



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Scientific production and editorial dynamics in a family medicine journal: bibliometric study of original articles (2014–2023)

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** bibliometrics constitutes a key resource for understanding the dynamics of scientific production in different areas of knowledge.

**Objective:** to analyze the editorial dynamics of a family medicine journal during a decade, through a bibliometric analysis of original articles.

**Methods:** bibliometric study, all original articles published in the Atención Familiar journal between 2014 and 2023 were included. Annual productivity, authorship, interinstitutional collaboration, thematic, geographic and institutional origin, methodological characteristics and citation were analyzed. Descriptive statistics were performed using frequencies, percentages and average.

**Results:** 229 articles were analyzed. Approximately 23 articles were published per year. The average number of authors per article fluctuated between 3,5 and 4,4 and annual interinstitutional collaboration varied from 9,1 % to 66,7 %. Nearly 40 % of production focused on non-communicable chronic diseases and mental health. Mexico City and State of Mexico concentrated the majority of publications with 24,9 % and 11,4 %, respectively; 11 entities registered no publications. Cross-sectional studies predominated (79 %), and 74,7 % employed non-probabilistic sampling. In total, the articles received 2508 citations, 90,6 % in Spanish language; mainly from theses (60,3 %).

**Conclusions:** the bibliometric indicators analyzed (productivity, geographic origin, methodological design and thematic) show structural restrictions in family medicine research. Addressing these limitations requires strengthening methodological and research management capacities, linking studies with real health service needs, and fostering more active academic production.

**Keywords:** Journal Article; Authorship in Scientific Publications; Bibliometrics; Scientific and Technical Publications; Scientific Publication Indicators.

## INTRODUCTION

Research in primary care is a fundamental pillar in health systems, as it generates scientific evidence applicable to the most prevalent health needs of the population.<sup>(1,2,3,4,5)</sup> However, in the Latin American context, the visibility, impact, and structural characteristics of scientific production in this area have been insufficiently documented.<sup>(6)</sup> In Mexico, family medicine has consolidated itself as a medical specialty with its own academic infrastructure, which includes postgraduate training programs, scientific societies, and specialized journals that channel the scientific production of thousands of physicians and health professionals.<sup>(7,8,9)</sup> However, the bibliometric characterization of these publications has received little attention, generating a knowledge gap on the patterns, trends and scientific scope of this disciplinary field.<sup>(6)</sup>

Bibliometric studies constitute an essential analytical tool for understanding the structural dynamics of scientific production within specific fields of knowledge. Through the systematic analysis of publication indicators, these studies reveal not only what is being researched, but also how the generated knowledge is produced, disseminated, and used. In the context of medical journals in emerging countries, bibliometric analyses acquire particular relevance, as they allow for the identification of strengths, the detection of gaps, the evaluation of temporal trends, and the substantiation of editorial and scientific policy decisions based on quantitative evidence.<sup>(10,11,12,13)</sup>

Journals specializing in family medicine and primary care face particular challenges in terms of visibility and scientific impact, especially when published in languages other than English and originating in middle-income countries. These challenges include lower indexing in international databases, limited citation by high-impact journals, and a predominance of descriptive methodological designs over experimental or longitudinal studies.<sup>(6,14,15)</sup>

However, these publications fulfill critical functions in their local and regional contexts: they document specific epidemiological realities, respond to particular health needs, train human resources in research, and consolidate scientific communities in geographical areas frequently underrepresented in the global biomedical literature.

In this context, it is pertinent to examine the bibliometric performance of medical journals in local contexts. This can help establish future editorial strategies, identify emerging research priorities, detect methodological and thematic gaps, and offer comparative benchmarks for similar journals in the region. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the scientific output and editorial dynamics of a family medicine journal over a decade, through a bibliometric analysis of original articles.

## METHODS

A descriptive bibliometric study was conducted that included all original articles published in the medical journal *Atención Familiar* during the period between 2014 and 2023.

### Data sources and information extraction procedure

The information was obtained through direct manual extraction from each article available in electronic format on the journal's official website. The following bibliometric indicators were captured in a structured manner for each record:

- ✓ Attributes of scientific production:
  - Year of publication
  - Total number of authors
  - Presence or absence of inter-institutional collaboration
  - Institution of origin
- ✓ Thematic and geographical attributes:
  - Main theme and subtopics
  - Geographic distribution by federal entity of the shipping location
- ✓ Methodological attributes of the studies:
  - Design type
  - Sampling type
  - Sample size
  - Unicentric or multicentric character
- ✓ Citation attributes:

The total number of citations received by each article was identified through a Google Scholar search conducted in December 2024. For each article, the following was recorded:

  - Total number of appointments
  - Language of the citation sources (Spanish, English or other).
  - Type of source (journals with impact factor, journals without impact factor, theses).

