

Dubious journals abound: study

In list of journals approved by UGC, 88% of 1,009 publications are predatory

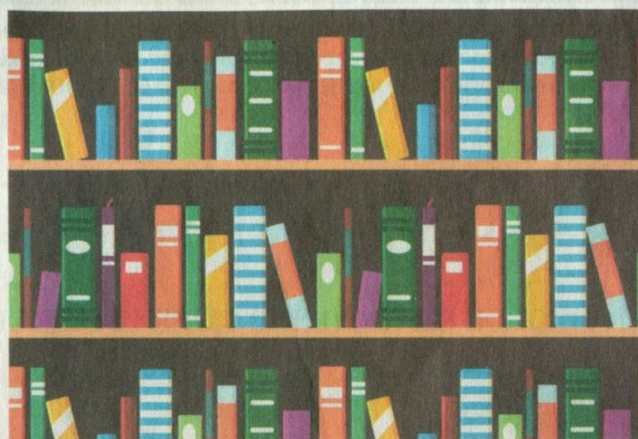
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A systematic study of the University Grants Commission's (UGC) approved list of journals has confirmed what scientists have long suspected. The white list contains a huge number of dubious or predatory journals which publish substandard papers for a small fee with very little peer-reviewing, if at all.

A team led by Professor Bhushan Patwardhan from the Savitribai Phule Pune University found 88% of 1,009 journals recommended by universities and included in the white list are dubious journals. Only 112 journals met the criteria set by UGC to be included in the list. The results were published on Thursday in the journal *Current Science*.

According to an earlier study published in 2015 in the journal *BMC Medicine*, 27% of predatory journal publishers are based in India and about 35% of authors in such journals are from Indian institutions.

The researchers had randomly selected 1,336 journals from 5,699 university-recommended journals that were included in the UGC



list. The journals included were representative of science, arts and humanities, and social science. After excluding 327 journals that were indexed in *Scopus/Web of Science*, the researchers took up 1,009 journals for critical examination.

For a journal to be included in the list, it should first meet the basic criterion of providing a verifiable postal address, and email addresses of the chief editor and editors, on their website. But 349 (34.5%) journals in the list either did not provide these details or the details provided were incorrect and therefore rejected. Of the remaining 660 journals, 528 were removed owing to false

claims about their impact factor, being indexed in dubious indexing databases, incorrect ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) and poor credentials of editors.

"Unfortunately, academic institutions which have recommended such journals have not really examined them with care. And the UGC committee appears to have taken the recommendation at face value," says Professor Subhash C. Lakhotia from the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, one of the authors of the paper.

Only 132 journals reached the secondary level of scrutiny for analysis. The secondary level of scrutiny looked

for misleading journal names such as 'international' and 'global' in journal titles, editorial policies, and nature of charges levied on authors. Twenty journals were rejected at the secondary level and only 112 journals out of 1,009 were found to be genuine in all.

A scam in itself

"The dubious or predatory journal publishing in India parallels the Nigerian lottery scam," says Professor Patwardhan, who is the corresponding author of the *Current Science* paper. "It makes a mockery of scientific publishing and has tarnished the image of India."

"Honestly, I was not surprised by the huge number of journals turning out to be dubious. Researchers have been receiving mails from journal publishers inviting us on editorial boards and to contribute special articles. It's a depressing scenario," says Professor Lakhotia.

"I think the UGC should not maintain the white list. It is simply not equipped to do it efficiently. It should instead issue advisories on the quality of research publications," says Prof. Lakhotia.