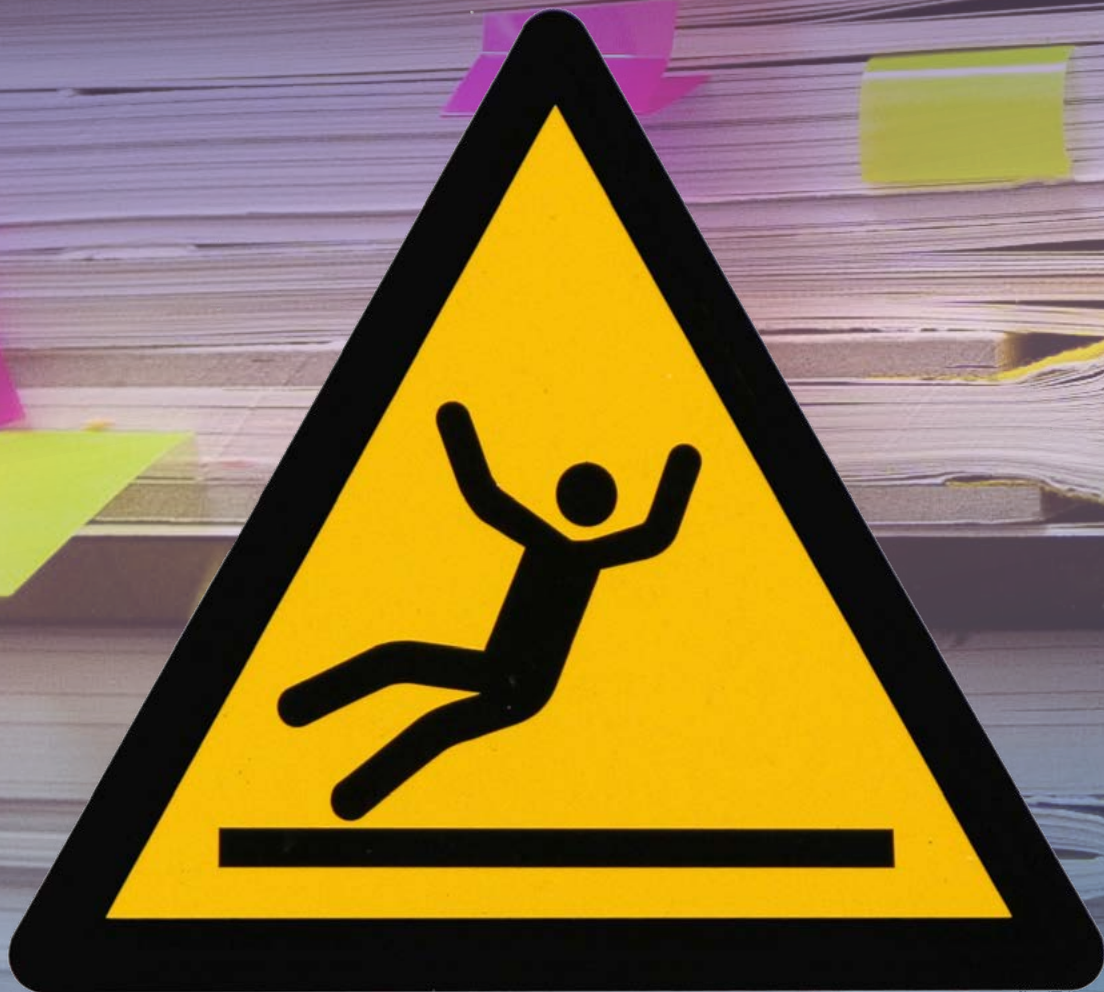# Predatory and Questionable Publishing Practices

How to Recognise and Avoid Them

Contents

1. Introduction

Publishers play an important role in the production and dissemination of scholarly research. They facilitate peer review, provide editorial support, handle production and distribution, and ensure availability of scientific publications. Publishing with a reputable publisher increases the visibility of researchers and their work and can help boost the impact of research results.

There are thousands of trustworthy (open access) publishers worldwide and in every academic discipline that provide high-quality publishing services guided by best practices and international standards.

