

Summary

This article is a systematic review of Spanish scientific production in the field of social work hosted in the Web of Science.

Findings

The article analyses the current state of social work research in Spain. Since the creation of the European Higher Education Area, Spanish social work has been obliged to meet university research requirements, including the publication of papers in journals indexed in the world's leading databases. Spanish scientific production is analysed from its beginnings until 2020. The main findings were that most research published by Spanish social work academics was written in Spanish, while other categories of authors, such as Spanish non-social work academics, published more in English. Spanish-language journals were mostly indexed in ESCI, while those in English were in JCR or SCOPUS, consistently receiving few citations. Women as main authors exceeded men in percentages of indexed articles. Bibliometric quality measures using SCOPUS data were slightly better than those using JCR. The most developed topics in the area were general and transversal issues such as immigration, social services, social intervention, social policies, etc.

Applications

The study demonstrates to Spanish social work researchers that they have a greater likelihood of obtaining higher quality measures if they publish in English in JCR- and SCOPUS-indexed journals, thus offering them enhanced academic career visibility.

A Systematic Review of Spanish Academic Production in the Field of Social Work

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Introduction

The relationship of Spanish social work to research in the field is a topic much discussed by authors such as Carbonero, Raya, Caparrós, Esteban-Carbonell, Del Olmo-Vicén and Gimeno (2016). The study of the situation of social work in Spain draws on a range of empirical research aimed at determining the demographic and occupational profiles, professional areas, social perception/image, social representation and self-perception, etc., of social workers. This research has mainly been undertaken on the initiative of the official associations of social work graduates, sometimes in collaboration or coordination with universities, requiring the hiring of individual specialists or companies for this purpose, and aided by volunteers and the invaluable willingness and participation of social workers themselves, along with myriad social organisations both public and private. The research carried out so far has sought to understand the situation of social work professionals from the perspective of structure (professional areas, work situation, tasks performed, etc.), development (evolution and changes), perceptions and

satisfaction, and from the standpoint of different dimensions. Such studies have set out to afford information that can serve to define challenges and action proposals for the profession and its associations (Pastor-Seller, 2014).

What is known

Traditionally, the lack of research in the field has been explained by deficiencies in funding and institutional support or by the sector's predominantly practical approach to training. Analysts such as Pastor-Seller (2014, p. 67) have put forward reasons such as the late inclusion of the subject in university syllabi, the impossibility of embarking on PhD studies equipped with only a professional diploma, the tardy creation of the area of knowledge (1990) and the lack of research training among social workers. Writers such as Esteban-Carbonell and Del Olmo-Vicén (2021) and Romero-Martín, Esteban-Carbonell and De Pedro (2021) have used similar arguments to explain the low level of development of social work research in Spain.

To counter this approach, centred on deficiencies in social work training, Vázquez-Aguado, Borrego-Alés and Orgambidez-Ramos (2018) put forward an alternative view, arguing that the lack of research development is due to the demands that the labour market has always made on Spanish diploma-qualified and graduate social workers. These scholars contend that it is difficult to carry out research when success in the professional marketplace is determined less by *explaining* social problems than by actively *solving* them.

The concern for research, however, has been constant throughout the history of social work, closely linked to the person of Mary E. Richmond, who laid the foundations

for the discipline with the publication of her book *Social Diagnosis* (Richmond, 2017). In this text Richmond formulated the first research- and experience-based theory of social work, in which she specifically stresses that without social research, social work cannot be performed.

What is not known

What has happened in Spain, then, to cause the concern for research in social work to emerge in the current professional and academic agenda? What reasons lie behind this interest? And how can the profession and its academic counterpart, both centred on the practical side of social work, make a turn towards research?

Apart from short-term responses associated with employment opportunities and requisites for academic promotion, the origins of this shift should be sought in the transformation and professionalization of social work in Spain. This process began with the advent of the democratic regime, in the form of what Fernández-Borrero, Vázquez-Aguado and Álvarez-Pérez (2016) describe as the “secular project” of social work, which essentially consisted in stripping the religious ideology from a profession that had been previously linked to charity, and transforming it into one associated with social policy and services, drawing on research in areas such as poverty, the family, social exclusion and care (Relinque-Medina, Muñoz-Moreno, Fernández-Borrero & Vázquez-Aguado, 2021). This, then was a historic shift from religious charities to services based on human rights. The impact this modernisation process has had on university studies in the field is explored by Banda-Gallego (2017).

A second large-scale change in Spanish social work came with the European Higher Education Area (EEES; Chaves-Montero & Vázquez-Aguado, 2021). Unlike the previous development, specific to the field, the EEES has had wide-ranging effects across the whole Spanish university world. In our area, the most radical change has been that from the three-year professional diploma to the full four-year Bachelor's degree, equivalent to all other degrees, and accompanied by the creation of the first Master's programmes and PhDs in social work. The difference from other disciplines was its starting point, which, as Vázquez (2013) notes, consisted in the discovery that a large part of the research done by social work academics prior to full incorporation into the universities did not count towards the award of government contracts and the promotion dependent on them; not because it is not good research, but because it was not published in the right journals, i.e. those included in the main international databases, especially the Web of Science (WoS).

What is the specific gap in our knowledge?

If the objective is that the area of knowledge should increase its research production and build more solid foundations, then researchers in the field should be aware of the steps they need to take to disseminate their work (Ivanović & Ho, 2019). In this way the lack of continuity in higher levels of education, which is, as the analysts cited above have highlighted, a hindrance to the development of social work, can be overcome.

