

Awareness and Attitudes Towards Open Access Predatory Publications Among the Academic Staff Members of Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The scholarly community is now dealing with a serious issue with predatory journals. It might be difficult for authors to identify predatory publications apart from reputable ones. The purpose of this study is to investigate the academic staff members of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka on awareness of predatory publications and open access. The research methodology used in this study to gauge participants' knowledge of "open access" and "predatory publishing" was a questionnaire survey. Data collection involved the use of a pretested questionnaire. The permanent academic staff members affiliated with the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, university of Jaffna comprised the study's population. A link to an online survey was shared with every one of the faculty's fifty-two academic staff members. The response rate of the study was 67.30 %. MS Excel was used for the data analysis to describe the data in frequencies, percentages and rank orders of responses.

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Socio demographic details shows that, highest number of respondents are female (57.14%), completed master/MPhil (51.42%), senior lecturer (57.14%) and interested in marketing (28.57%) as their research discipline. Respondents expressed their priority order for the factors considered to select journal to submit manuscript for publications, journal indexing is the highest priority. All the respondents have an idea about the open access publishing system. Respondents are expected to publish in open access journals because of high visibility, increasing citation number, prestigious journals and fast publication process in a frequency order. The result of the survey shows that, 97.15% of the respondents are knowledgeable about predatory publishing. Majority of the respondents are characterized, the predatory journals are, no insufficient peer review process, and Beall's list of predatory journals used by the high number of respondents to differentiate legitimate journals from predatory journals. More than half of the respondents are satisfied with the services provided by the library to avoid publishing in predatory journals. Responses are summarized for each of the 8 statements about the impact of publishing in predatory journals. Almost all the statements are agreed by the respondents other than the statement of "Articles published in predatory journals are poor in quality". Highest agreement found for the statement 3 which is "Predatory publications are not considered for any academic reward" in which 14 out of 35 were strongly agreed and followed by the statement 2 "many researchers published articles due to lack of awareness about predatory publication" (13 out of 35). Finally respondents are suggested to organize more awareness session on open access publishing and journal selection to avoid predatory publishing.

Keywords: Predatory journals, Open access publishing, Open access journals, Awareness of predatory journals, Publication ethics.

Introduction

More than ten years ago, Jeffrey Beall claimed to be the creator of the term "predatory journal." It has grown in importance among the academic community. Many articles were presented regarding the issues caused by predatory journals, the impact of improperly evaluated manuscripts, and how to lessen them. An increase in predatory journals coincides with the expansion of the open access publishing paradigm. Rather than encouraging high-quality research or information dissemination, these predatory publishers prioritize their bottom line over peer review, often operating with little to none at all. Academic evaluation of research publications becomes crucial and is also a fundamental component. Publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals is the benchmark for academic excellence and the most important way to share research findings.

Choosing a journal with appropriate subject coverage and scope, building reputation among fellow researchers in the field, having the work included in a reliable database, and making the work available to readers for dissemination among researchers are the main components of publishing. Publications that are open-access have greatly increased in quantity and range. In order to encourage authors to submit their work promptly and with unrestricted access, open access journals have used marketing strategies for the past 20 years ([Richtig et al., 2019](#)). But since 2010, there have also been unethical articles that have appeared alongside open access journals. Article processing charges (APCs) were used as a cost model by certain individuals and organizations to publish articles in low-quality journals without subjecting them to the required peer review procedure ([Gasparyan et al., 2013](#)).

These publications are generally referred to as predatory journals, and their publishers are predatory as well. A high likelihood of unethical acts, like

as falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, and guest or ghostwriting, can be found in published articles due to the absence of peer review ([Hebrang Grgić & Guskić, 2019](#)). Predatory publishers were also given an opportunity in the open access publishing model's expansion. Majority of the open access journal are authentic, which are published by very reputed publishers, professional bodies and research institutions. But some of the journals are questionable in the quality ([Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019](#)).

Open access publishing model started with the intension of equal chance for all the researchers to access the scholarly publications. Open access publication are freely available online journals which have no cost and with limited restrictions in terms of reuse. It makes the research information freely, immediately and online accessibility for the readers. Mainly there are two types of open access models popular among the scholarly community, which are gold open access and green open access ([Gasparyan et al., 2013](#)).

