

Mapping the Knowledge Structure of Family-Oriented Social Policies: A Global Bibliometric Perspective

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Aile Odaklı Sosyal Politikaların Bilgi Yapısının Haritalandırılması: Küresel Bibliyometrik Analiz

Öz

Bu çalışma, aile politikalarına yönelik akademik araştırmaların entelektüel yapısını, eğilimleri ve tematik çıktıları belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Web of Science veritabanı üzerinden ulaşılan 1.396 yayının R bibliometrix-biblioshiny kullanılarak yapılan analizi, yıllık %7,97'lik bir büyüme ve belge başına ortalama 24,1 atıf olduğunu göstermektedir. Yayın sayısı açısından önde gelen ülkeler Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Almanya iken, Thevenon, Neels ve Misra en üretken yazarlar arasında yer almakta, Gauthier ve Mandel ise en yüksek yerel atıf alan yazarlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Alandaki önemli dergiler arasında European Journal of Social Policy and Community Work ve Family dikkat çekmektedir. Tematik olarak, çalışma ilişkileri ve toplumsal cinsiyet konularının yoğun bir şekilde incelendiği görülmekte iken, odak noktası ise makro-politik tartışmalardan toplumsal cinsiyete özgü bakım işlerinin mikro-politik analizlerine kaymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile Politikaları, Bibliyometrik Analiz, Bilimsel Haritalama, Sosyal Politika, Trend Analizi

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the intellectual structures, thematic outputs, and research trends in the field of family policies. Based on 1,396 publications from the Web of Science database, the analysis conducted using the R program bibliometrix-biblioshiny shows an annual growth of 7.97% and an average of 24.1 citations per contribution. The United States and Germany are the leading countries in terms of publication output; Thevenon, Neels, and Misra are among the most productive authors, while Gauthier and Mandel have the most local citations. Significant journals include the European Journal of Social Policy and Community Work and the Family. Thematically, labor relations and gender issues dominate; the focus shifts from macro-political debates to micro-political analyses of gender-specific care work.

Keywords: Bibliometric Analysis, Family Policies, Scientific Mapping, Social Policy, Trend Analysis

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1. Introduction

Contemporary social, cultural, and economic transformations directly impact the structural integrity of the family institution. This multifaceted change process affects the relationships between

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individuals and the social structure in broader terms. Rather than merely being part of private life, the family is regarded as a dynamic and multifunctional structure at the center of social transformation. Therefore, as family-related issues become more prominent in the public sphere, developing policies that are more inclusive, flexible, and sensitive to the evolving needs of modern society becomes imperative. Consequently, states implement a range of policies to safeguard the continuity of the family institution.

The roles of individuals within the family, particularly child-rearing practices, undergo a transformation in line with global changes, which necessitate reconsidering the traditional family structure (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Castells, 2010; Lan, 2023). Within the context of modernization processes, women's participation in the workforce, increased urbanization, and widespread individualization have led to transformations in relationships among family members and in the functions of the family in general (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Mokhira, 2025; Therborn, 2004). Furthermore, in line with technological developments, internal family communication patterns are changing due to the influence of digital media, leading to new issues regarding parenting roles and children's psycho-social development (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018; Shrivastava, 2025). In this context, shifts in the family institution affect micro-level relationships and point to a macro-level process of change that affects the entire social structure of society (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Kagıtcıbası, 2017). Consequently, in order to preserve the sustainability of the family institution within these evolving contexts, a comprehensive transformation of support mechanisms is imperative, encompassing both individual and institutional dimensions, as well as societal frameworks.

Despite the structural shifts affecting the family institution, social policy instruments have been developed by states to protect and support this institution in a more comprehensive framework (Daly, 2010; Lister, 2009; Thévenon, 2011). By developing family-centered policies in childcare services, maternity leave, family benefits, and employment subsidies, welfare states aim to ensure gender equality and family cohesion (Korpi, 2000; Lewis, 2006; Saraceno, 2011a). Whereas in countries like Türkiye, where traditional family values are still prevalent, it is common to observe hybrid policy approaches shaped by modern social policy instruments and cultural values (Akkan, 2018; Gedikkaya, 2023). Moreover, family policies address demographic issues (fertility decline, aging population, etc.) and develop social capital that supports child welfare and women's employment (Esping-Andersen, 2002; OECD, 2011). In this regard, designing family policies in a multi-level and culturally sensitive manner becomes critical for both the sustainability of the family institution and the enhancement of social cohesion.

This study systematically examines the scope, orientation, and developmental dynamics of academic production in the field of family policies using bibliometric analysis methods. The field of family policies has gained significant prominence in academic discourse, given its intricate interweaving of multiple disciplines, including social policy, sociology, economics, public administration, and demography. However, despite the proliferation of studies that address both theoretical and applied aspects of this field, there is a paucity of studies that map the existing knowledge in the literature in a holistic and structured manner. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the quantitative distribution of academic literature in addition to the revelation of the research topics, prominent authors, collaboration patterns, and citation relationships that exert influence in the field. Consequently, this analysis will provide a comprehensive examination of the existing intellectual structure of the literature. This initiative seeks to elucidate emergent research frontiers and identify nascent areas of inquiry, fostering enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange. Moreover, these findings are anticipated to contribute to evidence-based decision-making processes for policymakers, academics, and practitioners and pave the way for more effective design of family policies.

