Revista Bioética
Print version ISSN 1983-8042 | On-line version ISSN 1983-8034

EDITORIAL

Predatory journals and editorial fraud: protecting trust in scientific communication

Dilza Teresinha Ambrós Ribeiro [1]

1. Conselho Regional de Medicina do Acre, Rio Branco/AC, Brasil.

Scientific communication is based on trust. Authors expect their manuscripts to be evaluated according to recognized editorial and scientific criteria; readers assume that published knowledge is reliable; reviewers devote their time and expertise to the critical evaluation of manuscripts; and institutions, indexing services, and funding agencies depend on the integrity of journals to disseminate and preserve scientific output.

The exploitation of this trust is precisely what makes the proliferation of the so-called predatory journals and other forms of fraud associated with scientific publishing a cause for concern.

Although there is no universally accepted definition, predatory publishing has been associated with entities that prioritize their own interests at the expense of science and are characterized by false or misleading information, a lack of transparency, deviations from the best editorial practices, and other conduct incompatible with scientific integrity [1]. The problem, therefore, does not lie simply in the charging of publication fees—a legitimate practice when transparent and properly disclosed—but in the use of deception and the lack of an effective commitment to the principles of scientific communication.

Among the identified practices are: false information about peer review, misleading claims regarding indexing and metrics, fictitious or unauthorized composition of editorial boards, and promises of publication that are incompatible with rigorous evaluation processes. However, editorial fraud in the digital environment can take even more sophisticated forms.

When fraud takes on the identity of a journal

One such method involves impersonating legitimate journals. The name, logo, ISSN, institutional information, editorial policies, and even the names of editors and researchers can be replicated to give the appearance of legitimacy to websites that have no connection to the original publication.

This phenomenon has been described as journal hijacking, in which fraudsters use the identity of a legitimate publication to deceive researchers, receive manuscripts, and obtain payments [2]. In such cases, the fraud goes beyond the model traditionally associated with predatory journals: rather than simply creating a publication of dubious credibility, it appropriates the reputation built by a genuine journal.

Recently, *Revista Bioética* identified a situation of this nature, in which an unofficial page was using information related to the journal, creating a risk of confusion between its legitimate channels and a page with no institutional ties to the journal.

This episode highlights an important issue for the entire scientific community: a professional appearance, the presence of an ISSN, the inclusion of editorial policies, back issues, or well-known names do not, on their own, constitute proof of a journal's legitimacy. In the digital environment, even true information can be used to construct a false identity.

Verify before submitting

The choice of journal should be part of the very scientific integrity process. Before submitting a manuscript, researchers should verify who is responsible for the publication, which institution or organization supports it, what its official website address is, who actually serves on the editorial board, how the peer review process works, what its ethics and integrity policies are, and what the conditions and any publication costs are.

Information regarding indexing, metrics, certifications, and institutional affiliations should not be verified solely on the journal's website. Whenever possible, this information should be verified directly on the official websites of the databases, institutions, and organizations mentioned.

Initiatives such as Think. Check. Submit. provide tools to help researchers evaluate journals and publishers before submission [3]. In addition, the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing, developed jointly by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), establish principles regarding transparency in editorial management, peer review, editorial staff, ownership, funding, and other publishing practices [4].

Protecting integrity is a shared responsibility

Fraud prevention is not the sole responsibility of authors. Journals and scientific institutions must also protect their digital identity, keep editorial information up to date, clearly identify their official channels, and promptly report attempts at impersonation or misuse of their identity.

In this context, editorial transparency serves a dual purpose: it is a requirement of best practices and a mechanism for protecting the scientific community. Educational and research institutions also play a significant role in training researchers to critically evaluate the channels through which they produce and disseminate knowledge.

Scientific integrity does not end with the completion of a research project. It accompanies the entire journey of knowledge—production, evaluation, publication, dissemination, indexing, and preservation. Therefore, addressing predatory publications, hijacked journals, and other forms of editorial fraud requires

joint action by authors, editors, reviewers, librarians, academic institutions, funding agencies, indexers, and readers.

The incident identified by the journal Bioética should be understood not merely as an issue related to a single journal, but as a warning to the scientific community. In a digital environment where identities, content, and institutional information can be easily reproduced and manipulated, verifying the origin and authenticity of a publication has become an integral part of the practice of scientific integrity itself.

Science depends on evidence. Its communication also depends on trust. Preserving that trust is everyone's responsibility.

References

1. Grudniewicz A, Moher D, Cobey KD, Bryson GL, Cukier S, Allen K *et al*. Predatory journals: no definition, no defence. Nature [Internet]. 2019 [acesso 3 set 2026];576:210-2. DOI: 10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y
2. Jalalian M, Dadkhah M. The full story of 90 hijacked journals from August 2011 to June 2015. Geogr Pannonica [Internet]. 2015 [acesso 3 set 2026];19(2):73-87. DOI: 10.5937/GeoPan1502073J
3. Journals. Think. Check. Submit. [Internet]. [acesso 3 set 2026]. Disponível: https://thinkchecksubmit.org/journals/
4. Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing. Committee on Publication Ethics [Internet]. 2022 [acesso 3 set 2026]. DOI: 10.24318/cope.2019.1.12

Dilza Teresinha Ambrós Ribeiro – PhD – dilza.ribeiro@portalmedico.org.br
0000-0001-8180-4008

Data availability: All data used or generated in this study are described and presented in full in the body of the article.