

Papers, policy documents and patterns of attention

Dr Lauren Cadwallader – lc340@cam.ac.uk
Office of Scholarly Communication, University of Cambridge

Introduction: Altmetrics have been suggested as a good tool for choosing REF impact case studies¹ for UK institutions. Inclusion in policy documents is one important and clearly demonstrable type of impact.

This proof-of-concept study investigates if there is any patterning in the types of altmetric attention received by papers that make it into policy documents in an attempt to assist in the selection of papers that will have a very definable real world impact.

Methods: A selection of 57 papers was made comprising of both papers that had been mentioned in at least 1 policy (n=28) and papers that hadn't been included in any policies (n=29). Further selection criteria were:

- An author from the University of Cambridge;
- Subject: Geography, Health or Education
- Published after 2011
- Non-policy papers were published in the same or similar journals at roughly similar times to the policy subset.
- Roughly equal distribution in terms of high V low attention paper in the two subsets.

Table. 1 Number of papers in sample by Altmetric attention score

	N in top 5% of all Altmetric scores	N in top 25%-6% of all Altmetric scores	N in bottom 75% of all Altmetric scores
Papers with policy mentions	14	10	4
Papers without policy mentions	10	11	8

Results: 1) Papers are making it into policy quicker than previously thought. Research has shown that it can take ~8-15 years for research to be included in policies^{2,3,4}. This study found the majority of papers were incorporated into policy within two years of publication.

