

# Faculty Experiences with Predatory Conferences: A Qualitative Study

Alnajjar H<sup>1\*</sup>, Asif U<sup>2</sup>, Bano N<sup>1</sup> and Aljohani W<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Nursing, King Saud bin Abdul Aziz University for Health Sciences, King Abdulaziz Medical City, National Guard Health Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Medicine, King Saud bin Abdul Aziz University for Health Sciences, King Abdulaziz Medical City, National Guard Health Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

<sup>3</sup>College of Nursing, King Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

## Abstract

**Background:** Predatory conferences are low quality events, in which speaker slots are purchased without peer review and phony research is provided an equal forum. The events are money making business devoid of any educational value but are portrayed as genuine scholarly gatherings of experts and specialists.

**Aim:** The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of faculty members in nursing and medicine colleges who had unknowingly fallen prey to the predatory conferences.

**Methods:** Exploratory and qualitative study design using in-depth face to face interviews was employed to describe the experiences. Sample comprised of seven faculty members from the school of nursing (x) and medicine (y) in city (z) in Saudi Arabia. Graneheimian approach was used for content analysis.

**Findings:** Consequences of participation in predatory conference extended beyond financial loss. It affected the internal motivation for professional development in participants who now live with a fear of being wrongly associated with predatory conference organizers, as attempts were made to misuse their information during and after the event without consent.

**Conclusion:** Institutes should initiate awareness and education programs to familiarize researchers with the true face and exploiting nature of predatory conference organizers. Funding for fake conferences should be stopped.

**Keywords:** Predatory Conference; Faculty Members; Experiences; Exploitation

\***Correspondence to:** HEND ALNAJJAR, College of Nursing, King Saud bin Abdul Aziz University for Health Sciences, King Abdulaziz Medical City, National Guard Health Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Tel: 966 22246666 Ext. 46900; E-mail: najjarh@ksau-hs.edu.sa

**Citation:** Alnajjar H, Asif U, Bano N, Aljohani W (2020) Faculty Experiences with Predatory Conferences: A Qualitative Study. *Prensa Med Argent*, S2:025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47275/0032-745X-S2-025>.

**Received:** June 20, 2020; **Accepted:** July 31, 2020; **Published:** August 04, 2020

## Introduction

'Predators' are characterized with behavioral aspects of hunting, stealing and scavenging [1]. The term 'predatory' is borrowed to showcase the tracking, stalking, exploiting, and fraudulent behavior of fake publishers and conference organizers. The term 'predatory publishing' was initially coined by Jeffrey Beall in 2010 who described them as 'new publishers that lacked transparency and used deceptive websites to attract manuscript submissions and the accompanying author fees' [2]. Ever since then, awareness has escalated against them and several authors and researchers across the globe attempted to expose 'predatory publishers', 'predatory academics' and 'predatory conference/congress organizers' [3-6].

Predatory conferences are extended operations run by predatory publishers. They have surfaced in a time period of less than 20 years [7]. They are low quality dubious events with a 'blink of an eye' abstract acceptance without peer review. Several conferences are usually staged in the same hotel to save money, where attendees in small numbers read their papers to one another. Sponsors generate revenue by heavy

registration fees, meals and sightseeing tours bundled in the event [8]. Emergence of predatory conferences is recognized as a problem that requires awareness and investigations into their validity [9].

## Background

The predatory conference/congress organizers approach their prey in a targeted and organized manner. They spam emails of academic and scientific people and attract them with conference titles and themes congruent to their area of specialization, interest and expertise. Mercier E, et al. (2018) [10] reported that 210 unsolicited invitations were received from predatory conference organizers on a single institutional email address within a time frame of 12 months, 24.2% of which were directly pertaining to the recipients' previous work and area of interest. Schepers T, et al. (2019) [11] reported an increase in number of email invitations from 4.5% to 40.8% that were received from predatory conference organizers and publishers within a duration of 5.5 years by a surgical Foot & Ankle specialist, 2.3% of which was directly related to his sub-specialty.



