JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

JLIS.it

Awareness of Predatory Journals and Open Access: an online survey among Italian Researchers

Silvia Maccarini[(a)], Núria Bautista-Puig[(b)], Eva Méndez[(c)]

a) University Carlos III of Madrid - Faculty of Humanities, Communication and Documentation, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4013-7338
b) Institute of Philosophy, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2404-0683
c) University Carlos III of Madrid - Faculty of Humanities, Communication and Documentation, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5337-4722

Contact: Silvia Maccarini, s.maccarini@inail.it; Núria Bautista-Puig, nuria.bautista@cchs.csic.es; Eva Méndez, emendez@bib.uc3m.es
Received: 12 November 2025; **Accepted:** 08 June 2026; **First Published:** 15 September 2026

ABSTRACT
This study investigates Italian academics' awareness, perceptions, and experiences of predatory publishing, a phenomenon recognised as a threat to research integrity and scholarly communication. An online survey of researchers affiliated with Italian universities and research institutes yielded 258 responses, which were analysed.
Results show that awareness of predatory publishing is high: almost half of respondents (47.9%) had discussed it with colleagues, and more than one-third had encountered it as authors, reviewers, or readers. Familiarity varies across dimensions, with predatory journals and spam emails being most recognised, and fraudulent websites and podcasts less so. 30% of participants reported personal experience of editorial misleading, mainly as authors, and 76% had received spam or phishing solicitations. Significant differences emerged by professional title and age, with senior researchers demonstrating higher levels of awareness and some training.
Most participants perceive predatory publishing as having a moderate or high impact on scientific integrity, but only half have received training in research ethics or use verification tools. Open-ended responses show concern about the "publish or perish" culture and the difficulty of distinguishing legitimate from predatory journals. The findings highlight awareness and vulnerability in the Italian academic publishing landscape.

KEYWORDS
Academic publishing; Predatory publishers and journals; Research communities; Editorial misconduct.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

1. Introduction

The dissemination of research findings is a cornerstone of scientific progress. However, there is growing concern within academic communities about flaws and scientific misconduct affecting the scholarly publishing ecosystem (Frank et al., 2023). One of the most urgent issues is the increase in predatory publishers and journals (PPJs), which undermine research integrity by prioritising profit over scientific rigour (Shen & Shah 2023).

Predatory publishing refers to exploitative entities that imitate reputable scholarly journals but partake in unethical editorial practices, such as insufficient (or suspicious) peer review, misleading indexing claims, and aggressive solicitation of manuscripts (Manca et al. 2017; Shen and Björk 2015). These journals misuse the open access (OA) model, corrupting its original aim of democratising knowledge (Cortegiani et al. 2020; Clemons et al. 2017; Duc et al. 2020; Shamseer et al. 2017; Kumar et al. 2022).

The term "predatory" was popularised by librarian Jeffrey Beall (2012), who curated a blacklist of potential OA publishers and journals for their lack of transparency, editorial oversight, and scientific quality. From his perspective, the ideal model of open access academic publishing that requires an Article Processing Charge (APC) has been exploited by unscrupulous publishers: "the more papers a publisher accepts and publishes, the more money it earns" (Beall 2017; 2013). Since the closure of his blog Scholarly Open Access in 2017, the scientific community has debated the objectivity, reproducibility, and ethical implications of such lists (Koerber et al. 2020; Siler et al. 2021).

Despite attempts to replace Beall's list—most notably with Cabells' *Journalytics Academic*, which categorises journals according to transparency and editorial quality—there is still no universal consensus on how to define or identify PPJs (Kratochvíl et al. 2020). Moreover, Beall's criteria exhibited several limitations: an English-language bias, the exclusion of non-OA journals, and an overreliance on individual judgment, all of which hindered cross-national comparability (Christopher and Young 2015).

Empirical analyses reveal that predatory publishing is a global issue, with different levels of prevalence and awareness across nations. The increase in predatory publications may indicate significant gaps in scientific evaluation and a mechanical dependence on journal lists for academic progression. This may indicate a failure to evaluate the quality of scientific outputs (Bagues et al. 2019). Furthermore, disparities in article processing charges (APCs) exacerbate inequalities among researchers and institutions, as fees vary significantly across reputable and questionable OA platforms (Teixeira da Silva and Al-Khatib 2021; Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021). In the long term, Berger's proposal is to promote authors' information literacy to help them navigate the complexities of scholarly communication, supported by one-on-one consultations with librarians to help them critically evaluate journals and their bibliometric and bibliographic indexing (Berger 2021; 2017).

Against this background, the present study aims to assess awareness of predatory publishing within Italian academic communities and examine their attitudes and editorial practices regarding the publication of scholarly information.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

2. Literature Review

Conceptualising predatory publishing

The term predatory publishing has developed significantly since its origin. Early analyses (Beall, 2012; Butler, 2013) identified it as a direct consequence of the OA business model, which introduced financial incentives that could compromise editorial integrity. Subsequent research broadened the definition to encompass various unethical behaviours, from false claims of indexing and fabricated impact metrics to fraudulent peer review and plagiarism (Clemons et al. 2017; Salehi et al. 2020; Kirilova 2021).
A recent effort to establish a consensus definition was proposed by Grudniewicz et al. (2019):

> Entities that prioritise self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterised by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.

Similarly, Linacre defined them as "deceptive and often fake journals giving the appearance of legitimate peer-reviewed journals by exploiting the Open Access model while using misleading tactics to solicit article submissions" (Linacre 2022, 11). These formulations emphasise the deceitful, profit-driven character of PPJs and their harmful effect on the credibility of scientific communication and academic stakeholders.
Researchers have also examined related phenomena, such as hijacked journals, legitimate journals cloned through fraudulent websites, and paper mills that mass-produce fabricated manuscripts for profit (Abalkina 2021; 2023a). Predatory conferences, closely linked to predatory journals, are also deceptive practices that deviate from scientific and ethical standards, representing "two sides of the same coin" (Cortegiani et al. 2020). The literature thus places PPJs within a spectrum of editorial misconduct that threatens research integrity (Anderson 2019; Manley 2019; Happe 2020).
The lack of critical assessment of sources, due to poor information literacy and a system driven by speed and blind trust in search engine results, benefits phenomena such as predatory journals, "journals boasting high standards of scientificity" (Cavalletto et al. 2018), which exploit this appearance to publish content without proper oversight in order to receive payments. As analysed by Xia (2021), it is not isolated cases of misconduct that cause the vulnerability of the academic system, but rather a broader ecosystem of global structural inequalities in research funding capacity, incentives and evaluation systems.
Beyond definitional debates, several authors emphasise that predatory publishing exploits the structural vulnerabilities of academia, especially the "publish or perish" culture that pressures researchers to prioritise quantity over quality (Kurambayev and Freedman 2021). Consequently, scholars (especially early-career researchers) might be duped by deceptive invitations or lack the expertise to assess the legitimacy of journals. Awareness of predatory journals is typically linked to research experience, training, and disciplinary culture (Christopher and Young 2015; Manca et al. 2017). Although predatory journals are often associated with the open access (OA) model, the relationship between the two is complex. The OA model aimed to democratise knowledge and remove paywalls for readers (Pearson 2016), but the rise of APC-based business models has created opportunities for exploitation. Studies show a wide range of publication fees, from free-

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

to-publish community journals to expensive commercial OA outlets, which leads to confusion and ethical dilemmas for authors (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021; Teixeira da Silva and Al-Khatib 2021). Conflicts of interest in scientific communication are a systemic issue, driven by commercial interests and a culture that encourages authors to take shortcuts. However, De Fiore (2024) writes that these are less problematic than other concerns, such as guiding science towards collective benefit by strengthening the governance of relationships between institutions and businesses, and promoting this through critical education and shared objectives: "to improve the quality of scientific literature, we must also limit industrial influence on research and policy".

Some publishers engage in questionable, aggressive business practices, such as rapid expansion, special issues, and peer reviews conducted in just a few days. These practices border on illegality and fall into a grey zone because they are not outright "fake publishers"—as they also publish quality research and are indexed in major databases, such as MDPI.[1] Several authors (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021; Shah et al. 2022) argue that the predatory label has unfairly stigmatized legitimate OA venues, creating a bias against open access itself. Consequently, some scholars advocate moving beyond the binary distinction between "predatory" and "legitimate" towards a nuanced understanding of misleading publishing practices that lie along a spectrum of transparency and quality.

2.1 The Italian context: research assessment and awareness

The Italian academic system shows a significant mix of actively supporting open access and heavily depending on bibliometric evaluation, which creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities related to predatory publishing practices. Initiatives have emerged to promote the Diamond Open Access publishing model, managed directly by academic communities, free for authors and readers, and an alternative to the "Gold Road" model based on APCs. One example is the one launched at the University of Bologna.[2] Another valuable contribution to a more sustainable and equitable future is promoting the "Green Road" model, which focuses on self-archiving in institutional repositories to increase the circulation and broader sharing of scientific knowledge. The University of Messina is a key proponent of this model,[3] and the JISC database is a valuable tool for analysing publishers' positions on open access repository deposit.[4]

To date, approximately 76% of public and private universities in Italy have signed the *Messina Declaration* (2004), which encouraged researchers to publish in open-access journals and to deposit their work in institutional repositories. Although repositories require more political support, open access has grown alongside further initiatives and infrastructure projects, such as OpenAIRE,[5] international collaborations and new publishing models (Poltronieri et al. 2010). OpenAIRE, as an European Commission infrastructure, has reinforced the regulatory framework with guide-

[1] Paolo Crosetto. Blog. https://paolocrosetto.wordpress.com/2021/04/12/is-mdpi-a-predatory-publisher/. Accessed 20 Mar 2026

[2] https://amsacta.unibo.it/id/eprint/8173/1/pubblicare-in-Open-Access-una-guida-pratica.pdf?

