Research integrity corner: Special issue on predatory journals

Editorial

Predatory journals and their effects on scientific research community

Farrokh Habibzadeh*[1], Ana-Maria Simundic[2,3]

[1]World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), Past President
[2]Department of Medical Laboratory Diagnostics, University Hospital "Sveti Duh", Zagreb, Croatia
[3]Editor-in-chief, *Biochemia Medica*, Zagreb, Croatia

*Corresponding author: Farrokh.Habibzadeh@theijoem.com

Received: May 2, 2017 *Accepted: May 9, 2017*

Biochemia Medica is an Open Access Journal dedicated to promote science and its values. Throughout the years, we have introduced many changes and novelties to improve the quality of our editorial practices and policies: establishing the position of Research integrity editor and introducing the Research integrity corner, to name only a few (1,2). Since its launch, Research integrity corner has been the section in our Journal where we tried to raise awareness about some most challenging research and publication integrity issues, such as authorship, plagiarism, peer-review, how Croatian open access journals support ethical research and many other (3-6). We had the privilege to work with some of the most eminent experts in the field who have been so kind to make their contribution to our Journal by publishing many educational articles of exceptional quality.

In this issue, the Research integrity corner again has the honour to host some world renowned scholars who have kindly accepted our invitation to collaborate on this Special issue on predatory journals guest edited by Farrokh Habibzadeh, Past President of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). The aim of this Special issue is to provide the insight into the origin of predatory journals and examine predatory and pseudo-journals from different aspects.

Predatory journals are a by-product of Open Access movement began in 1990s. First in this series of articles is the Opinion paper contributed by Jeffrey Beall, the person who coined the term "predatory journal" (7). He is well known for his contentious blog listing predatory journals and publishers from 2012 to 2017. In his Opinion piece, he describes his points of views on the origin of predatory journals and their threats to science integrity. In another article of this series, Dr. Ferris, the immediate Past President of the WAME and the Chair of WAME Ethics and Policy Committee, and Dr. Winker, a Past President of WAME, describe the ethical aspects of predatory journals and publishers and how these journals with intention to deceive authors try to earn money (8). The main problems discussed are lack of good editorial practice, low editorial and publishing standards, academic deception, and waste of research and funds. The authors try to demonstrate their points more clearly in several scenarios. Small scientific communities are not spared from the harms of predatory journals. Another Past President of WAME, Ana Marušić, and her colleague describe this important issue in another article (9). What they report, though are based on Croatian journals, can be applicable to many small journals and scientific communities (10).

Presence of predatory journals has helped many pseudo-researchers to be promoted in countries where academic promotion is still based on "publish or perish" mantra, but no critical evaluation of published articles is done. Having published many articles in predatory journals at acceptable article processing charges, these "predatory authors" misuse the incomplete legislations for academic promotion and being promoted, will earn more than what they had spent (11). It is therefore, important to examine the current promotional rules and audit the methods of evaluation of articles submitted for promotion to prevent such exploitation (12). Many countries, in fact, have abandoned this type of publication-based academic promotion.

No one knows the exact number of predatory journals, but there are an estimated of around 8000 predatory journals published round the globe (13). These journals though do not have any scientific infrastructure as we expect to see in legitimate journals — no real peer review system and no true editorial board, among other things — welcome submissions of quality manuscripts from deceived ignorant authors. Publication of such quality articles would help these journals to pretend they are legitimate, and who knows in this way, some of these predatory journals might even be transformed into a legitimate journal.

The life of a legitimate journal depends on various parameters including the number of quality submissions and enough income to continue the ever-increasing expenses of operating a journal. The number of journals published in the world has had an increasing trend since several years ago, particularly after ready availability of almost free Web-based desktop publishing software programs (14). Considering the competition on receiving the limited available quality submissions, to stay alive, these journals have to do their best. Sometimes, despite all the efforts they make, for several reasons, the most important of which is probably financial problems with budget cutting in many countries for economic crisis, they cannot continue operating. There remain two options: to announce bankruptcy and finish the work, or to become a predatory journal and publish all manuscripts submitted for article publishing charges, regardless of their quality. Therefore, a legitimate journal may turn into a predatory journal. Do not rely on the history of a journal; verify its legitimacy for yourself.

We are living in a world where we can no longer trust a scientific journal. Once, we had problem finding relevant information. Now, we have problem finding relevant authentic information in a sea of information contaminated with fake data. Nowadays, many people rely on information they retrieve from the Internet, including articles published in open-access journals. Many of these open-access journals may however, be predatory or pseudo-journals and thus, may contain unreliable misleading information.

Distinguishing a predatory journal from a legitimate journal is not always easy. Recently, WAME released a statement on identifying predatory or pseudo-journals (15). In this issue of the Journal, you have the opportunity to read this important statement presenting the stance of WAME against predatory and pseudo-journals, their main characteristics, and their differences from legitimate journals. We thank WAME for their kind permission to republish this statement.

In the current Research integrity corner, we tried to cover the most salient issues of predatory journals. But, it is impossible to cover all aspects in just few pages. Many questions still remain. Furthermore, you may have different points of views fair enough to be shared with our readers and discussed. Your comments and reflections are highly welcome. We wish to thank the authors for accepting our invitation to publish their contributions in this Special issue. Their knowledge and expertise is much appreciated.

Last, but not the least, we indeed hope that you will enjoy reading these articles and very much look forward to receiving your future contributions related to this or any other ethical issue in biomedical research.

Potential conflict of interest

None declared.

References

1. Simundic AM. Biochemia Medica appoints research integrity editor. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2012;22:271. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2012.028
2. Simundic AM. News at Biochemia Medica: research integrity corner, updated guidelines to authors, revised author statement form and adopted ICMJE Conflict-of-Interest Form. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2013;23:5-6. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2013.001
3. Supak-Smolcic V, Mlinaric A, Antoncic D, Horvat M, Omazic J, Simundic AM. ICMJE authorship criteria are not met in a substantial proportion of manuscripts submitted to Biochemia Medica. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2015;25:324-34. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2015.033
4. Šupak Smolčić V, Bilić-Zulle L. Patchwork plagiarism – a jigsaw of stolen puzzle pieces. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2013;23:16-8. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2013.004
5. Šupak Smolčić V, Šimundić AM. Peer-review policy and guidelines for Biochemia Medica Journal. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2014;24:321-8. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2014.034
6. Stojanovski J. Do Croatian open access journals support ethical research? Content analysis of instructions to authors. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2015;25:12-21. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2015.002
7. Beall J. What I learned from predatory publishers. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2017;27:273-8. https://dx.doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.029
8. Ferris L, Winker MA. Ethical issues in publishing in predatory journals. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2017;27:279-84. https://dx.doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.030
9. Stojanovski J, Marusic A. "Predatory" publishers and small scientific communities. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2017;27:292-9. https://dx.doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.032
10. Habibzadeh F. How can developing countries succeed in biomedical journalism? Saudi Med J 2004;25(1 Suppl):S6-7.
11. Habibzadeh F. Predatory or legitimate journals. Int J Occup Environ Med 2017;8:67-8.
12. Habibzadeh F, Yadollahie M. Read the articles; don't count them. Arch Iran Med 2009;12:302-3.
13. Lundberg GD. Gaslighting the medical literature. Available at: www.medscape.com/viewarticle/877134. Accessed March 29th 2017.
14. Habibzadeh F. Birth control of medical journals. J Postgrad Med Inst 2015;29:65-6.
15. Laine C, Winker MA. Identifying predatory or pseudo-journals. Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2017;27:285-91. https://dx.doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.031