

# Predatory Publishing in Nursing Journals: A Systems-Based Analysis Using the Predation Index

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Predatory publishing remains a persistent concern in nursing scholarship, yet identification approaches often rely on binary classifications or list-based designations that obscure variation among journals. This study examined predatory publishing in nursing using a systems-based, behavior-focused approach.

**Methods:** A dataset of 265 nursing journals was assessed using the Predation Index, a behavior-based instrument that evaluates observable publishing practices associated with predatory risk. Journals with publicly available information were scored and categorized as 1–3 (lower levels of predatory indicators), 4–6 (moderate levels of predatory indicators), or 7–10 (high levels of predatory indicators). Findings were interpreted using the Journal Systems Framework, which conceptualizes journals as systems shaped by governance, capacity, and intent. Longitudinal comparison was conducted with journals identified in a 2016 study.

**Results:** Of 265 journals, 166 had sufficient information for assessment. Among these, 27 (16%) scored in the lowest range (1–3), 45 (27%) in the intermediate range (4–6), and 94 (57%) in the highest range (7–10). The remaining 99 journals were no longer available for assessment. Journals drawn from exclusionary lists were distributed across all score categories, indicating that lists function as risk screens rather than definitive classifications. Longitudinal analysis found many journals identified in 2016 had ceased operation, reflecting system instability.

**Conclusion:** Predatory publishing in nursing is best understood as a systems-level phenomenon rather than a quality continuum. Using behavior-based criteria within a systems framework helps distinguish structurally stressed journals from exploitative ones and supports more precise, ethically grounded responses to research integrity concerns.

## Keywords

Publication ethics, editorial governance, journal evaluation, journal systems framework, editorial infrastructure, predatory journals

## Background and Purpose

The threat to the integrity of the scholarly literature in nursing posed by predatory journals has been discussed for more than a decade (Cobey et al., 2018; Oermann et al., 2023). Predatory journals are characterized by deceptive publishing practices, failure to adhere to editorial standards, and prioritization of publisher profit over contribution to the scholarly record. A recent report from Cabell's suggests that more than 20,000 predatory journals now operate across academic fields, including nursing (Linacre, 2026).

A substantial body of literature has described characteristics associated with predatory publishing. In a Delphi study, participants identified deceptive practices (for example, misleading or not verifiable claims about the editor, editorial

board, and publisher; solicitation of manuscripts through aggressive emails; fake impact factors; promise of a rapid peer review; misleading claims about indexing); lack of transparency about journal operations; and failure to follow accepted publishing standards as some of the characteristics of predatory journals (Cukier et al., 2020). Other studies

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found that predatory journals frequently promise rapid publication (often within one to two weeks) with questionable or absent peer review. Additional warning signs include fabricated or misleading impact metrics; absence from major indexing databases such as MEDLINE, the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Scopus, or Web of Science; editorial board members without relevant expertise; unclear or hidden publication fees; and aggressive spam solicitation (Cobey et al., 2018, 2019; Davis, 2025; Gabriellson et al., 2021; Laine et al., 2025; Memon, 2019; Oermann et al., 2016, 2018).

An early study in nursing identified 140 predatory nursing journals from 75 publishers (Oermann et al., 2016). At that time, most were newly established. A subsequent study examining 358 articles published in predatory nursing journals found frequent design flaws, content errors, and lack of relevance to nursing practice (Oermann et al., 2018).

Predatory publishing poses downstream risks. When misinformation or unreliable findings from predatory journals are cited in established publications, problematic content is disseminated through the scholarly literature (Laine et al., 2025; Oermann et al., 2019, 2021; Rice et al., 2021; Watson & Zhang, 2025). For example, 814 articles in established nursing journals were found to cite content from predatory journals; in a random sample of 204 of these, most were research reports (Oermann et al., 2018). In a broader study, 31% of 3,671 articles published in predatory journals were cited at least once in Web of Science–indexed publications (Watson & Zhang, 2025). Authors may be victims of predatory publishing, not realizing they submitted their manuscript to a predatory journal, or may choose one of these journals to ensure a fast publication of their article. Publishing in these journals can damage the credibility of the author's research and their reputation and wastes their time and money. Articles published in predatory journals are not indexed in major bibliographic databases such as MEDLINE and CINAHL, used to locate articles in a search. If a predatory journal ceases publication, the article may no longer be available.

