

Predatory Journals; a nuisance or a threat to research integrity?

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The almost daily emails experienced by academics and others, soliciting submission of manuscripts for speedy publication in what appears to be high-impact journals has become not only an insight to the proliferation of such journals but also a nuisance for many. Experienced academics will recognise such emails and can ignore them. But, for the less experienced academics or those under pressure to 'publish or perish' it can be more difficult. It is timely therefore to highlight the dangers of submitting often hard worked manuscripts to such journals and to educate readers on how they may avoid them.

Predatory journals are a threat to all. They accept articles for publication, along with authors fees or processing charges without performing promised quality checks for issues such as plagiarism or ethical approval.¹ They are characterised by deceptive practices aimed at exploiting authors for financial gain. These journals often lack quality peer review and robust editorial standards, resulting in the publication of substandard research. Predatory journals and publishers have been defined as "entities that prioritise self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterised by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial/publication practices, lack of transparency, and/or use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices".¹ The term 'predatory' is not universally accepted, as some argue that it implies that all authors are unsuspecting victims, and there is evidence that some authors knowingly publish in such journals in order to boost their CVs.²

Such journals and publishers are not in keeping with best Open Science or Open Scholarship practices. Open Scholarship is the practice of research, education and knowledge exchange in such a way that others can collaborate and contribute, where research publications, data, lab notes and other scholarly processes and works are properly and ethically managed and evaluated and, unless restricted for justifiable reasons, are freely available to all levels of society under terms that enable reuse, redistribution and reproduction of the work and its underlying data and methods.³

So how can authors avoid them? Multiple checklists have been developed to help authors identify if a journal or a publisher is considered predatory. However, a systematic review⁴ of 93 checklists revealed that 98% of checklists included a mean of 11 items (range 3-64) which were not weighted. 84% did not include qualitative guidance on how to use the checklist, 98%

did not provide quantitative guidance and 97% and were not evidence-based.

Readers are therefore advised to visit the *Think Check Submit* (thinkchecksubmit.org) website to identify trusted publishers for their research, or, the *Think Check Attend* website (thinkcheckattend.org) to identify trusted conferences.

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We urge all authors to be cautious about where they submit their manuscripts and if in doubt to consult with their library and or senior colleagues and visit the websites listed above.

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