2. Literature Review

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as one of the pivotal methodological tools in the social sciences, enabling researchers to comprehensively map the exponentially growing volume of academic literature and identify latent intellectual structures. The advent of bibliographic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, along with the increasing accessibility of visualization software like VOSviewer and Bibliometrix, has led to the dissemination of this method beyond the confines of the natural sciences, facilitating its integration into diverse fields including sociology, economics, and public policy (Hussain et al., 2024; Jialin & Chaojin, 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). By shifting from subjective narrative reviews to quantitative structural analyses, scholars maintain the capability to delineate the evolutionary trajectories, collaborative networks, and emerging trends within complex research domains (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Sanusi et al., 2025).

Within the extensive domain of family studies, bibliometric techniques have been effectively utilized in specific sub-fields, thereby unveiling distinctive thematic patterns. For instance, extensive bibliometric research has been conducted on work-family balance and family-friendly policies, highlighting a shift from conflict-based models to enrichment theories (Fang et al., 2025; Li & Zhang, 2023; Mude & Wesley, 2024). Concurrently, research on childcare, early childhood services (Abashah, 2024; Sholikhah et al., 2025) and single-parent family dynamics (Boduroğlu, 2025) has employed these methods to examine the impacts of policies on child development and economic resilience. Furthermore, broader analyses of social policy have identified macro-level trends including migration and austerity (Carradore, 2024). Despite these insights, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the specific analysis of family-oriented policies.

Despite the extensive research conducted on specific components of family welfare, particularly childcare, employment, and work-life balance, there is a lack of studies that analyze "family policy" as a comprehensive, multidimensional field. Existing analyses of the field tend to fragment the discipline into labor market issues in contrast to welfare state mechanisms, failing to capture the interplay between demographic shifts, gender equality, and state intervention. Consequently, the comprehensive intellectual structure that connects macro-level welfare regimes with micro-level family dynamics remains to be delineated in the extant literature.

This study addresses this limitation by adopting a holistic bibliometric approach to "family policies" over a 45-year period (1980-2025). In contrast to previous studies, which have focused on specific populations or corporate practices, this research employs a comprehensive research strategy to encompass the entire spectrum of family policy discourse, ranging from traditional welfare state typologies to contemporary gendered care dynamics. The integration of these diverse strands contributes to the existing literature by providing the initial global mapping of the intellectual structure, identifying the convergence of interdisciplinary streams, and highlighting the evolutionary shift from macro-policy debates to micro-level analyses of well-being and gender equity.

2.1. Family Policies

The comprehensive applications and provisions pursued by the state to protect the integrity of the family institution and increase family welfare are considered within the framework of family policies. As a fundamental part of social policy, family policies are initiatives and interventions intended to ensure the sustainability of family life by supporting the status and functions of the family institution (Alp, 2024; Mínguez, 2011; Turğut, 2016). Gauthier (1999; 2002) defines family policies as measures to enhance the well-being of families with children, encompassing a broad range of areas including employment, transportation, food, and education. Family policies are policy tools to assist families with children through services like healthcare, employment, and housing, while fostering outcomes such as increased fertility, equitable household responsibilities, and women's inclusion in the labor

market (Daly & Clavero, 2002; Koçak & Demir, 2023; Saraceno, 2011b). In this context, family policies serve as strategic tools that support both individual well-being and the stability of the social structure.

Family policies aim to increase social welfare by covering various areas, ranging from marriage and reproduction regulations to child protection; however, the impact of these policies, especially in developing regions, cannot be fully revealed through traditional comparative analyses (Amarante et al., 2025; Murry & Lippold, 2018). Kaufmann (2000) posits that family policies function as both social assistance programs designed to provide support to families and their members and as a platform for political rhetoric and legal discourse. Concurrently, the ideological underpinnings that the state ascribes to the family structure, in conjunction with demographic, institutional, economic, and socio-political factors, as well as considerations pertaining to children's well-being and gender equality, continue to wield a substantial influence. Family policies in European countries have increasingly evolved into a structure that balances work and family life; in particular, encouraging dual-income households, expanding childcare services, and supporting flexible working models have been key elements of this transformation (Dumon, 1991). Hantrais (2004), who defines family policies as practices that target families and affect their resources and structure, points out that the objectives of these policies shifted in the second half of the 20th century, with governments redistributing resources among families through taxes and subsidies.

Along with industrialization, urbanization, and the loss of the social security function of families, states have felt the need to implement new social regulations. During this process, the economic structural changes caused by industrialization and waves of migration from rural to urban areas led to the dissolution of family structures, prompting the state to redefine its social security mechanisms (Meder & Çiçek, 2013; Trask, 2022). As a demographic policy area, family policies have historically played an important role in regulating population growth. Moreover, these policies have also ensured the labor market's sustainability and support the early social integration of children (LeVine & White, 1997; Zarnowska, 1997). As previously stated, the comprehensive transformations that took place, especially in the last quarter of the 20th century, have led to the development of new approaches that systematically address family welfare. These approaches have focused on analyzing the effects of neoliberal welfare regimes on the family and have addressed not only the demographic but also the socioeconomic dimensions of family policies (Buğra, 2020; Jenson, 2009).

