

## *Tips on Research and Publication*

# HOW TO CHOOSE A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL FOR YOUR MANUSCRIPT

Samir Kumar Praharaj<sup>1</sup>, Shahul Ameen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor & Head, Department of Psychiatry, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka;

<sup>2</sup> Consultant Psychiatrist, St. Thomas Hospital, Changanacherry, Kerala

**Corresponding author:** Dr Samir Kumar Praharaj, Professor & Head, Department of Psychiatry, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka, India – 576104. E-mail: [samirpsyche@yahoo.co.in](mailto:samirpsyche@yahoo.co.in)

First submitted: 8/8/2019; Published online; 15/8/2019

‘Publish or perish’ notion in academia has led to a flurry of research in the biomedical field, and psychiatry is no exception. Besides the mandatory requirement for promotions, there are other reasons too for publishing research work. Sometimes it is motivated by incentives or appraisals at the workplace. Some publish as it feels good or helps them learn the subject better. It helps improve the curriculum vitae for career progression. A few do publish with an intent to disseminate the knowledge gained through research as it helps the advancement of science.

### **Where to publish?**

Once the researchers plan and execute their study, publishing the manuscript is the logical next step. Where you publish can affect your career advancement, professional reputation, and funding opportunities. While choosing a specific journal to submit their work, most authors aspire that the journal is a widely read

one so that their article is appreciated, of use in practice, and extensively cited. The speed with which the manuscript gets published too may be an important criterion, especially when the promotion is at stake.

### ***Open access journals***

The internet has allowed journals to post their content online for free access, thus vastly increasing the reach of the articles they publish. There are several open access journals of high quality, such as *Lancet Global Health*, *BMJ Open*, and *PLOS One*. Open access journals may be chosen to submit your manuscripts because they are likely to get you more readers. However, many open access journals charge the authors a manuscript processing fee, which may at times be a huge amount. Some journals allow a waiver for authors from developing countries like India, though. One should also remember that many open access journals are predatory, that is, though they charge you the manuscript

Please cite this article as: Praharaj S K, Ameen S. How to choose a scholarly journal for your manuscript. Kerala Journal of Psychiatry 2018; 31(2): 113-119. doi: 10.30834/KJP.31.2.2019.168

processing fee, they would not help improve the manuscript through any peer review or editing process. Also, some journals may not mention the fees involved at the beginning itself and may ask for money only much later, after you have waited for many months.

### **When is the right time to select the journal?**

There is no single right time to choose a journal for publication. Some plan this while writing the protocol, and doing so would enable you to meet all the requirements of the target journal – For example, if your target journal insists that clinical trials should be registered in a trial registry, you would have the opportunity to do that. You can also choose the journal immediately before you start writing the paper. In that case, you would be able to adopt the referencing style the journal uses and follow the limits demanded on the word count, the number of tables and figures, etc. One can also decide on the journal after the piece is written. The journal can then be selected based on the type of the manuscript, word length, number of tables and figures, etc.

### **Initial screening**

The initial step is to decide the readership for the manuscript. If it is suited to a broad readership, then journals such as *Nature*, *Science*, *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Lancet* should be preferred. If the manuscript has a narrow focus, then a journal that covers only that specific area should be the choice. If it is on a leading topic in an area, it is worthwhile to choose a journal with rapid turnover time, as delay in publishing can result in a loss of value of the manuscript. Sometimes, if the topic matches with a *theme*

*issue* that the journal has proposed, the chances of getting published get higher.

Also, consider the possible geographical distribution of the readers who may be interested in your manuscript. If the topic is something that would interest readers across the globe, choose an international journal. On the other hand, if you feel that it would be of relevance and interest to readers from a specific region only, you should make the journal selection accordingly. For example, if you are writing on an issue that would be of importance only to the psychiatrists working in Kerala, then Kerala Journal of Psychiatry should be your obvious first choice. Likewise, you may also have to opt for national or continental journals.

Another trick is to scan through the reference list of your manuscript and check which journals are being frequently cited — as they have already published manuscripts which are similar to yours, they are likely to be interested in your one too.

### ***Online journal selectors***

Several online journal selectors are available. The portal JANE-Journal/Author Name Estimator (<http://jane.biosemantics.org>) identifies the 50 best journal options when you submit your title or abstract. Several publishing houses such as Elsevier (<https://journalfinder.elsevier.com>), Wiley (<https://journalfinder.wiley.com>), Springer (<https://journalsuggester.springer.com>), etc. have their similar portals. However, it is not wise to depend only on such sites. The suggested journals can be scanned to identify the best option or used as a supplement to the information obtained from manual or other search strategies.

### Scrutinise each journal

If a manuscript falls outside the scope of a journal, the editor is likely to 'desk reject' it. Hence, before submitting to a journal, you should look at its 'Aims and Scope' section.

