

Are We as Otorhinolaryngologists Aware of the Danger of Predatory Journals?

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Editorial

We receive more unwanted (spam) messages, a request to submit an article, an invitation to a congress whose organizer is unknown, or a call for an assignment in the editorial board of an unknown journal, which reach our electronic mail (email) box almost every day. While thinking about writing an article on predatory journals and publishing it for a long time, I decided to evaluate these types of messages, which I received in July, according to their types and contents. Since I eventually deleted my email messages that I send to my trash box on a monthly basis, it was not difficult for me to retrieve all of them without any loss.

Leaving the classification of these emails to the end, firstly, I would like to write about what predatory journals and publishing in them are and about how these journals, which are increasing in number every day, are damaging science. Because of the increase and widespread internet use worldwide, the concept of open access journals and publishing emerged in 1990s, in addition to printed journals. As the name implies, open access to the journals was available at any time via the internet, and there was no need to subscribe or pay a fee to read the articles in these types of scientific journals (1). The working principles of open access academic journals were not different from those of printed ones. These journals also had editorial boards and reviewers, and most importantly, the articles coming to the journals also went through the peer-review process (2). Although there were important criticisms to open access journals and publishing in the beginning, this new method of publishing has become increasingly widespread, because it facilitates the communication in science and access to the articles that are the latest product of scientific research (3, 4).

Unfortunately, the concept of open access publishing, which is a valuable aim for the development and spread of the above-mentioned science, soon began to be abused by some malicious individuals and organizations. To state in the simplest way, the articles for which the authors paid for the evaluation of the “so-called” or “no” peer review were accepted in a short time period and published in these types of journals. Jeffrey Beall (5), a librarian at the University of Colorado, used the term “predatory” for these journals in his article published in 2009. In the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution, the meaning of the word “predator” has been stated as “any creature that catches and kills other living things for food” and “predaceous.” The predatory journal has been widely accepted in the world of science, and the mentioned fake journals and publishing system have begun to be called with this term.

Contrary to popular belief, publishing houses that publish predatory journals do not contradict the law. All of these are the publishers who are conducting open access publishing, and they provide serious amount of unjustified benefit by taking advantages of this publishing style. The only goal of the predatory journals is to be able to reach as many researchers or authors as possible, to acquire the scientific articles they have written, and publish them on the internet to get large amount of money from the authors. In the meantime, they by no means are concerned regarding the great damage that they are causing to science (6-8).

The common features of the predatory journals are listed below. Although they manifest themselves that they originate from the United States or the



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United Kingdom, a great number of these publications is issued from India followed by Nigeria, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, and Pakistan. When the internet sites are examined, a genuine communication address cannot be reached in most cases. There are post boxes usually located in the United States. It is also unclear to whom or to which institution (branch association, academic institution) these journals belong. The editorial boards include persons who are not at all related to that branch and scientists whose names are fictitious or are used without being informed or without his/her acknowledgement. The names and logos of the journals are very similar to those of the esteemed journals in that sector. However, it is quite typical that the contents on the websites of these journals have many grammatical errors (6, 7, 9, 10).

The fees that the predatory journals demand from the authors for the publication of the articles are also mostly not indicated on the internet sites. It is not uncommon that they are not mentioned at all and that the publication fee is charged after announcing that the article has been accepted. Due to the high fees requested, when the withdrawal of the article is requested, a charge may be asked for the cancellation. If not paid for, the article you have sent becomes a hostage that you cannot take back. Another problem is that it is later understood by the author that the journal in which the article is published is predatory. In this case, it is no longer possible for the author to withdraw the article or publish it again in a prestigious journal. In addition, the concern with these journals is that the publication life of the journal is sometimes as short as a few weeks. In this case, because of the lack of an authentic and permanent registration system in the internet site that has been closed, the article published in this journal may not be retrieved again (4, 6-9).

