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VIEWPOINT ARTICLE

Predatory Journals and Publishers at a Glance: Take Apart or Take Over?

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Have you ever received and been seduced by such attractive and flattering messages from editors? " .. *Please accept our apologies if you receive multiple copies of this call for papers. This email is for Academic/Editorial information and not for commercial purposes. This e-mail was sent to you as an active researcher ..*" Or *"… Already we contacted you earlier. Since we have not received any response from you, we are taking the liberty to resend the same regarding the submission of manuscript towards the Journal ….."*. The answer is obviously "*Yes!* ". Those beautiful messages come from a plethora of journals that have sprung up during the last few years, very talented to attract, becoming more and more annoying, under the name of "*Predatory journals"* as called by Beall, a librarian at Auraria Library and associate professor at the University of Colorado Denver, who compiled, from 2011 to January 2017, annual lists of potential, possible, or probably predatory scholarly open access journals [1].

For instance, Shen and Björk (2015) recognized 11 873 journals. Between 2010 and 2014, the estimated number of articles published by predatory publishers increased drastically from 53 000 articles to 420 000 (published in about 8 000 predatory journals) [2], that fulfilled Beall's criteria of predatory journals and publishers [3].

Unfortunately, Beall recently removed the lists from his blog, https://scholarlyoa.com/. He "was forced to shut down the blog because threats and politics." And therefore, declined to speak publicly about the decision.

Predatory journals, characterized by a weak or absent peer review process in combination with publication fees, take advantage of authors for reputational or financial gain, usually bypassing conventions of scientific publication designed to guarantee quality and transparency.

Some of them even claim to assess submissions within 48h! and digitally publish them upon acceptance and receipt of the fee. One of our colleagues (H.B) succeeded to convince an editor to send fees within 24h to get two articles published in less than a couple of days.

Furthermore, those fake journals have been found to be dishonest. The key actual difference between them and legitimate journals is the quality and consistency of the editorial and peer review process. They have no genuine archive collections and addresses. They claim to be based in the USA. However, most of them works in India, in Africa, and even in some European and Middle East countries. This is not astonishing since authors in such countries are under pressure to publish as those in high income countries but often lack guidance, support, and mentorship that is available in more developed countries [4].

What is absolutely horrific about predatory journals is that they tend to use famous author names as members of their editorial board without receiving any permission. Some authors stay faithful to them and therefore, are generously invited to the editorial board and will be favored with submission fees discount as it was the case of several researchers in the university where we are employed and who remain still working with.

It is even worse, as said Beall, when many researchers who purposefully use predatory journals become the journals' biggest defenders, and they attack anyone who questions the quality of their pet journals. Some of them are even proud for being so-called co-editor or reviewer to get benefit of discount. In some situations, even intelligent authors are still "genuinely misled".

On some predatory publishers' website, we found this expression "*Handling Large number of Manuscripts is our strength*". Their unique business is getting more and more articles. They only care about the amount. As said Persson "Soon more journals than authors?" [5].

Recent research, within the field of emergency medicine publishing, has suggested that one sixth of all journals (and nearly half of open access journals) in this field were probable predatory journals [6].

Algerian university researchers and scholars have been waiting for a long time until 2016, when the DGRSDT (The Directorate-General of Scientific Research and Technology Development), an academic organization under the authority of the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, published an exhaustive list of 1 301 predatory journals and 1 161 predatory publishers available on the directorate official website [7]. Unfortunately, at the level of several Algerian universities, and to the best of our knowledge, hundreds of vulnerable and naïve PhD students, blinded by pressure to publish quickly and collect papers, had already defended their PhD thesis. That is not all, numerous researchers and lecturers had already padded their CVs, obtained employment, grants, advanced their careers, and even got promotions.

