

Building a Trustworthy Research Environment: Challenges and Solutions to Predatory Publishing

Susan Veldsman

Director: Scholarly Publishing

UbuntuNet Alliance

26 March 2025



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Project

2020

Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences

OVERVIEW

PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS

RESOURCES



Policy for Science



the interacademy partnership

GORDON AND BETTY
MOORE
FOUNDATION

National academies plan assault on predatory journals

By Robin Bisson

Share [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [e](#)



Research Europe | 30 July 2020

Nations | 19

World

Academies to target predatory journals

Project aims to map global impact of bad practices in publishing and scale up interventions

Robin Bisson

An international project to determine the scale of predatory publishing practices is looking to harness the authority of national academies to turn the tide on profit-driven, bad-faith journals taking advantage of researchers.

Predatory journals offer rapid publication of research papers but often lack robust peer review, and their main aim is to collect fees from researchers. There is also an increasing trend for predatory conferences that present like standard scientific meetings but lack quality control over presentations and charge extortionate attendance fees.

"A lot of people either don't know this is an issue or think it's just an issue for the developing world," said Teresa Stoepler, executive director of policy at the InterAcademy Partnership. The global network counts more than 140 science, engineering and medical academies among its members, including the European Academies Science Advisory Council, the National

Academy of Sciences in the United States, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and African Academy of Sciences.

"We really don't know the extent of the problem globally, but it seems to be widespread and has potential to damage individual careers and reverberate throughout the research enterprise," said Stoepler.

Many previous initiatives to combat predatory journals have focused on creating blacklists or whitelists, including the widely used but now defunct list by American librarian Jeffrey Beall. "Very quickly our working group decided that it didn't want to create another checklist—they are already numerous and difficult to maintain," said Tracey Elliott, project director at the InterAcademy Partnership, following the first meeting of the working group in late June.

Instead, the InterAcademy project will survey researchers around the world at different stages of their careers, and look at scaling up and adapting interventions, such as training programmes on good practice for early career researchers, to combat predatory practices.

By the end of 2021, the team behind it hopes to produce recommendations for research institutions, policymakers, publishers and funders.

Elliott said funders in particular are a key lever in combatting predatory practices. "In some cases they are funding poor quality research which is wasteful at best," she said.

Stoepler said unethical practices have increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, with even legitimate, non-predatory publishers being overwhelmed by the volume of submissions.

In June two medical journals, the Lancet and the New England Journal of Medicine, retracted papers, including one that had halted international trials of the experimental Covid-19 drug hydroxychloroquine, due to questions over the data underlying them.

"Some of the information that's getting out there to policymakers on Covid-19 is alarming," said Elliott. "Whether the articles are retracted or not, they are still there in the public domain."

Another study will look at research evaluation practices and how they may exacerbate the growth of predatory journals and conferences emphasising publication at all costs.

"We are challenging a well-established system, and in addressing research evaluation we would be challenging it even more," said Elliott. ◻

“Some of the information getting out there to policymakers on Covid-19 is alarming.”

Tracey Elliott, project director at the InterAcademy Partnership



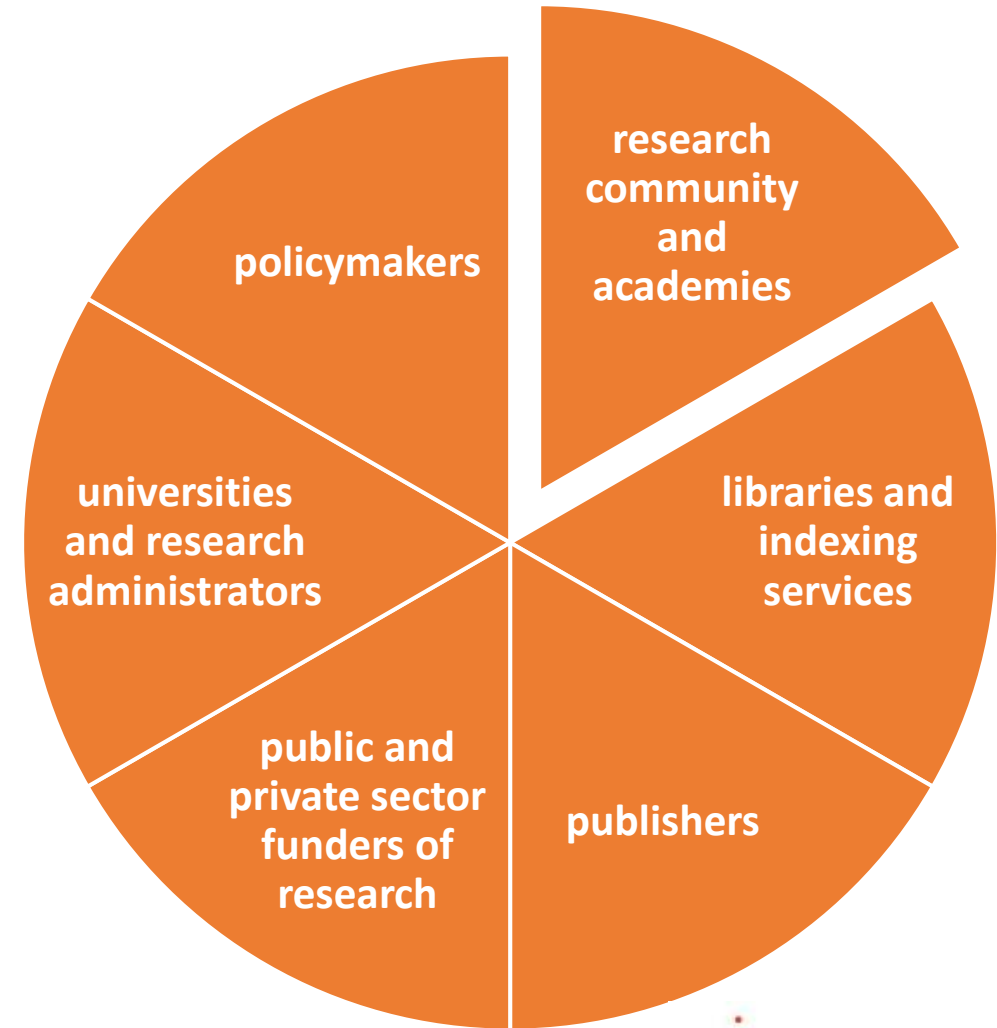
science, technology & innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Study objectives

