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Manuscript Submission Invitations from 'Predatory Journals': What Should Authors Do?

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Press freedom and worldwide internet access have opened ample opportunity for a staggering number of poor open access journals and junk publishers to emerge. Dubious publishers are abusing and camouflaging the golden open access model. In 2012, Jeffery Beall shed light on the predatory journals (as he preferred to call them) and the threat to open access scientific publication. Publishing in predatory journals is continuing to be a major threat for the development of science in developing countries. The authors of this article proposed solutions and outline a fresh perspective to help authors avoid publishing in predatory journals.

Keywords: Predatory Journals; Predatory Publishers; Scholarly Open Access

WHAT ARE PREDATORY JOURNALS AND HOW DO THEY OPERATE?

It was the time when an ambitious early career researcher finished writing the manuscript of his master's thesis. He tried to sort through a number of journals, though he was not sure which journal was the right one to publish his work. Then, suddenly, he received an "article submission invitation" email from a journal pledging publication within a month. That was the time this young scientist became the victim of a predatory journal.

Publishing is an essential step to reach a wider audience and it is a key metric to measure the maturity of scientists (1). However, for many young academicians, particularly from developing countries, the question of where to publish their work is a considerable challenge. Submitting a manuscript to an inappropriate journal is one of the common mistakes of early career scientists (1).

In developing countries, where institutions and libraries cannot afford the subscription fees to access journal articles, open access is the best model to reach those who cannot afford to access relevant scientific publications (2-4). Motivated by press freedom, global internet and financial gains, predatory journals have emerged to corrupt open access. Everyone working in science daily receives emails of article submission invitations from "journals" and "publishers". They request manuscript processing fees which mainly guarantees the acceptance of manuscripts without adequate scientific review (5, 6). They request payments from those who cannot even afford to publish manuscripts (5, 7). Predatory journals and publishers are those having minimal or nonexistent peer review, allowing weak scientific content to be published in the name of authentic science (5) (Fig. 1). The number of these predatory journals is ever increasing. The 2016 Jeffrey Beall list shows that 923 publishers, 882 standalone journals and 101 hijacked journals are registered as predatory (8).

Inexperienced researchers from developing countries are the victims of these junk journals (9). Promotions of academic ranks in developing country universities are based on the number of publications rather than quality (10, 11). In 2014, more than 400,000 articles were published in predatory journals. More than three quarter of the authors were from Asia and Africa (12). These journals are polluting the academic world as university positions are getting to be filled with people having poor quality publication profiles (11).

HOW CAN WE AVOID THESE JOURNALS?

Five emerging career scientists shared their experiences. They received 10-15 journal article submission and conference invitations in their inbox and spam folders from predatory publishers every day. For 28 article submission invitations, one of the