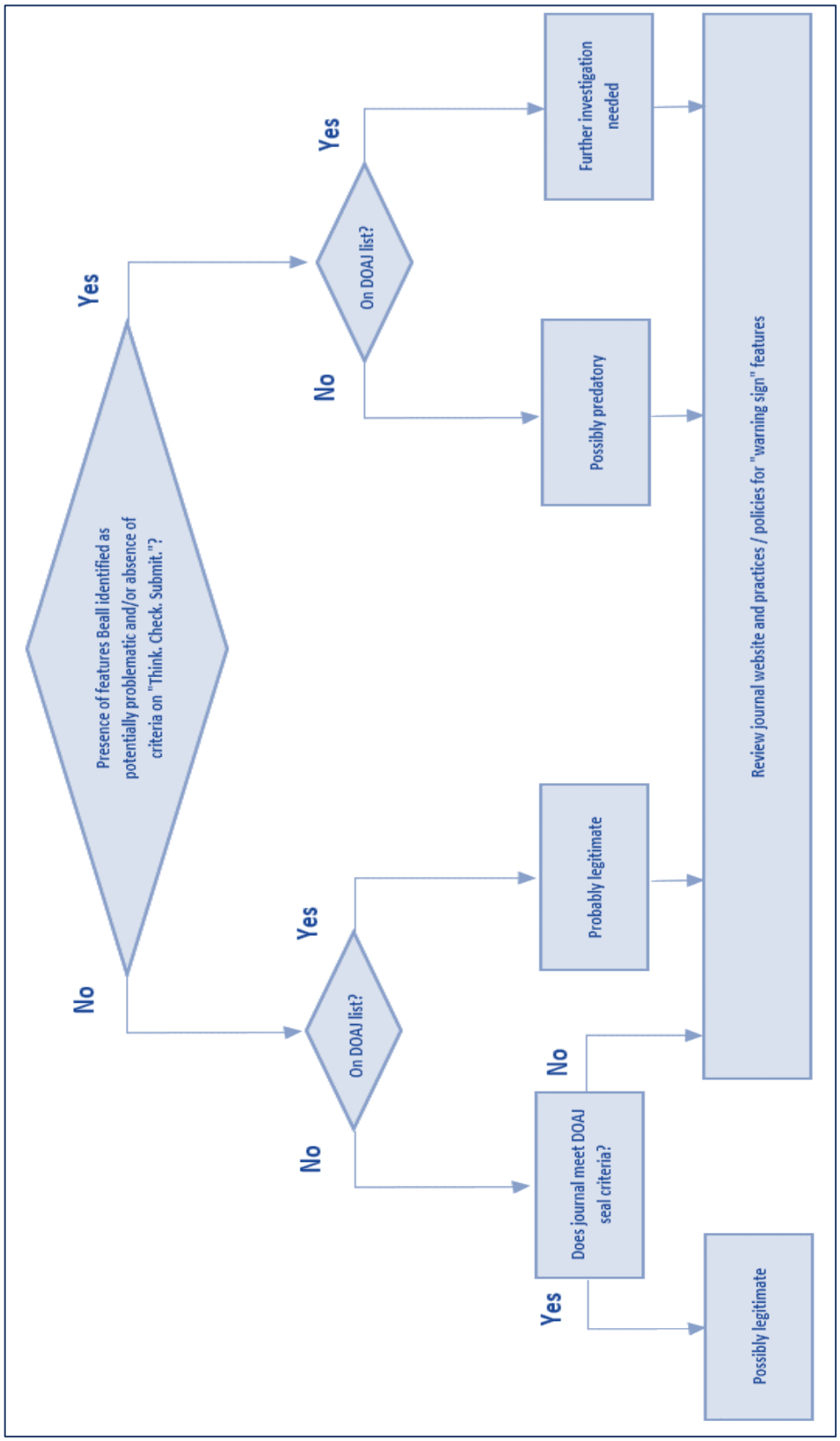


Figure 1. Predatory journals algorithm [9]

There are various reasons that lead some researchers to have recourse to those fake journals. Among them: poor research quality or being disappointed by the constant rejections of their research. While, those researchers could spend more time to improve their research and ensure that it meets the standards of legitimate journals.