- ❑ Define predatory and unethical practices in academic journals and conferences
- ❑ Gauge their prevalence and impact
- ❑ Understand the primary drivers or root causes
- ❑ Examine efforts to-date to combat predatory journals and conferences around the world
- ❑ Provide concrete recommendations for a GLOBAL STRATEGY to address the problem, that engages all key stakeholders



Landmark survey of researchers

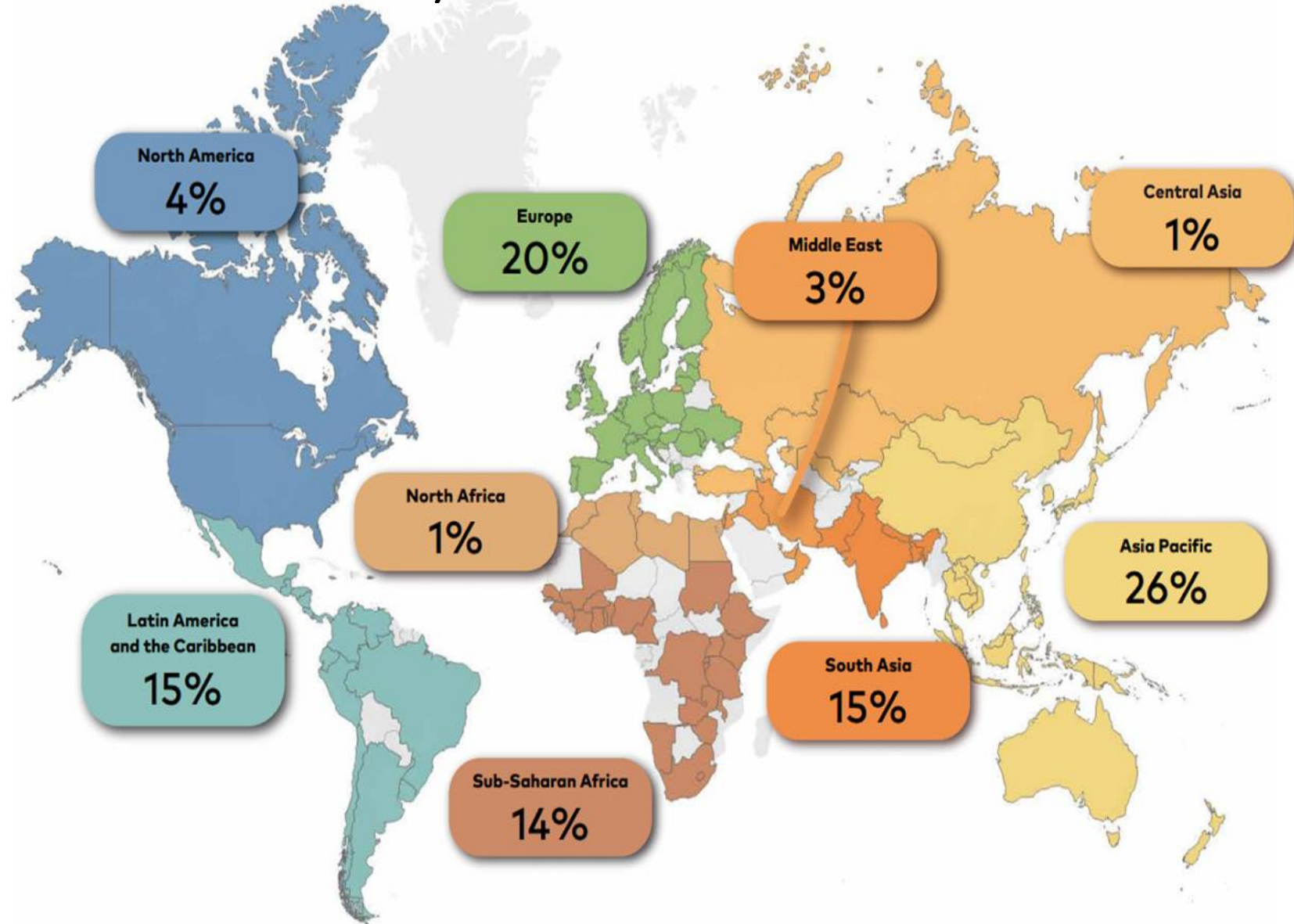
Total participants
1872
Total countries
112

Opportunity
Fri, 30 October 2020

Calling all researchers to participate in a landmark survey on academic predatory journals and conferences

Deadline
Nov 30

Policy for Science



Over 80%
perceive that predatory practices
are a **serious problem** or on the rise in
their country of work.