It is beneficial for scholars to publish in an authoritative, good-quality journal, book, or conference series produced by a reputable publisher in their research field. Yet there is growing concern about the increasing number of publishers and journals that conduct allegedly questionable publishing practices – e.g. low-quality peer review and/or aggressive acquisition – and the more fraudulent predatory publishers. Predatory publishers can harm scholars and their institutions financially and reputationally by charging a fee for no peer review or publishing service at all. Predatory publishers and questionable publishing practices have a negative effect on the credibility of the published scholarly record and the scholarly community as a whole.

How can you recognise and avoid these practices and publishers? What if you have submitted an article to, or are in a publishing process with, a publisher and something goes wrong or seems inaccurate?

This guide, written by open access specialists at universities across the Netherlands, provides insight and practical advice for authors on how to avoid questionable and predatory journals.

1.1
Definitions

What is predatory publishing? And (how) does it differ from questionable practices?
There is a spectrum of publishing practices ranging from trustworthy, high-quality to low-quality, fraudulent, and even malicious. When discussing these practices, this guide distinguishes between predatory publishers and questionable practices. includes a table reflecting this spectrum and categorising publishing practices.

The term *predatory publishing* was introduced in 2010 by librarian Jeffrey Beall to describe a publisher that "unprofessionally abuses the author-pays publishing model for their own profit" (1). This definition was related to the open access 'pay to publish' journal model, which was still relatively new in the mid-2000s, and the fraudulent initiatives that arose with it. Since then, the term predatory publishing has been commonly used within the scholarly community, but debate on its use and a clear and comprehensive definition is still very much alive.

Building upon Beall's short definition, a recent report (2) found that "Predatory journals solicit articles from researchers through practices that exploit the pressure on researchers to publish. Features of predatory journals include rapid pay-to-publish models without rigorous peer review, fake editorial boards falsely listing respected scientists, fraudulent impact factors, journal titles that are deceptively similar to those of legitimate journals, paid review articles that promote fake science, and aggressive spam invitations to submit articles, including outside of a researcher's expertise."

This guide defines predatory publishers as initiatives that have the intent to deceive scholars and deliberately deliver questionable publishing services (or no services at all) for their financial gain.

Questionable practices can be defined as publishing practices that are of poor quality, breach research integrity or ethics, are harmful for authors (financial, reputational) and the quality of their published work (scientific rigour, accuracy). Questionable practices can be deliberate, with a significant imbalance between profit and services, or they can be the result of errors and ignorance on the part of the publisher (e.g. ignorance of standard practices, inexperience in the editorial and peer review teams of a journal, publishing staff errors, and more). Whether they are intentional or not, publishers using questionable practices can professionally harm scholars, institutions, and the quality of their publications.

Several factors can increase scholars' vulnerability to predatory and questionable publishing activities. These factors include unfamiliarity with the publishing landscape, the 'publish or perish' pressure in scholarly career-making, research evaluation criteria that are based on quantity instead of quality, and requirements to comply with open access policies from institutions and funders.

1.2
Best practices and industry standards

How does the scholarly publishing community respond to predatory initiatives and questionable practices?
Four international organisations representing scholarly publishers have collaborated to identify principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing. These are set out in a joint statement on *Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing* (3) regarding journal content, practices, and organisation. By following these principles, publishers can avoid questionable practices. For scholars, best practices can also be translated into checklists. A journal not ticking the boxes should lead to suspicion. An initiative that helps to prevent scholars from submitting to predatory publishers is the website Think. Check. Submit.

University Librarian Jeffrey Beall was the first to systematically record journals and publishers that he found to be 'predatory' and established the so-called *Beall's List*. This initiative (active until 2017) aimed to catalogue and raise awareness about journals that were – based on Beall's criteria – "potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open access journals". Newer initiatives such as Predatory Reports and the paid subscription service Cabells also produce lists of potentially predatory journals to try and prevent scholars from submitting to them. Note that these lists should be used carefully. How and why journals are added to (and removed from) these lists is not always transparent. There is an ongoing debate in the scholarly community and publishing industry about the criteria used to mark journals as 'predatory' and the legitimacy of publishing these lists.

Finding the journal that you want to submit to listed as potentially predatory means you should (at the very least) proceed with caution.

Most internationally recognised and trusted indexation services are transparent about criteria used to evaluate journals. For example, in 2023, Clarivate – the company behind the indexing site Web of Science – delisted 50+ journals from coverage in their citation index (4). After a periodical re-evaluation of the journals indexed in the database, these journals failed to meet their 28 quality criteria for inclusion.