[3] https://oa.unime.it/open-access/.

[4] https://openpolicyfinder.jisc.ac.uk/.

[5] https://www.openaire.eu/

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

lines on research integrity, transparency, and publication quality standards. Predatory practices are indirectly countered by promoting reliable indices (e.g., DOAJ) and responsible research evaluation, even without strict legal regulation.[6] Another perspective is the commitment to the *Berlin Declaration* on Open Access (2003),[7] to which over 100 Italian institutions, including universities, research institutes, libraries, and foundations, have adhered. Although open access publishing has increased recently, this growth has mainly been propelled by the expansion of transformative agreements, which have also sparked concerns about their long-term sustainability and impact on the scholarly communication system.

Scientific research in Italy (conducted within universities and public research institutions) is governed by the Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (ANVUR).[8] This agency is responsible for assessing research quality, accrediting journals, and overseeing the national research evaluation exercises (Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca, VQR) with lists of scientific journals based on international databases like *Scopus* and *Web of Science*, used as benchmarks for academic appraisal and for the National Scientific Qualification (Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale - ASN) process. In recent years, ANVUR is aligning itself with the principles of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA),[9] which promotes qualitative, context-aware research evaluation and the responsible use of quantitative indicators. Nevertheless, high paper output and numerous citations do not facilitate meritocratic assessment in the academic system, which involves cumbersome recruitment procedures and state competitions and promotions influenced by personal connections rather than the actual value of research (Ciriminna et al. 2025). Moreover, the library system requires investment and development to respond to the challenges of digital transformation. There are considerable gaps between the skills required of librarians and documentation experts, and their current training remains inadequate (Pasqui 2021).

Although this evaluation framework aims to standardise quality, it may inadvertently encourage opportunistic publishing behaviour. Pressure to publish, language barriers, inexperience, and poor mentoring for open access publishing often lead researchers—especially early-career scholars or those from underfunded universities—to target venues that promise rapid peer review, guaranteed acceptance, or misleading indexing claims (Richtig et al. 2018). Such dynamics open opportunities for predatory journals to infiltrate legitimate academic circuits while claiming to enhance accessibility and visibility. However, it cannot be simplified to just the idea of predatory journals or to unfairly labelling a journal. Teaching students to critically evaluate the grey area between low-quality journals and outright scams is important to prevent unfair discrimination against legitimate open access journals that charge APCs (unfortunately, some with costly business models). (Moncada 2025)

Empirical evidence indicates that awareness of predatory publishing remains fragmented in Italy. Unfortunately, the low publication costs — subsidised at up to 18 times lower than those of traditional journals — also attract researchers from prestigious institutions conducting publicly funded

[6] Scientific Knowledge Production. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/srip/2024/ec_rtd_srip-report-2024-chap-03.pdf.

[7] Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development; Learn for our planet: act for sustainability. 2022. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381228.

[8] ANVUR – Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca. https://www.anvur.it/it

[9] CoARA – Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment. https://www.coara.org/

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

research (De Fiore 2024). A study of 46,000 Italian researchers found that about 5% had published in potentially predatory journals, often because these outlets were included in recognised indexes such as Scopus, making it difficult for evaluators to distinguish journal quality. The findings emphasise how information gaps and overreliance on journal lists can distort academic incentives and harm research integrity in assessment systems (Bagues et al. 2019). However, similar analyses have not been conducted at the national level in Italy, despite isolated cases of Italian researchers being targeted by deceptive publishers (Cortegiani et al. 2019). A recent study by Morriello (2022) on retracted publications in Italy, as reported on the Retraction Watch website, has found around 800 problematic cases, particularly in STEM and open-access articles. Errors in publication, cases of fraud or ethical violations (e.g., plagiarism, data and image manipulation, and false peer review) are reasons for retractions that are not requested by the authors. This demonstrates that even the practices of legitimate scientific journals and database evaluation systems are not always able to prevent or promptly identify misconduct, and this is true across the global system.

In recent years, many positive initiatives have been undertaken to combat misleading publishing practices and diminish the spread of predatory journals, especially by sharing information and promoting a more informed and responsible publishing culture through guidelines, academic research, and preventative measures. Italian universities support various outreach activities, including academic publishing support offices such as those in the Università di Studi di Padova,[10] the Bibliometric Office and Open Science Service in Modena and Reggio Emilia, which assess the reliability and quality of journals,[11] the Help Desk at the University of Florence,[12] and courses in training open access model, awareness, and institutional guidance on recognizing predatory journals organised by the University of Milan.[13] The CNR - Commission for Ethics and Integrity in Research has initiated a continuous effort to provide researchers with updates and recommendations.[14] The Italian Association for the Promotion of Open Science (AISA)[15] and the Roars (Return on Academic Research and School)[16] association have created resources on predatory publishing, including discussion forums that help raise critical awareness.

In this context, this paper aims to examine Italian researchers' awareness, perceptions, and experiences of predatory journals.

2.2 The European context: research assessment and awareness

Large-scale global initiatives and reports on "Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences"[17] have been realised by a working group of international experts from the InterAcademy

[10] Università degli Studi di Padova. https://biblio.unipd.it/biblioteca-digitale/per-chi-pubblica/editoria-predatoria
[11] Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia. https://www.pop.unimore.it/riconoscere-i-predatory-journals/
[12] Università degli Studi di Firenze. https://www.unifi.it/it/ricerca-e-innovazione/ricerca/scienza-aperta-ateneo/editoria-predatoria
[13] Università degli Studi di Milano. https://openscience.unimi.it/predatorie/
[14] CNR – Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. https://www.cnr.it/sites/default/files/public/media/doc_istituzionali/ethics/cnr-ethics-predatory-journals-revisione-2021.pdf
[15] Associazione Italiana per la Promozione della Scienza Aperta. https://aisa.sp.unipi.it/editoria-predatoria/
[16] Roar - Return on Academic Research and School. https://www.roars.it/editoria-predatoria/
[17] InterAcademy Partnership (IAP). https://www.interacademies.org/publication/predatory-practices-report-English.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Partnership (IAP), translated into various languages, and followed by a programme of regional webinars in partnership. Awareness has become the central and most immediate response to predatory publishing because disinformation is a primary cause of vulnerability. This has prompted a collaborative effort among universities, scholarly communities, and open science organisations to raise the problem's profile, offering researchers practical tools and encouraging a more critical and informed publishing culture.

A recent study in Germany surveyed orthopaedic and trauma surgeons to assess their awareness of predatory journals. The results showed that only 39.9% of participants were familiar with the concept of predatory journals and knew tools for identifying legitimate journals, meaning significant gaps in their training. Authors with more publications in academic and research contexts demonstrated greater knowledge, which was also associated with academic seniority, research experience, and employment status (Maurer et al. 2021).

Research conducted during the pandemic shows that early-career researchers face the greatest challenges in academic publishing due to immense pressure to build a robust publication record and limited editorial experience. The risk of encountering predatory journals is heightened in two distinct scenarios: hijacked journals clone the identities and websites of legitimate journals, and awareness of such practices is low, particularly among the habits of early-career researchers (ECRs) (Nicholas et al. 2023). For these reasons, distinguishing trustworthy from deceptive publishing venues demands critical assessment and awareness-raising initiatives across all academic sectors. Perceptions of predatory journals vary significantly across countries, highlighting differences in awareness levels, definitions and countermeasures. If there is limited awareness of academic publishing and the risks posed by predatory journals, the integrity of scientific research is at risk (Martinino et al. 2024). The *Stop Predatory Practices* website (https://www.stoppredatorypractice.com/) is a valuable international contribution, with strong involvement from the Czech Republic. It aims to combat editorial predation by providing concrete tools, such as education, training and awareness campaigns, to strengthen the integrity of scientific communication, particularly among doctoral students and early-career researchers.

3. Materials and methods

Study design and participants

This study uses an anonymised online survey to assess Italian researchers' publishing habits and their awareness of predatory journals. The target group includes members of the academic and scientific community affiliated with Italian universities and research institutes.

Email addresses (n=580) were collected from publicly available web pages of universities (e.g., UNIROMA1,[18] UNIROMA2,[19] UNIROMA3,[20] etc.) and national research institutes (e.g., INAIL,[21]

[18] Sapienza University of Rome. https://www.uniroma1.it/it/pagina-strutturale/home
[19] University of Rome "Tor Vergata". https://web.uniroma2.it/
[20] Roma Tre University. https://www.uniroma3.it/en/about-us/history-and-values/
[21] INAIL - Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro. www.inail.it

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

CNR,[22] INFN,[23] etc.), mainly located in the Lazio region. The invitation was sent via institutional email from 30 June to 30 September 2023. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 258 responses were received, resulting in an overall response rate of 44%.

3.1 Survey instrument

The survey was created and conducted using Google Forms. It included 19 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, with an estimated completion time of around 10 minutes. It was divided into four sections (the survey is available in the Supplementary Data section, archived in the Zenodo archive):

- Socio-demographic information, including gender, age group, field, and institutional affiliation.
- Publishing habits, focusing on the average number of publications per year, journal selection criteria, and familiarity with open access.
- Awareness of predatory publishing, assessing perceptions, awareness levels, and attitudes towards unethical editorial practices.
- Open-ended feedback, enabling respondents to share comments, suggestions, or reflections related to the survey topic. (Maccarini et al. 2026)

The questionnaire items were designed based on prior research and international best practices in scholarly publishing ethics, as outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Responses were automatically retrieved and exported to Microsoft Excel for data cleaning, then imported into R (version 4.3.1) for descriptive and statistical analyses. Each response was assigned a numerical identifier. Quantitative variables were summarised using absolute and relative frequencies, and, where relevant, stratified by participants' gender, age group, field, and professional qualification. Differences between groups were assessed using nonparametric tests: the Mann–Whitney U test for two-group comparisons (e.g., gender) and the Kruskal–Wallis test for variables with three or more groups (e.g., age, field, or professional qualification). For nominal variables, chi-square or Fisher's exact tests (with simulated p-values when suitable) were employed.

