


Trends in scientific production on dependency in the elderly from the perspective of Social Work. Scientific mapping of the period 2006-2023

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ENG Abstract: This paper deals with the evolution and trends in research on dependency and the elderly using a bibliometric methodology, identifying the most cited studies, the most influential journals and the leading countries and authors in the field, using the WOS database as a reference. The analysis reveals a significant increase in dependency-related publications since the early 2000s, suggesting a growing academic and practical interest. In addition, the most popular areas of research are highlighted, such as health and social aspects, as well as other areas of growing interest such as prevention. The implications of these findings for future studies are also discussed, highlighting the need for multidisciplinary approaches and the integration of new technologies and analysis methodologies. In summary, this literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of dependence research, offering valuable insights for scholars and practitioners interested in this expanding area.

Keywords: dependency, bibliographic analysis, elderly, care, Social Work

ES Tendencias en la producción científica sobre dependencia en personas mayores desde la perspectiva del Trabajo Social. Mapeo científico del período 2006-2023

ES Resumen: El presente trabajo versa sobre la evolución y las tendencias de investigación en dependencia y personas mayores utilizando una metodología bibliométrica, identificando los estudios más citados, las revistas más influyentes y los países y autores líderes en la temática, tomando como referencia la base WOS. El análisis revela un aumento significativo en las publicaciones relacionadas con la dependencia desde principios de la década de 2000, lo que sugiere un creciente interés académico y práctico. Además, se destacan las áreas de investigación más populares, como la salud y los aspectos sociales, así como otras áreas de interés creciente como es el caso de la prevención. También se discuten las implicaciones de estos hallazgos para futuros estudios, subrayando la necesidad de enfoques multidisciplinarios y la integración de nuevas tecnologías y metodologías de análisis. En resumen, este análisis bibliográfico proporciona una visión comprensiva del panorama actual de la investigación sobre la dependencia, ofreciendo valiosas perspectivas para académicos y profesionales interesados en esta área en expansión.

Palabras clave: dependencia, análisis bibliográfico, mayores, cuidados, Trabajo Social.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. Objectives. 3. Materials and Methods. 3.1. Procedure. 3.2. Sources and Data. 4. Results and Analysis. 4.1. Publications and Citations by Temporality. 4.2. Areas of Study. 4.3. Impact Factor. 4.4. Most productive and cited authors. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. References.

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1. Introduction

The aging of the population has significantly increased in recent decades. It is estimated that by the year 2050, the population over the age of 67 will exceed 30% in Spain (INE, 2024). Therefore, the debate on

population aging and the exponential rise in dependency has become a key topic in scientific research. As shown in Figure 1, the number of people in this situation has been continuously growing since 1975. By 2023, it is projected that 30.91% of individuals over the age of 64 in Spain will be dependent.

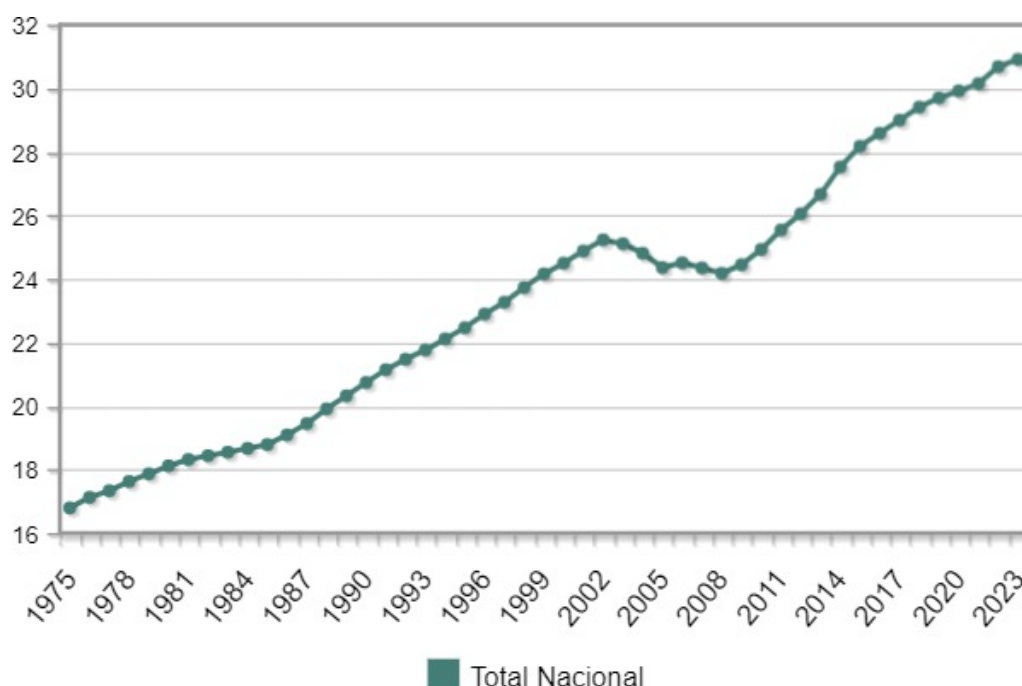


Figure 1. Dependency rate of the population over 64 years old in Spain. Source: INE, 2024.