Immediately upon publication, the final version of an article is permanently and freely accessible through gold open access. The benefit of rapid availability for authors is that it garners high publicity and influences the frequency of citations and distribution of the article. Gold open access allows to retain the copyright with the author. On the other hand Green open access retained to as self-archiving, which allows to deposit an author's manuscript in repository, also there are some restriction on, how the work can be reuse ([Manca et al., 2017](#)).

Recently Sri Lankan universities have started to evaluate the authenticity of the research publications during their promotions, rewards and funding. Individual universities have started to adopt their system to regularize publication authentication. The awareness level of predatory publishing among academic staff varies among the universities, widely based on factors

such as discipline, institutional policies, and the efforts made by the university to educate its faculty. University of Jaffna took an initiative to regularize the predatory publication by introducing an internal circular on “Publication Ethics”. It propose a set of processes to address this challenge within the University of Jaffna by raising awareness and creating appropriate mechanisms. University of Jaffna persistently promote its academic staff to publish in journals that belong to the following categories such as,

1. Journals which are members of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE),
2. Journals which are members of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA),
3. Journals which are included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
4. Journals published by nationally and internationally acclaimed, established academic institutions, research centers and professional bodies.

It also mentioned as “In evaluating publication included in application for academic positions or promotions, only those publications that belong to one or more of the following categories shall be considered legitimate and publications that do not fall under any of the following categories shall be deemed illegitimate and therefore won’t considered for rewards”.

According to a study on publications completed by academics from all Sri Lankan universities across a range of subject areas, University of Ruhuna has produced a report. A letter alerting academic staff members to predatory publication has been distributed to vice chancellors of all universities, based on the findings of this investigation. All faculty deans have received a copy of this letter in 2019 ([University of Ruhuna, 2021](#)). Every publication claimed

for appointment or promotion should not have been published in a predatory journal or by a predatory publisher, according to the UGC promotion circular Commission Circular 11/2019, which is issued for promotions to the post of Professor or Associate Professor. The evidence indicates that the universities in Sri Lanka must endeavor to control the scholarly publication ([Sarvananthan, 2022](#)).

We can identify the predatory journals and publishers by evaluating their features and performance. Predatory publishers started widespread in the publishing market in 2013. The principles of transparency and best practices in scholarly publishing is a major factor to get the membership with the organizations like, Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA) and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) plays a crucial role in addressing predatory publishing and promoting ethical publishing practices in the academic and research community. COPE is a global organization that provides guidance, resources, and support to publishers, editors, and researchers to maintain the highest standards of publication ethics. Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA) is an intentional community for open access publishing. It engaged and enable the access for the scholarly output. Membership in OASPA will enable effective development in the open access publishing ([Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, n.d.](#)).

Authors must thoroughly check the authenticity of journals and publishers before submitting their manuscripts. A majority of authors lack proper awareness about open access publishing and predatory publishing. This study aims to investigate the awareness level of open access predatory

publications among the academic staff members of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Objectives

This study aims to investigate the knowledge of academic staff members at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka on predatory publications that are available as open access. Furthermore, the study intends to comprehend how academic staff members at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, university of Jaffna see predatory journals and open access publishing.

Literature

The growth of open access publishing model allowed a path for the predatory publishers also. Majority of the open access journals are authentic, which are published by very reputed publishers, professional bodies and research institutions. But some of the journals are questionable in the quality. The appraisal of research publication is a major criteria considered for the academic promotions. Awareness about the predatory journals is very important for the researchers and academics to select suitable journals for their publication. A study was conducted among the young academics in Sri Lankan university sector using structured questionnaire, and concluded that only 15% of the respondents were aware about predatory journals. It shows that, there is a need to create awareness among academics about predatory journals ([Marika, 2020](#)). Fake journals are becoming popular among Sri Lankan scholars”, it emphasize that, the pressure on university young academics to publish more articles which are used as a criteria for evaluating for promotion. Under the merit promotion scheme in Sri Lankan universities, higher marks are given for an article published in a peer-reviewed journal. Author also have highlighted the problems related to increasing number of articles being

published in “fake journals”. Also most of the journals published by the universities in Sri Lanka are not indexed, and visibility of articles published in those are very poor ([de Silva, 2014](#)).

Number of studies have been conducted to find the awareness level of predatory journals and open access publishing, few of them were reviewed for this study to develop questionnaire to assess the awareness level among the academic staff ([Beshyah et al., 2018](#); [Cobey et al., 2019](#); [Kisely, 2019](#); [Kumari & Subaveerapandiyani, 2021](#); [Sharma et al., 2023](#)).