It is not always easy to know if a publisher or journal is a "predator". Figure 1 shows an algorithm on how to identify probably predatory journals. Further data are furnished by Think Check Submit campaign [8]

Those are some characteristics that could have those predators:

- Invitation to publish sent by e-mail to the researcher (spam);
- Non-professional contact email address (e.g., Gmail);
- Manuscripts must be submitted by email;
- Review that promises extremely rapid publication;
- No transparency on peer-review process;
- Modest publication fees (e.g., less than 200 USD);
- Access fees or dissemination embargo;
- Incorrect spelling and grammar (site or message);
- Fake impact factors;
- The website of the journal highlights an Index Copernicus;

Furthermore, they are reassuring a priori clues:

- The journal is referenced in the DOAJ;
- The journal is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE);
- The journal is a member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA).

Predatory journals in Nutrition Science

Open Access (OA) journals concept constitutes a novel revolution with a new concept that makes research freely assessable online by anyone.

Unfortunately, predatory journals are often confused with open access journals, which have enriched and benefited scientific community whereby studies are free to all and can be reused for many purposes. Legitimate open access publishing—which has widely benefited scientific communication—uses all the professional and ethical practices associated with the best science publishing.

In the field of human nutrition, there are hundreds of nutrition-oriented journals, some of which are wide-ranging and targeted at an international audience, and others that target specific nutrition communities. These journals are usually led by recognized editors and experts in their field and may also have an editorial board composed of reputable specialists who help guide the review and ensure the caliber of its review practices and publication.

Concerning our journal, *The North African Journal of Food and Nutrition Research (NAJFNR),* peer-reviewed papers submitted to our editorial office tend to have more weight because the integrity of our critical review process helps to ensure the quality of research with no fees.

Within the field of nutrition and food science, predatory journals are threatening the credibility of research. We know dozens of open access journals which are considered predatory journals as published by the DGRSDT:

- http://www.ijfans.com/index.php (actually closed)
- http://foodbiology.org/index.php/foodbio/
- http://world-food.net/products/scientific-journaljfae/
- http://www.sweft.in/
- https://www.omicsonline.org OMICS International (OMICS Publishing Group)
- www.ikpress.com International Knowledge Press;
- http://www.scirp.org Scientific Research Publishing;
- http://www.scholarsresearchlibrary.com/ Scholars Research Library;
- https://www.sciencepubco.com Science Publishing Corporation.
- http://jocpr.com
- http://jchps.com ……..

Conclusion

Several OA journals are legitimate that contribute to the ever-growing body of scientific knowledge; however, it is painfully evident that a significant number are untrustworthy [10].

We suggest that Algerian universities, colleges, and mainly the National University Commission should stop considering the quantity of published articles as a measure of academic promotion and performance.

As mentioned on Giglio & Luiz's article [11] "*We urge all scholarly publishers to join the fight against such practices* ".

The predatory journals' issue grows and worsens and both, researchers and respectable journals should not cite articles from predatory journals, and academic library databases should exclude metadata for such publications. The NAJFNR is committed to ensuring ethics in publication and continuously improve the quality of the editorial work. Therefore, no article published in predatory journal is and will be cited in the list of references of accepted manuscripts.

Unfortunately, the huge explosion of journals (legitimate and predators) makes it difficult to distinguish, and consequently, defeating the predatory publishers constitutes a great challenge for all of us. We need to increase awareness of predatory journals.

The lesson to be learned, is to make sure, as underlined in Think Check Submit campaign [8] that when submitting your manuscript for publication to a particular OA journal check prior if the journal is credible that will deal with your work with respect that it deserves. Be sure that the journal follows the international ethical standards of publication and respect its contractual commitments.

Do not let yourself be seduced by an attractive website or official name.

Be aware of messages that invite you to act as a guest editor of a special issue focused on your specialty.

Research institutions in low- and middle-income countries must establish clear guidance and requirements for publishing research in legitimate journals as did the DGRSDT in our country.

Predatory journals are yet another problem that disproportionately harms people in low- and middle-income countries, and the response will rest primarily with institutions in those countries [4].

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