

Predatory Publishing: A Medical Student Author's Perspective

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Background

The landscape of research is, for us, the average medical student, a widely unexplored area with potential new threats. Once the first work of any of us is published, a previously unknown individual has now become an aspiring researcher, and as inexperienced as its nature is, a broad range of hunters are looking upon its exotic new prey. By any means possible, these predatory publishers may easily lure us with appealing invitation e-mails to submit our manuscript to their questionable journals, accept the work in a matter of days, and finally ask us for article processing charges (APC) to generate funds for their self-interest.^{1,2}

Moreover, these highly dubious publishers also take advantage of our limited knowledge in scientific research and scholarly publishing practices in comparison with senior researchers; and also of our desire of being published, as the pressure of improving one's curriculum has become our constant struggle in search of increasing employability and career progression in the highly competitive nature of the medical world.^{3,4} Therefore, all the aforementioned factors combined with our lack of information about this type of journal, make us more vulnerable to their deception.

As the number of predatory publishers in both paper and electronic formats has expeditiously augmented over the last decade^{1,5}, the quantity of researchers who were unaware of their deceptive nature has also proportionally increased. In one study, 70.8% of the survey respondents did not know they were submitting their research to predatory journals⁶. Similarly, in the medical field, students have a low rate of awareness while groups elsewhere in medicine (e. g. specialists) had a higher rate of understanding of predatory publishing^{1,3}. Given this context, raising awareness about predatory journals among medical students and young researchers is vital in tackling unethical academic publishing practices².

The "predatory journal" term was first described more than a decade ago by the academic librarian Jeffrey Beall as the ones "which are dishonest and lack transparency, and centers in publishing counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays".⁷ However, the latter views proposed renaming it to one that englobes a wider spectrum to "predatory

publishers" or "deceptive journals" or "illegitimate journals".^{8,9} Likewise, no definition has been widely agreed upon what constitutes a predatory journal, until four years ago an expert consensus document was developed with characteristics (distinct features of all predatory journals), markers (features that are common among predatory journals, considered 'red flags') and empirically data (data from experiments or statistical analyses that indicate differences between predatory journals and legitimate publishers) [Table 1](#) that can be useful to separate predatory from legitimate publishers.^{3,9} Additionally, to aid in the identification of probable predatory publishers, multiple lists of probable predatory publishers have also been submitted online, being Beall's the most known.^{1,10}

Table 1. Delphi Items Consensus to Differentiate Between Predatory and Legitimate Journals.

Factor	Items
Characteristics	The journal's operations are deceptive (misleading; not truthful).
	The journal's operations are not in keeping with best publication practices (e.g., no membership in COPE*).
	Journal has low transparency regarding its operations
Markers	Fake impact factors are promoted by the journal.
	The journal has no retraction policy.
	The journal solicits manuscripts through aggressive or persuasive emails.
Empirically derived data	The contact details of the publisher are not easily verifiable.
	The journal does not mention a Creative Commons license.
	The journal's home page has a 'look and feel' of being unprofessional.
	Editors and editorial board affiliations with the journal are not verifiable.
	The journal is not a member of COPE*.

Legend: *Committee on Publication Ethics. From Cukier et al. Defining predatory journals and responding to the threat they pose: a modified Delphi consensus process. *BMJ Open*. 2020;10(2):e035561. Copyright© (2018) [BMJ Publishing Group Ltd.]

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Table 2. Personal Excerpts of E-mails Received from Predatory Journals.

Exert
... considering you to be a very positive author and believing that you'd definitely support us this time we are approaching you with the SPECIAL INVITATION.
... you being an eminent author to our Journal
In fact, I've not received acknowledgement or article for the first issue of 2024 and this month is a very crucial period for me as the journal and my performance ranking would be analyzed and graded
As an honor of support and encouragement from our end for all the authors across the globe, we are providing concessions on APCs.
Being at month end we are providing a flat 30% discount on submissions received within 48hs.

The Experience

The inspiration behind this work results from my own experience of deception. One day, an invitation from a previously unknown journal arrived at my mailbox to participate in their next issue. As inexperienced as I was, multiple e-mails were interchanged with naïve excitement around the details of the request. Nevertheless, numerous 'red flags' appeared as time passed, and after conducting the corresponding research, the realization of the deceit was made. Despite no vital information was exchanged, the confidence and initial enthusiasm vanished. Ever since the first e-mail, a plethora of the same type followed up.

The main aim of sharing this anecdote is to raise awareness and highlight the primary points that make me question the credibility

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of a journal. In [Table 2](#), there are some excerpts of different e-mails that I have received from these predatory publishers. Any ethical practices of legitimate journals would not be implicated in this kind of dubious action such as uplifting a young researcher by suggesting considerate discounts on APC or pressuring the authors to collaborate with them.

Conclusion

In summary, the path that follows beneath medical students' interest in becoming young investigators is full of deceiving endways. A wise decision of the potential journal to publish in must be made with the aid of numerous checklists, whitelists, and blacklists; but to look upon this information, raising awareness about the existence of predatory publishers and its consequences is fundamental. In this context, sharing personal experience and crucial information in dedicated journals of and for medical students is a promising course of action to reduce the increasing influence of illegitimate publishers.

Summary – Accelerating Translation

Título: Revistas 'depredadoras': Desde la Perspectiva de un Autor Estudiante de Medicina.

Las revistas 'depredadoras' son aquellas que son deshonestas y con falta de transparencia que se aprovechan del modelo de acceso abierto en donde los autores pagan y por medio de ello, obtienen sus ganancias con fines plenamente egoístas. Desafortunadamente, este tipo de revistas están en auge y pueden engañan con facilidad a investigadores inexperimentados como son los estudiantes de medicina que aspiran a incursionar en la investigación. En este contexto, el propósito del presente trabajo es ofrecer una vista generalizada de las revistas 'depredadoras', cómo identificarlas y evitarlas; así como también concientizar acerca de su existencia y discernir sus engañosos correos a través de mi experiencia personal.

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