

## Predatory Journals – Who are the captives?

Fatema Jawad

The subject of Predatory Journals and publishers has lately been more under discussion than ever before. It has surfaced in the last few years as a large number of people are falling victim to it. The publication of research papers is the requirement of regulatory bodies for graduation of students and promotion for the faculty. It was a few weeks back that a worried young author came for advice regarding an article submitted to a journal not knowing that it was a fake publication. She had received no communication from the journal editors and the fee had been paid on submission of the article. The article was on the open access website within a week. She was surprised as she was expecting some comments from the peer reviewers. By then she had learnt that the journal had no standing. When she wrote to the publishers that she wanted to withdraw the article, there was no response. Obviously there had been no peer review and no comments from a subject specialist. She lost her hard work as the journal had no recognition since it was a predatory, fictitious publication.

Predatory publishers are the talk of the day. Alex Hern and Pamela Duncan, reporters and journalists working with The Guardian, UK brought out their research report on predatory publishers in August 2018.<sup>1</sup> They wrote that “most of the 175,000 scientific articles produced by five of the largest predatory open-access publishers skip almost all of the traditional checks and balances of scientific publishing. They also discovered that more than 175,000 scientific articles have been produced by five of the largest “predatory open-access publishers”, including India-based Omics publishing group and the Turkish World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, or Waset.

The German newspaper, . “Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin” gave a report on 19 July 2018 that “more than 5,000 German scientists have published papers in pseudo-scientific journals.<sup>2</sup> Many of these researches were supported by public funding. What is alarming is

.....  
Editor-in-Chief, JPMA, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Correspondence:** Fatema Jawad Email: editor@jpma.org.pk

that the number of such publications has tripled globally since 2013.

It is evident that clever business minded people have found an easy way of earning big sums of money by enticing authors in need of publications. They demand large sums of money and promise rapid publication. The desperate authors do not investigate these fake publishers and journals and get attracted by the promise of quick Open Access publication. They fall prey to these uncouth business people and lose their research results. These journals advertise claiming false credentials. The submitted manuscripts are not peer reviewed and are published on the respective website after charging huge publication fees. The question arises how can any research be accepted for publication without other researchers examining it for errors or failings. These results will eventually influence the practicing physicians and finally the patients. Where is the Research Integrity? Where is the Ethical Writing and publishing?

When we look closely we can see the poor victims of these pseudo-journals. They are usually junior doctors or faculty members belonging mostly to the developing countries. They are under pressure to publish, due to the existing rules. They are handicapped with the English language being foreign to them, not having dedicated supervisors or mentors, and not having access to a choice of standard publications. They get attracted to the offers made by the predatory journals. This results in loss of good research and frustration for the authors as the publication would not be recognized by the higher authorities.

We, as senior members of the profession, having experience in medical journalism and holding responsible positions in the few class medical journals of the country, have a responsibility to first educate ourselves and then to help our students and colleagues to acquire the knowledge on publication ethics and inculcate it in all the medical research sectors. Detecting these predatory journals needs a careful watch.

Some of the important points and indicators have been highlighted by researchers as<sup>3</sup>:

- 
- The authors are invited via emails, promising a quick publication,
  - There is a claim of having a high impact factor and indexation and a high quality service.
  - If looked carefully into these journals, one notices the fake names resembling some well known journals with a slight change in the spelling.
  - The scope of the publishers includes non-biomedical subjects.
  - The website can have spelling and grammatical errors.
  - There is no editorial policy and the authors are advised to submit the articles to an unprofessional email address.
  - There is no retraction policy and no information on article preservation.
  - The copyright information may not be stated.
  - There may be two or more articles by the same lead authors in one issue.
- 

The demand for research is growing universally and we have to compete with the countries having more facilities. We do not want to be left behind. So let us pledge that we will root out the predatory journals. To provide an opportunity and publishing space for aspiring medical professionals more standard and registered journals should be launched. This requires teaching our students, faculty and peers to understand research integrity and honesty. There is need to create facilities for registered translation/writing centres since English, the international language of science and medicine, is not the language of many medical researchers.

### References

1. Hern A, Duncan P. The Guardian. Friday 10 August 2018 17.55 BST. available at [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) (cited on 28. October 2018)
2. Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin. More than 5,000 German scientists have published papers in pseudo-scientific journals. Stand: 19.07.2018. Available at : [https://www.ndr.de/..](https://www.ndr.de/) (cited on 26. October 2018)
3. Shamseer L, Moher D, Maduekwe O, Turner L, Barbour V, Burch R, et.al. Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison. *BMC Medicine* 2017;15:28 DOI 10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9