Review Article

THE DYNAMICS OF PREDATORY PUBLISHING: AWARENESS, MOTIVATION, AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract
This article delves into the phenomenon of predatory publishing that exploits the open-access model wherein authors pay fees for publication. These predatory journals pretend to be legitimate academic publications, but they deceive authors by claiming to have proper publishing practices while actually lacking rigorous peer review and transparency. The lack of an author's ability to assess illegitimate journals or ignorance about predatory publishing practices results in a researcher sending their manuscript to such journals. Resources like Cabell's Blacklist, Think.Check.Submit., DOAJ, COPE, etc., empower researchers to distinguish reputable journals. These tools offer checklists, ethical guidelines, and metrics, helping authors make informed decisions and safeguard their work from predatory practices. This article provides authors with valuable insights into the prevalence of predatory journals, which poses a serious concern for the academic community.

Keywords
Predatory Journals, Hijacked Journals, Scholarly Communication, Predatory Publishing

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1. INTRODUCTION

The publishing industry occupies a pivotal position in shaping the dissemination of academic knowledge and plays an indispensable role in advancing scholarly progress (Jubb, 2012). Publishers fulfil their ethical responsibilities, essential for the health of scholarly communication, through a variety of functions. Some of the publishers' functions include managing scholarly records, editing, proofreading, typesetting, coordinating peer review, and more (Anderson, 2018). Publishers add direct value to researchers' work by offering these quality services. Over the past few decades, the publishing landscape has undergone rapid transformation, reflecting significant changes in how knowledge is produced, shared, and accessed. Journals, being integral components of scholarly publishing, bear the responsibility of upholding the highest standards of quality, transparency, and ethical practices (Nuland & Rogers, 2016). Although journal publishing remains a widely accepted standard within the scholarly community, academics face challenges due to economic, technological, and social changes in the academic publishing field (Padmalochanan, 2019). Lately, the emergence of predatory publishers, cloned journals, and predatory conferences has posed a serious threat to the integrity of scientific research. These predatory practices raise serious concerns about the reliability and credibility of scholarly knowledge within the academic community by violating accepted standards of publishing.

Predatory publishing is an unethical practice in which publishers exploit authors by charging fees for publication, bypassing the peer review process and other essential editorial/ publishing services. Some common forms of predatory publishing practices include falsely claiming to provide peer review, misrepresenting members of the journal's editorial board, and other violations of copyright or scholarly ethics. Numerous definitions of predatory journals have been the subject of discussion within scholarly discourse. Some of these definitions are reproduced herein:

- Beall (2012) has described predatory publishers as entities that "publish counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays. These predatory publishers are dishonest and lack transparency. They aim

to dupe researchers, especially those inexperienced in scholarly communication."

- Grudniewicz et al. (2019) defined Predatory journals and publishers as "entities that prioritise self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices."
- Committee on Publication Ethics (2019), renowned organization dedicated to promoting best practices in the ethics of scholarly publishing, states "Predatory publishing is generally defined as for profit open-access journal publication of scholarly articles without the benefit of peer review by experts in the field or the usual editorial oversight of the journals in question."

The primary objective of predatory journals is profit, which is often achieved by deceiving authors to pay fees without providing genuine editorial services, thus prioritizing financial gain over trustworthy scientific contributions. Given that career advancement in academia is often contingent on publication, researchers may inadvertently submit their work to journals that promise to publish all submissions. These predatory journals attempt to attract new submissions through aggressive email advertising, cold calls, social media and promise guaranteed acceptance. In recent years, there has been a surge in research on predatory journals and their prevalence in scholarly literature, indicating a growing awareness of the issue. The study of Nagarkar and Khole (2023) showed a consistent growth in studies on predatory journals, particularly during the period from 2015 to 2019. The study by Shen & Bjorke (2015) revealed that the total number of active journals showed rapid growth, estimated at 1,800 journals in 2010 and expanding to around 8,000 journals in 2014. Some studies have explored the tactics and deceptive practices employed by predatory journals, which often involve email solicitation, misleading claims of academic legitimacy. Sureda-Negre et al. (2022) used content analysis to review 210 unsolicited emails sent by predatory journals. These emails fundamentally discussed the impact factors of the journals and

