



# Predatory Surgical Journals—a Menace to the Academic World

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## Abstract

Ever since the need for regular publication by the faculty in the medical institutions as per the norms of Medical Council of India's directive for academic promotion and career growth, there has been a trend for fast track publications of good research data in open-access predatory surgical journals which makes the whole publication futile and useless. A review of such predatory surgical journals is done with a word of caution and prevention of publication of scientific research in such predatory journals.

**Keywords** Predatory journals · Impact factor · Indexing

## Introduction

“Predatory journals exploit structural weakness in scholarly publishing” - Jeffrey Beall

*Predatory journals* are always open-access surgical journals that publish articles online with little or no peer review having low academic standards with little credibility and demanding a hefty author processing charge. Predatory journals usually seek to prey on young naïve authors in the medical institutions joining the “publish or perish” race to glorify the curriculum vitae for promotion in the faculty position as well as trying to gain respect and recognition in the surgical forum. Jeffrey Beall, a librarian from Denver City, coined the term “Predatory” for the first time in 2010 referring to the journals and publishers with fraudulent peer review process [1]. He received request from several journals via spam emails requesting him to join as editorial board member with unknown or doubtful editorial board team composition with questionable qualification with lack of transparent publishing process. All these fleet of journals had false indexing, false impact factor, heavy amount of plagiarism, and complete absence of ISSN (International Standard Serial Number), DOI (digital object identifier), and ISBN (International Standard Book Number) with a promise for fast track publication with a jet speed peer review process. Jeffrey Beall was running a blog called “Scholarly Open Access” since

2012 in which he used to criticize and condemn the predatory journals but was forced to close it and the work was dissolved in 2017 under the pressure of his employer, the University of Colorado. The predatory journal gang disliked his work and was harassing the University and his colleagues by email and started mudslinging to tarnish the name of the University. Beall was neither supported by his colleagues or the governing body of the University and was facing threats about job security [2].

In 2019, Kscien's list of predatory journals was made by a non-profit, non-governmental organization established by 23 young researchers under the title of “Predatory List Committee” (PLC), solely to embed and improve research culture in developing countries. This list classifies as predatory publishers, predatory standalone journals, hijacked journals, and misleading metrics. The basic difference is while Beall's list was based on intuition, Kscien's list was based on a research and scrutiny by PLC [3].

The consensus definition reached by the leading scholars and publishers of 10 countries about predatory publishing finally is “Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices” [4].

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## Predatory Rate

To prevent as well as protect the young author to fall a prey to the menace of predatory journals, Mehdi Dadkhah and

Giorgio Bianciardi from Siena University, Italy, scoring criteria for recognizing predatory journals based on Editor member's criteria, review process and publishing, announcements and open access, and publication charges. Predatory rate (PR) was calculated based on the score and any journal having PR as 0 was considered a non-predatory journal, any journal having PR score less than 0.22 means that the journal used predatory practices, and any journal having PR more than 0.22 was considered predatory journal [5]. A study on the 131 pharmacology journals based on PR, it was seen that 98.5% were predatory and .53 % were found to be following the predatory practices [6]. On a study on 76 dermatology journals, it was seen that 89.5% were classified as predatory journals and the remaining as journals involved in predatory practices [7]. Thus, it is becoming an essential criterion to first check the predatory rate of the journal before sending the research manuscript for publication.

## How to Identify Predatory Journals in Surgery

Thirteen parameters have been formulated to identify the potential predatory journals from the legitimate indexed journals. If the website contains spelling or grammar errors, images are distorted and fuzzy, the homepage language targets authors, promotes the Index Copernicus value prominently on the website, no proper manuscript handling process, email submission of manuscripts solicited, promise for rapid publication with no retraction policy after submission, information of digital preservation of the manuscript absent, low author processing charge [8], journals claiming to be open access either retain the copyright of the manuscript or fail to mention it, and finally, the contact email address is non-professional and non-journal affiliated [9]. Another significant way to identify the predatory journals is the label of being "indexed" in Google Scholar, which is not an indexing database at all. All the predatory journals also offer the post of Editor in Chief or Editorial board member to the naïve author with no way of delisting and thereby the predatory journal getting the legitimacy.

## Why Predatory Journals Are Getting the Fuel?

To get the academic promotion in a faculty of a medical college in India, Medical Council of India (MCI) has made it mandatory to publish the requisite number of original research articles in a scientific journal. This makes the young author fall prey to the predatory journals as most of them are indexed with "Index Copernicus." Index Copernicus is a highly dubious and highly controversial indexing agency. In fact, Beall's blog says "Index Copernicus has no value" [10]. The lucrative offer of fast track publication in a doubtful indexing site but which do promises it as "MCI approved Journal" on the front

page makes the authors submit their research manuscripts to these predatory journals. All should be warned of an increase amount of email from the predatory journals in the future and the universal language of predatory journals calling for paper are "Greetings! We came across your scientific contribution and we with an immense interest, invites you for a valuable contribution for our next issue."

