

Predatory publishing

Scientific publishing has changed dramatically with the advent of the internet and the open access publishing model. With the ability to rapidly publish large volumes of research, predatory publishers have increased their publication volumes from 53 000 articles in 2010 to 420 000 articles in 2014.¹ The publication of 420 000 articles at an average fee of 178 USD,¹ translates to profits in excess of 74 000 000 USD.

Unfortunately, researchers from developing countries including India, Asia and Africa are targeted by predatory publishers,¹ which means that valuable research monies and effort are being channeled to fraudulent publishers. Predatory publishers provide an avenue for unethical researchers to publish fraudulent research, facilitating plagiarism and the publication of low quality research that is unable to pass peer review.^{2,3}

Fraudulent publishing was noticed when a group of researchers from the University of South Africa researchers published numerous papers in the DHET accredited, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences.⁴ An anonymous author, submitted a 98% plagiarized paper to the journal who immediately accepted the paper without a peer review report.⁴ The journal has since been removed from the DHET list and is not indexed by [Web of Science](#) or [Scopus](#). Undoubtedly, the research ethics of authors who publish in predatory journals are called into question.

Predatory publishers send unsolicited email invitations to authors, inviting them to publish articles and books, and attend conferences. Health and medical researchers are targeted by these fly by night operators that take advantage of unsuspecting researchers who want to publish their findings. You can avoid publishing in predatory journals by selecting journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus. Do not respond to email invitations. Predatory journals may provide misleading metrics, including Google Impact Factors. Check on [Journal Citation Reports](#) and on [Scopus](#) to make sure that the journal is legitimate. Protect your research and your academic reputation by avoiding predatory journals!

The problem of predatory publishers and their poor scientific standards are becoming more well-known to academic institutions and funding bodies, who are recognising the red flags associated with fraudulent research.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) regards all research published in predatory journals as fraudulent. NRF funding and rating applications will be detrimentally affected if any predatory journals are identified in an author's CV. Academic CVs and applications should not include any articles published in predatory journals or articles in journals not on the DHET list. The faculty urges all researchers to resign from the editorial boards of suspect journals.

Jeffrey Beall's, Scholarly Open Access website was shut down on 16 January 2017. Lists of potentially predatory publishers and journals that should be avoided have been archived and are available on request.

Please contact Dr. Cheryl Tosh (tel: 012 319 2382 or email: cheryl.tosh@up.ac.za) for further information.

1. Shen C, Björk B-C. 'Predatory' open access: a longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics. *BMC medicine* 2015; **13**(1): 1.
2. Roberts J. Predatory Journals: Illegitimate Publishing and Its Threat to All Readers and Authors. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 2016.
3. Thomas A. African academics are being caught in the predatory journal trap. *The Conversation*; 2015.
4. Smillie S. Journal 'fails the test'. *The Times*. 2014 2014/10/13.

Predatory publishers are publishing e-books: someone always pays!

Predatory publishers send unsolicited emails to researchers asking them to contribute to topical academic books. For example [Avid Science Publications](#) publish e-books or chapters, without peer review, at cost to the author. When research is published without proper peer review or plagiarism checks, the quality of the research is dubious. Unsolicited emails, or emails inviting researchers to publish their chapters or conference presentations in e-books or as entire e-books should be treated with caution.

Researchers who pay to publish their own work, without peer review, in book chapters are generally guilty of “vanity” publishing or “self” publishing. Some publishers will publish your work “for free” and then try to sell copies of e-books at exorbitant prices, between 60 and 100 GBP. Their royalty agreements are often misleading and authors rarely receive any compensation for their work. [Lambert Academic Publishing](#), invited Joseph Stromberg (2014) to publish his thesis and he describes his journey in his article “*I sold my undergrad thesis to a print content farm*”. Lambert Academic Publishing is a subsidiary of [VDM Verlag Dr. Muller](#), a German publishing house that specializes in the mass publication of academic texts and thesis. The author signs away the rights to publish his or her work in legitimate academic journals, the books are unedited and are not peer-reviewed. Many of these books are not recognized by scientific databases and are essentially stolen research.

Academic books should be published by reputable companies and undergo proper peer-review.

Please contact Dr. Cheryl Tosh, cheryl.tosh@up.ac.za for advice or queries.

Stromberg, J. 2014. I sold my undergrad thesis to a print content farm.

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/03/lap_lambert_academic_publishing_my_trip_to_a_print_content_farm.html