

**Discussion Paper****Predatory Journals: A Threat to Scholarly Publishing**Jiban Shrestha^{1*} , Subash Subedi², Behzad Shokati³ and Amit Chaudhary⁴¹Agriculture Botany Division, Nepal Agricultural Research Council, Lalitpur, Nepal²National Maize Research Program, Rampur, Chitwan, Nepal³Young Researchers and Elite Club, Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran⁴Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences, Lamjung Campus, Lamjung, Nepal**Abstract**

Nowadays the world of scholarly publishing is in serious trouble because of the increasing number of predatory publishing. Besides, citation of articles from predatory journals is also unethical that undermines the quality of research papers. Because of ignorance of predatory publishing and/or compulsion of getting published in a limited time, scholars from Universities and young researchers become victim to predatory or hijacked journals. The purpose of this paper is to create awareness among authors, especially novice ones, about predatory publication. Research institutions should encourage their researchers to publish their articles in valuable journals indexed in Web of Science's Journal Citation Reports (JCR), Clarivate Analytics, formerly part of Thomson-Reuters) or other famous scientific databases such as Scopus, PubMed and MEDLINE. In this way, attention to the Thomson Reuters' Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and Journal Ranking (JRK) and Scopus grade (Q1, Q2 and Q3) may be useful and necessary.

Keywords: Predatory publishing, citation, threat of publication**Introduction**

Generally, young researchers or scholars try to publish a number of articles in a very short period of time to increase their academic reputation or strengthen their curriculum vitae. For this purpose, they usually get victim of predatory publication. They become

ready to pay high fees for publishing their manuscripts. Most notably, they are unaware of predatory journals. There are certain features of predatory journals that put them away from standard academic publishing. First, the predatory publishers charge publishing fees from the authors but they usually do not provide editorial services. They often act as open access academic publishers; most of them are usually online-only journals. Jeffrey Beall coined the term 'predatory journals' and 'predatory publishers' around a decade ago to refer to such journals and publishers that publish anything for money and "do not follow scholarly publishing industry standards" (Beall, 2016). According to Shamseer et al. (2017), predatory publishers frequently ask the researchers to submit their manuscripts to their publications and charge fees without providing review services.

Some features of most of the predatory journals are as follows (Beall, 2016; Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Nolfi, Lockhart, & Myers, 2015; Vinny, Vishnu, & Lal, 2016; Eaton, 2018):

- Though they try to show all the backgrounds, they actually are not included or linked up with reliable and authentic scholarly, academic or technical society or association.
- They do not have authorization to get public (e.g. government) funds or grants.
- They send some spam e-mails to potential authors.
- They try to show off their qualities, metrics and index status to attract the authors, which are fake.
- They try to include a Chief Editor who is highly experienced and have already done so many works of editing related to different disciplines that helps to increase weightage of that publication.
- They claim that they will adopt the fastest peer review process and publish the manuscript in a very short period of time.
- They have very similar kind of title as compared to good journals - they might make few changes in their title or subtitle. E.g. they may include the words like 'International', 'World', 'Global' or 'Universal' in their title.
- They pretend to be most reliable by falsely showing that they belong to renowned publishers and are based in major cities.
- They intentionally create dilemma in the authors so that the authors could not find the editorial and/or managerial team of the journal.
- They usually accept any paper with 'no changes needed'.

According to Stratford (2012), we can easily identify the predatory journals because they easily accept the articles, do less peer review and publish in a very short period of time. Predatory journals frequently ask for submission of articles and also include academics

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in their editorial team without taking permission from them (Butler, 2013; Elliott, 2012; Neumann, 2012). They try to make titles or website names similar to authentic and popular journals (Kolata, 2013), create false locations of contact (Elliott, 2012) and also try to show self-created fake impact factors. Fake journals are careless about the proofreading and proper correction of mistakes so they are full of grammatical errors (Mehrpour & Khajavi, 2014). They publish several issues per volume and the number of articles tend to go up every issue.

