



Editorial

Predatory Journals: “The Gray Market” of Academic Publishing

Abha Verma¹ Jiten Kumar² N. Khandelwal³

¹Department of Neuroradiology, Manipal Hospitals, Whitefield, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

²Department of Radiology, Dr ML Agarwal Imaging Centre, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi, India

³Department of Radiodiagnosis, NIMS University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Indian J Radiol Imaging 2025;35(Suppl S1):S114–S115.

In medicine, academic journals are the primary platforms through which knowledge and research findings are disseminated; researchers collaborate, authors submit their research findings, peers review these findings, and the work is published in respective journals, and this way the knowledge advances across various specialties. However, in recent years, predatory journals have emerged that have manipulated publication protocols, compromising the integrity of the academic publishing process.

Predatory journals, “pseudo journals,” or “deceptive journals” are publications proclaiming themselves legitimate academic journals, but their publication protocols are entirely questionable. The modus operandi is to extract money from the potential authors by charging a high article processing charge with the least amount of work done on the publisher’s side. The work put in by the journal is severely compromised in the form of a nonexistent peer review and dubious editing and indexing policies. The exercise aims to extract money from the authors without providing service to the author and the scientific community. They aim to mislead the researchers who are new to scholarly communication. These predatory journals have exploited the open access publication model.

There are several characteristics of a predatory journal. First and foremost, no rigorous peer review is conducted in these journals. A robust peer-review system is a hallmark of most of the reputed journals, with dedicated specialty reviewers evaluating the articles for their scientific quality. The predatory journals falsely claim to have an editorial board of eminent scholars. Often, the members of the editorial boards listed on these journal Web sites are not even aware of the journal’s existence, or they are unrelated to the journal’s publishing field.

The predatory journals usually promise a very short processing time, and the articles are often approved with minimal scrutiny, leading to the publication of substandard research. Most of the time, these journals utilize aggressive marketing tactics, such as frequently sending unsolicited emails to prospective authors, inviting them to submit their work while promising quick publication times and high visibility. They often mimic the names and the Web sites of reputed clinical journals. However, strict scrutiny of their Web sites will reveal a lack of valid communication information or office addresses. Sometimes, they even advertise an impact factor or citation metric, which is incorrect. Also, most of these journals are neither indexed nor their publications are archived in third-party repositories.

These tactics lure young practitioners for whom academic publishing is critical for career advancement in their professional field. So, these journals prey on young medicine professionals for quick recognition and credibility, offering them professional and financial progress.

Most researchers have a tough time deciding between credible and predatory publishing. A quick way to identify this is that the articles are often accepted “as-is” without any comments by the reviewer. They frequently reveal grammatical errors in the article. Some journals even use a single template for all their peer-review reports.

These journals pose a significant challenge for the academic community. First, since low-quality research work without peer review is published, it can potentially dilute the entire standard of scholarly publishing. This decreases the reliability of the scientific literature, and there is a risk of incorrect information that can influence the patients and colleagues and sometimes affect policymaking. Low-quality scientific literature also leads to the erosion of the readers’

Address for correspondence
Abha Verma, MD, DM,
Department of
NeuroradiologyManipal
Hospitals, Whitefield, Bengaluru,
Karnataka 560067, India
(e-mail: drabha84@gmail.com).

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0044-1792037>.
ISSN 0971-3026.

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trust in reputed scientific journals. People tend to be much more skeptical and doubtful of research integrity.

In addition, these journals do not index their contents or archive their contents in third-party repositories. As a result, the articles may not be retrievable if the journal closes, and the entire research could be lost. Also, since they are not indexed or archived, the publications are less likely to be read by peers and used as templates for future research and citations. All the effort in publishing these journals could be better utilized for scientific research if young medical professionals distinguish these predatory journals from recognized ones.

As medical professionals, a pertinent question is what to do with the research published in these predatory journals. Should we say it is like a gray market or consider it flawed unless proven otherwise? These are ethical issues and potential questions that warrant a discussion. For instance, is it moral to publish in a journal that does not uphold the standards of peer review? Should we trust the findings of research published in such journals? These are the kinds of questions that need to be addressed, along with the need to educate our medical professionals on where to submit their scholarly work.

Addressing the issue of predatory journals requires a multipronged approach. There should be education and awareness where the academic institutes and reputed scientific publications should take the lead in educating the potential researchers who are the targets of the predatory journals. A rigorous peer review for research should be emphasized by all young professionals. Workshops and seminars can empower young medical professionals to choose suitable journals to spread their scientific knowledge and work.

The institutes should be more rigorous and have clear policies regarding the publication process. They should also set up guidelines for the faculty for acceptable journals where the publications can be sent for publication and for filtering out predatory journals before submission.

The academic community should come forward and collaborate to fight this challenge and support the ethical open-access model journals that use open-access platforms but have credible peer-review systems and ethical practices. There can be technological solutions in the form of lists and databases of predatory journals maintained and updated over time by eminent authors and publishers. The predatory journals exploit the loop holes in journal selection policy of PubMed Central. The predatory journals may list the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors recommendations so as to convince prospective authors that they are submitting their research to a legitimate medical scholarly journal.

This menace of predatory journals poses a significant threat to the entire foundation of academic research. The publication of suboptimal research material, which the broader scientific community uses to make clinical judgments and plan treatments, is a cause for serious concern. We should also recognize that it is not just the academic community but also the patients reading such journals and relying on the information, as most are free to access. We must take steps to safeguard not just the scientific community but also our patients from any misinformation that is being spread.

The establishment of research integrity is a collective responsibility. All stakeholders, including young medical professionals, academic institutes, and the broader scientific community, must unite against the menace of predatory journals. Only through collective action can we effectively safeguard our research integrity.

Funding

None.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.