Qualitative feedback from the open-ended question was coded and categorised thematically to gain further insights. The findings of this analysis are presented in this article and will guide future research on the perception and prevalence of predatory publishing within academia.

[22] Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR). www.cnr.it
[23] INFN – Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare. https://www.infn.it/

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

4. Results

General participation characteristics

A total of 258 responses were received, representing an overall response rate of 44.2%. Among respondents, 156 (60.2%) were men, 96 (37.5%) were women, and 6 (2.3%) preferred not to disclose their gender. Regarding age, most participants were between 30–39 years (n=73; 28.2%) and 40–49 years (63; 24.6%), followed by those aged 50–59 years (5; 20.1%), over 60 (40; 15.4%), and under 29 (30; 11.6%).

Most respondents worked at a public university (209 participants; 80.7%), while smaller groups were affiliated with research institutions (27; 10.4%), the public sector outside universities (12; 4.6%), private universities (6; 2.3%), or were freelancers or employed in companies (2 and 1, respectively).

In terms of professional status, associate professors (68; 26.3%) and PhD candidates (51; 19.7%) made up the largest groups, followed by researchers or assistant professors (45; 17.4%), full professors (34; 13.1%), and researchers in non-academic roles (27; 10.4%). Other categories, such as postdoctoral researchers (18; 7.0%), early-career researchers (8; 3.1%), and faculty members (1; 0.4%), were less common.

Participants come from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds. The largest groups were Engineering and Technology (41 participants; 15.8%), Life Sciences (38; 14.7%), Social Sciences (37; 14.3%), and Medical and Health Sciences (35; 13.5%), followed by Others (33; 12.7%), Arts and Humanities (23; 8.9%), Economics (16; 6.2%), Experimental Sciences (10; 3.9%), Physics and Astronomy (10; 3.9%), Chemistry (9; 3.5%), Philosophy (5; 1.9%), and Education (1; 0.4%). Detailed descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1.

Variable	
Age range, n (%)	
30-39	73 (28.2)
40-49	63 (24.6)
50-59	52 (20.1)
>60	40 (15.4)
<29	30 (11.6)
Sex, n (%)	
Male	156 (60.2)
Female	96 (37.5)
Prefer not to answer	6 (2.3)
Working place, n (%)	
Public University	209 (80.7)
Research Institution	27 (10.4)
Public Sector (not university)	12 (4.6)
Private University	6 (2.3)
Freelancer	2 (0.8)

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Other	1 (0.8)
Companies	1 (0.4)
Professional title, n (%)	
Associate Professor	68 (26.3)
Ph.D. candidate	51 (19.7)
Researcher/Assistant Professor (tenured/non-tenured)	45 (17.4)
Full professor	34 (13.1)
Researcher Non-academic position	27 (10.4)
Postdoctoral Researcher	18 (7)
Early-Career Researcher (ECR)	8 (3.1)
Other	7 (2.7)
Faculty member	1 (0.4)
Field/discipline, n (%)	
Engineering and Technology	41 (15.8)
Life sciences	38 (14.7)
Social Science	37 (14.3)
Medical and Health Sciences	35 (13.5)
Other	33 (12.7)
Arts/Humanities	23 (8.9)
Economics	16 (6.2)
Experimental sciences	10 (3.9)
Physics and Astronomy	10 (3.9)
Chemistry	9 (3.5)
Philosophy	5 (1.9)
Education	1 (0.4)

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study cohort (n= 258).

Scientific publishing experience

Nearly all respondents had previous experience in scientific publishing. The majority had published more than 11 papers (166; 64.1%), followed by those with 1–5 publications (59; 22.8%) and 6–10 publications (30; 11.6%), while only a small minority had not yet published (4; 1.5%).
Regarding the open-access (OA) dimension, most respondents reported having published more than two OA papers (167; 64.5%), while 13.5% had not published any OA articles. A smaller proportion had published one (34; 13.1%) or two (23; 8.9%) OA papers. When asked about Article Processing Charges (APCs), 42.5% of participants indicated that APCs were covered by research projects (private or public), followed by institutional funds (36.3%) and cases where no fee was required (36.3%). Additional sources included university support (23.2%), personal payment (4.6%), and scholarships (0.8%). Because respondents could select more than one option, the percentages do not sum to 100%. While "institutional funds" generally refer to structured funding schemes with dedicated budgets to cover publication costs, and "university support" to broader and more

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

flexible forms of assistance (e.g., transformative agreements, repositories, or editorial support), the distinction between the two is not always clear and may involve overlap in how respondents interpreted these categories.
Overall, the data suggest that the Italian academic community represented in this survey is highly active in scholarly publishing and actively involved in open-access practices. The mechanisms for funding APCs, though, vary mainly depending on project-based and institutional support. (See Table 2 for detailed results)

Category	n (%)
No. of publications	
>11	166 (64.1%)
1-5	59 (22.8%)
6-10	30 (11.6%)
Not yet	4 (1.5%)
OA publications	
>2	167 (64.5%)
None	35 (13.5%)
1	34 (13.1%)
2	23 (8.9%)
APCs	
Covered by projects (private or public)	110 (42.5%)
Institutional funds	94 (36.3%)
No fee	94 (36.3%)
University support	60 (23.2%)
Personal money	12 (4.6%)
Scholarship	2 (0.8%)

Table 2. Scientific publishing habits and open-access experience among survey participants.

When analysing the criteria researchers use to choose an academic journal before submitting a manuscript (Figure 1), the journal's or publisher's reputation and the relevance of its scope emerged as the most decisive factors. Both variables showed the highest levels of agreement, with 95.8% and 93.8% of respondents, respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing that these aspects influence their journal choice. Indexing in databases, impact metrics, and APC/payment transparency also received high scores, with over 70% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Conversely, aspects related to peer review transparency, editorial information visibility, and clear website guidelines showed more moderate levels of agreement, ranging from 60% to 70%. Finally, the DOAJ listing showed the most diverse distribution, with only 41.3% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, and a significant proportion (38.2%) choosing the neutral option. These findings indicate that, while traditional reputation- and impact-based criteria remain dominant in journal selection, openness-related factors (such as transparency and inclusion in DOAJ) are not yet consistently incorporated into researchers' decision-making processes.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

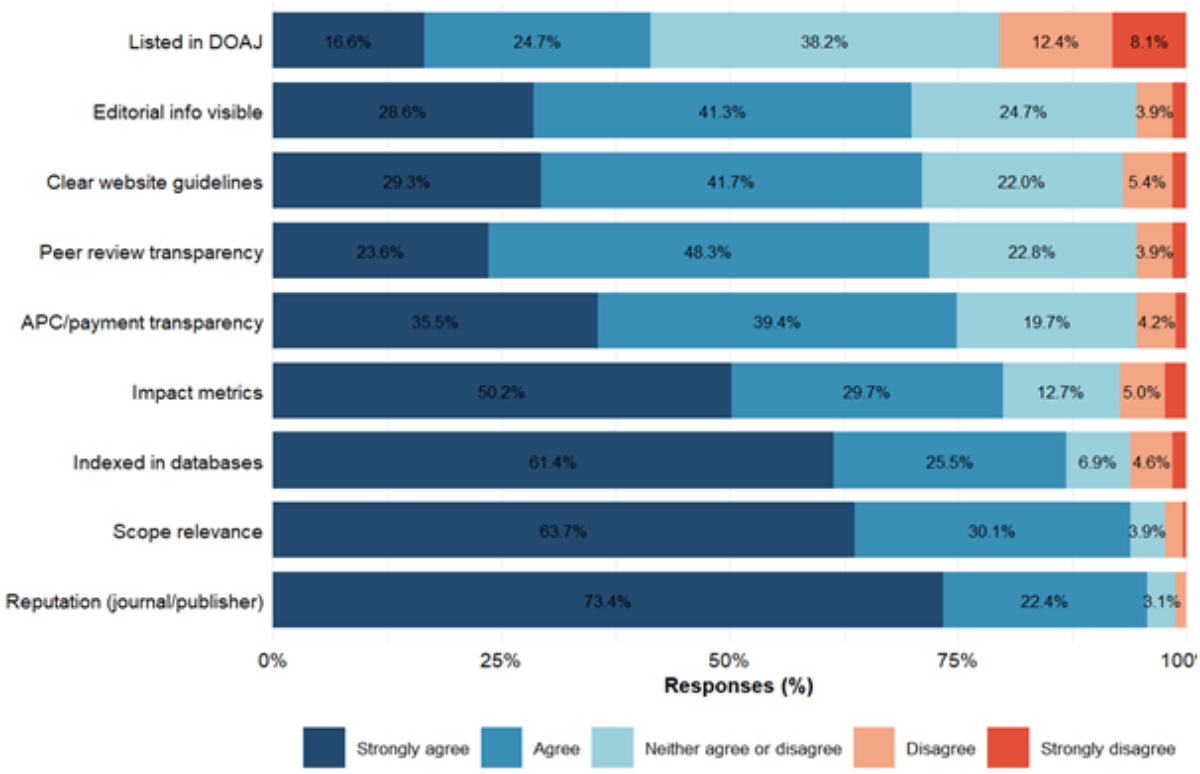

Figure 1. Measures employed by researchers to choose an academic journal before submitting a manuscript.

