



# The threat of predatory journals in respiratory, cardiovascular, and intensive care physiotherapy research and practice: an urgent warning

*O perigo das revistas predatórias na pesquisa e atuação em fisioterapia respiratória, cardiovascular e terapia intensiva: um alerta necessário*

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Dear Editor,

Scientific journals play a key role in disseminating knowledge and advancing science. However, the emergence of predatory journals has been a significant threat to the credibility of scientific research. Predatory journals can be described as those that publish research articles without applying the procedures and quality standards expected of academic journals, particularly peer review<sup>1</sup>, favoring commercial interests (of the journal) over knowledge and failing to respect good publishing practices<sup>2</sup>.

These journals, marked by questionable practices such as inadequate peer review, excessive publication fees, and dubious indexing, have misled researchers, especially those early in their careers or from institutions with fewer resources<sup>3</sup>. This report aims to raise awareness among the academic community about the risks associated with these publications and reinforce the importance of choosing reliable journals.

Predatory journals exploit the open access system, which, in principle, is a noble effort to democratize access to scientific knowledge. However, these journals distort this model, prioritizing profit over scientific quality. This is an alarming situation, as many of these articles lack scientific rigor and can undermine the credibility of research.

The lack of proper peer review is major threat by predatory journals. While reputable journals subject manuscripts to a rigorous evaluation process by experts, predatory journals often skip this step or conduct superficial reviews. As a result, articles with flawed methodologies, inconsistent data, plagiarism, or false results are published, potentially leading to the dissemination of incorrect information and harming scientific progress and public health<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the growth of predatory journals is a source of misinformation<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, researchers who publish in predatory journals may face negative consequences. Publication in predatory journals can compromise the academic reputation of authors, and result in the loss of a qualified article to which authors have dedicated time and resources and which will not achieve its full potential reach. This would reduce the chances of future funding and even hinder career advancement.

Predatory journals often approach researchers through enticing emails, based on the publication of abstracts in event proceedings or other published articles in which the researcher's contact email is disclosed. These emails offer tempting opportunities, such as rapid publication; however, these offers usually hide a profit-driven agenda and lack academic integrity, with little or no peer review, and the claimed impact metrics are often inflated, which can mainly impact young researchers<sup>5</sup>.

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In the field of respiratory, cardiovascular, and/or intensive care physiotherapy, publication in predatory journals can compromise the clinical application of scientific evidence. The publication of methodologically weak or unreviewed studies can influence therapeutic approaches for patients who are often in critical health conditions. Researchers in this field are often targeted by these journals due to the high demand for open-access publications.

To counter this issue, researchers must be well-informed about how to spot predatory journals. The Scholarly Open Access Beall's List blog, created by the author to expose predatory journals, was a great initiative that helped researchers. However, it was shut down in 2017 for personal reasons, with the author citing persecution suffered from the list he created. However, this name and initiative were revitalized by an anonymous researcher with data from the original list and updates<sup>6</sup> or tools such as Think, Check, Submit<sup>7</sup> offer clear guidelines to help authors choose reliable journals.

Moreover, researchers can use CONSORT guidelines and consult lists of journals indexed in recognized databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PEDro.

In addition to the practices described above, clinicians can use research on platforms focused on evidence-based practice, such as the evidence-based health portal<sup>8</sup> or the Epistemonikos database<sup>9</sup>.

Practices to combat the market for predatory journals, such as Beall's list, are relevant and have developed as an initiative of the list of recommended journals by the conference of rectors organized by the Faculty of Health at Sorbonne University<sup>10</sup> which distinguishes three groups of publishers: fraudulent (predatory journals), low quality (compliant journals that should not be recommended), and good quality (legitimate journals)<sup>2</sup>. The Center for Journalology<sup>11</sup> is developing a digital journal authentication tool to verify the transparency of a journal, and Retraction Watch<sup>12</sup> tracks retracted articles.

In this context, research institutions and funding agencies also play a crucial role in this process. They should promote training and workshops to raise awareness among researchers about the risks of predatory journals and provide guidance on good publishing practices. Establishing institutional policies that discourage publication in predatory journals is also a key step.

In conclusion, predatory journals pose a real threat to the rigor of science, the careers of researchers, and the conduct of evidence-based practice by clinicians. Awareness and the practice of responsible publishing are critical to protecting the academic and clinical community by ensuring that scientific knowledge continues to advance ethically and reliably for the benefit of the public.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nothing to declare.

## AVAILABILITY OF RESEARCH DATA

The data are the authors' opinions and the references cited.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Luiz Fernando Martins de Souza Filho: Substantial contribution to the study design; Participated in writing the preliminary version; Participated in the review and approval of the final version.

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