A database was created in Microsoft Excel, in which all captured fields were coded, cleaned, and verified. Descriptive statistics were applied by calculating absolute frequencies, percentages, and averages to characterize the patterns of productivity, collaboration, thematic distribution, and methodological structure of the articles published during the study period.

The study was based exclusively on publicly available and documented information contained in articles published by the journal, without involving patients, personal data, sensitive information, or clinical records. For this reason, it did not require approval from a research ethics committee. The authors were responsible for the collection, verification, and analysis of the information. To improve the clarity and flow of the manuscript, the ChatGPT artificial intelligence tool was used through an iterative process. The authors thoroughly reviewed and validated the generated content, ensuring its consistency with the original results and interpretations of the study.

## RESULTS

Two hundred and twenty-nine original articles published between 2014 and 2023 were analyzed. The journal's annual output remained at approximately 23 articles per year. Examining the number of articles and their relationship to authorship and interinstitutional collaboration revealed that the average number of authors per article ranged from 3,5 to 4.4. Regarding collaboration, the percentage of articles with participation from more than one institution varied annually from 9,1 % to 66,7 % over the period. The dynamics of this behavior during the decade of study can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Bibliometric indicators of production, authorship and collaboration per year.

Indicator	Year									
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Articles	21	20	26	27	22	20	20	27	24	22
Total number of authors	77	71	102	101	93	83	75	110	105	89
Average number of authors per article	3,7	3,5	3,9	3,7	4,2	4,2	3,8	4,1	4,4	4,1
Collaborative articles interinstitutional	13	6	8	5	2	2	3	18	10	7
Percentage of collaboration	61,9	30,0	30,8	18,5	9,1	10,0	15,0	66,7	41,7	31,8

The scientific output published in Atención Familiar during the study period focused on areas of high clinical prevalence and social relevance, particularly chronic non-communicable diseases and mental health; these two areas accounted for approximately 40 % of all articles. Maternal and child health, geriatrics, and medical education were secondary areas of interest, reflecting the clinical-educational profile of the specialty. In contrast, emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, social determinants of health, and health economics were not significantly represented, demonstrating the persistence of a predominantly clinical-descriptive research model (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Thematic grouping of the original published articles.

Main thematic category	Representative subtopics	Articles	
		No.	%
Chronic non-communicable diseases	Diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, obesity, dyslipidemia, metabolic syndrome, chronic kidney disease	62	27,1
Mental health and psychological well-being	Depression, anxiety, stress, burnout, suicidal ideation, psychological distress, family functioning	28	12,2
Reproductive and maternal-child health	Pregnancy, family planning, sexual health, menopause, contraception, vasectomy	24	10,5
Senior health and geriatrics	Frailty, functional dependence, sarcopenia, cognitive impairment, falls, polypharmacy	22	9,6
Medical education and professional training	Clinical skills, empathy, semiology, professional quality of life, family medicine as a specialty	20	8,7
Prevention and health promotion	Lifestyle, therapeutic adherence, social support, educational interventions, self-care	18	7,9
Cancer and advanced chronic diseases	Breast, cervical, and prostate cancer; palliative care; caregiver burden	15	6,6
Family health and interpersonal relationships	Family functioning, crisis, cohesion, conflicts, family typology, domestic violence	14	6,1
Infectious diseases	Tuberculosis, hepatitis C, HIV, acute respiratory infections, COVID-19	12	5,2
Pediatric and adolescent health	Behavioral disorders, childhood obesity, risk factors in school children, substance use	9	3,9
Occupational and healthcare worker health	Burnout syndrome, workplace harassment, psychosocial factors at work	5	2,2

Scientific output showed annual thematic variations, with a predominance of diabetes mellitus, family medicine, obesity, geriatrics, and mental health. In the early years, topics such as family planning and education stood out, while in more recent years, the frequency of metabolic diseases, mental health, and medical education increased (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Annual distribution of the main topics of the original articles published.