Predatory journals do not present any obvious and clear information in terms of peer review and the stages of this process. In addition, one of the remarkable features of these journals is that none of them are in a respectable index, such as Web of Science, Scopus, or PubMed. However, the articles published in these journals can be accessed from the Google Academic, which is not an index, but just a database that shows all "scientific articles" without any qualitative filtering in academic terms (3, 4, 6, 7). Although predatory journals report some impact factors, they are often fake. In recent years, fake organizations that provide impact factors for these journals have also emerged (7, 11, 12). Finally, the most well-known features of all these journals are the overwhelming number of e-mail messages requesting for articles. In these messages, it is particularly emphasized that the evaluation process of the articles does not exceed 3 weeks (4, 6, 7, 9).

The number of predatory journals is increasing by the day. In the list of Beall, also known as blacklist which include certain or probable predatory publishing houses, the number was 59 in 2012 and it rose to 1140 in January 2017 (13). In another study, it was stated that predatory journals constituted a market of \$ 74 million annually in 2014 (14). Despite the fact that they have such negative characteristics, the following can be said regarding where the interest in these journals arises from and how their

numbers increase: firstly, in many countries of the world, there is oppression on the scientists in terms of publication. "Publish or perish" is a well-known concept in the scientific world (15). Scientific articles must be written to achieve a raise in academics, to receive prizes, or to provide better job or position opportunities. In this case, although the goal is to make high quality research that really contribute to science and thus prepare articles, quantity comes before quality in many countries of the world. This, in turn, pushes authors to prepare more articles and publish them, ignoring quality. In contrast, a serious peer review process in reputable scientific journals filters out the incoming papers to a large extent (4, 7, 13). Articles which are very similar to previous ones, problematic in methodology or applied statistical methods, and studies in which the findings are not correctly interpreted or contradict the ethics of scientific writing are not accepted for publication. At the end of the peer review process, most of the submitted articles are rejected, although the ratios vary greatly from journal to journal. However; this situation that leads to sadness and sometimes frustration when viewed from the author's point of view is necessary for the development of science in a healthy way (2, 3, 7).

Predatory journals in which peer review is poorly performed or often not, provide an important opportunity for those who only aim to have the published articles (4, 6, 7, 9). Although prices ranging from \$ 100 to \$ 3,000 are paid for publication of these articles, these amounts can be ignored in terms of the fact that people can complete their application files (14, 16). However, since a very large number of authors do not know about predatory journals and their publishing concept, they send their scientific articles to these journals. Studies conducted on the subject have shown that the vast majority of these authors are young and inexperienced and are from developing countries (10, 13, 17).

If it is understood what and how regarding the predatory journals are damaging, the necessity and methods of fighting against these journals can be better revealed. The most important difference between reputable open access publishing and predatory publishing is that the peer review in predatory journals, which have been emphasized several times since the beginning of the article, is weak or does not exist at all. Besides unqualified or erroneous texts, this has enabled many articles that contain contradictions to scientific writing ethics, such as misuse of data, plagiarism, image manipulation, and desktop publishing to reach the masses through the internet. Now, an individual with a computer and an internet connection can prepare an article without any effort and publish it easily after paying for it (4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18). This quickly leads to the contamination of the scientific literature. Persons or institutions can lead to a wide range of negativities, such as information pollution, bias and unfair benefits in industry, politics, religion, or in many other areas by reaching large masses of people through the writings that they publish under the name of scientific articles. Inattentive published scientific articles may cause some unusual or extreme opinions to be approved or justified in the future, and similarly, number of fake authors may increase rapidly (7, 19).

Confusion also emerged in the evaluation of the academic performance with the articles published in predatory journals. This situation causes problems especially in environments where the number of publications is more important than the publication quality. The ability to scan the articles of predatory journals in Google Academic Database, which is widely used today, causes problems in calculating the h-index of authors. In contrast, it is difficult for those in that branch to be aware of the quality articles that the well-intentioned but inexperienced researchers publish in predatory journals, due to the fact that they are not in prestigious indexes. For this reason, even if they are of good quality, it is not possible for them to receive the citations that they deserve (3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 19, 20).

Finally, all the chaos that predatory journals cause in the world of science has shaken the trust in real scientific work, scientific article, and finally the science and scientists in the public (10).

