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# Predatory or Legitimate Journals

**P**redatory publishing is “an exploitative open-access publishing business model that involves charging publication fees to authors without providing the editorial and publishing services associated with legitimate journals (open access or not).”<sup>1</sup> No one has any idea how many predatory journals there are, but the number is in the thousands and is increasing.<sup>2</sup> Between 2010 and 2014, the estimated number of articles published by predatory publishers increased from 53 000 articles to 420 000 (published in about 8000 predatory journals).<sup>3</sup>

Predatory journals are a serious threat to the integrity of the scientific evidence. Distinguishing a legitimate journal with a well-established peer review system from a predatory journal that publishes articles regardless of their scientific merits, merely for a publication fee, can be difficult enough to fool many authors. Some of these journals have even counterfeit logos on their Web sites (Fig 1). The availability of these poor articles on the Internet would, in turn, provide readers with unreliable information. Considering the increasing tendency for some patients to believe that the Internet is a reliable source of medical information,<sup>4</sup> ready access to the information provided by predatory journals makes the condition worse.

Publishing in predatory journals has also dire consequences for authors, who may lose the precious results of their years-long research, and for scientists who may be misguided by incorrect published results. Identifying predatory journals and publishers is therefore very important. Recently, the World Association of Medical Editors (*WAME*) released a statement on identifying predatory journals and publishers.<sup>5</sup> The statement describes some common characteristics of predatory journals and publishers. Previously, Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at Auraria Library and an associate professor at the University of Colorado Denver, developed a list of potential, possible, or probable predatory, scholarly open-access journals.<sup>5</sup> The list, although neither complete nor precise (with some false-positive and false-negative results), was helpful. However, it was discontinued in January 2017. As a rule of thumb, if a journal is currently indexed by *MEDLINE* and the Directory of Open Access Journals (*DOAJ*), it is unlikely to be a predatory journal. However, do not believe what is on the journal's Web site; verify the information independently.

Journal publishing is profitable. Where

## Counterfeit logo



**Figure 1:** Use of counterfeit logo (similar to that of Elsevier) on a predatory journal Web site (Courtesy of Tom Lang, *WAME*)

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ever there is money, there are people who will abuse the system. All victims of predatory journals are not, however, innocent ignorant authors. Some authors are aware of the situation and deliberately submit poor work to such journals. Then, using the same propaganda these pseudo-journals use, they try to dress up their published article to fool their colleagues—you may call them “predatory authors!” The members of the career promotion committees should therefore examine each article with scrutiny and not only count the number of publications.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, the requirements for academic promotions need to be re-examined from a different perspective, one that does not pressure faculty members to publish their work in whatever way they can, wherever possible.

Do all of the above reasons mean that all articles published in a predatory journal are worthless? Of course not. Predatory journals may publish good-quality articles. Influenced by the propaganda spread by predatory publishers (now everyday stuff of your e-mail inbox), many good authors are deceived and submit their work to these journals. In fact, predatory journals prefer to publish as many quality articles as they can to improve their standing to deceive more authors to submit their manuscripts to these journals. These publishers, nonetheless, do not intend to publish quality articles; they just want to collect the processing fees. On the other hand, neither are all articles published in legitimate journals good. Everyday, retractions support this claim.<sup>7</sup> Legitimate peer-review sometimes does not identify flawed or weak manuscripts. The point is that, although a legitimate journal (author-paid or unpaid) may publish a low-quality (even faked) article, it does not mean to do so and has followed procedures designed to reduce this possibility. Legitimate journals make all efforts to publish scientifically rigorous, evidence-based articles.

The game of predatory publishers began around a decade ago. You find a tactic to attack them; they find a way to counter attack. This is an eternal battle between good and evil. The game goes on.

**Conflicts of Interest:** None declared.

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