Although awareness of predatory publishing has increased, research studies in nursing remain limited. A scoping review identified 4,967 articles on predatory publishing in healthcare, yet only 77 were research studies about predatory journals, and only 11 were conducted in nursing (Oermann et al., 2023). Furthermore, little research has examined the contemporary nursing journal landscape using structured behavior-based tools that assess the behaviors and characteristics of predatory journals (for example, if they have misleading claims about the editor and editorial board, indexing, and peer review; lack transparency in the article processing fee; and use spam emails to solicit manuscripts) and that interpret findings within a systems-level framework.

It is also important to distinguish between predatory journals and capacity-constrained/under-resourced journals, as defined in the Journal Systems Framework (JSF; Nicoll, 2026a, 2026b). Predatory journals are characterized by

intentional deception, such as misleading claims about peer review, fabricated editorial boards, and inaccurate indexing statements, often accompanied by aggressive solicitation practices and opaque fee structures. In contrast, capacity-constrained/under-resourced journals may demonstrate limited infrastructure, inconsistent editorial processes, or incomplete website documentation, but do not necessarily engage in intentional deception. This distinction is consistent with a systems-based understanding of publishing, in which observable risk indicators may reflect structural constraints rather than intentionally trying to exploit authors.

The purpose of this study was to examine publishing practices among nursing journals identified on exclusionary lists using a structured assessment tool: the Predation Index, developed and validated by Hinze et al. (2026), and to compare these findings with results from a prior 2016 study that first identified predatory publishing practices in nursing. The Predation Index evaluates journals based on observable publishing practices associated with predatory risk and assigns scores across three ranges: 1–3 (lower levels of predatory indicators), 4–6 (moderate levels of predatory indicators), and 7–10 (high levels of predatory indicators). For this study, exclusionary lists are defined as curated compilations of journals identified as potentially predatory or deceptive based on observable publishing behaviors. These lists function as risk-identification tools rather than definitive judgments, flagging journals that may warrant closer evaluation. This study sought to (1) characterize nursing journals across Predation Index score ranges; (2) compare contemporary journals with those identified in the 2016 study (Oermann et al., 2016); and (3) explore the implications of exclusionary list–based identification approaches when interpreted through a systems-level lens.

## Research Questions

1. What proportion of nursing journals identified on exclusionary lists fall within each Predation Index score range (1–3, 4–6, 7–10)?
2. What observable publishing practices characterize journals within each score range, and how do patterns differ across ranges?
3. How do journals identified in the 2016 study compare with contemporary journals when evaluated using the Predation Index?
4. How does exclusionary list membership align with assessment of publishing risk?

## Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the JSF (Nicoll, 2026a, 2026b), which conceptualizes scholarly journals as socio-technical systems shaped by governance structures, editorial capacity, resource allocation, and publisher-level incentives. Rather

than treating journals as static entities defined solely by reputation or list membership, the JSF emphasizes how observable editorial practices emerge from the systems in which journals operate.

Within this framework, problematic publishing behaviors may arise from different underlying system dynamics. Some reflect structural weaknesses or capacity limitations, whereas others reflect deceptive journal practices and systems that intentionally exploit authors. Distinguishing between system stress and system exploitation is therefore essential for understanding variation among journals identified on exclusionary lists. System stress refers to publishing environments in which journals operate under capacity constraints or limited infrastructure, resulting in inconsistent editorial practices, incomplete transparency, or evolving governance structures without evidence of intentional deception. In contrast, system exploitation relates to journals in which publishing practices are intentionally structured to generate revenue through misleading claims, unverifiable editorial leadership, and inadequate peer-review processes. Although both configurations may exhibit observable risk indicators, their underlying dynamics, and implications for authors, editors, and institutions, differ substantially.

In this study, the JSF serves as an interpretive framework rather than a measurement tool. The Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026) provides a behavior-based assessment of publishing practices associated with predatory risk. The JSF is used to contextualize Predation Index findings by linking observable behaviors to potential underlying system structures.