Regarding satisfaction levels, 49% of respondents are 'Sometimes' satisfied with the current academic publication system, 26.3% 'Very often', and 19.3% 'Rarely'. Only 2 participants (0.8%) indicated they are "Always" satisfied, while 12 (4.6%) declared they are "Never" satisfied. Figure 2 displays the data by gender, age, field, and professional title. When broken down by gender, responses are almost identical across groups. Among female researchers (97 responses), the most common answers are 'Sometimes' (52.6%) and 'Very often' (25.8%), followed by "Rarely" (16.5%) and "Never" (4.1%). Similarly, among male respondents (156 responses), "Sometimes" (47.4%) and "Very often" (26.9%) are the most frequent responses, with "Rarely" (20.5%) and "Never" (4.5%) close behind.

Regarding age, satisfaction levels tend to rise slightly among older researchers. Respondents aged 60+ exhibited the highest satisfaction, with "Very often" (42.5%) and "Always" (2.5%) together representing almost half of the group. In contrast, younger participants (aged 40–49) were more likely to choose "Rarely" (31%). Statistically significant differences were observed across age groups (Kruskal–Wallis $\chi^2 \approx 14.5$, df = 5, p = 0.005, R). Similarly, satisfaction levels varied notably by professional title (Kruskal–Wallis $\chi^2 \approx 21.0$, df=10, p=0.007), with higher satisfaction among senior academics such as full and associate professors ("Very often": 41% and 31%, respectively), and lower satisfaction among PhD candidates and early-career researchers, who mainly selected "Sometimes" (53% and 50%) or "Rarely".

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

When grouped by disciplinary field, the highest proportions of "Very often" satisfaction were observed in Medical and Health Sciences (43%) and Engineering and Technology (34%), followed by Life Sciences (26%). In contrast, Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences showed higher proportions of "Rarely" responses (39% and 24%, respectively), indicating comparatively lower satisfaction in these areas.

In summary, satisfaction with the academic publication system appears moderate across all demographic and educational sectors, with statistically significant differences only by age and professional title. Overall, these findings highlight a common sense of ambivalence towards the current scholarly publication landscape.

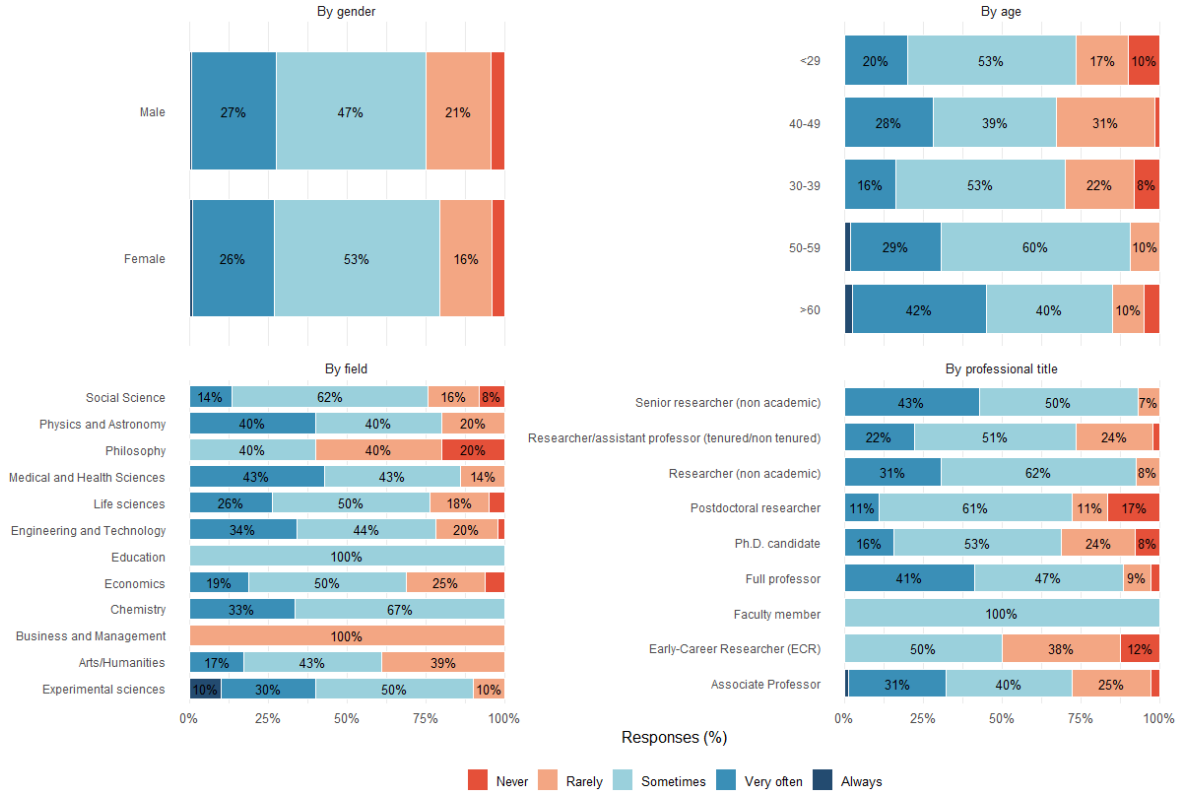

Figure 2. Percentage of satisfaction with the academic publishing system by age, gender, field, and profession title.

Predatory publishing awareness

Regarding awareness of predatory publishing practices, most respondents reported some familiarity or personal experience with the phenomenon. Nearly half of the participants (47.9%) reported discussing the issue with a colleague. Simultaneously, over one-third had direct experience with it, either as reviewers or readers (36.3%) or as authors (35.9%). Overall, one in three respondents (33.2%) reported hearing about it through social media, lectures, or presentations. In contrast, a small proportion of participants reported little or no awareness of the topic: 8.5% said they had never heard of it, and 5.8% mentioned they might have heard of it but were unsure. Awareness

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

levels varied considerably by professional title (Kruskal–Wallis, $\chi^2 \approx 21.0$, $p = 0.001$), with PhD candidates exhibiting lower awareness than senior academics, probably due to their relatively limited exposure to the publication and peer-review processes.

These findings demonstrate a high level of awareness and engagement with predatory publishing among the surveyed academic community, indicating that the problem is well recognised, frequently discussed among peers, and that many researchers have encountered it firsthand.

Figure 3. Predatory publishing awareness. The colour red indicates Low awareness ("I never heard it before"; "I may have heard it, but not sure"), orange shows Medium awareness ("Heard it in person/social media/lecture/presentation"; "Discussed with a colleague"), and green signifies High awareness ("Had to deal with it in real life as author"; "Had to deal with it in real life as reviewer/reader, etc.").

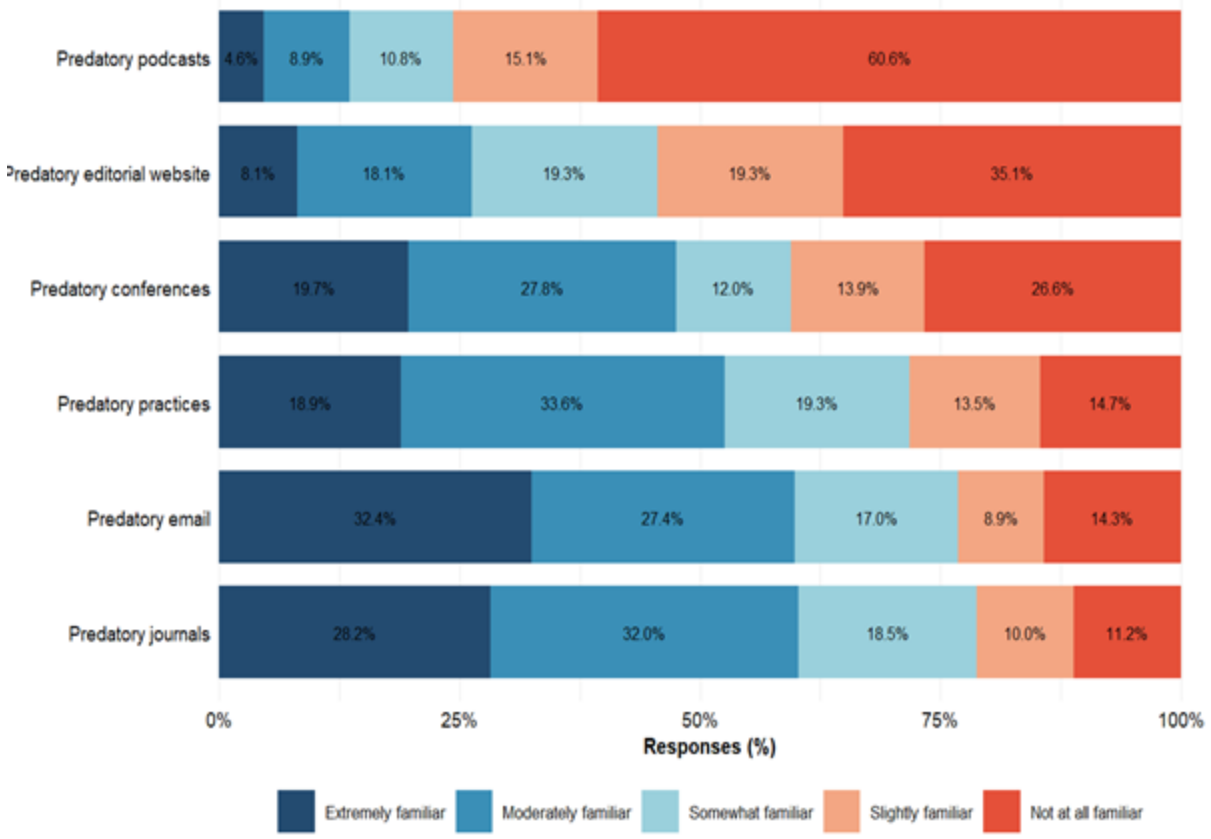

Figure 3. Understanding of predator-related concepts.

