

Beware of Predatory Publishers!

How Academic Libraries can Safeguard Researchers Against Counterfeit Journals

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Background and Problem

Predatory publishers are a growing hazard in the scholarly community, and all researchers should be aware of them. Essentially, predatory publishers, also known as deceptive journals or pseudo-journals, are counterfeit periodicals that exploit the principles of open access (OA) publishing for profit (Mohapatra, 2023). They violate publication ethics by luring unsuspecting authors into submitting their work in exchange for false promises, such as high sales or increased publicity (Linacre, 2022). They often prey on inexperienced researchers, such as early-career professors or graduate students, and even engage in downright criminal practices, notably extortion (Elmore & Weston, 2020).

Predatory publishers pose a significant threat to the integrity of research. Thus, it is imperative that researchers understand their tactics. Most pseudo-journals exhibit several identifiable behaviours, such as:

- Hidden publication fees and Article Processing Charges (APCs)
- Nonexistent peer review processes
- Little or no editorial services
- Inconsistent, often contradictory communication
- Aggressive solicitation on a large scale
- Rapid publication turnaround times
- Unclear publication standards. (Mohapatra, 2023)



Beyond forfeiting the rights to their work, authors who fall prey to pseudo-journals may also face identity theft or data leaks. Many of these victims seek guidance from their supervisors, departments, or scholarly communities, but that guidance is not always enough. The tools of deception that pseudo-journals employ are becoming increasingly complex. In addition to being supported, researchers also need to be cautioned and informed by knowledgeable allies.

Therefore, I assert that **academic libraries can and should be at the forefront of safeguarding researchers against predatory publishers.**

Applied Research

Before proceeding with this proposition, I completed a **literature review** to determine if this topic had already been explored by other scholars. I discovered that most research focused on identifying predatory publishers, defining their characteristics, and analyzing their impacts. Few scholars had investigated the specific role of academic libraries in educating researchers about pseudo-journals.

Methods

Faced with this dearth of applied research, I set out to conduct my own. I created a **questionnaire** for librarians and library technicians in academic libraries across Canada. I distributed the form through Facebook groups, emails, personal connections, and other avenues. I had three goals in mind: ascertain what the workers knew about predatory publishers; learn what libraries are currently doing to combat the issue; and gather opinions on whether these efforts are sufficient or not.

