

Ask Athena: Publication in Predatory Journals

Ask Athena is *Science Editor's* advice column for your most challenging publishing and editing questions. Submit your questions to scienceeditor@councilscienceeditors.org

Dear Athena,

I have a question about predatory journals. Recently, as a paper was going through review at one of our journals, the authors notified us that their paper had been published in a predatory journal. They had tried to get it taken down but had not made any progress with the other journal. They were hoping that, knowing the other journal is not truly legit, we could still consider their paper at our journal.

What should we tell them? They didn't realize the other journal was predatory when they submitted their paper. They did not actually want their paper published there and have requested the other journal take it down. It seems like a real shame to penalize the authors for a simple mistake.

—Puzzled About Predators

Dear Puzzled About Predators,

This is unfortunately something we are seeing more and more of. So-called predatory journals tend to have some characteristics in common.¹ They may try to emulate well-established journals by making a minor change to the journal title or even just pretending to be that journal. They typically charge high fees, publish papers without reviewing them first, and may even threaten authors who try to have their paper taken down once they realize their mistake, as the authors in your question have experienced.

According to the guidelines from the Committee on Publication Ethics,² the news for your authors is not good. Whether they wanted to or not, the authors published their paper in this other journal. It is available online, probably has a DOI, and may be copyrighted to that journal. Unfortunately, this constitutes prior publication, and the authors therefore may not submit their paper for consideration in another journal. There is nothing your journal can do for them.

Answers to Ask Athena questions are a group effort by members of the CSE Education Committee.

<https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4701-14>



The one thing you can offer them is to continue to pursue the other journal in asking them to remove the publication. If the authors did not actually consent to having their paper published there, they might have some luck enlisting legal help. Some predatory journals will relent in the face of threatened legal action. In the (unlikely) event the authors are successful in having their paper taken down, they could then submit it to your journal.

You may recommend a good resource to the authors called Think. Check. Submit.³ This is a website that helps researchers identify trusted publishers versus those that might be predatory, so they can hopefully avoid making the mistake these authors have fallen into.

Ultimately, this outcome will no doubt be difficult for the authors to hear, but hopefully it will be a learning opportunity for them.

Always,
Athena

References and Links

1. Elmore SA, Weston EH. Predatory journals: what they are and how to avoid them. *Toxicol Pathol.* 2020;48:607-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192623320920209>.
2. Committee on Publication Ethics. Predatory journals: what they are and how to avoid them. [accessed January 25, 2024]. <https://publicationethics.org/case/duplicate-publication-predatory-journal>.
3. <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>