

Beware of Predatory Journals



Predatory journals are a global threat. They accept articles for publication — along with authors' fees — without performing promised quality checks for issues such as plagiarism or ethical approval. Naive readers are not the only victims. Many researchers have been duped into submitting to predatory journals, in which their work can be overlooked. A separate analysis suggests predatory publishers collect millions of dollars in publication fees that are ultimately paid out by funders such as the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Defining predatory journals: no peer review, no point

(*Nature* 580, 29 (2020): <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00911-x>)

A group of scholars argue for a definition of a predatory journal that will protect scholarship (*Nature* 576, 210–212; 2019). Their proposed definition excludes an important feature of predatory journals — poor-quality peer review — on the grounds that such reviews are not accessible for analysis. It is a sad irony that this lack of transparency — a tell-tale trait of predatory journals — should be used to justify omitting an assessment of peer-review quality.

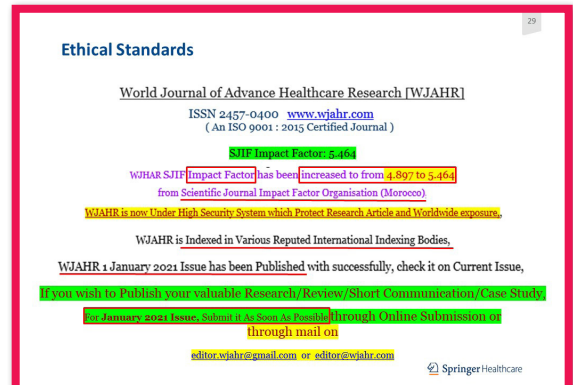
If misuse of the peer-review label is not included in the definition of predatory journals, it could strengthen rather than weaken them. Formal listings of those journals might shrink under such a definition: many journals would be removed because their questionable peer-review procedures have escaped scrutiny and they seem otherwise respectable. They could then become attractive outlets to potential authors.

It is pointed out, legitimate journals, legitimate journals that keep their peer-review processes under wraps encourage predatory practices. If publication of signed referees' comments were standard, journals publishing unrefereed papers would quickly be exposed. In our view, therefore, open peer review should be compulsory and the definition of predatory journals should include the quality of peer review.

Springer Nature's perspective

Springer Nature, with its almost 3,000 journals, is committed to ensuring the integrity and soundness of the scientific record. We ensure all manuscripts undergo rigorous assessment, and have a network of around 90,000 editors and 700,000 peer reviewers from all research disciplines to check content for scientific quality and soundness before publishing.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the research we publish stands up to scrutiny – this is essential for the scientific community to counteract any mistrust of science and experts. We want to work collaboratively with the research community to achieve this.



An example of a fake email

Adherence to ethical guidelines

Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing

Joint statement by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME).

<https://doaj.org/bestpractice>

Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)

<http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>

How to avoid submitting to a predatory publisher/journal:

<https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>