Does the journal encourage the publication of clinical or basic science research? Or is it more interested in translational research? These are the kind of questions you should have in mind while scrutinising the section. One way to identify whether a manuscript is suitable for a

Table 1. List of reputed journals in psychiatry (not exhaustive)

General/Broad focus	Specific/Narrow focus
JAMA Psychiatry (previously Archives of General Psychiatry)	Biological Psychiatry
American Journal of Psychiatry	Journal of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences
Lancet Psychiatry	Progress in Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry
European Psychiatry	Psychopathology
British Journal of Psychiatry	Journal of Affective Disorders
Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica	Molecular Psychiatry
World Psychiatry	Transcultural Psychiatry
Comprehensive Psychiatry	International Journal of Social Psychiatry
Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease	Psychosomatics
Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry	Schizophrenia Bulletin
Psychiatry Research	Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry	Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy
Journal of Clinical Psychiatry	Psychoneuroendocrinology
Psychiatric Clinics of North America	Infant Mental Health Journal
General Hospital Psychiatry	Journal of Anxiety Disorders
Canadian Journal of psychiatry	Psychopharmacology
Current Opinion in Psychiatry	International Psychogeriatrics
Harvard Review of Psychiatry	Academic Psychiatry
Psychiatry	Addiction

the journal is to look up some current issues to check if similar articles have been recently published there.

### How to identify a good journal?

#### *Well recognised*

Choose journals that are well known in the field (Table 1) — They are likely to be read more and cited. Most of the prestigious journals are associated with societies and associations of repute and are circulated amongst and read by the members. Also, the editors and editorial board members consist of distinguished members who are well known in the respective fields. Most of these journals also find a place in the libraries and are accessible widely. Discuss with senior colleagues or librarian to find out whether the journal is well known.

#### *Indexing*

Indexing agencies collate, classify, and catalogue research publications. *Index Medicus* was a comprehensive bibliographic database of medical research articles. However, it was discontinued in 2004 as the computerised alternative, Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS), which used automation and improved ease of use, became available. MEDLARS online was soon available, which is also known as *MEDLINE*, and the access to the services is through *PubMed*, which most researchers are familiar with. Journals are indexed with MEDLINE only after scrutiny to ensure credible and quality editorial work. However, all journals that appear in PubMed or PubMed Central are not indexed in MEDLINE. To find out whether a journal is currently indexed in MEDLINE, the journal details can be searched using 'NLM Catalog' in PubMed.

*Scopus* (Elsevier) and *Web of Science* (Clarivate Analytics) are two alternate indexing agencies that identify journals of repute based on certain criteria. Manuscripts published in journals indexed in MEDLINE, Scopus, or Web of Science are considered reliable. Most academic institutions rely on these databases to identify the credentials of publications by the authors for appraisal purposes.

Some paid databases such as *EMBASE* (by Elsevier) and *PsychINFO* (by American Psychological Association) too are reputed. However, there are several other indexing databases, the quality of which is questionable. For example, *Index Copernicus* is a dubious indexing agency that has a large number of poor quality journals included under it. Surprisingly, the Medical Council of India accepts papers for promotion published in journals that are indexed in Index Copernicus.

#### *Impact factor*

The journal impact factor is a good predictor of the quality of journals and hence, can be relied upon for identifying good journals for publication. It is calculated as the ratio between the number of citations the articles published in the previous years garnered and the total number of citable items published in that period. Impact factors for journals are calculated and published in June every year by Clarivate Analytics (previously by Thomson Reuters) as *Journal Citation Reports*.

However, there are certain criticisms of the impact factor. Certain kinds of articles are cited more frequently (e.g., review articles or methods articles). Some articles that are 'super classics' in the field are popular among the readership; these are cited very frequently.

Sometimes, articles which are controversial or have methodological flaws are cited to highlight the deficiencies or for argument's sake. Self-citations are another problem if the author works in a narrow field and cites his/her work in preference to others. Despite shortcomings, this method is rigorous, and it may take several years for a new journal to earn impact factor.

One practical limitation is that Journal Citation Reports is a paid resource. Hence, if you do not have access to it, you would have to believe the impact factor a particular journal claims on its website, and this may not be reliable in all cases.

### ***Alternative metrics***

Eigenfactor Score is another proxy measure for journal quality. It weighs the value of citations to a journal by the quality of the citing journal and corrects for the excess citations seen in some fields of research. Other novel initiatives are the Eigenfactor ranking (<http://www.eigenfactor.org/>), the Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), and the Impact per Publication (IPP, <http://www.journalmetrics.com/>). Also, the acceptance and rejection rates may be indicators of the quality of a journal. A high rejection rate and low acceptance rate indicate that the journal carefully selects manuscripts based on quality, methodological rigor, and likely impact.

### ***Quartile Scores***

This depends on journal ranking based on citations in a particular subject category. Q1 denotes the top 25% of impact factor distribution, Q2 is between the top 50% and top 25%, Q3 between top 50% and lower 25%, and Q4 is the lower 25%. Those belonging to

the top two quartiles, Q1 and Q2, are considered reputed journals in the field. Quartile scores for individual journals in each subject category can be accessed through databases such as Scopus.