In some cases, however, actions like a journal changing its title (for legitimate reasons not affecting the quality or content) can also affect its inclusion in or removal from indexing databases. This is why using multiple sources is essential when checking journal trustworthiness.

"All stakeholders across the research community – from individual authors, editors and reviewers, to publishers, institutions and funders – have an important role to play to uphold research integrity." (5)

Despite all preventative measures, research support staff still regularly hear from authors who have accidentally submitted an article to a predatory journal or have encountered questionable publishing practices.

1.3
Consequences and impact

Submitting articles to predatory journals or making use of a publisher that delivers questionable editorial and peer review services can have severe consequences for the academic credibility of the published record and for you as a scholar (6). Scholarly publications that do not undergo quality peer review risk being published with unreliable content. High-quality peer review assesses the validity of scholarly findings and improves the quality of a scholarly publication.

The dissemination of scholarly publications with poor or fake peer review, or lacking peer review completely, can allow misinformation to enter the published scholarly record and undermine the validity of academic research. Note that you have a responsibility yourself, too, if you act as peer reviewer to be honest and scrupulous, and refrain from working for journals that do not apply the required standards of quality to its publications (7).

Predatory conferences

Next to predatory publishers it is good to beware of the so-called 'predatory conferences'. These predatory conferences are set up to look like legitimate academic or professional events but their real purpose is to scam speakers out of money by charging them registration fees for services which they will not receive. Practices include publishing abstracts of presentations without consent, claiming involvement of prominent academics (who are unaware of this), last-minute cancellations without refund, and more. Speakers and attendees may pay to attend a completely non-existent event or, in more extreme cases, speakers turn up to find conference rooms with no audience other than fellow victims of the scam.

High-quality peer review plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of academic research and the advancement of scholarly knowledge.

1. Introduction

How can submitting to and publishing with a predatory or questionable publisher affect you?

A significant risk of submitting an article to a predatory or highly questionable publisher is the loss of control over your work. There is little stopping a predatory publisher from posting (publishing) your work online, even without your permission. Also, known predatory and questionable journals and their contents are actively excluded from most internationally recognised (citation) indexes. This means that colleagues won't find your article and you may not be able to count a publication in professional evaluations or list them in grant proposals. This is especially troubling for early career researchers for whom an individual article can form a significant portion of their published output. In addition predatory publishers commonly demand payment despite your request to withdraw your article.

On top of the potential reputation and financial damages, dealing with a predatory publisher can be very stressful personally.

Trustworthy publishers may refuse to consider work that has already been published online, even in a predatory journal, and withdrawing your article from a predatory journal can be very difficult.

drawup/danibal

2. Recognising predatory and questionable practices

In this chapter you will find tools and resources that can help you distinguish between high-quality journals and journals displaying predatory or questionable practices.

The best way to ensure that the journal you want to publish in is of good quality is to use a combination of advice and tools to get a complete picture of how the journal operates.

2.1
Key guidelines

When it comes to recognising predatory publishers and questionable practices, there are two overall guidelines to follow:

If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.

This phrase is commonly associated with fraudulent webshops but applies to publishing too. For scholarly publishing this applies to the costs of publishing open access but, more importantly, to the length of the peer review process. Rigorous peer review takes time, and it is doubtful that a journal can maintain high-quality standards if they promise publication within mere days or weeks from the moment of submission.

It's better to be safe than sorry.

Even when publication pressure is high, there is always time to make sure that your intended publication venue is one you will not regret. Authors can use the journal quality indicators below to conduct their own investigation. Properly evaluating the quality of a journal is well worth the

time and effort spent. Support staff in many university libraries have experience in helping authors assess journal quality and avoid predatory and questionable publishers.

2.2
Characteristics of predatory or questionable practices

High-quality (open access) journals are transparent about their editorial processes and deliver professional level publishing services to authors. Predatory and questionable journals do the opposite. Although they can be challenging to recognise, many predatory and questionable journals share similar characteristics. This section describes these common characteristics, why these are possible indicators of questionable practices, and how to check if their occurrence is a reason for concern. The table in section 2.3 gives an overview of typical publishing characteristics and their severity in determining whether a journal has a high, medium, or low risk of being predatory or questionable.