Methodology

This study selected quantitative method as methodological choice. Research strategy followed Survey method and purposive sampling method used as sampling technique. The population of the study is permanent academic staff members attached to the Faculty of Management studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna. Samples are academic staff attached to the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna. Data collected using structured questionnaire to assess the awareness of "Open access", and "predatory publishing". An online survey link was circulated among all the academic staff members (n=52) of the faculty. The response rate of the study was 67%. Data analyzed using MS Excel to describe the data in frequencies, percentages and rank orders of responses.

Results

Publication practice of the researchers

Table 1 illustrated the socio-demographic details of the respondents. Highest number of respondents are female (57.14%), 51.42% of respondents are completed Master/MPhil, 42.85% are completed PhD, 57.14% of them are

Senior lecturer, 11.42% are Professors and 28.57% are interested in marketing as their research discipline.

Table 1

Socio – Demographic Details

Gender	
Respondents	
Male	15 (42.85%)
Female	20 (57.14%)
Highest Educational Qualification	
Respondents	
PhD	15 (42.85%)
Master/MPhil	18 (51.42%)
Bachelor	02 (5.71%)
Academic Designation	
Respondents	
Professor	04 (11.42%)
Senior Lecturer	20 (57.14%)
Lecturer	11 (31.42%)
Research Discipline	
Respondents	
Accounting	07 (20.00%)
Commerce	04 (11.42%)
Financial Management	08 (22.85%)
Human Resource Management	06 (17.14%)
Marketing	10 (28.57%)

Table 2 shows that, 40% of the respondent's authored 10-20 publications, among them 28.57% are professors, 57.14% are senior lecturers and 14.28% are lecturers. Among the respondents 11.42% are authored more than 20 publications.

Table 2

Number of journal articles authored as the first author/co-author

Number of Publications	Respondents
<5	11 (31.42%)
5-10	06 (17.14%)
10-20	14 (40.00%)
>20	04 (11.42%)

Criteria to consider before submitting an article and the open access publishing

Table 3

Factors consider to select journal to submit manuscript for publication

Factors	Priority Order						
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Duration of publication process	4 (28)*	4 (24)	11 (55)	8 (32)	3 (9)	4 (8)	1 (1)
Impact Factor	8 (56)	13 (78)	3 (15)	4 (16)	2 (6)	3 (6)	2 (2)
Peer review process	5 (35)	9 (54)	11 (55)	2 (8)	3 (9)	2 (4)	3 (3)
Quality of the Editorial Board	7 (49)	9 (54)	5 (25)	3 (12)	4 (12)	1 (2)	6 (6)
Publication Cost	7 (49)	5 (30)	9 (45)	5 (20)	0 (0)	4 (8)	5 (5)
Editorial Support	4 (28)	5 (30)	7 (35)	4 (16)	8 (24)	1 (2)	6 (6)
Indexed journals (Web of Science, Scopus, etc)	16 (112)	5 (30)	6 (30)	1 (4)	0 (0)	2 (4)	5 (5)

*Calculated based on the weighted factor (7,6,5,4,3,2 and 1)

Table 3 reveals the most important factors considered for publication of scientific work in a preferential order. Authors are advised to go through the journal profile and evaluate its performance and good practices before submitting manuscripts (Beall, 2016). Journal indexing (112) is the highest first priority for the respondent and it was followed by, the impact factor of the journal (56), publication cost (49) and quality of editorial board (49) in

journal selection. Less priority was given for the duration of publication process.

Table 4

Awareness level of Open Access publishing

Are you aware of “Open Access System”?	Respondents
Fully Knowledgeable	09 (25.71%)
Knowledgeable	13 (37.14%)
Somewhat Knowledgeable	09 (25.71%)
Slightly Knowledgeable	04 (11.42%)
No idea	00
If yes, did you publish anything in an Open Access Journal yet?	Respondents
Yes	23 (65.71%)
No	12 (34.28%)
Reasons for publishing your scholarly work in an open access journals	Frequency
High visibility	19
Increasing citation number	14
Prestigious Journals	11
Fast publication process	09
Promotion of the result over social media	04
Less restricted peer review process	02
Easy to publish without significant result	01

How much would you be willing to pay for a publication in an open access journals?	
Amount	Respondents
LKR Zero/ Nothing	14 (40.00%)
< LKR 10,000	10 (25.57%)
LKR 10,000- 20,000	07 (20.00%)
LKR 20,000- 50,000	04 (11.42%)

Scientific research shows that publishing in open access, because of the worldwide visibility without barriers, demonstrably leads to more citations and more impact. It makes the research information freely, immediately and online accessibility for the readers ([Christopher & Young, 2015](#)). Table 4 discuss about the open access publishing. In this, 37.14% of academics are knowledgeable about the open access publishing and 25.71% of them are fully knowledgeable. All the respondents are have an idea about the open access publishing system.