Respondents showed varying levels of familiarity with different aspects of predatory publishing (Figure 4). Overall, predatory journals and predatory emails were the concepts most recognised by participants. Specifically, 60.2% of respondents reported being moderately (32.0%) or extremely familiar (28.2%) with predatory journals, and a similar pattern was observed for predatory emails, with 59.8% indicating moderate (27.4%) or high familiarity (32.4%). In contrast, predatory podcasts were the least familiar: 60.6% of participants reported no familiarity, and only 13.5% report-

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

ed moderate or high familiarity. Awareness of predatory editorial websites was also limited: 35.1% were not at all familiar, and just 26.2% indicated greater familiarity (moderately or extremely familiar).

Familiarity with predatory practices and predatory conferences occupied an intermediate position. About half of the respondents (47.5% and 52.5%, respectively) reported moderate or extreme familiarity, suggesting that awareness of these issues is uneven and possibly linked to direct experience in the academic publishing process. These results indicate that exposure to predatory practices increases with proximity to the publication process, while peripheral formats (e.g., podcasts, websites) remain less recognised among academics.

The characteristics most strongly linked to predatory journals were aggressive or spam solicitation (86.1% agree or strongly agree), unqualified editors or reviewers (84.6%), and hijacked or fraudulent websites (79.6%). Claims about indexing or partners also received high support (77.6%). In contrast, blocking web crawlers or virus risk attracted much less agreement (40.5%) and the highest levels of neutrality (37.5%), indicating lower certainty among respondents regarding this criterion. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference by age (Kruskal–Wallis, $\chi^2 \approx 17.5$, $p = 0.016$), suggesting that older researchers tended to express stronger agreement with the indicators of these editorial features.

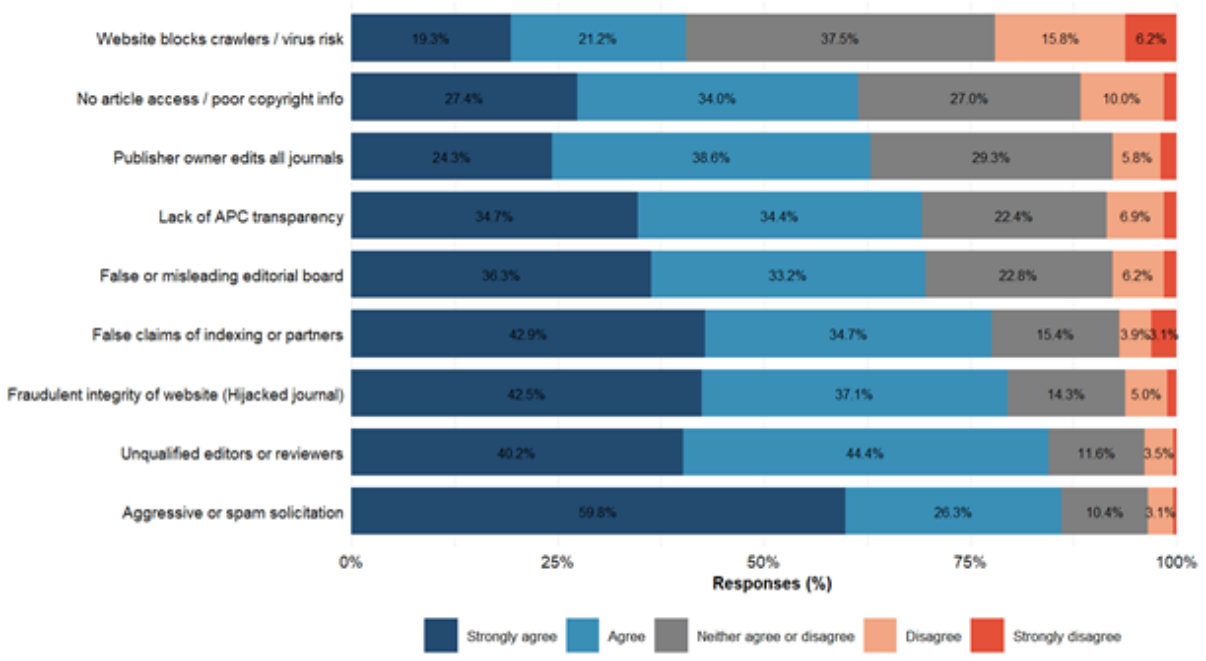

Figure 4. Features most closely linked to predatory journals.

Most respondents agreed that multiple systemic and procedural factors sustain predatory publishing practices (Figure 6). The highest agreement was for the "publish or perish" culture (84.1% agree/strongly agree), spam invitations to publish or review (84.5%), and a rapid or poor peer review process (85.3%), highlighting the perceived influence of academic pressure and the lack of control over editorial processes. Similarly, aggressive email submission campaigns (79.9%) and

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

inexperienced authors or lack of editorial support (79.6%) were also widely recognised as enabling conditions. A moderate level of agreement was observed regarding the lack of transparency in journal information (76.1%) and the lack of awareness of predatory publishing (75.7%), indicating that limited access to information and insufficient knowledge remain key vulnerabilities in the research ecosystem. Conversely, items such as lower publication costs (APC advantage) (61.8%), data falsification, plagiarism, ghost authorship (57.5%), lack of communication among colleagues (56.4%), and academic promotion pressures (53.7%) received less support, reflecting a more complex or varied perception among respondents about their significance.

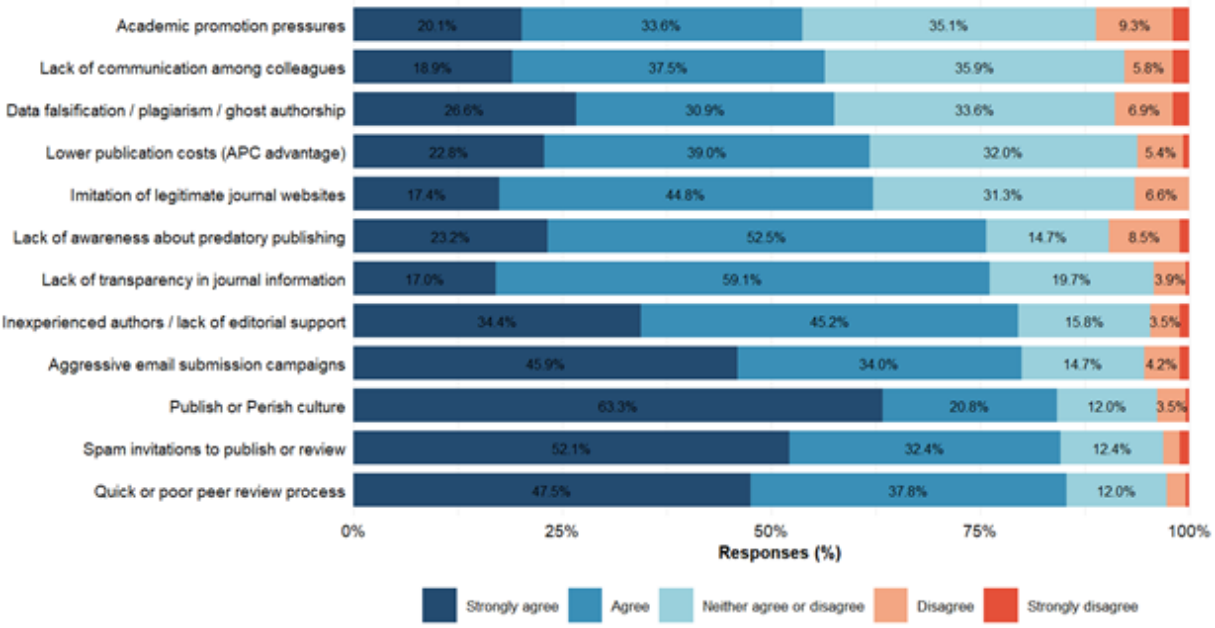

Figure 5. Predatory publishing practices.

When asked whether they had encountered any unexpected editorial malpractice or misconduct in academic journals, 30.5% of respondents answered Yes (n=79), while 44.8% reported No (n=116), and 24.7% were unsure (n=64). Statistically significant differences emerged by professional title (Fisher's exact test, p=0.011), suggesting that senior academics are more likely to have experienced or identified editorial misconduct than early-career researchers. These results suggest that although a significant proportion of participants have not directly experienced editorial misconduct, almost one in three have perceived or encountered such practices at least once in their academic careers.
Among those who reported being affected (n = 143), the majority indicated they had experienced misconduct as an author (67.8%), followed by as a reviewer (21.0%) and as a member of an editorial committee (5.6%). A smaller proportion referred to experiences as students (2.1%) or mentioned other situations (3.5%). These findings emphasise that editorial misconduct is most often perceived within the author–journal interaction, rather than during peer review or editorial service stages.
Regarding specific predatory practices experienced by respondents (Figure 7), the most frequently reported was spam or phishing email solicitation to submit a manuscript, indicated by 75.5% of

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

participants (108 participants). This was followed by poor or unclear peer-review experiences (n=94; 65.7%), indicating that communication and transparency in the review process still raise significant concerns. Other reported issues included unsolicited or unexpected payment requests not previously mentioned (9.1%), being added as an editorial member without prior consent (8.4%), and being unable to withdraw one's work from a journal (4.9%). A small proportion of respondents (0.7%) also reported instances of unauthorised access to their work or personal data, while 11.2% selected other circumstances. Statistically significant differences were found by professional title (Fisher's exact, p = 0.023), suggesting that senior academics (e.g., full and associate professors) were more likely to report experiencing these issues than early-career researchers. Overall, these results indicate that experiences with deceptive editorial practices differ and often stem from unsolicited communication or insufficient peer-review procedures.