their inclusion in various databases, repositories, and indexes. Approximately 90% of the spam lacked personalization, suggesting indiscriminate sending. Sorokwoski et al. (2017) conducted a sting operation to understand the functioning of predatory journals compared to legitimate journals. The study by Cukier, et al. (2020) analysed checklists and revealed they were in English, designed to finish within five minutes, and consisted of an average of 11 items each. These checklists addressed six thematic categories: editorial & peer review process, journal operations, communication, APC, dissemination, indexing, and archiving.

2. AWARENESS AND MOTIVATION OF RESEARCHERS

Studies have analysed awareness, knowledge, attitude, and opinions of authors regarding predatory journals. A study by Kharumnuid and Deo (2022) shows that the majority of the researchers were acquainted with open-access journals (91%) and predatory journals (59%), but most (53.2%) participants found it difficult to discern between a predatory and a legitimate journal. Panjikaran and Mathew (2020) found that 43% of authors in LMICs (low-income and middle-income countries) and 26% of authors in HICs (high-income countries) lack awareness of predatory journals. Atiso et al. (2019) revealed that most of the researchers in the study were aware of predatory journals and often received solicitations from them. However, they lacked the necessary training or tools to determine the legitimacy of a journal, and many participants lacked complete knowledge of all the characteristics of predatory journals. AlRyalat et al. (2019) found that 93% of authors were unaware of the existence of predatory journals. However, following the introduction of a straightforward and comprehensive infographic about predatory publishing, the awareness dramatically increased from a mere 7% to an impressive 97.5%. The survey by Christopher and Young (2015) showed that only a few respondents were aware of the term "predatory journal (23%)," DOAJ (24%), or Beall's list (5%). When describing the term "predatory journal," some respondents completely misunderstood its meaning. Study of Nicholas et al. (2023) showed that while researchers were motivated to publish papers for professional advancement, they had not been enticed to

publish in predatory journals. ECRs also possessed a strong awareness of predatory journals and were vigilant about avoiding them, with almost a quarter of them perceiving an increase in questionable practices during the pandemic. The study by Barker et al. (2023) found that many respondents were of the opinion that studies published in predatory journals might still present legitimate research by genuine authors. In the study of Webber and Wiegand (2022), nearly all (86%) faculty members were aware of predatory publishing, with the primary sources being colleagues (67%) and literature within their respective fields of study (47%). The study by Wang et al. (2021) revealed that the majority of respondents (81.32%) were unaware and had never heard about predatory journals. Most students possessed minimal knowledge regarding predatory journals and often confused them with open-access journals.

Studies have analysed the reasons and motivations behind authors' submissions and publications in predatory journals, as well as the experiences of authors who have previously published in these journals. The findings of a study by Nejadghanbar et al. (2023) revealed that the majority of authors were from Asia, held a doctorate, and primarily chose PPJs for quick publication or to fulfil job or degree requirements. Additionally, they generally perceived PPJs as reputable and reported positive impacts on their studies or academic careers (75.12%). A qualitative analysis of interview data identified themes such as low information literacy, unrelenting publishing pressures, unawareness, failure to publish in top-reputed journals, and social identity threats. Kashyap et al. (2023) found three primary factors driving South Asian healthcare researchers to publish in predatory journals, i.e., lack of research support, pressure to publish, and pseudo benefits. Mertkan et al. (2022) revealed that publishing in journals with "questionable" publishing standards was not solely due to naivety or inexperience. Occasionally, authors deliberately select predatory journals to uphold their self-efficacy, often in reaction to rejections from more prestigious journals. Conlogue et al. (2022) revealed that those who had published more articles, had better knowledge of predatory publishing, and placed greater importance on research metrics and tenure were more inclined to publish in

