

Predatory Practices Are Increasing Among Some Open Access Medical and Biological Journals

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Sanjay A Pai discussed an important problem in the academic world and warns researchers about predatory publishers [1]. Devnani and his colleagues believe that low-income countries must devote more resources and more researcher support to aid in dealing with predatory journals [2]. According to these Authors, predatory journals are not indexed journals or, at least, they lack reputable indexes (such as “PubMed” [3]). These Journals declare, e.g.

We have contacted you earlier through email. Since we have not received any response from you regarding your valuable manuscript submission, we are taking the liberty of resending the invitation as we are aware that you may be engaged in other activities or my message may not have successfully reached you. I request you to submit a Research, Review, Case report or a Short commentary for December Issue. The impact factor of the journal is 1.9*.

What's that*? Nothing. It is written in the e-mail you have received, but if you go to their websites, you see that the declared IF is "an unofficial" IF. A fake Impact Factor, one of the stringent criteria to define a predatory journal by Beall Jeffrey [4]: it uses some made up measures, so claiming an exaggerated international standing.

We are now observing that predatory practices are also emerging among some reputable, indexed journals. Some Scopus, PubMed and Thomson Reuters indexed journals (especially journals indexed in Thomson Reuters' Zoological Index) seem to act like predatory journals, e.g., having unclear review processes and hidden publication fees. In effect, reviewing the last updates in Beall's list of predatory journals, we can find such journals [5]. It can undermine the credibility of research results and damage public trust in biological/medical journals.

In particular, we have observed questionable “special issues” in reputable indexed journals, as an example of these predatory practices [6]. It seems that some reputable indexed journals create special issues and publish many papers outside of the journal's scope apparently only to make money. Some open access journals which do not have a publication fee and have been supported by Universities or Institutes create these questionable “special issues” and publish many papers only to generate

revenue. Figure 1 shows the number of published papers in questionable special issues by some reputable, indexed journals in the first half of 2015.

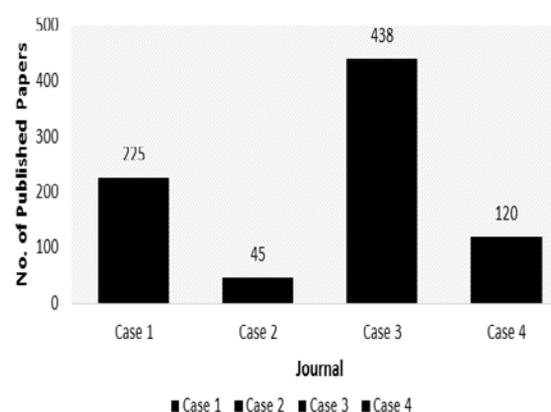


Figure 1. Number of published papers in questionable special issues (case: four different journals). Journals with predatory practice in the first half of 2015.

Here, we are defining “questionable special issues” as “issues with many papers in different domains” or “many special issues in the same year.” Please note that predatory journals are improving their techniques of soliciting papers from authors. They send emails praising an author's earlier papers, inviting them to submit new papers. They enroll Editorial Board members to solicit papers from authors, or the Editorial Board members themselves are solicited to send papers every month.

To solve the problem of this predatory practice, researchers should be wary of open-access journals that organize many special issues or that frequently employ guest editors for themed issues.

In a less specific way, there are many potential unethical practices related to predatory journals, researchers need education and planning to confront them.

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