

## Peer Review

# Review of: "Navigating the Madness of Academic Publishing"

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It is an engaging and accessible description of the publication process and key related problems many researchers are facing when publishing their work. It is good reading for the general public and undergraduate students, but it lacks depth and details for more senior academics. There are also some things that are missing and need to be clarified.

One of the jarring problems is focusing on a simplistic dichotomous divide between Global North and Global South countries/researchers (which is geographically not accurate). Countries sit on the gradient of economic and financial advantage, but this gradient is a simplistic average of the very heterogeneous research funding landscape within each country, among its institutions, research teams, and individual researchers. Painting the picture that “all researchers in the Global North/wealthy countries” have plentiful funding and high salaries vs. “all researchers in the Global South/low-income countries” are poor and cannot afford anything is a gross and harmful oversimplification which is in perfect alignment with the mantra of large commercial publishers, along the lines: “we give APC fee waivers to the researchers from a narrow selection of the poorest countries which makes us so fair and generous, and fixes all the problems with APCs....” This simplistic thinking ignores millions of researchers from the middle-income countries as well as high-income countries, where the majority of them do not hold large grants or are affiliated with well-funded institutions that can support their publication fees. The publishing landscape is increasingly inequitable, despite the claims that everything is more open and accessible now. The ones who are truly rich can get even richer, but everybody else gets even more marginalised.

The conclusion of the article is naive and simplistic - “Ultimately, meaningful change in academic publishing will require a collective effort from the scientific community to prioritize ethical and equitable publishing practices.” Unfortunately, this is not enough, given how much researchers

depend on publications in prestigious journals (science is a "reputation game") and various metrics that are controlled by commercial institutions. What is needed is support and action by those who have the power to change things in the system on a large scale – especially, the funders and research institutions. This would need to involve drastic and large-scale changes to how research and publications are funded and evaluated. Although there are some movements in this direction, they have not managed to break the stronghold of commercial mega-publishers, and more drastic reforms are needed to the whole system globally.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.