LETTER

Exposing preprint piracy: Lessons from a manuscript misappropriation by a predatory journal

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The overemphasis on publication as a key metric of academic productivity, coupled with the commercialisation of scientific publishing, has opened the door to predatory publishing models that promise rapid publication without adequate peer review in exchange for an "article processing charge." Such practices can compromise the integrity of scientific evidence and weaken public trust. For instance, the unprecedented surge in publications during the Covid-19 pandemic left the scientific community scrambling to differentiate between legitimate and dubious evidence [1]. In this letter, we share our experience of a probable case of "preprint piracy," in which a predatory journal published one of our manuscripts, originally uploaded to a preprint server as part of a legitimate submission process, without our knowledge or consent.

Our manuscript, "Genetic Polymorphisms of IL-18 and Their Association with Infectious Diseases - An Update," was accepted by *Current Genetic Medicine Reports* following a standard peer-review process in May 2025 and published in June 2025 [2]. At the same time, we found that the identical manuscript had been published without our knowledge or consent by the *International Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases* [3]. While we had never submitted the manuscript to that journal, a draft was posted to the preprint server *preprint.org* at the time of our initial submission to another journal in September 2024 [4]. We contacted the office of the *International Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases*, requesting them to remove the paper. However, emails to the listed contact address (info@clinicsearchonline.com) bounced back saying "address not found", and the messages sent through the website contact form received no response. Our attempts to reach the Editor-in-Chief using an email address retrieved from their publications received no response, strongly suggesting that the journal was predatory. Also, though our manuscript was posted on the preprint server in September 2024, the predatory journal's website claimed that it had been submitted to them in March 2024 and published in April 2024, a time when the manuscript had not yet been fully drafted. Further, we have an institutional policy on Research Integrity and Publication Ethics, as outlined by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in effect since 2019 [5]. As mandated by this policy, we had obtained clearance for the manuscript from the Research Integrity Unit of our institute in August 2024, making it chronologically impossible for the manuscript to have been published in April 2024.

We informed the editorial office of *Current Genetic Medicine Reports* about the unauthorised duplicate publication in the *International Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases*. The journal team escalated the issue to the Springer Nature Piracy Team. Multiple takedown notices were issued to the predatory website. Google and Bing search engines were requested to remove the relevant content from their search results. The situation was monitored until November 2025, when Springer Nature confirmed that the *International Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases* had removed the unauthorised article. The link now led to an error page (https://clinicsearchonline.org/article/genetic-polymorphisms-of-il-18-and-their-association-with-infectious-diseases--an-update).

Our experience highlights the need to safeguard academic publishing from the increasing predatory publishing practices. Even a well-intentioned platform, such as a pre-print server designed for the early dissemination of results, can be misappropriated by predatory outlets. Hence, authors must keep a record of milestones such as first-draft completion, institutional approval, etc, as the onus is often on authors to prove that the work is original and has not been submitted or published elsewhere. Our case serves as a stark reminder that vigilant author record-keeping, continued collective action, and strict adherence to publication ethics are indispensable for safeguarding academic integrity.

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