In parallel, the scientific community's interest in this line of research has grown in Spain following the publication of Law 39/2006, of December 14, on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for People in Situations of Dependency (hereinafter, Law 39/2006). One of its key points is the recognition of research and development as pillars of progress in this field. This is specified in the tenth additional provision: "Public authorities will promote research in areas related to dependency within R&D&I plans."

This legal framework has facilitated the development of action strategies for people with disabilities, advanced age, or chronic illnesses. It represents a legislative milestone that acknowledges subjective rights through the provision of a portfolio of social services. This understanding highlights the interconnection between the institutional process that led to the creation of the System for Autonomy and Care for Dependency (SAAD) in Spain and the factors that have influenced its implementation, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (2019), particularly regarding the necessity of research and intervention transfer to achieve more inclusive societies.

Thus, dependency has been consolidated as the fourth pillar of the Welfare State by establishing a care system that ensures universal access to the public network, enabling individuals to live with dignity, autonomy, and independence—putting an end to decades of neglect. However, in order to make these services effective, the contribution of knowledge has been crucial in diagnosing the conditions of these individuals, as indicated by validated measurement scales:

- Katz Index: Focused on functional dependency, it measures levels of personal care control, mobility, communication, and social cognition (Research Foundation State University of New York, 1991).
- Barthel Index: This scale, used in various institutions and studies, measures parameters to assess the degree of self-sufficiency and the level of independence in individuals, with a singular focus on physical aspects (Cid-Rudafa & Damián, 1997).
- Dependency Assessment Scale: This is a measurement instrument used in Spain to determine functional dependency from a legal and administrative perspective. It considers self-care, mobility, household tasks, and decision-making by elderly individuals (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2000).

In light of these proposals, analyzing the scientific corpus on dependency in older adults is of particular interest, as it constitutes the foundation of this scientific analysis, generating knowledge that aligns with contemporary social issues. In addition to the aforementioned arguments, it is essential to recognize that enriching the foundation of this topic requires establishing useful interpretative frameworks that define the trajectory and impact of its findings in its primary field of dissemination: publications in scientific journals.

As a result, the specialized literature gives rise to scientific publications analyzed through bibliometrics. This branch of scientometrics is based on the premise that scientific discoveries and research findings are published in scientific journals, with the scientific article being its unit of analysis (Salinas-Ríos & García, 2022). In this regard, bibliometrics serves as a useful tool for measuring and analyzing the quality of scientific

activity (Idareta-Goldaracena, Viscarret-Garro, Ballesterio-Izquierdo & Úriz-Pemán, 2020), facilitating the systematization of the number of documents produced, impact indicators, and the most recurrent research topics. It encompasses a wide range of approaches that can be classified into performance studies, which analyze the number of publications and impact indicators (Holden, Rosenberg & Barker, 2005).

This article presents an updated longitudinal review, using bibliometric analysis, of publications on aging and dependency over the past two decades (2006–2023). In general, there is a growing trend in the use of bibliometric studies across various disciplines, including health sciences and social sciences, with a notable prevalence of scientific production taking a holistic approach (Moral-Muñoz, Herrera-Viedma, Santisteban-Espejo & Cobo, 2020). However, regarding the specific subject of this study, we have identified certain gaps, as the concept of dependency is a highly specific term in Spain, encompassing research in the fields of disability, health, and care policies in a broad sense.

As mentioned earlier, this study consists of a bibliometric analysis of major international scientific journals indexed in the SJR Scopus database and present in the Web of Science (WoS). The aim is to systematically and diachronically analyze the evolution of themes and core interests in scientific production related to Social Work within the field of aging and dependency studies. In doing so, this research provides a comprehensive overview that encourages systematic reflection in a field that has been scarcely studied under the specific framework of dependency.

2. Objectives

Publication is the most important way science promotes research and presents its findings. Understanding the existing body of work on a specific topic is essential for assessing the quality of research in that field. For this reason, the main objective of this article is to study the level of interest within the scientific community regarding dependency. Specifically, we will focus on the attention that various scientific journals give to this type of research. Through this analysis, we aim to provide an overview of studies related to dependency and their impact on scientific activity.

Based on this primary objective, we establish the following secondary objectives:

- Analyze the different research lines in which the concept of dependency is embedded, based on the set of keywords extracted from the reviewed publications, to obtain a comprehensive and structured vision of the predominant approaches and trends in this field of study.
- Classify the journals analyzed in the Web of Science database, organizing and ranking them according to their specific position in the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR).
- Identify and assess the most prominent authors and research groups in the scientific production related to the study of dependency and older adults, considering not only the quantity and quality of their publications but also their influence and recognition within the academic community.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Procedure

This study has been conducted based on a bibliometric analysis of the scientific production related to the concept of dependency, using as a reference the descriptive model proposed by authors such as Muyor and Fernández (2021). This model explains the characteristics of a topic based on existing literature, its geographical distribution, and productivity.

