

Predatory Journals and Publishers: Understanding Researchers' Knowledge and Perception Towards Predatory Publishing

Aisha Wali¹, Unaiza Pervaiz Hashmi², Rubab Jawed³, Sapna Solanki⁴, Ifra Shakeel⁵

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aimed to understand the researchers' Knowledge and Motivation Towards Predatory Publishing.

Materials and Methods: The convenience sampling method was selected and all the faculty members and research scholars from Medical, Dental, and Allied Health Sciences Departments of the University. Participants who were absent on the day of data collection were excluded from the study. A pre-validated questionnaire prepared by Cobey et al was used and it was then peer-reviewed by the subject specialists for content validity and relevance. The questionnaire consists of participants' demographics, participants' perceptions, and experience in publishing in predatory journals.

Results: : Out of the 150 survey respondents, 39 individuals (26%) indicated the existence of a formal policy regarding publication in predatory journals. Additionally, 29 participants (19.3%) acknowledged that they were aware the journal to which they submitted their work was predatory. Furthermore, 72 respondents (48%) indicated that they used the online submission platform to submit their manuscripts to the journal.

Conclusion: The study's findings suggested that most of the participants lacked awareness of predatory journals and exhibited a challenge distinguishing between predatory and reputable scholarly publications.

Keywords: Funding, Knowledge, Perception, Predatory, Pakistan, Researchers

¹Assistant Director Research & Head of the Department, ^{4,5}House Officer, Baqai Dental College, Baqai Medical University, Karachi, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Community Dentistry, Jinnah Medical & Dental College, Sohail University, Karachi, Pakistan.

³Administrator/ Trial Coordinator, Control, Office of Research, Innovation & Commercialization (ORIC), Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Corresponding author: Aisha Wali, Super Highway, Gadap Road, P.O box 2407, Karachi, Pakistan.

Email: aishawali@baqai.edu.pk

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INTRODUCTION

Predatory publishing has become a significant concern in academic publishing, threatening the credibility of scientific research and international publication standards. The transition from closed-access to open-access publishing in the 1980s marked a pivotal moment in the publishing sector, facilitating unrestricted access to cutting-edge research globally.¹ Predatory publishing is a type of publishing model where authors pay a fee to publish their scientific articles in open-access mode. However, this type of publishing does not guarantee a peer review process or normal indexing services.² The term “predatory” is quite loose and complex, especially when considering authors who intentionally publish with these journals. In addition, low-quality, open-access journals in the developing world fall between deceptive predatory journals and legitimate journals with high standards. While these journals don’t meet high-quality publishing standards but are not necessarily predatory in nature. Therefore, the term “predatory” shouldn’t be used for these journals.^{3,4,5}

Predatory publishers and journals have surged from just a handful to over a thousand in the last decade. This issue affects authors from almost every field worldwide. It has been reported that researchers who have published in open access (OA) journals received unsolicited emails inviting them to submit their papers, become members of the editorial board, or serve on review panels. There are many of these “predatory” journals based in developing countries, including Nigeria, Pakistan, and India. It is commonly believed that most predatory publishers and journals operate out of developing countries in Asia and Africa.⁶ Pakistan was ranked 17th out of 20 OIC countries in a recent study by Machacek and Srholec on predatory publications, with 20 being the worst ranking.⁷ Many of these journals do not adhere to the policies established by organizations such as the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Council of Science Editors (CSE), and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).⁸

Predatory journals are typically not indexed in reputable scientific databases such as PubMed, Medline, JCR, Scopus, or Web of Science. These journals often lack genuine and transparent peer review processes, adequate quality control, proper licensing, and content preservation. They may falsely claim to have an impact factor, but this is not the legitimate impact factor assigned by the

Institute for Scientific Information (Thomson Reuters). Instead, they may use altered or fictitious impact factors like Journal IF, Real IF, Prognosis IF, or Unofficial IF.⁹