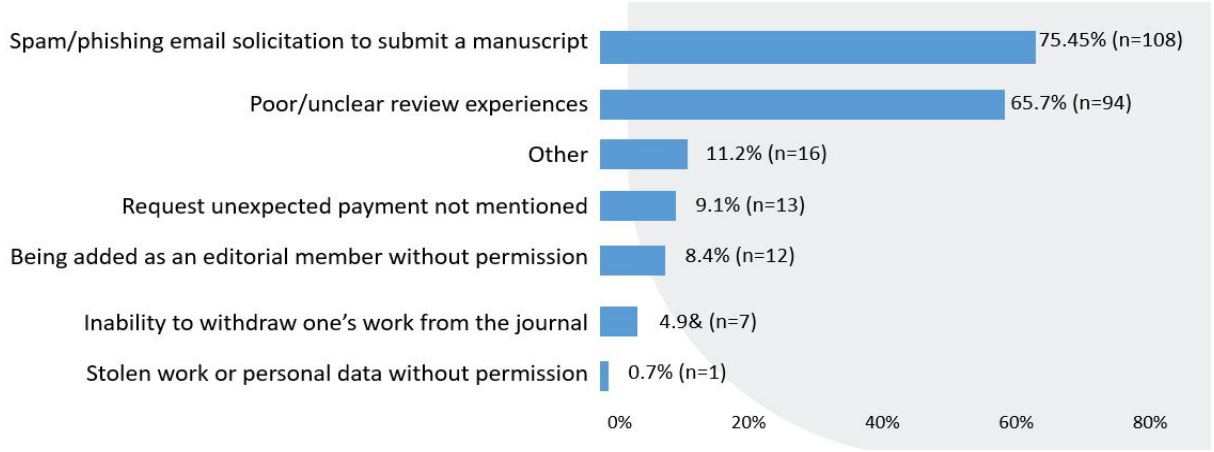

Figure 6. Predatory practices experienced by the respondents.

Integrity awareness, verification tools, and research ethics training

Nearly half of the respondents (47.9%) reported that they had never heard of such tools or the use of verification tools (e.g., Beall's List,[24] Cabells Journalytics,[25] COPE,[26] or Think.Check.Submit.,[27] Retraction Watch,[28]) to assess the reliability of journals or publishers. Compared to this, 18.9% stated they do not use them. Conversely, 26.6% reported at least occasional use (16.6% "sometimes" and 10% "yes"), indicating limited but existing awareness of these resources within the academic community.

[24] This list was deleted by Beall in 2017 and kept active by anonymous volunteers. https://beallslist.net/

[25] It is an underpayment service (Journalytics Academic & Predatory Reports) for the academic research community. https://cabells.com/solutions/predatory-reports.

[26] COPE - Committee on Publication Ethics. https://publicationethics.org/

[27] It is a checklist to help you discover what you need to know when assessing whether or not a publisher is suitable for your research.

[28] It is a database that reports retractions of scientific articles and related topics. https://retractionwatch.com/ or https://retractiondatabase.org/RetractionSearch.aspx?

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Regarding the perceived effect of predatory publishing practices on scientific integrity, nearly all respondents recognised at least a moderate influence. Most rated the impact as moderate (45.2%) or high (45.2%), while a smaller portion considered it low (9.3%) or none (0.4%). These results demonstrate a broad consensus among researchers that predatory practices significantly threaten research credibility and ethical standards.

Regarding training on research integrity and responsible conduct of research, self-directed learning was the most common approach: 70.3% of respondents reported being autodidacts ("by myself"), followed by tutoring or guidance from teachers or colleagues (36.3%) and on-the-job training (14.7%). Formal educational opportunities were less common: 14.3% had completed university courses, 4.6% had engaged in online tutorials, and only 1.2% had received training from private stakeholders. 51% of participants reported never receiving specific training on ethical publication practices. Statistically significant differences appeared across age groups ($\chi^2 \approx 16.3$, $p = 0.014$), with younger researchers more often lacking formal training. Meanwhile, mid-career and senior participants reported greater exposure to instruction on integrity-related matters.

Open-ended responses on predatory publishing in academia

Thirty-five participants provided open-ended comments on predatory publishing in academia. Their reflections discussed common difficulties in selecting an appropriate journal, as well as challenges encountered before submitting a manuscript and during the review process. Respondents' observations were thematically categorised into groups such as the Open Access model, article processing charges (APCs), scientific integrity, safelists (whitelists) and watchlists (blacklists), spam email solicitation, and peer review quality, as summarised in Table S.1 of the Supplementary Material.

Overall, participants expressed strong concerns about maintaining scientific integrity within the current "publish or perish" system and about the ongoing difficulty of distinguishing predatory from legitimate publishers. Many also emphasised the need for clearer, locally tailored information on the Open Access publishing landscape to help differentiate trustworthy editorial practices from deceptive or unethical ones. Poor-quality peer review was described as the "worst editorial practice," while aggressive email invitations were commonly seen as a clear sign of predatory activity.

4.1 Discussion

The results of this survey present a nuanced yet troubling view of Italian researchers' awareness and experiences with predatory publishing. Although awareness of predatory journals is widespread, it varies across age groups and professional categories, indicating that structural, institutional, and experiential factors continue to shape how scholars perceive and respond to deceptive publishing practices. These findings support previous evidence that predatory publishing is a systemic and multifaceted issue, rather than a marginal phenomenon limited to specific disciplines or countries (Grudniewicz et al. 2019; Shen & Björk 2015). While the sample size of 258 participants is not statistically representative of the entire research population, it is large enough to support descriptive and exploratory analyses.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Awareness and experience across age and career stages

The analysis shows that awareness of predatory publishing increases with academic seniority and research experience, particularly among respondents aged 40–49, who also reported the highest publication activity. This trend aligns with previous studies indicating that familiarity with predatory practices increases with direct exposure to editorial and peer-review processes (Manca et al. 2017; Christopher and Young 2015).

In contrast, PhD candidates and early-career researchers demonstrated notably lower awareness and familiarity, indicating their limited participation in journal selection and review. This pattern corresponds with concerns identified in the literature that younger scholars, often under intense "publish or perish" pressures (Kurambayev and Freedman 2021), are particularly vulnerable to misleading invitations and dubious editorial practices. The absence of formal mentoring and structured guidance on publication ethics intensifies this vulnerability (Shen and Shah 2023).

Structural and contextual factors shaping awareness

Within the Italian academic system, the evaluative framework coordinated by ANVUR emphasises bibliometric algorithms, journal rankings, and indexing in Scopus or the Web of Science (Baccini and Re 2025). Although these mechanisms aim to safeguard quality and accountability, they may unintentionally reinforce a publication culture that prioritises quantity and journal prestige over transparency and integrity of editorial standards. This dynamic, combined with uneven institutional support and ongoing language barriers, may explain why Italian scholars, especially those in under-resourced or non-Anglophone settings, remain vulnerable to deceptive publishing. National media have echoed similar concerns, noting Italy's relatively high exposure to questionable journals (Manca et al. 2016).

Moreover, the survey revealed that almost a third of respondents had personally encountered or observed editorial malpractice or misconduct, including unexpected publication fees, lack of peer review, and deceptive indexing claims. These experiences closely resemble the characteristics described by Beall (2012; 2017) and subsequently formalised by Grudniewicz et al. (2019), highlighting ongoing concerns regarding transparency and oversight in editorial practices.

The persistence of such practices, despite the availability of tools like *Cabells Journalytics* or *Think. Check.Submit.,* highlights that the challenge lies not only in detection but also in disseminating trustworthy information. As Koerber et al. (2020) emphasised, the post-Beall landscape continues to lack universally accepted, reproducible criteria to distinguish legitimate from predatory journals. This gap remains evident in Italy's evaluative environment.

Ethical implications and training needs

More than half of the surveyed academics reported receiving no formal training in research integrity or responsible publishing, confirming the educational gap already highlighted by Mabou Tagne et al. (2020). This lack of structured guidance hampers researchers' ability to recognise predatory practices and results in uneven awareness across institutions. Given that ANVUR has

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

recently joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), which advocates qualitative and context-sensitive evaluation (Bertocchi et al. 2015), this gap seems particularly paradoxical. The results reveal a misalignment between institutional commitments to responsible assessment and researchers' lived experiences, who continue to face intense productivity pressures in competitive environments with limited ethical guidance.

Enhancing integrity training and ethical literacy is therefore crucial, not only to prevent misconduct but also to bring Italian academia in line with the broader European initiative for Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI). Incorporating obligatory modules on publishing ethics, advocating COPE-aligned standards, and guaranteeing access to reliable resources such as DOAJ, Cabells Journalytics, and Think.Check.Submit. would be tangible measures to bridge this gap.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

This study offers one of the earliest evaluations of awareness and experiences of predatory publishing within the Italian academic community. The results confirm that the issue should be seen not just as a moral failing but as a structural consequence of evaluative pressures, funding imbalances, and uneven institutional frameworks.