Woods (2012) classifies family policies into four main types: social assistance, tax credits, childcare, and family leave. Social assistance provides cash support to integrate low-income families into the workforce, while tax credits aim to increase the income of working families (Cecchini, 2021; Gunnarsson, 2013). Childcare services facilitate parents' employment while supporting children's development, and family leave allows parents to take leave with job security while caring for their children (Freiberg, 2019; Lee & Sirgy, 2024). Family policy measures encompass financial support, tax incentives, flexible working arrangements, and childcare services, which aim to directly or indirectly influence fertility rates (Szabó-Morvai et al., 2019). These measures have the potential to positively impact the decisions regarding childbearing by increasing the likelihood of women returning to work after giving birth.

Family policies are distinguished as a multifaceted social policy area that aims to provide economic security and strengthen gender equality (Backman & Nieuwenhuis, 2025; Drobnič & Son, 2025; Salonen & Koivisto, 2024). Specifically, the implementation of gender-neutral parental leave policies and the provision of inclusive childcare services have been identified as key factors in facilitating women's reintegration into the workforce, thereby contributing to the equitable distribution of care responsibilities within the broader societal context (Österbacka & Räsänen, 2025; Schaber et al., 2025). From this perspective, public support for low-income or resource-limited families combats poverty and

increases family resilience (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2023). Nevertheless, exceedingly long parental leave periods have the potential to reproduce gender roles in certain circumstances, necessitating careful policy design (Craig & Mullan, 2010; Dickey & Miller, 2023). In contemporary society, family policies have evolved into a fundamental component of social welfare systems, serving as a means to facilitate the comprehensive development of both individuals and society at large. In this context, effective family policies play a pivotal role in the development of egalitarian and inclusive societies.

3. Methodology

The selection of a research method is preceded by the guidance of the underlying research philosophy (Günbayi & Sorm, 2018). This research adopts a systematic approach to interpret the academic framework in the field of family policies in a general and holistic manner. The study is based on the positive paradigm, which aims to access information through objective, measurable, valid, and repetitive means (Creswell, 2009). Within the positivist approach, generalizable conclusions are drawn from testable data, a comprehensive review of the scientific literature allows for the identification of trends and research gaps. Since scientific research is defined as a reflection of a systematic search for knowledge, a holistic approach emerges within the conceptual framework (Ponterotto, 2005). The research technique conducted based on this philosophical aim is bibliometric analysis.

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach that allows for the analysis of general and statistical information from academic research within the literature on a specific topic using numerical data (Donthu et al., 2021). Based on this research technique, the focus is on topics such as the historical trend, productivity, collaborations, key concepts, influential sources, and so on, of the literature on family policies. The Web of Science (WoS) database was chosen as the bibliographic data source for the study. WoS is considered a reliable reference for bibliometric analysis due to its multidimensional disciplinary structure, including social sciences, its inclusion of comprehensive and highly validated journals, and the high impact factors of these journals (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The standardized inclusion of elements such as author, institution, country, keywords, and so on makes it an important resource for comparative analyses.

The data obtained through WoS was obtained as a result of a search conducted on July 25, 2025, using the keywords "family policies" within the "topic" category, a key factor in determining research validity and reliability. A total of 1,396 sources were used for this data, without any specific research type or time constraints. To ensure a holistic approach to reflect the overall bibliographic results, no limitations were placed on the type of research (article, book chapter, conference, etc.) or publication year. This allows for a multifaceted analysis of family policies across a wide range of topics, including the development of the literature, conceptual reflections, collaborations, and impacts within a general, holistic, and current context.

To conduct the analysis process for the aforementioned data, biblioshiny, a graphical interface within the bibliometrix package in R Studio, was used. In recent decades, bibliometrix-biblioshiny is a user-friendly open-source R package for visualizing and analyzing large datasets, enabling a holistic interpretation of the scientific literature (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Given the vast amount of data in the social sciences, it facilitates systematic literature searches and its functional and methodological robustness creates a significant impact. The biblioshiny package easily imports data from leading databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, and complies with the principles of transparency, reproducibility, and comparability required in bibliometric research (Merigó & Yang, 2017).

4. Findings

According to the main/general results of the research presented in Figure 1, based on the findings obtained from the WoS database, it was found that research on family policies began in 1980 and

continued until August 2025. The number of studies conducted to date, regardless of their type, is 1,396. The annual growth rate, approaching 8, demonstrates the increasing importance of these studies. A total of 2,572 authors produced work, and one-quarter of the studies were the result of international partnerships. 2.31 authors conducted studies per document, and 2,719 keywords were used. A total of 54,224 sources were cited. Finally, studies on family policies received an average of 24.1 citations per document. The overall findings indicate that the theme of family policies, which has a forty-five-year history in terms of academic studies, has seen cumulative growth and high potential, along with the increasing trend. The multidimensional nature of the research, across time, space, and dimension, is particularly noteworthy. The ability to uncover general and holistic implications for family policies is crucial for assessing the underlying framework and developing future directions.