One essential foundation of any profession is the area of knowledge that defines it (Echegaray, 2018). Social work is an emerging and growing area of research not only in well-positioned social work journals, but also in those of allied disciplines, such as sociology, social education, etc. Such research has had important implications and

repercussions not only for the growth of knowledge but also for policy development in various parts of the world (Brandenburg, Raatz & Ward, 2022). In most disciplines, journals are one of the main means of accumulating and disseminating the knowledge that defines the discipline. Further, publication in journals constitutes one of the main ways in which new scientific knowledge is shared, at the same time providing the crucial quality control needed for scientific findings in the field (Hodge, Yu, & Kim, 2020).

Thus, a process of four phases should be clearly distinguished and delineated. The first phase is the production of knowledge itself through research, either basic or applied. Such production can be carried out by means of projects designed for the purpose or by assessing professional practice. Once knowledge is obtained, we move to the second phase, which consists in writing scientific papers, normally articles which are subsequently published in journals after undergoing peer review. Successful completion of this second phase requires specific knowledge ranging from that of the world of indexed journals to the requisites for publication, ethical rules, etc. of the chosen journal. The third phase is the dissemination of the published study so that one's colleagues in the field can be aware of it and make citations from it. Normally this phase receives little attention because the authors are already exhausted by the time they reach it. Lastly, the fourth phase is the bibliometric assessment of the knowledge produced, which may be performed by specialists in bibliometrics or by analysts from each specific discipline who evaluate the knowledge produced by their peers.

This paper takes bibliometrics as its analytical model. This is understood as “the science of the assessment and analysis of the sciences” (Martínez, Díaz, Lima, Herrera & Herrera-Viedma, 2014) and uses journal publications as the main medium through which

to analyse and assess the quality of the scientific activity of particular researchers, areas of research, research groups, universities and countries. There are two types of bibliometric studies which can be performed to analyse the scientific activity in a field of knowledge (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó & Baier-Fuentes, 2019; Muñoz, Viedma, Espejo & Cobo, 2020):

1º) Bibliometric studies of basic performance measured by quantitative indicators such as the number of publications, or by impact factors calculated by analysing the number of times a publication is cited (Visconti-Lopez, 2022), taking citations among journals as the measure of the publication's importance in terms of its recognition by other scholars.

2º) Bibliometric studies of content based on maps of science constructed using the co-occurrences of specific terms (Ledro, Nosella & Vinelli, 2022). Such maps enable us to visualise the conceptual structure of a scientific field and even to analyse the evolution of its concepts (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó & Baier-Fuentes, 2019; Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma & Herrera, 2012).

Bibliometrics, therefore, has become an essential tool in most scientific areas that aim to make progress (medicine, mathematics, economics, computer science, physics, sociology, psychology, etc.); and this is also the case for social work (Martínez, Cobo, Herrera & Herrera-Viedma, 2015). In order to carry out a bibliometric study of any kind, it is necessary to consult the specific databases where bibliographical information on publications – authors, titles, dates, names of journals, keywords and citation count – are compiled. As is well known, the three most important databases are: Web of Science

(WoS, by Clarivate Analytics), Scopus (Elsevier) and ESCI (the Emerging Sources Citation Index). All these databases encompass a wide range of publications in both the sciences (including the social sciences) and the humanities (Martínez, Díaz, Lima, Herrera & Herrera-Viedma, 2014). WoS, Scopus and ESCI have been chosen in preference to other databases such as ASSIA, Social Services Abstracts, PsychInfo, ProQuest and EBSCO because they are two of the most internationally recognised databases, where authors present their research in order to disseminate it as widely as possible and obtain a certain prestige within their areas of knowledge. Furthermore, these databases are indexed and updated up to and including the year 2020, which is essential for a valid bibliometric analysis.

Despite its linguistic and geographical bias (in favour of English-language journals from the USA and UK), WoS has two features that make it the database of choice for most scholars (Martínez, Rodríguez, Cobo & Herrera-Viedma, 2017):

a) It includes a large number of journals since their origins (from 1900), while Scopus only records those published since 1996.

b) A journal's impact factor is determined using WoS. This is a key factor for assessing the quality of a researcher's scientific activity and can be consulted in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) database, which publishes separate editions for science and social science journals.

Bibliometric analysis, then, is based on the work published in scientific journals, which are the most common medium in all fields for disseminating the outcomes of research. On the current academic scene, publication in high-impact journals is key for

communicating new scientific knowledge, in addition to being the basis for the quality assessment of the resulting scientific outcomes (Martínez, Díaz, Lima, Herrera & Herrera-Viedma, 2014). What is the current status, then, of Spanish social work journals?

In agreement with Vázquez (2010, p. 20) we can affirm that their “presence in journal assessment databases, registers and platforms is uneven, depending on the source organisation. Journals published by universities have greater presence than those of professional colleges, associations or publishing houses. This may be because the journals of professional bodies, although they are seen as journals, function more as a medium of professional communication and information, with the main objective of maintaining links between members and professionals rather than disseminating scientific knowledge”.

Also, the major problem of our journals is their impact and quality. One way of advancing in both would be to improve quality as a first step towards increasing impact. This would require strengthening the journals in two ways: firstly, as a medium for spreading information, and secondly through the quality of what is actually published in them (Alperin & Rozemblum, 2017). As Vázquez remarks, “To achieve this, these scholars put forward a total of 56 measures for improving the following: the information quality of the journal as a medium of scientific communication; the quality of the publishing process (deadlines, manuscript selection, peer review systems, management of the editing process and publishing house organization and structure); the scientific quality of the journal; and the quality of its dissemination and visibility. A useful guide to quality improvement is the set of criteria used by the FECYT [Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology] in its call for journal assessment” (Vázquez, 2010, p. 21).