these open-access journals. The survey by Elliott et al. (2022) revealed that the majority (83%) of respondents perceived predatory practices as a "serious problem' or a growing problem. The majority (87%) of respondents who had engaged in such activities cited unawareness and knowledge of predatory practices as their main reason. Other motivations included career advancement, opting for a cheaper, faster, and easier option, and receiving encouragement from peers. Alrawadieh et al. (2020) identified the primary motivations for publishing in predatory journals, which included a lack of awareness about the predatory nature of these journals, pressure to publish, the need for quick and easy publication for career advancement, intentional publishing to meet publication quotas, and high rejection rates from reputable journals. Bagues et al. (2019) found that evaluators with limited research backgrounds often struggle to accurately assess the quality of the journals where applicants have published their work, frequently giving credit to articles in questionable journals. Many authors who published in these journals were either misled by deceptive information or knowingly engaged in such practices with the expectation of receiving academic credit, as these journals are sometimes included in whitelists like Scopus. In the study by Cohen et al. (2019), only a handful of editors were generally aware of predatory journals; most authors were not. 30.1% of authors believed their work appeared in a predatory journal, and most of them expressed their intention to refrain from publishing in the same journal in the future. The study by Cobey et al. (2019) showed that the motivations for publishing in these journals were diverse and included factors such as pressure to publish, ease and speed of publication, and difficulties encountered when trying to publish in other reputable journals. Also, the majority of respondents reported a lack of institutional policies to guide them in avoiding publication in predatory journals. In Kurt's (2018) study, some respondents expressed a lack of knowledge about the journals' credibility at the time of publication, indicating that they would have made different decisions if informed. Some say they would have published in those journals if their institution did. The pressure to publish significantly influenced scholars' decision to

choose these fast-turnaround journals. Through qualitative research interviews, Shaghaei et al. (2018) discovered that experienced researchers from both developed and developing countries published in predatory journals for similar reasons: ease and speed of publication, the chance to publish work rejected elsewhere, and lack of awareness. The study by Pyne (2017) revealed that the majority of faculty members with research responsibilities had publications in "predatory journals."

