

Predatory Publishing Practices: paper tigers or actual threats?

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Recently, changes in how science is being evaluated increased the visibility of lower-quality research, incurring a moral panic about predatory publishing practices (PPP) on the science system. Predatory publishers are known to falsely claim impact and indexation in key databases, foregoing peer review, spamming researchers and engaging in cyber-crimes by cloning legitimate journals' websites or using phishing to attract authors. However, there is little empirical research examining the causes, risks, and impact of PPP on the academic system, reflecting the key characteristics of a moral panic: intense concern without sufficient justification. While criminological research about the actual causes of questionable research practices is challenging due to their invisibility, the effects of labelling practices as questionable are more immediate. Due to the important role that reputation plays in the scientific reward system, accusations of misconduct or the retraction of journal articles have serious consequences for the accused, making it important to understand how these labels are used and assigned. Nonetheless, Criminology rarely uses its conceptual and methodological toolbox to look into deviant practices in scientific research and publication, leaving it as an under-developed area in occupational and organisational crime scholarship.

Given the current panic about PPPs and the damaging effects of labelling behaviours as predatory, the 4-year study "Predatory publishing practices: Paper tigers or actual threats from evaluation systems?" proposes an explorative and comparative mixed-methods approach to elucidate the relationship between evaluation systems and PPPs, considering that negatively labelling behaviours and outcomes relies heavily on cultural context, which cannot be ignored in a global academic community that readily compares and evaluates research produced in different contexts. In this context, the relevance of criminological research on deviance in science, namely PPPs, will be discussed in depth.

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