

# A study with spoof paper - reflection of reviewing processes in open - access journals

Sir,

John Bohannon from the journal *Science* had submitted a spoof paper to 304 open-access (OA) journals across the board of different publisher's such as Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer, and Sage, identified from the "Directory of Open Access Journals" and Beall's list<sup>[1]</sup> with major scientific flaws, which are easily identifiable by any researcher with adequate experience. Of these, 157 journals had accepted and 98 rejected the manuscript. Thirty-six of them had commented, recognizing those flaws, finally 16 accepted the paper after commenting. Of the 157 journals, which accepted the article, 64 are based in India. This sting operation has brought to light the poor editorial quality and peer-reviewing process of these OA journals, despite the fact that the study does not have any control group with non-OA.

OA is a platform where a researcher's finding, following a scholarly, peer-reviewed process is available for free. There is no doubt that these OA publications increase the access to new knowledge for a great number of readers.<sup>[2]</sup> In fact, recent studies have shown that the numbers of OA journals have nearly doubled from around 26.3% in 2006 to 50.2% in 2010 worldwide.<sup>[3]</sup> Due to the increasing journal subscriptions, many of the OA journals are collecting article-processing charges (APC) from the authors or institutions or organizations providing funds for the research, to accomplish the journal's operations. In his study, Bohannon has shown that many of the OA journals have overlooked these simple but serious flaws because of the fact that the authors submit manuscripts knowing that there is an APC and therefore accepting and publishing the same would add to the journal's fund. The first step in a publication cycle is the editorial review followed by the peer-review process for those articles found to be within the scope of the journal and should be done in an unbiased manner. There are no specific guidelines laid down to consider who can be an editor/peer-reviewer for the manuscripts submitted to a journal. But in general, one who is involved in doing exactly the same or similar kind of research is considered preferably. Although the largest survey published till date regarding open access publishing (SOAP) from European commission under seventh framework program<sup>[4]</sup> on opinion of scientist on OA publishing highlighted that only slightly less than 20% of the researchers undermine the peer-review process, Bohannon has shown that it actually has a major impact. Each journal should have standardized procedures for selecting

editors, peer-reviewers, training and rewarding. Professional agencies for peer-reviewing process can also be considered. Journals can also carry out an initial screening of the manuscript and if found acceptable, can display it for the public and eliciting their comments and views before publishing. Some journals allow authors to suggest their peer-reviewers but recent reports<sup>[5]</sup> of hacking of the editorial system are bothersome. Recently, there is an increase in the number as well as the impact factor of many Indian OA journals.<sup>[6]</sup> Our previous study<sup>[7]</sup> had evaluated the policy of reviewing statistics among Indian biomedical journals and found that only 2/10 journals were allowing all the original articles for statistical review, only 3/10 editors were formally trained in statistics and none of them have guidelines for statistical review of their manuscripts. Unless, the publication ethics are followed by all the stakeholders in a journal, the dictum 'publish and prosper' will never be achieved.

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