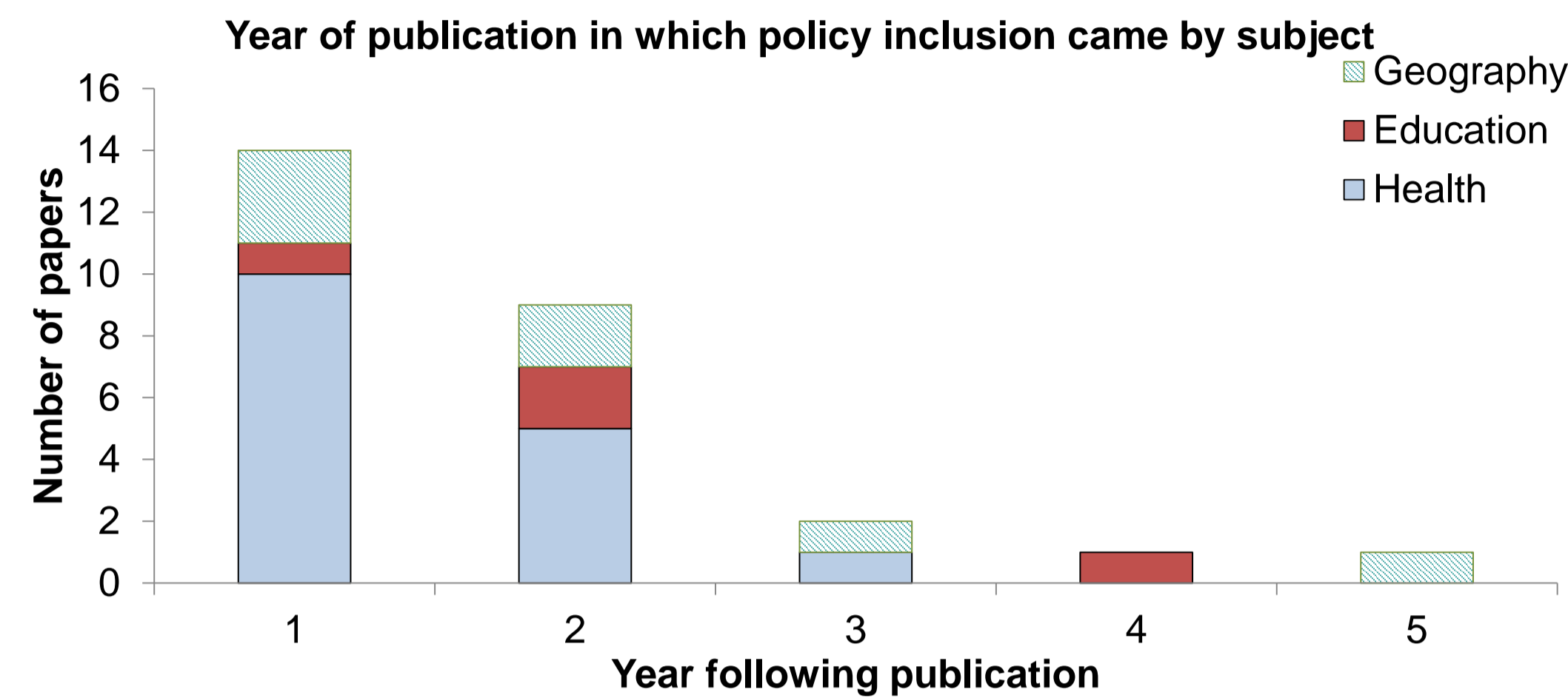


Fig. 1 Breakdown of the year in which papers were incorporated into their first policy document.

2) Not all papers get attention – this is roughly equal for the policy V non-policy subsets. Policy inclusion does extend the duration of attention for some papers beyond ‘the norm’.

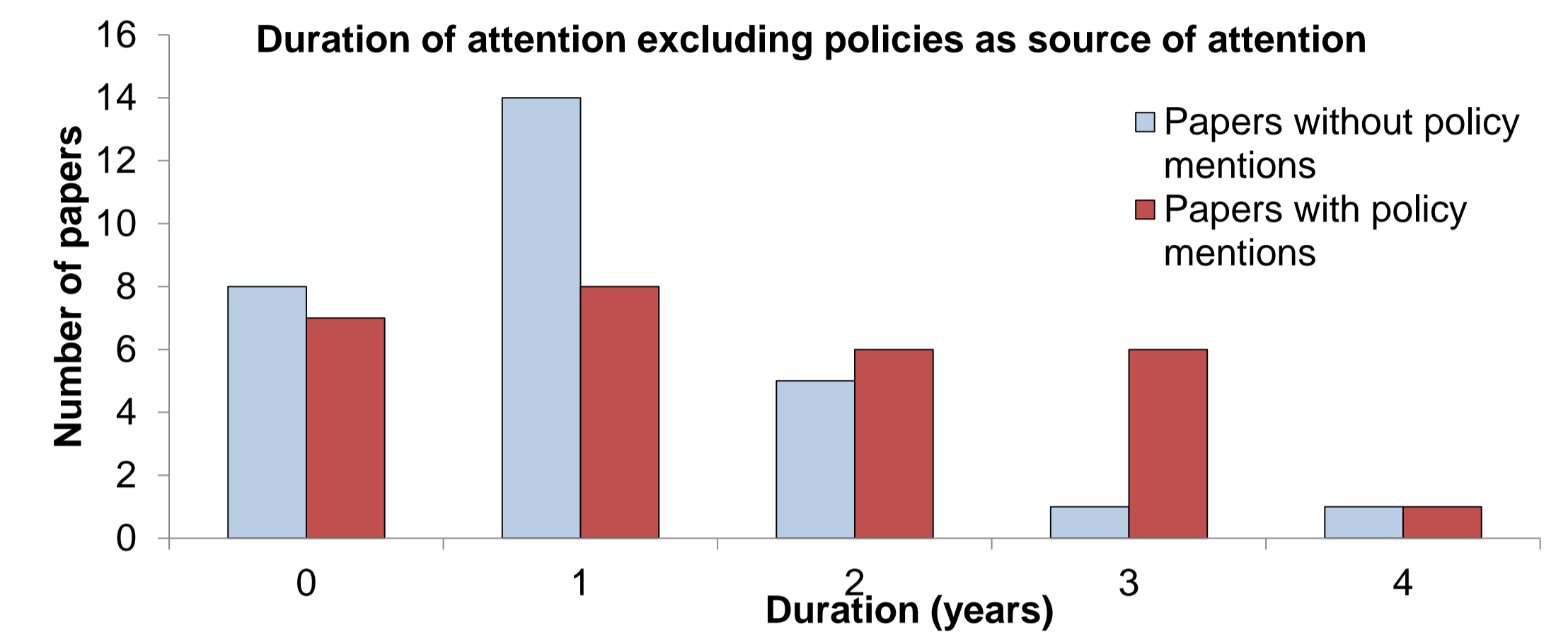


Fig. 2 Duration of attention received by papers. Policy mentions are excluded as a source of attention. Duration of 0 years refers to the first week following publication.

