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Mulubrhan Balehegn

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Increased Publication in Predatory Journals by Developing Countries' Institutions: What It Entails? And What Can Be Done?

Mulubrhan Balehegn

Research and Publication Officer, Mekelle University, Mekelle, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT
Recently, there has been an alarming increase in the number of "academic" papers published in vanity journals and publishers. Such journals, dubbed predatory because their main objective is making money out of authors, compromise or completely abandon the peer review system. An increase in publishing with such journals, which is common in developing counties, will affect the quality of science, excellence, development, and individual researchers' and institutions' professional reputation. In this article, the author discusses strategies for individual researchers and institutions for identifying and discouraging publishing in predatory journals. Moreover, suggestions on how to deal with faculty who have published and already bestowed positions on the grounds of papers published in predatory journals are also given. Strategies and suggestions discussed in this article can provide insights to librarians and publication officers on how to curb the problem of predatory publications.

KEYWORDS
Academic promotion; predatory journals; publication fraud; zombie professors

Predatory journals and publishers, usually open access, are those that use exploitative techniques with the intention to decieve authors and readers (Butler, 2013). Since 2010, the global academic publishing has been overwhelmed by a steady increase in predatory journals and publishers (Beall, 2013). For instance, Shen and Björk (2015) identified 11,873 journals that fullfilled Beall's criteria of predatory journals and publishers (Beall, 2015). The main deceptive techniques used by predatory journals and publishers include: hijacking of established journals; displaying dubious journal bibliometrics; visually mimicking established journals; advertising very short duration between submission and publication; spamming researchers with unsolicited email invitations; etc. (Beall, 2015; Gutierrez, Beall, & Forero, 2015; Jalalian & Mahboobi, 2014). Their main intention is to make money out of authors (Butler, 2013; Günaydın & Doğan, 2015), though sometimes they might not ask for article processing fees, intending to benefit only from the web-traffic papers create on their websites. The main problem of publishing in predatory journals is that, because their main objective is making money, peer review is completely abandoned or compromised, violating one of the basic principles of science (Berger & Cirasella, 2015; Günaydın & Doğan, 2015; Rahman, Dexters, & Engels, 2014).

The majority of researchers who publish with predatory journals and publishers, are young and inexperienced authors, mainly from developing countries (Xia et al., 2015), though there is evidence for limited numbers from prestigious institutions in developed countries (Rahman et al., 2014). Most of the unfortunate researchers are duped into believing the dubious claims to proper peer review, fast publication time, and pseudo-metrics advertised by the predatory journals. Moreover, complacent authors might also abuse the easy publication outlet provided by predatory journals and publishers, to escape the double blind peer review process and cheat systems in their institutions for scoring underserved points for promotion, positions, and prestige.

Publishing in predatory journals is expected to have far reaching consequences to science, development, and individual and institutional professional reputation in developing countries. With the current global shift and enthusiasm towards evidence-based policy making in developing countries, published and supposedly working technologies will be quickly pilot tested within a few years of publication (Behague, Tawiah,

CONTACT Mulubrhan Balehegn mulubrhanbghz@yahoo.com; mulubrhan.balehegn@mu.edu.et Mekelle University Main Campus, Post Box 231, Mekelle, Ethiopia.
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Rosato, Some, & Morrison, 2009). Therefore, if low quality "science," which did not pass through rigorous double blind peer review, is continuously published and made available to practitioners, then development and societal well-being will be at stake.

Undeserved promotion of faculty, on the grounds of publications in predatory journals, will also discourage genuine ones who are sincerely working for making impactful contributions. This will contribute to increased job dissatisfaction and more brain drain from developing countries. Moreover, academics promoted on the grounds of publication in predatory journals end up being assigned administrative and academic positions where they will be dealing with complex issues without having the necessary experiences and intellectual capacity, further contributing to declining excellence. Such professors are wittily dubbed "zombie professors" in many countries in Africa, implying that they are professors only in their titles and not in intellectual status and contributions.

Being nicknamed "zombie professor" is a bad enough reason to tarnish the professional reputation of an individual faculty. On the top of that, with the advent of increased availability of information on predatory journals and publishers, many institutions and organizations are now screening professionals based on the legitimacy rather than quantity of their publications. In an effort to tell the good from the bad, Cappell (2015), for example, recommended a format for academic curricula vitae (CVs) with papers from predatory publishers listed separately from those published in legitimate ones. Moreover, information published in predatory journals is considered "lost science," as it is usually not discoverable through the formal search and archiving services (Clark & Smith, 2015). Even when discovered, scientists are becoming increasingly wary of citing such papers, contributing to a declining impact, or bibliometrics, of those who publish in such journals (Clark & Smith, 2015). All these will affect the academic reputation and future career prospects and opportunities of academics who publish with predatory journals. Moreover, the metrics-based ranking of the institutions where such academics are affiliated, will also be affected by contributing to the declining reputation, influence, and prestige of such institutions.

