

Scholarly Mirage: Predatory Publishing and Scientific Integrity Erosion.

Alongside the growth of academic publishing, there is the growth of predatory academic publishers that make monetary returns from research, while eroding academic principles of contribution and communication. They go by the name of open access, but are actually peddling the “publish or perish” syndrome, since they can accept articles in a matter of days with very little or no peer review and are more open to profit motives than to science or academia.

The most horrific effect is that it is stripping the real scientific evidence base. Studies are poorly vetted or are not methodologically sound, they enter the literature, and impact the systematic review conducted and the recommended clinical guidelines. In the biomedical sciences it goes further, and might distort the health care of the patients as well as the policy making for public health, using untrue pseudo evidence.

Predatory journals are largely targeting naive and younger researchers with high numbers of naive, low-resource countries, having aggressive solicitations and false indexing, abstracting and impact claims. The reputational harm that results from the publications in such venues adds to the financial exploitation. At the same time, these journals also create bibliometric anomalies and exaggerate their publications, thus compromising the reliability of bibliometric indicators for recruitment, promotion or funding decisions.

Apart from the academic sector, these inferior publications spread the misinformation on a larger scale. With science becoming more accessible to the public, the lack of identification of legitimate from predatory contract research compromises trust in science, especially in high-stakes therapeutic and epidemiological disciplines, clinical trials and environmental health.

Mitigation usually needs to be a systemic change. Academic institutions need to move away from the assessment system based on quantity, and devote more attention to the assessment of quality, with a focus on the credibility of the journal and the strength of the method. Strengthening the publication literacy by formal training in research ethics and journal selection is very essential. Some new developments, such as the incorporation of open review algorithms and the verification of journals using digital solutions, provide potential avenues for bringing the accountability back in.

The predatory publication does not exist on a unique level but is also a structural problem that is related to the incentive systems of the academics. Ensuring the scientific integrity requires a shared approach and commitment to the reassertion of strictness, transparency and ethical accountability for the dissemination of knowledge.

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