The predatory conference organizers ‘feed on’ the need of researchers to be published and offer them a tempting opportunity to present their research. They lure in their prey with promises of publications in ‘hijacked journals’ which are often counterfeit websites of authentic and credible journals [8]. The patronizing and flattering tone of email invites is also hard to neglect. The recipient is momentarily elated by acknowledgments and bestowments invoking interest and obligation [12]. Researchers from the developing countries are hit hard as they may lose valuable funding and professional growth opportunities in pursuit of predatory conferences unknowingly [13,14].

The predators compete among themselves fiercely and have hoisted their own conference alert websites, building a situation where predatory conferences outnumber legitimate scholarly events [7]. One of the most effective techniques used by them is to offer a popular, sought-after and exotic vacation destination as the conference venue [12]. These conference organizers steal identities of reputable scientists and notable academicians and use their information as plenary speakers or key-participants [7].

Finding a fool proof solution is the focus for many researchers in recent years. Lang R, et al. (2019) [6] emphasized on the importance of mentorship by expert faculty on conference value and highlighted the need to develop a ‘formal tool for assessing conference quality’. Detailed studies are required to present features of predatory conferences to the naïve contributors. They may also enlighten cognizant contributors who constantly overlook the perils of participation in fake conferences and maintain a symbiotic relationship with predatory publishers [15]. Even more importantly, they will provide grounds for the funding bodies to define credence in allocations, based on actual value sought in predatory conferences reported in research studies documenting first hand victim’s account. Editorials have also been written to direct focus on the need of further research and authentication of evidences at hand [16-19].

Although individual accounts reporting bitter experiences of participation in fake conferences are documented but to the best of our knowledge, a research study describing the experiences of attendees of predatory conferences recruited as study participants is not yet reported.

## Purpose

The purpose of the study was to explore experiences of nursing and medicine faculty with predatory conferences.

## Methods

### Design

An exploratory qualitative design using in depth interviews was utilized to describe the experiences of nursing and medicine faculty members who had fallen prey to predatory conferences.

### Data Collection

Data collection ensued with purposeful sampling. Faculty members belonged to college of nursing (X) and college of medicine (Y) in city (Z) in xxxx (place of origin). Participant’s profile is shown in Table 1.

All participants had attended genuine conferences before their inadvertent participation in predatory conference. Data collection was conducted by in-depth face to face interviews using semi structured open-ended questions following informed consent. Interview duration ranged from 35-50 min. It was conducted in a calm and comfortable

**Table 1:** Participant profile.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	College	Job title	Predatory event venue
Dr. Avery	56	Male	Canada	Medicine	Assistant professor	Sydney, Australia
Dr. Grey	40	Female	Pakistan	Medicine	Assistant professor	Valencia, Spain
Dr. Bailey	50	Female	Saudi Arabia	Nursing	Associate professor	New York, USA
Dr. Pierce	43	Female	South Africa	Nursing	Assistant professor	New York, USA
Dr. Stevens	38	Female	Pakistan	Nursing	Assistant professor	Geneva, Switzerland
Dr. Torres	49	Female	Egypt	Nursing	Assistant professor	Singapore
Dr. Webber	65	Male	UK	Medicine	Associate professor	Rome, Italy

setting. Non-verbal reactions, facial expressions and attitude were noted. Interview notes were also taken. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim within a week. Member checking was done with the interviewees to endorse credibility. Interview data sets were allocated numbers and any identifying information was removed before filing to protect the privacy of the study participants.