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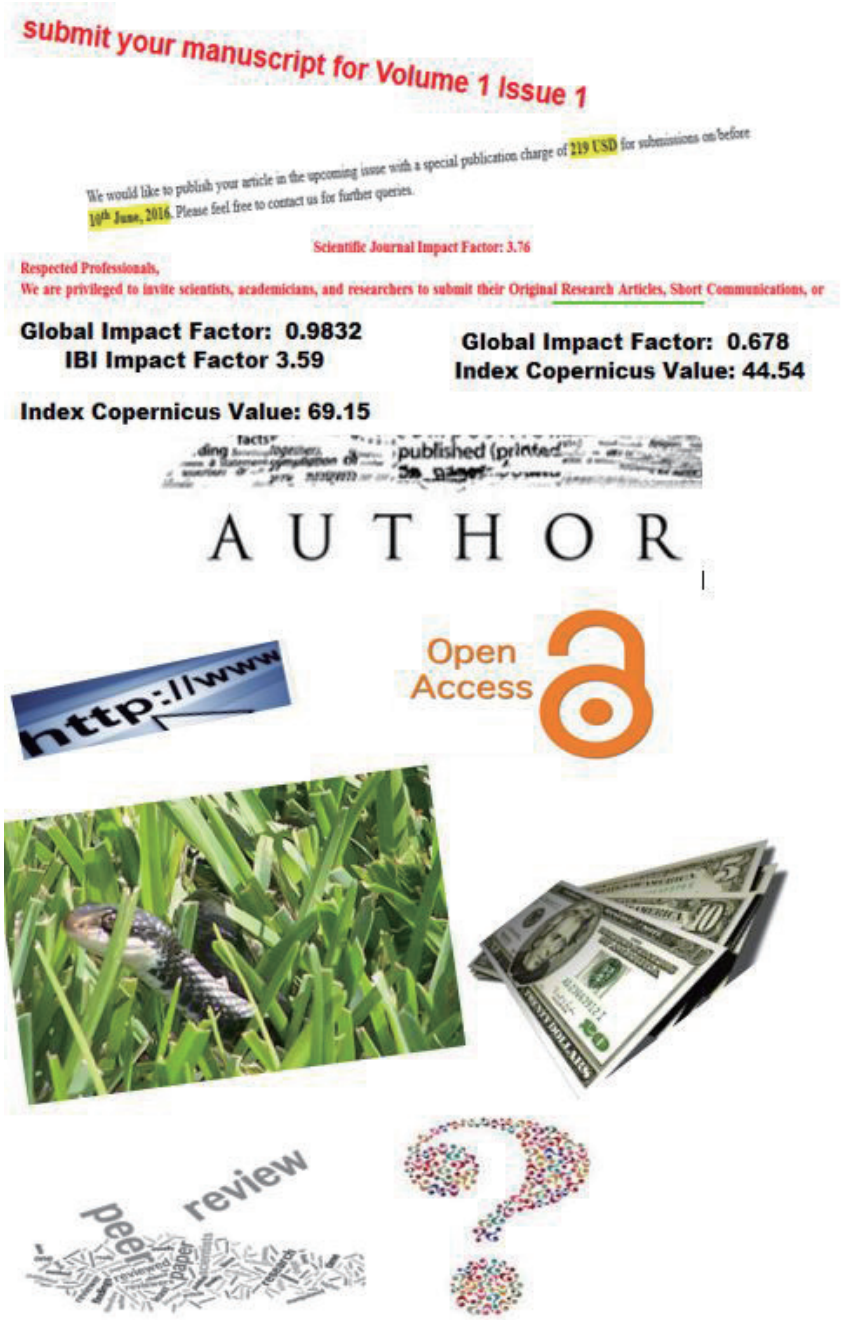

Fig. 1. Predatory journals. (The image file was organized from multiple sources in the web. Sources are here. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_review, http://www.freeimages.com/premium/question-mark-1409031)

victims replied:

"Dear predatory publishers,

Please stop writing article submission invitation emails. I will send your journal to Jeffrey Beall so that your journal will be added in the predatory journals list. Please stop your actions."

One of the so called editors in chief replied with broken English: *"Well, sir, you do not be angry, I am Your email removed but do not journal no fraud occurred. Please visit my journal web page".* This shows how these predatory journals operate. They are mostly one-person and one-PC operations (13).

The question is how can we avoid from publishing in these predatory publishers? In many occasions, young authors bargain with the publishers to reduce the requested publication fee. Others described that they pay the requested publication fee through third party payers such as through their relatives living abroad. Authors from low-income countries need to be aware that they should not pay for publishing. Publication fees from legitimate open access journals are waived for authors from developing countries.

One junior scientist declared that *"Being the victims of these*

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junk publishers has made me feel the pain at least after a year, and after receiving so many rubbish article submission invitations through emails". He continued *"I asked myself, are these journals really good journals, and is it possible to identify good journals from a fake one? That was the time I taught myself about these counterfeit journals. Awareness of the problem is the key to tackle".* Collaboration is important to minimize, or if possible, to avoid the problem. Research has become more of collaborative effort. The more collaborative a research is, the higher the quality it is and the more likely it will be submitted to a reputable journal. Senior faculty members of developing country universities need to coach young scientists on publication processes.