## Methods and Procedures

### Study Design

This study employed a descriptive, cross-sectional design with a longitudinal comparison component. The aim was to characterize publishing behaviors among nursing journals identified on exclusionary lists using a behavior-based assessment instrument, the Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026), and to compare findings to a 2016 study of predatory nursing journals (Oermann et al., 2016). The JSF (Nicoll, 2026a, 2026b) was used for interpretive analysis.

### Journal Identification and Dataset Construction

A dataset of 265 nursing journals was constructed from two sources: (1) journals identified as predatory in the 2016 study by Oermann et al. ( $n = 140$ ), and (2) journals with “nursing” in the title listed in Cabell’s Predatory Reports ( $n = 201$ ). The combined dataset underwent systematic deduplication based on journal title, publisher, URL, and observable characteristics; 76 duplicate entries were removed. Records referring to the same journal under variant titles or URLs were reconciled into a single entry. To support longitudinal analysis, journals from the 2016 Oermann et al. study were incorporated into the dataset and flagged to indicate prior inclusion.

Of the 140 journals identified in 2016, only those that remained discoverable and had sufficient publicly available information were eligible for reassessment.

### Assessment Instrument

Journals were evaluated using the Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026), a 10-item behavior-based instrument assessing transparency, editorial governance, peer review practices, solicitation behavior, and publisher conduct. Items are scored dichotomously (true (ie, present) = 1, false (ie, absent) = 0), yielding total scores ranging from 0 to 10. Because the instrument assesses the presence of risk indicators, scoring is intentionally oriented toward risk accumulation: a value of 1 reflects the presence of a potentially problematic feature, and higher total scores indicate greater observed predatory risk.

Example items include:

- There is no editorial board, or a partial or unverifiable editorial board (1 = true)
- The journal provides no information about publication ethics (1 = true)

Consistent with Hinze et al. (2026), journals were grouped into three score ranges:

- 1–3: Lower levels of predatory indicators
- 4–6: Moderate levels of predatory indicators
- 7–10: High levels of predatory indicators

These score ranges are descriptive categories derived from the structure of the Predation Index and do not constitute independent classifications developed by the present study. The Predation Index is available online at the website of the International Political Science Association, which includes a video describing its development and use: <https://www.ipsa.org/publications/predatory-publishing>

### Reliability and Consistency of Assessment

Four reviewers independently scored approximately one-quarter of the dataset each. To support calibration, a subset of 16 journals representing all score ranges, including journals that were no longer active, was independently scored by all reviewers.

Exact agreement across all four reviewers was observed for 42% of journals. Pairwise agreement ranged from 50% to 83%, with most reviewer pairs demonstrating agreement in approximately three-quarters of cases. These findings indicate substantial consistency in overall journal characterization, despite expected variability in scoring individual Predation Index items.

Formal inter-rater reliability coefficients were not calculated, consistent with the design and intended use of the

**Table 1.** Distribution of Journals by Predation Index Score (Hinze et al., 2026).

Predation Index Score	n (%)
1–3	27 (16)
4–6	45 (27)
7–10	94 (57)
Subtotal (assessable)	166 (63)
Not assessable/no longer available	99 (37)
Total dataset	265 (100)

Predation Index. The use of multiple reviewers, calibration scoring, and independent assessment procedures supports confidence that observed patterns reflect systematic differences among journals rather than individual reviewer bias.

### Analytic Approach

Analyses were descriptive and included frequency distributions and cross-tabulations of Predation Index scores. Longitudinal comparisons focused on journals from the 2016 study that remained assessable at the time of review. Findings were interpreted using the JSF as a conceptual lens.

### Ethical Review

Institutional Review Board approval was not sought because the study relied exclusively on publicly available journal and publisher materials, involved no interaction with human participants, and included no identifiable private information.

## Results

### Overall Distribution of Predation Index Scores

The current dataset comprised 265 nursing journals identified from an exclusionary list or from our previous study, of which 166 had sufficient publicly available information to permit Predation Index assessment. Among assessable journals, 27 (16%) scored 1–3 (lower levels of predatory indicators), 45 (27%) scored 4–6 (moderate levels of predatory indicators), and 94 (57%) scored 7–10 (high levels of predatory indicators) (see Table 1). The remaining 99 journals (37%) were not assessable (e.g., website no longer available). This distribution demonstrates heterogeneity in observed publishing practices within journals identified on exclusionary lists.

