

100 Years of Social Work in Spanish-Speaking Contexts: An Approach to Disciplinary Debates in the Scientific Literature of Web of Science

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ENG Abstract: The article reports on an investigation focused on the main Spanish-speaking debates in the scientific literature of social work, commemorating a century of disciplinary development. The study uses a bibliometric design exploring the scientific production Social Work category, in the main catalog in the Web of Science database, covering the period from 2008 to 2025. Among the main findings emerges the notable asymmetry in the scientific production with a marked predominance of Anglo-Saxon publications and the underrepresentation of works in Spanish: 98.29% of the publications are in English, while only 0.95% are in Spanish. In the same way, in the analyses that contrast the citations received by the works in English and Spanish, differences are observed with ratios of 150 to 1 and 200 to 1. The study, through an analysis of the conceptual structure of the documents analyzed, identifies three clusters of central and prominent debates in the Spanish-speaking disciplinary scientific literature, that revolve around the topics: Social Work, Gender and Family, standing out by total of appearances, the cluster of social work that registers the highest centralities, which suggests a wide discussion in the disciplinary community, but at the same time registers low density, which indicates that these discussions are not deeply developed, which highlights the imperative need to develop studies and research that enrich the disciplinary reflections of social work. The analyses highlight the need to strengthen the visibility and the impact of the scientific production in Spanish in order to balance the geopolitical representation of knowledge and point to its democratization.

Keywords: social work, bibliometrics, scientific production, Spanish-speaking, thematic map.

ES 100 años de trabajo social en habla hispana: aproximación a los debates disciplinares en la literatura científica de Web of Science

Resumen: El artículo da cuenta de una investigación centrada en los principales debates de habla hispana en la literatura científica de trabajo social, conmemorando un siglo de desarrollo disciplinar. El estudio utiliza un diseño bibliométrico explorando la producción en la categoría *Social Work*, en el catálogo principal en la base de datos Web of Science, abarcando el período de 2008 a 2025. Entre los principales hallazgos emerge la notable asimetría en la producción científica con una marcada predominancia de publicaciones anglosajonas y la subrepresentación de trabajos en español: 98,29% de las publicaciones están en inglés, mientras que sólo el 0,95% están en español. De igual modo, en los análisis que contrastan las citas recibidas por los trabajos en inglés y español, se aprecian diferencias con ratios de 150 a 1 y de 200 a 1. El estudio, por medio de un análisis a la estructura conceptual de los documentos analizados, identifica tres clústeres de debates centrales y prominentes en la literatura científica disciplinar de habla hispana, que giran en torno a los temas: Trabajo social, Genero y Familia, destacando por total de apariciones, el clúster de trabajo social que registra las centralidades más altas, lo que sugiere una amplia discusión en la comunidad disciplinar, pero al tiempo registra baja densidad, lo que indica que estas discusiones no están profundamente desarrolladas, lo que remarca la imperativa necesidad de desarrollar estudios e investigaciones que enriquezcan las reflexiones disciplinares de trabajo social. Los análisis destacan la necesidad de fortalecer la visibilidad y el impacto de la producción científica en español a fin de equilibrar la representación geopolítica del conocimiento y apuntar a su democratización.

Palabras clave: trabajo social, bibliometría, producción científica, habla hispana, mapa temático.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 1.1. Brief review of the disciplinary trajectory of social work. 1.2. Modernity as context. 1.3. Disciplinary Debates: Approaches to the Scientific Literature. 2. Methodology. 2.1. Focus and design. 2.2. Data Collection Procedure. 2.3. Data analysis. 3. Results. 3.1. First Bibliometric Approach. a) General Results. b) Sources. c) Language and region/publication regions. d) Most cited documents. 3.2. Second Bibliometric Approach. a) General results. b) Sources. c) Most cited documents. d) Keyword Frequency. e) Analysis of the Conceptual Structure in Author Keywords. 4. Discussion and Conclusions. 5. Funding Sources. 6. References.

How to cite: Zurita-Castillo, R.; Yáñez-Pereira, V.; Contreras-Vera, V. & Muñoz-Salinas, N. (2026). 100 Years of Social Work in Spanish-Speaking Contexts: An Approach to Disciplinary Debates in the Scientific Literature of Web of Science. *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social* 39(1), 21-32. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/cuts.96645>

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief review of the disciplinary trajectory of social work

The commemoration of 100 years of social work in Spanish-speaking contexts stands as a significant opportunity to look at its development: in 1899 the creation of the first School of Social Work in Amsterdam, Netherlands is recorded (Esquivel, 2020), a milestone linked to the foundation of the School of Philanthropy in 1898, which in 1918 would be called the New York School of Social Work (Acero-Sáez, 1988). In the Spanish-speaking context, it is recognized that “public health physician Alejandro del Río promoted the creation of the first School of Social Service in Chile, founded on May 4, 1925” (Castañeda-Meneses & Salamé-Coulon, 2015, p. 403), a significant milestone, not only for the Chilean and Latin American case (Brito-Rodríguez et al., 2023), but for social work in Spanish-speaking contexts worldwide.