There are ongoing efforts to bring to light predatory practices in academic publishing. Jeffrey Beall was the first to compile a list of such publishers in 2018, known as Beall’s List.¹⁰ Beall’s list was a useful tool for assessing the credibility of journals. However, it faced severe criticism from many authors, journals, and publishers. Beall removed the list from his blog after receiving legal threats and pressure from his University of Colorado employer.¹¹ Following the issue, In June 2017, Cabell International introduced a subscription-based blacklist of predatory journals. In response to this, a coalition of scholarly publishing organizations developed a checklist called “Think. Check. Submit.” to help authors choose legitimate journals for their research.¹²

The study aimed to understand Researchers’ Knowledge and Motivation Towards Predatory Publishing.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current questionnaire-based study was carried out at Private Medical University from April to July 2023. Permission was granted by the Ethical Review Board of the institution BDC/ERB/2023/026 to conduct the census survey of the faculty. The convenience sampling selected the study participants including faculty members and research scholars from Medical, Dental, and Allied Health Sciences institutions. Participants who were absent on the day of data collection were excluded from the study. A pre-validated questionnaire prepared by Cobey et al¹³ was used and it was then peer-reviewed by the subject specialists for content validity and relevance. The questionnaire consists of participants’ demographics, participants’ perceptions, and experience in publishing in predatory journals. Participants were approached in their respective workplaces by researchers trained in this data collection process. The researchers explained the purpose and nature of the study and obtained verbal consent. Participants were then asked to fill out the survey form and return it at the end of the day. The Data was entered and analyzed for frequency and percentages using SPSS software version 22.

RESULTS

A total of 150 participants took part in the survey, and their demographic characteristics are outlined in Table 1.

Thirty-nine (26%) participants stated that there is a written policy for publishing in predatory journals. Twenty-nine (19.3%) of the participants mentioned that they were aware the journal they were submitting to was predatory. The online submission system was used by 72 (or 48%) of participants to submit their work to the journal. 87 (or 58%) of the participants reported that their manuscript was peer-reviewed. A total of 73 participants (48.7%) paid the article processing fees with their funds. Of the participants, 56 (37.3%) claimed that publication in predatory journals did not pose a career risk. 37 (24.7%) of the participants indicated that they would be more cautious in the future when selecting journals before submission. Table 2 outlines the knowledge and motivation of researchers towards predatory publishing.

Figure 1 outlines how the authors first become aware of the predatory Journals before submission. Thirty three (22%) of the participants responded that while reading the Journals they first became aware of predatory Journals.

Figure 2 outlines no of times the paper has been submitted previously to predatory journals. Fifty-two respondents (34.6%) were unable to recall the number of previous

submissions to predatory journals. Of the other participants 43(28.6%) of the participants responded that they had just once submitted previously in predatory journals.

Figure 3 outlines the Factors that influenced the decision to submit a manuscript to a predatory journal. Sixty-two participants (41.3%) found the journal appropriate for publication.

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Characteristics.

Characteristics	n	(%)
Gender		
Male	60	40%
Female	90	60%
Research status		
Faculty member	106	70.7%
Research scholar	44	29.3%
Research Disciplines		
Medical College/Hospital	60	40%
Dental College/ Hospital	81	54%
Pharmaceutical Sciences	3	2%
Physical therapy	6	4%

Table 2: Knowledge and Awareness of Participants about Predatory Journals.

Items	Response	n(%)
Did the primary institution you were based at the year you published your paper have a written policy for publishing that prohibited predatory journals?	Yes	39(26%)
	No	58(38.7%)
	Don't know	53(35.3%)
We believe the journal in which you published may be predatory. When submitting, were you:	Aware that it was predatory	29(19.3%)
	Not aware that it was predatory, but now do consider it Predatory	27(18%)
	Not aware that it was predatory and continue to think.	31(20.7%)
	It is not predatory	63(42%)
Had the paper you published in this presumed predatory journal been submitted elsewhere previously?	Yes	40(26.7%)
	No	110(73.3%)
How was the paper submitted to the journal?	Online submission portal	72(48%)
	Via email	41(27.3%)
	Other	37(24.7%)
Did the paper receive peer review?	Yes	87(58%)
	No	63(42%)
Was the peer review substantial and helpful?	Yes	59(39.3%)
	No	91(60.7%)
Where did you obtain money to pay the fee to publish?	Research grant funding	15(10%)
	University/employer	20(13.3%)
	research funding	73(48.7%)
	Personal money	12(8%)
	Other	30(20%)
	No fee paid	
Did you see any career risks associated with publishing in this journal (eg, getting caught by a colleague)?	No	56(37.3%)
	Yes	29(19.3%)
	Reprimanded by supervisor	15(10%)
	Few citations	16(10.7%)
	Damage to reputation	15(10%)
	Retraction	7(4.7%)
	Continued emails from journal	6(4%)
	Missed opportunity for peer review	6(4%)
Has the experience of publishing in a potentially predatory journal affected how Do you evaluate future journals before submission?	No	39(26%)
	Yes	37(24.7%)
	Will check the details about the journal	30(20%)
	Consult with others	15(10%)
	Will only publish in known/prestigious/authentic journals	16(10.7%)
	Not published in open-access journals	9(6%)
	Fees Suggestions	4(2.7%)