Bibliometric studies are highly valuable as they not only provide an in-depth exploration of a research topic but also offer a broad perspective on the current state of research in the field. Their methodological procedure ensures data quality, making it a systematic and non-arbitrary approach (Holden & Barker, 2005). Furthermore, bibliometric analysis allows us to study the impact of publications and authors based on their productivity and to identify the knowledge areas in which these topics are framed. This is particularly relevant for the advancement of a scientific field (Cobo et al., 2012). For clarity, the following figure summarizes the phases of the methodological procedure:

First Phase February 2024	Initiation and design of the research. Definition of the study objective and the approach to be used. Bibliographic review to establish the theoretical foundation of the study.
Second Phase March–May 2024	Methodological development, selection of the sample based on established criteria, and data analysis.
Third Phase June–August 2024	Systematization of results, discussion of findings, and final drafting of the study.

Figure 2. Phases of the Study.

3.2. Sources and Data

We believe that there are currently various databases that serve as good starting points for conducting these types of studies. In our case, we have chosen the Web of Science (WoS) as it is an open-access portal that includes both Spanish and English-speaking regions, as well as other non-English-speaking countries. It offers a wide range of options, making it a highly useful tool widely employed by the scientific community (Olmeda-Gómez et al., 2017; Guallar et al., 2020).

Furthermore, WoS data allows for the analysis of indicators to visualize the impact of authors based on different criteria. In this study, we have used the h-index and H-classics indices: the first to measure impact productivity based on the relationship between the number of publications and citations, and the second to systematize citation searches from the h-index (Scheriber, 2007). To refine the results, only journal articles from 2006 to 2023 were selected.

Regarding the search criteria, a series of steps were followed to determine the most appropriate terms. The selection primarily focused on concepts related to the study topic as outlined in Law 39/2006. Additionally, these terms are defined in the DeCS/MeSH thesaurus. The term dependency is one of the key elements, as it is the central concept of this study. Although it encompasses a wide range of areas, when combined with the other criteria, it directly focuses on the need for third-party assistance. Another important term is personal autonomy, which refers to a person's lack of capacity to perform activities of daily living.

Finally, while dependency can affect any individual, it is more prevalent among older adults due to aging. According to data provided by IMSERSO (2023), most beneficiaries of the System for Autonomy and Care for Dependency are individuals over 80 years old (52%), with the second largest group being those aged 65-79 (21%). This justifies the choice of older adults as a key search term.

The aforementioned concepts were introduced using the keyword search option in the title and abstract fields, thus eliminating unwanted results. Table 1 presents the keywords used according to the Teseo thesaurus.

Search Criteria. Keywords
Dependency
Care Policies
Older Adults
Aging
Personal Autonomy

Table 1. Search Criteria.

As mentioned, in this study, we believe that the use of the term older adults is crucial in the analysis of scientific articles, as it allows us to merge various concepts and meanings into a single one, such as dependency. It is important to highlight that the term dependency, outside the Spanish-speaking world, when not associated with older adults, tends to be used in the context of substance consumption. Additionally, we are interested in analyzing social policies and their application to social intervention in countries such as Spain, which is a pioneer in this field, and in Latin America, where the impact of the Spanish Law has been more significant.

A second step, once the articles were located, was to eliminate results that did not align with the subject of study, which, according to the regulation, relates personal autonomy to dependency. Articles that addressed this topic were selected through a review of the abstract and keywords. When deciding on the language, we chose results in both English and Spanish, as the platform allows search results to be filtered by language, allowing for a more focused study. The results were then normalized and analyzed through a database exported to Microsoft Excel.

Regarding the criteria used to select the indicators for analysis, we followed the work of several authors (García, 2020; Ramírez-Campos, 2020; Ortiz-Núñez & Rodríguez, 2021; Muyor & Fernández, 2021). To achieve the objectives of this study, it is important to analyze the publications based on the impact factor of the journals in which they are published. This index was explored through the Scimago Journal & Country Rank. Additionally, we collected data on the ID, DOI, title, abstract, MeSH terms, date, volume, topic, open access status, publication type, authors, affiliations, number of citations, and categories (Barceló-Hidalgo & Dávila-Lorenzo, 2023), as indicated in the results. Finally, the exportation to Microsoft Excel allowed us to process and generate the figures.

To organize and systematize the information, this study focused on aspects of production by year, number of citations, impact index, and number of publications by author. In this case, we were particularly interested in the areas of study to observe which fields are focusing more on topics related to dependency and older adults.

4. Results and Analysis

The analysis yielded a series of results based on the research objectives outlined, which we classify into the following sections:

- Temporality, i.e., the number of publications and citations per year.
- Areas of study, or the fields in which the concept of dependency is used.
- Impact factor of the article or publication.
- Origin of the works or the country where the research was conducted.
- Authors' names, as well as the number of articles they have authored and the number of citations they have received.