Among them 65.71% are published their manuscripts in open access journals and 34.28%are not yet published in the open access journals. Respondents were allowed to select more than one option regarding the reasons for publishing the scholarly work in an open access journals. Reason to publish in an open access journal were (1) High visibility (19), (2) increasing citation number (14), (3) prestigious journals (11), and (4) fast publication process (9). It shows the 25.57% of the participants indicated to be willing to pay less than LKR10,000 and 40% of the respondents are not willing to pay any fee or article processing charges to publish in open access journals.

Awareness of Predatory publications

Table 5

Awareness about predatory publications

Are you aware to identify the potentially “predatory journals”	
	Frequency
Fully Knowledgeable	10 (28.57%)
Knowledgeable	15 (42.85%)
Somewhat Knowledgeable	05 (14.28%)
Slightly Knowledgeable	04 (11.42%)
No idea	01 (02.85%)
How would you characterize a “Predatory Journal”?	
	Percentage
Open access to all articles	05.12%
Low quality of the published articles	17.94%
No or insufficient peer review	20.51%
No editorial board or no qualified persons in the editorial board	08.54%
Unprofessional journal layout	14.53%
High professional fees	06.83%
Fast publication	19.54%
Easy/ No review process	07.73%
Are you aware about the following?	
Database	Frequency
DOAJ	20
COPE	18

OASPA	10
Beall's List	23
Cabell's List	6
If aware about the above, which one you use to check if an unknown journal is a predatory?	
DOAJ	23.52%
COPE	15.68%
OASPA	7.84%
Beall's list	43.16%
Cabell's list	9.80%
Do you receive excessive spam mails from unknown publishers to submit manuscripts or serve as editorial members?	
Yes	30 (85.71%)
No	5 (14.28%)
Identifying predatory journals from legitimate open access journals is	
Very easy	4 (11.42%)
Easy	4 (11.42%)
Can identify	17 (48.57%)
Difficult	10 (28.57%)
Very difficult	0
Your level of satisfaction provided by the library with regard to avoid predatory publications?	
Highly satisfied	7 (20.00%)

Satisfied	14 (40.00%)
Neither satisfied or Dissatisfied	8 (22.85%)
Dissatisfied	4 (11.42%)
Highly dissatisfied	2 (5.71%)

Table 5 discuss about the predatory publishing and it is impact. Predatory journals have recently become a significant problem within scholarly literature. Though there is no single defined definition of predatory journals, they may be considered as journals that claim to maintain scholarly publishing standards while neglecting to meet those standards. Awareness on predatory publication is important for the researchers and academics to avoid publishing in those journals. Among the respondents 28.57% of them are fully knowledge about the predatory journals, followed by 42.85% are knowledgeable, and 14.28% are somewhat knowledgeable. Only 2.85% are not having any idea about the predatory journals. This survey shows nearly 97% of the respondents had prior knowledge of predatory journals. Predatory journals and publishers could be identified by evaluating their features and performance. High number of respondents are characterized predatory journals as no or insufficient peer review process (20.51%), followed by low quality of published articles (17.94%) and unprofessional journal layout (14.53%). Peer review is a key feature of predatory journals, according to 90% of respondents who were fully knowledgeable and knowledgeable. The majority of responders said they were aware of possible predatory journals. The majority of responders indicated that they were aware of potential predatory journal identification.

A key component of becoming a member of organizations such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA), and Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is adhering to the best practices and transparency in scholarly publishing. Authentic journals and publishers can be distinguished from predatory journals and publishers by holding memberships in these societies. Most responders are aware of DOAJ and Beall's list of predatory journals. To determine if an unknown journal was a predatory journal or not, nearly half of the respondents (43.16%) consulted Beall's list of predatory journals.

In the context of academia, researchers often receive spam emails from predatory journals, conferences, and publishers. These emails are typically characterized by aggressive marketing and a lack of personalization. They may use enticing subject lines, such as invitations to publish in prestigious-sounding journals or present at high-profile conferences. In this survey, 85.71% of the respondents were received excessive spam mails from unknown publishers to submit manuscripts or serve as editorial members.