These findings indicate that exclusionary list membership did not uniformly align with assessment of predatory publishing risk. Although many journals identified on exclusionary lists demonstrated high Predation Index scores, a substantial proportion exhibited moderate or lower levels of predatory risk indicators. This heterogeneity suggests that exclusionary list membership reflects identification of potential risk rather than uniform publishing behavior. Behavior-based assessment,

therefore, provides a more detailed analysis, distinguishing between journals exhibiting structural exploitation and those demonstrating fewer or context-dependent risk indicators.

### Journals Scoring 1–3

Journals scoring between 1 and 3 on the Predation Index exhibited a limited number of predatory risk indicators. These journals generally had identifiable editorial leadership, described peer-review processes, and provided information regarding publication fees.

Predation Index indicators that were present most commonly related to incomplete website documentation, limited transparency regarding editorial workflows, or basic web infrastructure. Overtly deceptive practices were infrequently observed within this score range.

### Journals Scoring 4–6

Journals scoring between 4 and 6 demonstrated a moderate accumulation of predatory risk indicators. Cross-tabulation of Predation Index items within this group revealed that the most frequently flagged indicators related to editorial governance transparency, clarity of peer-review processes, and publisher-level practices.

Common patterns included unclear or inconsistently described peer-review processes, limited information about editorial roles or decision-making authority, and ambiguous publisher accountability. Explicitly deceptive practices (e.g., fabricated editorial boards or false indexing claims) were less consistently observed than in journals scoring 7–10.

### Journals Scoring 7–10

Journals scoring 7–10 demonstrated high levels of predatory risk indicators. These journals frequently exhibited misleading or unverifiable claims regarding peer review, editorial leadership, or indexing status; unclear governance structures; aggressive solicitation practices; and publisher-level clustering (e.g., portfolios of numerous similarly structured journals). Multiple indicators frequently co-occurred within the same journal, suggesting patterned rather than isolated behaviors. Predatory risk indicators in this group were often accompanied by evidence of instability over time, including changes in journal identity, shifting publisher affiliations, or website discontinuity.

### Country and Geographic Patterns

Analysis of journal publishing locations revealed geographic diversity across all Predation Index score ranges. Journals scoring 1–3, 4–6, and 7–10 were published across multiple regions, including high-, low-, and middle-income countries. No single country or region was uniquely associated with high Predation Index scores. However, journals scoring 7–10 were more likely

**Table 2.** Predation Index Score Distribution for Reassessable 2016 Journals (n = 40).

Predation Index Score	n (%)
1–3	11 (27.5)
4–6	11 (27.5)
7–10	18 (45.0)
Total	40 (100)

to be associated with publisher-level clustering across multiple jurisdictions, which refers to situations in which a single publisher manages multiple journals that are based in different countries or geographic regions. These arrangements may reflect centralized publishing operations that extend across jurisdictions, rather than independent local journals.

**Longitudinal Comparison with Journals Identified in 2016**

Of the 140 journals identified in the 2016 study of predatory nursing journals (Oermann et al., 2016), 40 (29%) remained discoverable and had sufficient publicly available information for Predation Index assessment. Among these journals, 11 (28%) scored 1–3, 11 (28%) scored 4–6, and 18 (45%) scored 7–10.

Journals scoring 7–10 demonstrated persistence of high levels of predatory risk indicators over approximately a decade. Journals scoring in the lower ranges exhibited fewer observed indicators at the time of reassessment. Journals that could not be reassessed were largely discontinued or inaccessible (see Table 2).

**Discussion**

This study advances understanding of predatory publishing in nursing journals by integrating a behavior-based assessment instrument, the Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026), with a

systems-level interpretive framework, the JSF (Nicoll, 2026a, 2026b). Together, these approaches allow differentiation among journals with low Predation Index scores (1–3), intermediate scores (4–6), and high scores (7–10) without relying solely on binary or list-based classifications. As shown in Table 1, nursing journals in the current dataset were distributed across these score categories, underscoring that predatory publishing is best understood as a structural system phenomenon rather than as a simple dichotomy, meaning that predatory behaviors emerge from interactions among publishing infrastructure, governance, incentives, and resource constraints, rather than solely from the actions of individual journals. This interpretation is consistent with the JSF, which conceptualizes journals as operating within broader publishing environments shaped by structural and system-level dynamics.

