A publisher's response to the IAP study

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I think the IAP report is remarkably strong and a hugely important benchmark that really tackles the complexity of the situation. Very many thanks to Tracey, the IAP and all the authors for this very valuable work. I was pleased to be able to participate in the report's peer review and launch event.

Having been in traditional and Open Access (OA) publishing for almost 20 years, working for several different publishers, I'd like to share my own personal perspective on predatory publishing, which resonate with the IAP report.

First, the ability to charge money for fraudulent services in scholarly publishing is possible because of a system that rewards researchers only for outputs – and only one of these at that (publications) – rather than how they practice and use their research. Not only are they rewarded for just the one type of output – a publication – but even this isn't examined on its own merits: instead, it is assessed purely on where it is published - good work in minor journals becomes invisible and poor work in prestigious journals gets lauded and rewarded. Doing work to a high standard, reporting it clearly and publishing null, negative and inconclusive results – contributing to the Integrity of Research - is actually penalised because such an open and transparent re-telling of the research – and research is messy - is then less likely to be published in a highly prized, high ranking and highly selective journal or to be seen as high-enough quality work by their peers.

Second, from a publishing perspective, fraudulence has also been made possible because money is provided to publishers for the outputs of scholarly communication – namely the publication – and not the service that the publisher provides. Like the researcher, the publisher is not rewarded for good practice – they are rewarded for their brand or for the perception of prestige that their name brings. This is why a western sounding English Language journal published in a higher-middle income country always trumps a perfectly good new journal that serves local needs in lower-middle income ones: these journals are part of the neglected periphery (e.g. see the work of Emanuel Kulczycki in Poland). This is why those researchers who do not have access to training, mentorship, tools and resources to collect, report, share, collaborate and communicate in a way that improves research are always going to be more vulnerable to authorities that require them to publish in certain prestigious journals or only in English, for example.

Third, and related, the ability for fraudulent actors to take advantage of the system is because of the commercialisation of research more generally. Starting from the second half of the 20th Century, scholarly publishers – including not-for-profit scholarly societies and large, dedicated commercial publishing companies – found a way to make large amounts of money by *renting* out all research publications, as the only output that came to be of any importance. Everyone had to keep paying rent for everything because researchers need access to all research. Rents (i.e. subscriptions or pay-to-view) are part of the predatory spectrum of practices. Commercialisation of research has also been driven by institutions and funders who use proxies of quality – such as journal rank and impact factor – to evaluate research and researchers. Ultimately, this is played out in the money received by high ranking and prestigious Universities for high-ranking faculty, which has created perverse commercial incentives for institutions and funders in a deeply inequitable negative feedback loop with publishers and journal impact factor. As long as false proxies are used to assess the quality of research, there is no motivation for institutions to ensure that researchers are trained in good practice and no motivation for funders to change how they review and evaluate grant proposals.

Fourth, predatory practices are not about Open Access. All of the three points I have mentioned already afflict the subscription publishing business as well as open access – and affect large, prestigious publishers as well as small ones – fraudulent practice has been rife in publishing at large over the past few decades, especially since the arrival of the world-wide web – a tool for immense public good that can also be abused and misused. The problem is that the services that publishers provide are conducted behind closed doors: they are not transparent. Paradoxically, in an Open Access world, it is easier to detect some of these practices or to assign blame because of a lack of transparency and openness across all publishing. The proof of this is that it is virtually impossible to compare the peer review service of one journal with that of another. The author pays -or APC model – is particularly vulnerable to such attack because it takes advantage of the ability to have global digital distribution (a good thing about OA but not APC specific) – and can scale easily: the more articles, the more money. Furthermore, the largest APCs are charged by established subscription publishers converting to Open Access but it is not clear why it is so expensive. Should authors, research funders or institutions relating to accepted papers, for example, be subsidising the time it takes to reject the 90% of articles not accepted?

These points are all symptoms of a scholarly communication system that is no longer fit-for-purpose – and no one stakeholder is to blame: we all have to work together now to build a new system of scholarly communication, as the IAP study and its ISC sister initiative state.

What are the solutions?

1. **Publishers need to make their publishing services transparent**: unbundle the services that a journal or publisher provides. Researchers, funders, institutions and the public should be able to know what actually goes into the screening service, the peer review service or the mark-up and production service i.e. those services that ensure articles are reliable and can be reused, accessed and discovered by others, and that enables all researchers, regardless of place and location to contribute equally to the world's scholarly knowledge. Transparent peer review is one obvious step but only one of many services that are needed to create a truly collaborative and global network of research – and that is what Open Science is all about and aims to achieve. Open access is just the first step.

2. **Publishers should reward researchers – their customers - for good practice**. This includes accepting robust science, even when there are null negative and inconclusive results. These are not failures but the backbone of scientific knowledge: we learn so much from what doesn't work in research and risk missing out on all the innovation that this body of invisible research provides.

   Enabling reviewers to be rewarded is a further requirement: they should gain credit and acknowledgement for providing a good service of peer review (but should not be paid so as not to create perverse incentives for, for example, "predatory reviewers"). Publishers should **train editors and reviewers** to focus on research practice and community standards of scholarship and not how to increase the prestige or impact factor of their journal citations (impact factor). Publishers should be **willing to peer review any article where researchers have met the standards of scholarship** that are appropriate to their discipline, whether through specific reporting guidelines, or making sure the data are available in an accessible and publicly available data repository. **Peer review should be transparent**, with information about the type of peer review provided, together with the peer review policies of the journal (which can be made machine readable**). Publishers can provide a range of different types of peer review:** not every article needs two in-depth peer review reports – some large multidisciplinary articles need far more, and some, perhaps, just need some ethical and technical checks and can then made available as a preprint. Finally, **publishers in higher-middle-income countries** have a responsibility to ensure that they explore a range of business models and make publishing as equitable as possible – not judged through western eyes or charged through western prices. They should support capacity building and the necessary infrastructure for publishers in lower-middle-income countries so that they can launch their own journals, train their own editors and reviewers, and publish their own regionally important research. This approach is imperative for the local and regional implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and other vital global policy agendas. The future of our planet depends on a new and transformative system of scholarly publishing.

In conclusion, I should say that – while these views are my own – they also resonate with Hindawi's values. Unfortunately, the erroneous tag of "predatory" that was assigned to Hindawi - based largely on reasons of being "other" to western approaches to publishing, being open access and located in Africa - has yet to be totally erased. We have done a lot of great work to bring research integrity to the fore in all aspects of our work and have built a solid standing with other publishers in the industry and many of the relevant external bodies and organisations through our leadership in open access, our willingness to be transparent and the approach we have taken to ensuring our journals are best serving their respective communities. We are not "predatory" but, in parts of the wider research community, the tag still lingers – highlighting the real damage and consequences of terms like "predatory" when poorly defined, understood or expressed. IAP's work in clarifying predatory behaviours should help minimise this happening in future.