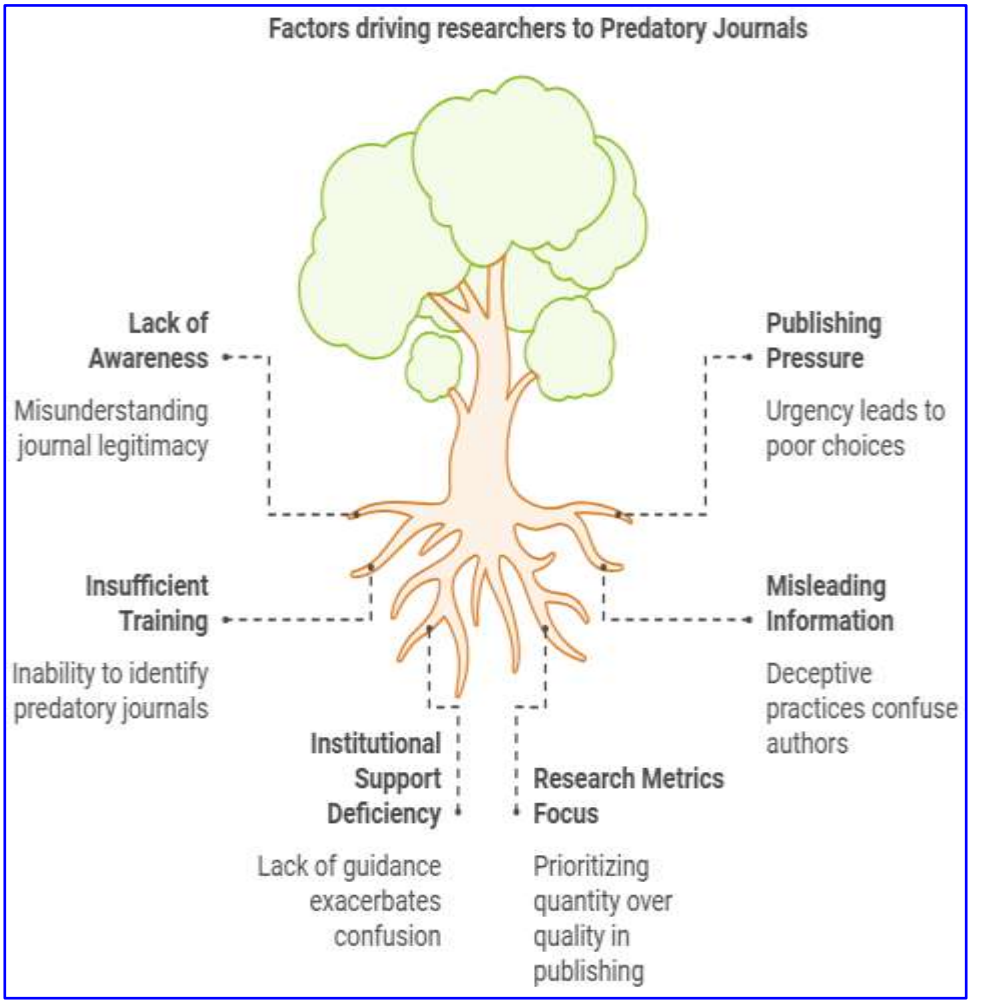

Figure 1: Factors driving researchers to predatory journals

3. INDIAN SCENARIO

In literature it has been noted that Predatory publishers exploit academics worldwide, especially in developing countries. It is

estimated that the output of papers from five major predatory publishers has increased threefold since 2013, reaching approximately 175,000 articles as noted by Priyadarshini (2018). Studies have shown that a notable share of corresponding authors in predatory journals come from India. The study by Demir (2018) showed that India, Turkey, and Nigeria had the highest number of researchers publishing in predatory journals. Also, editors from 53 nations serve as the editorial board for PFJs, with India boasting the highest number at 57.89%. Contact location data from IP/WHOIS, a tool for identifying IP address owners and related registration details, indicates that 62.0% of PFJs are located in India. Xia et al. (2015) revealed that individuals publishing in "predatory journals" were early-career researchers from developing' countries, often lacking a history of prior publications and citations. The concentration of authors in predatory journals was prominent in specific countries, notably India (725), Nigeria (80), and Pakistan (44). Frandsen (2017) found that South Asia dominated the geographical distribution of citing authors, with Southeast Asia and the Middle East following closely. According to Patwardhan and Thakur (2021), India leads in the number of predatory journals published, accounting for 64%, and 11% of authors publish in these journals. The proliferation of predatory publications originating from India is primarily attributed to the prioritization of the quantity of research publications over their quality as a measure of academic performance (Vaidyanathan, 2019). Patwardhan and Nagarkar (2021) contend that, in India, a significant factor which contributed to the rise of predatory publishers is the mandatory requirement for research publications in the appointment & promotion processes of faculty members in Indian HEIs, as mandated by the UGC.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF PREDATORY PUBLISHING

Predatory publishing has caused harm by employing unethical practices, thereby contaminating knowledge within the publishing sector. According to Mathew et al. (2022), over the last few decades, predatory journals and their linked publishing houses have systematically undermined the credibility and trustworthiness of scientific output across the world. The

repercussions of predatory publishing extend to several negative consequences within the academic and scientific domain. A publication in a predatory journal cause wastage of resources and