Awareness is widespread but fragmented, especially among early-career researchers, who often lack proper mentoring and training. Tackling these gaps requires systemic measures: aligning national evaluation frameworks with CoARA principles, strengthening institutional mentoring and research integrity training, and promoting a non-commercial open access model with clear, evidence-based guidelines for journal evaluation.

This study has limitations in terms of representativeness, as the small sample size of 258 participants may not accurately reflect the diversity of the Italian academic community with regard to seniority, research fields and institutional type. Nevertheless, the collected data enabled meaningful statistical analysis. Additionally, because this was a voluntary survey, participants may have been more knowledgeable or more sensitive to the topic, which could introduce selection bias and overestimate their level of awareness. Considering the self-reported nature of the data, the discussion on publications in predatory journals may be affected by misconceptions or social desirability. Lastly, the applicability of the findings is limited by the study's focus on a specific geographical area. This is partly due to constraints on data management approval, which make it challenging to generalise the conclusions to other national or international contexts.

Predatory publishing both reflects and worsens deeper issues in scholarly communication, where an emphasis on visibility and performance metrics can undermine scientific credibility. Enhancing ethical standards, transparency, and institutional responsibility will be crucial to protecting the integrity of Italian research and ensuring that academic career progression does not undermine public trust in science.

Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

References*

Abalkina, Anna. 2021. "Detecting a Network of Hijacked Journals by Its Archive." *Scientometrics* 126 (8): 7123–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-021-04056-0.

Abalkina, Anna. 2023a. 'Predatory vs Hijacked Journals: A Commentary to "A 'Trojan Horse' in the Reference Lists: Citations to a Hijacked Journal in SSCI-Indexed Marketing Journals." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 49 (6): 102798. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102798.

Anderson, Rick. 2018. *Scholarly Communication: What Everyone Needs to* Know®. Oxford University Press.

Baccini, Alberto, and Cristina Re. 2025. "Is the Panel Fair? Evaluating Panel Compositions through Network Analysis. The Case of Research Assessments in Italy." *Scientometrics* 130 (4): 2093–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-025-05255-9.

Bagues, Manuel, Mauro, Sylos-Labini, and Natalia, Zinovyeva. 2019. "A Walk on the Wild Side: 'Predatory' Journals and Information Asymmetries in Scientific Evaluations." *Research Policy* 48 (2): 462–77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2018.04.013.

Beall, Jeffrey. 2017. "What I Learned from Predatory Publishers." *Biochemia Medica* 27 (2): 2. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.029.

Beall, Jeffrey. 2012. "Five Scholarly Open Access Publishers." *The Charleston Advisor* 13 (4): 5–10. https://doi.org/10.5260/chara.13.4.5.

Beall, Jeffrey. 2013. "Scholarly Publishing Free for All." *College Quarterly* 16 (2). https://collegequarterly.ca/2013-vol16-num02-spring/beall.html.

Berger, Monica. 2017. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Predatory Publishing but Were Afraid to Ask*. CUNY New York City College of Technology Edition. (New York), CUNY New York City College of Technology Edition.

Berger, Monica. 2021. *Teaching Authors about Predatory Journals in the One-on-One Consultation*. CUNY New York City College of Technology Edition. (New York), CUNY New York City College of Technology Edition.

Bertocchi, Graziella, Alfonso, Gambardella, Tullio, Jappelli, Carmela A., Nappi, and Franco Peracchi. 2015. "Bibliometric Evaluation vs. Informed Peer Review: Evidence from Italy." *Research Policy* 44 (2): 451–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2014.08.004.

Butler, Declan. 2013. "Investigating Journals: The Dark Side of Publishing." *Nature* 495: 433–35. https://doi.org/10.1038/495433a.

Cavalletto, Tommaso, 'Democrazie in crisi epistemica: il suffragio universale alla prova'. PhD diss Università di Milano Bicocca. 2019. https://boa.unimib.it/retrieve/e39773b6-8a34-35a3-e053-3a05fe0aac26/phd_unimib_823205.pdf

* Last date of access to the websites: June 15, 2026.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Christopher, Mary M., and Karen M, Yong. 2015. "Awareness of "Predatory" Open-Access Journals among Prospective Veterinary and Medical Authors Attending Scientific Writing Workshops." *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 13 (2): 22. https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2015.00022.

Ciriminna, Rosaria, Cristina Della Pina, and Mario Pagliaro. 2025. "Italy's Excellence in Research." *Heliyon* 11 (1): e41335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e41335.

Clemons, Mark, M. De Costa E Silva, Miguel, A.A. Joy, Anil Abraham, Cobey Kelly D., Mazzarello Sasha, Stober Carol, Hutton Brian. 2017. "Predatory Invitations from Journals: More than Just a Nuisance?." *Oncologist* 22 (2): 236–40. https://doi.org/10.1634/theoncologist.2016-0371.

Cortegiani, Andrea, Andrea, Manca, Manoj, Lalu, and David, Moher. 2020. "Inclusion of Predatory Journals in Scopus Is Inflating Scholars' Metrics and Advancing Careers." *International Journal of Public Health* 65 (1): 3–4. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01318-w.

Cortegiani, Andrea, Filippo, Sanfilippo, Jacopo, Tramarin, and Antonino, Giarratano. 2019. "Predatory Open-Access Publishing in Critical Care Medicine." *Journal of Critical Care* 50: 247–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrc.2018.12.016.

Cortegiani, Andrea, Andrea, Manca, and Antonino, Giarratano. 2020. 'Predatory Journals and Conferences: Why Fake Counts'. *Current Opinion in Anaesthesiology* 33 (2): 2. https://doi.org/10.1097/ACO.0000000000000829.

De Fiore, Luca. 2024. *Sul Pubblicare in Medicina: Impact Factor, Open Access, Peer Review, Predatory Journal e Altre Creature Misteriose*. Roma: Il pensiero scientifico.

Duc, Nguyen Minh, Hiep, Dang Vinh, Thong, Pham Minh, Zunic Lejla, Zildzic Muharem, Donev Doncho, Jankovic Slobodan M., Hozo Izet, Masic Izet. 2020. "Predatory Open Access Journals Are Indexed in Reputable Databases: A Revisiting Issue or an Unsolved Problem." *Medical Archives (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina)* 74 (4): 318–22. https://doi.org/10.5455/medarh.2020.74.318-322.

Frank, John, Rosemary, Foster, and Claudia, Pagliari. 2023. "Open Access Publishing – Noble Intention, Flawed Reality." *Social Science and Medicine* 317 (115592). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115592.

Grudniewicz, Agnes, David, Moher , Kelly D., Cobey, Gregory L., Bryson, Samantha, Cukier, Kristiann, Allen, Clare, Ardern, Lesley, Balcom, Tiago, Barros, Monica, Berger, Ciro Jairo, Buitrago, Lucia, Cugusi, Michael R., Donaldson, Matthias , Egger, Ian D., Graham, Matt, Hodgkinson, Karim M., Khan, Mahlubi, Mabizela, Andrea, Manca, Katrin, Milzow, Johann, Mouton, Marvelous, Muchenje, Tom, Olijhoek, Alexander, Ommaya, Bhushan, Patwardhan, Deborah, Poff, Laurie, Proulx, Marc, Rodger, Anna, Severin, Michaela, Strinzel, Mauro, Sylos-Labini, Robyn, Tamblyn, Marthie van, Niekerk, Jelte M., Wicherts, and Manoj M., Lalu. 2019. "Predatory Journals: No Definition, No Defence." *Nature* 576 (7786): 7786. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y.

Happe, Laura E. 2020. "Distinguishing Predatory from Reputable Publishing Practices." In *Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy*, 26 (8). https://doi.org/10.18553/jmcp.2020.26.8.956

Kirilova, Savina. 2021. 'Hijacked Journals - How Dangerous They Can Be?' *Academia Letters*, ahead of print, July 15. https://doi.org/10.20935/al2081.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Koerber, Amy, Jesse C., Starkey, Karin, Ardon-Dryer, R. Glenn, Cummins, Lyombe, Eko, and Kee, Kerk Fong. 2020. "A Qualitative Content Analysis of Watchlists vs Safelists: How Do They Address the Issue of Predatory Publishing?." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 46 (6): 6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102236.

Kratochvíl, Jiří, Lukáš, Plch, Martin, Sebera, and Eva, Koriťáková. 2020. "Evaluation of Untrustworthy Journals: Transition from Formal Criteria to a Complex View." *Learned Publishing* 33 (3): 308–22. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1299.

Krawczyk, Franciszek, and Emanuel, Kulczycki. 2021. "How Is Open Access Accused of Being Predatory? The Impact of Beall ? S Lists of Predatory Journals on Academic Publishing." *Journal of academic librarianship* 47 (2): 2. WOS:000632489100001. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102271.

Krawczyk, Franciszek, and Emanuel, Kulczycki. 2021. "On the Geopolitics of Academic Publishing: The Mislocated Centers of Scholarly Communication." *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 4 (1): 1984641. https://doi.org/10.1080/25729861.2021.1984641.

Kumar, Akhilesh, Ravi Gupta, Krishna Kant Tripathi, and Rajani Ranjan Singh. 2022. "Predatory Publications in the Era of the Internet and Technology: Open Access Publications Are at Risk." *Athens journal of mass media and communications* 8 (2): 79–92. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajmmc.8-2-1.

Kurambayev, Bahtiyar, and Eric, Freedman. 2021. "Publish or Perish? The Steep, Steep Path for Central Asia Journalism and Mass Communication Faculty." *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 76 (2): 2. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695820947259.

