

Case study

Predatory publishing – the dark side of open science?

SOURCE: De Rijcke, S., & Stöckelová, T. (2020). Predatory publishing and the imperative of international productivity: Feeding off and feeding up the dominant. In: De Rijcke, S., & Stöckelová, T. (eds.) *Gaming the Metrics: Misconduct and Manipulation in Academic Research*, pp. 101-110. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11087.003.0010>

In 2015, a significant discussion emerged in an Eastern European country, centred around the publication and evaluation of research. The catalyst for this debate was the case of a highly productive junior researcher affiliated with one of the country's most prestigious universities. At first glance, this scientist appeared to be a successful scholar, boasting an extensive record of international publications, collaborations, and co-authorships – precisely in line with the prevailing research standards established in the country. However, upon closer examination, the situation revealed a rather different story.

This researcher earned his PhD in 2007 and afterwards claimed authorship, co-authorship or co-editorship of 17 scientific monographs between 2011 and 2013, as well as over 80 journal articles from 2006 to 2015. While the sheer volume of his output was impressive, several aspects of his output raised concerns:

- 1) the author also acted as an editor in chief, editorial board member, and even publisher of some of the journals in which he published,
- 2) some of the journals in which he published were included in Jeffrey Beall's database of predatory journals,
- 3) one of his co-authors appeared to be a fictional character with fake affiliations of prestigious universities.

Amid this controversy, some whistleblowers submitted a complaint to the University's Ethics Commission. The researcher's contract was subsequently terminated; however, at the same time, the contract of the main whistleblower was not renewed.

Steps of case analysis (the Four Quadrant Method)

Step 1. Initial perception – **20 minutes**. Please, discuss the following questions in your group:

- *What are the ethical issues at stake in this case?*
- *Who are the stakeholders?*
- *How should stakeholders react to this case?*
- *What should/can stakeholders do to prevent such cases?*

Step 2. The Four Quadrant Analysis – **20 minutes**. Please, discuss this in your group and fill in the following table.

<p>I. Relevant Facts: What are the most relevant facts concerning the situation?</p>	<p>II. Uncertainties: Which features of the situation are uncertain, lacking in clarity, or controversial?</p>
<p>III. Courses of Action: What are the practically available options for providing a solution to the case (how to react to the case and how to prevent such cases in the future)?</p>	<p>IV. Contextual Features: What legal, financial and institutional policies and regulations apply to the case?</p>