There is a need for a very serious struggle to overcome all these negative aspects caused by predatory journals and publishing. This struggle cannot be successful if it is carried out by authors or educational institutions alone. Cooperation is essential here for the all related shareholders of scientific writing and publishing. Firstly, awareness should be raised about predatory journals and publishing in young academics in developing countries where scientific cultures are not mature enough. By these means, while young authors learn to choose the correct journals to send their articles to, they may be sensitive to not referring to the articles published in predatory journals. If the journal to which the article is to be sent at this stage is an open access journal, it must be checked through the channel of the Directory of Open Access Journals. In addition, it may be useful for the journals to be evaluated through organizations, such as the Committee on Publication Ethics, Open Access Scholarly Publishers, and the World Association of Medical Editors. A similar website called as "think, check, submit" (<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/>) could be considered (3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17-19).

Frequent enlightenment which Jeffrey Beall has been updating and publishing (<http://beallslist.weebly.com/>) as of 2009 about predatory journals, which is also known as the blacklist, has become one of the most utilized and recommended source of information in recent years. However, as of January 2017, updating these lists was terminated, and the relevant website was also withdrawn from the internet environment by Beall for unknown reasons (13). Although it may be useful to create and share the lists of predatory journals, in addition to the increase in the number of journals, the fact that some of them have only a few weeks of publication life makes the actions difficult (6, 8, 21).

In the evaluation of persons for academic promotions or similar competitive processes, the importance given to publication quality should get ahead of the number of publications. In addition to universities and other educational institutions, central authorities in the country should also make arrangements in this direction (3, 6-10, 12, 18, 21). It is also necessary to consider this important situation when evaluating the candidate files of

the academic members who take charge in the processes of academic promotions, or when evaluating the candidate files of the juries of associate professorship as in our country.

While scientific journals make informative or warning publications on this subject, access to such publications may be enabled without paying a fee to reach large populations. At the same time, journal editors and reviewers may be sensitive about not referring to the articles published in predatory journals. Branch associations may organize meetings to raise the awareness of their members about the issue and may post warning messages on the internet sites of the association (6, 7, 9, 18, 21).

Organizing counterfeit scientific meetings has become to be the ever-increasing method of providing unjustified profits since 2010, in addition to predatory publishing. Many of these fake meetings held in various parts of the world are often organized by predatory publishers. Young academics should also be very careful about such invitations and should not participate in these activities without conducting a serious investigation for the invitation (6, 7, 22-24).

After stating how the predatory journals and publishing developed, the damages and the measures to be taken to prevent it, I can provide the messages of July 2017 about the subject that I mentioned at the beginning of the article. In a 31-day period, I received 186 emails containing a request to write an article, an invitation to become a speaker at the congress, and a call to become a member of the editorial board of a journal. Only nine of these belonged to the real journals or scientific meetings. After they were excluded, the remaining messages were as follows: When I left those related to the predatory journals and publishing houses to the end, two messages had an invitation to join the editorial boards of the journals which I had not heard of before. While one of these journals was related to Pediatrics, the other was a general medical journal. The total number of the messages in which I was invited as a speaker was 102. While the number of messages for the invitation as a speaker related to ENT was four, all of them were for the same meeting. Most of the other emails were for the medical meetings, but there were also invitations as a speaker at various branches of science, such as human rights, tourism, veterinary medicine, and politics.

The number of messages for requesting articles from the journals was 72. Of these, 11 belonged to a total of seven ENT open access journals. When I evaluated the web sites of these journals via the internet, I found that only one was a genuine open access journal, five were definitely predatory journals and the other one might probably be a predatory journal. In addition to the Turkish otorhinolaryngologists who were in the editorial boards of these five predator journals, it was noteworthy that there were also publications made from Turkey in these journals.

As a result, predatory publishing houses, which abuse open access publishing and cause unfair profits in large amounts, present great damage to science and scientists today. Authors, universities, faculty members, editors, journal reviewers, repu-

table publishers, branch associations, database establishments, and governments should take measures in cooperation in the fight against these publishing houses and journals. The concept of “publish or perish” can be considered as valid for the academic life of our country, as well. However, it should not be forgotten that inappropriate publications may cause serious damage to the academic life of the person, if not carefully handled.

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