

# Publishing Open Access: Considerations for Responsible Engagement



## 1.0 Introduction

Scholarly contributions commonly involve descriptive sharing of research findings with reference to the critical evaluation of the existing body of knowledge. Journal articles, conference papers, books and book chapters, etc., are popular modes of publishing, which could be subscription-based or open-access. Typically, subscription-based systems publishing requires the reader to bear the costs, in contrast to authors taking care of the expenses in open-access. Ensuring sufficient visibility to promote accessing articles in a subscription-based model seems challenging when research information is readily available via open access at no cost for the reader. Improved accessibility due to technological advancements and authors inclined to shoulder the financial burden is becoming a trend, where responsible engagement with open access publishing is essential to avoid being a victim. Hence, some insights into open access publishing have been presented in this article to empower scholars.

Authors who publish in open access are commonly subject to being financially accountable under the following types and categories and colour schemes indicated in Table 1, and the most common monetary obligation will be in the form of Article Processing Charge (APC).

Table 1: Open access category and costs (Source: Open Economic guide (<https://openeconomics.zbw.eu/en>))

| Open Access Category | Characteristics                                                                                      | Costs involved               |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Gold                 | Articles are fully accessible on the journal website, under a Creative Commons or similar license.   | APC                          |
| Green                | Self-archives, generally identified as pre- or post-print of the articles in online repositories.    | APC                          |
| Hybrid               | Journals with a subscription and an additional payment will convert to open-access.                  | APC and Journal subscription |
| Bronze               | Online journals without a license and generally not available for reuse.                             | APC                          |
| Diamond              | Community-driven, academic-led, and academic-owned online publishing initiatives/platforms/journals. | No cost                      |
| Black                | Unrecognized platforms that are considered illegal or predatory (may change the status with time).   | No cost                      |

## Open Access Research Publications in the Context of Sri Lanka

The Elsevier's Sri Lanka Research Snapshot (2019–2023) reveals that over 47% of Sri Lankan research publications are in open-access platforms [2], and the current status is depicted in Table 2, in par with the rest of the South Asian countries (Table 3). The country's research/publication output has grown by 56% between 2019 and 2023, possibly due to increasing research, strong international collaborations, and expanding open access initiatives [2].

Table 2: Publications from Sri Lanka during 2019–2024 (Source: Scopus.com as of 24th May 2025)

| Year | Publications Total | Open Access Publications |        |      |       |        |        |
|------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|------|-------|--------|--------|
|      |                    | Value                    | %      | Gold | Green | Hybrid | Bronze |
| 2019 | 2868               | 1172                     | 40.86% | 752  | 730   | 83     | 182    |
| 2020 | 3433               | 1398                     | 40.72% | 949  | 816   | 137    | 136    |
| 2021 | 4286               | 1884                     | 43.96% | 1320 | 1054  | 158    | 200    |
| 2022 | 4450               | 2073                     | 46.39% | 1453 | 1106  | 202    | 208    |
| 2023 | 4511               | 2017                     | 44.71% | 1379 | 994   | 260    | 231    |
| 2024 | 4661               | 1876                     | 40.25% | 1366 | 611   | 346    | 52     |

Open-access publication platforms evolving to be a lucrative business have also emerged as a growing global threat to research integrity [3] due to the predatory nature of some publishers. Developing Asian and African countries have contributed more than 90% of such publications [4]. This rising threat to the honesty of research publications has become a global outbreak and has been identified using terms 'predatory', 'bogus', 'deceptive', 'dubious', 'illegitimate', 'fake', 'fraudulent', 'parasitic', 'pseudo', 'questionable', etc. However, the term 'predatory' is widely used since its introduction in 2010 by Jeffrey Beall, an American librarian and library scientist,

drew attention to the "predatory open access publishing". Journals often having ad-hoc peer-review processes, low editorial standards, and forcing the authors to publish for a fee are common characteristics of predatory publishers. Maintaining fake versions of reputed legitimate journals with identical titles and ISSN numbers can also be observed and considered as "hijacked journals" [5]. A recent survey in Sri Lanka on open access research publications has identified the following as the main concerns that could challenge genuine scientific contributions and overall dissemination of knowledge.