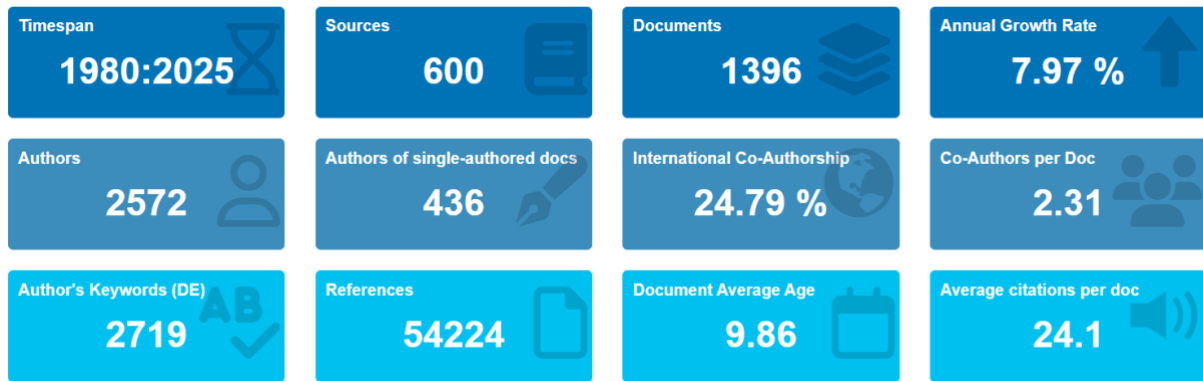


Figure 1. Main Findings Regarding Family Policies

4.1. Findings Regarding Annual Production and Citations

The annual productivity and citation results for family policies, presented in Figure 2, reveal that trends are generally increasing. Although the first study in the field appeared in 1980, no significant increase in the number of studies was observed until 1988. While production values experienced a partial decline in the early 1990s, they generally entered an increasing trend, albeit with some fluctuations, especially after 1995. The rapid increase in research trends between 2006 and 2008 was particularly striking. The year 2024 saw the highest number of studies. It appears that the period of greatest interest and highest productivity from past to present occurred last year.

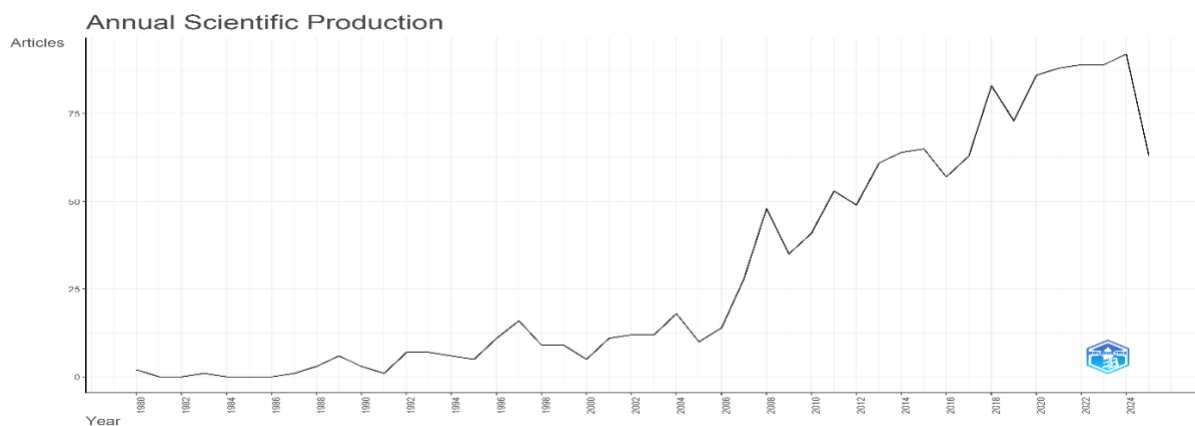


Figure 2. Annual Studies on Family Policies

An examination of research citation trends (Figure 3) reveals a fluctuating trend, rather than a steady increase in publications. Following the first citation period in 1983, rapid breaks and fluctuations have been observed periodically. The highest citation rate over the forty-five-year period occurred in 2004 (approximately 5 citations per study), and the topic's importance within academic studies peaked during that period. Following this, citation trends generally declined after 2011, the year with the second-highest average citation count. This decline in citations, despite the increasing number of studies as they approached the current year, presents a striking situation. These fluctuating citation rates suggest that, despite the increasing volume of research on family policies, its influence within the academic literature has not yet spread.