Figure 1 further illustrates the interpretation of Predation Index Scores with the JSF and represents this structural system phenomenon by illustrating how observable publishing behaviors align with broader system-level interpretations. The Predation Index identifies behavioral signals, while the JSF provides a structural interpretation of those signals, distinguishing patterns of system stress, elevated predatory risk, and system exploitation. In this way, Figure 1 operationalizes predatory publishing as a structural system phenomenon rather than a binary classification (ie, predatory or not predatory) of individual journals.

**Differentiating System Stress from System Exploitation**

A central contribution of this study is the empirical distinction between system stress and system exploitation. Journals scoring in the lowest Predation Index range (1–3) generally demonstrated limited numbers of predatory indicators and maintained identifiable editorial leadership, stated peer-review processes, and fee transparency. While some risk signals were present, these tended to reflect incomplete

System Stress	Elevated Predatory Risk	System Exploitation
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Predation Index 1–3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance present</li> <li>• Editorial leadership identifiable</li> <li>• Infrastructure limitations</li> <li>• Risk indicators limited</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Predation Index 4–6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance signals uneven</li> <li>• Transparency inconsistent</li> <li>• Publisher practices ambiguous</li> <li>• Accumulation of risk indicators</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Predation Index 7–10</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deceptive claims</li> <li>• Fabricated or unverifiable governance</li> <li>• Aggressive solicitation</li> <li>• Publisher-level predatory portfolio</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.** Predation index score ranges interpreted through the journal systems framework (JSF).

Note: Predation index scores reflect observable behaviors. The JSF provides structural interpretation of these behavioral patterns.

documentation, limited infrastructure, or governance inconsistencies rather than overtly deceptive practices.

Journals scoring in the intermediate range (4–6) exhibited a different pattern. These journals demonstrated multiple predatory indicators, including weaknesses in editorial transparency, unclear peer-review descriptions, and inconsistent governance signals. However, they did not uniformly display the concentration of deceptive practices observed in journals scoring 7–10. Rather than representing a midpoint on a single continuum, the intermediate category reflects structural heterogeneity: journals with multiple predatory indicators and signs of governance instability, but not at the threshold observed in journals scoring 7–10.

In contrast, journals scoring 7–10 demonstrated persistent and co-occurring indicators of predatory publishing embedded in system design. These journals frequently exhibited misleading or unverifiable claims regarding peer review, editorial leadership, or indexing; aggressive solicitation practices; and publisher-level clustering across large portfolios of journals. Within the JSF, such journals represent predatory systems governed by structures that prioritize revenue generation over scholarly integrity. These findings underscore the distinction between journals that exhibit structural vulnerability and those designed as exploitative systems.

Notably, all journals in this dataset were identified through exclusionary lists (eg, Cabell's Predatory Reports). The observed variation in Predation Index scores indicates that inclusion on such lists reflects identification of potential risk rather than uniform publishing behavior. This finding underscores the importance of distinguishing between system stress and system exploitation. List membership alone should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of predatory intent; instead, journals flagged for risk warrant further evaluation. The integration of the Predation Index with the JSF enables differentiation among system configurations within a population already identified as potentially at risk, distinguishing structural vulnerabilities, such as limited infrastructure or governance capacity, from patterns of intentional deception. This approach supports more nuanced, behavior-based evaluation for authors, editors, and institutions.

### *Longitudinal Persistence and System Durability*

The longitudinal comparison with journals identified in the 2016 study (Oermann et al., 2016) provides insight into the durability of predatory systems. Journals from the 2016 cohort that remained assessable were disproportionately classified as predatory (scores 7–10) in the current dataset, demonstrating persistence of exploitative behaviors over approximately a decade. This persistence supports the interpretation of predatory publishing as a durable system state rather than a temporary deviation from editorial and publishing standards.