On an international level, prior research on scientific production in the field of social work already exists. Studies such as Ligon, Cobb and Thyer (2013) show that rankings based on publication productivity are mostly considered a useful measure of academic quality and have been used in many academic and professional fields. These data can be of use to university researchers and practitioners who are interested not only in identifying the rankings of particular institutions, but also their trends over time. In addition, these studies afford recognition for universities with a high level of productivity and represent a challenge for others who wish to improve their level of research activity (Ligon, Cobb & Thyer, 2013). Empirical research such as this study helps social workers to write and publish more. Other studies, such as Ligon, Cobb and Thyer (2013) focus on citation analysis as a measure of scholarly activity and highlight the number of universities whose faculty have made substantial contributions to the professional social work literature over many years. Such research has certain unique distinguishing aspects, such as blind peer review, feedback to authors and the opportunity to revise and improve scientific articles to make them publishable (Ligon, Cobb & Thyer, 2013).

What is needed to fill the gap in knowledge, and the purpose of this study

In order to improve the productivity and impact of their most substantial contributions to the social work literature, universities should not only consider bibliometrical issues (Ligon, Cobb & Thyer, 2013) but also others such as the time lag between acceptance and publication of scientific articles, the quality of peer review experienced by social work scholars, and the number of unindexed journals publishing social work research (Ligon, Cobb & Thyer, 2013).

Scientific production in Spain has grown considerably in recent years as result of social work being established as a field of study and instruction in universities. In the research field, the General Council of Social Work Colleges and the Official Colleges of Social Work of Catalonia and Malaga have created research awards with the purpose of boosting theoretical studies and their practical applications (Goin, Rendueles & Prates, 2016).

Since the beginning of this century, the growth of information technology has globalised all actors in the production and spread of knowledge. This has radically changed the landscape and we now find ourselves in a new social world (Vázquez, 2010). Technological advances have led to the emergence of large-scale bibliographic databases that include scientific journals and institutional repositories accessed through digital portals or by intranet. Thus, thanks to technological advance, we have fast and convenient access to information (Ligon, Cobb & Thyer, 2013).

Regardless of whether a journal aims to disseminate professional activities or to communicate knowledge in the social work field produced in Spain or internationally, we should embrace the opportunities offered by IT and endeavour to set benchmarks of quality, dissemination and visibility that, from our local sphere, will enable us to reach a worldwide audience (Vázquez, 2010).

The aim of this paper is to examine Spanish publications that include social work studies, analysing the articles published, identifying the journals and the language used, and determining the topics discussed and whether the authors were academic or otherwise.

Method

Inclusion and Exclusion

In this paper, a total of 1,092 articles published between 1972 and 2020, representing the total volume of scientific production of Spanish social work for these years, are analysed. To search for these articles the WoS database was chosen and a population conforming to the following criteria was selected:

1. A search was made combining the terms “social work” and “Spain”. The first term retrieved the articles included in that category, while the second was limited to the corresponding address field of the article and set out to determine the origin of the authors.

2. Web of Science was selected as the main database and an advanced search was performed using the following field labels and Boolean operators: WC="SOCIAL WORK" AND AD="SPAIN". The WC field label identified the Web of Science category, while the AD label identified the address of the institution which published the article. The two labels were related by the Boolean operator "AND", which searched for articles that met both the first condition of the operator (WC="SOCIAL WORK") and its second condition (AD="SPAIN").

3. A specific period of time was chosen, namely articles published from 1972 to 2020.

4. Within the main WoS collection the search was limited to the following databases: Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE); Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI); Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI); and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). Special reference was made to the ESCI database, since, as we show below, it afforded the largest number of articles included in this study.

Data extraction

When the WoS data had been gathered, the information was filtered, selecting only articles and leaving aside other texts such as letters to the editors and book reviews. Amongst the filtered data four areas containing information relevant to the study were identified. These were:

1. Article data: year of publication, language, citation count, type of article, methodology adopted.

2. Journal data: name of the journal in which the article was published, database in which it was stored (JCR, Scopus, ESCI), quartile, impact factor, research field and WoS category.

3. Author data: number of authors, gender, nationality, type (Spanish social work academic, foreign social work academic, Spanish non-social work academic, foreign non-social work academic, Spanish researcher, foreign researcher, social services professional, health professional or other).

4. Keywords: number of keywords and specific words used.

Once these data had been compiled they were entered into our own database, organised as shown below in table 1:

The types of authors in the sub-table were classified into the following groups. (1) Spanish social work academics: all those academics working in the social work field in Spanish universities. (2) Foreign social work academics: all academics working in the social work field in foreign universities. (3) Spanish non-social work academics: all academics working in fields other than social work field but belonging to Spanish universities. (4) Foreign non-social work academics: all academics working in fields other than social work and belonging to foreign universities. (5) Spanish researchers: all Spanish-nationality researchers working in the academic context. (6) Foreign researchers: all foreign-nationality researchers working in the academic context. (7) Spanish social services professionals: all professionals working in the social services in Spain. (8) Spanish health professionals: all health professionals working in Spain. (9) Other: any author not accounted for in the above categories.

The WoS author data were taken as the source for determining the category of each author, and, in cases where the category was unclear, a search was carried out in Orcid or Dialnet.