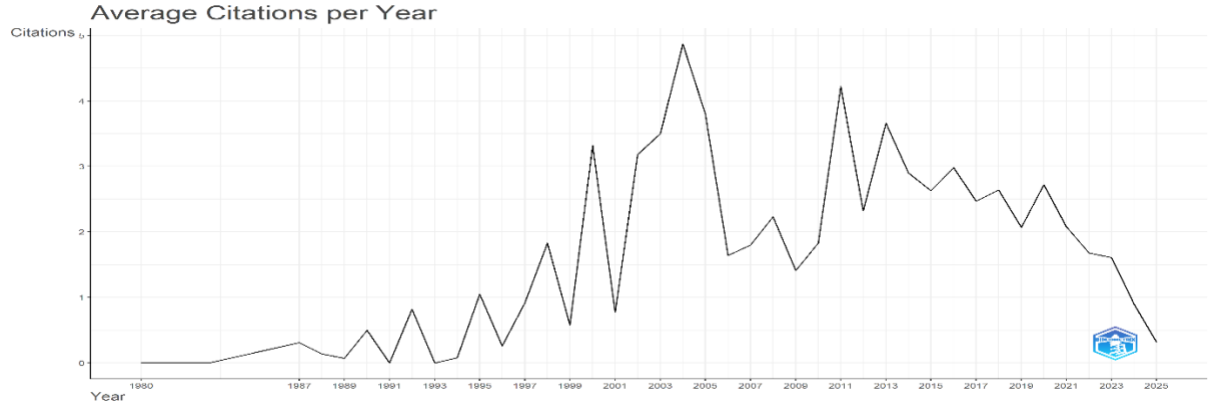


Figure 3. Average Citation Numbers on Family Policies

4.2. Influential Authors

The first stage, shown in Figure 4, explored the number of documents contributed by authors to the field of family policies under the heading "most relevant authors." Thevenon O. was found to be the author who contributed most to the intellectual development of family policies, with 13 academic documents, the highest-ranking author in document production. Following closely behind were Neels K. with 12 documents, and Misra J., Saxonberg S., and Wood J. with 11. These authors stand out for their work on social policy comparisons, typologies of welfare states, and policies to support women's employment. Furthermore, the authors with the most production were ranked and the most cited authors were distinguished, revealing differences. Not only quantitatively productive authors but also qualitatively academics with high theoretical and methodological impact on the literature were identified. By identifying the most frequently cited authors based on citation count, their contributions and leading roles in the field were revealed. According to the analysis results, the author with the highest qualitative impact on the field of family policies was Gauthier AH., with 146 citations. Following this, authors such as Mandel H. (121 citations), Andersson G. (120 citations), and Blair-Loy M. (119 citations) were found to have had a significant impact on the field. They have made empirical contributions, particularly by providing theoretical and methodological developments on topics such as gender, work-family balance, and women's employment.

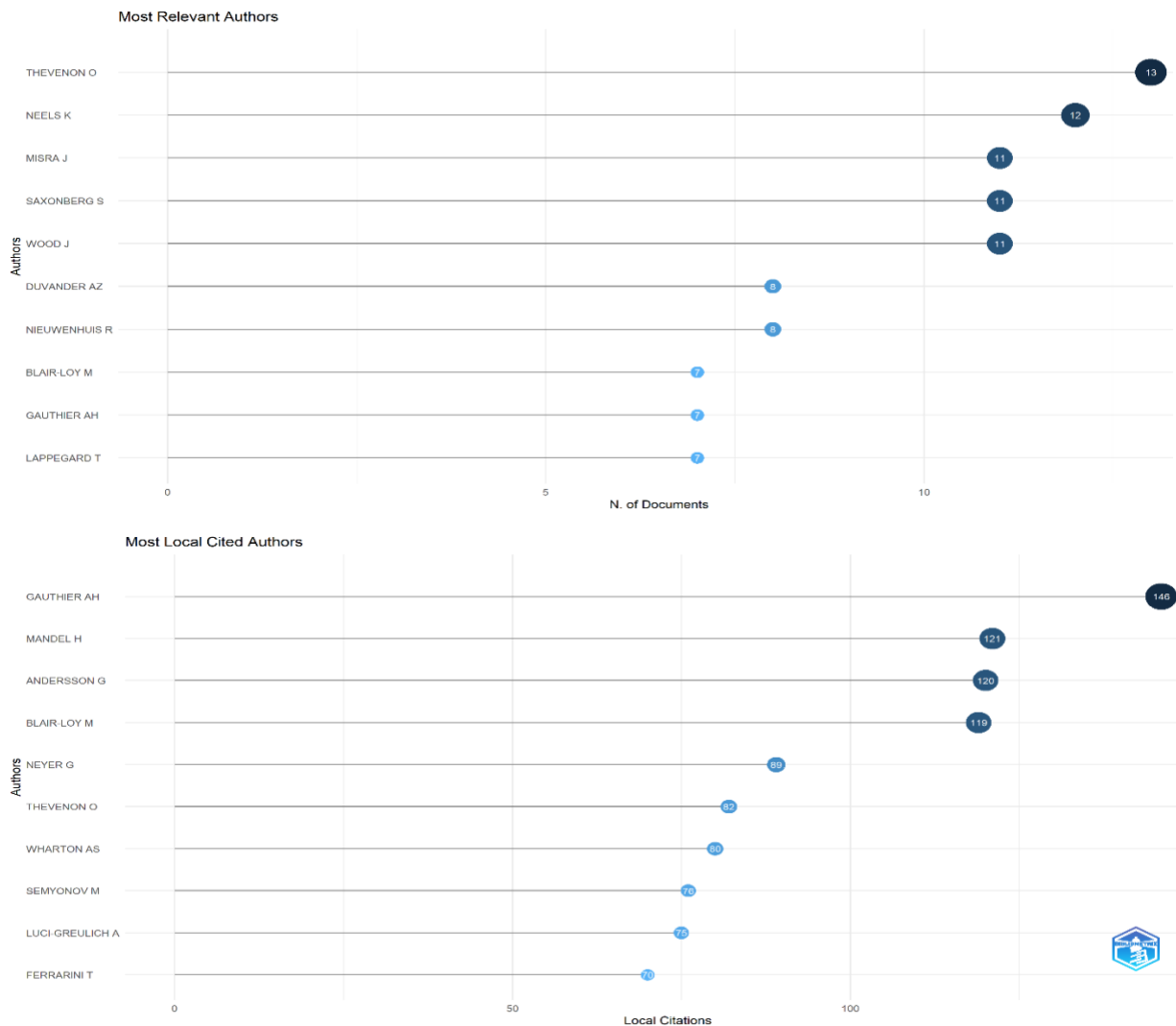
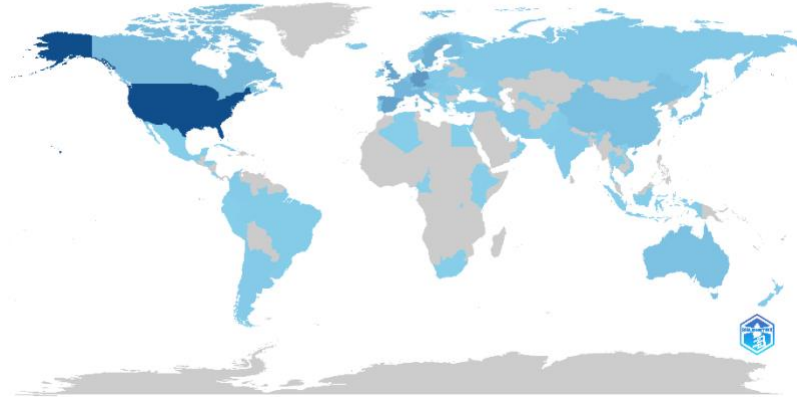