4.1. Publications and Citations by Temporality

Once the search criteria, including the keywords, chronological range, and publication type (article), were introduced, we obtained over 5000 publications. After eliminating duplicates and those deemed irrelevant based on titles and abstracts, a total of 4300 articles remained.

Taking the temporality of the articles as a reference, we observed variations in publications over time. Figure 3 illustrates the increase and decrease in the number of publications according to the years analyzed. It is noteworthy that 2006 marks the start of a continuous increase in publications on dependency, which can undoubtedly be associated with the enactment of Law 39/2006, which provided a set of tools that made it easier to study dependency and its context. In 2015, there was a surge that peaked in 2021, which saw the highest number of publications. The increase in interest during these years could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which particularly affected older adults, prompting scientists to focus on this area of study. In general, it can be observed that the production trend has been upward over the last eight years.

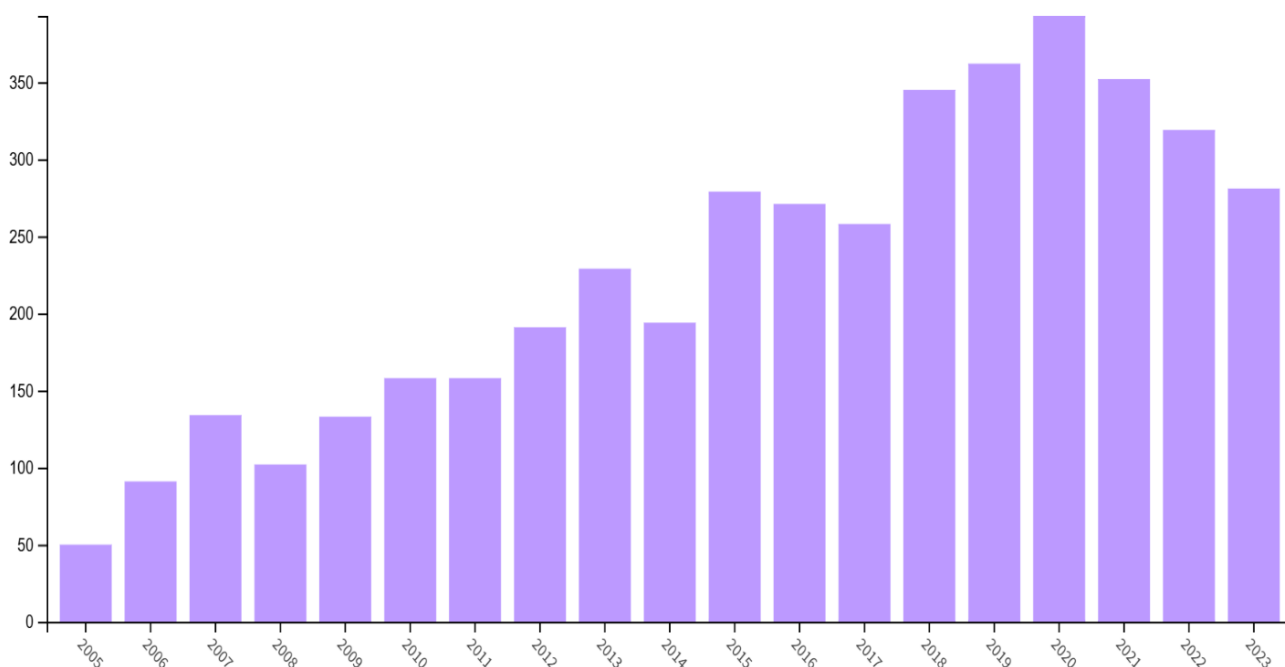


Figure 3. Number of publications on dependency by year.

Regarding the number of citations of the mentioned articles, we found a similar trend. Since 2006, there has been a constant increase in citations, which again can be linked to the implementation of Law 39/2006, which provided the scientific world with a legal foundation to study the field of dependency. Similarly, 2020 saw a sharp increase in citations, which can be related, as in the previous case, to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for older adults in a state of dependency.

Figure 4 shows that the most cited years are the early ones when research on dependency began following the approval of Law 39/2006, and the year 2020, which marked a spike in scientific production on the topic. However, starting in 2020, the number of citations begins to decline. It is important to note that this does not necessarily reflect a decrease in the scientific community's interest in dependency and older adults. According to Wang et al. (2013), citations are typically made on publications from previous years, meaning there is a period during which an article needs time to achieve a high citation count, typically between 3 and 7 years. As mentioned in the introduction, the term "dependency" is a concept characteristic of countries like Spain and Portugal.