When the data had been recorded in our database they were processed using the IBM statistical program SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The basic descriptive measures of frequency, mean, media and mode were examined, in addition to the dispersion measures (standard deviation and variance).

Once this basic study was completed, an exhaustive analysis was made of all variables, comparing them to determine their relationships. Lastly, the bivariate correlations were studied in order to ascertain whether any two variables were related and, if so, the direction of the relationship and whether it was strong, moderate or weak.

To analyse the topics discussed and the bibliometric quality measures we processed the keywords and the citation count of each article using the science mapping analysis software SciMAT, which includes performance and quality measures for the maps yielded (Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma & Herrera, 2012). First, the keywords were standardised, assigning a single value to both singular and plural keywords and those with the same meaning. Second, a square NxN co-occurrence grid was constructed in which N represented the keywords and pairs were selected, excluding replicated pairs, i.e., those made up of the same keyword. If two keywords appeared together in the articles they were assigned an equivalence measure of 1, and if not, 0 (Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma & Herrera, 2012).

The co-occurrence grid was subsequently processed in SciMAT with the following values: minimum data frequency, with the value set at 2 due to the low number of documents; minimum co-occurrence frequency: 1; measure of similarity used to standardise the network: equivalence index; grouping algorithm: simple centres algorithm, with a maximum network value of 6 and a minimum of 3, in order to obtain a more specific network of terms. SciMAT was used to determine the topics of the research area under study, their relationships and bibliometric quality measures.

Methods of analysis

The method of analysis adopted consisted in firstly analysing the variables from table 1 individually, beginning with the journals, then moving on to the authors and lastly the keywords.

The study of the descriptive statistics was divided into the following areas: a frequency analysis (comprising absolute frequencies, percentages and relative accumulated frequencies); a central tendency analysis (including the mean, the median, the maximum and minimum values and the typical mean error); a dispersion analysis (encompassing standard deviation, variance, maximum and minimum ranks and typical mean error); a distribution analysis (using the asymmetry and kurtosis coefficients).

Once the statistics had been studied individually, the variables were scrutinised in pairs by crossing the tables. A chi-squared test was performed for association and independence and subsequently a bivariate correlation analysis was applied in order to ascertain whether the variables were independent or not.

The SPSS 24 study centred on three main areas: The journals and their relationships with the other variables in table 1; the authors and their relationships with the other variables; and lastly the keywords and their relationships with the other variables.

The variables included in the study of the journals were: journal name; JCR indexing; JCR quartile; JCR impact factor; Scopus indexing; Scopus quartile; Scopus impact factor; ESCI indexing; WoS category 1 and 2.

The variables included the study of the articles were: publication date; article language; article research areas 1 and 2; WoS citation count; Scopus citation count; article type; methodology type; number of authors; author name; author gender; author type; and author nationality. The variables included in the keywords study were the keywords in the same order as presented in the article. The purpose of the SPSS 24 study was to find relationships between the variables in order to reveal the behaviour of the research field.

For the topic analysis a completely different approach from that of the statistical study was chosen, as bibliometric science maps were used to show the structure of scientific production in the field. By means of these science maps we set out to identify the most important research topics and which topics grouped the largest number of articles written by the scientific community. SciMAT (Science Mapping Analysis Software Tool) was applied, since it uses bibliometric impact measures to create science maps. These measures are known as bibliometric quality indices (h-index and g-index), and they reflect the number of citations made of a scientific article. Not only do they measure the quantity, but also the quality of the scientific production of an author or a specific topic (Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma & Herrera, 2012).

The search for the research topics identified their distribution according to whether they were major, marginal, emerging or basic. SciMAT yielded two types of

science maps: a strategic map or diagram and one of the topic development across the time period. Unfortunately, due to the scarceness of publications before 2015, the topic development map lacked scientific value and afforded no significant information, which meant that it was not possible to effectively follow the development of the topics through time.

Results

Publication language

A total of 601 articles were published in English, representing 55.04% of the total number of articles published, while 480 (43.96%) were published in Spanish and 11 in other languages (1.01%). In a detailed study of the article languages, we found that the journals with the most publications in English were those shown in table 2 below, while those with the most in Spanish were those shown in table 3.

Journal indexing

Of the three journals with the most publications in Spanish (*Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, *Trabajo Social Global* and *Interacción y Perspectiva*), none were indexed in either JCR or Scopus, although they were in ESCI. In contrast, the first three journals in table 2 (the main journals publishing in English) were indexed in both JCR and Scopus, but not in ESCI. Tables 4 and 5 below show the journals with the most articles in English and Spanish in order of indexing.

Journal quartile

The quartile in which the journal appeared at the time of publication of the article was taken as its positioning. It was found that articles indexed in SCOPUS were higher in percentage terms for the Q1 and Q2 quartiles than those indexed in JCR, while articles indexed in JCR were higher in the Q3 and Q4 quartiles than articles indexed in SCOPUS. In terms of citations received by quartiles for both JCR and SCOPUS, in absolute values, articles received more citations in SCOPUS than in JCR. The articles indexed in SCOPUS received more citations in the Q1 quartiles (71.71%) and less in the other quartiles (Q2, 24.82%; Q3, 1.41%; Q4, 2.06%). For JCR the citations received by quartiles were somewhat more evenly distributed (Q1, 58.82%; Q2, 18.29%; Q3, 18.32% and Q4, 4.57%).