Figure 4. Influential Authors

4.3. Scientific Productivity by Country

Academic studies conducted on family policies vary depending on numerous factors, including the socioeconomic structures of the authors' countries of origin, their understanding of welfare, and their academic capacity. A country-by-country analysis revealed the geographical impact of academic productivity on the topic. According to the results presented in Figure 5, the United States (US), represented by a dark blue hue, is home to the most productive authors in the field of family policies. The US boasts the highest scientific productivity due to its infrastructure, funding opportunities, and research structure, making it a key player in academic research. Family policies stand out with their focus on work-family balance, work-career, and gender. Meanwhile, countries such as Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands are among the countries that contribute the most to the literature on family policies. These countries stand out as welfare states with strong social policy traditions and institutionalized practices focused on family welfare. Scandinavian countries, in particular, are frequently cited in the literature for their exemplary practices in transforming family policies based on gender equality and parenting.

Country Scientific Production



Country	Freq
USA	966
GERMANY	372
SPAIN	300
UK	286
SWEDEN	212
FRANCE	172
ITALY	172
CANADA	129
BELGIUM	111
NETHERLANDS	111

Figure 5. Productivity of Countries

4.4. Most Effective Documents

Identifying the most influential publications in the scientific field is crucial for identifying the developmental processes of the family policy literature. According to the analysis results presented in Table 1, the influence of the fundamental studies that shape the field is highlighted through their citation counts and annual average citation rates. Mills' (2011) study, the cult study with the highest total citation count, falls within the scope of family social policies developed to address the disruption of parenting processes in Western societies and has become a significant reference source in the field. In fact, it has the highest number of citations both overall and by year. Following closely behind, studies by Voydanoff, Williams, Daldfogel, et al. were identified as the most cited reference sources in the field. A general overview of the most influential and cited documents demonstrates that family policy research is multidisciplinary and is informed by studies published in diverse disciplines such as social policy, sociology, psychology, economics, and organizational behavior. In addition, these most cited studies provide both a theoretical basis for researchers and a rich framework in terms of methodological approaches.

Table 1. Most Global Cited Documents

Paper	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year
MILLS M, 2011, HUM REPROD UPDATE	10.1093/humupd/dmr026	710	47,33
VOYDANOFF P, 2004, J MARRIAGE FAM	10.1111/j.1741-3737.2004.00028.x	486	22,09
WILLIAMS JC, 2013, J SOC ISSUES	10.1111/josi.12012	471	36,23
WALDFOGEL J, 1998, J ECON PERSPECT	10.1257/jep.12.1.137	439	15,68
CRAIG L, 2011, AM SOCIOL REV	10.1177/0003122411427673	413	27,53
BATT R, 2003, IND RELAT	10.1111/1468-232X.00287	408	17,74
JUDGE TA, 2004, J APPL PSYCHOL	10.1037/0021-9010.89.3.395	402	18,27
PERRY-SMITH JE, 2000, ACAD MANAGE J	10.5465/1556339	384	14,77
ROTHBARD NP, 2005, ORGAN SCI	10.1287/orsc.1050.0124	377	17,95

THEVENON O, 2011, POPUL DEV REV	10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00390.x	343	22,87
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4.5. Keyword Analysis Results and Thematic Analysis