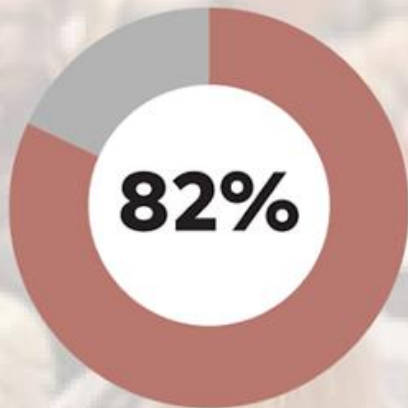
Survey headlines

- ❑ Researchers at **ALL career stages** need to be on their guard
- ❑ Researchers in **low and middle income countries** are more vulnerable
- ❑ Some **disciplines** are more vulnerable than others
 - researchers in arts and humanities with predatory journals
 - researchers in transdisciplinary & engineering sciences with predatory conferences
- ❑ **At least 14%** of respondents admit they have used a predatory journal or conference
- ❑ This equates to **over 1.2 million researchers** of the 8.8m around the world who could have used predatory outlets, with **billions of dollars of research costs** (people, materials, time) wasted as a result. **This requires urgent attention.**

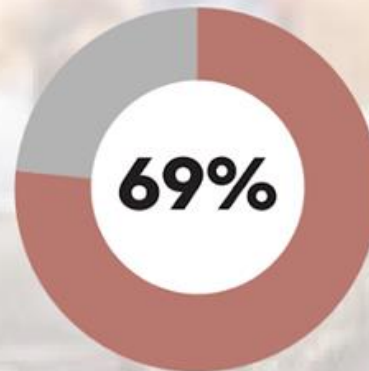
Why it is important to address these practices

If left unchallenged, the majority of respondents believe predatory practices will have detrimental effects.

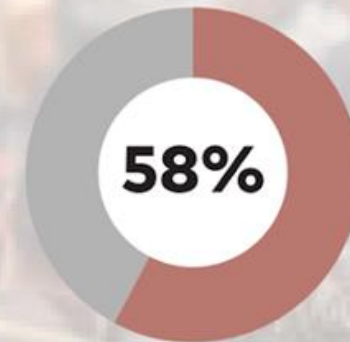
**Fuel misinformation
in public policy**



**Infiltrate and
undermine the
research enterprise**



**Widen the research
gap between high
income and low
income countries**



Some personal accounts

*"Wherever my CV went (whether it was to societal memberships, communities of practice or hiring institutions), people would highlight and question my predatory publications. It has become a **really obvious black dot in my career.**"*

*"The experience was bad as I had **no option of omitting/removing my name** from these journals."*

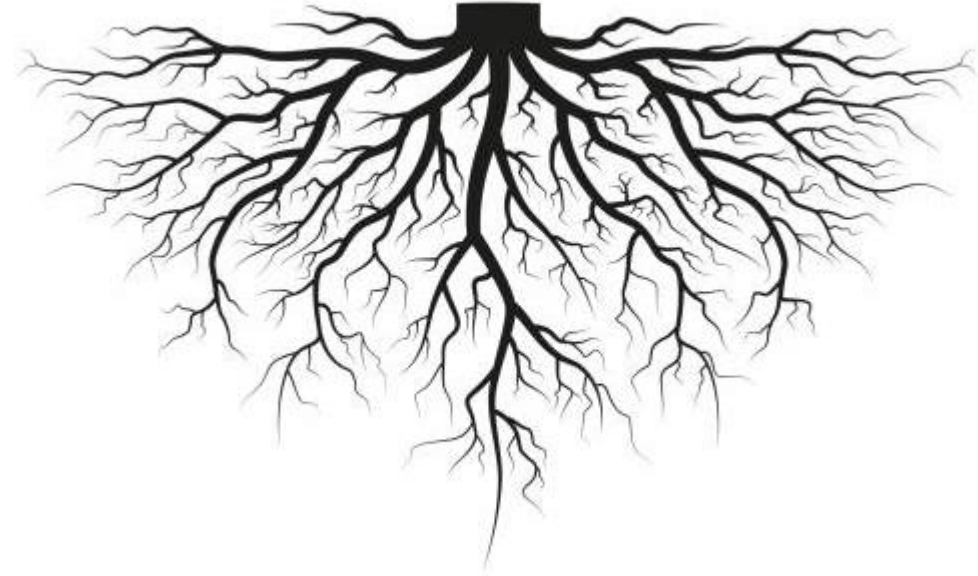
*"It has **delayed my PhD completion by many years** because after that discouragement set in, I disconnected and am now trying to pick up the pieces. It is hard."*

