

Are We Prepared to Save the Sanctity of Science from Predatory Journals?

Sir,

Publication of scientific articles remains an important scholarly metric and the infamous jargon “*Publish or Perish*” stands a viable testimony to this concept. Given the highly competitive existing academic scenario, publication of articles is mandated for successful submission of Ph.D. theses, securing faculty positions and attaining higher levels of hierarchy.^[1] Hence, the pressure to publish has thrown open the gates to the boom of predatory mafia that call themselves publishers. These predatory mafia lure the “vulnerable” scientific community into rapid publishing for a fee and literally Sans peer review.^[2]

Jeffrey Beall, a librarian from the University of Colorado, was the one who coined the term “*predatory journals*” and he took the initiative to bell the cat with his famous blog. Rather than maintaining a whitelist, he set out to blacklist the open-access publishers and standalone journals based on a set of criteria. As the predatory publishers grew, so did his list in the blog. The blog was recommended by the various universities to check before submitting any manuscript to the journals. Eventually, even Dr. Beall had to pull down his blog owing to severe pressure from those publishers threatening to take legal action.^[2]

The predatory publishing has become an organized industry, and by 2015, there were over half a million papers minted out by them.^[3] The current situation is grim with these predatory journals on the loose and taking toll on the scientists and science altogether.

Now, how do we move forward without getting science mauled by these predators?

There exist a few online directories like the “Directory of Open-Access Journals” that enable to check for white-listed journals. However, one of the weaknesses noticed with the white-list journals is the erroneous inclusion of the predatory journals or journals that turn predatory after they are listed.^[2] Cabell’s Blacklist appears to be a promising blacklist of deceptive and predatory academic journals featuring over 4000 journals.^[4] However, it is not a free service like Beall’s list, which could impact the accessibility of scholars from the resource-strapped settings.

In this unsettling milieu, we could seek out to the international scientific organizations such as the International Committee of Medical Journals Editors (ICMJE) to chalk out plans and define criteria to distinguish between legitimate and predatory journals. Citation database giants like Scopus and Web of Science should crack the whip harder to ostracize the journals suspected of predatory practices.

The scholars themselves need to exercise utmost caution while choosing a legit journal and should have an eye for detail, to look out for predatory journals. This could be based on a few

criteria such as the indexing history, quality of editorial board and established publisher, association with a professional society and whether the journal practices transparency and has a clear peer-review process.^[1,5] Thus, it is the need of the hour for the scientific community to work in unison against predatory journals and publishers that are eroding the legitimacy/ethics of well-conducted science.

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Vignesh Ramachandran, Esaki M. Shankar¹

Preclinical Department, Faculty of Medicine, Royal College of Medicine Perak, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Malaysia, ¹Department of Life Sciences, Division of Infection Biology, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. Vignesh Ramachandran,

Preclinical Department, Faculty of Medicine, Royal College of Medicine Perak, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh 30450, Malaysia.
E-mail: vignesh@unikl.edu.my

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