Frequently used keywords in the field of family policies were evaluated, and the results are presented in Figure 6. Accordingly, the most frequently used keyword in the graph is "family policies," which directly represents the concept of the topic, and was used 301 times. This demonstrates that family policies are at the core of the literature as a political field, both conceptually and practically. Family policies encompass a wide range of topics, including employment policies, family structures, the welfare state, and so on. The term "gender" comes second, with 222 uses, demonstrating the adoption of a gender perspective as a decisive analytical framework in the family policy literature. This concept is frequently discussed alongside topics such as women's employment, gender-based inequalities, and work-family balance. Following this, terms such as "impact" (183), "work" (176), and "employment," which have a significant impact on the labor market dimension of social policy, were widely used. Women's employment was associated with indicators such as labor force participation and productivity. Overall, keyword density reveals that family policy research is shaped by gender, care work, women's employment, and international comparisons.

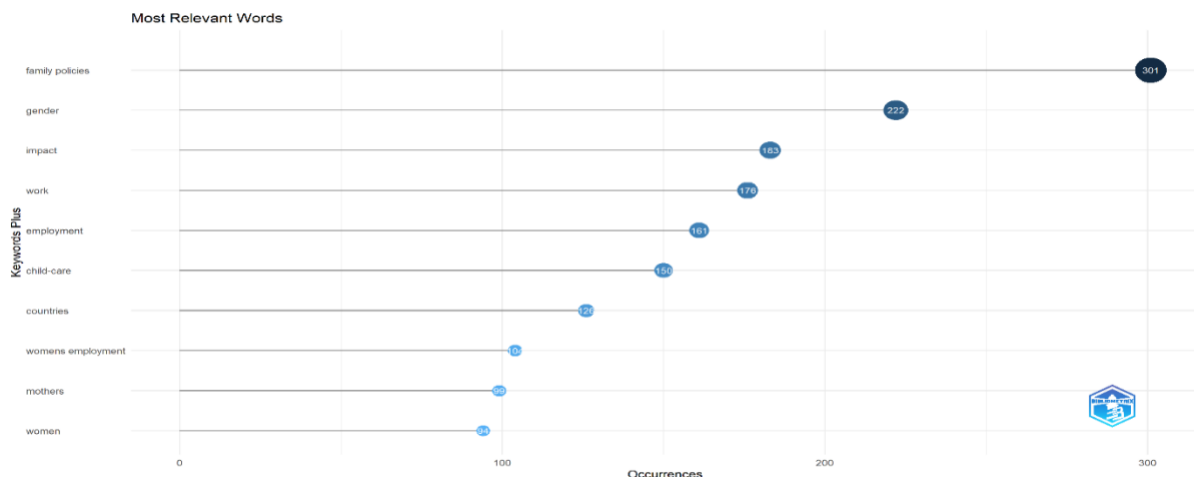


Figure 6. Most Relevant Words

Identifying popular words alongside frequently used keywords (Figure 7) offers insights into evolutionary processes transforming from the past to the future and reveals currently popular areas. Primarily, during the first five-year period (2005-2010), topics such as part-time work, work, and family came to the fore, with themes focusing particularly on the positioning of women's employment within the context of welfare states. Between 2010 and 2015, concepts such as child poverty, women's employment, and social policies became popularly incorporated into the literature. Similarly, the understanding of social policy applied to the labor market and labor economics continues to be reflected. Between 2015 and 2020, the range of concepts became more diverse, with topics such as "parental leave," "gender equality," "work-family policies," "childcare," and "attitudes" representing research that simultaneously discussed both political instruments and social norms. Studies focusing on samples from countries like Sweden, Finland, and Australia have increased, and the understanding of social policy has broadened. Finally, from 2020 to the present, topics such as "well-being," "family support," "grandparents," and "pronatalism" have gained prominence in the post-COVID-19 era. This development has brought to the forefront the transformation of family policies during the pandemic, the burden of intergenerational care, and new discourses on fertility incentives. Pro-natalist policies have been identified as the concept that continues to gain popularity. Research indicates that

government policies encouraging families to have children in response to declining fertility rates have become more visible.