*"I really regret it. **Our reputations get tarnished and people start judging us for many years.** It becomes a painful experience, especially for academics who started off just wanting to share their knowledge and contributions to the world and nothing more."*

*"Unfortunately, I had over 20-25 papers sacrificed in these journals. They can't be considered for promotion, and I **become a questionable researcher** everywhere my CV goes. Everyone looked down on me. I lost a few good friends and even broke into tears once in public because **I was so ashamed. It was a truly painful experience.**"*

Drivers or root causes

- **The monetisation and commercialisation of the research sector**, including an academic publishing system whose proprietary and commercial interests may lead to conflict with research integrity, with the **author-pays model** being especially prone to abuse.
- **Quantity-over-quality research evaluation systems**, together with the institutional drivers and incentives that shape the behaviour of individual academics.
- **The lack of transparency (whether fully open, anonymised or hybrid) in the peer-review process**, exacerbated by poor training, capacity and recognition of peer reviewers.



A spectrum of predatory behaviours



TYPICAL MARKERS

FRAUDULENT

- Rapid and unrealistic service
- Poor or no peer review
- Plagiarise reputable outlets
- Use researchers' names without permission
- Fake editorial or advisory boards
- Meaningless programmes
- Lie about their credentials e.g. impact factor

LOW QUALITY

- Breach good practice
- Low quality peer review
- Aggressive or indiscriminate solicitation
- Inactive editorial or advisory board
- Lack of focus or organisation
- Invitations are full of mistakes
- Exaggerate their prestige
- Promised services are poor or lacking

QUALITY

- Thorough peer review
- Strong editorial and advisory boards
- Transparent, robust policy to ensure research and operational integrity (practice due diligence)
- Transparent policy for retraction or refund
- Clear about costs
- Take proper action when challenged

Questionable publishing practices

- Unacceptable levels of publication intensity by the editor or a member of the editorial board (in their own journal).
- Unacceptable publication intensity by an individual in the journal (more than two papers in the same issue would be considered an excessively large number).
- ‘Publication cartels’ where two or more individuals (sometimes also members of the editorial board) co-author repeatedly in the same journal.
- Plagiarism
- Salami slicing
- Ghost authorships or author affiliations

Seeking profit over contribution to scholarship

Predatory journals are characterised by:

- The deliberate deception of authors by either hiding or not disclosing fees (APC, handling fees, fast-track fees, etc.)
- The omission of any revenue-related information
- The simultaneous launch of a large number of journals, for example, in 2009 OMICS launched 200 journal titles

Example: Profit Making

Dear **Dr. ABC**,

Thank you for the prompt response.

If you want to withdraw the manuscript, as per our journal policy you need to pay 50% of actual processing charges as withdrawal fee i.e., 1150 Euros.

Kindly provide your acceptance to this email. So that we will send you the withdrawal invoice.

If we did not receive any response within 24 hours the your article will be published with **RETRACTION NOTE**.

+++++

Dear L,

See below and kindly advise. The student submitted without checking that the journal is in the DHET list.

Best Regards

However, I am concerned that Dr D's application for promotion seems to me to be undermined by her **choice of publishing platforms**.

African researchers are perhaps particularly at risk from the global network of predatory publishing which takes advantage of the increasing pressure on career academics to 'publish or perish' to make money for themselves as commercial (and not properly academic) enterprises. The consequent undermining of academic standards and the damage to the structures of the scholarly profession are by now well attested.

It is unfortunate that the articles and chapters submitted for review purposes all appeared in what are **generally viewed by the international academic community as predatory journals/publishing houses**.

My own reading of the articles and book chapters presented suggests that it is likely that these would have been improved if a more **thorough process of peer-review** had been involved, as would have occurred through submission to non-predatory publishing outlets that engage in robust peer-review processes.

Misrepresentation of abstracting, indexing and metrics

- False claims of indexing in Web of Science and/or Scopus and others
- Claims of inclusion in databases of companies that provide fake and misleading services
- Claims and listing of fake indexing and other organisations



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Examples of fake indexing listed on a predatory journal website

The screenshot displays the homepage of 'EAS Publishers'. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Journals, For Authors, For Editors, For Reviewers, Membership, Payments, and Copyright. The main content area is a grid of logos for various indexing services, including ICMJE, DRJI, Scientific Journal Impact Factor, Journal Seeker Research Bible, Crossref member, ESJI, OCLC WorldCat, INDEX COPERNICUS INTERNATIONAL, Google Scholar, AcademicKeys, ICI WORLD of JOURNALS, and Scientific Indexing Services. On the right side, there is a 'TOP EDITORS' section with three entries: Dr. Md. Habibur Rahman (Chief Editor, EAS Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology), Dr. Benard Chemwei, PhD (Chief Editor, East African Scholars Multidisciplinary Bulletin), and NFI Joseph Lon (Chief Editor, EAS Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies). A 'Submit' button is visible in the top right corner. The footer contains the URL 'ournalList.aspx'.