Linacre, Simon. 2022. *Predator Effect: Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals*. Maize Books. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12739277.

Mabou Tagne, Alex, Niccolò, Cassina, Alessia, Furgiuele, Elisa, Storelli, Cosentino Marco, and Marino Franca. 2020. "Perceptions and Attitudes about Research Integrity and Misconduct: A Survey among Young Biomedical Researchers in Italy." *Journal of Academic Ethics* 18 (2): 193–205. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-020-09359-0.

Maccarini Silvia, Nuria Bautista-Puig, and Eva Méndez. 2026. "Predatory Publishing in Academic Scientific Publications. Awareness among Research Communities in Italy". *Zenodo*, March 28. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.19286209.

Manca Andrea, Gianluca, Martinez, Lucia, Cugusi, Daniele, Dragone, Zeevi, Dvir, and Franca, Deriu. 2017. "The Surge of Predatory Open-Access in Neurosciences and Neurology." *Neuroscience* 353: 166–73. Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroscience.2017.04.014.

Manca Andrea, Lucia, Cugusi, Daniele, Dragone, and Franca, Deriu. 2016. "Predatory Journals: Prevention Better than Cure?." *Journal of the Neurological Sciences* 370 (November): 161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jns.2016.09.052.

Manley, Stewart. 2019. "Predatory Journals on Trial: Allegations, Responses, And Lessons For Scholarly Publishing From FTC v. OMICS." *Journal Of Scholarly Publishing* 50 (3): 183–200. Wos:000464577600002. https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.50.3.02.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Martinino Alessandro, Gabriele Campagnoli, Sofia Dallavalle, Allison Soto, Sjaak Pouwels, and Frank Smeenk. 2024. "Investigating Country-Specific Perceptions of Predatory Journals and Their Impact on Scholarly Integrity. A Systematic Review". *Cureus*, 16(7): e64674. http://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.64674.

Maurer, Elke, Nike Walter, Tina Histing, et al. 2021. 'Awareness of Predatory Journals and Open Access Publishing among Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgeons – Results from an Online Survey in Germany'. *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders* 22 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12891-021-04223-7.

Moncada, Manuela. 2025. 'Recognizing Predatory Journals.; Riconoscere Le Riviste Predatorie'. In *Recenti Progressi in Medicina*, vol. 116. no. 2. https://doi.org/10.1701/4450.44439.

Morriello, Rossana. 2022. *Dalla pirateria dei libri all'editoria predatoria: un percorso tra storia della stampa ed etica della comunicazione scientifica*. Prima edizione. Ledizioni.

Nicholas, David, Eti Herman, Abdullah Abrizah, et al. 2023. 'Never Mind Predatory Publishers… What about "Grey" Publishers?' *El Profesional de La Información*, September 9, e320509. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2023.sep.09.

Pasqui, Valdo. 2021. 'Biblioteche Digitali e Trasformazione Digitale Della PA'. *DigItalia* 16 (1): 9–37. https://doi.org/10.36181/digitalia-00024.

Pearson, Geraldine S. 2016. "Open Access and Predatory Journals: Two Very Different Entities." *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association* 22 6: 447–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078390316668478.

Poltronieri Elisabetta, Ivana, Truccolo, Corrado, Di Benedetto, Mauro, Castelli, Mauro, Mazzocut, and Gaetana, Cognetti,. 2010. "Science, Institutional Archives and Open Access: An Overview and a Pilot Survey on the Italian Cancer Research Institutions." *Journal of Experimental & Clinical Cancer Research* 29 (1): 168. https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-9966-29-168.

Richtig, Georg, Berger, Marina, Lange-Asschenfeldt, Bernhard Friedrich, Gustav, Aberer, Werner, and Erika, Richtig. 2018. "Problems and Challenges of Predatory Journals." *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology* 32 (9): 1441–49. https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.15039.

Salehi, Mohammad, Mohammad Soltani, Hadis Tamleh, and Shohreh Teimournezhad. 2020. "Publishing in Predatory Open Access Journals: Authors' Perspectives." *Learned Publishing* 33 (2): 89–95. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1261.

Shah, Waqar Ali, Ali Rukhsana, and Lashari, Asadullah. 2022. "De-Naturalizing the "Predatory": A Study of "Bogus" Publications at Public Sector Universities in Pakistan." *Accountability in Research* 31 (2):80–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2022.2106424.

Shamseer, Larissa, David Moher, Onyi Maduekwe, Lucy Turner, Virginia Barbour, Rebecca Burch, Jocalyn Clark, James Galipeau, Jason Roberts, Beverley J. Shea. 2017. "Potential Predatory and Legitimate Biomedical Journals: Can You Tell the Difference? A Cross-Sectional Comparison." *BMC Medicine* 15 (1): 28. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Shen, Cenyu, and Christer Björk, Bo. 2015. "Predatory" Open Access: A Longitudinal Study of Article Volumes and Market Characteristics." *BMC Medicine* 13, 230. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2.

Shen, Cenyu, and Leena, Shah. 2023. "Predatory Publishing Practices: What Researchers Should Know before Submitting Their Manuscript." *Insights the UKSG Journal* 36 (October): 19. https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.631.

Siler, Kyle, Philippe, Vincent-Lamarre, Cassidy R., Sugimoto, and Vincent, Larivière. 2021. "Predatory Publishers' Latest Scam: Bootlegged and Rebranded Papers." *Nature* 598 (7882): 563–65. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-02906-8.

Teixeira da Silva, Jaime A., and Aceil Al-Khatib. 2021. "Copyright Transfer in Group-Authored Scientific Publications." *Insights-the uksg journal* 34 (April). https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.535.

Xia, Jingfeng. 2021. *Predatory Publishing*. 1st edn. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003029335.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

Appendix

Table 3. S.1.

Open Access Model	It would be beneficial to provide precise information on open science practices and open-access publications, which are too often conflated with predatory publishing. Predatory journals are more prevalent in certain research fields than in others. For instance, in the IT sector, most open-access journals are reputable and trustworthy, providing reliable sources of information, such as those published by MDPI. In my field (theoretical physics), I hardly know anyone who has published in open-access predatory journals. There is probably greater awareness. Stop the witch hunt against open-access journals that are not 'predatory', such as MDPI and Frontiers. Expanding the definition of 'predatory' to include them weakens the entire effort against genuinely predatory journals.
Article Process Charge (APC)	The Italian system means PhD candidates and early-career researchers generally do not pay to publish a manuscript. However, they contribute towards publishers for conferences and seminars. 'Pay to publish' has been a vast deal, spreading like wildfire across all journals globally, with the Italian compulsory open-access publishing. No one should have to pay to publish an article, in any journal, including the 'prestigious' ones. There are unjustifiably high charges for access, submissions, and article publication, with substantial profits going to a few private companies funded mainly through public investments in research.
Scientific Integrity	'Publish or perish' is the death of scientific integrity, as it encourages competition at all costs instead of collaboration. Some universities or research institutions permit publication in predatory journals when they should prohibit them, which is problematic because it results in the loss of public funds and can significantly influence the selection of researchers in these sectors. Even today, the checks on both the quality of publications and the journals where they are published remain minimal. On the authors' side, predatory publishing is driven by the pressure to publish numerous scientific articles to advance their careers. The practise of evaluating researchers based on the quantity of published papers rather than their quality is the most significant issue in academia, at least in my country. I am familiar with predatory publishers and journals, and it is advised that early-career researchers avoid them. The predatory publishing practices do not compromise scientific integrity if researchers avoid articles published in journals known for their 'predatory' behaviour. It is difficult to distinguish between predatory and non-predatory publishers. As researchers, we are constantly invited to submit papers or attend conferences. On the one hand, the ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research) list of scientific journals in Italy helps protect against predatory journals. However, it restricts freedom of research and dissemination. Universities should consider the aims and scope of journals rather than the quartile. The number of article citations, excluding self-citations, should be taken into account when assessing the quality of the article rather than the journal. The current system of academic publications is harmful and ineffective, with all its rankings, indices, impact factors, citations, etc. This consumes a significant amount of resources that could be better used for research and researchers, rather than for their "monitoring". Overall, the "legal" part of the system itself is morally repulsive. The illegal predatory practices are merely the most aggressive expression of a much deeper and more insidious cancer.

JLIS.it vol. 17, no. 3 (September 2026)
ISSN: 2038-1026 online

DOI: 10.36253/jlis.it-720

	Beyond strictly predatory journals, there are also structural problems in class A journals. Stop evaluating only the QUANTITY of publications and not the QUALITY; the same applies to citations. A single-authored high-quality paper in an excellent journal (based on international reputation, editorial standards, etc.) counts 1000 times more than ten papers published with many co-authors in questionable journals (despite having a good impact factor and high metrics). Predatory publishers stem from the entire scholarly publishing, indexing, and assessing process, which needs to be reconsidered.
Savelist (whitelist) **Watchlist** (blacklist)	Whitelists are recommended over Blacklists (i.e. Beall's List). Each University should share a list containing these fraudulent journals, fake conferences, etc., for consideration. Journal etiquette is not well-established, as high-quality work is published in journals that later prove to be predatory.
Spam email	There is some awareness that an email marked as spam, sent by someone unfamiliar or unknown in your sector, is most likely a scam. Aggressive email campaigns are a symptom of predatory publishers.
Peer review	Not having enough time for a detailed peer review is the worst editorial practice. Good peer review practice is essential, as it is the only way to guarantee the quality of scientific papers. It is a generally unacceptable practice to treat the work of peer-reviewed researchers as voluntary. Reputable journals should cease requiring (or even mandating) the indication of potential reviewers during submission. This can easily foster bias through friend influence.