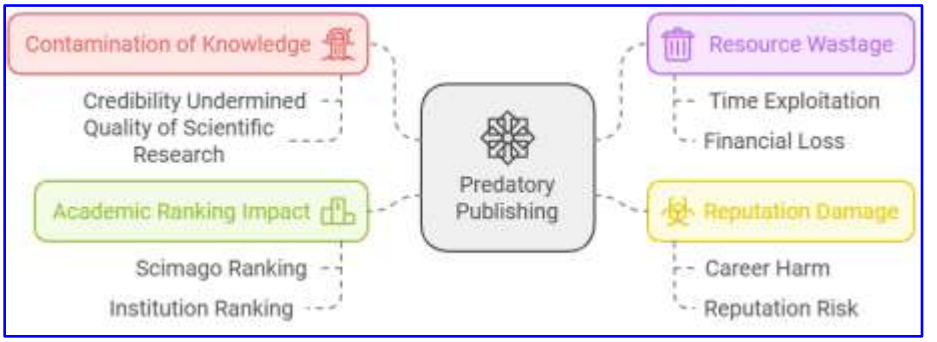

Figure 2 : Consequences of Predatory Publishing

funds (Sharma & Verma, 2018) in the academic community, exploiting both researchers' time and financial resources while diminishing the quality of scientific research. A publication in a predatory journal might harm the career and reputation of individual researchers listed on the article (Chen et al., 2023; Cook et al., 2023; Richtig et al., 2018). Forero et al. (2018) elucidate that engaging with predatory publications can have a negative impact on academic ranking of a country in systems like "Scimago's journal and country ranking".

5. INFERENCES DRAWN & CONCLUSION

Predatory publishing, involving unethical practices, has significantly contaminated scientific knowledge, undermining its credibility and trustworthiness, leading to negative consequences in the academic and scientific domain. Many authors lack awareness of predatory journals, and many lack the necessary training or tools to determine their legitimacy. Researchers struggle to distinguish between legitimate and predatory journals. Predatory journals draw the attention of authors through their deceptive measures, irrespective of their experience in publishing. Despite the motivation to publish for professional advancement, many researchers are not enticed to publish in predatory journals. The authors' motivation to publish in these journals is driven by rapid academic promotion, academic reward systems, pressure to publish, unawareness, lack of research proficiency, rejection from

Figure 3 Inferences

other reputed journals, lack of institutional policies to guide researchers in avoiding publication in predatory journals, easy and quick publication. The geographical distribution of predatory publishers, and authors shows that the phenomenon of predatory publishing affects the research community globally. The predatory publishing phenomena cannot be ignored in India, as it has appeared to be a serious issue within the country as well.

Figure 4 Inferences

When it comes to predatory publishing, as noted by Zhao (2014), academic library professionals are in a prime position to assist researchers/scholars in understanding and avoiding predatory practices. However, before they can do so effectively, library professionals themselves need to acquire a diverse set of knowledge related to information literacy, and scholarly publishing. Scholarly publishing and information literacy lies at the core of "scholarly publishing literacy". Library professionals, traditionally educators in information literacy within universities, now have to broaden their scope and incorporate aspects of scholarly publishing literacy into their roles. Beall (2013) emphasizes that library professionals should take the lead in acquiring skills in "scholarly publishing literacy." Also, international organizations such as COPE, OASPA, WAME, and UGC CARE at national level are striving to alert researchers about predatory publishing. Jeffrey Beall played a pivotal role in exposing predatory publishers by maintaining a list on his blog, Scholarly Open Access, from 2012 to 2017. In the aftermath of the removal of "Beall's List," various tools have emerged that aids

authors to distinguish legitimate journals from predatory ones. Several dedicated portals/services such as the website "Predatory Journals: A One Stop Shop of Predatory Journals," DOAJ to index legitimate open-access journals, Stop Predatory Practices, Think.Check.Submit and the Academic Journal Predatory Checking System, are actively engaged in disseminating information regarding predatory publishing practices. However, despite these efforts, researchers continue to fall prey to predatory publishers, except in certain cases wherein some authors may knowingly publish in these outlets to gain academic benefits. Therefore, the research community needs to be made more aware and sensitized. We need to equip researchers with the knowledge to identify and steer clear of predatory journals, enabling them to make more informed decisions and upholding the integrity of academic publishing.

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