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# All it takes is money to be a 'published author'

'16% publishers agree to attach names to a paper without any research work'

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For as much as ₹20,000, any "researcher" can become a published author in predatory journals.

Pravin Bolshete, a medical researcher from Mumbai, decided to delve into the world of "predatory journals" — those that charge authors for publications in journals without due scientific process — and if the name of an author could be attached to a paper without doing any work or research.

When he reached out to them, a staggering 16% of publishers and 9% of standalone journals agreed outright. "We did expect some, perhaps around 5%, to agree. But the numbers are still surprising," said Mr. Bolshete, who presented his findings at the 8th edition of the International Congress on Peer Review and Scientific Publication held earlier this week in Chicago.

In all, a little more than half (53%) of the responses were deemed "unethical". "An ethical response would be to say 'No' outright. But in these cases, they showed perceptible intent to publish by asking authors with manuscripts if they would agree for co-authorship or were positive in some way of the suggestion," said Mr. Bolshete.

Using a well-known list of

## Predatory journals

Charge for publishing, without offering scientifically rigorous method for research

Jeffrey Beall from University of Colorado published a list of more than 900 publishers that produce predatory journals

### The study

263 publishers and 64 standalone journals were contacted by email.

The question: Can authorship in papers be bought?

16.2% of publishers who responded agreed on payment

5.3% gave "unethical" responses

Only 44% declined to offer

### Who publishes in these journals

Government and private colleges

51%

Private, Central and State universities

36%

National Institutes

11%

Industries

2%

Source: Pravin Bolshete, University of Oslo study published in Current Science in December 2016

predatory publishers published by Jeffrey Beall (a librarian at University of Colorado in the U.S.). Mr. Bolshete emailed 263 publishers and 64 standalone journals specialising in biomedical research between November 2015 and December 2016. Nearly 30% of the chosen journals were based out of India.

"Predatory journals are known for their poor publication practices. However, there is no data to demonstrate their unethical practices concerning authorship," says the researcher.

Assuming a fictitious name, he wrote to several publishers claiming that his "busy schedule and patient overload" did not allow him time to do research or publish papers. "...But now this

is needed for my promotion...I will be glad if you can add me as co-author on any medicine related article or if someone can write article on my behalf and help me in publishing some articles," reads Mr. Bolshete's mail.

In response, one publisher said: "...we could request some authors to add your name as a co-author in their research and you just have to pay the publication fee (300 USD for two papers)". While some sent abstracts of upcoming papers, another publisher responded: "I have seven unpublished manuscript am about sending to you. I will only forward the abstract to you then negotiate on the payment... (sic)."

The fee structure varied

for Indian and foreign journals, and one even offered him a post as editorial member if he paid a fee.

## Predatory journals

In 2016, a University of Oslo study showed that "lack of monitoring" of research saw more than half of papers published in predatory journals from private and government colleges, while a further 29% of the published papers were those from premier national institutions or Central and State universities.

P. Balaram, former director of Indian Institute of Science and former editor of Current Science, said the "recent phenomenon" of predatory journals arose due to the insistence on "research" at every college.

"The problem with a formula-based approach (to evaluate researchers for promotions) is that someone will find a way to work around this...You just can't avoid it unless the incentives for the practices are taken away," he said.

K. Vijayraghavan, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, called it a global problem, and in India, these journals prey on committees that look at the numbers of papers published. "What needs to get into our culture is not how many papers you publish, but rather what is published," he said.