

The experience and attitude of TMU faculty and researchers toward predatory journals and research productivity

Li-Chuan Huang (a), Ya-Fang Hsiao (a), Shu-Yuan Siao (a), Hsiao-Fen Yu (a), Tzu-Heng Chiu (b)

(a) Taipei Medical University Library, Taipei, Taiwan

(b) Center for General Education/ University Library, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan

Abstract

A questionnaire related to journal submission was sent to researchers for a 2-week period to investigate the submission status as well as the problems faced by Taipei Medical University faculties and researchers. This study has two major findings including the experience of predatory journals and calculations of academic performance point, and discusses users' cognition and their needs from the library and the university, as well as the library policy and services related to predatory journals. The Authors of this paper hope that the research results can serve as reference for other medical libraries planning to provide relevant services.

Key words: open access journals; predatory journals; library services; journal impact factor.

Introduction

In 2020, almost 60% of the papers in the name of Taipei Medical University (TMU) are published in open access journals, researchers also place a high priority on Journal Impact Factor (JIF) because of tenure and promotion needs. Since a feature report (1) on predatory journals from a local business magazine was released in 2019, some researchers mentioned that similar problems were encountered. Although there's still no agreed definition, as to what constitutes predatory publishing, only a consensus that it exists (2), to publish in deceptive journals does affect researchers' reputation, decreases research productivity and wastes research effort and budget. The aim of the study is therefore to investigate the submission status in predatory journals as well as the problems and needs faced by the TMU researchers from 11 colleges, 11 research centers, a center of general education, as well as our 3 affiliated hospitals.

Research method

This study was based on a questionnaire survey, using Google Forms to construct online questionnaires. A questionnaire related to the journal submission was sent to the researchers for a 2-week period, from 31 October to 15 November 2020 via email. The authors used

SPSS for descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA analysis. Participants answered the following 6 questions:

Q1 Basic information, including institutional affiliation and job titles.

Q2 Could you tell me if you have experienced the following conditions in the past?

- you are called for paper by unfamiliar journals;
- you are invited as a reviewer by unfamiliar journals;
- you are invited as an editor by unfamiliar journals;
- you submit to a journal which is not what you expected, but with a similar name, and the JIF it claims is simply deceptive;
- the journal you submit has a JIF, but when you need to calculate the performance points, you find that the journal has been suppressed by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and the latest JIF of the journal is not available;
- the journal you submit has a JIF, but when you need to calculate the performance points, you find that the JIF is different from the year you submitted and much lower than the value of the year.

Address for correspondence: Tzu-heng Chiu, Center for General Education/ University Library, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1094-8279>. E-mail: tzchiu@tmu.edu.tw

- Q3 Have your articles ever been published in a predatory journal? Can you give a description of the process?
- What are your expectations for help from the library?
 - What are your expectations for help from the university?
- Q4 What do you think the university can do when the journal you submitted to has a JIF, but when you need to calculate the performance points, you find that the journal has been suppressed by the JCR and the latest JIF of the journal is not available? Or do you have any idea how other universities operate?
- Q5 What do you think the university can do when the journal you submitted to has a JIF, but when you need to calculate the performance points, you find that the JIF is different from the year you submitted? Or do you have any idea how other universities operate?
- Q6 Thank you for filling out the questionnaire. Would you like to spend more time with the library to have a thorough discussion of your experience and ideas?

Research findings

1,286 questionnaires were sent and 114 valid questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 8.9%. 70.2% of respondents come from universities, 29.8% from affiliated hospitals, and 78.1% have faculty position (Figure 1).

The main findings are divided into two parts: the experience of predatory journals and calculations of academic performance point.

The experience of predatory journals

1. The ANOVA analysis shows that there is no significant difference between the experience of predatory journals and “affiliated institutions” or “positions”.
2. All respondents have received call for papers emails from unfamiliar journals, and approximately 80% of them have been invited as a reviewer. Furthermore, over a half of them have been invited as an editor (Figure 2).
3. 14% of the respondents have accidentally published articles in a predatory journal.
4. As to issues related to predatory journals, 36.5% of the respondents felt that there was no need for assistance from library. 31.3% of the respondents expect the library to provide blacklists. (See Figure 3 for other details)
5. 53.01% of the respondents felt that there was no need for assistance from the university. Rest of the respondents hope that the university could help them withdraw the submitted articles, develop negotiation skills, provide legal advice, etc.