2.2a
Journal characteristics

Scope
The journal's scope is important to determine whether editors or reviewers possess the necessary expertise to evaluate an author's article correctly. If this scope is overly broad, the journal may aim to publish as many articles as possible and potentially care less about quality. A journal publishing articles that fall outside of their scope is another indicator of questionable publishing practices.

Editors
Check the list of editors and the editorial board for experts in your field. Editorial boards of predatory journals often list fake names or researchers who are not actually editors for the journal. Occasionally, experts know about their participation, but are unaware of the questionable nature of the journal. If in doubt, try to contact one or two editors/board members and ask about their experience with the journal. Editors and board members of good quality journals normally respond promptly and professionally to author enquiries.

Mimicking famous journals
Some predatory journals try to lure authors by pretending to be another journal, usually one that is well-known within a particular discipline. Check the journal title, contents, and website carefully before submitting.

> If a title is notably similar to another authoritative journal within your field, but looks odd or shows unexpected changes (e.g. a different publisher), you may be dealing with a predatory publisher.

Indexing
Being registered in esteemed databases or acknowledged by renowned organisations is an important indication of a journal's trustworthiness. There are various organisations that perform some level of quality check before including journals or publishers in their listings.

- The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is a database that indexes full open access journals. The DOAJ conducts a quality check before including journals and articles in their database.

- Major databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO or commonly used database in your specific field use

inclusion criteria for their indexes and periodically remove suspicious articles and journals from their register.

- The Commission on Publication Ethics (COPE) provides leadership and guidelines on publication ethics, and practical resources including flowcharts on handling publication ethics issues. Publishers need to comply with quality criteria to become a member of COPE.

- The Open Access Scholarly Publication Association (OASPA) is a community of organisations that encourages and enables open access as the predominant communication model for scholarly output. Publishers need to comply with quality criteria to become a member.

It is important to note that inclusion in such databases or registries is not a foolproof indicator of quality. In the past, some suspected and proven predatory journals have been found indexed in major databases. In addition, it may take several years for new but trustworthy journals to be included in these databases. Check the organisation's own website for their most current and accurate listings.

Metrics
Be careful when considering a citation metric listed on a journal's website.

> It is very easy for predatory publishers to post fake or meaningless metrics on their website, e.g. Index Copernicus Value (8).

Metrics can be verified via the databases that produce them. For example, Impact Factors can be verified via Web of Science, and CiteScore can be verified via Scopus.

Special issues / guest-edited collections

For authors, special issues can be attractive as the scope is often narrowly defined and explicitly targets an audience of researchers working on the same subject. Some journals produce an excessive number of special issues per year, possibly even encompassing most of their articles. They may also offer a higher likelihood of acceptance and a speedy publication process, which may come at the expense of quality. Each issue needs (guest) editors and a considerable number of reviewers, and the pool of reviewers per discipline is not bottomless. This leads to rising concerns about maintaining proper peer review standards.

Licensing

A high-quality open access journal makes sure that the rights for use and re-use of content at article level are clearly stated with a licence on each article. Most journals use the Creative Commons licence for this purpose, although sometimes other licences may be used. These rights must be properly indicated, both on the website and during the submission process.

Persistent identifiers

Persistent identifiers, like the Digital Object Identifier (DOI), are essential for articles to be findable and accessible. Nowadays, almost every digital journal uses such identifiers to ensure that their content is easily found. Check if published articles have such an identifier assigned in the journal.

2.2b
Quality of the peer review process

A robust, high-quality peer review process is essential for accurate and scientifically sound publishing. The type of peer review used by the journal should be clearly stated on the journal's website and adhered to in the editorial process.

Essential tools

A commonly used checklist for avoiding predatory publishers is Think. Check. Submit.. It includes several questions regarding membership in recognised industry initiatives, such as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA).

Another important tool is the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Journals and publishers indexed within this database have to meet a range of ethical and quality standards, so they are less likely to be questionable.

The peer review process can vary in quality and thoroughness, even with journals that are not intentionally deceiving authors but are still of questionable quality. Some questionable journals have very high acceptance rates or put pressure on reviewers or even editors to accept a manuscript despite flaws. The quality of the review process can be difficult for authors to assess but gives important information on a journal's trustworthiness.

- Make use of your professional network. Do your colleagues know the journal, are they positive about it and about the thoroughness of their peer review process?

- Have you or your colleagues ever conducted peer review for this journal?

- Check the journal's correction and retraction history on Retraction Watch.