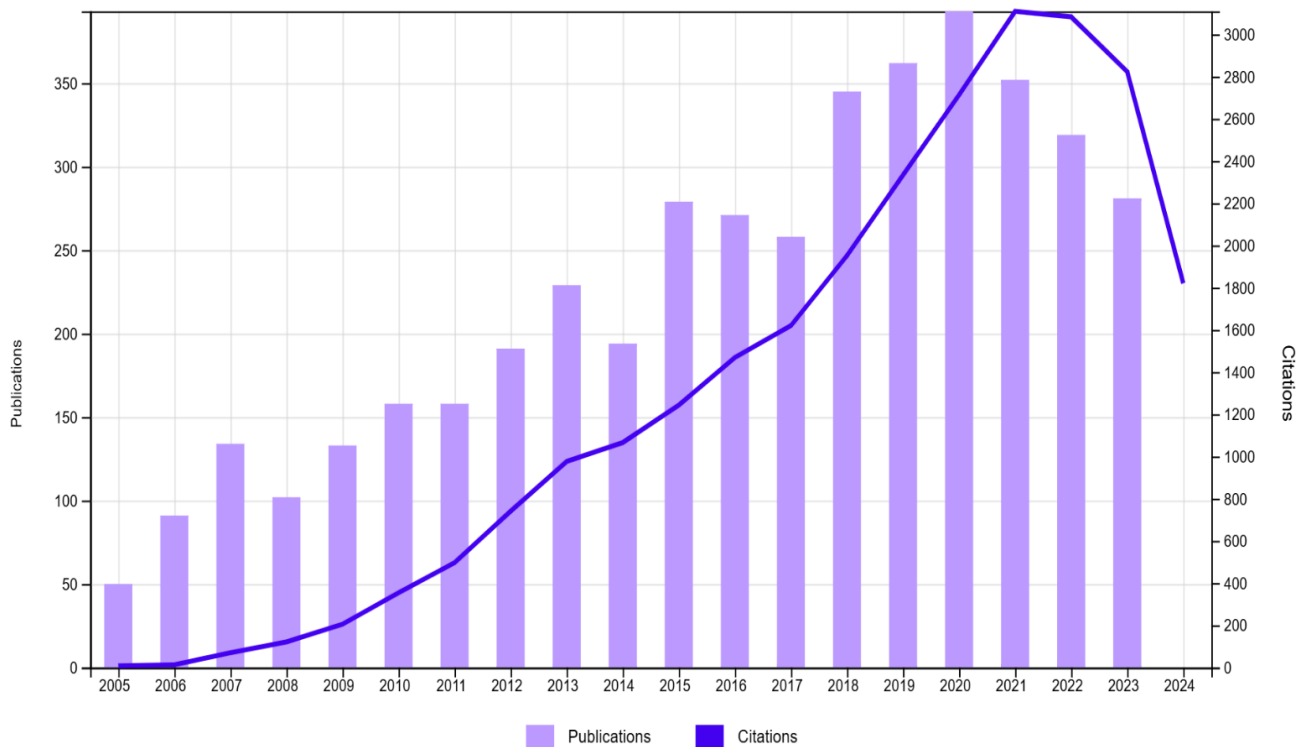


Figure 4. Number of citations by year.

4.2. Areas of Study

When analyzing the areas of study of the scientific journals, the current results show a wide variety of fields, primarily from health and social sciences, focusing on research related to dependency. However, Figure 5 explores the thematic areas in which the various publications on dependency and older adults are classified.

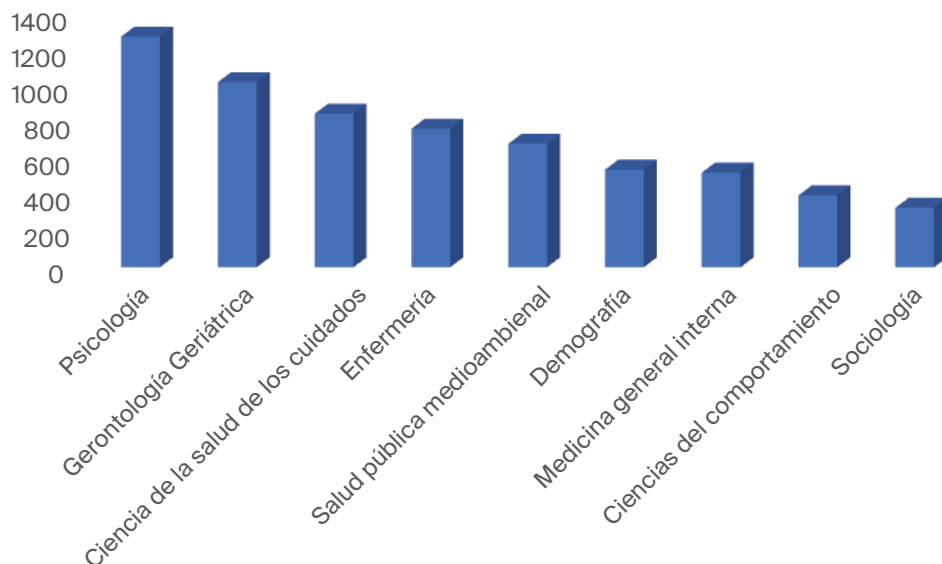


Figure 5. Thematic Areas of the Study.