## Data Analysis

Accuracy of the transcripts was compared to the audio recording. The transcribed data was analyzed using inductive approach proposed by Graneheim UH, et al. (2004) [20]. In the first step, transcripts were read and re-read to find evident experiences pertaining to participation in the predatory conference (body of text). In the next step, significant similar statements, comprising of phrases, sentences, words and clauses were selected (meaning unit). In the following step, the significant statements were categorized and summarized (condensed meaning unit). In the final step, conceptualization of the summarized content was done to yield themes and subheadings (coded units). Data analysis resulted in four themes with 2-3 subheadings, populated with 5 to 48 statements.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was attained by applying standards of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability proposed by Lincoln YS, et al. (1985) [21]. For credibility of the findings, the content underlying each one of the four themes was checked and compared with the interviewee’s feedback. Dependability was established in a sitting with two qualitative study design experts and the researchers by mutual inspection and discussion (in pursuit of meaning and relevancy). It resulted in a joint agreement on conclusion. In depth and rich description was provided for transferability. Confirmability was attained by an audit trail conducted on the exploratory process and initial raw data.

## Ethics

The research proposal was reviewed in KAIMARC and ethical approval was granted by the IRB in King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (Approval No. RJ19/040/J). The study participants were interviewed following informed consent. The purpose of the study was explained to them with assurance that their identities and affiliations will not be revealed and they may withdraw from the study at any point.



## Findings

Participant's experiences regarding their attendance in predatory conference fell into four main themes, namely 'entrapped', 'shocked', 'affected' and 'concerned'. Each theme had 2-3 subheadings populated with 5 to 48 statements. A brief profile of the participants is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Themes and subheadings of faculty experiences in predatory conferences.

Theme	Sub categories
Entrapped	The bait
	Missed red flags
	Cloaks of authenticity
Shocked	Light bulb moments
	The Exploitation
	The Commotion
Affected	Emotional turmoil
	Shifted conduct
	Tangible damage
Concerned	Evolution of predators
	Easy preys

### Entrapped

Whilst describing factors that contributed to their registration in the conference, the participants felt that they stepped into the trap laid by the predatory conference organizers unknowingly as it captured their particular interests and they were misled by the lucrative offers. Tailored approach had few of them ensnared.

*'I entered some keywords, location, medical education, conferences, the year and the month and so many conferences popped up, but the one that I chose, had the exact dates I was looking for'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'They were the best travel dates for me, also it was tourist season and really a good time to travel with my husband plus it was my dream destination, I jumped to the opportunity'* (Dr. Torres).

The faculty members described that they overlooked several features that gave away the true nature of the event. They recalled several instances which they found strange but disregarded at that time.

*'I clearly remember that there was no extra visa letter fee for registered accompanying person on their website initially, afterwards the information was updated. It was weird but I had already paid so much for registrations so there was no turning back!'* (Dr. Torres).

*'The most attractive thing to me was the program; at that time there were no speakers listed ... I didn't figure it out then.'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'I tried to visit gallery for their last year's event, it was not updated but I ignored it then, because I could not really think past the venue and the dates'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'There were several categories [for abstract submission], which were not even related, not falling under the umbrella of conference title'* (Dr. Avery).

*'They will constantly call you to remind you that you need to register. I received numerous calls from an American number with an xxxxx (developing country) accent'* (Dr. Pierce).

The participants described that they felt the organizers were genuinely interested in their attendance because of deep scholarly regard as they received special considerations and favors.

*'Early bird deadline was up but they still offered me the discounted*

*early bird fees. I was flattered but when I think about it now, it was a red flag'* (Dr. Grey).

*'They allowed me to submit the abstract way after submissions had closed and gave me acceptance for key note spot in 2 days. I said to myself, hey, these people truly appreciate my research'* (Dr. Torres).

On the other hand, the participants described some aspects before registration, which lead them into believing that it was indeed going to be a beneficial conference.

*'The way they advertised, it didn't seem fake, the registration process didn't seem fake. Everything was there as if it was a real conference'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'Their office was in London and the conference was in Italy, the program looked very detailed, very comprehensive, it covered vast area of neurophysiology and also my specialization area, which is hypothalamic function.'* (Dr. Webber).

