

## Predation in Publishing

The road to publication can seem long and daunting. Further, access to published work is often limited to larger institutions that can afford expensive journal subscription fees. Gold open-access publications aimed to change the landscape of evidence-based science, allowing papers to be widely accessible without a subscription, often requiring an article processing fee paid by the author or institution. Regardless of the access model, reputable journals are expected to adhere to the publishing code of ethics and provide transparency in the peer review process. While the latter can significantly increase the length of processing time through multiple revisions, editors and peer reviewers provide expert opinions and valuable feedback, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the journal and the scientific process.

Unfortunately, numerous counterfeit journals have arisen in this era of open-access publishing. Beall, from the University of Colorado, was the first to use the term “predatory” in describing these journals.<sup>[1]</sup> The so-called predatory journals find easy prey in early career researchers and academics hoping to publish at any cost. Predatory publishers have since been defined as those that “*prioritize profit at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial practices, lack of transparency, and use of aggressive or indiscriminate solicitation practices.*”<sup>[2]</sup>

The need to publish or perish in the current academic environment drives some authors to seek the easiest route to publication without realizing the threat to evidence-based science. Counterfeit journals threaten to pollute the pool of scientific evidence with poorly conducted research and pseudoscience.<sup>[3]</sup> Cortegiani *et al.* argue that authors are not always the “prey” and, in fact, can be predators themselves, aware of the dubious practices yet ignoring these in the pursuit of a much-needed publication or presentation to improve their curriculum vitae. These vicious cycles can allow the propagation of suspicious publications and predatory conferences.<sup>[4]</sup>

Beall’s List, named for its founder, is a list of predatory publishers discontinued in 2017. Criticized for targeting publishers from lower-income or developing countries and lacking evidence-based criteria for listing predatory

journals,<sup>[5]</sup> various groups have attempted to provide criteria ranking suspicious publication practices.

These criteria include characteristics of the editorial section, such as the use of general e-mail services, editorial affiliations, number of editors, length of time to review, announcement e-mails, and publication fees. Each criterion has a weighted rank. Tosti and Maddy used this to rank predatory journals in dermatology, finding almost 90% of dermatology journals in Beall’s list could be classified as predatory. The other 10% were classified as journals engaging in predatory practices. This demonstrates that predatory journals are abundant in the field of dermatology.<sup>[6]</sup>

Ultimately, the burden is upon the author to review potential journals. Authors can review ISSN numbers and countercheck whether the journal location is consistent with the location provided in the ISSN. Numerous websites list potential predatory journals and publishers, although the accuracy of these is not guaranteed (<https://predatoryjournals.com/journals/> and <https://predatoryjournals.com/publishers/>). Websites such as [thinkchecksubmit.org](https://thinkchecksubmit.org) help researchers identify potential red flags before journal submission.<sup>[3]</sup>

While early career investigators bear the burden of publication pressure, authors must be reminded of why they need to publish -- their invaluable contribution to evidence-based medicine.

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