They mainly neglect the good peer review procedure but show that they have very reliable editorial team, altering the database list and affiliation status under any renowned institution. Carroll (2015) said that if any publisher promises to accept and publish the article by doing rapid review then it is sure that it is a predatory type of journal. In fact, predatory journals do not perform any sort of valid peer review. Therefore, an author must read the received email from any publisher very carefully to prevent fraud cases. Olson (2017) concluded that predatory journals generally lack proper listing of editorial team, clear contact and identifying information.

The University of Nairobi (n.d.) has succinctly summarized the criteria for determining predatory and questionable publishers or journals in the following list:

- They promise that the articles will be published within a week or so.
- They send spam emails to authors regularly requesting to submit their manuscripts.
- Publication fee is often not publically displayed on the website.
- The publisher fails to state the licensing policy information on articles; they lack policy for article retraction.
- Editors are found that they have published their articles in predatory journals.
- All editors come from one region, department or community.
- Their journals have titles similar to other popular Journals. They use terms like International; British, European, American, New, etc. in their journal titles.
- They use the same editorial board member for more than one journal.
- The coverage of subjects is broad to attract more articles.
- Editors/review board members do not possess academic expertise to qualify them.
- The links and telephone numbers they provide on the website do not work.

Fake journals claim themselves that they have (Thomson-Reuters) impact factors, Index Copernicus Value, or advertise themselves by creating fake “impact factor” services, or also use some fake synonym of impact factors (e.g. view factor) pretending to have good features in them. Due to this bad trend of creating fake impact factors, even the authentic

journals are losing their respect in the publication field. Those publishers who do not belong to reputed impact factors (e.g. the Journal Citation Reports) or metrics create fake impact factors. The significance of any journal in terms of the number of articles published is mainly defined by its impact factor (JIF). The impact factor of more than 10,000 journals have been listed in Journal Citation Report (JCR) published by Clarivate Analytics, also used to be known as Thomson Reuters and ISI (Shrestha, Subedi, Timsina, & Tripathi, 2018).

Comparison of journal is usually made by using the impact factor. It can also help to compare and know the significant role played by any academic researchers, related institutions, scientists in scientific publication world. Generally, the fake impact factors used by predatory journals often lure novice researchers to choose the journal. This trend has been badly affecting the academic publication. Moreover, it is very difficult to eliminate those entire fake journal metrics from the list available online. Below is the list of available fake metrics.

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| • AE Global Index | • IMPACT-FACTOR.RU |
| • Advanced Science Index | • Impact Factor Services for International Journals (IFSIJ) |
| • African Quality Centre for Journals | • Index Scientific Journals (ISJ) |
| • American Standards for Journals and Research (ASJR) | • IndexCopernicus |
| • Arab Impact Factor | • Infobase Index |
| • Cite Factor | • Institute for Science Information (ISI) |
| • Cosmos Impact Factor | • International Accreditation and Research Council (IARC) |
| • Digital Identification Database System (DIDS) | • International Impact Factor Services |
| • Digital Online Identifier-Database System (DOI Indexed Journals Impact Factor / DOIJIF) | • International Innovative Journal Impact Factor (IIJIF) |
| • Directory of Indexing and Impact Factor (DIIF) | • International Institute for Research |
| • Directory of Journal Quality Factor | • International Institute of Organized Research (I2OR) |
| • Directory of Research Journals Indexing (DRJI) | • International Journal Impact Factor (IJIF) |
| • Einstein Institute for Scientific Information (EISI) | • International Scientific Indexing (ISI) |
| • Eurasian Scientific Journal Index (ESJI) | • International Scientific Institute (ISI) |
| • General Impact Factor | • Jour Informatics |
| • Global Impact Factor | • Journal Impact Factor |
| • Global Science Citation Impact Factor (GSCIF) | • Journals Impact Factor (JIFACTOR) |
| | • Journal Influence Factor |
| | • Journals Consortium. Journal Influence Factor (JIF) |
| | • JPR Impact Factor |