As seen in the figure above, we observe that the leading field of knowledge is Psychology, followed by Geriatric Gerontology. It is not surprising that a large portion of the writings on dependency is clustered around geriatrics, as this area addresses both the social and healthcare aspects of research on older adults. This translates to the fact that healthcare scientists are the primary contributors to the publications on dependency. Therefore, the data suggests that, although dependency is a social phenomenon, it has not been equally emphasized in the field of social sciences. This highlights the imbalance in the health-social binomial in the scientific realm of dependency. As a result, dependency is often treated from a singular perspective—health or social—rarely leading to socio-health studies. Greater synergies are needed to balance

the health-social binomial, with gerontology being the field that most closely aligns with this approach. To strengthen this argument, Ruipérez (2005) suggests using the term socio-health when referring to long-term care, which includes the study of dependency.

4.3. Impact Factor

Table 2 shows the impact factor of the journals in which the analyzed articles were published. These results were obtained by locating the quartile of the journals with the highest number of publications according to the Scimago Journal & Country Rank. This sampling reflects that, despite the prominence of international journals, Spanish and Spanish-speaking journals have a significant number of contributions, positioning themselves as key references when discussing dependency. As previously noted, the familiarity with the terminology likely contributes to Spanish journals being more favorable for publishing these types of articles.

It is worth highlighting that most journals are not indexed in SJR. However, as will be shown later, the indexed journals are the ones with the highest number of citations. Based on their ranking positions, Q4 journals are the most abundant among the indexed ones, followed by Q3, and finally, those with a Q2 ranking. Among the journals with the highest number of publications, none have a Q1 index.

This distribution presents a complex picture, as we see that most publications fall within journals with a low impact factor and limited internationalization. A thematic search for publications in other languages might yield a different result; however, this study focuses on analyzing the phenomenon within the Spanish-speaking world, as the countries in this region share social and cultural similarities in their approach to the dependency phenomenon.

Next, we will explore the journals indexed in SJR and some of their characteristics, such as country and publications. Table 2 shows that the *Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP* (Q2) is the first in terms of the number of publications, with a total of 118, followed by the *Revista Brasileira da Enfermagem* (Q3) with 114. The third journal with 100 publications is *Nutrición Hospitalaria* (Q3).

Journal	Impact Factor	Number of Publications
Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP	Q2	118
Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem	Q3	114
Nutrición Hospitalaria	Q3	100
Revista Española de Geriatria y Gerontología	Q4	98
Gerokomos	Q4	90
Cuadernos de Saude Publica	Q2	79
Revista Bioetica	Q2	67
Revista Española de Salud Pública	Q3	55
Revista Brasileira de Medicina do Esporte	Q4	51
Papeles de Población	Q4	50
International Journal of Morphology	Q3	46
Revista Novedades en Población	Noindex	46
Revista Latino Americana de Enfermagem	Q2	45
Salud Pública de México	Q2	43
Revista Cubana de Medicina General Integral	Q4	42
Gaceta Sanitaria	Q3	41
Revista de Enfermagem Referencia	Q4	40
Enfermería Global	Q3	39
Revista de Ciencias Médicas de Pinar del Río	Noindex	39
Revista Cubana de Salud Pública	Q4	38
Revista de Salud Pública	Q4	38
Revista Habanera de Ciencias Médicas	Q4	35
Escola Anna Nery	Q3	34

Table 2. Top 25 Journals with the Highest Number of Publications and Indexing

Moreover, Table 3 provides another interesting result: the relevance of Spanish-speaking journals outside of Spain. Countries such as Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, and others with international scope like Brazil have a large number of articles, many references to them, and journals with a high impact factor. The social impact of aging in the Latin American population has contributed to the high demand for gerontology studies. In fact, this is a region where aging is more prevalent than in Europe (United Nations, 2017). The challenges posed by this situation are a key reason why these countries are particularly concerned with addressing the dependency situation among older adults, which would explain the high number of results obtained, along with the use of Spanish-speaking terminology.

In relation to this idea, Table 3 clearly shows a clear dominance of Latin American and Brazilian journals. However, there are also publications in North American journals, while publications in countries outside of the Spanish-speaking realm are marginal. It is not that there is no interest in other countries regarding this topic, as the consequences of aging and long-term care are of high interest worldwide, but we reiterate that our study refers to the results obtained based on the selected keywords, which limits the results of the search.

Country	Number of publication
Brasil	1107
España	788
Cuba	519
México	409
Colombia	374
Chile	359
Portugal	184
Estados Unidos	173
Argentina	136
Perú	79
Ecuador	60
Costa Rica	49

Table 3. Number of publications by country.

We observe that Spain ranks second in the number of publications, after Brazil. According to various studies, such as those from the United Nations (2023), the social and economic situation faced by older adults in Spain justifies that issues related to elderly people are a key scientific interest. This idea is proportional to the scientific production in Brazil, which is highly focused on social and intervention fields, where researchers study the situation of neglect faced by older adults in a state of dependency in order to address this issue.

