

Predatory Journals: Exposing the Flaws in Academic Research

Author

Enago Academy

Post Url

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Predatory journals make money by offering fast-track publication of low-quality scientific research without the hassle of editorial and peer review. They have been widely criticized by the academic and publishing community for undermining the quality of science, the reputation of honest scientists, and the open access initiative. Despite this opposition, the number of articles published in predatory journals is on the rise. In 2014, 400,000 [articles were published](#) in 8000 potentially predatory journals. So, why are predatory journals such a desirable component of the [academic publishing](#) market?

Easy Targets

Most young scientists are unaware of the details of academic publishing. Along with the added pressure to publish or perish makes these inexperienced scientists prime targets for predatory journals. They are also easily duped by kind invitations to submit their work for publication. Furthermore, predatory journals [exploit feelings of personal failure](#) that are common in research scientists because of constant rejection from funding bodies and reputable journals. The quick acceptance of their article from a predatory journal gives them a feeling of relief and accomplishment. However, these publications can undermine credibility, making it harder to establish a solid scientific reputation in the future.

Not All Authors are Victims

The identity of predatory journals is not a well-kept secret. Until its recent mysterious disappearance, Jeffrey Beall's controversial blog *Scholarly Open Access* had [exposed more than 1,115 suspicious journals](#). Furthermore, reputable open access journals can easily be found in the Directory of Open Access Journals. Clearly, not all authors publishing in predatory journals are unaware or the victims of a scam. What motivates these individuals to knowingly publish in predatory journals?

The world of academia is brutally competitive. Getting funding for your work and any chance of elevation to a tenured position are heavily dependent on the number of

papers you can publish in a given time. Scientists are under extreme pressure, not only to publish their findings but to publish them as fast as possible before somebody else does and all is lost. This tremendous pressure pushes desperate scientists into the welcoming arms of predatory journals, who offer fast publication, no questions asked, and a route up the academic ladder. These challenges are even greater in poorer countries with fewer resources. In a recent survey of 262 authors who admitted to publishing in predatory journals, the majority were from developing countries. In these institutions, poor research capacity and limited skills force scientists to publish in journals with lower standards and no peer review process. However, scientists who are promoted on the basis of publications in low-standard, uncontrolled predatory journals are ill-equipped to fulfill their academic and administrative responsibilities in important academic positions. These individuals have been coined “[zombie professors](#)” in many African countries and weaken standards within their institutions.

Things to Learn

Low journal standards and deliberate deception are very worrying and most agree that predatory journals are not good for science. However, predatory journals are still in demand and this has exposed significant flaws in the academic research establishment. If the system promoted research excellence and rewarded researchers for the quality rather than the quantity of their work, then low-standard predatory journals would no longer be in demand.

In developing countries, research institutions need to recognize that poor research capacity is promoting publication in predatory journals and that research standards must be improved to circumvent this. Continuous support to young scientists from experienced mentors will help to achieve this. Also, leaders should encourage and provide their employees with incentives to publish in credible journals. Furthermore, individual institutions need to protect the reputation of their scientists by retracting any publications already published in known predatory journals. To prevent honest scientists from being duped by predatory journals, the principles of good academic publishing need to be explained early on. Numerous guidelines outline good publication practices, including the COPE guidelines. Instructions need to be provided on how to select a journal for submission. In addition, the warning signs of predatory journals should be made clear (e.g. variable research quality, no editorial board, low-quality website, unsolicited email invitations, and so on). The World Association of Medical Editors ([WAME](#)) has a detailed guide to spotting predatory journals that can be really helpful to young scientists.

In short, the problems with predatory journals are not the important issue here. Rather, we should be focusing more on improving the quality of research, training, and support at academic institutions to eliminate the need for predatory journals in the first place.

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