Table 3: Publications from South Asian Countries during 2019–2024 (Source: Scopus.com as of 24th May 2025)

| Country     | Publications Total | Open Access Publications |        |        |        |        |        |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|             |                    | Value                    | %      | Gold   | Green  | Hybrid | Bronze |
| India       | 1662404            | 465102                   | 27.98% | 286591 | 206235 | 50132  | 66574  |
| Pakistan    | 222023             | 97916                    | 44.10% | 77490  | 40942  | 8349   | 5847   |
| Bangladesh  | 78213              | 35478                    | 45.36% | 26493  | 18185  | 3744   | 2287   |
| Sri Lanka   | 24209              | 10420                    | 43.04% | 7219   | 5311   | 1186   | 1009   |
| Nepal       | 20931              | 13525                    | 64.62% | 10527  | 8099   | 1330   | 656    |
| Afghanistan | 3511               | 2300                     | 65.51% | 1790   | 1232   | 236    | 117    |
| Bhutan      | 1555               | 908                      | 58.39% | 704    | 472    | 95     | 57     |
| Nepal       | 742                | 414                      | 55.80% | 278    | 228    | 80     | 18     |

### 1.1 Destroying confidence in scientific communication and compromised quality

Limited or non-existence of a standard peer reviewing process could disseminate flawed, unreliable, or even fraudulent information. This undermines the integrity of work that could damage or weaken the literature of a particular domain, making it harder to distinguish credible research outcomes. The proliferation of predatory journals not only undermines trust in academic literature but also masks the research landscape with numerous low-quality articles. Despite isolated laws, policies and awareness attempts to combat predatory inputs, the absence of recognised ethical publishing standards the genuine publishers may be penalised with rigorous evaluation processes

### 1.2 Impact on research funding and reputation of researchers

Academic institutions and funding agencies often assess researchers based on their publication record. Therefore, having articles in predatory journals may impede career progression by diluting scholarly contributions and disqualification from funding. Early career researchers seem susceptible to being the victims of predatory publishers due to their interests in producing publications for promotion requirements or quick publishing for citation records. Ultimately, they devote time and

money to and share research outcomes via sub-standard avenues, which could also damage the author's reputation and credibility of work.

### 2.0 Global Efforts in Publication Quality Control

To overcome the challenges enforced by predatory publications, there have been initiatives at the global level despite the complicated environments. The following attempts facilitate to improvement of our awareness of the publication landscape.

#### 2.1 Bibliographic databases that monitor journals

Scopus is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary database of peer-reviewed literature launched by Elsevier in 2004 [3]. To ensure high standards, Scopus has developed a re-evaluation program that continuously monitors and assesses journals with a radar tool that detect journals exhibiting suspicious behaviour. Web of Science, originally founded in 1964 as the Science Citation Index, retains a collection of citation databases and journals that meet its editorial standards, with publishers who fail to maintain them undergoing de-listing.

#### 2.2 Reputable organizations that provide memberships for publishers

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE): COPE is a global organization that provides guidelines, resources, and support to publishers, editors, and re-



searchers to uphold publication ethics. It continuously monitors to identify predatory journals and employs strict membership criteria to ensure the quality of member publishers.

Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA): OASPA is an international organization supporting open-access publishing and scholarly transparency. Membership in OASPA promotes strict adherence to ethical open-access publishing standards.

### 3.0 Finding Credible Journals to Publish Open Access

Researchers should avoid being victims of fraudulent publishers by verifying the transparency in the editorial process and quality of the journal. Accordingly, before submitting manuscripts, it is recommended to check for the peer review process, ISSN authenticity, Journal website presentation and editorial information, publishing workflow and article quality to determine the publisher's reputation. It is also possible to identify a journal's credibility based on its appearance in the following:

#### Membership in Reputable Organizations

COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) (<https://publicationethics.org/about>)

OASPA (Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association) (<https://www.oaspa.org/>)

#### Indexing in Trusted Databases

Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (<https://doaj.org/>)

Scopus ([www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com))

Web of Science (<https://mjl.clarivate.com/search-results>)

Scimago Journal and Country Rank (<https://www.scimagojr.com/>)

#### Affiliation with Recognized Institutions

Nationally and internationally reputed universities, research centers, and professional bodies.

#### Inclusion in Whitelists, Blacklists or Checklists

Whitelists (COPE Member List, OASPA Member List and Cabells Scholarly Analytics via <http://www.cabells.com/>)

Blacklists (Beall's List of Predatory Publishers - Since Jeffrey Beall discontinued updating an anonymous group maintains this at [bealllist.net](http://bealllist.net) and Cabells Scholarly Analytics via <http://www.cabells.com/>)

Checklists (Think.Check.Submit via <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/> and ABDC Journal

Quality List via <https://abdc.edu.au/abdc-journal-quality-list/>)

### 4.0 Conclusion

Predatory publishing is a growing threat to academic integrity, research quality, and institutional credibility. Authors could be victims of pseudo publishing by losing money or credibility and duplicating their scientific contributions without permission. Funding institutions could also be misled by fraudulent research and publications. While global organizations attempt to maintain standards, local proactive measures are also essential to safeguard the research community and maintain the credibility of Sri Lankan research outputs. Given the rising number of open-access publications, higher education institutions may have to enlighten early-career researchers on the risks posed by predatory publications and the requirement for ethical and credible sharing of research findings. Recognised Sri Lankan journals could facilitate such initiatives while enhancing their global visibility and impact.

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