



## Predatory Conferences are Cybercrimes: Be Careful What You Sign up for!

*Sue Turale*

**Abstract:** Today, there are many scams on the internet, including predatory publishing, predatory journals and predatory conferences. These fraudulent activities are a form of cybercrime and cause reputational damage to science and scientists in many disciplines. These activities also threaten the integrity of modern health care and scholarship. In this paper, the scamming associated with predatory conferences is discussed. An email is the most typical way researchers are asked to sign up for a predatory conference.

Nurses, midwives and others are warned of the potential for lost funds, time, effort and emotional investment if they invest in a non-existent conference or one of low quality. Vigilance is needed by experienced scholars and clinicians, as well as early career researchers and graduate students, to try to detect when conferences are not what they seem. Suggestions are given here to try to determine if the conference is predatory. Understanding the extent of predatory conferences and evidencing clear strategies to reduce the likelihood of being scammed are much needed. While many papers are published about this problem, there is a lack of research, and this is an opportunity for nurses and midwives to consider for their next project. Action is clearly needed to reduce or eliminate these scams, and individuals and groups affected by predatory conferences need to report this to their institutions who must refer the matter to law enforcement agencies.

*Pacific Rim Int J Nurs Res 2023; 27(3) 399-403*

**Keywords:** Caution, Cybercrime, Emails, Predatory conferences, Nursing, Midwifery, Research, Scholarship, Scams

### Introduction

In this editorial, I want to caution readers about predatory conferences. Some of you might have heard of predatory journals or predatory publishing; the former is where authors are encouraged by email to submit their papers to dubious journals. These predatory journals make promises of fast peer review and publication in what seems at face value to be a

*Correspondence to: Sue Turale, DEd, MNurStud, FAcN, FACMHN, Visiting Professor Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai Thailand. Editor, Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research. E-mail: turalecmu@gmail.com*

reputable online journal. However, after acceptance, many unsuspecting authors receive an email asking for large sums of money to cover publishing costs.

Here I want to focus on predatory conferences since these are of great concern to science, like predatory

journals and other forms of predatory publishing. Unfortunately, many nurses and midwives, as well as other disciplines around the world, do not know of these fraudulent activities. Simply defined, predatory means preying on something or hunting or stalking. One of the definitions given by the Cambridge Dictionary is that “a predatory person tries to get things from other people in a way that is unfair.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, for little effort, predatory conference organizers work to get people to sign up and pay for attendance at bogus conferences, no matter the quality of submitted abstracts or presentations. These organizers are cybercriminals, and their online activity has been ongoing for at least two decades.

### **Background and context**

Conferences are important to academics, researchers, clinicians and other groups wanting to network and collaborate to extend knowledge and practice nationally or internationally. Unfortunately, too often, I have heard of colleagues or graduate students being so happy to have received invitations to conferences, and sometimes these prove to be predatory. Sometimes it has been too late for me to warn them to do their homework about the invitation because they have already paid out money which can never be retrieved. More on that later.

I agree with these authors, who have done an excellent systematic review of the literature about predatory conferences and predatory journals:

*“Predatory publishers or specialized conference groups organize them; they have the common goal of profit-making and no interest in advancing the frontiers of science and knowledge. The predatory conferences use WebCrawler to locate information of authors, potential attendees from the journals’ websites.”<sup>2, p176</sup>*

Over the years, I have had many papers published in journals and elsewhere and presented at conferences,

and this information is readily available on the internet with my email address. It is from these that the fraudsters have taken details about me. In my experience, the process of their “predatory” behavior often follows a similar approach. Emails often appear in my inbox with effusive greetings, trying to flatter me on my publication or presentation and inviting me to present a paper at a conference. Before I became very wise to these emails and just deleted them, I often looked at the conference’s website. At one stage, I was once nearly on the point of paying for attendance at one of these conferences but saved the money after discussing the veracity of the matter with a colleague. Now these emails and home pages of the conferences ring alarm bells for me. But for others, predatory conferences do not raise suspicions or may not be easy to identify.

### **Experiences of colleagues**

Two of my colleagues signed up for what turned out to be a predatory conference in Tokyo. They had spent a lot of money on international travel, accommodation and conference fees and arrived at the conference venue to find a room had been booked. But no organizers were in attendance, and nothing had been organized for a conference. So, they and other attendees decided to organize their conference! Another colleague arrived at what she thought was the conference venue to find confused like-minded nurses from four countries trying to find the conference location without success. Their funded conference attendance was in the pockets of fraudsters. On both occasions, my colleagues were embarrassed but angry about their naivety. The loss of time, scholarly effort, valuable conference leave at work, and a loss of money compounded their emotional investment! Over the years, four of my graduate students and a colleague have written excitedly to me about invitations to conferences, but luckily, I was able to warn them in advance about not paying money or sending abstracts. They were horrified to think they were nearly duped by cybercriminals.