Since its emergence in the Spanish-speaking context, the debates that have shaped social work have been woven around its object and subject of intervention (Melano, 2001), professional functions and roles (Zamamillo & Gaitán, 1991), professional identity (Aguín, 2003), and its eventual scientific status (Gartner-Isaza, 1999), which at the same time intersect with concerns about theoretical status (Quiroz, 2000) and the conflictive fragmentation between theory and practice (Montaño, 1998). Regarding its nature, proclamations have circulated ranging from considering the profession as an art, as a technique, as a technology, or as a social scientific discipline (Moix, 2006), also including the ideas of scientific art and philosophy of action (Evangelista-Martínez, 2010). However, the view of social work as a scientific discipline currently finds greater consensus (Zurita-Castillo, 2012), an epistemic matter that affects the scientific position it occupies, due to its capacity to generate knowledge (Yáñez Pereira et al., 2023) as well as to use it in the resolution of social problems.

Consequently, during its evolution, the discipline has shown itself to be highly permeable to the currents of its time, reflecting particularities, accents, and emphases at crucial moments of its development. Examining its trajectories, that is, those fluctuating and changing sequences of historical positions occupied since its emergence (Bourdieu, 1999), requires keeping in view the heterogeneity that characterizes the contexts that have shaped it and that undoubtedly guide its debates, contributing to thinking about how the processes of construction and historical disposition of the discipline arise, as well as its forms and focuses of scientific knowledge. Thus, it is possible to identify, in the so-called first tradition of social work (Yáñez-Pereira, 2007), modalities of practice that stood out for attention in the individual and family spheres, characterized by the prevalence of psychological perspectives and an assistance-based approach, with the primary objective of professional action being to adapt subjects to their environment (Zamamillo, 1999).

During the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, the discipline was influenced by the rapid political and social changes of the time, seeing the emergence of the reconceptualization movement, which sought to break the functionalist and pragmatic logics in which it was embedded, giving rise to a critical profile that emerged from the regional context and aimed to think about and express professional debate in terms of historical materialism (Del Valle & Ramella, 2010).

In 1976, within the framework of the contextual demands of the time, marked by the civic-military dictatorships of the Latin American continent, what would later be known as the technological cycle (Aylwin et al., 1982), which in the methodological field still maintains broad acceptance, based on the planning structure of the logical framework and the appropriation of the traditional method of social policies, as a constituent part of a second tradition where positivism, structural functionalism, and rational choice theory prevail. Here, the idea of discipline “ventures into the domain of ideas that the specialist considers as his own property” (Morin, 2001, p. 149).

Now, from the 1990s with the advent of democracies on the continent and up to the present, a new tradition emerges that seeks to legitimize contemporary social work. Its imprint lies in problematizing and denaturalizing the current order, especially its consequences in social life and the effects this produces in everyday lives, through the cultivation of critical theories in which, among others, late Marxism, post-structuralism, new hermeneutics, anti-oppressive, feminist, and/or decolonial approaches appear (Yáñez Pereira et al., 2023), arising from a questioning of value neutrality, absolute truth, metatheory, and universal method, linked to the social sciences that recognize relational dynamics, historicity, contextuality, as well as broader structural interpellations (Benzecry et al., 2019).

1.2. Modernity as context

There is agreement in recognizing that scientific and academic disciplines, and consequently social work, correspond to a product of their time: they do not exist outside the context of modernity (Muñoz-Arce, 2011). In a Foucauldian key (1991), it is science that assumes the monopoly of truth, hegemonizing structures and their signifiers (Quijano, 2000), with the positivist/empiricist discourse on scientific practice then predominating in the Western world of the second half of the 19th century (Cortés-Mancilla, 2020), whose belief in scientific feasibility and productivity drove innovation in the natural sciences during the 16th century, as well as political and industrial revolutions from that historical moment (Han, 2015).

Dilthey himself (1981) emphasized the need to have stable, coherent, and organic knowledge, based on intellectual understanding “with the pretension of an autonomous epistemological status, (...) he also hoped to achieve canons of interpretative objectivity, reflecting a latent positivism; but, dealing with a field of which the research subject itself is part” (Yáñez-Pereira, 2021, p. 78). In such efforts, the aim to join the scientific knowledge of the individual is hinted at, to illustrate the sciences of the spirit, which, although born in critical opposition to positivist, naturalist, and/or empiricist conceptions, in turn possess, as Osorio (2001) says, that search for certain rules of general validity, marked by a status similar to that of their predecessors, though without aspiring to homogeneity but to equivalence.

The modern spirit unifies the way in which science arbitrates knowledge (Pardo, 2003). Within these margins, the social sciences and their history carry the split of two major research paradigms or scientific programs, as referred to by Kuhn (2007) or Lakatos (1998), respectively, reflecting the tensions between two attitudes of understanding which, despite being different in their constitution and meaning, are not mutually exclusive (Ricoeur, 2013); this refers to the explanatory attitude and the interpretative attitude.