In a study on 1907 predatory papers in journal, corresponding authors came from 103 countries, including India (27%), the USA (15%), Nigeria (5%), Iran (4%), and Japan (4%). An analysis of general academic articles from 2013 to 2015 in Scopus found that 10% or more from India and Nigeria was in predatory journals, as compared to less than 1% from Japan and the USA, making practically India the global leader in predatory publication [11].

## Can Surgeon Dodge Predatory Publication?

In a study on potential online predatory journals, 40% of editors surveyed were not aware that they were part of the editorial board for that journal in question, 21.8% confirmed a lack of peer review process. After proper defining and educating about the predatory journals, 87.9% of the authors surveyed vowed not to publish in the same journal again in the future [12]. The proliferation of medical journals raised an obvious need to provide some ranking index which was first initiated by an American linguist and co-founder bibliometrics and the creator of Science Citation Index, Eugene Garfield at Philadelphia in 1955 and the concept of "Impact Factor" was born to measure the reputation and fame of the journal in question. These bogus predatory journals often claim to have a high impact factor when in fact they do not have a Thomson Reuters impact. They often include into the journal title terms like "international," "global," or "universal" in order to be attractive to authors who need to publish in an international journal for career growth. Though this phenomenon was not there a decade ago, it is now very essential to do a background check of the journal before submitting the manuscript. It should be taught to all the medical students and post graduate trainee in surgery in the early part of their career.

All surgeons before choosing the journal for sending their research manuscript should search the Directory of Open Access Journals ([www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org)) and search the National Library of Medicine Catalogue ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)) and see if it is indexed in MEDLINE. It must also be checked if the journal is listed in Cabell's list of predatory journals ([www.cabells.com](http://www.cabells.com)). Next it is important to check the impact factor of the journal from the Journal Citation Reports Database (JCR) which is a product of ISI Web of Knowledge and is an authoritative resource for impact factor data. This database provides impact factors and rankings of many journals in the social and life sciences based on millions of citations. The last but not the

least way to cross check about a predatory journal is to get a second opinion from an experienced librarian. The website “Think Check Submit” ([www.thinkchecksubmit.org](http://www.thinkchecksubmit.org)) is another good way to identify predatory journals.

## Why Avoid Predatory Journals?

If an author once publishes in a predatory journal, the research cannot be published or submitted in another journal for consideration. If the author recognizes the predatory nature of the journal late, there is no scope of retraction of the manuscript or get the article removed from the website of the dubious journal. These journals have no clear publishing agreement or effective copyright protection rules [13]. Authors should not publish in, or cite articles published in, predatory journals, even if an individual study appears credible. The biggest crisis looming the authors of surgical journals currently is publications in these scientifically questionable journals have already infiltrated citation databases such as PubMed (United States National Library of Medicine) and Scopus (Elsevier) [14]. Sixteen percent and 25% of predatory journals retrieved in neuroscience and neurology respectively are indexed in PubMed and predatory journals outnumber the legitimate journals in neurology. The country of origin of 26–37% of the predatory journal publishers was impossible to trace out due to poor and confusing websites. Of the rest 35.3–42% reported their headquarters in the USA, 19.0–39.2% in India, and 3–9.8% in other countries [15]. A new term “predatory author” was coined by Gasparyan AY et al. that use predatory journals to boost their publication records [16]. He commented that the authors who unfortunately end up publishing in predatory journals are the prey, and not the predators. Sadly, nearly a sixth of the authors in predatory open-access journals are Indians. The reason why the predatory journals are thriving in Indian subcontinent is people here do not consider criticism helpful, healthy, or constructive and therefore, “peer review” is considered a barrier toward the ultimate goal of publishing and this psyche is conveniently exploited by the predatory journals [17]. The decision by the Medical Council of India (MCI) not to recognize publications in all “e-journals” for the academic appointments or promotions in 2015 is the most glaring example to prevent these dubious publications from getting recognized. In 2020, Medical Council of India recognized and recommended publications in medical journals indexed with either one of these—Medline, Pubmed Central, Citation index, Sciences Citation index, Expanded Embase, Scopus, or Directory of Open Access Journals (DoAJ).

## Conclusion

Time has come for all the authors to be vigilant and be conscious of the problem of publishing in a fraudulent predatory journal where publication is easy, fast, and without the barrier of peer review and the fear of the manuscript getting rejected, but ultimately the research becomes a garbage science. The surgeon should choose the open-access journals very carefully and only send the publication in a recognized indexed journal to get the due recognition and fame.

“No research is more important to humans than medical research, and it deserves to be published in top-quality journals that professionally manage peer review and add value through copyediting and promotion of published articles. Aim for the top. Do the best possible research and share it with colleagues by publishing it in the top journals in your field.” - Jeffrey Beall

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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