

# Editorial



## Predatory Journals: A Potential Threat to Nursing Practice and Science

**A**s the author of a published journal article, you may feel flattered when you receive the first email from a predatory journal, complimenting you on your recently published article. Unfortunately, these unsolicited emails will continue to grow in volume and frequency over time. More than just an annoyance, predatory journals are a potential threat to nursing practice and science. If you are a practicing clinician who has not yet authored a paper, you may also be affected by articles published in predatory journals and not be aware of it. In this editorial, I describe the implications of predatory journals and how articles published by these journals could have a negative impact on nursing practice and science.

Even experienced authors are challenged by the volume and questionable legitimacy of emails from predatory journals. First, it is important to recognize that these emails are automated, similar to robocalls and texts. Automated web crawlers locate authors' email addresses by trolling a variety of websites to obtain author information. Second, publication ethics do not permit a duplicate article on the same topic, also known as redundant publication.<sup>1</sup> If the results and discussion sections look the same in 2 articles, they have too much similarity and cannot be published again in another journal. Unless you are an experienced author with a program of research or clinical expertise, emails that look too exciting to be true, probably are.

Most predatory journals appear to be more interested in profit than in the quality of scientific

dissemination. They often do not comply with typical editing and publishing standards. No formal peer-review and/or editing process may exist, which lowers the quality of the publications.<sup>2</sup> In a study of 358 randomly selected articles from predatory nursing journals, investigators found that fewer than 4% were considered to be excellent quality.<sup>2</sup> Forero et al<sup>3</sup> also questioned whether inadequate peer review may lead to published findings that are potentially harmful to patients.

Articles in predatory journals are often not indexed in standard bibliographic databases such as CINAHL and Medline, making it more difficult for readers to locate these publications. One study found that many predatory journals published only 1 to 2 volumes, and after publishing stopped, articles were no longer available online, creating a situation in which a published article would not be discoverable.<sup>4</sup> In addition, predatory journals may not have an available repository of back issues and future issues may not be regularly scheduled. Information on the publisher's website is often misleading or incomplete. Processing fees may range from hundreds to thousands of US dollars. From the emails that I have personally received, journals have requested fees ranging from \$599 to \$1500.

Emails soliciting articles for predatory journals often contain long URLs, resulting in a copious volume of blue hyperlinks in the body of the message. Additionally, emails often include grammatical errors, peculiar word choices, exaggerated compliments about your extraordinary work, and lack professional language,<sup>5</sup> including the following:

- Greetings for the day!
- Hope this email find you in good spirits!
- We've spent a bit of time for surf in prominent authors in online.
- I found some of your innovative works fascinating and feeling glad to communicate through this email.
- Have a nice and healthy day ahead!

It is important to note, however, that 58% of emails (n = 119) did not contain any clues that they were sent from predatory journals,<sup>5</sup> making it difficult to distinguish emails from legitimate journals from those that are from predatory journals.

All authors, reviewers, educators, researchers, editors, and clinicians should be aware of how to identify predatory journals. This skill is needed to select an appropriate journal for article submission and equally important to avoid citing articles from a predatory journal. Authors who may be at risk for publishing in a predatory journal are those who have had an article rejected following peer-review and are looking for a less rigorous process to achieve a successful publication.<sup>6</sup> Citing potentially low-quality articles may reduce the quality of your own article as well as undermine the body of science in your area of expertise.<sup>7</sup> Oermann et al<sup>7</sup> located 814 citations to articles published in predatory nursing journals between 2009 and 2018. One nursing practice journal was reported to have as many as 77 citations of articles from predatory journals.<sup>7</sup> Imagine the implications of making clinical practice recommendations that are based on low-quality or inaccurate data. We need to do all that we can to prevent "evidence" from predatory journals from reaching the bedside. It will take a village to avoid publishing in and citing from predatory journals. Putting a stop to this practice will involve authors, reviewers, educators, researchers, editors, and clinicians.

Legitimate journals may also use unsolicited communications to reach potential authors. Many of these journals are online only, open access journals, which offer free access to readers, in contrast to journals that are available only through personal or institutional subscriptions or association membership. Legitimate online only, open access journals have a peer-review process and follow publication ethics and standards, similar to subscription-based journals, including indexing in bibliographic databases.<sup>7</sup> Open access journals often charge authors a publication fee. On the other hand, authors may benefit from a shorter waiting period from submission

to publication and dissemination of their work to a broader audience. The faster turnaround time from submission to acceptance may also be an advantage for time-sensitive topics or for academic faculty being assessed for promotion and tenure.

A variety of lists have been created to help identify legitimate journals and reputable publishers. The first list, Beall's List of Predatory Journals and Publishers, was created by an academic librarian, Jeffery Beall, and is now maintained and updated by an anonymous source.<sup>8</sup> Beall's criteria for selection of questionable online journals include high publication fees and limited peer-review and editorial processes. Beall's list also has a searchable feature allowing users to submit names of journals or publishers. Oermann et al<sup>7</sup> located a total of 127 predatory nursing journals using Beall's list. One author reported falling prey to a predatory journal and encouraged other authors to check both the journal name and publisher on Beall's list before submitting an article.<sup>9</sup>

Because I delete most emails in my junk mail, I have often wondered if I would someday miss a "real" invitation to publish. That situation presented itself recently when I deleted an invitation to submit a commentary on de-implementation (one of my research areas) in a high-impact, European critical care journal owned by a credible publisher. Thankfully, a second invited author contacted me directly to discuss our collaborative, interdisciplinary article. This deleted email was a near miss, and given the amount of time that it takes to review the high volume of unsolicited journal emails, it may happen again.

I encourage authors to delete unsolicited emails from predatory journals and continue to submit manuscripts to journals that are recognizable and a good fit for your area of expertise (clinical or research) and target audience. Take the time to read about the mission of the journal and ensure that the journal has a peer-review process. Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE) is another site that potential authors can use to decide on the best fit for their article.<sup>10</sup> JANE flags journals that are indexed in Medline or considered to be high-quality open access journals. Also, an international, interprofessional collaboration, Think, Check, Submit,<sup>11</sup> provides a series of prompts for potential authors to assist with the journal selection process. A directory of quality nursing journals is also vetted and maintained online by Dr Leslie Nicholl; a checklist is available for transparency of the vetting process.<sup>12</sup>

I hope that I have been able to shed some light on the confusing topic of predatory journals. Please do your part to maintain high publishing standards in our profession; avoid citing articles from predatory journals and avoid publishing in predatory journals. Educators can help to disseminate this information and reviewers and editors can help by screening for predatory journals when they review publications. Clinicians can ensure that evidence-based literature searches include evidence only from reliable sources. We encourage you to continue submitting your articles to high-quality journals from credible publishers, such as AACN, whether the articles are in print or online. **CCN**



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