Aggressive advertising and solicitation of articles

- Daily indiscriminate e-mails to prospective authors
- Increasingly familiar and flattering language
- The use of business marketing language, for example submit two articles and pay for one



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Inappropriate journal title and scope

- A broader disciplinary scope
- A combination of scientific disciplines with very little in common
- Copying the titles of acclaimed journals, for example Science and Nature



Example: Physiotherapy

hosted by **DergiPark** AKADEMİK

English Login

Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation

ISSN: 2651-4451 • e-ISSN: 2651-446X • Founded: 1974 • Period: Tri-quarterly • Publisher: Türkiye Fizyoterapistler Derneği

Search article in the journal

ABOUT



Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation is the official peer-reviewed scientific journal of the Turkish Physiotherapy Association. It is abbreviated as Turk J Physiother Rehabil. The journal publishes three issues at April, August and December, in Turkish and English. This is a open access journal and all rights of the journal belongs to Turkish Physiotherapy Association.

“Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation” is listed in Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), EBSCO, Excerpta Medica (EMBASE), Turkey Citation Index and Ulakbim TR Medical Index.

It is abbreviated as Turk J Physiother Rehabil.

ARCHIVE

Latest Issues

- 2022 - Volume: 33 Issue: 3
- 2022 - Volume: 33 Issue: 2
- 2022 - Volume: 33 Issue: 1
- 2021 - Volume: 32 Issue: 3

EXPLORE

- Submit a Manuscript
- Send Reviewer Request
- Aim & Scope
- Author Guidelines
- Ethical Principles and Publication Policy
- Price Policy
- Journal Boards
- Statistics

Windows taskbar: 10:13 2023/03/12

Example: Physiotherapy

Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation

TJPR

Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation

Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation is an open access, peer-reviewed, publishing online journal that encompasses all academic and clinical aspects of Physiotherapy, emphasizing on providing the base line data for the academic, clinical and research areas, thus to maintain the high level standards in the academic practice and research in the field of Physiotherapy.

[Aim & Scope](#)

[Author Guidelines](#)

[Archive](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Contact](#)

Issues

▼ 2022
Volume: 33 Issue: 1

▼ 2021
Volume: 32 Issue: 3
Volume: 32 Issue: 2

Volume 32 - Issue 3 - Dec 20, 2021 [Last Issue](#)

- [1. Detection of Two wheelers Helmet Using Machine Learning](#)
Pages 01 - 08
M. V. D. Prasad, E. Kiran Kumar, S.V.N. P Vamsi Krishna, M. Santosh Kumar, P. Sri Harsha, Sk. Hasane Ahammad
- [2. Reducing Covid-19 Readmissions Using Machine Learning](#)
Pages 9-15
Madala Jaya Lakshmi Koteswari, Maliseti Balaji, Kota Sainadh, Dr K.Ch.Sri Kavya
- [3. Health Status of Leaf Measuring the nourishment of a Farming leaf using RGB Sensor and Bluetooth Module](#)