Citation count

Turning to the citation counts attributed by WoS to the articles in each of the main research areas, table 7 below shows the absolute values and percentages. The averages column shows the average number of citations per article. It can be seen that, although the articles assigned by WoS to the main research area of “Social Work” received more citations, the ratios of citations to articles received for both JCR and SCOPUS were low (1.66% JCR and 1.72 SCOPUS), while other areas such as Family Studies (14.30% JCR, 15.54 SCOPUS) had a higher ratio of citations to articles.

Authors

Regarding the gender of the main author of the articles published in the indexed journals, we found that in JCR women represented 58.61% and men 41.39%; in Scopus 54.88% and 45.12% respectively; and in ESCI 55.86% and 44.14% respectively. Taking into account the gender of all authors signing the article, the percentages showed that women

were again in the majority in all databases, with a slightly higher proportion of women authors in JCR.

Type of author

For the journals in which all the different types of authors were represented we found that both Spanish social work academics and non-Spanish social work academics mostly published in *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*. The data on the journals by type of author are listed below (table 8).

Turning to the language in which articles were written, we observed that Spanish social work academics published mainly in Spanish (see table 9). The publication of articles in indexed journals in JCR, Scopus and ESCI showed that Spanish and foreign social work academics published more in ESCI journals, while Spanish non-social work academics published more articles in JCR and Scopus journals (see table 10).

Bibliometric analysis (visibility and impact factors)

Since the scarcity of papers published in the years prior to 2005 (41 papers in total) ruled out a time series approach, the SciMAT study was carried out across the whole period. The clusters or topics are shown in table 11.

These data were transferred to a strategic two-dimensional diagram showing measures of visibility and impact according to citations in WoS (figure 1). When compared with the Scopus citations strategic diagram (figure 2), this revealed that the articles were more cited in Scopus than in WoS, and therefore the bibliometric quality measures (h-index) for the research area were higher in Scopus than in WoS.

Analysing the quadrant corresponding to the major topics, i.e. those that are basic for the construction of the scientific field because they are more fully developed and highly organised (quadrant 1, top right), we observed that only the “adolescents” cluster stood out, with an h-index of 4.

In quadrant 2 (top left), corresponding to the peripheral topics, i.e. those which were highly developed but isolated from the rest, we found examples such as foster-care, etc. Studying the number of citations, it emerged that these are also the topics with the highest number of citations, while the number of publications is low. In quadrant 3 (bottom left), which groups together the emerging and declining topics, i.e. those which are poorly developed or emerging, no important topic was found.

In quadrant 4 (bottom right), corresponding to the basic topic areas, i.e. those that are comprehensive, present in all others and paramount for the research area, we found the most indexed areas: “children” and “resilience”. On the other hand, “social service” emerged as the topic that had the highest number of documents with a low level of citation. This coincides with the data from the SPSS 24 study, where articles in the research area of “social work” were abundant but with a very low number of citations, which therefore led to low scores in the bibliometric quality measures.

Limitations of the study

~~In this section we can say that~~ The main existing limitation of this study was the size of the sample, since the quantity of existing articles is very small and they are concentrated into a very short period. This meant that it was not possible to make an evolutionary

analysis of the research topics over time. To carry out such an analysis, a greater volume of production over a longer period would be necessary. We found only 229 published articles distributed heterogeneously over 15 years, and in the initial period (2004 to 2013), they totalled only 31; and while production subsequently increased, the following years still yielded very few.

Another limitation was the lack of previous studies on the topic under discussion. Although there exist studies using SciMAT in other research areas, in social work there is no such previous research, and from the point of view of the analysis of statistical data with SPSS 24, no work was found addressing the area. This, then, also limits the scope of the discussion.

Conclusions

The outcomes of the statistical analyses led to the following conclusions concerning scientific publications in the area of social work in Spain:

Of the articles included in WoS in the 1900-2021 period, the number of publications in the years prior to 2005 was low, with a total of only 41 publications from 1900 to 2004. From 2005 onwards, the number of publications began to increase slowly, although it was only from 2015 that the number of publications started to grow significantly. This is due to the fact that the three journals with the most publications, *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, *Trabajo Social Global* and *Interacción y Perspectiva* (as shown in table 3), began to have articles indexed in WoS from 2015, when ESCI indexing began to appear.

In the Spanish journals the main language of publication was Spanish, with few journals published in English, while in the main international journals the prevailing language was English, with very little publication in Spanish (see tables 2 and 3).

Publication in Spanish meant that there was no chance of an article being indexed in the most important databases, unless it was published in the journal *Prisma Social*. This conclusion is evidenced in tables 4 and 5, showing that while the main Spanish-language journals were indexed neither in JCR nor Scopus, they were indexed in ESCI.

The journals in which Spanish authors published were those on general topics and as a whole were not found in the Q1 quartile of social work. The reason for this was that the journals in this quartile treated areas such as child abuse, abuse in general, etc.; subjects which Spanish social work academics and professionals had not researched.

The quartiles in which the journals were indexed were lower in JCR than in Scopus for the same journal, as can be seen from table 6.

Authors publishing in research areas other than social work received more citations than those publishing in social work. This can be observed from the data in table 7, where the average numbers of citations per article in the WoS-assigned area of social work were lower than in other areas. Thus this research area was characterised by high bibliographical production but low numbers of citations.

Both Spanish social work academics and Spanish non-social work academics mostly published in the journal *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social* (see table 8). Spanish non-

social work academics published more articles in English than Spanish social work academics, who published more in Spanish, as can be observed in table 9.

Spanish non-social work academics published more and with more citations in JCR and Scopus journals than Spanish social work academics, who published more in journals indexed in ESCI (see table 10).

