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Repository Citation

Nolfi, D. A., Lockhart, J. S., & Myers, C. R. (2015). Predatory Publishing: What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You. *Nurse Educator*.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000000179>

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Title of Manuscript:

Predatory Publishing: What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You

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Disclosure:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Citation:

This is a non-final version of an article published in final form in:

Nolfi DA, Lockhart JS, Myers CR. Predatory publishing: what you don't know can hurt you. *Nurse
Educ.* 2015;40(5):217-219. doi: [10.1097/NNE.000000000000179](https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.000000000000179).

Abstract

Predatory publishers recruit faculty and graduate students to publish in their seemingly high quality journals that frequently lack peer review, charge fees, and have poor reputations.

Tenure-track nursing faculty with publishing expectations may be especially vulnerable to the inviting emails received from predatory publishers. Nurse educators should collaborate with their health sciences librarians to identify and implement strategies to combat predatory publishers in nursing education and research.

Keywords (MeSH):

Publishing; Nursing Research; Periodicals as Topic; Peer Review, Research; Journal Impact Factor

Introduction

Nurse educators are expected to disseminate their scholarship through reputable peer-reviewed journals. In fact, publishing expectations outlined in academic progression criteria related to tenure and promotion require faculty to address a peer-reviewed journal's quality using measures such as Journal Impact Factor™ (1) and other metrics. Faculty members in tenure-track positions are expected to publish in peer-reviewed high-impact journals (2) appropriate to their disciplines and expertise.

Writing for publication within traditional subscription journals often poses a challenge for both novice and experienced nurse educators who report various barriers to writing, among them lack of confidence and knowledge about the publishing process (3), fear of failure (4), and lack of motivation (5). Challenged with job expectations to continually produce high quality

publications, faculty may feel pressured to publish and therefore be easily susceptible to offers to publish in journals that seem too good to be true.

The growth of open access journals may pose another layer of confusion to an already complex publishing process. Unfortunately, not all open access journals follow peer-review standards. As a result, nurse educators may find themselves lured to publish in journals produced by publishers commonly referred to as being “predatory.” It is important for nurse educators to recognize predatory publishers, avoid publishing in such journals, and guide their graduate students similarly. The purpose of this article is to help nurse educators become aware of inquiries from potential predatory publishers, determine if a publisher is predatory, and implement strategies to combat predatory publishers in nursing to benefit themselves, their colleagues, and their graduate students.

Background

Nurse faculty are not alone in being lured by predatory publishers. In 2008, a scientist named Stephen Harnad described the phenomenon of new scientific publishers that were using widespread spam emails and attempting to lure authors to publish in their newly created journals (6). These publishers were attempting to exploit the “Gold Open Access” model in which the author pays the journal publisher a fee and then the publisher makes the article freely available online. This alternative to the traditional subscription model is in use by many well-respected journals such as the Public Library of Science (PLOS) and BioMedCentral journals. In 2010, a librarian in Colorado named Jeffrey Beall wrote a review of several open access publishers. In this review, he characterized some of the publishers he reviewed as “predatory”

because their focus seemed to be on maximizing revenues from author fees rather than advancing science and scholarship (7). Beall reports that his list of potential predatory publishers has grown from 23 in 2012 to 693 in 2015 (8).

As predatory publishers proliferate, their potential impact on scholarly publishing is becoming more evident. Many researchers, including those in nursing, receive flattering, customized emails, sometimes effusively praising their work and inviting them to publish in seemingly prestigious journals that are actually produced by "Predatory Publishers." These publishers trawl the internet to identify researchers, junior faculty, recent PhD graduates, and others who may be eager to publish their works quickly. The publishers also target experienced researchers, inviting them to serve on journal editorial boards in an attempt to lend credibility to their journals. Although many of these journals have official sounding names that are similar to the names of well-established and respected journals, in reality, they are relatively inexperienced in science publishing and typically employ lax peer review methods.

Recognizing Inquiries from Predatory Publishers

It can be difficult for nurse faculty members to recognize when they have received an inquiry from a predatory publisher. Some of the ways that you can recognize predatory publishers include:

- Aggressive solicitation of article submissions via email
- Emails invitations that include grammatical errors or unusual sentence construction
- Promises of unusually fast peer review and publishing turnaround times
- Journal names that sound important but are unfamiliar to you

- Publishers that are unfamiliar
- Invitations that contain effusive but vague praise of your work
- Very broad subject coverage (for example, one of the authors received an inquiry from a journal that covers the fields of medicine, nursing, and rehabilitation)

Of course, it is important to note that virtually any of these bullet points could potentially apply to a legitimate publisher, and that there is no single indicator that a publisher is predatory (9).

Therefore, the best course of action is to first be skeptical and then to further investigate the journal with your health sciences librarian.

Predatory Publishers Use Deceptive Practices

Another important characteristic of predatory publishers is that they use deceptive practices to lure authors. Some journals attempt to mimic well known publishers and databases. For example, one publisher uses a logo that closely resembles Elsevier's logo (10). Another journal reported being indexed in numerous scientific databases, but on further investigation the databases did not exist. Other publishers even report "impact factors" for their journals that can be confused with well-established journal metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor™ produced by Thomson Reuters (11). An additional unethical practice we found included republishing a previously published article using a different author's name (12-13).