### Shocked

The participants described how they were shocked when they discovered that they had signed for a predatory event. Realization dawned upon them as soon as they stepped into the venue.

*'People were seated like 'sardines in a can'. It was just one room for the entire day, no parallel sessions and no workshops'* (Dr. Pierce).

*'It was not the venue that I expected, it was like a classroom and not appropriate for a big conference... the one that we paid for'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'Scientific posters were of different shapes, sizes and colors...no unifying format.'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'I was expecting a big neurophysiology conference, it was just one room on one side and on the other side there was a Nursing Conference going on, one registration desk served both. They mounted posters at the entrance of the hotel in the walk way'* (Dr. Webber).

The faculty members verbalized their shock mixed with emotions of anger and frustration upon finding out that neither the conference program was in effect nor the renowned speakers mentioned in the program were present.

*'I was looking forward to attend the session by the FDA person mentioned in the program, they said it's cancelled. Young people who looked like students distributed badges and jute bags with some flyers for their next conference. I asked them about actual resource person but they just said that he is not available at the moment. I asked about the keynote speaker, again they were clueless. All bells rang at once'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'They simply announced that, their program is now reduced to two days, which was originally scheduled for three days. We were all shocked; we had official leaves approved to attend a three days scientific meeting'* (Dr. Grey).

The study participants described how the local organization was a remote controlled operation and the few organizers actually present at site did not fit the profile envisioned based on their email correspondence.

*'Someone is taking photographs and I ask him because I found that he speaks Arabic then I pulled him at the side and I told him, look I'm serious I'm going to call my embassy, who is organizing this? He said no, he is not here, he is sick, if you need anything, I will convey the message'* (Dr. Bailey).



*'The organizers are actually invisible or absent during the duration of the conference. Very shady characters were at site, an xxxx (developing country) and two xxxx (developing country). Every question that you ask them they would tell you, okay I will find out and let you know'* (Dr. Pierce).

*'One boy and a girl, they said they were PHD students, handing over the badges. They were constantly in contact with someone on phone; they said that they have no information about the organizers'* (Dr. Grey).

They also highlighted the surprising features of the predatory conference that they discovered by describing how it was poles apart from the genuine conferences they had attended earlier on.

*'There was no comparison with the other conferences I had been to, they just give some kind of folder, not even a bag, just folder with program paper and that's all'* (Dr. Webber).

*'Food arrangements were very poor, especially for those who opted for vegan, they queued up in a long line and they were not actually served with anything but the salad'* (Dr. Avery).

The study participants bitterly recalled that they felt even more exploited as the plot unfolded further. They were assigned role of session chair /moderator on spot without prior agreement.

*'Yeah, I found my name as an organizer. I didn't organize anything with them, I found my name on the certificates and I was not told I am part of anything in that conference, they used my credential as a Dean of xxxxxxxx and an Associate Professor in issuing the certificates. By the end of the day, they give certificate with my name and people are asking me to sign it so I said no I'm not signing it and then I went to this guy who was taking photograph and I said who put my name on the certificate, I was not told. I do not accept that, I'm calling my embassy. And I called the embassy.'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'You are told in the last moment like maybe 2 minutes before the presentation that you have to be the moderator'* (Dr. Pierce)

Another surprising aspect of the meeting was the presence of multinational attendees. There were few well-respected experts and specialists among them (equally bewildered) who had unfortunately fallen prey to the predatory conference in the same way as others.

*'A group was attending from xxx (developing country), they were all doctors and surgeons.'* (Dr. Webber).

*'Yeah, the strange thing is that when you look at people that are actually presenting, there were lots of people from UK, Canada, the US itself...'* (Dr. Pierce).

Adding insult to injury, there were accounts of being side scammed from the participants as well.

*'They forced me to book the hotel accommodation through them in the same hotel where the conference was held and I found it rather convenient, but later on when I extended my stay in the hotel, I found out that the daily charges for the same room were less than half of what they took from me...it was outrageous!'* (Dr. Grey).