In all the databases, women were more highly represented as lead authors of articles than men. Scopus was the database with the highest percentages of articles authored by women. The h-index bibliometric quality measures were very low, since they reflect citation counts, also very low (see table 11). Comparing the bibliometric quality measures for citations in WoS with those from Scopus, we found that the latter were slightly higher than the former (see figures 1 and 2).

The social work subjects that were most studied in Spain and which therefore had higher bibliometric quality scores were found in quadrant 4, that of general and transversal topics, although these higher scores were achieved with a large quantity of articles and a low citation count. On the other hand, other topics located in quadrant 1 reached a similar level with fewer articles.

The causes of the low number of citations obtained by the publications of the social work area were directly related to the low scientific production, which was mainly due to two factors:

First, the late incorporation of social work into the European Higher Education Area, since it was not until 2007 that the discipline was included in the EHEA. With this incorporation, research began to be promoted through Master's and PhD degrees, thus shifting the field from one where professional practice prevailed to one where scientific research has its place alongside practice. The scarcity of publications continued until 2015, and thereafter, although there was a significant increase with respect to previous years, numbers were still very low.

The second and more decisive factor concerns where the articles were published and the language of publication. For an article to be cited often, it must be made known to the largest possible scientific community. In this study it was found that the highest amount of scientific production was published in Spanish or Latin American journals and that their main language was Spanish. Thus the breadth of the scientific community reached was restricted, and the number of readers citing the articles in their work was therefore reduced. Most of the articles were published in journals not indexed in JCR or Scopus; thus, for example, the group of Spanish social work academics chose to publish in journals such as *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, *Trabajo Social Global* and *Interacción y Perspectiva*, all indexed in ESCI.

Lastly, the importance of scientific publications has been addressed by different authors and from different perspectives, such as those of the individual authors themselves, the organisations (journals, universities, etc.) involved, and society as a whole. Related to this, a pioneering study by Holosko (2021) in Hong Kong, the United States and Canada investigated the impact of citation in schools of social work more globally. According to the author, the study was limited by the paucity of international

literature on the subject. As pointed out in the article, there is no scientific basis for explaining or comparing these results in order to make generalisations, given their uniqueness. In comparison with the research presented here, the explanatory factors that the authors offer for Spain are different from those of Hong Kong, the United States and Canada, due to the social context and location of the universities and their syllabi.

From an author's point of view, the most important factors are: ease of communicating studies and results quickly and with widespread diffusion (Reyes Rodríguez & Moraga Muñoz, 2020); increase in production, productivity and quality of work (Rojas, 2008); and assistance through feedback and discussion with peers (Rojas, 2008). This is what makes an author known in the scientific community, thus boosting their academic career and international impact (Reyes Rodríguez & Moraga Muñoz, 2020). It is an evaluable factor of individual productivity and a measure of the researcher's academic activity (Reyes Rodríguez & Moraga Muñoz, 2020; Fingerhut, 2017).

From the reader's point of view, the important factors are: rapid and wide diffusion of the research (Lamedá, Suárez, Uzcátegui & Zambrano, 2015); and quality assurance through arbitration and peer review (Rojas, 2008).

For society as a whole, the important factors are: enriching academic discussions and the development of the research area (Rodríguez, 2016); and helping universities and other institutions to build advances in knowledge, at the same time as boosting their role in promoting, disseminating and spreading this knowledge (Rodríguez, 2016). Social benefits and economic returns from investment in research can also be yielded (International Council of Science, 1999).

From the point of view of the social work professional, the importance of publishing research in high-impact journals is encapsulated in the production of scientific knowledge that can be applied to daily practice, the results of the application of such knowledge, and the feedback received. Publication in high-impact journals such as Q1 to Q4 represents a high standard of research, since articles are peer reviewed, thus enhancing quality. High-impact scientific publications, therefore, are a source of high-quality knowledge.

Research Ethics

Not required.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors confirm that they have no conflict of interest in respect of the material submitted in this article.

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Table 1. Details of database created for the study

Name	Values	Description
Year of publication	2003 to 2018	Year of article publication
Language	English, Spanish, Portuguese, other	Article language
Journal	94 journals	Name of journal in which article was published
JCR indexed	Yes / No	Whether journal was JCR indexed
JCR quartile	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	Quartile in which journal was indexed
JCR impact factor	Number	Numerical value of journal JCR impact factor
Scopus indexed	Yes / No	Whether journal was Scopus indexed
Scopus quartile	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	Quartile in which journal was indexed
Scopus impact factor	Number	Numerical value of Scopus impact factor
ESCI indexed	Yes / No	Whether journal was ESCI indexed
Research area 1	45 different research areas	Main research area of article
Research area 2	45 different research areas	Secondary research area of article
WoS category 1	36 different categories	Main WoS category of journal
WoS category 2	36 different categories	Secondary WoS category of journal
WoS citation count	Number	Article citation count in WoS
Scopus citation count	Number	Article citation count in Scopus
Type of article	Theoretical review, research, intervention	Type of article according to method
Type of methodology	Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed	Methodology used in research article
Number of authors	Number	Number of article authors
SUB-TABLE	Author name	Name
	Author gender	Female / male
	Author type	9 options (see below)
	Author country	Name of country
Keyword	Word	Article keyword

Source: created by the authors.

Table 2. Main journals publishing in English.

	English		Spanish		Other	
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%
Children and Youth Services Review	110	18.30	0	0	0	0
Child Abuse & Neglect	64	10.65	11	2.29	1	7.14
European Journal of Social Work	47	7.82	0	0	0	0
Journal of Community Psychology	39	6.49	0	0	0	0
Child & Family Social Work	34	5.66	0	0	0	0

Source: created by the authors using SPSS data.