## **Suggestions to identify predatory conferences**

If you receive an email invitation to a conference, here are some suggestions and explanations to identify if that conference is predatory. These suggestions are compiled from my own experiences and those of various authors.<sup>2,3,4</sup> First, it is essential that you read the email carefully and then look at the website of the conference to try to determine if it is a genuine conference:

If it is a predatory conference, the text of the email about the predatory conference often contains spelling and grammatical mistakes. You may also find errors on the conference website.

There may be extravagant claims about the conference being a prestigious event. The location is often a selling point and might seem more of a vacation experience. To you, this might seem a desirable place to go, for example, Rome or Athens.

The originating email address is often a free email one, such as Gmail or Hotmail and does not appear to belong to a known and reputable organization. Usually, you receive multiple follow-up emails if you have not responded to the first email. If you start correspondence with the organizers, there might be increasing pressure to join the conference and pay the required subscription by a specific date. Requests for further specific information may be met with implausible or terse responses or unanswered.

The name of the conference is often similar to another reputable conference, making it difficult to determine if it is fake.

Most often, it is not clear who is holding the conference. If the organization's name is given, it is not well-known or bears a similarity to a reputable organization. At this stage, it is important for you also to do a web search about the organization or the conference. Additionally, many predatory conferences are advertised as multidisciplinary, hoping to attract attendees from many disciplines. The topics are

often wide-ranging and varied without focusing on a particular theme. Predatory conferences are also often advertised as global or international in scope, again to attract attendees.

The conference's homepage often stands out for its lack of information that genuine conferences have, for example, specific details about the writing of abstracts or previous conferences that have been held. The names and photographs of scholars may be displayed as part of the conference's scientific team, an attempt to increase credibility. However, these scholars may not be aware that their details have been lifted from their academic institution's home page.

There are often promises that the decision about your abstract will be fast-tracked and accepted presentations will be published in a journal or special issue (which might be non-existent or a predatory publication!). Part of these bogus promises may include that papers presented at the conference will be published in Scopus or Web of Science-indexed journals.<sup>3</sup> This might seem a good selling point for novice researchers to have a conference presentation and a journal article from one event! But unfortunately, the same cybercriminals are often involved in predatory publishing and predatory conferences.

Look for information about all the costs involved. Predatory conferences charge a lot of money for attendance and processing your abstract. However, sometimes the various costs of attendance at the conference may be hard to find. And the first you know about the expensive cost of being involved is when you receive an emailed invoice on acceptance of your abstract. Too often, authors feel obligated to pay the money. And if only a small number of people pay up, this is a lucrative business for the fraudsters.

Another suggestion is to seek the advice of librarians. They often have better resources to identify if a conference is predatory. Also, get the advice of respected colleagues about whether a conference might be predatory, and this is especially vital for early career

researchers or graduate students. Still, even experienced scholars or researchers get caught out in these scams.

Listen to your intuition if any of the above points worry you after your sleuthing. Do not correspond with or sign up for these conferences; block their emails. There will be other opportunities to present your work.

### **Strategies for the future**

A message to everyone reading this paper is to be very cautious about what you sign up for. Tell others about the predatory conferences, for many nurses and midwives do not know of their existence. Educators and clinicians are responsible for spending time with students informing them of the need to be vigilant and careful when receiving emails about what seems to be excellent opportunities to conference and network. Universities and other educational institutions are responsible for providing clear policies about the identification and use of conference funds and supporting staff in their scholarly endeavours.

A search of databases reveals an increasing number of articles written on predatory conferences from different disciplines worldwide, many containing helpful information. However, a recent systematic scoping review<sup>5</sup> on predatory conferences found that little research is being undertaken on this problem. It seems that this is an essential matter for nurse and midwifery scholars to consider for a future project.

The potential for reputational damage, loss of money, time and effort because of these fraudsters is a matter of concern to us all and the legal side of the problem. In all of the articles on predatory conferencing I have read thus far, very few have mentioned the reporting of predatory conferences to legal authorities.

