

New study sheds light on characteristics of the 'predatory' scholarly publishing market

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New light is shed on the volume and market characteristics of so-called 'predatory' scholarly journal publishing in a study conducted by researchers from Hanken School of Economics and published in the open access journal *BMC Medicine*. The study shows the number of articles published in journals defined as such that have increased nearly eight fold since 2010; however, it concludes that the problem of 'predatory journals' is limited to a few countries where researchers are known to be placed under pressure to publish in international journals.

In one of the most widely used [open access publishing](#) models, authors or their funders usually pay an article-processing charge (APC) to make their article freely available and they retain the copyright to their work. Beyond the accessibility of the articles after publication, there is no difference between open access and traditional subscription publishing; peer review practices, layout and indexing on the whole tend to remain the same.

The success of open access publishing, which has seen enormous growth in the last 15 years, has also seen the unwelcome development of what has become known as 'predatory' journals. These are APC-charging journals, which publish articles rapidly without proper peer review. 'Predatory' is the most common term for this type of publishing practice but the authors note: "We are not particularly satisfied with the term 'predatory', since we believe that the term has a highly negative connotation and we feel it is slightly misleading. We would instead have preferred to talk of 'open access journals with questionable marketing

and peer review practices'."

In the past few years, there have been investigations or journalistic stings into 'predatory' publishing but very few systematic research studies. To address this, an empirical investigation was undertaken, which took as its starting point Beall's List. Beall's List is a blacklist of over 600 'predatory' publishers and 400 individual journals compiled by the librarian Jeffery Beall based on a number of criteria that he believes reveal the true nature of such journals, for instance obscuring where the [journal](#) is operating from, faked editorial boards, and marketing unrealistically low delays from submission to publishing. The researchers utilized this list as the basis for their study, as it is currently the most widely known list available.

Lead researcher, Cenyu Shen, says: "So far media coverage of 'predatory' publishers has mainly concentrated on individual scandals, or experiments with faked manuscripts that have passed the '[peer review](#)' in journals from this type of publisher. Our study fills in the current knowledge gap to provide comprehensive data about 'predatory' open access publishing. It provides insights into some key characteristics of 'predatory' publishers and journals including market size, development over time, article-processing charges, publishing speed and the regional distribution of authors."

Due to the size of Beall's List, the researchers used a multistage stratified sampling method to form a sample that would give a general picture of publishers of varying sizes. In the first stage 11,873 journals were identified. After sampling, this was reduced to a total of 613 journals that gave representation of the overall market. The researchers then analyzed information such as article volumes, country of origin of publisher, country of origin of authors and APC.

The researchers found a substantial increase in the number of articles

being published by 'predatory' publishers, rising from 53,000 in 2010 to an estimated 420,000 in 2014. It was found that 'predatory' publishers who published more than 100 journals dominated the market prior to 2012, but since then those that publish 10-99 journals have the largest market share.

Of the publishers analyzed, the highest percentage, 27%, were located in India, followed by North America with 17.5%. It was not possible to determine the location of 26.8% publishers. Most authors were from Africa and Asia, with around 35% from India and 8% from Nigeria . The average APC paid by an author to publish in these journals was found to be US\$178, with authors seeming to have a preference for journals with a lower APC.

The researchers suggest that some authors may knowingly submit to 'predatory' journals, as they are under great pressure to publish in international journals and think that people will not be aware of the nature of the journals when their publications list is being evaluated.

The second author, Bo-Christer Bjork, says: "A better understanding of 'predatory' publishing and its real extent is important because currently this type of publishing is tainting open access publishing in general. The average researcher encounters these journals mainly via the vast amount of spam email he or she receives. Our study nevertheless demonstrates that the problem is predominantly limited to a few countries, where international publication is a prerequisite for academic appointment, more funding, or promotion. No wonder that the names of so many 'predatory' journals start with International or American, despite the often very obscure origins of the journals."

More information: "Predatory" Open Access - A longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics, Cenyu Shen and Bo Christer Björk , *BMC Medicine*, [dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2)

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