Table 3: Main journals publishing in Spanish.

	English		Spanish		Other	
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%
Cuadernos de trabajo social	9	1.50	276	57.50	0	0
Trabajo social global	1	0.17	92	19.17	7	63.64
Interacción y perspectivas	0	0	28	5.83	0	0
Prospectiva	2	0.33	23	4.79	0	0
Trabajo Social	0	0	20	4.17	0	0

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 4: Indexing of main journals with the most articles in Spanish.

	<i>JCR</i>	<i>SCOPUS</i>	<i>ESCI</i>
Cuadernos de trabajo social	0	0	350
Trabajo social global	0	0	63
Interacción y perspectivas	0	0	7
Prospectiva	0	0	15
Trabajo Social	0	0	7

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 5: Indexing of main journals with the most articles in English.

	<i>JCR</i>	<i>SCOPUS</i>	<i>ESCI</i>
Children and Youth Services Review	645	1039	0
Child Abuse & Neglect	1888	2015	0
European Journal of Social Work	182	199	0
Journal of Community Psychology	603	644	0
Child & Family Social Work	292	346	0

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 6. Quartiles of the JCR and Scopus indexed journals in the year of article publication.

	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		TOTAL
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	
JCR	261	46.44	140	24.91	106	18.86	55	9.79	562
SCOPUS	335	56.59	176	29.73	55	9.29	26	4.39	592

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 7. Citations received by WoS research area with article percentages and averages.

	Nº art.	<i>JCR</i>	% <i>JCR</i>	<i>SCOPUS</i>	% <i>SCOPUS</i>	<i>ESCI</i>	% <i>ESCI</i>
<i>Criminology & Penology</i>	2	9	4.50	9	4.50	0	0.00
<i>Development Studies</i>	13	17	1.31	19	1.46	0	0.00
<i>Education & Educational Research</i>	6	10	1.67	11	1.83	0	0.00
<i>Family Studies</i>	233	3331	14.30	3621	15.54	3	0.01
<i>Geriatrics & Gerontology</i>	3	9	3.00	12	4.00	0	0.00
<i>Psychiatry</i>	17	109	6.41	89	5.24	0	0.00
<i>Public Administration</i>	10	6	0.60	8	0.80	0	0.00
<i>Public, Environmental & Occupational Health</i>	89	933	10.48	1020	11.46	0	0.00
<i>Social Issues</i>	4	35	8.75	7	1.75	0	0.00
<i>Social Work</i>	715	1190	1.66	1232	1.72	417	0.58

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 8. Author type according to journals in which they published the most articles.

SPANISH SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS	Nº Art.	Percentage
<i>CUADERNOS DE TRABAJO SOCIAL</i>	128	40.51
<i>TRABAJO SOCIAL GLOBAL-GLOBAL SOCIAL WORK</i>	56	17.72
<i>INTERACCION Y PERSPECTIVA</i>	20	6.33
<i>EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK</i>	17	5.38
<i>TRABAJO SOCIAL</i>	14	4.43
<i>PROSPECTIVA</i>	9	2.85
<i>JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH</i>	8	2.53
<i>INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK</i>	7	2.22

<i>BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK</i>	6	1.90
<i>AFFILIA-JOURNAL OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL WORK</i>	5	1.58
<i>TENDENCIAS & RETOS</i>	5	1.58
<i>CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW</i>	3	0.95

NON-SPANISH SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS	Nº Art.	Percentage
<i>CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW</i>	3	9.09
<i>EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK</i>	3	9.09
<i>INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK</i>	3	9.09
<i>PROSPECTIVA</i>	3	9.09
<i>TENDENCIAS & RETOS</i>	3	9.09
<i>BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK</i>	2	6.06
<i>CHILD & FAMILY SOCIAL WORK</i>	2	6.06
<i>CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT</i>	2	6.06
<i>JOURNAL OF GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIAL WORK</i>	2	6.06
<i>FAMILY RELATIONS</i>	1	3.03

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 9. Author type by language of article published.

	<i>English</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>%</i>	
<i>Non-social work Spanish academic</i>	403	67.73	175	36.01	5	45.45	
<i>Non-social work foreign academic</i>	75	12.61	22	4.53	2	18.18	
<i>Spanish social work academic</i>	84	14.12	228	46.91	4	36.36	
<i>Foreign social work academic</i>	26	4.37	10	2.06	0	0.00	
<i>Spanish researcher</i>	1	0.17	0	0.00	0	0.00	
<i>Spanish health professional</i>	4	0.67	16	3.29	0	0.00	
<i>Spanish social services professional</i>	0	0.00	35	7.20	0	0.00	
<i>Foreign researcher</i>	2	0.34	0	0.00	0	0.00	

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

Table 10. Type of author by indexing in journals.

	<i>JCR</i>		<i>SCOPUS</i>		<i>ESCI</i>	
	<i>Nº</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Nº</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Nº</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Non-social work Spanish academic</i>	4768	75.96	4938	78.34	324	54.18
<i>Non-social work foreign academic</i>	628	10.00	667	10.58	69	11.54
<i>Spanish social work academic</i>	461	7.34	339	5.38	170	28.43
<i>Foreign social work academic</i>	296	4.72	301	4.78	11	1.84
<i>Spanish researcher</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Spanish health professional</i>	18	0.29	9	0.14	5	0.84
<i>Spanish social services professional</i>	104	1.66	48	0.76	19	3.18
<i>Foreign researcher</i>	2	0.03	1	0.02	0	0.00

Source: created by the authors using WoS data.