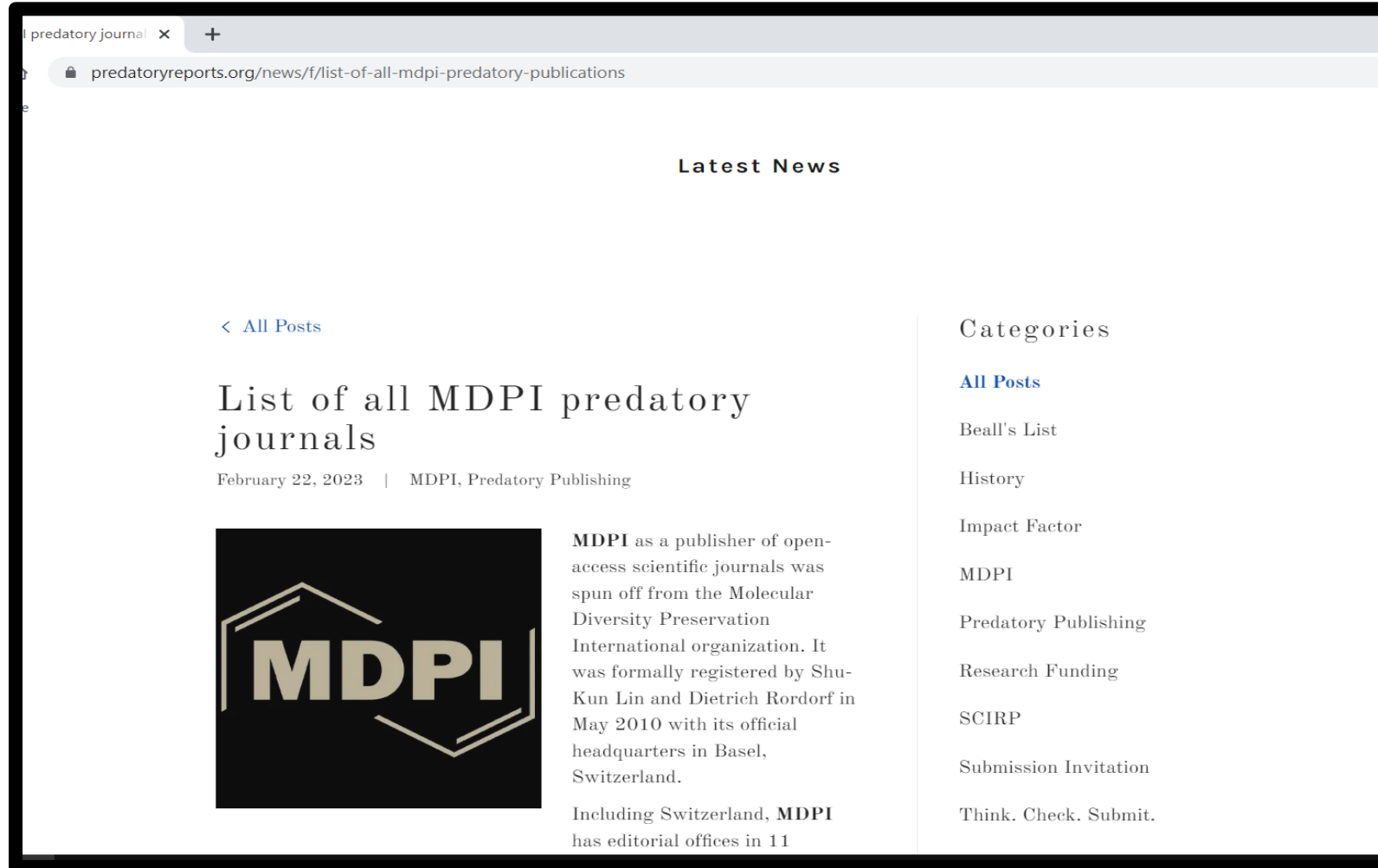


Example: Multidisciplinary

PONTE: Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences and Research

The screenshot displays the website for 'PONTE: Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences & Research'. At the top left, there is a 'Home' button. The main header features the journal's title in red and blue, with a background image of a bridge and the text 'Since 1945 Florence, Italy'. A navigation menu includes 'Homepage', 'About us', 'Contact us', 'Current Issue', 'Aims & Scopes', 'Call for Paper', and 'Join Editorial Board'. On the right, there is a 'Submit Paper' button and a search icon. A Google Translate widget is visible, showing 'Italian' and 'English' options. Below the header, there is a section for 'Articoli recenti' with the text 'Non tutti i mali vengono per nuocere'. The main content area features a large 'IL PONTE' logo in red, with the subtitle 'Rivista di politica economia e cultura fondata da Piero Calamandrei'. A yellow banner at the bottom of the main content area states: 'Scilit is currently under system maintenance from 28th February 2023 until 12th March 2023, during this time it will be unavailable to update the databases. Thank you for understanding.' Below this banner, there is a section for 'PONTE International Scientific Researchs Journal' with a 'View all articles' button. A 'Journal Information' box contains the text: 'Published by: Ponte Academic Journal (10.21506) Total articles: 156'. At the bottom right of the main content area, there are three buttons: 'Number of articles', 'Open access articles', and 'Average authors per article'.

The case of MDPI



predatory journal x +


predatoryreports.org/news/f/list-of-all-mdpi-predatory-publications

Latest News

[< All Posts](#)

List of all MDPI predatory journals

February 22, 2023 | MDPI, Predatory Publishing



MDPI as a publisher of open-access scientific journals was spun off from the Molecular Diversity Preservation International organization. It was formally registered by Shu-Kun Lin and Dietrich Rordorf in May 2010 with its official headquarters in Basel, Switzerland.

Including Switzerland, **MDPI** has editorial offices in 11

Categories

- [All Posts](#)
- [Beall's List](#)
- [History](#)
- [Impact Factor](#)
- [MDPI](#)
- [Predatory Publishing](#)
- [Research Funding](#)
- [SCIRP](#)
- [Submission Invitation](#)
- [Think. Check. Submit.](#)

MDPI?

- Is it predatory?
- Has elements of both: they have aggressive ways of rent-seeking (money-making) rather than predatory. Current publishing practices and growth rates may shift them to predatory
- They are publishing good articles, but their strategies are questionable and on the verge of predatory
 - huge growth rate in article publishing
 - APCs are charged, APCs have increased. Dan Brockington: 14 mill in 2015-191 mill in 2020

