Predator
—Preatory Publishing の 1 例—

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In previous articles, we have covered different aspects of publishing ethics. We will explore this further by introducing real and specific cases in publication ethics that were presented to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)1) and discussed by its council members, with a full translated version in Japanese to increase understanding.

The topic of this first case is predatory publishing. Predatory publishing refers to open access journals which actively solicit manuscripts and charge publication fees with little or no peer review and editorial services purely for their own profit2). Although this unethical phenomenon has attracted much attention, many researchers are still quite unaware of the problem and are unable to distinguish between a predatory and legitimate journal3), such as in the case presented here to COPE.

Case number: 16–22

Withdrawal of accepted manuscript from predatory journal

Case text (Anonymised)
Our journal has been contacted by an author who would like to submit a review article. The author responded to a request for an invited review from a predatory journal without realizing it was a predatory journal. The author submitted the article only to receive an unexpected invoice and clear evidence of no peer review. The author investigated the journal and then realized the predatory nature of this journal.

To remove the submitted manuscript from this journal, the author communicated via email, phone and certified letter, and also contacted members of the editorial board, but has received no return communication. Periodically, the manuscript has disappeared from the journal’s website, only to reappear in a later issue. The author never signed a copyright agreement and never paid the journal to publish the article. The author would like to have the manuscript published in a legitimate journal but does not wish to be guilty of duplicate publication.

As the former editor-in-chief of the journal, the only advice I could offer was to contact the present editor-in-chief of the legitimate journal to which the author wishes to submit the manuscript, explain the situation and see what advice is given. If accepted and published, a statement could be included that this is the only valid version of the paper.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum
What advice can be given to the author about submitting the manuscript to a legitimate journal without the author being guilty of duplicate publication?

Advice:
The Forum agreed with the advice of the former editor-in-chief. As there was no copyright transfer, the paper could be published in the legitimate journal, ideally with an editorial note on the paper explaining what has happened. Otherwise, the author may have to write off this paper to experience and lessons learned.
The Forum noted that this case highlights the importance of the Think.Check.Submit. initiative, which provides tools to help researchers identify trusted journals for their research.

Another suggestion was to threaten legal action—the predatory journal may back down if legal action is threatened.

Follow up:
The editor conveyed the Forum’s advice to the author. She sent another letter via certified mail to the predatory journal, but it was returned unopened (as no one was present at the address to accept the letter). She did not threaten legal action because her university’s legal counsel would not endorse that approach and she was unable to obtain a response from anyone at the journal via phone, email or certified letter in order to communicate that threat effectively. However, she then sent a message to the publisher of the predatory journal:

“Immediately remove my article from your website. If you do not do so immediately, I will take legal action.”

The publisher responded by asking her for the article title and associated journal. The author provided this information and indicated she would proceed with legal action if the article was not removed from the journal’s website by a given date. She will now proceed with submission to a legitimate journal, and the editor of the legitimate journal is comfortable that duplicate publication is no longer a problem.

Resolution: Case Closed Year: 2016
The main points we would like to point out from this case are the following: 1) the author responded to a request for an invited review from a predatory journal without realizing it was a predatory journal; 2) the author contacted members of the editorial board, but has received no return communication; and 3) the author wants to remove the submitted manuscript from this journal and submit it to a legitimate journal but does not want to be accused of duplicate publication.

The most efficient way for authors to protect themselves from predatory publishing is to become familiar with the characteristics of those predatory journals\(^5\). Predatory journals frequently send emails, encouraging authors to submit an article, or invite them to do so\(^3\).

As we mentioned in our previous article, authors need to check up on the journal they are submitting to before actually doing so. This can be done by visiting the journal’s website. If the journal is legitimate, the website should clearly state the aim and goals of the journal, the journal’s peer review policy and process, members of the editorial board, instructions to authors regarding manuscript preparation, copyright transfer agreement, and any additional information such as author fees.

It is important for authors to carefully read each of these areas and look out for things that might sound too good to be true and become familiar with some of the common characteristics of predatory journals. These might include 1) no peer review or peer review in a very short period which is too quick and impossible, 2) almost no detailed guidelines on manuscript preparation, 3) aims and goals of the journal are too vague, 4) members of the editorial board do not give legitimate affiliations or contact information, 5) no explanation of copyright transfer, 6) if the journal requires author fees, the amount is not clearly stated, or too excessive, 7) author fees are not listed on the website but authors are contacted about additional fees after the manuscript is accepted, 8) the journal gives a very high impact factor that is not from a reputable index such as MEDLINE, 9) the journal title is very similar to another prominent journal to confuse the author, 10) none of your colleagues have ever heard of or submitted to the journal\(^2\,\!\!6\).

Of course, the utmost way for authors to protect themselves from predatory journals would be to not trust emails that are sent to you randomly, and to access directly the website of the journal you are wishing to submit to. It would also be wise before any submission to read through several recent issues of the target journal\(^8\). This could additionally help authors to determine whether that journal is the most appropriate choice of readership for their manuscript.

**Closing Message**

Authors should be aware that a predatory journal may exist in name only. For example, in this case, the registered mail was returned unopened to the author because no one was present to sign for the registered mail. This indicates that it is highly possible that the journal did not really exist. Furthermore, despite the fact that the editor-in-chief of the legitimate journal gave permission to accept the submission and confirmed with the author that this would not be considered duplicate publication, there is still the possibility that a non-valid version of the submitted manuscript may exist somewhere. It is unclear as to whether the publisher or the predatory journal actually removed the article as requested by the author. Authors, especially those who have little or no experience in publishing, need to be extremely careful about invitation emails to submit articles.
References

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