For scientists, early to press means success

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A provocative new study suggests it is straightforward to predict which academics will succeed as publishing scientists.

Those who publish earlier and more often while young are typically the long-term winners.

"For reasons that are not totally clear, some people just 'get' the publishing game early in their careers, and it's these scientists who are most likely to keep on publishing strong research," said Professor Corey Bradshaw, Director, Ecological Modelling of the University of Adelaide's Environment Institute.

"We were really surprised," said Professor William Laurance of James Cook University in Cairns, Australia, who led the study.

"It doesn't matter if you go to Harvard or a low-ranked university. If you begin publishing scientific articles when you're still a graduate student, you are far more likely to succeed in the long run."

The team scrutinized more than 1400 biologists on four continents, and then selected 182 to study intensively.

They found the researchers varied greatly - by almost a hundred-fold - in the number of scientific articles they published during their careers.

Another finding was that women faced some disadvantages in publishing research, even those who overcame the well-documented attrition of

senior female academics.

"Women have to jump a lot of hurdles in science," said Carolina Useche of the Humboldt Institute in Colombia. "Family responsibilities weigh heavily on them, and they don't seem to promote themselves as aggressively as some men do."

Language also plays a role, according to Ms Useche. "Those who grow up speaking and writing English have an advantage, because most scientific journals are in English," she said.

The research team reached two key conclusions.

First, far too few women make it to the top in science, in large part because they do not, on average, publish as often as men.

"For women scientists, it's just not a level playing field, and we need to find ways to help them advance professionally," Professor Bradshaw said.

Second, those who publish early and often are most likely to become scientific superstars, regardless of the international standing of the universities where they obtained their PhD.

"We need to pay a lot of attention to the early training of scientists," Professor Laurance said. "If we do a good job, we can give them a head start that will last their whole lives. This research gives us a good evidence base for our efforts."

Predicting publication success for biologists has been published online in *BioScience*.

More information: www.jstor.org/discover/10.1525/bio.2013.63.10.9

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