard editorial processes, proper reviews, and ethical publishing principles. These

journals are not transparent, and one must be able to differentiate these from good journals.<sup>7</sup> Some of the essential contrasting features are:

- Lack of proper editorial and review process
- A fake, non-valid, and an unqualified editorial board
- Non-transparent article processing charges model
- None or suspicious indexing of the journal
- Mimicking name and website to a reputed journal
- Hazy aims and objectives of the journal
- Quick turnaround of the submission and publication (with our proper reviews and revisions)

There are more than 14000 known predatory journals at present, and these are constantly growing.<sup>8,9</sup> Identifying these journals is essential for the researchers before getting into their trap for publishing with them. It is sometimes challenging to identify these, and some quick ways are described below:-

- Check their listing in Beall<sup>8</sup> and Cabell's predatory reports.<sup>9</sup> However, many predatory journals manage to escape from these lists and some journals on these are not predatory in nature. Whereas, some journals may have a change in status from predatory to non-predatory when were they objected. Hence, these reports are not entirely accurate and to be believed exclusively.
- Check the journal listing in a trusted indexing databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), and Directory of Open

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Access Journals (DOAJ). However, many predatory journals have also managed to be listed in the PubMed and Medline. But, every year the indexing agencies like PubMed and Scopus remove many predatory journal, after their scrutiny. Therefore, one should be cautious with finding the status of these predatory journals.

- Check the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India listing of approved journals.<sup>10</sup>
- The journal may have many grammatical errors on its website.
- These journals usually promote International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). It should not be taken as a sole marker for quality as anyone can register and fulfill its requirement to get one. Incidentally, many predatory journals may have a good impact factor. One such example is World Journal of Stem Cells from Baishideng Publishing Group with impact factor of 4.75.
- Lack of clear or transparent processing fees on the journal's website or guidelines to the authors.
- They may promise a rapid review and a fast publication.

There are several disadvantages of publishing in a predatory journal, as mentioned below:

- There is a permanent loss of valuable research in an insignificant publishing journal.
- There is no credit for such work amongst peers and future academic growth.
- Around 60% of the articles published in predatory journals do not get cited over five years.<sup>7</sup>
- As the journal publishing schedule is unclear, the paper may be lost forever in limbo.
- Poor impression on the colleagues and legit academicians, once they see your name attached to such journals.
- A poor readership of the hard work. Publishing in these journals is similar to having published an article in a magazine.

It is intriguing and sometimes obvious that why do some authors opt to publish in these journals:

- It is a quick route to publish your work without hassles and facing rejections.
- Those authors who need to show publications to gain promotions tend to go this way.
- To flaunt their suboptimal or previously rejected work in reputed journals, some authors get it published in these journals anyway.

- To avoid paying the high APC of the recognized open-access journals<sup>3</sup>

The realms of research are boundless. The field is expanding exponentially, and so are the problems related to them. It is crucial to safeguard the quality of papers that we read or refer to. The purpose of research and publications is to read without bias and judgment, gain newly acquired knowledge, and alter clinical practices to benefit patients. It is therefore vital to curb the existence of predatory journals, which may take some time. With constant vigilance, one may be able to identify them quickly and avoid the trap.

The commonly known adage of “Publish or Perish” is undoubtedly essential in the professional success of a researcher or a clinician,<sup>1</sup> but not at the cost of a poor quality publication in a predatory journal. It is our responsibility to safeguard medicine and the future implications that these journals may hold. To quote Peter P. Marra - “Cats are opportunistic predators by nature. If given a chance to kill a bird or other small animal, most cats will take it. That is just the way cats are made”. The predatory publishers are somewhat similar to these ‘cats’!

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