4.4. Most productive and cited authors

For this study, more than 100 authors were identified who had published at least one work on dependency and older adults. There is a high number of authors with very small production, publishing one or two articles, so we can assume that this topic is not their primary research line. Studying these factors allows us to see which authors have the most significant production and which works are the most cited, helping us understand which studies are being followed as references when addressing this topic. On the other hand, the most prolific authors are not necessarily the most cited. To understand the most cited studies, we have examined those with the highest references in WoS, and we will briefly mention them in the following table.

Authors	Number of cites
Veras, Renato.	380
Abala, Cecilia; Lebrao, María Lucía; León-Díaz, Esther María; Ham-Chande, Roberto; Hennis, Anselm; Palloni, Alberto; Peláez, Martha; Pratts, Omar.	219
Singh, Shamsher; Bajorej, Beata.	188
Duarte, Yeda; Andrade, Claudia; Lebrao, María Lucía.	146
Pereira, Renata; Cotta, Rosangela; Franceschini, Sylvia; Ribeiro, Rita; Sampaio, Rosana; Priore, Silvia; Cecon, Paulo.	146

Table 4. Authors with the highest number of citations.

To summarize in a few lines the work of these authors, Renato (2009) analyzes the social and health consequences of the increasing number of older adults in Brazil. He also examines the health indicators of this group and analyzes improvements in health conditions, although it is understandable that older adults, due to their characteristics, experience a higher prevalence of illness and disability, which in turn leads to greater use of services. Therefore, the author concludes that better structures are needed to evaluate the health of older adults as a preventive action.

On the other hand, Albala et al. (2005) describe the methodology of the SABE survey, which examines the challenges posed by the rapid aging of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in health services. Older adults in the region tend to age with more functional limitations and poorer health than in developed countries. As family networks change and their ability to provide support decreases, social systems face increased pressure, which highlights the importance of research on aging.

Regarding Singh and Bajorek (2014), they analyzed the definitions surrounding older adults, observing that most were based on age. Most guidelines used the term generally, suggesting an approach based on age stereotypes. Through thematic analysis, they established five main themes that describe older adults as fragile, highlighting the lack of evidence to guide clinical decisions. The study concludes that guidelines should move away from age-based definitions, focusing more on individual patient characteristics, thus improving personalized care and clarity in treating older adults.

Duarte and Lebrao (2007) highlighted the growing need to use functional assessment tools for the older population, especially given the increase in the number of elderly individuals. Among these, the Activities of Daily Living (ADL) Index by Sidney Katz is one of the oldest and most widely cited in both Brazilian and international literature. However, the multiple modified versions of this index make its proper application difficult. The article aims to provide a historical account of the development and evolution of this index, highlighting the changes made later to promote the standardization of research information in the fields of gerontology and functional assessment.

Finally, Pereira et al. (2006) examined how different aspects used to measure quality of life (physical, social, psychological, and environmental) contribute to well-being. The results indicated that the physical aspect had the strongest correlation with overall quality of life, followed by environmental and psychological factors, with a discussion on why social factors had minimal impact.

Four of these articles fall within the earliest time frame used in this study, so it is logical that they have a higher number of citations. Additionally, the topics address fundamental issues of dependency, so it is common to refer to them when understanding concepts and risk factors.

Continuing with this section, we must analyze the authors with the highest number of contributions according to WoS. Although the number of authors is quite high, certain names appear much more frequently.

Authors	Number of publications
Lima-Costa, María Fernanda	42
de Andrade, Fabiola	45
Wong, Rebeca.	33
Duarte, Yeda	30
Reyes-Ortiz, Carlos	30

Table 5. Most prolific authors.

The author Lima-Costa has numerous contributions regarding issues related to dependency and the quality of life of older adults. From a more medical perspective, de Andrade has contributed many articles addressing the COVID-19 epidemic and its relation to older adults. On the other hand, Wong explores topics related to the socioeconomic perspective of this age group and its impact on health and aging, as well as issues related to the factors associated with morbidity in older adults. Duarte focuses on health aspects and conditions that are common in this group. Lastly, Reyes-Ortiz also studies and contributes articles on aspects affecting older adults, making them a vulnerable group prone to dependency, such as falls and chronic diseases.

5. Discussion and conclusions

From the analysis conducted, we observe an increase in studies on dependency since 2009, and although research has decreased since 2021, there remains a high volume of contributions to the field of dependency studies. Similarly, the research output on older adults has also increased in the last decade. We also note that, although many journals with a high number of contributions are not indexed in SJR, there are still several publications on dependency in journals with Q4, Q3, and Q2 impact factors. This may be due to the professional community's interest in applied research rather than large reference research groups. However, in general terms, the production in Spanish and Portuguese in these research areas is not very prolific in high-indexed journals, with the exception of years when specific legislative milestones occurred, such as the

publication of the Dependency Law in 2006, or social-impact events, such as the year following the COVID-19 health crisis, which focused on elderly care.