*'They charged 60 Euros for my husband [registered accompanying person] lunch, when I asked the hotel next day about charges of the same lunch buffet, it was 30 Euros per person!'* (Dr. Torres).

Study participants recalled how a collective set of emotion was shared by the conference attendees, most of whom left the venue shortly. Several others did not turn up in the following days.

*'People were frustrated, were angry and very disappointed that they had paid their money and got something that was not worth it, but no one knows what to do'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'There were only about 20 people in the first session, after that everybody left, for sightseeing!'* (Dr. Webber).

### Affected

The study participants talked about the emotional turmoil that entailed their experience. They described that initially, they were not comfortable about sharing their experiences as it was embarrassing for them to admit being victim of a scam.

*'I should have known better... it is still hard for me to believe that I was an actual victim of a fraud that big ...because I am usually a very careful person'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'When I realized that I am trapped in a predatory conference, I felt very shy about it'* (Dr. Grey).

The financial implications were also big as it turned out to be a costly venture. The participants voiced their despair on how losing an opportunity to attend a good conference has affected them. It also discouraged them in their pursuit for professional development.

*'I felt betrayed so I don't want it to happen to me again so I became very cautious. It [experience] discouraged me to attend any conference. I think part of self-development and lifelong learning is when you have internal motivation to attend these things because ...you go optional it's not part of your contract and I think it reduced that internal motivation for learning...'* (Dr. Bailey).

*'I wasted my professional leave, it is only one chance in the whole year, I don't see myself travelling for a conference again anytime soon!'* (Dr. Torres).

*'It is a waste...what can I do with the certificate of attendance, I can't even show it on my CV!'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'You know how they say that nothing is more expensive than a lost opportunity, this is exactly how I feel about it'* (Dr. Avery).

*'I am too scared to sign for another conference, it is just unfortunate'* (Dr. Grey).

The faculty members voiced their anger on how their experience was heavy on the pocket and devoid of any educational value. They also feared the prospect that their information can be used in future by the predatory conference organizers to lure in other gullible preys.

*'...without asking he was taking pictures, what will happen if they use it on their next fake conference webpage...they can do that you know, and post my image and write 'organizer' underneath?'* (Dr. Avery).

*'Can I tell u what I found out later, I googled xxx (first name), xxx (second name) and the word omics, and there was a webpage with my name and a profile mentioning the predatory event, my previous affiliation also. People will think I am one of them, I don't know how to deal with this now!'* (Dr. Torres).

### Concerned

The participants expressed concern on the expanding operations of predatory conference organizers. They described how technology (e.g. email and web design) enables them to reach their prey and camouflage their true colors.



*'They have the skills to copy, their website information is ditto to what you see on website for an authentic conference, it is easy to get fooled if you don't know they exist.'* (Dr. Avery).

*'I think technology is the strongest reason ... makes it easier for them'* (Dr. Bailey).

The participants described the deliberate conduct of the fake event organizers, fearless of being exposed.

*'They know that people who have seen their real faces will be so embarrassed that they will not speak about their experience. I usually take a selfie with the organizers but this one, in predatory conference never gave me a chance to take his picture. Everyone who accidentally ends up in a predatory conference should take pictures of the people who are local organizers, many pictures, they will be scared, because right now, they are deliberate and getting fearless day by day'* (Dr. Avery).

The participants told us that some of their peers were not bothered by the fact that they had attended fake conferences, especially when the expenses were not paid out of their own pockets and compared it to experiences of others, whom they met in the predatory conference.

*'I met this one lady attending with me coming from xxxx (developing country), who saved all year round to come to this one conference, leaving behind her three-year-old, she was very angry. Because she had spent her own money, the damage was too big for her I think'* (Dr. Grey).