Predatory conferences, like predatory journals and other forms of predatory publishing, are cybercrimes that need to be dealt with by the law. If these fraudsters catch you out, I urge you to report the crime to your institution, which has a responsibility to support you. All institutions of higher learning and governments have a duty to assist law enforcement agencies in actions to stop this criminal activity.<sup>6</sup>

### **References**

1. Cambridge Dictionary. Definition of Predatory. 2023 [cited 2023 May 6]. Available from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/predatory>
2. Nisha F, Das AK, Tripathi M. Stemming the rising tide of predatory journals and conferences: a selective review of literature. *Annals of Library and Inform Stud (ALIS)*. 2020;67(3):173–82.
3. Papanikos GT. Predatory publishing, predatory academics, predatory conferences and predatory universities. Working Paper, No 02/2022. Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). 2022 [cited 2023 May 17]. Available from: [https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Papanikos\(2022\)-Predatory-Publishing.pdf](https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Papanikos(2022)-Predatory-Publishing.pdf)
4. Asadi A. Invitation to speak at a conference: the tempting technique adopted by predatory conferences' organizers. *Sci Eng Ethics*. 2019;25(3):975–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-018-0038-0>.
5. Godskesen T, Eriksson S, Oermann MH, Gabrielsson S. Predatory conferences: a systematic scoping review. *BMJ Open*. 2022;12:e062425. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-062425.
6. Darbyshire P, Hayter M, Frazer K, Ion R, Jackson D. Hitting rock bottom: the descent from predatory journals and conferences to the predatory PhD. *J Clin Nurs*. 2020;29:4425–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15516>

## การประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวงเป็นอาชญากรรมไซเบอร์: โปรดใช้ความระมัดระวังในสิ่งที่ลงชื่อสมัคร!

Sue Turale

**บทคัดย่อ:** ในปัจจุบันมีการหลอกลวงหลายรูปแบบในอินเทอร์เน็ต รวมถึงการหลอกลวงในรูปแบบสำนักพิมพ์ หลอกลวง วารสารหลอกลวง และการประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวง วิธีการหลอกลวงหรือการฉ้อโกงในลักษณะดังกล่าวจัดว่าเป็นอาชญากรรมไซเบอร์และก่อให้เกิดความเสียหายทางด้านวิชาการและส่งผลกระทบต่อนักวิชาการในหลาย ๆ สาขาวิชาชีพ นอกจากนี้ยังคุกคามต่อเสถียรภาพของการดูแลสุขภาพสมัยใหม่และความเป็นวิชาการอีกด้วย บทความนี้อภิปรายเกี่ยวกับการหลอกลวงในรูปแบบการประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวง ซึ่งส่วนใหญ่ นักวิจัยมักได้รับอีเมลเชิญชวนให้สมัครเข้าร่วมประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวง

พยาบาล ผุ้สมัคร และนักวิชาการอื่นๆ ได้รับคำเตือนว่าอาจเกิดการสูญเสียค่าใช้จ่าย เวลา แรงกาย และแรงใจหากมีการทุ่มเทลงไปที่การประชุมทางวิชาการที่ไม่มีอยู่จริงหรือคุณภาพต่ำ จึงจำเป็นต้องมีการเฝ้าระวังโดยนักวิชาการและผู้ปฏิบัติทางคลินิกที่มีประสบการณ์สูง ตลอดจนนักวิจัย นักศึกษาระดับบัณฑิตศึกษา โดยการพยายามตรวจสอบว่าการประชุมวิชาการนั้น ๆ มีลักษณะของการหลอกลวงหรือไม่ บทความนี้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะที่จะช่วยตรวจสอบว่าการประชุมวิชาการ มีลักษณะของการหลอกลวงหรือไม่ ในขณะที่มีบทความที่น่าเสนอปัญหานี้หลายฉบับแต่ยังไม่มีการศึกษาเป็นงานวิจัย ดังนั้นจึงเป็นโอกาสอันดีที่พยาบาลและผุ้สมัครอาจพิจารณานำไปศึกษาต่อไป การศึกษาเพื่อทำความเข้าใจกับขอบเขตของการประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวงและศึกษากลยุทธ์ที่จะขจัดปัญหาการหลอกลวงในลักษณะดังกล่าว จึงมีความจำเป็น บุคคลและกลุ่มบุคคลที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวงควรรายงานสิ่งที่เกิดขึ้นกับองค์กรของตน ซึ่งอาจมีการดำเนินการต่อไปทางด้านกฎหมายเพื่อลดปัญหาดังกล่าว

*Pacific Rim Int J Nurs Res 2023; 27(3) 399-403*

**คำสำคัญ:** การเตือน อาชญากรรมไซเบอร์ อีเมล การประชุมวิชาการหลอกลวง การพยาบาล การผุ้สมัคร วิจัย ความเป็นวิชาการ การหลอกลวง

*Correspondence to: Sue Turale, DEd, MNurStud, FACN, FACMHN, Visiting Professor, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Editor, Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research. E-mail: turalecmu@gmail.com*