

Commentary on: Predatory publishing; pressures, promotions and perils

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Dear Editor,

The recent editorial by Quek and Teo outlining the perils of predatory publishing is to be welcomed.¹ From an epistemological perspective, the threat posed by such 'journals' to the creation of robust and insightful knowledge is significant. In addition, highlighting the illicit practices of such publishers is important for early stage researchers who may be less experienced and more vulnerable to the solicitations of such unscrupulous opportunists.

However, it should be noted that the portrayal of the academic publishing industry implicit in Quek and Teo's article is perhaps overly simplistic. A more nuanced understanding of the sector is required to better forewarn novice researchers. Before continuing to address this issue it is important to consider the context and environment that has fostered such dubious publications and allowed them to flourish.

One obvious driver is the academic imperative to 'publish or perish'. However, other factors are also important. The traditional publishing model is one in which costs are borne by the reader or their organisation. One problematic issue with this model is that of the emerging information divide between advanced industrial economies and economically developing countries. Open access publishing was philosophically driven by a desire to overcome such divisions.

Other issues with traditional publishing models included the slow pace of publication, inflexibility in article structure and low acceptance rates. On this last point it should be noted that some of the world's leading health and medical journals, such as *The Lancet*, *The British Medical Journal* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* have acceptance rates of less than 10%. Other barriers include publication bias against non-significant findings, and the challenges of publishing both qualitative research and research in specific niche areas.

Quek and Teo present a dichotomous image of publishing that differentiates between the poor quality of the predatory publishing sector and traditional publishers.¹ However, this divide is simplistic and fails to acknowledge weaknesses in the established publishing sector. Quek and Teo reference the 'Bohannon experiment', but fail to explore the implications of this article in-depth.² It is important to note that the bogus article in this experiment was also accepted by journals from 'reputable' publishers such as Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer and SAGE.²

This is not the first time that 'reputable' publishers have been implicated in suspect publishing ventures. For example, Elsevier Australia was paid by Merck to produce a series of six pseudo journals promoting their products (e.g. *The Australasian Journal of General Practice*).³

Perhaps the most damning indictment of the quality issue in many mainstream journal articles can be most clearly seen in the routine rejection rate of articles in most Cochrane systematic reviews. An analysis of Cochrane reviews in 2010 noted 376 active reviews with no studies included.⁴

Quek and Teo also note the exorbitant cost associated with publishing in predatory journals.¹ However, this is presented as though it is something very different from the traditional academic publishing sector. However, respected online journals such as the BMC series, which is part of Springer Nature, currently charge US\$2145 per article.

Quek and Teo note Jeremy Beall's blog, in which the librarian outlined his list of suspected predatory publishers. However, it should be noted that this blog began to take on racist overtones, which are particularly evident in his writings related to journals emanating from Hyderabad, which he labelled City of Corruption.⁵

Authors and reviewers should always critically evaluate quality in any article, regardless of its provenance. Perhaps the expansion of professional society and university based scholarly publications offers an alternative, third, way to the development of scholarly, quality, not for profit venues for publications.

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