Results

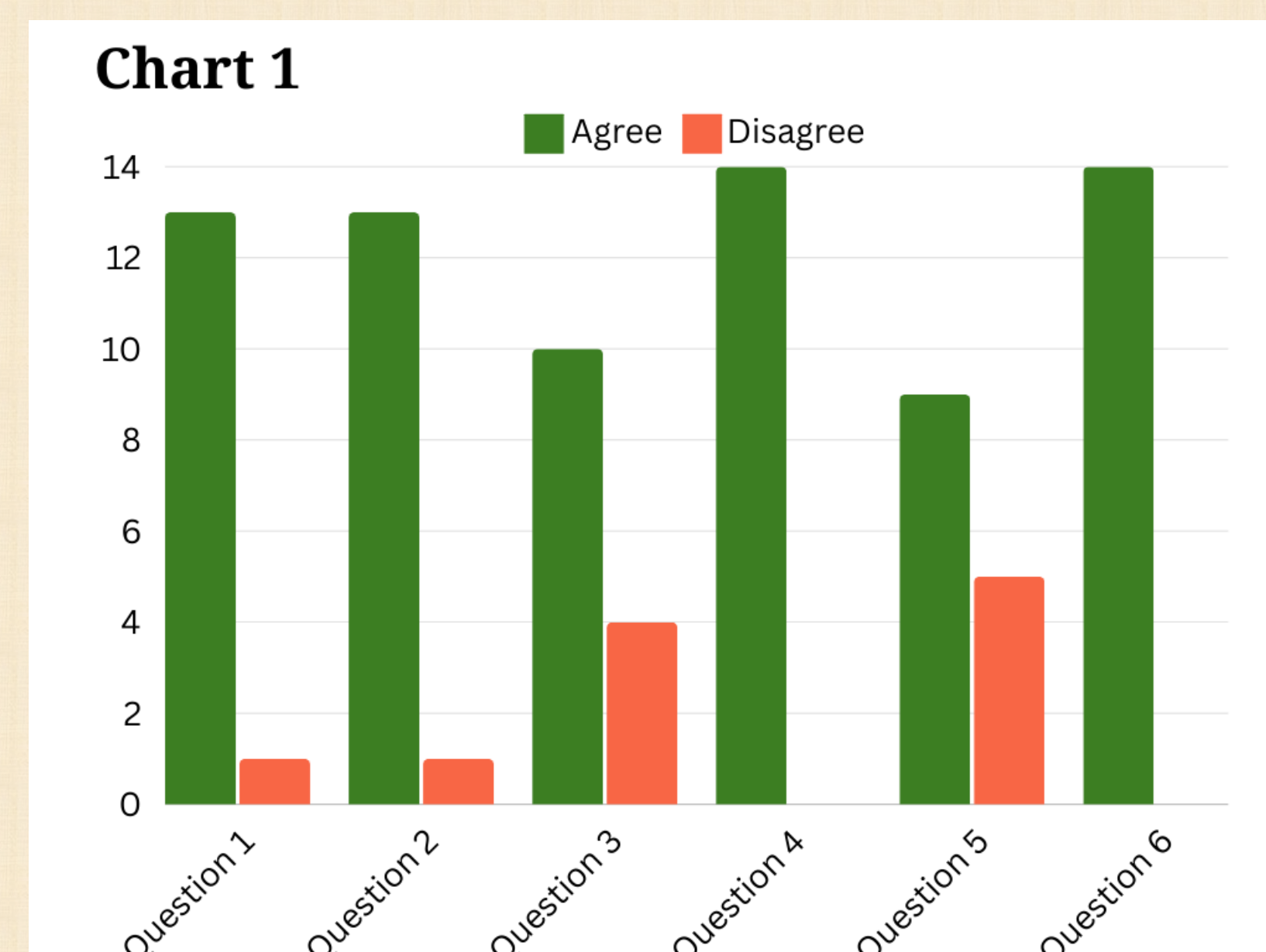
Ultimately, **14 respondents** filled out my form. Exactly seven were librarians and seven were library technicians. A breakdown of the respondents' locations, institutions, and position titles can be found

in **Tables 1, 2, and 3**, respectively.

For **quantitative data** (which I will be concentrating on in this poster), I asked six **agree** or **disagree** questions:

1. I am familiar with the concept of predatory publishers or deceptive journals.
2. I believe predatory publishers pose a significant threat to the integrity of research.
3. I have encountered predatory publishers in my professional experiences.
4. I believe academic libraries play an important role in combatting predatory publishers.
5. I believe my library is doing enough to assist patrons in identifying and avoiding predatory publishers.
6. I believe predatory publishers will become even more of a problem in the future.

The results of these questions can be visualized in **Chart 1**.



From this data, it is clear that the majority (93%) of academic librarians and library technicians are familiar with predatory publishers and consider them major threats to academia. Nearly three-quarters (71%) have encountered pseudo-journals in their careers, and there is a consensus (100%) that academic libraries are important in combatting these predators.

The biggest point of contention came from Question 5. Roughly two thirds (64%) of respondents believe that their workplace is adequately helping patrons avoid deceptive journals, whereas a third

Table 1

Location	Count
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan	10
Brampton, Ontario	1
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	1
Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan	1
Oshawa, Ontario	1
Grand Total	14

Table 2

Institution	Count
University of Saskatchewan Library	6
Saskatchewan Polytechnic Library	5
Gabriel Dumont Institute	1
Ontario Tech University Library	1
Sheridan College Library	1
Grand Total	14

Table 3

Position Title	Count
Library Client Service Specialist	2
Health Sciences Librarian	2
Business Librarian	1
Metadata and Operations Services Specialist	1
Library Resource Facilitator	1
Program Head, Library Liaison Services	1
Engineering & Science Librarian	1
Reference & Academic Integrity Remediation Technician	1
Acting Assistant Dean	1
Liaison Librarian	1
Grand Total	12

(36%) believe that more could be done. Interestingly, workers from the same institutions had internal disagreement. Regardless, all respondents (100%) concur that predatory publishers will become an even larger hazard in the future.

