


Comment on “Predatory Publishing Awareness Among Dental Interns in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: A Cross-Sectional Study” [Letter]

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Dear editor

We read with great interest the article by Alkadi et al, who presented a timely and important study examining predatory publishing awareness among dental interns in Riyadh. Their work addresses a notable gap in the dental education literature and provides valuable insights into the vulnerability of early career researchers to exploitative publishing practices.¹ However, a few issues merit further clarification concerning the recognition, whitelisting, terminology used for predatory journals, motivations and publication experience.

The identification of predatory journals has become increasingly complex. Traditional markers such as inadequate peer review, questionable editorial boards, and misleading citation metrics are no longer sufficient. Many deceptive journals now feature professionally designed websites, falsified indexing claims, fabricated archives, and even issue Digital Object Identifier (DOI) numbers, commonly referred to as DOI numbers, or plagiarism checks. Misuse of logos from reputable bodies such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), further complicates detection, making it especially challenging for early career researchers to differentiate legitimate from deceptive outlets.^{2,3} These evolving tactics have significantly blurred the boundary between reliable and unreliable publishing venues. The article also highlights the historical importance of Beall’s List, which played an early role in raising awareness about illegitimate publishing. However, the list has been criticized for its lack of transparent inclusion criteria, inconsistent judgments particularly in cases involving Frontiers, and for inadvertently disadvantaging journals from developing regions due to language or structural limitations.³ After its discontinuation in 2017, Cabells Predatory Reports emerged with seventy-four evaluation criteria, yet remains behind a paywall. To address these limitations, the Kscien List was developed as a free, community driven, and daily updated resource offering transparent criteria as well as conference and cumulative watchlists to assist researchers worldwide, particularly those from resource limited settings.^{2,3} The authors report that 74.8% of respondents were unfamiliar with Beall’s List, yet it was the strongest predictor of awareness (OR = 38.99). This reliance is problematic, as Beall’s List is discontinued, contested, and insufficient for proper assessment. Even 5% of those familiar with it still lacked awareness, showing that list-based methods are inadequate. Structured frameworks like Think Check Submit, endorsed by COPE, offer more reliable training than any single list.

The terminology employed to describe these journals requires reconsideration. The word “predatory”, though widely used, has been criticized for being accusatory and legally imprecise, as it implies malicious intent. More neutral alternatives such as “non recommended journals” have been proposed to emphasize questionable practices rather than presumed motives.^{4,5} Beall originally introduced the term to describe journals that exploit open access without proper peer review, yet recent scholarship shows that problematic journals vary substantially in intent, transparency, and quality. Distinguishing between fraudulent outlets and merely low-quality journals is essential, as respondent perceptions may conflate these categories when identifying “predatory characteristics”.

Research on author motivations further supports the need for structured educational interventions. Evidence shows that perceived journal quality, speed of review, and ease of publication strongly influence decisions to publish in open access venues, often more than traditional metrics such as impact factor or ideological reasons such as accessibility. Career pressures, prior rejections, and convenience often drive researchers toward journals that promise rapid publication without rigorous peer review, increasing susceptibility to predatory outlets.⁶ This reinforces the importance of training early career researchers to critically evaluate journals beyond surface level conveniences.

Finally, research indicates that publication experience alone does not reliably predict ethical awareness or competence in scholarly publishing. Instead, mentorship quality, formal instruction in research ethics, and supportive institutional culture play more decisive roles. Although increased publication activity may enhance exposure to academic practices, it is the surrounding environment that better predicts awareness and the ability to avoid predatory journals.^{7,8} This underscores the need for comprehensive educational strategies that emphasize ethical research conduct, critical journal evaluation skills, and mentorship frameworks in addition to publication productivity.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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