The often used measure of identifying the credibility of journals is Thomson and Reuters Impact Factor (14). Predatory journals have created their own indexing and counterfeit metrics. The name Thomson and Reuters Impact Factor which authors shortly know as Impact Factor of journals is hijacked and the fake measure called "Journal Impact Factor" has emerged. Beall has listed more than 50 misleading metrics and questionable companies providing these metrics (8). Fake journals and their fraudulent metrics are confusing inexperienced scientists from developing countries. Authors need to make sure that whether the metrics provided by the journal are from recognized bodies such as Thomson and Reuters or Scimago Journal and Country Ranks. The problem is increased when these dubious articles published in predatory journals are cited as references in good quality peer reviewed journal articles which in turn lead for poor quality research outputs to have citation reports. Hence, credible journals and peer reviewers need to prevent citation by requesting authors to remove references published in predatory journals.

One of the victims of these journals has 12 publications and half of them are on the Jeffrey Beall's list of predatory journals. He was recently promoted to the assistant professorship position. There are a number of other inexperienced researchers who achieved research positions, assistant professor as well as in the associate professorship positions, by accumulating poor publication accounts. We have asked him why he preferred to publish in the predatory journals. He reported *"peer review process is extremely slow, frustrating and rude. I should have publications to be promoted".* The frustration to be promoted is one of the key reasons why emerging scientists from developing countries are knowingly or unknowingly submitting their manuscripts to the predatory journals. To solve this problem, university councils responsible for promoting academic staffs to higher academic positions need to have a regulatory framework or revise their senate legislations for preventing the promotion requests of researchers having poor publication accounts. Publications should be carefully checked before approving the promotions and articles from predatory journals should not be counted.

A senior faculty member in one of the universities in Ethiopia searched his name in Google Scholar and found a new publication which he did not approve the manuscript before submission. In fact, the article was published in one of the fast-track predatory journals. Supervisors of the students need to make sure that the article shall not be submitted unless they have approved the submission. They have to follow and coach their students on manuscript preparation and publishing in legitimate journals.

It is ambitious to claim that the global scientific community should come together and appeal for firm actions to be taken against this misconduct. Closing down the web sites of these fake journals and publishers or suing them for their alleged cybercrime is unconvincing. Instead, we have to alert our students, and the scientific community around the world, especially in developing countries. A recent study reported awareness campaigns and consultations with information facilitators could make a difference in tackling the predatory publishing practice (15). Course contents of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculums need to include mechanisms of checking the authenticity of a journal, credibility of the metrics and whether the journal is indexed in reputable databases such as MEDLINE, PubMed or Web of Science. We recommend authors mainly not to rely on PubMed to check the reputability of a biomedical journal. MEDLINE is a relatively more rigorous and more powerful means of checking credibility. Authors should also check whether the journal is from a credible publisher, affiliated research institute or university, has a transparent peer review process and availability of the journal contact details (especially postal address and telephone number). Moreover, authors may consider to consult Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE) website (http://jane.biosemantics.org/) to look for potential reputable journals for their particular topic (16)

HOW TO RESPOND TO ARTICLE SUBMISSION INVITATIONS?

Credible journals do not chase authors and send article submission invitations, rather authors look for them. However, legitimate publishers and journals also use email to reach potential authors on a regular basis. Authors should simply ignore or delete article submission invitations from questionable journals and publishers. Instead, they should only consider credible journals from well-established publishers. We have contacted Jeffrey Beall in case he would like to have the spam emails forwarded to him. He said *"I am always happy to have people forward me the spam emails they receive when they believe they have discovered a new questionable publisher or journal".* He also stressed: before forwarding these emails, authors should first check whether the name of the publisher or a journal is in the Beall's list. Frequently, predatory publishers release new journals. Hence, authors should check whether these journals are included in

the Beall's list of predatory publishers. If the publisher is already in the list, there is no need to forward these article submission invitations.

This article provided a fresh perspective to help authors avoid publishing in predatory journals. The emergence of new predatory publishers, fake journals, and their fake metrics, fake conferences and publishing in the predatory journals is likely to continue. An organized database to help authors quickly search and identify whether a journal is predatory needs to be developed. Moreover, a concerted multi-country level initiative composed of all stakeholders (publishers, credible journal editors, reviewers, and researchers) is required to alleviate the problem and build the legacy that Beall has already established and fight the problem on a global scale.

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