Calculations of academic performance point

When quantifying the research productivity, the performance points are calculated and the latest JIF is needed

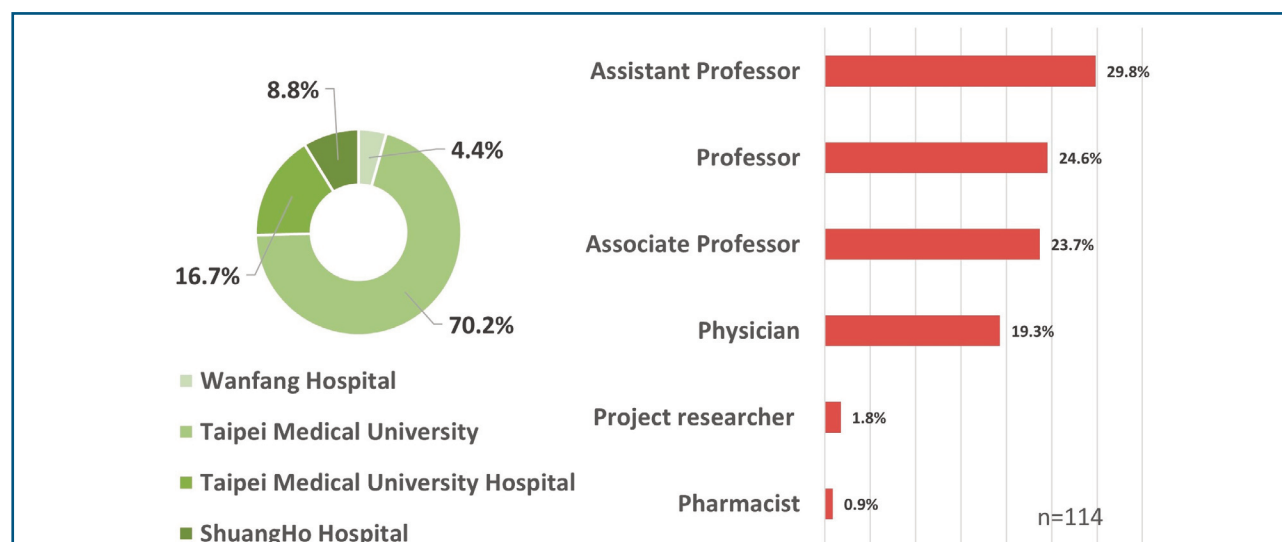


Fig. 1. Distribution of institutional affiliations and job titles.

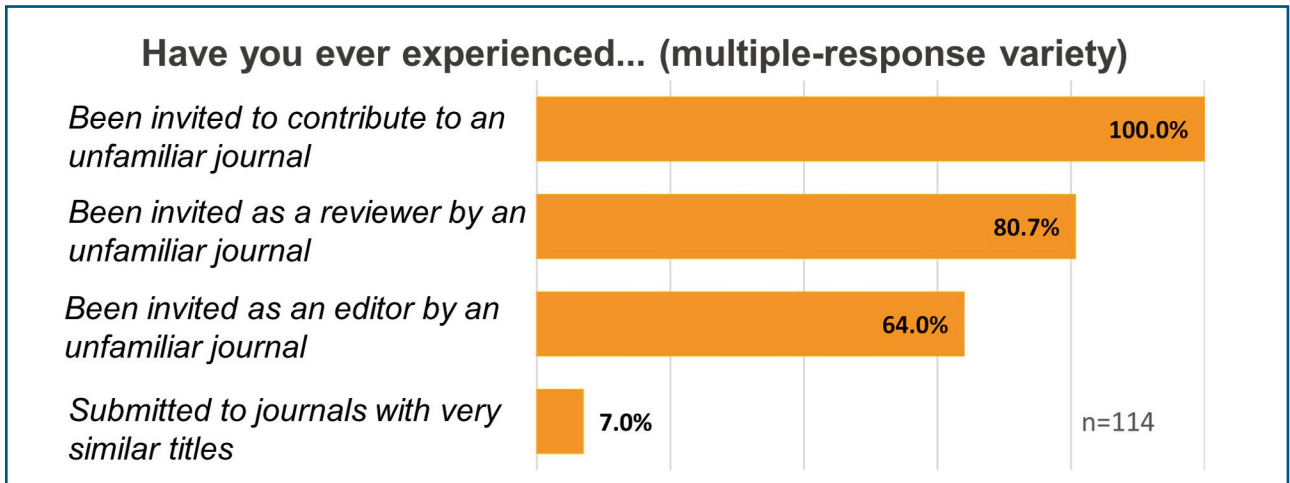


Fig. 2. Experience with unfamiliar journals.

in the formula to abide by the university rules. 15.8% of the respondents have experienced the JCR journal suppression, the JIF became not available which turns the score into zero. 30.7% of the respondents have experienced the JIF value decrease dramatically which minimize the points. For both conditions, about 20% of respondents think the current measure is working fine, but more than 50% of respondents believe that the university should modify the calculation standard value (for example the year selection of the JIF) (Figure 3) and some respondents believe that JIF should not be the only indicator.