Highlighting the above, invites recognition of the critiques linked to the geopolitical position of knowledge (Quijano, 2000), both in its spatial and symbolic dimensions (Muñoz-Arce & Rubilar-Donoso, 2022), reflecting the historical interweaving of power and knowledge structures, which is evident in how “the forms of social reproduction shape the production of socially useful knowledge” (D'Amico, 2016, p. 432), and its processes of validation and transmission. While Bacon emphasized that knowledge is power, Foucault (2012, 2019) tells us that knowledge and power exist reciprocally, one producing and maintaining the other as a relationship of mutuality, which entails a constant and strategic struggle, according to devices that reinforce reproduction in the forms and functions of truth (Foucault, 1991), which, of course, knowledge transmits across generations and periods.

It is within this framework that social work emerges belatedly, in the scientific field, immersed in the characteristics and regimes of truth of the era. The discipline arises facing what Rosanvallon (1995) and Castel (2002) conceive as the social question (Rozas-Pagaza, 2010), paired with the ways in which social assistance assumed greater organization, following its combination with scientific and methodical advances in biomedical, sociological, psychological, and even humanistic languages. From this basis, its professional configuration is established on objectives centered on knowledge and the problematization of the social, with a view to its transformation, privileging one pole over the other, in accordance with the assumptions with which both its theories and ethical frameworks are conceived (Yáñez-Pereira, 2013).

1.3. Disciplinary Debates: Approaches to the Scientific Literature

Academic journals stand as one of the most common means for the dissemination of scientific research results (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014), under the auspices of institutions mandated to oversee, produce, and communicate knowledge, materializing their discussions through an activity increasingly “organized by management devices” (Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021, p. 149), resulting in a sustained increase in journals and research networks.

This progressive increase in the production and dissemination of knowledge through scientific journals (García-Peñalvo, 2018) has not been without criticism, with the phrase publish or perish becoming popularized as a maxim of academic activity in recent decades, recognizing that at times scientists are “forced to produce publishable results at all costs” (Fanelli, 2010, p. e10271), putting tension on the real impact of published research, the public value of scientific knowledge, as well as its access and possibilities for apprehension (da Silveira et al., 2023).

Another issue that has characterized scientific dissemination in academic journals is that of linguistic and geographic disparities. English has established itself as the predominant language in scientific communication (Ammon, 2001), which at the same time is reproduced in overrepresentation in databases and impact indices, affecting “non-Anglophone academics when disseminating their research” (Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011), sometimes requiring them to “highlight the research as solid, significant, and worthy of publication” (Moreno, 2024, p. 86), with the language itself becoming a complexity that increases the likelihood of the feared editorial rejections, given that “empirical evidence shows that failing to meet the linguistic requirements of central academic communities reduces academic productivity” (Uzuner, 2008, p. 255).

2. Methodology

The research is based on the assumption that it is possible to analyze the debates and tensions that have shaped the disciplinary field of social work through a systematic analysis of its scientific production. For this purpose, the scrutiny of the Web of Science core collection was chosen, due to its recognized quality and international visibility (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), as well as for its key comparative advantage: explicitly classifying the category of social work as a “scientific activity in which research activity is developed”

(Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014, p. 430), which allows for a more precise location of the disciplinary corpus. This choice therefore responds to criteria of analytical precision and disciplinary relevance.

2.1. Focus and design

The study was structured as an approach with a quantitative focus, of exploratory/descriptive depth (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014) and cross-sectional in nature (Chamblas et al., 2001). In accordance with the above, the study adopted a particular bibliometric cohort methodological design (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2019), following the guidelines proposed by Massimo Aria and Corrado Cuccurullo (2017), an approach that enables the quantification and understanding of a field (Letelier S et al., 2005) through the scrutiny of publications in a research area (Sánchez-Martin et al., 2022).

2.2. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was structured into two search routes in the Web of Science core collection, which includes the indices: Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI).

Both bibliographic searches were conducted on August 1, 2023, updating the search at two subsequent moments: June 21, 2024, and April 4, 2025. The first search route followed the following equation: search in [1] Web of Science Categories: social work, [2] in the year range from 2008 to 2025, covering the entire available period; considering that in the indices SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, and AHCI documents are hosted from 2008 to the present, while the ESCI index considers the last 5 years (2020 to the present)¹.

The second search route repeats the previous criteria, adding a language filter, expressed in the following equation: search in [1] Web of Science Categories: social work, [2] in the year range from 2008 to 2025, [3] Languages: Spanish.

2.3. Data analysis

Once the set of studies to be included in the analysis was identified, bibliometric information was extracted from the database used. These data were exported in Bibtex (Bib) and comma-separated values (CSV) formats. Particularly for the second bibliometric exploration, considering that the ESCI index only displays results from the last five years, the three explorations were merged and duplicates manually removed. For the analysis, RStudio software was used, specifically the R package Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Soler et al., 2020).