Identifying predatory journals from legitimate open access journals can be challenging, as predatory journals often copy the appearance of legitimate ones. However, there are certain signs and criteria that can help you to differentiate between the two, such as, peer review process, editorial board, journal website, indexing and impact factor, checking with authentic databases ([Li et al., 2019](#)). Majority of the respondent are able to differentiate the legitimate journals from the predatory journals and only 28.57% of them said, it is difficult. Libraries play a crucial role in supporting researchers to identify predatory journals and guiding them toward legitimate sources. Libraries can empower researchers to make informed decisions about where to publish their work and help safeguard the integrity of scholarly communication. Academics

attached to the faculty of management were ask to put the level of satisfaction regarding the support given by the library to avoid predatory publications, 20% of them were highly satisfied, 40% were satisfied and 5.71% were highly dissatisfied.

Table 6

Impact of publishing in predatory journals

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Knowledge of predatory journals is inevitable in the electronic information world	10	9	7	5	4	0
Many researchers published articles due to lack of awareness about predatory publication	13	9	5	4	1	3
Predatory publications are not considered for any	14	9	5	3	4	0

academic reward						
Predatory publications do not receive any valid citations.	9	6	7	7	4	2
It is unfair to remove the predatory publications when considering for academic rewards without making proper awareness among the members.	7	12	7	6	3	0
Articles published in predatory journals are poor in quality.	7	5	12	7	4	0
Publishing articles in predatory	10	8	8	5	4	0

journals reduce the reputation of the researcher.						
Predatory publishing leads to a distortion of the published scientific literature.	12	5	4	7	2	5

In table 6, Responses are summarized for each of the 8 statements about the impact of publishing in predatory journals. Almost all the statements are agreed by the respondents other than the statement of “Articles published in predatory journals are poor in quality”. Highest agreement is found for the statement 3 “Predatory publications are not considered for any academic reward” in which is 14 out of 35 were strongly agreed and followed by the statement 2 “many researchers published articles due to lack of awareness about predatory publication” (13 out of 35). Highest number of disagreement is found for the statement 8 “Predatory publishing leads to a distortion of the published scientific literature” in which 25.71% respondents are disagreed and strongly disagreed. Highest proportion of “don’t know” responses (5 out of 35, 14.28%) is for the statement “Predatory publishing leads to a distortion of the published scientific literature”, which address the consequences of predatory publishing for the literature of respective disciplines.

Discussion and Conclusion

Open access journals and publishers are increased over the last decades it ensure the availability of scientific knowledge for researchers freely. Unauthentic journals and publishers took the advantage from the burden on researcher to publish more number of articles for their academic promotions ([Lutz & Rudiger, 2013](#)). The inadequate peer review process practiced by the predatory journals become severe problem for scientific literature ([Kumari & Subaveerapandiyan, 2021](#)). Researchers and academic need to analyses the impact of publishing in predatory journals and most of the predatory publications are from the researchers who are not aware about those journals.

The result of this study revealed that, majority of them are Master/MPhil qualified, and also senior lecturer and above involved in marketing related research. Among the respondents nearly half of them are published 10-20 articles during their research career. Indeed majority of participants in this study indicated Journal selection is an important factor, which influence on their research visibility, while journal indexing was the highest first priority. More than half of the respondents are knowledgeable about the open access publishing and published in open access journals. Moreover majority of the respondents are able to identify the potential predatory journals by using Beall's list to identify predatory publishers and journals. Studies proved that, number of predatory journals were indexed in popular indexing systems ([Manca et al., 2017](#)). However, differentiate the predatory journals from the authentic journals become challenging for researchers. Libraries are playing major role in educating the authors on journal selection and more than half of them are satisfied with the services provided by the library. Finally respondents are suggested to organize more awareness session on open access publishing and journal selection to avoid

predatory publishing particularly they mentioned as “Awareness program on predatory publication is essential for researchers, it should be avoided in future by creating proper awareness, researchers should be given proper awareness from library etc”.

In conclusion, the present study among the academic staff attached to the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna, the majority of the respondents were aware about the concept of open access publishing, predatory publications and the negative impact of predatory journals on scholarly community publishing quality and integrity. However, identification of predatory journals and particularly differentiate the authentic journals from predatory are not well known. Respondents are highlighted the necessity of awareness programs regarding the challenges of predatory journal publishing and it’s problem among the scholarly community.

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