

## **Predatory publishers/journals**

Predatory publishers “actively solicit manuscripts and charge publication fees without providing robust peer review and editorial services” (Shamseer et al. 2017), resulting in exploitation of the Open Access model for their own profit. Legitimate Open Access publishers also charge Article Processing Costs (APCs), but use them to cover their publishing and archiving costs and offer profound and professional peer review. Predatory publishers usually promise these same services only do not provide them once authors have paid the APCs. Furthermore, they often lack transparency in their operations.

### **Why is publishing in a predatory journal a problem?**

Publishing in predatory journals can negatively impact your academic career and WUR through damaged credibility as a researcher. Publications in these journals may not count towards doctoral thesis regulations or tenure track goals, which could prove problematic in finding and attracting research grants or academic positions. Additionally, a paper that is mistakenly published in a predatory journal cannot be published in a legitimate journal anymore. As such, be wary of predatory journals!

### **How to detect and avoid them? Warning signs, tips and tricks.**

All predatory journals pretend to be legitimate. However, some are easy to recognise, but others are much harder to identify (see [here](#) for a description of different types of predatory journals).

In the [WUR Journal Browser](#), you will find journals that meet the basic quality requirements. Here, you can check whether your journal of choice has an impact factor, the number of WUR articles published there, and how often the journal has been cited by your WUR colleagues. Finally, the WUR Journal Browser provides information on Open Access options and possible discounts.

Additionally, various criteria lists are available on the internet to identify a predatory journal, such as provided by [Shamseer et al. \(2017\)](#) and the ‘[Think. Check. Submit.](#)’ initiative. The list below is a selection of a multitude of criteria from these lists that should enable you to identify whether a journal is predatory.

*Verify information on the journal website.*

- The editorial board is very small, still needs to be announced and does not include experts from your field or other credible scientists.
- The journal’s contact email address, if at all (completely) listed, is non-professional/non-journal affiliated (e.g. @gmail.com, @yahoo.com).
- The contact information of the journal’s board members, if at all (completely) listed, cannot be verified on, for instance, their university webpage.
- The address of the journal’s editorial office location is unverifiable.
- The Editor-in-Chief of the journal is also Editor-in-Chief of (many) other journals with widely different subjects.
- The provided Journal Impact Factor cannot be verified on, for example, the Journal Citation Reports website or the journal claims to have an impact factor despite it being a new journal.

### *Assess how the journal presents itself*

- The journal has a poor and amateurish/unprofessional looking website. It might show clashing colors, non-academic advertisements, mimic credible publishers, is not very informative and contains factual mistakes and language errors.
- The aims and scope of the journal are not defined or rather vague.
- The journal asks for a typically low (e.g. <150 EUR) submission rather than publication fee. Even if your paper does not get accepted, you will still have to pay the fee.
- The journal promises a very fast publication process (e.g. a few days to few weeks), which makes appliance of a proper peer-review process unrealistic.
- The journal claims or seems to be rather new. It has a very low number of published papers and issues so far.
- The journal requests manuscripts to be submitted via email.
- The journal has a very high acceptance rate of papers, within a very short time.
- The journal sends open calls/unsolicited emails to many authors to invite them to submit papers to them, which are poorly written, appear overly flattering (e.g. 'you are a leading expert in your field') or make contradictory claims.
- The journal is not transparent about the peer review process, editorial policies, publishing schedule, copyright agreements, and fees that they apply.
- The journal requires authors to transfer copyright despite claiming it is Open Access.

### *Look at the published materials*

- The journal defines no clear publication date. There is no regular publication activity visible. The journal does not state a fixed number of issues and volumes to be published per year.
- The journal publishes papers that are far outside the scope of the journal.
- The paper titles and abstracts contain errors.  
The journal claims to be very international but has no or very few papers from well-known or international authors.
- The time between article submission and acceptance is very short, which implies lack of proper peer review and revision.

### *Search for the journal in directories*

- The journal is listed on [Beall's list](#) of predatory journals or any other journal blacklist. Note that Beall's list is no longer maintained and will lose its completeness and accuracy over time.
- The journal (if it is open access) is not listed on the Directory of Open Access Journals ([DOAJ](#)). The DOAJ is a kind of 'whitelist' for open access journals as certain criteria must be met in order to be listed. An alternative whitelist is Quality Open Access Market ([QOAM](#)).
- The publisher of the journal or editor is not a member of a recognised professional body that commits to best practices in publishing, e.g. the Committee on Publication Ethics ([COPE](#)), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association ([OASPA](#)), the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers ([STM](#)) or the European Association of Science Editors ([EASE](#)).
- The journal is not indexed in any of the established journal databases such as PubMed, Scopus or Web of Science. A journal indexed there, is trustworthy. However, be aware that new journals take time to be indexed.
- The journal is not read or known by your colleagues. They do not publish in nor read this journal.

**Indexed articles published in predatory journals.**

Recently, it was found that a high number of predatory journal articles are indexed in reputable databases, such as PubMed ([Manca et al. 2020](#), [Manca et al. 2017](#)). Therefore, it is not only important to avoid publishing in predatory journals, but also to be careful when it comes to (re-)using publications for your research.

**Still unsure? Ask around or get support.**

Check with your colleagues and peers in your field whether they have encountered, read or published in the journal you have doubts about or contact WUR [Open Access support](#) for help.