<https://paolocrosetto.wordpress.com/blog/>

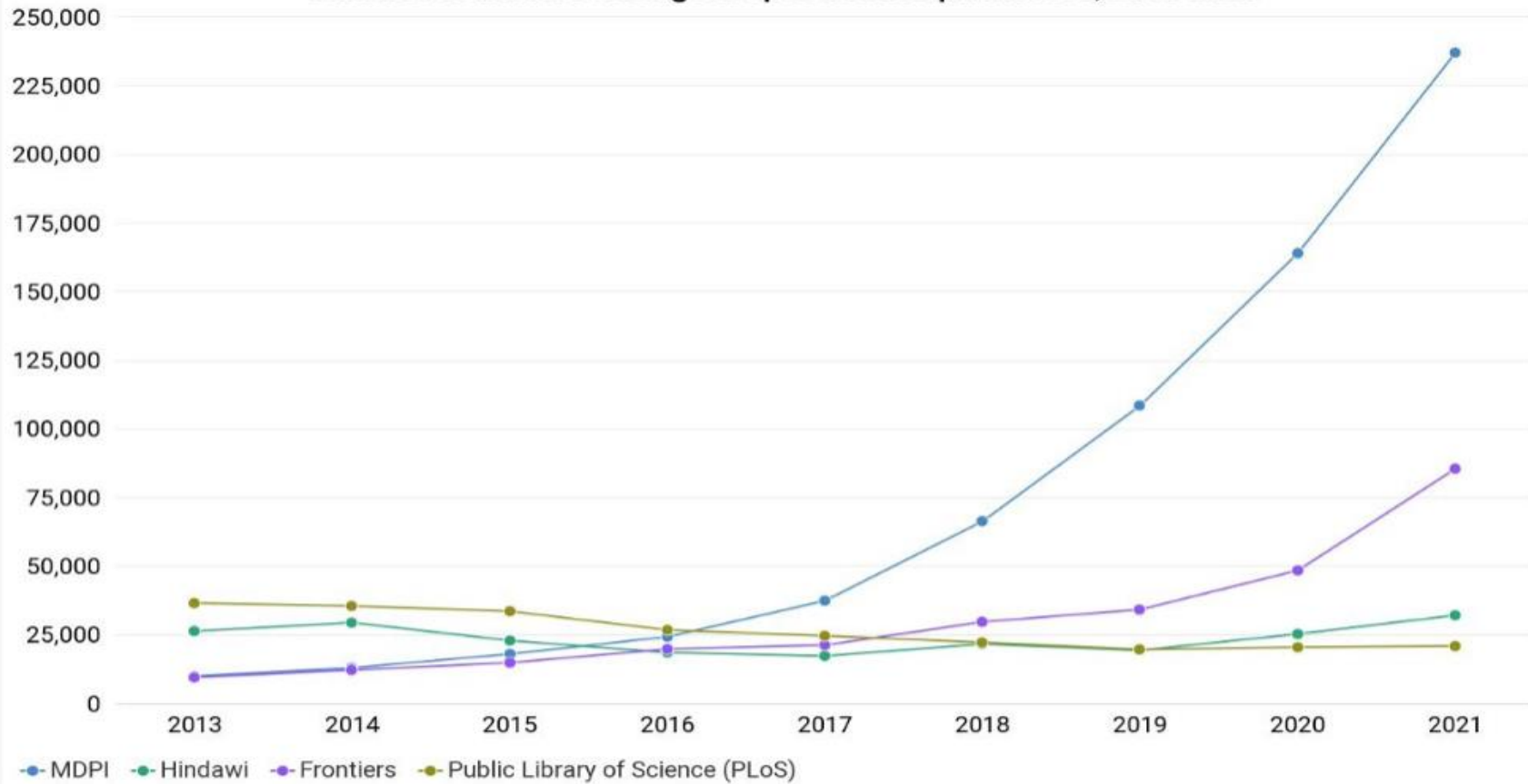


science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Number of articles from gold open access publishers, 2013-2021



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
Exported: August 10, 2022
Criteria: Publication Type is Article, Open Access is Gold.

© 2022 Digital Science and Research Solutions Inc. All rights reserved. Non-commercial redistribution / external re-use of this work is permitted subject to appropriate acknowledgement. This work is sourced from Dimensions® at www.dimensions.ai.

Source: Mouton, J & Van Niekerk, M. 2023. What is and how to identify predatory publishing. CREST (ppt)



