



## Predatory Journals Are Unfortunately Here to Stay

**The Predator Effect. Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals.** By Simon Linacre; Ann Arbor, MI: Against the Grain (Media), LLC; 2022; ISBN 9781941269572; 69 pages; \$14.99 (paperback; also available as open access e-book)

Richard Balon<sup>1</sup>

Received: 22 May 2023 / Accepted: 26 May 2023 / Published online: 12 June 2023

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to American Association of Chairs of Departments of Psychiatry, American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training, Association for Academic Psychiatry and Association of Directors of Medical Student Education in Psychiatry 2023

Like probably many other senior psychiatric educators, I am frequently quizzed by residents and early-career faculty members regarding the publication of their work. They ask what journal to publish in, and they often come with names of specific journals from which they have received an offer to publish their work or, at times, to join the editorial board. These are mostly journals I have never heard of.

I receive similar emails. The latest one was from a journal that the email sender called “The International Journal of Clinical Studies & Medical Case Reports.” The information included a specific international standard serial number (ISSN) for the journal and a specific volume and issue number in which my work would be published, and the email stated that my manuscript was going to be peer-reviewed, that a specific digital object identifier [DOI] was going to be assigned “to attain Global Recognition,” and that, if I would submit my work by the end of the month, publication charges would be waived, though “DOI processing charges are applicable.” When I checked the name of the journal and the ISSN online, I could not get any information. I did not answer the email. I knew it was an obvious case of a predatory journal looking for yet another victim.

In the first chapter of his slim volume *The Predator Effect: Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals*, Simon Linacre cites Cabells’ *Predatory Reports*, which lists over 16,000 journals (as of May 2022) that “it deems to be predatory,” with 1800 added each year. Linacre also offers his own definition of predatory journals at the end of the second chapter: “Predatory journals are deceptive and often fake, giving the appearance

of legitimate peer-reviewed journals and impact academic stakeholders by exploiting the Open Access model while using misleading tactics to solicit article submissions.” His definition, like some other ones, does not include one feature I consider important: the motivation, which is to get the author’s money in the form of various so-called publication or processing fees.

The book addresses several issues related to predatory journals, such as subscription access versus open access (OA) (Chapter 4); the beginning of the investigation of these journals by Jeffrey Beall (Chapter 5); the continuous rise of predatory practices (Chapter 6); whether authors submitting to these journal are unaware of their practices or acting unethically (Chapter 7); how to fight back against these journals (Chapter 8); and the digital future (Chapter 9).

The author points out the strong link between open access and predatory journals. The open access model allowed predatory journals to enter the publishing arena and create an illicit market. Almost all predatory journals exploit the open access model. There are various definitions of *open access*; basically, it should allow all scholarly work from all disciplines to be published openly and to be freely accessible to all from at least one repository. It is supposed to be free of charge, free of most copyright and licensing restrictions, and online (Chapter 4). Linacre is quite optimistic about the OA system.

The discussion of Jeffrey Beall’s work on predatory journals in Chapter 5 mentions the astonishing amount of spam trying to entice naïve authors—150 billion messages in 2019—and that according to one study, 55% of academics received up to 10 of these emails daily. These spam emails lure authors all around the world. Thus, many authors have published in predatory journals, knowingly or not. The two main factors of publishing in these predatory journals are “the waste of university and third-party funding resources,

✉ Richard Balon  
rbalon@wayne.edu

<sup>1</sup> Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA

as well as the contamination of the academic record as the articles are read, cited and used by academics and society in general” (p. 34). Yet the articles are not peer reviewed, could be completely bogus, or make fundamental errors. To illustrate the money involved, Linacre estimates that the predatory market could “be worth at least \$75–\$100 million a year” (p. 35). The fact is, as noted later, the internet makes the act of plagiarism and predatory publishing much easier.

The strategies of the predatory journal industry are getting more “sophisticated.” They include organizing predatory conferences (e.g., who has not been invited to chair a session?), using misleading names of predatory journals that are close to the names of reputable journals, “retconning” (i.e., rebranding identified predatory journals under a new title or publisher), and “bootlegging” (i.e., plagiarizing and appropriating articles already published in legitimate journals and passing them off as original work). Interestingly, almost a quarter of academics, in one survey cited by Linacre, either had published in predatory journals or contributed to predatory conferences or did not know if they had.

Thus, the existence of predatory journals and conferences is a serious and growing problem for academia. Yet, as pointed out by Linacre, the issue of predatory journals and the ethics of publishing are rarely taught in any depth in academia. It is not clear if those who have published in these journals have done it because they are unaware of these practices or if they are cynically motivated due to the ease of publication in these journals in comparison with the difficulties of publishing in legitimately indexed journals and dissatisfaction with the scholarly communications industry as a whole.

At the end of the chapter on how to fight back, Linacre answers questions such as how to detect and avoid predatory journals; what is the warning sign that a journal or its publisher is predatory; what steps to take to minimize the chance to publish in predatory journals; what happens if one publishes in a predatory journal; what one should do if one realizes that one has published in a predatory journal; and whether it means that one’s research is lost if it was published in a predatory journal (Chapter 8). The chapter on the digital future also adds “red flags” of predatory conferences and discusses possible digital precautions of predatory practices (Chapter 9).

The issue of publishing in places such as predatory journals is, among others, enhanced by the constant pressure to “publish or perish” in academia. Do we need to rethink that pressure? We are going to face even more problems in publishing with the arrival of artificial intelligence and tools such as ChatGPT. Sadly, we not only are served bad publications but may be paying for them indirectly, as research-granting institutions such as the US National Institutes of Health are funded from taxes.

Finally, I would like to mention the issue of open access again. As Linacre mentioned, it helped to initiate predatory publishing. However, open access also brings the issue of lack of equity in academic publishing. It may be relatively easy for researchers to get publication funding, as the associated fees could be included in grant budgets. This venue of funding or subsidizing publishing is not available to most educators and clinicians, however, who may be forced to pay out-of-pocket. Thus, I do not share Linacre’s enthusiasm with open access.

This little book is interesting and useful reading, not only for possible authors but also for educators. As noted, we are frequently asked for our recommendations regarding publishing. Thus, we need to educate ourselves about it, especially about predatory journals, to be able to help ourselves and our trainees. This book provides the education in a text that one could read through pretty quickly, and an electronic version is available for free, as it has been published through open access [1].

## Declarations

**Disclosures** The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

## Reference

1. Linacre S. The predator effect. Understanding the past, present and future of deceptive academic journals. Ann Arbor, MI: Against the Grain (Media), LLC; 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12739277>.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.