

Confronting the Threat of Predatory Journals: Time for Nepalese Academia to be Aware

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INTRODUCTION

According to International Committee of Journal Medical Editors (ICMJE), there are growing numbers of entities that advertise themselves as a “scholarly medical” journal but do not function as they claim termed as “predatory” or “pseudo-journals”.¹ According to bibliometric analysis of 1289 standalone journals and 1162 publishers which corresponds to approx. 21735 journals in the Beall’s list, 38.8% were located in the United States, 30 % in India and 7.1 % in United Kingdom. Surprisingly, the majority of journals were listed in the ISSN database, Crossref, PubMed, Scopus, DOAJ, Pubmed Central, or Web of Science.² This distribution highlights the global impact of predatory publishing, which surprisingly also included established scientific journals and publishers. Developed nations with strong academic infrastructure and governance immediately became aware of the emerging issue, however developing nation with poor academic governance were not even entirely aware of the situation and the looming threat they will be facing in next decade.

Predatory journals have become a significant problem for researchers in the academic world. These journals cleverly request papers promising speedy publication while avoiding reliable peer review, and editorial supervision without following good publishing standards and norms.³ The prime motive was of the predatory publishers and journals was to earn money using the open access model but deceiving the innocent and unaware authors who had pressure to publish for academic purposes.⁴ Since the problem is on global scale, the increasing burden highlights the urgent call for awareness and prevention strategies among not only the global scholars but also the Nepalese academic scholars.

Predatory journals are typically demonstrating the absent or fraudulent rigorous peer review process which is an essence to academic writing and publication. Those journals generally put emphasis on profit over quality, questioning the integrity of academic publication.³ These journals were also found to conduct an aggressive email campaign showing exaggerated journal metrics with promises of quick acceptance.⁵ The researchers are in deception as these journals have very similar titles to renowned journals, whereby they claim high impact factors or unverified names of the editorial board members.⁶ Additionally, these journals have opaque fee structures characterized by unforeseen high fees or concealed costs with no clear-cut guidelines mentioned in their websites and normally deals in individual basis.

Although predatory journals are prevalent globally, their detrimental effects are increasingly resonating inside the expanding research sector, particularly in Nepal. The link of Nepalese researchers with predatory publications may diminish the perceived quality of Nepalese academia and impact the worldwide acceptance and credibility of research undertaken locally.³ Secondly, academic organizations that rely on quantitative publication measures are likely to incentivize their academics to publish in inferior journals,⁷ thereby diminishing the value of genuine scientific contributions. Such an environment is likely to undermine research credibility, foster unethical promotion practices, and results in the waste of crucial financial resources aimed to promote the academics of the country as well.

Recent global researches have outlined the wide spreading reach of predatory publication among academicians. Study of biomedical journals flagged as “potentially predatory” indicated that many of the publications had poor editorial oversight, with low quality journal homepage lacking verifiable information.⁴

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Another study noted that predatory publishers usually send emails in mass, targeting multiple authors from different parts of the world.⁶ Nepalese researchers, especially young academics under pressure to publish, similarly receive many such approaches, claiming that the publication will be faster with low chances of rejection. It is becoming even more difficult for new researchers due to the lack of strict quality control over certain claims of membership and indexing in reputed organizations.

Multi-centric approaches are necessary to mitigate the unintentional consequences of research waste by sensitizing Nepalese researchers for maintaining the quality of the country's local research culture. Universities can reinforce on the idea of journal credibility rather than mere publication count while considering for promotion and funding preferences. Institutional level trainings should also make the academicians aware regarding reputable journals and publishers. Senior faculty members with concrete ideas in medical research can guide the juniors' colleagues for submitting into vetted journals with standard editorial practices.

The claims done by most questionable journals are often found false. Therefore, verifying the journal indexing status in the recognized databases like PubMed, Web of Science, is must before submission.⁴ The journals mentioning a clear details regarding the peer review process and publication fees indicate higher legitimacy reflecting transparency.⁶ Nepalese medical institutions and governing bodies can jointly maintain a database of national as well as international verified journals or known predatory nature publishers' names preventing the young researchers into publishing in the low quality journals.

Table 1. Suggested steps

1. Check the journal's editorial board and website content thoroughly.
2. Cross-verify the journal's claimed presence on the recognized databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science etc. rather than relying on the basis journal's claim alone.
3. Look for clear retraction and correction policies since credible journals have transparent guidelines mentioned for handling any errors, retractions, and corrections.
4. Confirm all the fees upfront and compare it with the established journal Article Processing Charges (APCs).

Table 1. Suggested steps

5. Review the peer review guidelines mentioned in the journal website and request the journal to provide complete peer review timeline and guidelines.
6. Select the journals published by recognized publishers mainly non-commercial and active in recognized databases.
7. Check whether the publisher is affiliated with recognized organizations. [e.g., Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE), Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), ICMJE etc.]
8. Look out for generic email addresses (e.g., Gmail, Yahoo) used by the editorial staff during editorial workflow. Good journals typically have institutional or publisher specific domain emails.
9. Prefer the journal that put emphasis over readers' perspective than attracting the authors with flashy metrics/claims.
10. Evaluate the editorial consistency by looking at the past issues. Poorly edited articles might suggest minimal editorial standards.
11. Seek for expert mentor recommendations who will assist to find out journals with established peer-review practices and good reputation.

WAY FORWARD

Predatory journals pose a significant threat to the credibility of Nepalese researchers, demanding urgent attention. These journals compromise the integrity of research and publications, diverting critical resources away from academia. It is essential for researchers, academic institutions, and policymakers to collaborate in establishing clear institutional and nationwide policies that discourage unethical editorial practices and foster successful partnerships. By promoting proactive awareness and encouraging careful journal selection, Nepalese academia can maintain its integrity and credibility within the global scientific community. A collaborative effort to develop shared guidelines aligned with national and international research conduct standards for ethical research practices is imperative.

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