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Are Scholars' Publishing Choices Fueling the Crisis in Scholarly Journal Publishing?

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Lightning talk speaking notes

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Title slide: Are Scholars' Publishing Choices Fueling the Crisis in Scholarly Journal Publishing?

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I'm here from the Public Knowledge Project, or PKP: a core facility at Simon Fraser University that combines research and infrastructure development to advance open scholarship.

Our work helps make knowledge accessible around the world by supporting community-owned publishing. We're part of a growing movement that sees scholarly communication not as a commodity, but as a public good: something that everyone should be able to contribute to and benefit from.

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PKP develops free, open-source software for scholarly publishing, including Open Journal Systems, which many of you may already know. OJS is a platform for managing submissions, editorial workflow, and publications for academic journals.

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The crisis in scholarly publishing isn't new, but it's evolving.

Libraries have long struggled with unaffordable and unsustainable subscription costs to provide access to published research to their campus communities. This is research that is authored and reviewed by scholars without compensation from the publishers.

Commercial publishers have embraced open access, but on their terms: through article processing charges and so-called "transformative" read-and-publish agreements. A study done in 2023 found that globally authors paid \$1.06 billion in publication fees to five major academic publishers from 2015 to 2018. Data collected in 2024 found that an overwhelming majority (89%, n=5,192) of journals increased their OA fees between 2019 and 2023, including 40% of journals which increased above the 19% inflation.

Transformative agreements which bundle journal subscription costs along with article processing charges for authors, are meant to be transitional and should be treated as a temporary measure. Long-term sustainable and ethical alternatives are needed to address the need for global access to research.

Meanwhile, the incentive of prestige in publishing keep scholars locked into this system. Many scholars choose journals for their impact factors and rankings, and in doing so they help to sustain the very models that limit access and exclude smaller institutions and underfunded researchers.

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Diamond open access offers a community-owned alternative. From the Toluca Cape Town declaration on Diamond Open Access, Diamond Open Access journals are community-owned, community-led, and non-commercial journals that do not charge fees for readers or for authors.

Diamond open access removes financial barriers for both readers and authors. These journals are supported by institutions, libraries, and scholarly communities, rather than by APCs or subscriptions.

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PKP's Open Journal Systems provides the infrastructure that makes this model scalable and sustainable.

Today, OJS is used by over 55,000 journals in more than 150 countries, publishing in 60 languages. A 2021 study found that around 60% of all diamond OA journals globally publish using OJS.

This widespread adoption shows that equitable, scholar-led publishing is possible and already thriving.

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Scholars and their institutions make choices that shape the system.

When we as authors or institutions pay APCs or sign transformative deals, we reinforce commercial control. But when researchers choose to publish, review, or edit for diamond open access journals, and when institutions invest in open infrastructure, we help to shift power back to the academic community.

Libraries, funders, and universities can redirect even a fraction of what's currently spent on commercial publishing toward open systems like OJS or other community-owned platforms.

This isn't just about saving money; it's about aligning our publishing practices with our values of equity, inclusion, and access.

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Knowledge can only be a public good if everyone can participate. PKP and our partners are working to extend scholarly publishing by creating spaces that welcome diverse voices and recognize many forms of research and scholarship.

But this work depends on shared commitment from scholars, institutions, and funders to sustain the open infrastructure that makes it possible.

If we believe that scholarship should serve the public, then open access must also mean open participation.

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References