- Information about journal policies regarding the peer review process can be found in the Transpose database.

Length of the peer review process

The length of the review process can vary between disciplines, but it is impossible for it to take a mere couple of days. At the very least, you should expect the process to take several weeks. In most cases, this is (much) longer. If a journal actively promotes exceptionally quick review times, it is highly likely that this speed comes at the expense of quality or that this is a predatory journal offering fake peer reviews. You can check the peer review speed on e.g. SciRev, Journal Guide, or the website of the publisher.

The contents of the reviewer report

Aside from review process length, if you have unwittingly submitted your paper to a predatory journal, you can often recognise questionable review practices by the nature of the reviews themselves. Overly short reviews or those that contain only comments on grammar and formatting should be treated with caution.

2.2c
Website and author recruitment

The website of a predatory predatory publisher can look professional. Some larger predatory publishers devote considerable time and effort to making their website as attractive as possible. It is difficult to rely on website appearances alone to identify predatory journals. However, there are specific website characteristics that are particularly suspicious:

- The website is heavily focused on the author, and not on the reader: article access requires a lot of navigation and while carefully selected articles are clearly highlighted, the bulk of articles are much more hidden behind layers of menus.

- The website contains (an unusual amount of) grammar/spelling errors, chaotic layout, flashing elements, etc.

- There is a notable lack of information about important aspects of the journal like charges, the editorial process, copyright, and publishing licences.

- References to 'author perks' take pride of place, like rapid review, super quick publication times, relatively low open access fees, and easy article acceptance.

- The publishing company address or telephone number does not exist, cannot be reached, or is shared by other companies. Journal email address domains are non-professional (e.g. Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail)

Author recruitment and article solicitation

Both legitimate and questionable journals solicit researchers to submit manuscripts. Be critical of unexpected invitations, especially from journals you have never published in. Author sollicitation becomes suspicious when it is overly aggressive (e.g. many emails), there are very few barriers for starting a special issue (e.g. any topic welcome, offering free publication for editors and authors), or when you are invited to contribute on a topic that doesn't correspond to your area of expertise.

Predatory publishers often refer to many 'author perks', like very short publication times, incredibly low open access fees, and easy acceptance.

2. Recognising predatory and questionable practices

An example of a questionable email from a journal. Note the overly broad journal scope, extremely rapid publication (48 hours), irrelevant indexing, and the use of a Gmail email address instead of a professional email domain. The email also doesn't address any specific person or invite an article on a particular subject.

Subject: Peer Review Journal

International Journal Dental and Medical Sciences Research
IJDMSR

Call For Paper

Submit Your Paper

Dear Author,

We are pleased to inform you that IJDMSR is going to launch its next issue (May 2021). We would like to invite you to contribute your Research Paper for publication in IJDMSR.
The Journal publishes papers of the highest scientific merit and widest possible scope work in all areas related to medical and dental science.

The Journal welcomes review articles, leading medical and clinical research articles, technical notes, case reports and others.

Publication frequency: 12 issue per year
IJDMSR follows the rapid publication process

Indexing: Crossref, NASA ads, DOAJ, Index Copernicus, Open-J Gate etc.
ISSN : 2582-6018

- ICI INDEXED MEDICAL AND DENTAL JOURNAL
- IJDMSR JOURNAL PUBLISHES WITHIN 48 HOURS

Contact Details

Website : www.ijdmsrjournal.com
Email Id : ijdmsr.ad@gmail.com

Regards
Director General
(IJDMSR)

Unsubscribe

2.3

Risk table

The presence of one or more questionable characteristics does not necessarily mean that you are dealing with a predatory journal. Questionable practices may result from unintended communication errors or omissions. However, even if omissions or flaws are not deliberate, it may still be wise to reconsider your publication venue if you doubt that this journal will help you publish a high-quality article. The quality of the peer review process shouldn't be something you compromise on.

This table gives an overview of typical publishing characteristics and their severity in determining whether a journal has a high, medium, or low risk of being predatory or questionable.

** Medium-to-low risk journals
This category can be broken down into two main types of journals/publishers:

1) Non- or semi-professional publishers, e.g. small journals run by interest groups or academic societies. These may not adhere to professional publishing standards due to lack of resources or industry knowledge.

2) Large commercial publishers exhibiting an imbalance between quality content and commercial interests. These type 2 enterprises may pose more considerable risk to scholarly publishing than type 1.