The continued presence of high-scoring journals suggests that exploitative systems can maintain stability when revenue

structures (eg, opaque fee practices, misleading claims about peer review or indexing) remain intact. In these cases, exploitative practices may function as stable organizational configurations supported by centralized publishing infrastructures and recurring revenue models.

At the same time, many journals from the 2016 cohort were no longer operational or lacked accessible websites, indicating instability and discontinuity within portions of the predatory publishing landscape. This suggests that exploitative systems may demonstrate differing levels of durability: some persist over time, whereas others dissolve or disappear when profitability declines or operational conditions change. Together, these patterns reinforce the interpretation of predatory publishing as a system-level phenomenon shaped by governance structures, incentives, and resource configurations rather than transient or episodic journal behavior.

### *Geographic Distribution*

The geographic diversity observed across all Predation Index categories underscores the limitations of proxy indicators such as country of origin in identifying predatory publishing. Journals scoring in low, intermediate, and high ranges were published across high-, low-, and middle-income countries. No single geographic region was uniquely associated with predatory classification.

Instead, predatory journals were more consistently associated with publisher-level patterns, including portfolio clustering (e.g., large numbers of journals launched under a single publisher), replicated website templates, and shared governance structures across titles. These findings align with emerging research using artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted analyses that emphasize structural and behavioral signals over geographic proxies (Zhuang et al., 2025). Predatory publishing appears to be better explained by system-level incentive structures than by national origin.

### *Methodological and Conceptual Contributions*

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the utility of combining a behavior-based assessment instrument with a systems-level theoretical framework. The Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026) provides observable indicators of publishing behavior, while the JSF contextualizes those indicators within broader governance and incentive structures. This integration avoids common pitfalls in predatory publishing research, including overreliance on lists, binary classification, and assumptions about intent.

Conceptually, the study contributes to a clarified model in which journals scoring:

- 1–3 exhibit limited predatory indicators and lower overall risk signals,
- 4–6 display multiple predatory indicators within structurally heterogeneous configurations, and

- 7–10 represent structurally predatory systems characterized by persistent exploitative incentive structures.

This framing supports more precise interpretation of publishing risk and encourages layered assessment approaches.

Distinguishing structural vulnerability from structural exploitation is not merely semantic. Interventions appropriate for journals exhibiting governance instability or limited infrastructure differ fundamentally from those required to address exploitative systems. A systems-based framework clarifies these distinctions and supports more proportionate and targeted responses to publishing risk.

### *Implications for Editors, Authors, and Institutions*

For editors and publishers, the findings highlight the importance of governance transparency, editorial accountability, and structural coherence in distinguishing genuine journal operations from predatory system configurations. The results underscore the importance of evaluating journals based on observable publishing practices rather than relying solely on reputational heuristics or list membership.

For authors and nurse scholars, these findings suggest that being included on a list of predatory journals alone should not be used as the sole basis for journal evaluation. Exclusionary lists may serve as useful starting points for risk identification, but absence from a list does not necessarily indicate that a journal follows sound editorial and publishing practices. Instead, authors should assess governance, transparency, and editorial oversight when evaluating journals. This approach supports more nuanced and ethically grounded decisions about where to publish.

Observable indicators should also be interpreted in context. For example, the presence of an incomplete website or limited infrastructure does not necessarily signal structural exploitation. In contrast, patterns such as unverifiable editorial leadership, misleading indexing claims, and aggressive manuscript solicitation practices warrant heightened concern. Layered assessment approaches—beginning with risk-identification tools and followed by close examination of governance transparency and editorial accountability—may provide more accurate evaluations than reliance on list membership alone.

For institutions and research integrity bodies, the study supports the use of layered assessment approaches, in which exclusionary lists serve as initial risk screens and behavior-based tools provide analytic clarification. Such approaches can reduce overgeneralization and focus attention on journals that pose sustained structural risk to scholarly communication.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, journal assessments were based on publicly available information at the time of review, including journal and publisher websites. As a result, a subset

of journals lacked accessible information to permit Predation Index assessment. Within a systems perspective, the disappearance or inaccessibility of journals may itself reflect structural instability; however, such cases could not be directly evaluated using the Predation Index and should be interpreted cautiously.