We also aimed to observe the research areas in which the concept of dependency is framed. We have found that dependency is mainly linked to older adults. While it is not exclusive to this group, most articles focus on them, likely because they are the age group most affected by the situation.

Likewise, according to the data, health is a fundamental aspect tied to dependency. This makes sense since health and dependency are closely interrelated, and we cannot ignore the fact that dependency is a process with many factors, with the lack or deterioration of health being one of them. As a result, articles place significant emphasis on understanding which aspects influence dependency (Dorantes-Mendoza et al., 2001; Mejía-Arango et al., 2007; Mendoza-Parra & Merino, 2009; Oliver et al., 2009; Castellanos-Perilla et al., 2020). There is also a wide range of studies exploring physical activity as a factor significantly affecting dependency, particularly as a preventive measure (Manrique-Espinoza, 2014; Manrique-Espinoza et al., 2011; Benavides-Rodríguez, García-García & Fernández, 2020; Duran-Badillo et al., 2019).

Moreover, there is a large number of articles studying mental health problems associated with dependency, which is a very relevant element in understanding the holistic health of individuals. In conclusion, there are more and more studies not only on cognitive aspects but also on mental disorders and those associated with them (Ávila-Fuentes, Melano-Carranza & Payette, 2007; Rodríguez & Gutiérrez, 2014; Segura-Cardona et al., 2015; Estrada et al., 2013; Runzer-Colmenares, 2017; Duran-Badillo et al., 2020). Additionally, the influence of nutrition on dependency is a topic that stands out, as it is often not considered as much as it should be in the social field (Giraldo-Giraldo, Pardes-Arturo, Idarraga-Idarraga & Aguirre-Acevedo, 2017; Noronha et al., 2015; Bravo, Godoy, Sánchez & Riveros, 2021; Fernández, 2019).

It is worth noting that the approach to studying dependency is made from numerous fields of study, which is quite positive as it offers us a broad perspective on its implications and what factors contribute to experiencing it, as well as the repercussions it has on the lives of those affected and their families and caregivers. However, we have observed that there is not a significant number of articles that combine socio-health aspects, so we believe that a greater research effort is needed, one that explores various aspects in a single study, as is the case with Dorantes Mendoza et al. (2001). On the opposite end, the weakest point we have identified in terms of production is the study of the social aspects related to dependency.

Looking at the most cited authors, we conclude that dependency research is focusing, at least in this study, on factors associated with dependency, as well as the mental health of those in situations of dependency. We believe it is appropriate to focus analysis on aspects related to dependency, as well as studies on the quality of life of dependent individuals. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the population is aging rapidly, which compels society to understand what affects and how dependency impacts lives in order to take appropriate measures, in a problem that inexorably increases each year.

Our observations highlight that prevention is the most effective resource for reducing the incidence of dependency. Although it is not a major focus in the analysis of the articles reviewed, it is a growing trend in recent years (Guzmán-Olea et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2017; Leiton-Espinoza et al., 2022; Pedrero-Pérez et al., 2022; Pinto et al., 2023). One reason for this is the realization that reactive policies, while fulfilling an important role in ensuring a good quality of life for dependent individuals, are not enough to address the wave that has already arrived. Therefore, prevention is a resource that is not analyzed and exploited as it should be, but it is gradually being given the importance it deserves. It is also noted that the latest trends focus on the role of new technologies in elderly and dependent care, as well as the need to improve the quality of care for adults in the new model emerging after the pandemic.

In conclusion, this study has shown that dependency is a global phenomenon whose interest has grown over the years. We affirm that it is a complex issue that spans multiple disciplines, but we emphasize that the bibliographic analysis conducted can help identify key areas for future research, such as new methodologies for detecting the risk of dependency, as well as understanding its impact on society. This analysis ultimately concludes that dependency must be addressed comprehensively to better understand how it influences our lives and the society we live in, and also to understand what factors contribute to it and how to prevent them. In this regard, we consider the contribution of Social Work to be crucial, as this discipline is a leading profession in social issues and in the comprehensive view of dependency.

Finally, we want to emphasize that this study focused on the Spanish-speaking world, which has narrowed its field of study. Therefore, the conclusions and analysis are not directly applicable to the entire international scientific community. However, it sought to understand how these topics are approached in countries with similar social and cultural characteristics. For future studies, it would be of great interest to expand the field of study using Anglo-Saxon terminology, such as "functional dependency," or studying "elderly care," carefully considering the meaning and use of these terms, which are not always associated with dependency. Additionally, other resources and databases can be explored to expand the analysis. Finally, another limitation of this study is the difficulty of simplifying all the data from the quantitative analysis. However, it is worth noting that many of the authors come from the field of Social Work and Social Services, as it is a central subject for future study, given that the elderly are the majority population in the social intervention field. This is undoubtedly an emerging issue for Social Work.

6. References

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