Parameters	High risk	High-to-medium risk	Medium-to-low risk**	Low risk
Journal scope	No clearly defined scope	No clearly defined scope The publisher/journal publishes an excessive number of special issues (compared to regular volumes)	Very broad or vague journal scope The publisher/journal publishes an excessive number of special issues (compared to regular volumes)	Scope clearly defined and subject specific Publisher publishes a normal of amount of regular and special content
Editorial and peer review process	Unclear peer review process Peer review is absent or obviously of very poor quality Peer review is exceptionally fast (days) Very high (almost guaranteed) acceptance rate	Unclear peer review process Peer review is exceptionally fast (days), and reviews focus on anything but academic content Reviewers' expertise notably varies from article topic Very high acceptance rate	Peer review process not well explained upfront Authors can suggest their own reviewers Peer review focuses on grammar or is not subject specific Relatively high acceptance rate	Clear peer review process that is stated upfront Peer review reports contain critical reviews on article contents by subject experts

2. Recognising predatory and questionable practices

Parameters	High risk	High-to-medium risk	Medium-to-low risk**	Low risk
Editors	Editors are fake, not subject experts, or unaware of their inclusion in board No professional contact information for editors	Editors are not active or do not adhere to good editorial practices No professional contact information for editors	Editors are slow to react to enquiries and/or communicate in unprofessional manner No professional contact information for editors	Editorial board consisting of experts Editors can be contacted and respond in a timely and professional manner
Website and marketing emails	Journal/publisher copies or mimics other websites or journals Website and marketing is poorly designed, has grammatical errors, and/or contains false or misleading information Marketing and website are focused on author perks and solicitation of content rather than readers Author sollicitation is very aggressive and/or targets authors irrespective of their expertise	Website and marketing is poorly designed, has grammatical errors, and contains incomplete or incorrect information Marketing and website are focused on author perks and solicitation of content rather than readers Author sollicitation is very aggressive and/or targets authors irrespective of their expertise	Website and marketing emails contain small errors or incomplete information Very active article sollicitation	Website and marketing emails are transparent, accurate, subject specific, and contain complete information for authors and readers Emails and other active marketing tools target the appropriate subject specific audience
Metrics, quality indicators, citations	Journal uses fake Impact Factor or unusual/meaningless metrics and quality indicators High level of self citations	Journal uses unusual metrics and quality indicators High level of self citations	High level of self citations	Journal uses only relevant, recognised metrics
Indexing	Journal falsely claims indexing in databases Journal claims it is indexed in meaningless or non-selective databases (e.g. Google Scholar, ResearchGate, etc.)	Journal not indexed in relevant or commonly used databases	Journal not indexed in relevant or commonly used databases	Journal is indexed in commonly used databases (WoS, Pubmed, etc.) Journal is registered in the DOAJ
Submission process	Unprofessional submission process (e.g. to a private email address)	Unprofessional submission process (e.g. to a private email address)	Unclear submission process	Submission process is clear, transparent, and professional

2. Recognising predatory and questionable practices

Parameters	High risk	High-to-medium risk	Medium-to-low risk**	Low risk
Author services	Lack of professional support, except for publication charge payment	Poor author support (e.g. difficult to contact publisher) Notable delays in responding to questions/messages	Unprofessional author support (e.g. slow response from publisher/editor)	Professional, prompt, and thorough author support. Publisher takes proper action in case of problems or questions
Contact information	No or fake contact information for journal or editors Publishers have the same contact information as lots of other companies	Contact information for journal or editors is not stated, difficult to find, or not up to date	Contact information for journal or editors not immediately findable or not up to date	Contact information for journal and editors is immediately clear and correct
Publishing charges	No upfront information on publishing charges Publishing charges are very low compared to similar journals	No clear upfront information on publishing charges Publishing charges are very low compared to similar journals	Vague information on publishing charges	Clear and transparent information on publishing charges stated upfront Publishing charges conform to similar journals
Licences (e.g. CC BY) and copyright	Journal disregards user licences User licence and copyright are unclear/not properly defined	Journal disregards user licences User licence and copyright are unclear/not properly defined	User licences and copyright may not be clearly stated	Appropriate user licences and copyrights are clearly stated
Permanent identifiers	No or fake permanent identifiers	No permanent identifiers	No permanent identifiers (e.g. small journal or non-professional publisher)	Correct use of permanent identifiers
Actions to take	Don't submit any work in this journal Seek help if you submitted work or published here (see section 3).	Proceed with extreme caution Consult colleagues and/or support staff before submitting any work here.	Proceed with caution Evaluate journal thoroughly before submitting (see section 2). Consider consulting colleagues and/or support staff before submitting any work here.	Evaluate quality of journal for your subject area before submitting work If unsure, consider consulting colleagues and/or support staff before submitting any work here.

