

Predatory journals an actual problem

Revistas depredadoras, un problema actual

Scientists and young researchers need to publish in indexed journals. Since the rise of the internet, the knowledge generated by researchers has spread to the whole world. But not all that glitters is gold, and predatory pseudo-publications have emerged. The reason for this phenomenon is the very rise in scientific publications, which caused prestigious magazines to set a cost to the access of information to obtain more profits. Hence the movement of Open Access (OA) was born. OA benefits include global outreach, broad visibility, and access to more readers and publications.

Although OA makes scientific publishing seem easier, it isn't, since indexed journals have established editorial processes that can last anywhere from a couple of months to much longer. Taking advantage of this "delay" in editorial production, predatory publishers appear to attract young academics and researchers, offering them a faster publication process. These companies have corrupted the peer review process, which ends up being minimal or not being carried out. Magazines attract the naive by presenting them with portals or pages that are the mirror of prestigious and indexed magazines so that they can send their manuscripts and thus obtain some monetary benefit in the form of putting a price on article processing, a publication fee, a payment per event, etcetera.¹

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "predator" is anyone whose purpose is to exploit for personal gain or gain. In biomedical publications, it refers to the journals that prey on the young researcher or academic to earn money through the manuscript publication process, without meeting the standards of a scientific publication.

The modus operandi is as follows, the prey receives an attractive invitation by email to submit a manuscript to a recently launched magazine. In four days they reply that their article has been accepted. The galley's test will arrive by mail with an order of payment of \$500.00 US dollars. The magazine informs that the article can only be published if proof of payment is received. Authors submit their manuscripts to these "pay per publishing" magazines for the following reasons: 1. The desire to publish as soon as possible. 2. Increase the number of publications. 3. Low-quality research papers with insignificant findings. 4. Appear in the open access system and have the desired visibility.

Academic librarian Jeffrey Beall of the University of Colorado and other academic service firms have compiled a list of predatory journals and editorial services, noting that an alert should be set especially among medical students and young researchers.²

The World Association of Medical Publishers (WAME) issued a document in 2018 as a guide to distinguish legitimate journals from predators. Although predatory magazines maintain that they do peer review and mimic a structure



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like that of a legitimate magazine, they publish all or almost all the material proposed to them without external review and do not follow the policies of organizations such as WAME, the Committee on Ethical Publications (COPE), the International Committee of Medical Journals Editors (ICMJE) and the Council of Science Editors (CSE) on issues such as the archiving of materials, the management of potential conflicts of interest, errata, and the transparency of processes and policies, including quotas. To distinguish between a predatory journal and a legitimate one, it is recommended to review the Beall's list (<https://beallslist.weebly.com/>) and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The idea is that predatory journals legitimize their processes and improve their practices, that authors who propose material to these journals share their experience, and that there is a mechanism for submitting research to a peer-reviewed journal.³

Lorraine Ferris and Margaret Winker summarize the ethical considerations for publishing in predatory journals as follows. Predatory journals distort their identity, and the services they offer lack standards and good publishing practices that improve the quality and ethics of published work. Authors distort their academic work to publish in these magazines. Therefore, they do not receive the recognition they deserve and their papers may be inaccessible despite the effort and risk of doing research, and they also risk losing their money. Also, published content may be lost and may not be accessible in the future. Predatory journals significantly weaken the trust that readers and the public have in the research literature.⁴

What are the most common characteristics of these magazines?⁵

1. They use attractive words in magazine titles like "international", "global", "world", "universal", "Asian", "American" or "European".
2. They are located in low or middle-income countries, such as India, Pakistan, or Nigeria, although they offer addresses in the United Kingdom or the United States.
3. They use the COPE logo without being members.
4. The review time is very fast, from a few days to weeks, and with options to speed up the process at an additional cost.
5. They claim to have indexing with legitimate databases such as PubMed, DOAJ, or even in Web of Science, but they do not appear in such bases.
6. They simulate high impact factors.
7. They use emails from free providers like Gmail® and Yahoo®.
8. They send emails from different accounts inviting editor or reviewer positions, or to send manuscripts.
9. There is no information on who forms the editorial committee or it is very scarce.
10. Charges apply for item processing.

It is important to educate young people and establish transparency policies in different magazines and publishing associations, especially in developing countries. It is very easy to fall into the claws of editorial predators, more so if one has the greed or need to publish to earn academic points the easy way, which in terms of quality is never the best. Academic excellence has a cost, it requires honesty and intellectual rigor. Editorial garbage abounds like the rest of false information. The inexperienced and

impatient researcher is easy prey for the temptation for career advancement. Dishonest academics take the opportunity to publish low-quality works to complete their low salary with some meager economic stimulus or to boast a status that they do not have, to impress neophyte and naive students, and fancy as *The Naked King*.

The European Association of Science Editors (EASE) recommends that editors reject papers whose references contain predatory journals. At the Mexican Association of Editors of Biomedical Journals (Asociación Mexicana de Editores de Revistas Biomédicas, AMERBAC) we disapprove of these practices and invite you to make that extra effort for the quality and integrity of the writer and out of respect for the specialized public that seeks to be properly informed and educated. Consistent with this initiative, from now on, and to increase our quality, the journal *Cirujano General* will apply the policy of rejecting articles whose references come from predatory magazines.

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