Predatory Publishing: What It Is and How to Avoid It and Its Negative Effects

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Today there is tremendous pressure to publish scientific articles. This is a particular problem for non-native speakers of English whose research may be excellent but who have difficulty in expressing themselves in a style favored by the reviewers of their target journal. This has created a huge market of genuine academically sound new start-up journals and also what are called “predatory journals” which are making use of the need of certain researchers to publish papers in English fast, regardless of the character of the journal.

Scientific publishing has seen some major innovations over the years. One significant change has been the introduction of online journals and open access. Online journals became a very popular way to save printing costs, allow authors to provide supplementary material, and expand the access of the readership. However, in recent years the problem of predatory publishing has emerged. The term, predatory publishing, was first introduced by Jeffrey Beall, who is a librarian and researcher at the University of Colorado.¹ In 2008, he began creating his own list of predatory publishers, which has been known as Beall’s List.² Since then, predatory publishers have increased, especially in countries such as India, where there is a greater need, ability and personnel able to publish quickly for academics who wish to earn tenure or promotion.³ Even though scientists may be aware that this is a questionable practice, they might deliberately publish in these journals as a means to improve their c.v. easily.

Predatory publishing is dangerous for the author, and unethical, as it accepts and publishes papers that are not properly reviewed in academically unrecognized journals. Authors are generally asked to pay excessive fees for the publication, which is not reviewed by experts in the field. These ephemeral journals (ephemeral because they generally last only for as long as authors pay them to publish) set up websites to resemble legitimate online journals making it difficult for other authors to determine whether they are valid or not. Beall states that a price of these counterfeit publications and ‘unethical’ authors who take part, is paid by honest scientists whose research may also be questioned “as it becomes tainted by association” with work that is published unethically.³

How can authors protect themselves from predatory publishing? The first important step is to be aware of some of the characteristics of predatory journals. Many predatory journals send emails to researchers inviting them to publish in their journal. Authors need to check the legitimacy of the journal by first checking to see if the journal is included in an index such as MEDLINE. Also, authors should visit the journal’s website, review the journal’s peer review policy, and examine the scope of the journal and author fees, as predatory journals tend to provide little or unclear information regarding these issues.

Beall’s List has raised some controversy. Some publishers have made legal threats, while others have complained of the lack of transparency in Beall’s criteria for a predatory journal.⁴ Furthermore, Beall’s website which provided his list of predatory journals of 1,155 predatory publishers and 1,294 predatory journals has recently been shut down.
in January 2017, for reasons we do not know but are probably related to the above.\(^5\)

**Closing message**

Features common to many predatory journals include, but are not limited to, lack of history, lack of impact factor, promise of extremely fast review plus publication, and in particular a considerable charge for processing. Nevertheless, this increasing problem of predatory publishing will remain, as academic promotions still depend largely on the number of publications, and there is constant pressure to publish more.\(^6\) Authors, especially those whose native language is not English, need to be aware of this issue of predatory publishing in order to protect the integrity and transparency of their future scientific research reputation.

**References**