



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Dealing with predatory publishing is a shared responsibility: the role of Latin American journals

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‘Predatory publishing’ has been a serious problem for science and has remained a topic of discussion among the scientific community during recent years. Such journals are considered to be on continuous rise even after several steps have been taken to tackle them and despite the suggestions against them (Gasparyan et al. 2016a, 2017, Laine and Winker 2017). While some authors believe that these journals are just the problem of the developing world, others suggest that the problem is not limited to the low and middle income countries but a global phenomenon (Clark 2018). Although Beall’s blog had remained, for several years, the first and a useful source to identify such journals and publishers but its sudden closure and appearance of commercial listings left the room open for increasing controversies, and poor researchers devoid of such sources (Laine and Winker 2017). Moreover, most of the researchers might not be aware of the resources for selecting a target journal and avoiding predatory journals while submitting their work, and existing publisher-specific, commercial, and noncommercial journal selectors (such as the Journal Author Name Estimator-JANE) (Memon 2017). Although much has been said about the predatory journals in the existing literature, this paper attempts to draw the attention to the less explored areas in context to these journals and publishers.

The features of predatory journals commonly referred to in scientific literature are mostly related to the peer review, their working model, email spams, fake metrics and indexation (Laine and Winker 2017). While discussing predatory journals, I believe, we unintentionally forget the low-quality journals from the developing world. It may be noted that though the low-quality, small-scale journals from the developing countries might not meet the standards of high-quality publishers, they are not necessarily predatory (Laine and Winker 2017). However, they might be following predatory practices, and should improve their standards to be aligned with the standards of legitimate publishing (Laine and Winker 2017). Hence, the term ‘predatory’ may not be appropriate for small-scale, poor-quality legitimate journals from the developing world. Recently, some authors argue that the term ‘predatory’ may not be applicable in cases

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where authors deliberately publish in such journals; the authors of the paper therefore suggest revision in existing terminology of categorizing journals and recommend a new way of distinguishing low-quality legitimate journals from fraudulent journals (Eriksson and Helgesson 2018).

The so called ‘predatory publishing’ has been the consequence of open-access publishing paradigm. There are a variety of reasons why authors choose to publish in predatory journals including, among others, easy and quick publication for promotion, excellence in career, research funding, and to satisfy their ego saying that “See! I have an international publication in *International Journal of.....*” (Cartes-Velasquez 2017, Memon 2017). However, some authors argue that “pressure to publish” is the most common reason to publish in predatory journals, especially in countries and institutions where the number of papers is preferred over quality of the work (Gasparyan et al. 2016a). Of course, an author would be happy to share his/her achievements to the people and would want as if everyone sees and admires the work. In this regard, one of the most important factor concerning journals is the ‘visibility’ and ‘access’ of journal’s content - which is primarily, among others, based on its indexing and working model (open access *versus* paywalled). There are several indexing agencies and databases, few are very famous and known to everyone while others might not be very well known. However, concerns have been raised against major indexing databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus and Medline, for inclusion of several predatory and fraudulent journals (Gasparyan et al. 2016a, 2017). Recently, few mainstream science journals from Asia have attempted to create awareness among the scientific community in this area by publishing some papers about indexing agencies and databases (Gasparyan et al. 2016b). However, much is need to be done on this topic. There may be several databases in Latin America and the Caribbean such as the widely known *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO; <http://www.scielo.org/>) but the contributions about regional legitimate databases and indexing agencies from the authors of Latin America are almost nonexistent. Altogether with legitimate indexing services like the well-known Medline/PubMed, Scopus, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and metrics such as the journal impact factor by Clarivate Analytics and the CiteScore by Elsevier, there are questionable indexing agencies such as Index Copernicus and Scribd and metrics such as the Global Impact Factor (Cartes-Velasquez 2017, Gasparyan, et al. 2016b). Therefore, scientific contribution about the topic of journal indexing and scientometrics is necessary, especially from Latin American journals. This would be helpful in creating awareness about the local databases and indexing agencies in the Latin America and Caribbean, and would increase the access of these databases to the wider scientific community.

Predatory publishing is a global phenomenon but its roots are very strong in the developing world, especially in Asia and Africa (Clark 2018). It is generally assumed that young and inexperienced researchers are the victims of such journals but this may not be the case. Recent evidence suggests that experienced researchers may be victimized by such journals (Memon 2017). Therefore, the authors of the nonmainstream science countries with limited to no education and training about scientific publishing, limited access to scientific literature, and without a proper support from the government and infrastructure are at more risk of being duped by fraudulent journals. It is also noteworthy that contributions regarding predatory publication and publication guidance come from the North and West while papers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America about this topic are almost negligible (Memon 2018). This may partly be due to the fact that there is a significantly low share from this region to predatory publishing (Frandsen 2017). However, recent evidence suggests that 34.7%, 16.4%, and 9.2% of the corresponding authors publishing in predatory

journals represent India, Africa, and North America respectively (Gasparyan et al. 2016a). Although few recently published papers by Latin American journals may be visible, the contribution is far below the magnitude of the problem (Amaral 2018, Cartes-Velasquez 2017, Cordeiro and Lima 2017, Goldenberg 2017). It might also be noted that the scope of predatory publishing activities is diverse, and covers almost all fields and specialties and regions of the world, particularly non-Anglophonic and nonmainstream science countries (Gasparyan et al. 2016a, 2017). Thus, the journal editors from this region are encouraged to increase their contribution to this area in order to create awareness among the scientific community and readership of the journals of this region. This way, the responsibility would be shared and the editors from this region would also create awareness in their community by adding to the existing literature that mostly comes from the developed nations and would share their commitment to science.

As a common notion, the journals from developing countries are marginalized because of their low quality and publication standards. Speaking specifically, the journals from Latin America face this problem due to the difference of language and variation in the indexing agencies, which keeps the literature of journals from this region ‘out of access’ to most of the scientific community. The responsibility to deal with the problem of predatory publishing should, in fact, be a ‘shared response’. By shared I mean it should be the responsibility of the authors, mentors, institutes, organizations, and publishing industry irrespective of the geographic boundaries to create awareness about the issue of predatory publishing and create ways to oppose them. However, in order to achieve this objective, the major responsibility lies on the shoulders of the editors of the journals from developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and Caribbean who should not only start talking about the predatory and legitimate publishing practices but also specifically about the indexing agencies and databases, scientometrics, and other issues concerning publishing ethics. There is a collective and collaborative effort needed to counter the ‘bad science’ from every part of the world because “united we stand, divided we fall”.

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