Following the proposal of Rodríguez-Soler et al. (2020), standard scientific mapping by flow, developed by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017), was used, focusing the study's analysis on five key dimensions: general information from both explorations, descriptive analysis of the main sources, analysis of languages and countries, analysis of the most cited documents in both explorations. The central focus of the study analyzes the conceptual structure (Lledó et al., 2022), particularly using author keyword frequency analysis, assuming that they most faithfully reflect the authors' intentions (Campina-López et al., 2024), using the co-word technique, based on the frequency with which two words are associated in a set of documents (Gálvez, 2018). This allows for graphical representation of concepts, enabling visualization of the relationships and strength of connections between concepts, presented through the thematic map [Figure 4] (Parra-González et al., 2020), also called a strategic diagram (Cobo et al., 2011).

This graphical representation is divided into four categories or quadrants, in which thematic sets or clusters are classified. Their classification and representation are carried out according to parameters of degree of development or density [density] and degree of relevance or centrality [centrality], providing information regarding the strength of concept connections and their relative importance within the network (Pradhan & Pal, 2020). For the construction of the co-occurrence network, the Fast Greedy algorithm was used, restricting the number of nodes to 100, which avoids network overload (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), providing a clear representation of the dominant conceptual clusters.

3. Results

The results of both bibliometric explorations are presented in the order described in the previous section.

3.1. First Bibliometric Approach

a) General Results

The first search yielded a total of 64,755 publications associated with the Social Work category in Web of Science, of which 51,126 correspond to scientific articles, representing 78.95% of the total. The remaining publications are distributed as follows: 5,736 bibliographic reviews (8.85%), 3,824 editorial materials (5.90%), 3,321 review articles (5.12%), 2,758 early access (4.25%), and others.

Publications associated with the Web of Science category Social Work also appear linked to the categories of: Family Studies (n=18,934, 29.23%), Public Environmental Occupational Health (n=6,828, 10.54%), Social Psychology (n=4,216, 6.51%), Public Administration (n=3,547, 5.47%), Social Issues (n=3,419, 5.28%), and Multidisciplinary Psychology (n=3,121, 4.82%).

¹ Access to the WoS databases may vary between institutions and according to the respective access agreements.

The works identified in the first exploration are linked to the indices Social Sciences Citation Index (n=56,316, 86.86%), Emerging Sources Citation Index (n=8,516, 13.13%), Science Citation Index Expanded (n=581, 0.89%), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (n=100, 0.15%).

Linked to the 64,755 publications identified in the search, there are a total of 89,568 authors, with the works simultaneously published in 102 sources.

b) Sources

Associated with the Social Work category in WoS, there are 102 different sources, of which those accumulating the highest number of publications are, in first place, the journal *Children and Youth Services Review* with 6,667 publications, representing 10.29% of the total. In second place is the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* with 4,216 publications, representing 6.51% of the total. In third and fourth place are the journals *British Journal of Social Work* and *Health & Social Care in the Community*, with 3,416 (5.27%) and 2,849 (4.40%) publications, respectively.

The journals occupying the following positions within the top 10 in terms of number of works are, in fifth place, *Journal of Community Psychology* (n=1,807, 2.79%), *Research on Social Work Practice* (n=1,597, 2.46%), *International Social Work* (n=1,552, 2.39%), *Child & Family Social Work* (n=1,521, 2.34%), *European Journal of Social Work* (n=1,513, 2.33%), *Social Policy & Administration* (n=1,451, 2.24%), and finally, *Journal of Social Policy* (n=1,425, 2.20%).

c) Language and region/publication regions

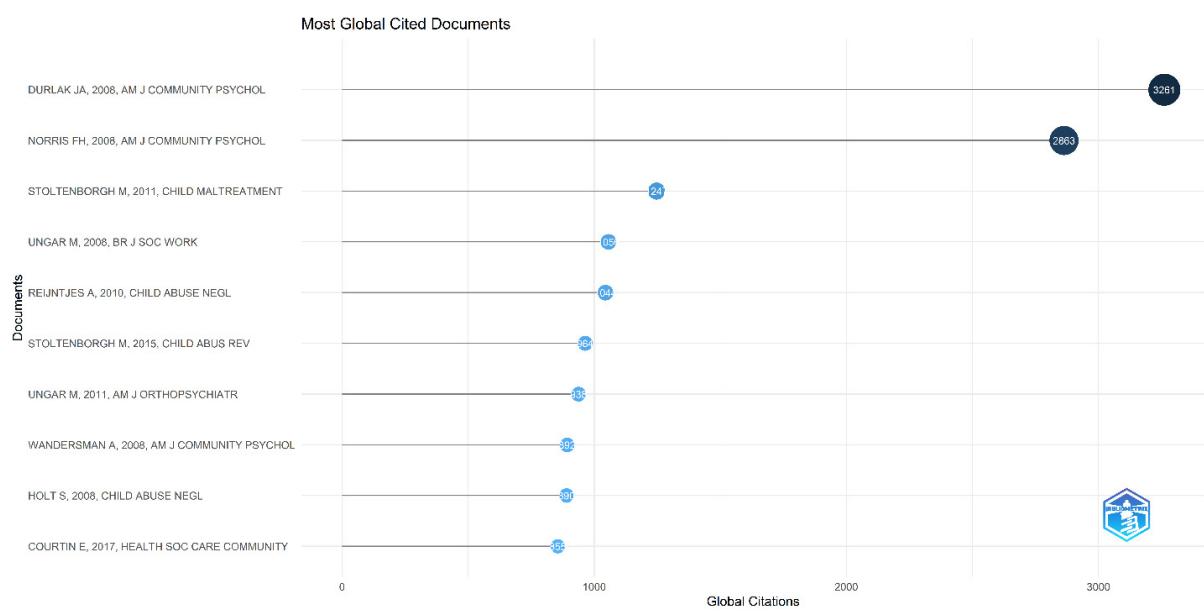
The countries with the highest number of publications, based on the nationality of the authors, are the United States with 28,103 works, representing 43.39% of the total. Followed by England with 8,215, representing 12.68% of the total. In third place is Australia with 4,705 works, equivalent to 7.26% of the total. Next on the list are Canada, with 3,938 (6.08%), China with 3,058 (4.72%), Israel with 1,769 (2.73%), and Sweden with 1,452 (2.24%). In eighth position is Spain, accumulating 1,381 works, representing 2.13% of the total works analyzed. The ninth and tenth positions are occupied by Scotland with 1,246 (1.92%) and the Netherlands with 1,083 works (1.67%).