Year	Most representative topics	Percentage of articles
2014	Family medicine, family planning, education, anxiety and depression, geriatrics	57
2015	Family medicine, diabetes mellitus, family planning, burnout, teenage pregnancy	63
2016	Family medicine, geriatrics, diabetes mellitus, obesity, depression	60
2017	Diabetes mellitus, geriatrics, family medicine, obesity, high blood pressure	66
2018	Diabetes mellitus, family medicine, breast cancer, chronic kidney disease, geriatrics	71
2019	Diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular risk, pregnancy, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	68
2020	Geriatrics, diabetes mellitus, obesity, mental health, family medicine	70
2021	Diabetes mellitus, obesity, geriatrics, public health, cancer	67
2022	Metabolic diseases, mental health, COVID-19, oncology, medical education	75
2023	Medical education, topics in family medicine, metabolic diseases, mental health, sexual and reproductive health	72

During the period analyzed, Mexico City accounted for the largest proportion of published original articles ( $n = 57$ ; 24,9 %), followed by the State of Mexico ( $n = 26$ ; 11,4 %), Guerrero ( $n = 20$ ; 8,7 %), and Michoacán ( $n = 17$ ; 7,4 %); these four states contributed more than half of the national output. Tamaulipas ( $n = 16$ ; 7,0 %), Sonora ( $n = 15$ ; 6,6 %), and Puebla ( $n = 12$ ; 5,2 %) also stood out for their contributions. In contrast, six states contributed one or two articles, and 11 did not register any publications during the decade under study. The complete distribution by state can be found in Figure 1. Only three of the 229 published articles reported funding (1,3 %).



**Fig. 1** Geographic distribution of original articles published from the Mexican Republic.

Of the articles included in the study, 209 (91,3 %) were carried out in Mexico, 9 (3,9 %) in Spain and 11 (4,8 %) in other countries.

Of the total number of original articles, 165 (72,1 %) came from the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), 12 (5,2 %) from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), 8 (3,5 %) from the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE), 4 (1,8 %) from the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP), and 4 (1,8 %) from the Ministry of Health (SS). The remaining 15,7 % were distributed among other national and international institutions.

During the period analyzed, cross-sectional studies were the predominant methodological approach. Within this category, descriptive designs were more frequent than analytical ones. Quasi-experimental, qualitative, case-control, cohort, longitudinal, and validation studies represented a smaller proportion of the total. The "other" category includes unspecified or non-conventional designs. The complete distribution by study type is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Distribution of original articles according to study type.

Type of study	Articles	
	No.	%
Descriptive cross-sectional	104	45,4
Analytical transversal	77	33,6
Quasi-experimental	15	6,5
Other	9	3,9
Case-control studies	7	3,1
Qualitative	6	2,6
Validation study	4	1,8
Longitudinal	4	1,8
Cohort	3	1,3

Of the original articles analyzed, 171 (74,7 %) used some type of non-probability sampling, 34 (14,8 %) reported probability sampling, and 24 (10,5 %) did not specify the type of sampling used. Only 11 (4,8 %) were reported as multicenter studies.

Of the articles that reported sample size (n= 223), it was distributed as follows: 71 articles (31,8 %) had samples between 100 and 199, and 62 (27,8 %) between 200 and 499. In smaller ranges, 40 articles (17,9 %) reported between 50 and 99 participants, and 30 (13,5 %) had samples of up to 49. Only 20 articles (9,0 %) reached sizes of 500 or more participants.

Between 2014 and 2023, original articles published in Atención Familiar were cited a total of 2,508 times. Of these citations, 2,271 (90,6 %) came from Spanish-language sources, 216 (8,6 %) from English-language sources, and 21 (0,8 %) from other languages. Regarding the type of source, 996 (39,7 %) citations were from scientific journals and 1,512 (60,3 %) from academic theses. Only three of the journal citations were from publications in journals with an impact factor.

## DISCUSSION

This study constitutes a bibliometric analysis of the journal *Family Care* during a decade of publications. The journal's output, stable at approximately 23 articles per year, contrasts with the growth of global scientific production in health, reported for decades.<sup>(16)</sup> In Mexico, this gap reflects structural limitations in family medicine research, including lack of funding, healthcare burdens that limit the time available for academic activities, and the absence of formal mentoring and research capacity-building programs.<sup>(6,17)</sup>

In contrast, other countries have developed consolidated infrastructures such as university departments of family medicine with funding, national research networks, and academic programs that integrate clinical practice with scientific activity.<sup>(18,19)</sup> The absence of these structural elements in the Mexican context conditions both the magnitude and the profile of the research generated.

