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THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF PREDATORY PUBLISHING: A CALL FOR ACTION

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Predatory publishing (PP) is a growing challenge since the emergence of an online and open-access publishing model[1].The term PP was first coined in 2010 by Jeffrey Beall who explained that the mission of predatory publishers was "to exploit the author-pays, open-access model for their own profit"[1:15]. Publishing in predatory journals is becoming an industry that threatens the integrity of scientific discovery and scholarship[2]. PP not only wastes funding and other resources[3], but it is also detrimental to authors' reputation and careers. It impedes meaningful knowledge dissemination due to the fact that information published in predatory journals may not be credible or reliable[4]. This is a cause for concern to nursing and the biomedical sciences when PP is cited in legitimate journals[5–6] or when they are included in evidence syntheses published in legitimate journals[7]. Such citations have the potential of altering results[7] and/or impacting patient care[8]. Of concern, the number of predatory journals continues to increase across disciplines[9] with 'no signs of slowing' - Cabells Scholarly Analytics list of suspected predatory journals includes 17,000 journal titles![10] Although much has been written about PP, there continues to be a notable lack of empirical studies on PP across all disciplines[9] including nursing[4,9]. In this editorial, we highlight best practices for scholarly publishing, discuss current perspectives on PP, and identify strategies to halt submissions to predatory journals.

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) worked collaboratively to develop the "Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing"[11]. We recommend that readers peruse the websites of these organizations for additional guidance on legitimate publishing and lists of reputable journals. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) also include recommendations and resources for best practices in scholarly publishing.

Contributing to the complexity of PP is that some authors knowingly choose to publish in known predatory journals[12–13]. As such, Frandsen[13] identifies two author groups - the knowingly and the unknowingly or uninformed. Motivations for knowingly PP are often monetary (funding) and promotion-based incentives and institutional pressure to publish[12] including international publishing requirements (particularly in developing countries)[13]. Predatory journals pay poor attention to scientific rigour and offer rapid publication and low article processing charges[8,14]; presenting "a low-barrier way to getting published"[13:58]. Conversely, the unknowingly author group choose where to publish based on factors such as journal reputation, readership, and impact factor[13,15] and are unaware that they are publishing in a predatory journal[13]. Recognizing these two author groups has led to some debate and critical discourse in the literature about whether the term 'predatory' be replaced by a term such as 'deceptive' to acknowledge authors' motivations and intentionality[16].Mills and Inouye[12] suggest a holistic approach to understanding authors' publishing motives and decisions that is situated in context.

Predatory publishers and journals have questionable business practices that lack quality standards; they tend to include an article processing charge with limited or no peer review or other publishing services[8,14,17–18]. They often lack adherence to publication best practices such as transparency in editorial policies and publication ethics[11,18]. They solicit submissions through email invitations that may show as spam email and often contain spelling or grammatical errors[8,17]. They may also cite one's previous publications in their invitation email. These predatory emails may include invitations to speak at predatory scientific conferences. Some journal names may appear similar to those of legitimate academic journals[8,14,18] however, they are often not indexed in established electronic databases (e.g., Scopus)[14,17]. Additionally, the website of a predatory journal may not list an editorial board, and it may present misleading journal metrics (e.g., impact factors)[14]. For an extensive list of evidence-based characteristics of predatory journals, we suggest that readers visit Cobey et al[17] and COPE[18].

While many authors find Beall's list to be a useful tool for the identification of predatory journals, it was widely criticized for lacking transparency in methods and was removed in 2017 amid legal threats[19]. Cabells Scholarly Analytics, launched shortly thereafter, uses over 60 behavioral indicators (published on their website) to evaluate whether a journal is considered legitimate or is suspected to be predatory; criteria are grouped according to severity and include areas such as integrity, peer review, publication practices, fees, and indexing and metrics[20].

Cukier et al[21] identified 93 different checklists for identifying potential predatory journals, only three of which were considered evidence-based. Updating their systematic review, Ng and Haynes[22] included the same three evidence-based checklists as Cukier et al[21] and identified an additional evidence-based checklist however, with the caveat that these four evidence-based checklists lacked reliability and validity testing and were developed prior to a consensus definition for predatory journals and publishers. Informed by the work of Cobey and colleagues[17] and in consultation with stakeholders an international consensus definition of predatory journals and publishers was developed in 2019 with the aim of guiding research and informing policy: "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"[16:211]. Based on this consensus definition, Ng and Haynes[22] proposed a composite evidence-based checklist template of items for further development to identify predatory journals.

To advance scientific rigour and knowledge dissemination in legitimate journals, a multi-strategy approach is needed to halt predatory publishing. We suggest that a paradigm shift is needed in the "publish-or-perish" academic culture[2,16], whereby the focus should be on the quality and impact of publications. Scholars, funding agencies, publishers, and academic institutions all play a role[3] and shall therefore work together to create an academic environment in which scholars are shielded from falling victims to PP. Strategies targeting researchers could raise awareness and foster 'publication literacy' through education campaigns[2,16,18] to train and mentor individuals to meet expectations of high-quality journals[13]. Further research is needed to support evidence-based strategies. As journal editors in nursing, our advice to authors is to be cautious and resist to knowingly falling victims to their temptations. A publication in a predatory journal could possibly hinder one's career and compromise the credibility of their scholarly work. As such, we recommend that one always chooses quality over quantity in publication.

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