In order to keep abreast of the issue in the coming years, what else can be done, specifically?

For **qualitative data**, I provided the respondents with seven short answer prompts. They were asked to elaborate on the current offerings in their libraries and consider what else could be implemented.

Generally, the responses indicate that each library holds workshops, presentations, or other information sessions designed to educate researchers on pseudo-journals. Additionally, many libraries promote informative online tools, such as LibGuides, journal evaluation checklists, and infographics. However, none of the libraries develops their own evaluation guidelines for journals. Moreover, the respondents are unsure if other branches of their parent institutions play a role in safeguarding patrons against predatory publishing.

Discussion

Unsurprisingly, all respondents believe that deceptive journals will grow in frequency and complexity as time goes on. Accordingly, they believe that their libraries will need to increase their efforts. Some suggestions target the murky waters of APCs while others contemplate the emerging role of artificial intelligence (AI). Across the board, the attitude suggests that **more will need to be done** in general.



Recommendations

Using the results from my questionnaire, secondary data analysis, and my own ideas, I compiled a list of feasible, sustainable solutions that academic libraries can pursue:

- Ongoing institutional **advocacy** of OA publishing, publication ethics, and peer reviewing
- Routine **workshops/presentations/seminars/information sessions** for both faculty and students
- One-on-one **consultations** or **source checks** with liaison librarians or scholarly communications librarians
- Independent learning tools, such as **posters, pamphlets, infographics, LibGuides, social media posts, webpages, blogs**, etc.
- Thoughtful **blacklists** ("watchlists") and **whitelists** ("safelists") that do not overlook under-resourced journals or favour well-funded ones
- **Locally established guidelines** and **resources** for evaluating journals, where possible; otherwise, **promotion of established alternatives**, such as the Think. Check. Submit. initiative, the collaborative Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing, the Journal Evaluation Tool from Loyola Marymount University, and others
- The instruction of critical thinking and evaluation skills rather

than the simple application of static criteria

- The usage of **generative AI** to identify predatory journals by certain characteristics and patterns (e.g., poor grammar, low-quality website design)
- **Indexing services** with two layers: one being more comprehensive, trying to cover all journals, and the other being more discerning, carefully omitting ones showing predatory behaviour (The InterAcademy Partnership, 2022)
- Continuous **professional development** opportunities for library staff that communicate changes and trends in deceptive journals
- Partnerships with **information technology** (IT) services to preemptively block emails from known predatory publishers
- A **unified approach** facilitated by **better communication** with other divisions of a library's parent organization, including research offices, ethics boards, and program departments.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this list can arm library workers with realistic, actionable mechanisms. As technologies and scholarly communications grow and change, so too will the schemes of predatory publishers. I implore libraries across Canada to become more proactive in their resistance. Publication ethics and the integrity of research must be upheld.



(World Journal of Research and Review, n.d.)

Limitations

It is necessary to note the limitations of my research.

First and foremost, I was under the **time constraint** of a four-month semester. The project functioned as both an independent study and a for-credit course. I worked on it concurrently with seven other courses and a part-time job. Understandably, my methodologies and conclusions may have been hasty, and it is likely that I made oversights. Furthermore, the **sample size** for the questionnaire was admittedly small. This was the result of the time constraint, of course, as well as my lack of connections with other library professionals. It was difficult to find willing respondents, especially because I am so early in my career. These limitations could be rectified with future research from more established researchers.

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