

PUBLISH AND PERISH: PREDATORY JOURNALS' THREAT TO SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY

PUBLICAR E PERECER: AMEAÇA DAS REVISTAS PREDATÓRIAS À INTEGRIDADE CIENTÍFICA

PUBLICAR Y PERECER: AMENAZA DE REVISTAS PREDATORIAS A LA INTEGRIDAD CIENTÍFICA

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“Publish *or* perish” is a classic saying well known for researchers. This comes from the high demand for achieving publication of scientific findings in peer-reviewed journals. Frequent publication has been one of the most powerful metrics in academia, as successful publication attracts attention not just to researchers, but also to their institutions. Frequency and quality of publications are key factors in securing research funding, promoting individual's progress through their field and academic ranks, and in institutional rankings. If one cannot achieve strong track-record of publication (often defined as high number of publications published in journals with strong impact factors and/or international recognition), then they, researchers and institutions, perish.

This high demand for successful publication has been exploited by predatory journals. Predatory journals are publication outlets that have, as one of their main purposes, the goal of facilitating publication through the payment of a publishing fee.

This “predatory” practice has become recurrent, adding new threats to the credibility of scientific production. Predatory journals offer authors a fraudulent or non-existent peer review process that damages academic publishing standards in the sole interest of profit⁽¹⁾ – these communications come through email spams promising quick publication of open-access articles. By checking the PubMed database with a combination of the words “predatory” and “journal” on November 13, 2019 we found out 132 publications from the last 5 years dedicated to warning researchers to the growing advancement and dangers posed by predatory publishers.

Offers to publish your work in a time frame shorter than any regular journal per se should raise suspicion. A due publishing process in authentic journals involves peer-review, editor review, response to authors, manuscript repairs, editorial feedback, editing, indexing, and publication of the manuscript; all of which requires a reasonable time of at least a couple of months. Credible invitations to publish an

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invited manuscript are uncommon. They are addressed to researchers who are recognized as experts in their field of study, journals approach them selectively and articles' acceptance is never guaranteed in advance⁽²⁾ – they should still go through peer review process.

Predatory journals do not abide by rules of scientific integrity. They often fail in the maintenance of active and qualified editorial board, author protection policy, conflict of interest management, transparency about editorial policy and publishing fees⁽³⁾. In short, these journals are oriented towards profitability rather than quality. Authors can be put through a “apparent process” of submission of their papers, but never seen their work actually published. That can occur due to the fact that these journals misreport information regarding the publication's indexing, hide editors and editorial staff identity, include the word ‘international’ in their titles to boast supposed prestige⁽⁴⁾.

Publications of this kind employ robots in order to identify potential authors and send them email spams which, in a single message, may include invitations to submit a manuscript, become a peer reviewer and member of the editorial board. In general, they target novice authors such as graduate students and junior faculty who are keen on having their scholarly text published as soon as possible and freeing themselves from academic pressures. Uneasiness about productivity and career progression, lack of knowledge on journals qualification criteria, and frustration with the long and sometimes painful peer-review step required by authentic academic journals are factors which can lead authors to be lured by these predatory journals⁽⁵⁾.

Some researchers may be tricked into submitting to predatory journals, while others may do so dubiously to pad their curriculum vitae for career advancement. This is where you will “Publish *and* perish.” Regulatory agencies nationally and internationally, such as *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (Brazil) and National Institutes of Health (USA), as well as academic institutions will not validate the scientific contribution of manuscripts published in predatory journals. Although the “easy publication” call may be seductive at first glance, it has been considered a noxious practice.

This has sparked so much worrying that a wide range of initiatives have been taken to both inhibit and prevent researchers from falling into the traps of the predatory market.

The website *Choosing a Journal for Publication of an Article: List of Suspicious Journals and Publishers*⁽⁶⁾, created by Yale University, for instance, is one of the initiatives aimed at recognizing legitimate and reliable journals; others focus on spotting predatory journals, as the one free resource developed by Jeffrey Beall, which lists *Potential predatory scholarly open-access publishers*⁽⁷⁾, consisting of 1249 journals/publishers to be avoided. In addition to that, there is the webpage “*Think, Check, Submit*⁽⁸⁾” designed to assess whether the chosen journal meets reliability requirements. However, all those resources are still limited in their ability to fully provide a complete picture of all the predatory journals that are out there.

The growing dissemination of predatory journals invokes important ethical issues as the lack of editorial standards and practices, waste of resources and distortion of research which can decrease the quality of scientific contributions⁽²⁾ be detrimental to authors, reviewers, editors of trusted journals; as well as deteriorate the image of *open access* publications⁽⁹⁾.

Additionally, it is important to note that texts published without quality checks on their research procedures and ethical aspects, may report erroneous or fabricated results that, when embedded in science, may influence therapeutic and preventive decisions and significantly compromise people's health⁽⁴⁾.

Hence, this scenario requires assertive positions from the entire academic community, including authors, institutions and publishers, both to identify whether researchers are part of a predatory journal - in order to request their disaffiliation, and to select journals of acceptable quality where academic productions can be safely published⁽¹⁰⁾.

Collaborating with journals of this kind, whether by sending texts, acting as publishers, or allowing peers to publish consciously, has contributed in a harmful way to eroding the trustworthiness of the

scientific literature⁽⁴⁾. The current challenge before us is to educate everyone to recognize predatory journals, discourage the submission of material and avoid citations of these articles⁽¹¹⁾. The already exhaustive process of scientific production needs to incorporate measures capable of counteracting this practice, in order to preserve the credibility of researchers, institutions and science.

Therefore, it is better to live with “publish *or* perish, then it is to compromise your integrity and waste public funds directed to research – publication in this context will not save you from the scientific and academics demands, thus you will “publish *and* perish”.

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