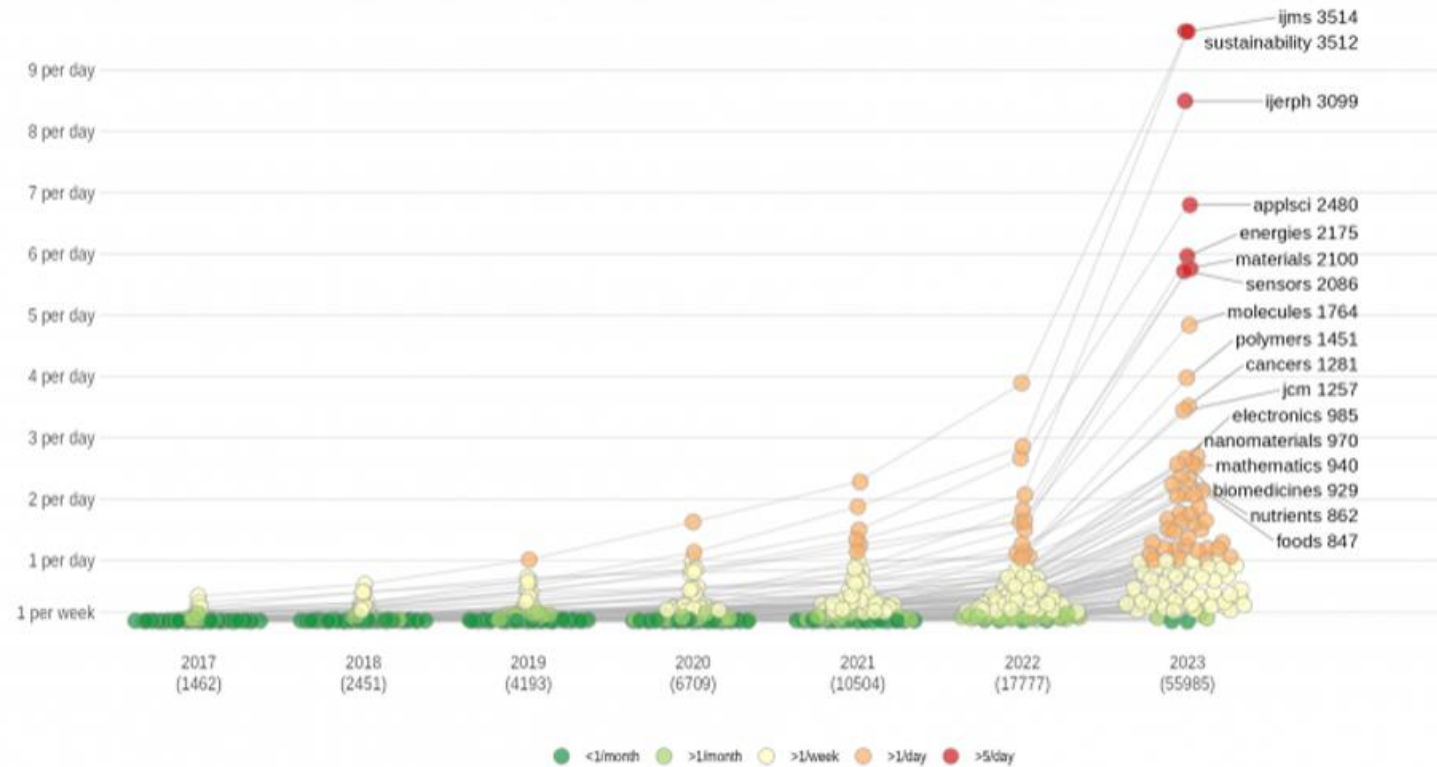
science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Number of Special Issues at MDPI: 2017-22

98 journals with an Impact Factor



code @paolocrosato -- data scraped from MDPI website

Source: Mouton, J & Van Niekerk, M. 2023. What is and how to identify predatory publishing. CREST (ppt)



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Alert in science: more than 16 thousand scientific articles made with the help of Artificial Intelligence have been withdrawn

Scholars believe that this figure will increase in the coming months.

Errors and inaccuracies that have recently appeared in scientific journals, such as an image of a rat with a giant penis or another of a human leg with too much bone, reveal the increasing use of **artificial intelligence (AI)** in these publications, to the detriment of their quality.

<https://www.elcolombiano.com/tecnologia/retiran-miles-de-articulos-cientificos-hechos-con-inteligencia-artificial-HP25195741>

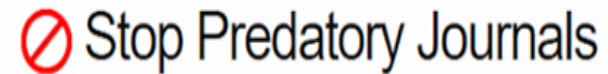


Examples of resources already available

A beginner's guide to avoiding 'predatory' journals



<https://predatoryjournals.com/publishers/>



Predatory Reports

Specialists analyze over 60 behavioral indicators to keep the community aware of the growing threats and to keep academia protected from exploitative operations.

Get a quote

CABELLS
SCHOLARLY ANALYTICS



International Congress and Convention Association

ICCA

Members

Benefits

Knowledge

News

Events

About

Predatory Conferences

Tips on How to Identify and Avoid Predatory Conferences

latindex

Online Regional Information System for Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal



Choose the right journal or publisher for your research



Recommendations to authors, supervisors and mentors

- Practice due diligence to minimise risk
- Use the spectrums as meta-level navigation tools.
- Get to know the common and most reliable characteristics/traits of predatory journals
- If a journal purports to be indexed in a reputable index e.g. Scopus, Web of Science, check personally and if found untrue, avoid such journals.

Recommendations to authors, supervisors and mentors

- Check if a journal is listed in **DOAJ** (Directory of Open Access Journals); if it is, the journal is less likely to be problematic because it has been vetted. Similarly, check if a journal is a member of **COPE** (Committee on Publication Ethics), where it must follow COPE's publication ethics (COPE Core Practices).
- If a researcher's institution has its own list(s) of acceptable and unacceptable journals, or subscribes to Cabells Predatory Reports, use them with **caution and cross-check** with other resources in this report.
- Seek advice from **mentor/supervisor/librarians**: if they are uninformed themselves, encourage them to train up.



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Recommendations to authors, supervisors and mentors

- Ignore SPAM e-mails; they will likely be SCAM emails
- Researchers should familiarise themselves with **peer-review good practice** and offer their services as a peer reviewer to help build capacity
- Actively participate in committees/other platforms to advocate for **quality-not-quantity evaluation**. Use journals and indexing services, universities and academies fora as platforms for change. **Be activists – help effect change.**



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Thank you!!

susan@assaf.org.za



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