*'People just go for the venue, for travelling, so some of my colleagues don't really like the talk of predatory conference and journals, one of them even said that, if I have the knowledge I should benefit from it but should not ruin it for the rest of them. I think it is because they will get reimbursements anyways.'* (Dr. Stevens).

*'I just feel that some people really want to go to bogus conferences because they know that there will be no expert to point out faults in their [Research] presentation and they will have a chance to be session chair, judges in poster competition, because in their hearts, they think that they will not have that opportunity in a real conference.'* (Dr. Avery).

*'I think there is a very wide spectrum of people who can go to this intentionally or non-intentionally. Expert people, young people, weak people or someone who doesn't want to learn. Sometimes I felt, if people do not pay from their pocket, it is paid for them, it doesn't matter for them. They just go have fun and come back.'* (Dr. Bailey).

The study participants identified naïve scholars, young researchers and physicians and overly ambitious peers as easy targets for predatory conference organizers.

*'Flattery would be dripping from the tone in their emails. They are very persistent. You can block as many as you want, your account will have few more emails next day, it is like they have marked you and they won't ever let go'* (Dr. Torres).

*'They work around your inner desire to be known as an expert, they will call u exactly that in their emails, make you feel appreciated by talking about your distinguished published work, how valuable it is, so you either deserve a Nobel prize or to be a keynote speaker in their conference. They study their subject before they strike, their homework is good.'* (Dr. Avery).

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of faculty members in nursing and medicine regarding their participation in predatory

conference. Four themes were derived based on findings of the study namely entrapped, shocked, affected and concerned.

Although participants of this study had varying backgrounds in terms of job position, experience, gender and nationality (Table 1), yet all of them failed to identify the fake conference prior to registration. Their individual accounts indicated a defined pattern in which the predators operated. They described how the trap was laid out carefully by adorning the conference webpage with lucrative offers that could be reached by internet browsing or via a link provided in an unsolicited email. Lack of awareness is reported to be one of the major factors contributing to the flourishing business of these scam operators. A survey conducted in medical residents and faculty in University of Calgary showed that 71% faculty members were approached by presumed predatory conference organizers and publishers but only 56% had awareness regarding 'predatory science' [6].

The participants explained that they were enticed by the opportunity to present their study and share their findings. Invitation to speak is a tempting technique used by predatory organizers which is, in fact a growing menace [22]. Predatory organizers selected attractive venues to stage these substandard events. Our study showed that this was one of the major reasons for participants to register in the predatory conference. This is in line with Kovach CR, et al. (2018) [12], who explained that advertising the sought-after exotic location is just the start of the pitch, as many other tricks are revealed later on.

For the more detail-oriented mind, they provided a comprehensive conference program, mentioning credible names as speakers or organizers. It appeared to be a two-edged sword in our study. Some of the senior faculty members expressed that it was undeniably the conference program that captured their interest as it catered to their area of specialization. On the other hand, the prospect of meeting experts along with the opportunity to network was difficult to ignore by the study participants with fewer years of job experience. The participants described how the cloaks of authenticity were thick. The predatory websites mimicked authentic conferences and it was nearly impossible to differentiate between them. This is in line with Cress PE (2017) [23], who stated *'sometimes the conference name varies only by its punctuation—such as a dash—and the nuance is overlooked, just as the predators would like. One presenter was duped into participating because of the difference between Entomology 2013 and Entomology-2013'*. At this point awareness becomes crucially important. Kakamad FH, et al. (2019) [14] indicated that an 'unceasingly updating blacklist' (e.g. Kscien list) is required to expose the constantly mutating predatory publishers.