Second, although multiple expert reviewers were involved and a structured process was used, formal inter-rater reliability coefficients were not calculated. This reflects the design of the Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026), in which items represent distinct observable behaviors rather than indicators of a single latent construct. Internal consistency and test–retest reliability metrics are not appropriate for this type of instrument. The use of four reviewers, stratified calibration, and independent scoring was intended to support consistency and reduce individual reviewer bias, but some degree of subjectivity in item interpretation cannot be fully eliminated.

Third, the longitudinal comparison with the 2016 dataset was limited to journals that remained discoverable and assessable at the time of the current study. A substantial proportion of journals identified in 2016 were no longer operational or lacked accessible websites. While instability and disappearance are patterns frequently associated with predatory publishing systems, the inability to reassess these journals limits definitive conclusions about their current status.

Fourth, journals newly added to the dataset were drawn in part from exclusionary lists intended to identify predatory risk rather than to provide definitive classification. As a result, the dataset intentionally includes journals exhibiting a range of predatory indicators. Findings should therefore be interpreted as describing heterogeneity in observable publishing behavior rather than validating or invalidating any single list-based approach.

Fifth, this study focused on nursing journals included on an exclusionary list, and findings may not be directly generalizable to other disciplines. However, the integration of a behavior-based assessment instrument with a systems-level interpretive framework suggests that the analytic approach may be transferable with contextual adaptation.

Finally, the JSF was used as an interpretive lens rather than a formal analytic model. While the framework provides conceptual clarity for distinguishing structural vulnerability from structural exploitation, it does not generate predictive classifications. Future research could extend this work by applying systems-based analyses across disciplines, examining changes in system structure over time, or integrating qualitative data from editors and publishers to further validate system-level interpretations.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a systems-based examination of predatory publishing in nursing journals by integrating the Predation Index (Hinze et al., 2026) with the JSF (Nicoll, 2026a, 2026b). Rather than relying solely on binary

classifications or list membership, this approach demonstrates how observable publishing behaviors reflect underlying system structures that shape governance, accountability, and editorial practice.





The findings indicate that journals identified through exclusionary lists exhibit substantial variability in predatory indicators. Journals scoring 7–10 demonstrate persistent and co-occurring indicators consistent with structurally predatory systems. Journals scoring in the intermediate range (4–6) display multiple predatory indicators within heterogeneous structural configurations, while journals scoring 1–3 exhibit fewer observable risk signals. These lower-range indicators may reflect capacity-constrained/under-resourced publishing environments, such as incomplete website documentation, evolving editorial governance, or limited infrastructure, for example, with new journals, rather than intentional deception. These distinctions reinforce the importance of differentiating structural exploitation from structural vulnerability when evaluating publishing risk.

Longitudinal comparison with journals identified a decade earlier highlights both the durability of predatory systems and the instability that characterizes many such journals over time. The persistence of high-scoring journals supports the interpretation of predatory publishing as a durable system configuration rather than a transient deviation.

By situating behavior-based assessment within a systems framework, this study contributes a more precise and analytically grounded approach to understanding predatory publishing in nursing. For authors, editors, institutions, and research integrity bodies, the findings support layered evaluation strategies that combine risk-identification tools with careful analysis of journal governance and publisher practices. Such approaches can reduce overgeneralization and focus attention on journals that pose sustained structural risk to scholarly communication.

Addressing predatory publishing requires moving beyond lists and labels toward attention to publishing systems. The integration of the Predation Index and the JSF offers a pathway for advancing this work within nursing and across the broader scholarly ecosystem.

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### CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Leslie H. Nicoll: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Investigation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Writing – revisions.

Marilyn Oermann: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Investigation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Writing – revisions. Supervision.

Elizabeth Eisenhauer: Data curation; Investigation; Validation; Formal analysis; Writing – review & editing.

Melissa Mastorovich: Investigation; Validation; Writing – review & editing.

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The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as a language-support tool during manuscript preparation to assist with editing, phrasing, and organizational refinement. All conceptual content, analytic decisions, data interpretation, and final manuscript revisions were developed and reviewed by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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