- Online Publications Quality Control Association (OPQC)
- Open Academic Journals Index
- Perma Society of Technical Education and Research
- Pubijcon Science Index
- RJI Factor (Research Journal Impact Factor)
- Root Indexing
- Science Impact Factor
- Scientific Indexing Services
- Scientific Journal Impact Factor
- SCIJOURNAL.ORG (International Scientific Institute)
- SPARC Indexing
- Systematic Impact Factor
- Technical Impact Factor
- Universal Impact Factor

(Source: <https://predatoryjournals.com/metrics/>)

Trend of Publishing in Predatory Journals

The quality and quantity of contributions to the publication sector are very important for any academic researchers or scientists. They mainly use this information to prepare their resume or to show the experiences they have achieved while trying to get any job, research grants, project grants, promotion or for further studies, too. Generally, some funding agencies and research organizations also expect to have frequent publications by the researchers for their reputation which leads the concerned authors to choose fake publishers. Likewise, good journals frequently reject the poor or average quality manuscripts which may be frustrating to authors and thus they tend to make this mistake – choose predatory journals (Roberts, 2016a). This problem is mainly seen in case of developing countries as well as in case of new scholars or researchers (Kearney, 2015; Shrestha et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2014).

Clark and Smith (2015) recommended that academic scholars and researchers of developing or low income countries should be given good knowledge and awareness about choosing authentic publications. Shen and Björk (2015) found that the trend of universities benefitting their academic researchers for frequent scientific publications have also increased the number of fake publications. In 2010, about 53000 fake articles were published followed by 420000 articles in 2014 which were published through about 8000 fake journals. The regular occurrence of fake conferences and publication of fake articles through them are increasing in a regular manner. Bohannon (2013) found that among the fake articles sent as a trial to 304 fake journals, 157 of those journals easily accepted those manuscripts for publication. Likewise, it was also observed that 24 conferences easily

accepted 85 fake manuscripts in 2013 (Bohannon, 2015). About 35% of Indian researchers have published their papers in useless journals (Vyawahare, 2017). Nepal may also have similar kind of trend. The scholars and researchers of highly reputed institutes like Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), ICMR labs, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and National Institute of Technology (NIT) have also published their findings in fake journals. Researchers from Nepalese organizations or institutions like Nepal Agriculture Research Council (NARC), Tribhuvan University (TU) and Agriculture & Forestry University (AFU) too have done similar kind of works. This happens mainly due to submission activity done by co-authors who do not have enough idea about it and the main authors show carelessness about the selection of good journal. Likewise, PhD candidates have the pressure to publish their papers. So to fulfil their requirements, and due to lack of enough time, they randomly select fake journals to place their articles. Easy access of online submission process also have benefited this bad trend in developing and low income countries (Bowman, 2014; Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Kearney, 2015).

The authors have to face several problems if they have published in fake journals. Nicoll and Chinn (2015) found that if authors want to remove their articles from the fake journals after publication, then either the authors are asked to pay the withdrawal charge or the publishers refuse to return the article. It must be remembered that we should never try to publish our articles in fake journals as well as should not cite any articles from the predatory journals because this can deteriorate our own article's authenticity. It will be useless for our curriculum vitae (CV) or resume. Any funding organizations, companies, research institutions, academic institutions etc. evaluate the research publication according to its authenticity and quality (Smith, 2006). While choosing any journal by academic librarians; they mainly examine their impact factor (Barschall, 1988; Coleman, 2007). Fake journals also have fake editorial team (Sorokowski, Kulczycki, Sorokowska, & Pisanski, 2017). According to a study by Sorokowski et al. (2017), an imaginary CV of a person named Anna O. Szust (derived from a polish word 'Ozust' which means 'fraud') was sent to different journal. All the qualifications, degrees and experiences about scientific and academic publications were fake. Despite such fake information, 40 predatory and 8 Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) indexed journals accepted the CV and they included her in their editorial team, too (Sorokowski et al., 2017). This clearly expresses the devastating condition of fraud happening in scientific publication work. The prestige of genuine open access publishers is also being declined day to day (Beall, 2013).

Harmful Effects of Predatory Publishing

Authors are easily fooled by predatory journals by showing the fake but attractive features. The published articles may be present online for many years and disappear later. It may be easier for authors to publish in such journals and earn popularity for a short term

but it will be devastating in the long run.