The study participants verbalized their shock upon discovering that the conference was predatory. This experience is described as an 'Alan Partridge nightmare' by Darbyshire P (2018) [24], where ten or twenty participants with absurdly diverse set of interest read papers to each other in a ridiculous setting. We came across lurking damages in case of actual attendance in predatory conferences. The credibility of the attendees was at stake as their information was often misused by the organizers who tried to paint them as part of their team. It involved identity theft, carried out either during the conference or afterwards. Without any informed consent, they printed some participant details on certificates as organizer, asked them to moderate sessions and proceeded to post their information online to trap others. The organizers never revealed their identities and in every case the event appeared to be a remote control operation. There were no limits to their greed and several exploitation tactics were in play. They were bent on maximizing



their monetary gains by subjecting the participants to overpriced meals, accommodation and sightseeing tours. The study participants shared that they now live with a fear of being wrongly associated with predatory organizers. *'I am too scared to find out where my abstract is published'* (Dr. Pierce). McCrostie J (2018) [7] mentioned similar risk poised at the reputation of genuine researchers, as their honest research might be sandwiched amidst phony abstracts in a predatory conference proceeding, made available online. Aftermath of the experience was complex. It ranged from a point where it affected them with a loss of valuable opportunity or financial damage to a point where spirits were broken and reputations were at stake.

The study participants felt that the predatory conference organizers are encouraged in absence of any control over the situation or law enforcing body where they can be reported. Disappointment laced dialogues of the study participants, who wanted to expose and report them, but had no information on how and where to do it. There is however, some light at the end of the tunnel. One of the most notorious and well known operators in predatory science is the OMICS publishing group which organizes over 3000 conferences annually with its de facto subsidiaries, which accounts to 60% of their revenue generated mainly from registration fee and pharmaceutical sponsorship [25]. The Federal Court in Nevada found them guilty of 'unfair and deceptive practices' in violation of Federal Trade Commission Act and are required to pay a fine of \$50.1m (£38m; €45m) to the US government [26,27].

Based on their experience and what they had witnessed in the predatory conference, the study participant described that the young, naïve and overly ambitious researchers are prone to a higher risk of being a successful target. This notion is supported by Darbyshire P (2018) [24], stating that un-wary students and eager academics can be easily duped by predatory conference organizers.

It came up several times during the interviews that some peers (cognizant contributors) overlook the conference value consciously and continue to travel on professional development grants, whereas others, who spend out of their own pockets, are less likely to opt for predatory conferences. This finding is also supported by McCrostie J (2018) [7] who stated; *'many researchers view the plethora of predatory conferences as opportunities to spend research funds on junkets'*. Independent attempts to expose predatory conferences are made, but it is not enough unless the institutes, who continue to grant leaves and funds, shift their stance [7,23]. The inaction of the institutes is heavily criticized by researchers who see it as a reason for the continuing growth of the predatory operations [7,24]. Institutes who plan to take a stand against funding predatory conference should also initiate education for academics, researchers and medical practitioners on how to identify and avoid them. The most effective way is to use the proposed criteria of identifying such conferences presented by some researchers [14,15, and 23]. This may be a damaging blow for predatory conference organizers as their cognizant contributors are usually the ones who travel on grants. This study has few limitations. The sample size was small and the findings were based entirely on self-reports [28,29].

## Conclusion

This is an explorative qualitative study describing the first hand experiences of faculty members who had fallen prey to predatory conferences. The actual risk poised at them lies beyond the financial implications and induces a lasting impact. The academics and researchers can immensely benefit from education given to them about predatory conferences. Workshops with training exercises enabling attendees to demarcate between legitimate and fake events

are required. Funding for predatory conferences should be brought to an end. In face of inaction, their fraudulent operation continues to flourish impeccably. Further research reporting shady facets of predatory publishers and organizers is needed.