Adapted from: IAP Working Group. Report Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences. March 2022, page 32 (Figure 2.1: A spectrum of predatory behaviours for journals) | URL: https://www.interacademies.org/publication/predatory-practices-report-English.

3. HELP! What to do when

Your article has ended up in the hands of a predatory journal, either by your own submission or it has been taken from elsewhere online. What can you do now? Withdrawing your work, or requesting that the publisher remove it from their website, can seem like a daunting process. There are steps you can take to find help and increase your chances of stopping a predatory journal from publishing your article.

A predatory publisher may publish your article online without your permission. There is no guarantee that they will remove your article from their website once published. Speak to your employer or support network to investigate what your options are.

Support network
At any stage in your career, and for many reasons beyond publishing, it is vital to build and maintain a professional network of peers, supervisors, and other contacts who can provide advice and support. Part of this should also include becoming familiar with (legal) support from your institution. This can be a supervisor, librarian, research support staff member, or legal advisor. These colleagues can also help you establish whether a journal is indeed predatory or questionable. Via this network your institute can support you in case you need advice on interacting with the publisher.

Documentation
Keep all associated communications with suspected predatory publishers (emails, screenshots, invoices, etc.). Be transparent with editors if you later submit any similar or derivative versions of this article to a trustworthy journal.

Quick action plan

In general

- Prevention is the best action. Be cautious and avoid sending your work to a predatory or questionable publisher.

- Maintain a good network of peers and support contacts who you can ask for advice.

After the fact (Your article has been submitted or already published online by a predatory publisher)

- The first step is always to alert your support network, including legal affairs, and ask for help.

- Taking immediate action can possibly help with reaching a desired result. Accept that this process may take a long time and you may not be able to publish the article elsewhere.

- In coordination with legal affairs, use clear language and firmly state you are withdrawing your article or demand its removal from the journal/website.

- Do not pay a predatory publisher or sign any agreements with them.

- Keep all associated communications (emails, screenshots, invoices, etc.). Be transparent with editors if you later submit any similar or derivative versions of this article to a trustworthy journal.

3.1
Action plans

You worry that your work has been submitted to a questionable publisher

- Alert your support network at your institute about what has happened. This way your institute can support you if you need advice on interacting with the publisher.

- Communicate politely but firmly with the publisher that you wish to withdraw your article and do not give permission for them to publish it. You do not need to state that you think the journal may be predatory. **There should be no fee for withdrawing your article and no payment should be made to the publisher.**

- If the publisher does not comply with your request, speak with your institute's librarian or legal team to determine the appropriate next steps.

Your work unexpectedly appears in another journal

- Similar to the steps above, start with informing your support network.

- If the work is already published under copyright (or with any other type of licence with restrictions, e.g. CC BY NC) elsewhere, contact the original publisher to determine what steps can be taken to have the copied article taken offline.

  - Remember, if your original article was published under an open licence (e.g. CC BY) then it may be reused as long as the original is properly cited and attributed. If the citation is not included, request that the new publisher adds this.

  - If the new publisher does not comply with your request to add the correct citation, speak with your institute's librarian or legal team to determine the appropriate next steps.

You have published, signed a copyright agreement, and paid for an article in a journal you now realise is predatory or questionable

- The options for resolving this are limited. You can try to retract the article. Alternatively, you can leave it and decide whether or not to include the publication on your CV (e.g. with a note that it has not been thoroughly peer reviewed). It is important to note that your article may not be submitted as a new article to another journal without risking self-plagiarism. Speak to your support network for advice.

Your name unexpectedly appears on an editorial board of a journal

- Alert your support network about what has happened. This way your institute can support you if you need advice on interacting with the publisher.

- Communicate politely but firmly with the publisher that your name (and any other identifiers) must be removed from the publisher's website.