### ***Publisher***

Journals from reputed publishers are reliable. Among others, *Karger, Oxford, Wiley, Springer, Elsevier, BMJ, Informa Healthcare, Taylor & Francis, Thieme, and Wolters Kluwer* are well known. However, some of the not so good journals also may be published by these publishing houses, making it difficult for authors to choose.

### ***Peer review***

All reputed journals follow a structured peer review process. If the details of the peer review process are mentioned in the journal website, it is more credible. Blinded review, in which the reviewer would not know the identity of the authors or their institution, yields a more objective evaluation of a manuscript. On the other hand, open review, in which the author and the reviewer would know each other's identity, ensures transparency in reviewing.

### ***Where not to publish***

Journals which are dubious include predatory journals, hijacked journals, and those promoted by predatory publishing. Kscien's list of predatory journals is an updated version of the former Beall's list that listed the predatory journals, based on a set of criteria. It lists dubious publishers, standalone journals, hijacked journals, and misleading metrics.

### ***Predatory journals***

Behaviours of journals suggestive of a predatory nature include a promise of a very

quick publication, claims about fake impact factors, presence of plagiarised material in the published articles, and a lack of transparency regarding ownership, editors, and publishers. The journal or publisher website may appear unprofessional and contain a lot of grammatical errors. The title of the journal may mimic that of reputed journals, most likely with an intention to confuse unsuspecting authors (e.g., “American Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience”). Also, the scope of the journal may appear very broad, cutting across disciplines (e.g., medical and engineering, or medicine and surgery).

### *Hijacked journals*

These are duplicates or fake versions of reputed journals indexed in MEDLINE or Scopus, which offer to publish research faster, usually for a fee. They utilise the title, ISSN number, and other details of the original journals and a similar sounding website address to dupe unsuspecting authors. Usually, the hijacked journals appear for a

very short time only, until the real journal discovers them and takes action.

### *Fake metrics*

Fake impact factors are supplied by companies to predatory journals. The values are mostly made up either by these companies or the journals themselves and announced on their websites. Naïve authors may not differentiate between authentic and fake impact factors and may submit to predatory journals. As mentioned earlier, the authentic impact factors can be accessed through the Journal Citation Reports. Table 2 is a partial list of fake indexing bodies and fake metrics.

### *Spamming*

Soliciting manuscripts is another indicator of predatory journals. Typically, spams praise an earlier publication by the researcher, however insignificant, and seek for submissions. They promise to publish fast, with a substantial article processing charge. On careful observation, all the features of predatory

Table 2. List of fake indexing bodies and fake impact factors (not exhaustive)

<b>Fake indexing</b>	<b>Fake impact factors</b>
Index Copernicus	General Impact Factor
Scientific Indexing Services	Global Impact factor
Directory of Research Journals Indexing	Journal influence factor
Academic Journals Online	Science impact factor
Global Research Journals	Universal impact factor
Scientific Research Publishing	Journal Impact Factor
World Open Access Journals	Cosmos Impact Factor
Scholar Journals	Advanced Science Index
Medical Science Journals	Research Journal Impact factor

Journals become apparent, including fake metrics. It is interesting to note that the message is always addressed to the first author of the paper but is delivered to the corresponding author!

### **Parting comments**

Despite all the precautions, it may be difficult to identify which journal is not reliable. Choose to publish in the journals that are well known in the field and recommended by librarians or senior researchers. However, it may not always be possible to publish your work in such high impact journals. The other alternative is to publish in regional journals which are indexed in MEDLINE, such as Asian Journal of Psychiatry, Asia Pacific Psychiatry or East Asian Archives of Psychiatry. Among the Indian journals in the field of psychiatry, none is currently indexed in MEDLINE. However, Indian Journal of Psychiatry and Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine are indexed in Scopus and may be considered.

It always pays to submit your manuscript to a reputed journal with a higher impact factor after ensuring that your manuscript falls within its scope so that in the event of rejection, the constructive comments help to improve the manuscript before submitting to the next best one. However, submitting an average manuscript to a high impact journal may lead to fast rejection and subsequent frustration. Similarly, a good manuscript submitted to a lower quality journal may ensure acceptance but lower credibility to the researcher. It is worthwhile to identify the right journal for the manuscript by striking a balance between the two.

### **Further Reading:**

1. Abbott JH. How to choose where to publish your work. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther* 2017;47(1):6-10. doi: 10.2519/jospt.2017.0102.
2. Beall J. Best practices for scholarly authors in the age of predatory journals. *Ann R Coll Surg Engl* 2016;98(2):77-9. doi: 10.1308/rcsann.2016.0056.
3. Castillo M. Is your journal indexed in MEDLINE? *Am J Neuroradiol* 2011;32(1):1-2. doi: 10.3174/ajnrA2119.