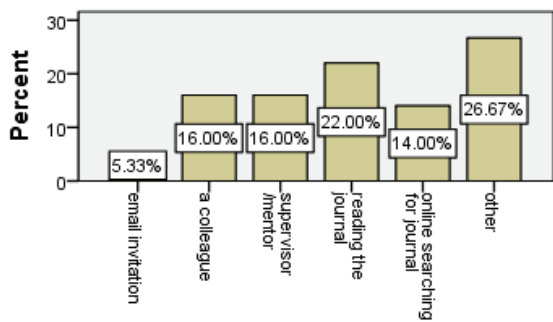


Figure 1: How Did You First Become Aware of This Presumed Predatory Journal Before Submission?

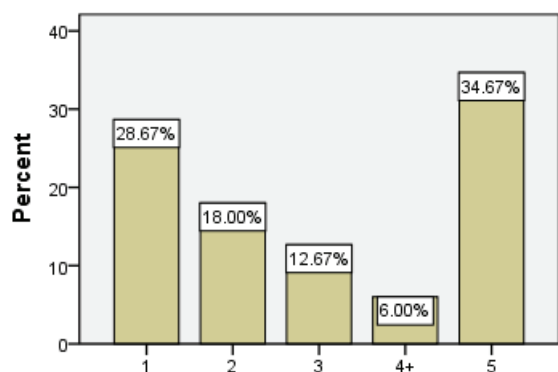


Figure 2: Outlines No of Times the Paper has been Submitted Previously to Predatory Journals

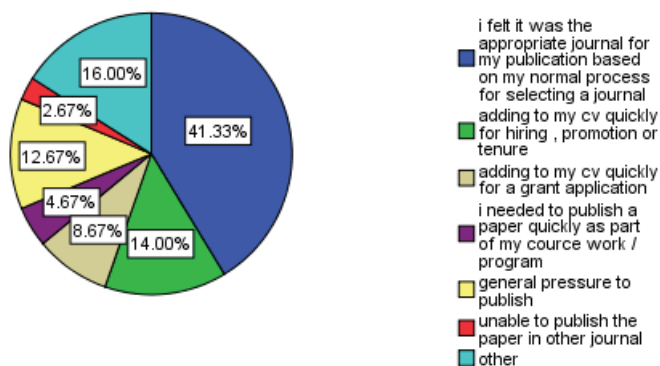


Figure 3: Outlines the Factors that Influenced the Decision to Submit a Manuscript to a Predatory Journal

DISCUSSION

This study is among the first to investigate the knowledge and motivation of Pakistani researchers concerning predatory publishing. Predatory journals have become a concern for researchers due to their easy publication processes.¹⁴ and promises of fast acceptance.¹⁵To avoid these journals, researchers can use different approaches

such as blacklists.¹⁶and systems that help authors choose legitimate journals¹⁷ Additional sources of information include scientific literature, friends, colleagues, emails, conferences, and media platforms, including social media.¹⁸

The escalation in predatory publications has been linked to the simultaneous rise in email solicitations that encourage novice researchers to submit work with promises of rapid publication and reduced costs.¹⁹ Upon exposure to an infographic, research participants gained insight into the deceptive characteristics of specific emails and publications. It is crucial to examine novel strategies employed by predatory journals to target researchers, especially those situated in developing nations.⁵ The researchers of the current investigation inquired about how participants initially became acquainted with the predatory journal before submission; among those surveyed, 22% encountered the journal while perusing an article, while 27% could not recall. Cobey et al.¹³ determined that merely 5.1% of participants stumbled upon the journal while reading the article, with the majority receiving an email solicitation. In a study conducted by AIRyalat SA et al ²⁰ 90.5% of respondents expressed disagreement or strong disagreement towards email solicitations from unfamiliar journals requesting manuscript submissions.