- If the publisher does not comply with your request, speak with your institute's legal team to determine the appropriate next steps.

3.2
Why is it important to inform your institute?

Reporting the incident is important for several reasons. A key reason is to ensure that other parties involved (e.g. co-authors, your supervisors) aren't surprised later when you need help or the publisher contacts them.

Reporting the incident can also help prevent other colleagues from making a similar mistake and spread awareness of predatory publishing and specific questionable or predatory publishers. How the case unfolds can help support staff and academic colleagues learn how to respond to similar cases in future.

Staff and colleagues at your institute can give practical advice on what to do next. Contact with a predatory publisher can be a frustrating, emotional, and even intimidating experience. It is important to keep emotions in check when communicating with the publisher. Having your support network help write communications to the publisher with you, or discuss what the next steps are, can help ease the burden of communicating with the publisher.

Legal help is often available through your institute. Employers are often required to support employees with legal advice or assistance. Your institute's legal team may have experience with writing official complaints to external organisations such as publishers. In some cases there have been group actions against particular predatory publishers. Check with your institute to find out if there are other complaints about particular publishers and whether you can participate in any group actions.

Further actions you can take:

- Leave (anonymous) reviews about your experience on sites such as SciRev.

- Share your experience with colleagues to help prevent your peers from making a similar mistake or support peers who may be experiencing similar problems.

3.3

I've survived my brush with predatory publishing. What can I do with my article now?

After your experience with a predatory or questionable publisher, it's likely you'll still want to try and publish your research in a trustworthy journal. If the article was posted online by the predatory publisher, it will be difficult to publish it with a reputable journal. Most legitimate journals are unlikely to consider an article that is already available on another publisher's website. Nonetheless, it may still be worth trying. Speak to a librarian at your institute for help. You may consider posting your article as a preprint and inviting open peer review that way.

If the predatory publisher did not post your article online, you can probably still submit it. In this case, be transparent with the editors of the new journal you are submitting to. Let the editors know before or at submission that your article had been submitted elsewhere previously and what happened. Some editors may wish to see evidence of what happened with the previous submission (emails, review reports, etc.). Keep in mind that predatory publishers may still post your submitted article online long after your last contact with them.

NOT ALL THE JOURNALS ARE ROTTEN APPLES

QUESTIONABLE PUBLISHER

drawup/danibal

4. FAQ

4.1
Pre-submission

- How can I tell if a publisher is trustworthy?
  - Use this guide!

- Should I respond to an unexpected invitation to submit an article?
  - See section **2.2.c**

- I see a famous journal name butsome details look strange. Should I be suspicious?
  - See section **2.2.a**

- I contacted an interesting journal but the editors won't respond to my questions about the publication. Should I submit anyway?
  - See section **2.2.a**

- I know someone who has published in this journal before. Does that mean the journal is no longer predatory or questionable?
  - Not necessarily. If the journal conducts predatory or questionable practices (for example, an unclear peer review process), it is still very important that you use your own judgement to evaluate the journal. Colleagues also make mistakes and publish in questionable journals without meaning to.

- I want to share my work as soon as possible and avoid high open access fees. How can I do this while limiting the risk of publishing in a predatory/questionable journal?
  - An easy, ethical solution to get your work out in public quickly with no or low costs is sharing a preprint before submitting to a journal.
  - See section **2.2.a** to find reputable journals in your field. Check if your institution has agreements with publishers to cover the open access fees.

4.2
Post submission – Withdrawing your article

- I think I submitted to a predatory journal. Should I let my institute know?
  - See section **3.2**

- Should I try to get my article back now that I realise it's a questionable journal?
  - Yes. See section 3.1

- Should I pay a questionable publisher?
  - No. See section **3.1**

4.3
Serving as Editor

Questions and advice are very similar to when you are an author.

- I've been asked to be an editor. Should I accept the invitation?
  - Advice for prospective editors is similar as for authors. See section **2.2.c**

- I really want to be an editor but I have some doubts about the quality of the journal. Is it unethical for me to become an editor there anyway?
  - As an editor you are responsible for journal integrity and represent the journal to authors and readers (7). If you trust a journal and are prepared to conduct thorough editorial work, then you will also feel comfortable representing the publication to authors and readers. If you do not trust the journal, take part in poor editorial work, or misrepresent the quality of the journal to authors and readers, you will be contributing to the questionable journal problem.

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