In accordance with the results by country, the analysis of publication languages shows a clear predominance of Anglo-Saxon publications. Works published in English represent 98.29%, totaling 63,650, followed by publications in Spanish, which represent only 0.95%, with 620 works. In third place are publications in Croatian with 299 works (0.46%). In fourth place are publications in Portuguese with 124 works (0.19%).

d) Most cited documents

Of the 64,755 works examined in the exploration, 47,889 (73.95%) received at least one citation, while 16,866 (26.05%) did not register any citations. Of the total works analyzed, the 10 articles with the highest number of citations together receive a total of 14,002 citations. Two works notably stand out for concentrating the highest number of citations: in first place, *Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation* (Durlak & DuPre, 2008), and in second place, *Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness* (Norris et al., 2008), registering 3,261 and 2,863 citations respectively, both studies published in the **American Journal of Community Psychology** [see Figure 1].

Figure 1. Most cited documents



Source: Own elaboration

3.2. Second Bibliometric Approach

a) General results

At this point, it is important to clarify that, as indicated in the methodology section, for the second exploration, the databases collected in 2023, 2024, and 2025 were manually combined, because the WoS platform, for the ESCI index, only displays results from the last five years. This is particularly significant for the present exploration, since considering only the last five years would result in a total of 620 documents analyzed. By merging the databases, 934 documents are analyzed.

The second bibliometric exploration, corresponding to the Social Work category in Web of Science and limiting the search to results in Spanish, yielded a total of 934 publications, of which 653 are articles, 133 are book reviews, 113 are editorial materials, while the remaining document types are letters, reviews, and bibliographic items. It is notable that even though the search covers the same period as the previous review, from 2008 to 2025, results only appear from the last 16 years, from 2010 to 2025, which are linked to 10 different sources, all of them academic journals.

Of the total works analyzed, 932 are indexed in ESCI and 2 in SSCI; that is, scientific communication in Spanish is predominantly found in the ESCI index. The annual scientific production from the second exploration shows that the two works linked to SSCI were published in 2010 and 2014, while the works associated with ESCI were published from 2018 (n=164), 2019 (n=150), 2020 (n=157), 2021 (n=175), 2022 (n=124), 2023 (n=50), 2024 (n=71), and 2025 (n=41).

b) Sources

Of the 10 sources linked to the 934 publications in Spanish, associated with the Social Work category in WoS, only 7 are Spanish-language journals. Likewise, of the 10 journals, only 8 recorded citations during the studied period [see Table 1].

Table 1. Highest impacting journals

Journal	Total citations	H-index	G-index	M-index	Total publications
Prospectiva	135	6	7	0,75	158
Trabajo Social Global-Global Social Work	109	5	7	0,625	92
Cuadernos De Trabajo Social	94	5	5	0,625	195
Eleuthera	37	3	3	0,375	163
Trabajo Social	37	3	3	0,375	196
Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social	30	3	3	0,5	43
Interacción y Perspectiva	27	2	4	0,25	83
Child Abuse & Neglect	2	1	1	0,063	1

Source: Own elaboration

Of the 8 journals that accumulated citations, the one with the highest number of citations is **Revista Prospectiva**, affiliated with the University of Valle, Colombia, followed by **Trabajo Social Global-Global Social Work**, associated with the University of Granada, Spain, registering a total of 135 and 109 citations, respectively.

In third place by total citations is **Cuadernos de Trabajo Social** from the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. In fourth place by number of citations are **ELEUTHERA** from the University of Caldas, Colombia, and **Trabajo Social**, affiliated with the National University of Colombia, each registering 37 citations.