Discussion

A journal without JIF is not necessarily a predatory journal

The study found that 14% of the respondents admit to having accidentally published articles in a predatory journal. In their description of the manuscript submission experience, the respondents viewed predatory journals as journals with similar names, journals in which their review process are extremely rapid, journals in which withdraw drafts are not allowed, and other methods in accordance with the publications described in predatory journals. However, one-third of the respon-

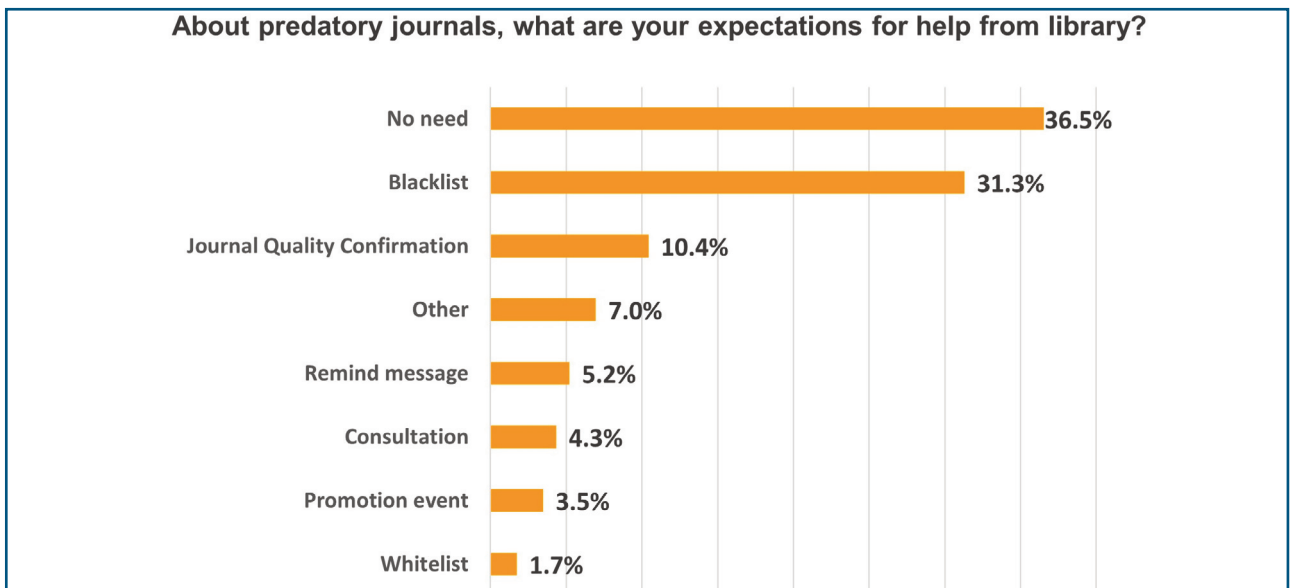


Fig. 2. Expectations for helps from the library.

dents indicated that the journals suppressed by JCR were predatory journals. According to JCR suppression policy (3), “Suppressed journals represent anomalies in citation behavior and exceed category-based norms” and “Journals that show evidence of citation distortion will not receive a Journal Impact Factor”. To sum up, predatory journals are very often open access journals, but journals without a JIF or suppressed by JCR are not necessarily a predatory journal, the definitions are different.

The role of the library

More than 60% of the respondents expect the library to provide journal title lists, consultation and promotion events, etc. TMU library has launched Preliminary Check Service of Journal (<http://library.tmu.edu.tw/predatory/>) since October 2019. The service website describes some predatory journal characters and principles of identification, it is also a portal for all TMU faculty and researchers to submit journals for initial inspection. Librarians will check the journal basic information, and the result will be replied to the applicant as well as announced in TMU internal network for our faculties to browse. TMU faculty and researchers can also book an in-person or online meeting with reference librarians for further discussion or consultation about specific journal titles. As to promotion activities, the TMU library will continue to invite speakers to give lectures on the topic of predatory journals and record the lecture as an online training course. Besides, the library will also collect fre-