Interinstitutional collaboration patterns, fluctuating between 9,1 % and 66,7 %, suggest that this practice has not been consolidated as a structural component, but rather depends on individual efforts or the particular characteristics of certain projects. This contrasts with family medicine journals in contexts where formal research consortia, research networks with standardized protocols, and incentive systems that promote collaboration as an academic evaluation criterion exist.<sup>(20)</sup> The absence of structures situated between the individual work of the researcher and the macro organization of the scientific system limits the capacity to generate continuous and cumulative research programs.

On the other hand, chronic non-communicable diseases and mental health disorders represent highly prevalent health burdens; however, their predominance (39,3 %) and the absence of emerging research lines raise questions about the mechanisms for constructing research agendas.<sup>(21)</sup> In this study, this thematic concentration suggests that the agenda is primarily determined by the clinical experience of family physicians, rather than by formal prioritization processes. In environments with limited funding, where research is developed as a supplementary activity, the repetition of descriptive studies on the same clinical problems is favored, and the formulation of questions with greater theoretical complexity or with the potential to influence health policy decisions is restricted.

The geographic centralization of Mexico City, with 24,9 % of the articles, reproduces inequalities documented in global bibliometric studies. The literature has documented that scientific production is concentrated in urban centers with a high density of academic institutions, researchers, and access to infrastructure.<sup>(6,17)</sup> The limited participation of states such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and northern states indicates that scientific knowledge is produced primarily in the capital. Consequently, health problems specific to non-metropolitan contexts remain underrepresented.

The limited availability of external funding (1,3 %) acts simultaneously as a cause and consequence of the observed limitations. Without resources, it is difficult to conduct multicenter, interdisciplinary, or methodologically robust studies. In turn, the predominance of descriptive research (45,4 %) with basic designs reduces competitiveness in calls for proposals that prioritize innovation and impact potential. Research without external funding is less likely to generate sufficiently novel or robust findings to compete for new funds, thus perpetuating the cycle. Overcoming this dynamic requires the implementation of specific calls for proposals for primary care research, development and capacity-building programs aimed at preparing competitive proposals, and seed funding schemes for pilot projects that can scale up to larger-scale research.<sup>(18, 19)</sup>

The Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) accounts for 72,1 % of research output, characterizing it as an academic-healthcare entity that integrates service provision, human resource training, and research generation. This structure offers advantages, such as access to large populations and well-established information systems. However, limited institutional diversity restricts the possibility of triangulation and reduces the external validity of the findings.

From a methodological perspective, 79,0 % of the studies are cross-sectional and 74,7 % employ non-probability sampling. While these designs generate valuable information on prevalence, population distributions, and associations, their almost exclusive use reveals a lack of more developed methodological approaches. The scarcity of longitudinal, experimental, or in-depth qualitative studies indicates that research in the journal remains in exploratory stages, without systematically progressing toward levels of greater methodological or theoretical complexity.

Citation analysis revealed that 90,6 % of the 2,508 accumulated citations came from Spanish-language sources and 60,3 % from theses, with only three citations from journals with an impact factor. From a critical perspective, the journal primarily functions as a pedagogical resource for training specialists, as an academic development platform for clinicians who combine clinical practice and research, and as a repository of contextually relevant knowledge. However, according to conventional metrics their performance. This is interpreted as evidence of a moderate impact and limited circulation of knowledge, which translates into little international visibility.<sup>(22)</sup> The challenge is to integrate these local functions within a strategy aimed at strengthening their presence in global areas of scientific production.

### Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results. The analysis considered only original articles, excluding reviews, case reports, and editorials, which are also part of the journal's academic output and could offer a broader view of its scientific activity. Another limitation is that the study focused on a single journal, so the findings cannot be extrapolated to the national landscape or to other publications in the same field. The evaluation of citations using Google Scholar limits the possibility of performing more advanced bibliometric analyses, such as mapping thematic relationships, detecting links between publications, or identifying related research groups.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of scientific output, characterized by stagnation, geographic and institutional concentration, a predominance of descriptive methodological designs, a thematic agenda closely linked to the clinical practice of family physicians, and a restricted scope of publications, suggests that the identified limitations stem from structural factors. To reverse this situation, it is necessary to strengthen research in family medicine, overcome structural barriers through capacity building, and effectively integrate research into health services. Likewise, it is essential to broaden the thematic diversity and promote inter-institutional collaborations that facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen existing networks. These elements are essential for fostering the development of a more robust scientific agenda and for sustainably boosting scientific output in this area.

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This research did not receive external funding.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Authorship contribution

**RDM:** participated in the research, writing - original draft, writing - revision and editing.

**GLO:** participated in the conceptualization, research, writing - original draft, writing - revision and editing.

All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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