The survey revealed that 20.7% of participants were not aware that the journal was predatory, while 42% believed that it was not a predatory Journal. AIRyalat SA²⁰ found that 93% of potential authors were unaware of predatory journals and the significance of selecting the right publication for their research.

Universities and research organizations need to educate their researchers, especially those who are new to the field, about the existence of predatory journals and the risks associated with them. They should also be provided with guidance on how to avoid such journals.²¹

A reliable method to identify legitimate and predatory open-access (OA) journals is through their peer-review processes. Predatory journals tend to promise quick turnaround times, often within just a few hours, which raises doubts about the thoroughness of their peer review procedures. This indicates that predatory journals are motivated by profit and may lack the necessary resources

or be unwilling to invest the required time to carry out a robust peer-review process.¹⁰ The present study reported that 58% of the participants reported that their submitted manuscript was peer-reviewed, it was also reported by 60.7% of participants that the peer review was not substantial or helpful. According to Cobey et al¹³, 83.3% of participants reported peer review of their papers, while 16.7% said they did not. Among participants who reported peer-reviewing their papers, 79.7% found the process helpful, while 20.3% found it not to be substantial or helpful. Some open access (OA) and non-OA journals require authors to make a payment for publication upon acceptance of their manuscript. Pakistan, classified as a developing nation, encounters challenges in the authors' ability to finance these charges.²² According to the current study, 48.7% paid the processing expenses themselves, while 13.3% indicated that the institution paid through a research grant. As stated in the present study, 48.7% of individuals covered the processing fees personally, while 13.3% reported that the funding came from their respective institutions. Research conducted by Sheikh A²², found a significant portion of faculty members, specifically 316 (53%), of the opinion that the author's institution should handle the publication fee. Additionally, 173 (29%) proposed that the cost should be covered by research funding organizations, and 50 (8.4%) suggested that the author's department should take responsibility. Moreover, 33 (5.5%) recommended cost sharing among authors, while only 24 (4%) put forth alternative funding sources.

Publishing in predatory journals in Pakistan carries significant career risks for researchers and academics. These risks include damaging one's credibility, hindering career progression, and potentially leading to the loss of valuable research, as highlighted in various research papers.^{23, 24 25}

The survey specifically explored the understanding of researchers' Knowledge and Motivation Towards Predatory Publishing." The survey targeted the faculty members and postgraduate students at the Medical university and is the first kind of study done in Pakistan. The current study has several limitations. First, data was collected using convenience sampling, meaning only participants present on the data collection day were included. Additionally, participants were selected from just one university, resulting in a small sample size. Future studies should involve a larger sample and

consider incorporating other important variables.

CONCLUSION

The present study concluded that most of the participants in the study were unaware of the predatory Journals and that they could not differentiate between predatory and legitimate journals. It is recommended to encourage and spread awareness through arranging workshops, and lectures for researchers in different universities and research institutions.

DISCLAIMER:

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Ethical approval was provided by Ethical Review Committee at Baqai Dental college. Reference no: BDC/ERB/2023/026.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Conception and design of the study: R. Jawaid, A. Wali
 Acquisition of data: U.P. Hashmi, A. Wali
 Analysis and interpretation of data: A. Wali, U.P. Hashmi, S. Solanki, I. Shakeel
 Drafting of the manuscript: A. Wali, R. Jawaid
 Critical review of the manuscript: I. Shakeel, S. Solanki
 Approval of the final version of the manuscript to be published: A. Wali, U.P. Hashmi, R. Jawaid, S. Solanki, I. Shakeel

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