The list continues with **Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social**, affiliated with the University of Alicante, Spain, registering 30 citations, followed by **Revista Interacción y Perspectiva**, linked to the University of Zulia, Venezuela, which received 27 citations.

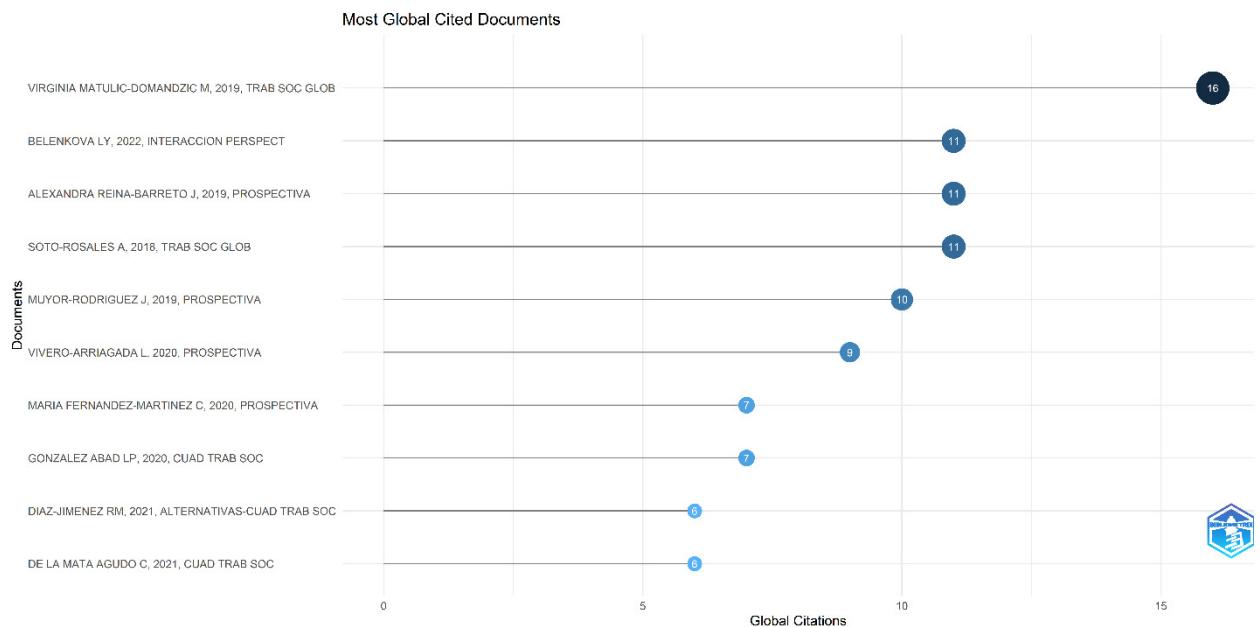
c) Most cited documents

In the second bibliometric exploration, of the 934 works analyzed, only 215 (23.02%) recorded at least one citation, while 719 (76.98%) received no citations. The 10 works with the highest number of citations together total 94 citations [see Figure 2]. The work *Las mujeres sin hogar: realidades ocultas de la exclusión residencial* (Homeless women: hidden realities of residential exclusion), (Matulic-Domandzic et al., 2019), published in **Trabajo Social Global-Global Social Work**, occupies first place with 16 citations.

In second place, with 11 citations each, are the works: *La pedagogía digital en el sistema de educación superior inclusiva* (Digital pedagogy in the inclusive higher education system) by Belenkova et al. (2022), published in **Interacción y Perspectiva**; *Apoyo social en la maternidad indeseada de estudiantes universitarias ecuatorianas* (Social support for unwanted motherhood in Ecuadorian university students) (Reina-Barreto &

Fernandez-D'Andrea, 2019), published in **Revista Prospectiva**; and *Satisfacción laboral y desgaste profesional en trabajadores de servicios sociales de atención a la infancia* (Job satisfaction and burnout in child-care social service workers) (Soto-Rosales & González-Losada, 2018), published in **Trabajo Social Global-Global Social Work**.

Figure 2. Most cited articles in Spanish



Source: Own elaboration

d) Keyword Frequency

The keyword frequency analysis was conducted using author keywords, assuming that they most accurately reflect the authors' intentions. The total number of keywords analyzed and derived from the second bibliometric exploration amounts to 2,031 author keywords, of which 86 registered 5 or more occurrences and are represented in a circular word cloud [see Figure 3].

The results show that, of the total publications studied, the most prominent author keyword is *social work*, appearing in 191 works, followed by the keywords *gender* and *social*, each with 33 occurrences. In fourth and fifth positions are the keywords *family* and *social intervention*, with 30 and 27 occurrences, respectively. The list of keywords completing the top 10, each with more than 15 occurrences, includes: *social services* (n=25), *human rights* (n=23), *intervention* (n=23), *migration* (n=16), and *work* (n=16).