quently encountered journal submission problems or precautions, and promotes them in university or college-level meetings and in new faculty orientation. Studies (4, 5) show that fake impact factor, flattering language, grammatical flaws, article processing charge, non-journal affiliated contact e-mail addresses, etc. usually appear in spam from predatory journals. Researchers should be well informed to protect their own reputation as authors and that of science. We think it is appropriate for the library to promote in this way since all of the respondents have received call-for-papers e-mails from unfamiliar journals.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the measures related to TMU library are in line with the imagination of the researchers. The TMU library will strengthen the following measures to help our researchers not to submit articles to predatory journals even by accident: provide the existing reference title list of predatory journals on the Internet, encourage faculty and researchers to apply for our preliminary inspection services of journals for basic background checks, and provide customized advisory services to individual case. Hopefully, the above services will reduce submission to predatory journals and save more time and money for researchers. Regarding the opinions on the performance points calculation these will be submitted to the appropriate units of the university for further consideration.

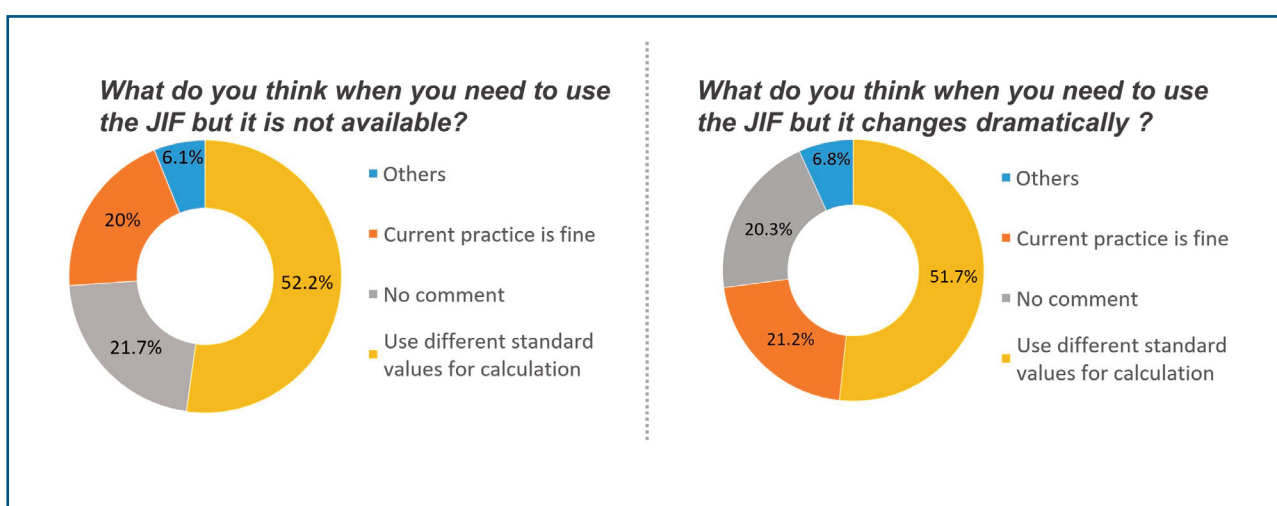


Fig. 4. Perspective and suggestions for using latest Journal Impact Factor (JIF) as the standard value in calculating the research performance.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this paper received the award for best poster presentation overall at the EAHIL 2021 Virtual Workshop, "Crossing the bridge: new challenges, new opportunities" Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey, 5-8 July 2021.

Submitted on invitation.

Accepted on 25 August 2021.

REFERENCES

1. Lu P, Tien M, Yang J, Chen Y, Yang M. [The history of academic black market: why Taiwan became the cash cows of predatory journals]. *CommWealth Magazine*. 2019;(669):84-95[Chinese].
2. Grudniewicz A, Moher D, Cobey KD, Bryson GL, Cukier S, Allen K, et al. Predatory journals: no definition, no defence. *Nature*. 2019;576(7786):210-2.
3. Clarivate. *Journal Citation Reports: Reference Guide 2021* [updated June 2021; cited 2021 Aug-21]. Available from: https://clarivate.com/webof-sciencegroup/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/06/JCR_2021_Reference_Guide.pdf.
4. Sousa FSDO, Nadanovsky P, Dhyppolito IM, Santos APPD. One year of unsolicited e-mails: The modus operandi of predatory journals and publishers. *Journal of Dentistry*. 2021;109.
5. Lund BD, Wang T. An analysis of spam from predatory publications in library and information science. *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*. 2020;52(1):35-45.