3) Duration of attention differs by type of attention. Papers that make it into policies are more likely to have sustained news and blog attention and be tweeted about at a later date. Health papers appear to have more sustained attention in general.

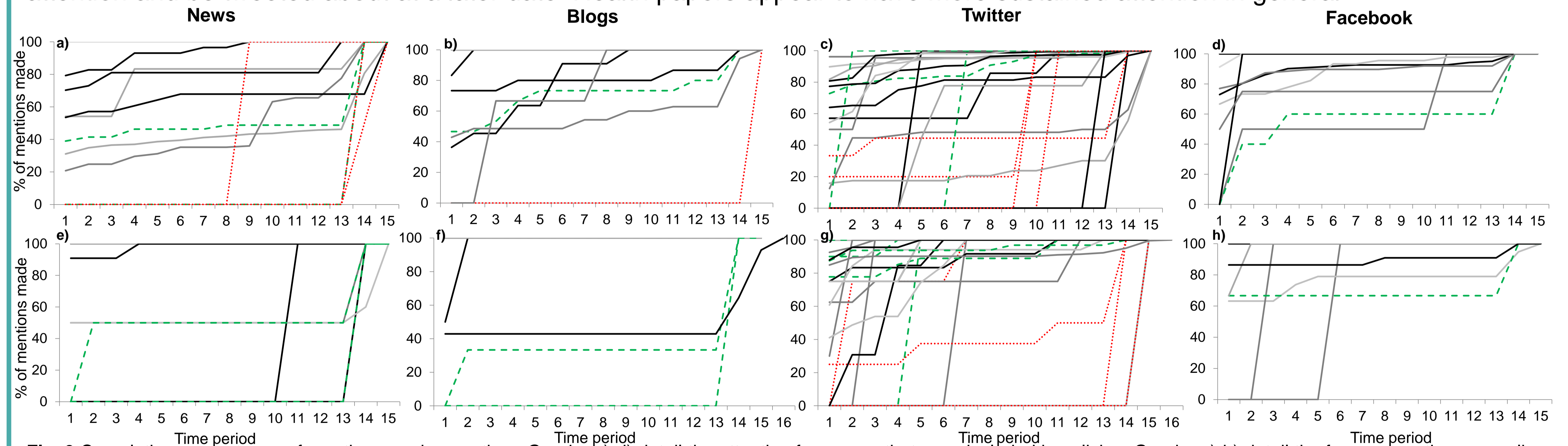


Fig. 3 Cumulative percentages of mentions made over time. Graphs a-d) detail the attention for papers that were included in policies. Graphs e-h) detail the for comparative non-policy papers. The time period is divided into thirteen 4 week periods (totalling 1 year) with divisions 14 and 15 representing the 2nd and 3rd years after publication. Each line represents one paper. Key: — Health; - - - Geography; ···· Education.

Conclusions: Research is having ‘real world’ impact sooner than before. Some papers that made it into policy had sustained news and blogs interest unlike any of the comparative sample – this could be a good indicator for potential REF high impact papers. Larger sample sizes are needed to fully explore the trends – the area of health lends itself best to this exploration.

Acknowledgements & further information: This work was funded by Altmetric.com via their Annual Research Grant scheme. For more information about this research see: <https://www.altmetric.com/blog/cadwallader-altmetric-study/>
Data supporting this research can be found here: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17863/CAM.4584>

References:

1. Konkiel, S. 21st May 2016, What could altmetrics add to the REF exercise?. *Altmetric.com* blog <https://www.altmetric.com/blog/altmetrics-and-ref/>
2. Hanney S. R. *et al.* (2015). *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 13:1.
3. Mansfield E. (1990). *Research Policy*, 20(1): 1–12.
4. Morris Z. *et al.* (2011). *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 104(12): 510–20.