Some of the dangers of publishing with a predatory publisher are outlined below:

Poor Quality Assurance

The major way of assuring the good quality of any article is through peer review followed by editorial services. Predatory journals do not usually practice the peer review process, which leads to the poor quality of the published article.

Low Visibility and Findability of the Articles

Fake journals may mention the details like they have been included in some authentic databases like Scopus or Web of Science but we cannot find them in real. This causes low visibility and difficulty in finding the concerned articles.

Non-guaranteed Long-term Availability of the Publication

Fake journal cannot guarantee to make the article available permanently because they themselves disappear after some year vanishing all available articles from online sources.

Risk to Scientific Career and Reputation

Though it is very easy to publish articles in predatory journals, it can deteriorate our scientific career and reputation. It decreases the quality of a researcher's CV. Fake journals are only created to earn money but not for providing any scientific contribution to the world of science. It will deteriorate the reputation of any author suffering rejection from any job agencies or grants organizations.

Identifying Good Versus Predatory Journals

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) includes the criteria for authentic publishers, and provides guidelines to editors, reviewers and authors to address breaches of research and publication ethics. Likewise, International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and African Journals Online (AJOL) have jointly developed criteria for good journals - Journal Publishing and Practices and Standards (JPPS). The major reputed research groups and repositories like Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), DOAJ, INASP, International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER), Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), Scientific Technical Medical Journal (STM), United Kingdom Serials Group (UKSG) and individual publishers mainly suggest to authors that they check the journal background very carefully and then apply for article publication. Likewise, World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), DOAJ and OASPA have good transparency principles and protocols to be followed for publication. Nevertheless, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and Scopus are not free of

indexed articles published in fake journals which get vanished after the disappearance of that journal from online (Betz, 2016).

With the growing number of Open Access journals, a category of dubious Open Access journals has also emerged which, although they describe themselves as peer reviewed; publish virtually every contribution submitted against payment of a publication fee. To be a good journal, it must have articles with particular Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs), ISSN, Copyright, and a diverse editorial team. It should also have clear user rights e.g. Creative Commons (CC) License. Good journals are placed on Ulrichs Web Global Serials Directory as well as in DOAJ and are members of OASPA. All the required information like contact details, impact factor, fee structure, indexes, publication date, schedule etc. are given in a detailed and clear way. After the predatory publication of scientific articles, related researchers, research institutions may be included in black list and their whole scientific reputation will be spoiled. If an author publishes his/her findings in a good authentic journal, then an attractive scholarship, grant or job opportunity will be provided by reputed international institutions (Samuel, 2018).

We can easily find the predatory journals by reviewing Beall's lists and COPE guidelines about ethics to be followed during genuine publication (Yucha, 2015). The problem is that some journal may keep fake logo of COPE (Roberts, 2016b). Likewise, we can also visit the website of International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers (STM) and the OASPA (Shahriari, Grant-Kels, & Payette, 2016). We have to check the official website of DOAJ about the existence of any journal in its list. All the universities, institutions, researchers and scholars must keep patience and be very careful about publication of a few quality articles in good journals better than publishing a larger amount of articles in predatory journals.

An author must search on authentic databases like Scopus, PubMed, MEDLINE and Thomson Reuters Web of Science to choose true publishers for publication. Journal Citation Report (JCR) and SCImago Journals Rank (SJR) indicators are two better ways to find out good journals for publication. JCR was only the option which was used to show the real impact factor (IF) of an authentic journal before the emergence of Scopus data. Good quality journals are listed in Scopus databases (Mahmood & Almas, 2016). According to Research Assessment (n.d.), "Quartile rankings are derived for each journal in each of its subject categories according to which quartile of the Impact factor (IF) distribution the journal occupies for that subject category" (para. 2). It goes on to elaborate the quartile ranking in this way: "Q1 denotes the top 25% of the IF distribution, Q2 for middle-high position (between top 50% and top 25%), Q3 middle-low position (top 75% to top 50%), and Q4 the lowest position (bottom 25% of the IF distribution)" (Research Assessment, n.d., para. 2).

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