



Predatory Publishing Practices Corrode the Credibility of Science

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A recent review by Gasparyan et al. (1) entitled, “*Publishing Ethics and Predatory Practices: A Dilemma for All Stakeholders of Science Communication*”, is timely as it examines the upsurge of illegitimate and wasteful publishing. The article exposes the menace of the uncontrolled expansion of predatory publishing practices and calls for concerted actions of all stakeholders of science communication.

Authors all over the world are targeted by greedy start-up open-access publishers, offering their online platforms for limitless archiving of poorly edited and unchecked articles for fees. These publishers notoriously compete with and imitate well-established and globally recognized ones, and aim to archive their journals in PubMed Central and then somehow get indexing status from Scopus and Web of Science. They claim to rely on fast and fair peer review and good service to their authors, but are concerned more with the manuscript processing and on-line posting costs.

Recent proliferation of dodgy journals attracting inexperienced or desperate authors is a response to their exaggerated career advancement and promotion plans, which are grounded on quantity but not quality. The mere existence of illegitimate publishers weakens the whole publishing world, and may destroy it eventually (2).

A growing number of open-access journals without legitimate impact indices persistently send soliciting emails, trying to attract by seemingly low publication charges. Generous offers of editorial posts and honorable board memberships often follow without considering editorial experience and specialization of an addressee.

A logical way out of the current situation, exemplified in the index article by Gasparyan et al. (1), may include delisting predatory journals from Scopus and Web of Science, the so-called self-cleaning of the databases, and revising indexing criteria of prestigious databases and archiving services.

Gasparyan et al. (1) call our attention to the main cause of predatory publishing and dissemination of untrustworthy papers, which is the lack of authors' education. As predatory publishers target inexperienced authors, and primarily those from nonmainstream science countries, they should be offered more

educational courses on science writing, editing, and publishing ethics. Some authors apparently lack skills in appraising the quality, citability, indexing, and open-access models of the target journals.

The scrutiny of peer review in legitimate publishers should be welcomed by authors instead of a sham or no peer review in predatory publishers. Experienced authors must maintain the highest academic standards and mentor younger colleagues in research, writing, publishing, reviewing, and identifying unethical work (3).

The index article touched the issue of fake reviewing practices and vanishing editorial functions in some journals. Essentially, superficial editorial control led to the emergence of ‘rational cheating’ in peer review, which is yet another form of predatory practice, affecting established and newly launched journals (4). Such practice is aimed to unfairly devalue and reject good submissions and credit the reviewers' own works with lower scientific merits.

The lack of reviewing skills and professional credentials is often evidenced by hardly understandable and irrelevant reviewer comments, which may also indicate the lack of the editors' discretion. Authors, reviewers and editors have to pass regular training courses on science writing, editing, journal evaluation, research misconduct, and publishing ethics to survive the tough competition. Fortunately, related courses are now available across the world (5). The problem, however, is that there are also ‘predatory’ courses arranged by agencies and individuals, who may even lack relevant academic background themselves.

All stakeholders must raise awareness and educate authors about predatory publishing and its ethical implications. They must continuously upgrade guidelines for evaluating open-access journals. They should assess not only practices of predatory journals, but also conditions promoting their survival.

Many authors from non-Anglophone countries are in dire need of editing services and advice of publication consultants. But all these services and consultancies need to be properly controlled and certified. Unethical agencies and self-nominated ‘experts’ may provide ghost-writing services and recommend ‘friendly’ journals as homes for their edited works, violating all

norms of ethics. It is, therefore, important to reflect on all forms of predatory publishing and recommend targeted actions by all stakeholders of science communication.

DISCLOSURE

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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