## References

1. Margalida A, Colomer M, Sánchez R, Sánchez FJ, Oria J, et al. (2017) Behavioral evidence of hunting and foraging techniques by a top predator suggests the importance of scavenging for preadults. *Ecol Evol* 7: 4192-4199.
2. Beall J (2013) Predatory publishing is just one of the consequences of gold open access. *Learn Publ* 26: 79-84.
3. Djuric D (2015) Penetrating the omerta of predatory publishing: The Romanian connection. *Sci Eng Ethics* 21: 183-202.
4. Eriksson S, Helgesson G (2017) The false academy: predatory publishing in science and bioethics. *Med Health Care Philos* 20: 163-170.
5. Sorokowski P, Kulczycki E, Sorokowska A, Pisanski K (2017) Predatory journals recruit fake editor. *Nature* 543: 481-483.
6. Lang R, Mintz M, Krentz HB, Gill MJ (2019) An approach to conference selection and evaluation: advice to avoid "predatory" conferences. *Scientometrics* 118: 687-698.
7. McCrostie J (2018) Predatory conferences: A case of academic cannibalism. *IHE* 29: 6-8.
8. Beall J (2016) Dangerous predatory publishers threaten medical research. *J Korean Med Sci* 31: 1511-1513.
9. Heasman PA (2019) Unravelling the mysteries of predatory conferences. *Br Dent J* 226: 228-230.
10. Mercier E, Tardif PA, Moore L, Le Sage N, Cameron PA (2018) Invitations received from potential predatory publishers and fraudulent conferences: a 12-month early-career researcher experience. *Postgrad Med J* 94: 104-108.
11. Schepers T, Rammelt S (2019) The burden of predatory journal and congress requests in foot and ankle surgery. *Fuß Sprunggelenk* 17: 61-67.
12. Kovach CR (2018) Buyer beware: Avoiding the minefield of predatory conferences. *Res Gerontol Nurs* 11: 279-280.
13. Memon AR, Azim ME (2018) Predatory conferences: Addressing researchers from developing countries. *J Pak Med Assoc* 68: 1691-1695.
14. Kakamad FH, Mohammed SH, Najjar KA, Qadr GA, Ahmed JO, et al. (2019) Kscien's list; a new strategy to hoist predatory journals and publishers. *Int J Surg* 17: 5-7.
15. Eaton SE (2018) Avoiding predatory journals and questionable conferences: A resource guide.
16. Cobey KD, Mazzarello S, Stober C, Hutton B, Moher D, et al. (2017) Is this conference for real? Navigating presumed predatory conference invitations. *J Oncol Pract* 13: 410-413.
17. Yoder-Wise PS (2017) Predatory publication: The conference version. *J Contin Educ Nurs* 48: 3.
18. Laskowski-Jones L (2017) Don't fall for predatory conferences either. *Nurs* 47: 1-3.
19. Rossiter RC, Stone TE (2016) "Buyer Beware!" predatory conferences: Avoiding an expensive mistake. *Nurs Health Sci* 18: 414-415.
20. Graneheim UH, Lundman B (2004) Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Educ Today* 24: 105-112.
21. Lincoln YS, Guba EG (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications Inc, California, United States.
22. Asadi A (2018) Invitation to speak at a conference: The tempting technique adopted by predatory conferences' organizers. *Sci Eng Ethics* 25: 975-979.
23. Cress PE (2017) Are predatory conferences the dark side of the open access movement?. *Aesthet Surg J* 37: 734-738.
24. Darbyshire P (2018) Fake news. Fake journals. Fake conferences. What we can do. *J Clin Nurs* 27: 1727-1729.
25. Vakili C (2019) Predatory journals: Authors and readers beware. *Can Fam Physician* 65: 92-94.



26. Dyer O (2019) US consumer agency wins \$50 m order against predatory publisher OMICS. *BMJ* 365: 11639.
27. Federal Trade Commission (2016) Complaint for permanent injunction and other equitable relief. Case No. 2:16-cv-02022, Omics Group Inc., United States.
28. Gadamer HG, Weinsheimer J, Marshall DG (2004) *Truth and method*, (Revised edtn), Bloomsbury Academic, London, UK.
29. Vecchio M (2019) Don't get caught in the crosshairs of predatory conferences and journals. *Oncol Nurs Forum*.