Fortunately, individual researchers can easily avoid falling prey to the predatory journals by being a little more vigilant in their selection of journals and using different tools and strategies (Günaydın & Doğan, 2015). First of all, authors should be careful about responding to unsolicited e-mail invitations for submission of a manuscript (Beall, 2013). It is also necessary to scrutinize a target journal in terms of whether: (1) it is part of various predatory journal black lists (Beall, 2014); (2) its claimed impact factor is legitimate or not (Gutierrez et al., 2015); (3) it is indexed by legitimate indexing services (Clark & Smith, 2015); (4) it is part of established publishers, such as Springer, Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, Wiley Publishing, JSTOR, BioOne Publishers, Oxford Journals, etc. (Smith, 2015); and (5) it has any of the telltale signs of a predatory journal or publisher (Beall, 2015). Authors can also ask questions about journals in different online researchers' discussion forums, such as Research Gate, Author Aid, and others, to obtain information from other scientists who had experience with a journal in question. Prospective authors can also check journal metrics and ranking from free online journal metrics, such as Google scholar (Delgado-López-Cózar & Cabezas-Clavijo, 2013), to get fairly objective measures of journal quality and legitimacy. Institutions can also purchase a subscription to the Web of Science, so that their authors can check the legitimacy of an impact factor claimed by any journal. Moreover, a journal in question can also be checked for its presence or membership in various white lists, including Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (www.oaspa.org), Committee on Publication Ethics (www.publicationethics.org), or International Association of Scientific, Technical, & Medical Publishers (www.stm-assoc.org). There are also specific criteria that could be used to identify if a journal is legitimate (Beall, 2015; Hill, 2015; Smith, 2015).

Research institutions and universities can discourage their faculty from publishing in predatory journals using many ways. First of all, they have to recognize that predatory journals are only part of the problem, and that overall poor research capacity and skills is the main reason why authors resort to publishing in dubious outlets (Devnani & Gupta, 2015). A researcher who collected quality data and wrote quality manuscript will most likely take the time to identify a better journal for publishing her work. Therefore, universities and research institutions in developing countries have to work on improving research skills and excellence of their faculty. Developing the culture of academic and research mentoring, and multidisciplinary and team publication will also help young researchers learn from

experienced ones about choosing the right journal and other aspects of academic publishing. Universities and institutions should establish clear guidelines for controlling and monitoring research and publication quality (Clark & Smith, 2015). Moreover, universities and institutions in developing countries can also easily establish a white list of journals from which their faculty can choose, though such list needs to be dynamic to accommodate for newly emerging legitimate journals and other informal publication outlets.

The main challenge is, however, in many universities in developing countries, some faculty have already published one or more papers in predatory journals (Patwardhan, Galib, Thakur, & Kumar, 2014; Xia et al., 2015). For instance, out of 262 sampled authors who published in predatory journals, the majority were from developing countries with 34.7% from India, 25.6% from Asia without India, and 16.4% from Africa (Shen & Björk, 2015). In such cases, universities and research institutions can make authors write official retraction letters to the predatory journals and publishers. If the retraction letters are accepted and papers are retracted, authors can then rewrite their papers and submit them to other legitimate journals, as done by Pruksathorn and Vitidsant (2009), who retracted their paper from a predatory publisher called Science Publications (http://thescipub.com/html/10.3844/ajeassp.2009.1.7) and published it in the Korean Journal of Chemical Engineering. As can be expected, however, predatory journals will usually not be willing to retract papers, or might ask for "retraction fees." Even when a retraction is denied, authors can upload the retraction letters attached to their papers on institutional or personal archiving services, such as Google scholar citation page, Research Gate, and Academia, etc. This will be viewed as an ultimate display of commitment to science, quality, and professionalism on the part of the author and the institution. Moreover, such letters will act as a warning sign to readers that the material has not been peer reviewed, limiting its citation, thus contributing maintenance of excellence. With such an open display of commitment, editors of legitimate journals could also sympathize with the authors and may allow submission of a re-written version for peer review and ultimate publication.

The case, however, gets more complex if faculty are already promoted and bestowed positions on the grounds of papers published in predatory journals. Though the logical implication is to demote such faculty, doing so would have complex legal and social implications. Nonetheless, institutions can make publications used for undeserved promotion to be a liability to their writers. For instance, if a faculty was promoted on the grounds of *n* papers published in predatory journals, then for the next step of promotion, the same faculty can be made to write *n* more papers in legitimate journals than what is normally required by the legislation. By doing so, institutions will make their faculty gain the necessary intellectual and academic experiences of being peer reviewed that they missed in the first place. Moreover, this will effectively solve the common complaint of double standards, where a paper written by multiple authors is already used for promotion by one author before it is discovered to be from a predatory journal, resulting in the rejection of subsequent request by co-authors for using the same paper for promotion.

However, there is the possibility that genuine authors could be duped into publishing their important data in predatory journals. Similarly, journals, once listed by predatory journal lists, could be delisted after they demonstrate their legitimacy, as has been the case for Hindawi Publishers (Butler, 2013). Therefore, promotion committees, in consultation with subject matter experts, librarians, and publication officers, should evaluate the quality of papers published in predatory journals, and decide on whether to maintain the merit accorded to such papers in the first place. This will avoid double jeopardy to innocent authors whose important papers were published in predatory journals.

Conclusion

Predatory journals and publishers are abusing the open access model of academic publishing for making easy money out of uninformed, and sometimes complacent, authors. This is compromising the peer review system, and is expected to have negative repercussions on individual and institutional professional reputation, development, and sciences. Fortunately, individual researchers and institutes can use a variety of techniques to avoid publishing in predatory journals. Librarians and publications officers at universities and research institutions can use the aforementioned strategies to help their respective institutions deter the problem of publishing in predatory journals.

ORCID

Mulubrhan Balehegn http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6832-8369

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