Figure 3. Highest Frequency of Author Keywords



Source: Own elaboration

e) Analysis of the Conceptual Structure in Author Keywords

As described in the methodology section, the analysis of the conceptual structure is visualized through the graphical representation in the thematic map [see Figure 4], which allows the classification of research topics and/or debates in the scientific literature published in Spanish on social work in WoS.

The analysis identifies a total of eight thematic clusters. Each cluster "is labeled using the name of the most significant keyword" (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014, p. 423) of the cluster, adopting the name of the keyword with the highest number of occurrences. The interpretation of the thematic map is based on the axes of centrality and density. The representation of the clusters in each of the quadrants allows the identification of:

Motor Themes: The motor themes quadrant (upper right) is composed of a single cluster: *social*, in which the keywords with the highest occurrences are: *social, work, participation, territory, capitalism, discrimination, and exclusion*; registering a centrality of 0.47 and a density of 22.286. The debates associated with motor

themes are extensively developed while being highly interconnected with other research topics or debates (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2020).

Niche Themes: In the niche themes quadrant (upper left), there are three clusters: *care*, *child protection*, and *violence against women*. The *care* cluster is composed of the terms: *care*, *inclusion*, *inequality*, *profession*, *dependency*, and *employment*, registering a centrality of 0.03 and a density of 25.787. The second cluster, *child protection*, consists of the terms: *child protection*, *social policy*, *neoliberalism*, and *community participation*, with a centrality of 0 and a density of 22.172. The third cluster, *violence against women*, is composed of two terms: *violence against women* and *intimate partner violence*, registering a centrality of 0 and a density of 21.666.

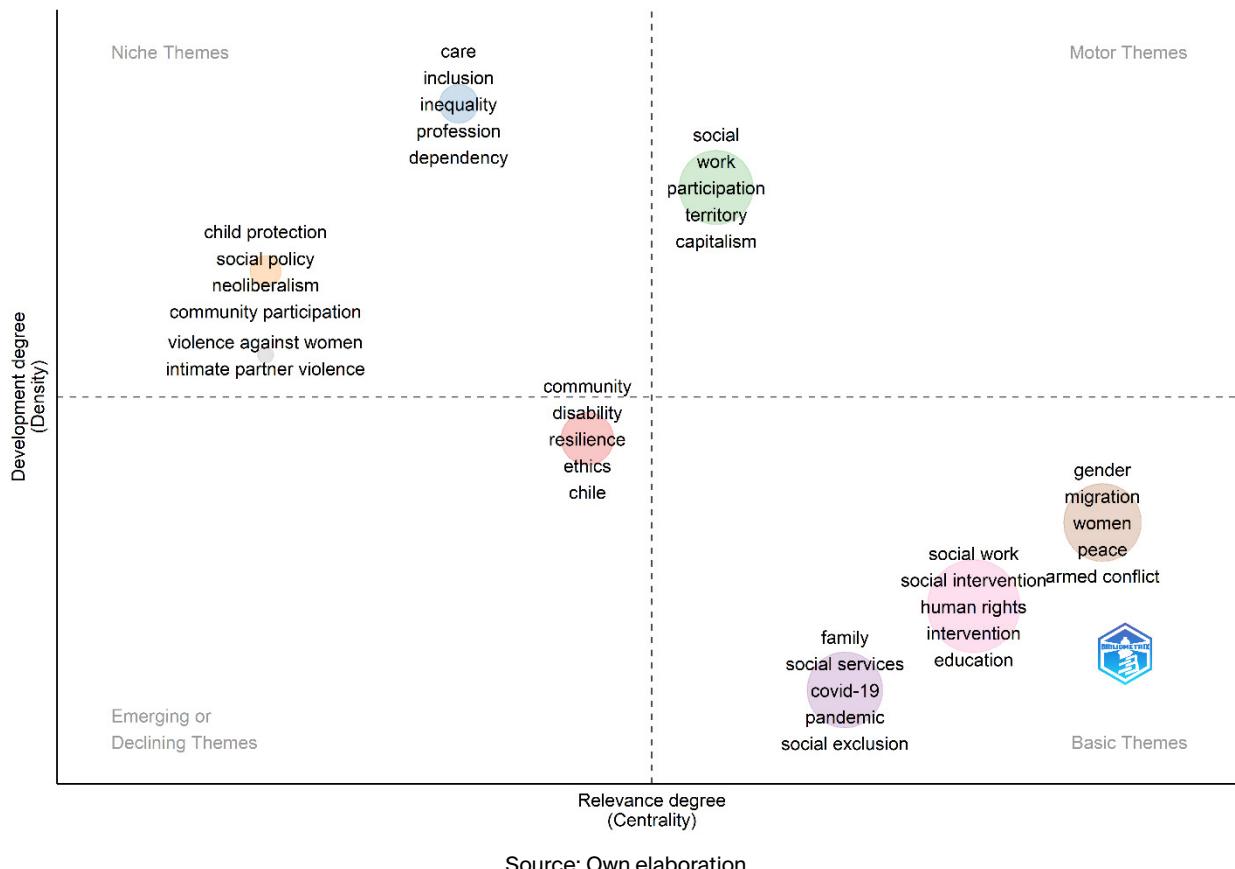
The debates associated with the three niche theme clusters show low or null centrality but mostly high density, suggesting that these debates are deeply developed and specialized, although they are not particularly connected to other debates (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014).