How to Determine if a Publisher is Predatory

Determining if a publisher is predatory is not always a straightforward process and might require using a variety of methods. One easy way to start is by checking "Beall's List" of predatory publishers that can be accessed from Beall's Scholarly Open Access Web site (14). This list includes the names of publishers and journals that Beall believes to be potentially

predatory. One of the challenges that Beall notes is that the publishers seem to add new “imprints” or change names frequently. Thus, keeping up to date on all the publishers can be difficult.

Another approach is to search for the journal in resources that you can find at an academic library, like the ones included in Table 1. One of the easiest things you can do is contact your librarian. In addition to the resources listed, librarians have access to other resources and methods beyond those typically available to nurse faculty. Librarians are familiar with large numbers of publishers and databases and can quickly check a number of resources.

Invitations to Publish Dissertations

Closely related to predatory publishers, vanity publishers employ similar tactics in order to entice newly graduated doctoral students (15). These publishers collect metadata from electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) repositories and then invite new PhD graduates to publish their dissertations as books. This inquiry can seem very flattering and tempting, and presents an opportunity for the graduates to receive a “free” printed book version of their dissertations. Graduates are also led to believe the book can be listed as a separate publication on their curriculum vitae. However, the “book” is typically not reworked or edited, simply published as-is, and cannot be counted as a separate publication. Also, the lack of an editorial process presents the real possibility that any errors in the dissertation will be duplicated. Graduates who sign these agreements can be subject to fees and loss of their dissertation copyright, including loss of future publication rights for works based on their dissertation. Therefore, it is important that faculty inform doctoral students of this potential practice and advise them how to select reputable publishers where they can disseminate their research.

Combatting Predatory Publishing in Nursing Education and Research

In a nation-wide collaborative effort to combat the ill-intentions of predatory publishers, the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) recently assumed a leadership role by publishing a series of editorials in their respective journals (16-21). One of the most important things that the nursing community needs to do is determine how to approach the problem of predatory publishing, especially within nursing research. Starting early in the education process is critical. Undergraduate students need to be exposed to the idea of predatory publishing but even more so, graduate students need to be introduced to predatory publishing in research courses. Additionally, as graduate students complete their dissertations and theses, they need to be reminded that they will likely be seen as easy targets by predatory publishers, and truly need to be educated on how to evaluate any and all solicitations they may receive.

It is also important for faculty experienced in publishing to mentor junior faculty in developing proactive strategies to identify and select high quality journals that are relevant to their research interests. Beyond one on one mentoring, senior faculty can sponsor publishing workshops in collaboration with librarians. One approach is to help them evaluate journals using a checklist that helps determine if publishers are predatory (22). Additionally, INANE recently published guidelines to assess the integrity of a journal (23).

Another approach is to help junior faculty find journals using reputable publishers' tools such as the Springer Journal Selector (24) or the Elsevier Journal Finder (25). Independent tools for identifying journals in which to publish include the Edanz Journal Selector (26) and Jane (Journal Author/Name Estimator) (27), a resource limited to journals indexed in Medline.

Beyond these tools, librarians can help junior faculty identify other possible journals in which to publish. Other strategies may be helpful for informing colleagues and students:

- Communicate problem journals with colleagues via listservs and professional groups
- Include information about predatory publishers in appropriate courses
- Inform advisers and others working with students about predatory publishers
- Develop “scholarly publishing literacy” (28)
- Become familiar with reputable journals (including open access) within your discipline
- Address the role of journal quality in tenure and promotion

Conclusion

Recognizing predatory publishers is an essential responsibility of nurse faculty who are expected to publish in peer-reviewed high-impact journals and to advise students in disseminating their research. Collaborating with health science librarians is the first step for nurse faculty to develop “scholarly publishing literacy” and to tackle predatory publishers in nursing education and research. As our title states in regard to predatory publishers, “what you don't know CAN hurt you,” but “what you do know can HELP you.”

Table 1. Resources to Locate Reputable Nursing Journals

Source/Website	Description
Ulrich's Periodical Directory http://ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com/	A database that provides information about all types of periodicals, including scholarly and scientific journals. Ulrich's does not claim to be an arbiter of the quality of journals. In fact the authors were able to find predatory publishers' journals in Ulrich's. However, Ulrich's is just one of the sources you can check.
Journal Citation Reports http://thomsonreuters.com/journal-citation-reports/	The source of Thomson Scientific's Journal Impact Factors™. Because it is based on citation data from Thomson Scientific's highly selective Web of Science, the presence of a journal in Journal Citation Reports virtually assures that it is not predatory.
SCImago Journal & Country Rank http://www.scimagojr.com/	This website provides journal metrics based on citations from Elsevier's Scopus database. Although not as selective as Web of Science, presence in SCImago Journal & Country Rank is also a good indicator of a journal's quality.
The Directory of Open Access Journals http://doaj.org/	This website is meant to serve as a list of all the open access journals. In the past, it did list some predatory publishers' journals but the editors of the website have been doing a thorough review process to ensure that these journals are being weeded out and not added in the future http://doajournals.wordpress.com/2014/08/08/proactive-not-reactive/ .
The Directory of Nursing Journals http://nursingeditors.com/2014/07/04/directory-of-nursing-journals-moved-updated-and-improved/	This resource is produced by the International Academy of Nurse Editors (INANE). Journal editors must apply to have the journals included on this list and experienced INANE members personally vet each journal before allowing it to be published on the list.

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