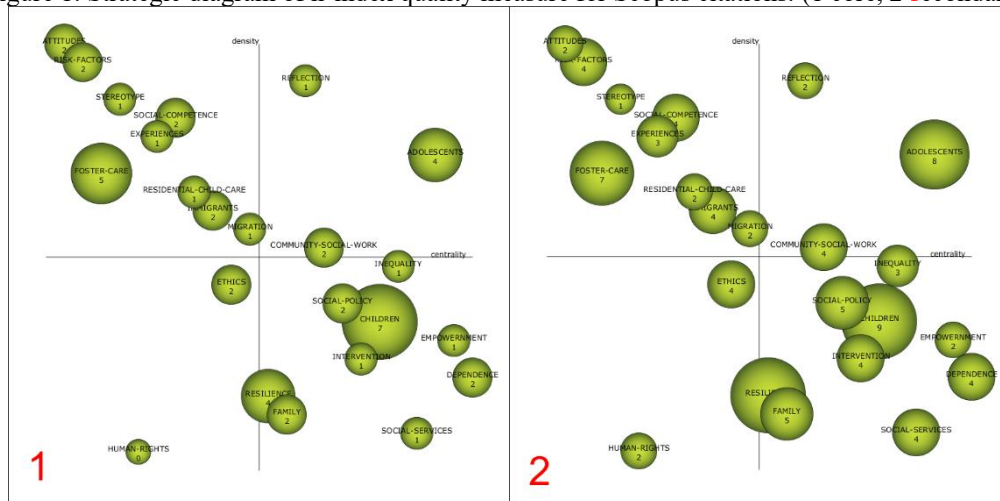
Table 11. Clusters or topics with ranks of centrality, density and bibliometric quality measures (h-index and g-index).

CLUSTERS INFORMATION				
NAME	Centrality	Centrality range	Density	Density range
REFLECTION	5.57	0.61	15.28	0.91
INEQUALITY	7.08	0.83	4.88	0.48
EMPOWERMENT	9.58	0.96	2.94	0.3
SOCIAL POLICY	5.85	0.7	4.02	0.39
IMMIGRANTS	3.06	0.39	6.38	0.61
CHILDREN	6.44	0.78	3.82	0.35

FOSTER CARE	0.48	0.13	8.86	0.7
ETHICS	3.3	0.43	4.03	0.43
ADOLESCENTS	8.15	0.91	9.42	0.74
COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK	5.78	0.65	5.36	0.52
INTERVENTION	6.02	0.74	2.93	0.26
SOCIAL SERVICES	7.27	0.87	1.14	0.09
RESILIENCE	4.16	0.52	2.16	0.17
FAMILY	4.47	0.57	1.51	0.13
DEPENDENCE	14.87	1	2.22	0.22
ATTITUDES	0.09	0.04	22	1
SOCIAL COMPETENCE	2.21	0.3	13.52	0.83
STEREOTYPE	0.89	0.17	15.28	0.87
RISK FACTORS	0.18	0.09	20	0.96
HUMAN RIGHTS	1.09	0.22	0.79	0.04
EXPERIENCES	1.86	0.26	10.42	0.78
RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE	2.25	0.35	6.67	0.65
MIGRATION	3.98	0.48	5.71	0.57

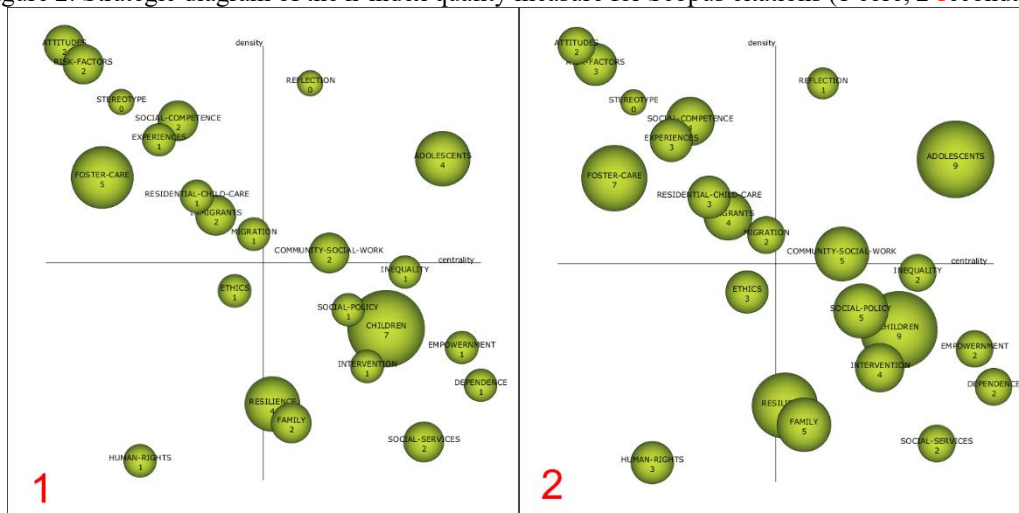
Source: created by the authors using SciMAT data.

Figure 1. Strategic diagram of h-index quality measure for Scopus citations. (1 core, 2 secondary).



Empowerment
Source: created by the authors using SciMAT data.

Figure 2. Strategic diagram of the h-index quality measure for Scopus citations (1 core, 2 secondary).



Empowerment
Source: created by the authors using SciMAT data.