Emerging or Declining Themes: In this quadrant (lower left) appears the *community* cluster, where the most frequent keywords are: *community*, *disability*, *resilience*, *ethics*, *Chile*, *leadership*, and *power*. The cluster registers a centrality of 0.13 and a density of 21.050, reflecting low centrality and low density, which indicates that these are topics with limited development and connectivity. The debates in this quadrant are underdeveloped and marginal within the field (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2020). This cluster encompasses debates that could either represent emerging areas of interest or topics that are declining in relevance.

And finally, **Basic Themes:** In the lower right quadrant, three clusters appear: *social work*, *gender*, and *family*. In the first cluster, the most frequent keywords are: *social work*, *social intervention*, *human rights*, *education*, *research*, and *university*, with a centrality of 0.81 and a density of 18.166. The second cluster groups the keywords: *gender*, *migration*, *women*, *peace*, *armed conflict*, and *violence*, with a centrality of 0.81 and a density of 19.338. The third cluster includes: *family*, *social services*, *COVID-19*, *pandemic*, *social exclusion*, and *poverty*, with a centrality of 0.65 and a density of 16.345.

The debates associated with this quadrant are transversal and general within Spanish-speaking social work discussions, but they are not highly developed (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2020).

Figure 4. Thematic map



4. Discussion and Conclusions

One of the first issues worth highlighting is the existence of the Social Work category in the Core Collection of Web of Science, a database recognized as the most relevant scientific information service (Parra-González et al., 2020), which engages in the debates around the disciplinary scope of social work (Evangelista, 2010; Moix, 1991); the explicit presence of social work in the WoS core collection could suggest that these debates have been partially resolved. In this context, it is notable that *social work* appears prominently in author

keywords, present in 191 works—meaning in 1 out of every 5 publications analyzed in this study—which could indicate a strong need to reaffirm the disciplinary position from which research is published, while also engaging with the issue of the subalternity of knowledge and the position of the discipline in the sociotechnical division of labor at the dawn of cognitive capitalism (D'Amico, 2016).

The bibliometric approaches reveal a clear and marked asymmetry between publications in English and Spanish (Zurita-Castillo et al., 2025), with a notable Anglophone predominance, evident both in the number of publications and in the impact and citations received. During the period analyzed in both cases, English-language publications totaled 63,650, while 620 works were registered in Spanish, representing an approximate ratio of 100 to 1. This pattern is further amplified when contrasting the 10 most-cited articles in both explorations: the 10 most-cited English-language publications received 14,002 citations, whereas the 10 most-cited Spanish-language works received 94 citations, reflecting a ratio of 150 to 1. Similarly, comparing the single most-cited article in each language, the top English-language article received 3,261 citations, while its Spanish-language counterpart received 16 citations, a ratio of 200 to 1.

These figures reflect not only linguistic hegemony but also the geopolitical reproduction of knowledge (Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021), directly related to colonialities of knowledge (Quijano, 2000) and hierarchies of domination dictated by the Global North (Muñoz-Arce & Rubilar-Donoso, 2022).

The analysis by publication language shows that 98.29% of publications are in English, while only 0.95% are in Spanish, consistent with the analysis of publication sources, which identified 102 journals associated with the Social Work category in WoS, of which only 7 are Spanish-language titles, all appearing exclusively in the ESCI index; an index that holds a peripheral status in global knowledge circulation networks, constituting a barrier to access and dissemination of knowledge generated in Spanish-speaking countries, highlighting structural limitations in the scientific production and dissemination of knowledge. This situation is contradictory when aligned with the principles of open science (Lobato et al., 2022), which seek to guarantee equitable access and broad dissemination of academic results between science and society (Mansur et al., 2021), aiming for the democratization of knowledge and its use in spaces of direct professional intervention.

The analysis of the conceptual structure through the thematic map allows identifying that the most prominent debates in the scientific literature on social work are located in three research fronts: Social Work, Gender, and Family. These discussions show the highest centralities but low density, indicating that they are widely discussed by the disciplinary community; that is, they are interconnected but not deeply developed. This underscores the imperative need to conduct studies and research that enrich reflections and disciplinary debates, strengthening and “theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically grounding” (Camelo & Cifuentes, 2006, p. 169) the practice of social work.

The study opens avenues for future research; there is a need to deepen analyses of Spanish-language scientific literature through systematic reviews, qualitative explorations of publication content, and additional bibliometric studies in different databases.

5. Funding Sources

Research project funded by the Universidad Autónoma de Chile, DIUA Project 272-2023 of the Vice-Rectorate for Research and Doctorates.

The project is also linked to the thesis process in the Doctorate program in Social Work at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina.

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