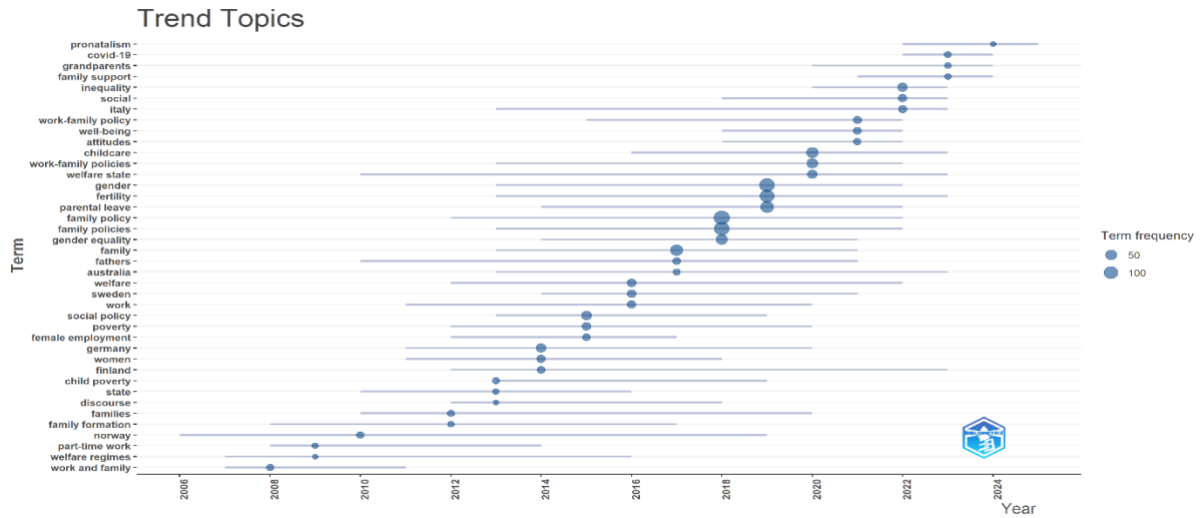


Figure 7. Trends Topic

The results of the thematic analysis presented in Figure 8 reveal the trends in studies on family policies based on keywords and themes. First, themes such as "Children," "child poverty," "migration," "early childhood education and care," and "demography," which are highly central to the family policy literature, are directly related to the target groups of family policies. On the other hand, key terms such as "family policy," "gender," "gender equality," "parental leave," and "work-family policies" are prominent within the core themes that constitute the founding concepts of the family policy literature. Meanwhile, themes related to work-family conflict and various country examples emerge within emerging or declining themes. The presence of the "work-family conflict" theme in this position bears the traces of a debate that was popular in the past but evolved over time into more systemic policies (e.g., parental leave, childcare). Finally, regarding niche themes, one of the most important outcomes of the thematic analysis, themes such as "flexible working" and "part-time work" stand out as specific research topics that have been thoroughly examined but have limited relevance to other themes in the literature. These themes are important for flexible working styles, transformations in the labor market, and particularly for women's employment conditions. However, their weak connection to central themes suggests a need to integrate these topics into more holistic theories.

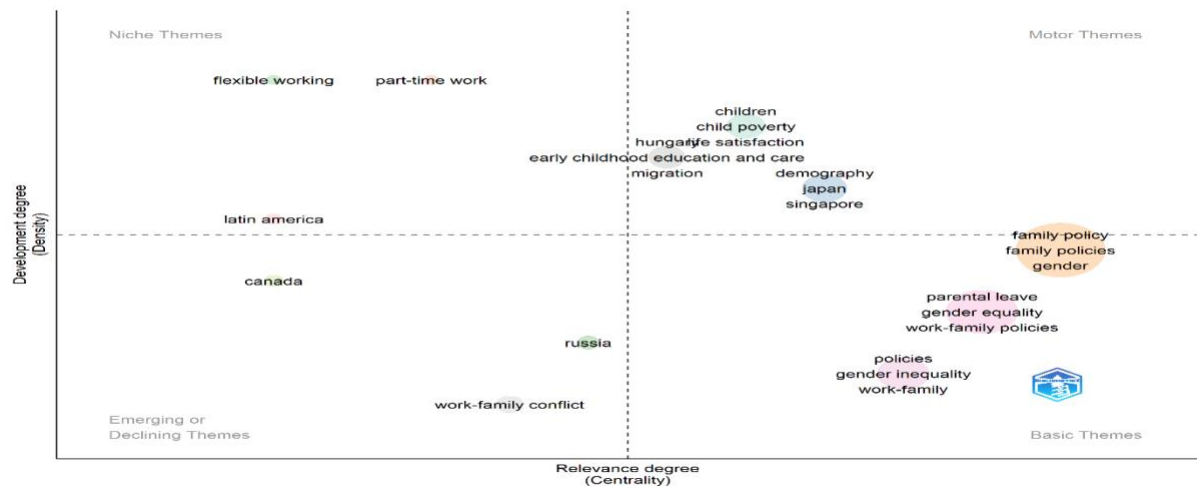


Figure 8. Thematic Analysis Results

Conducting evolutionary analysis alongside thematic findings allows us to identify the transformation of family policies from the past to the present. Thematic results (Figure 9), obtained by dividing the years 1980-2017 and 2018-2025, reveal that concepts such as "Work and Family," "Work-Family Policies," and "Family Policy" are strongly present in both periods. These themes are among the enduring themes that maintain the connection between family policies and employment relations. Similarly, the themes of "education" and "gender inequality" appear to persist in the subsequent period under the "education" and, more broadly, "gender" theme. Broad headings such as "parents" and "fertility" evolved into more micro and structurally focused concepts such as "motherhood penalty," "gender gap," and "familialism." The evolution of the "Work-Family Balance" theme into the more functional measurement variable "time use" demonstrates increased empirical representation in the literature. Themes representing macro-constructs such as "Europe," "population," "organizations," and "public policy" have been replaced by more specific themes in the new era. This reflects a shift in the focus of analysis in the literature from the general to the specific, focusing more on policy outcomes, actors (parents, children, grandparents, etc.), and gender-based differences.

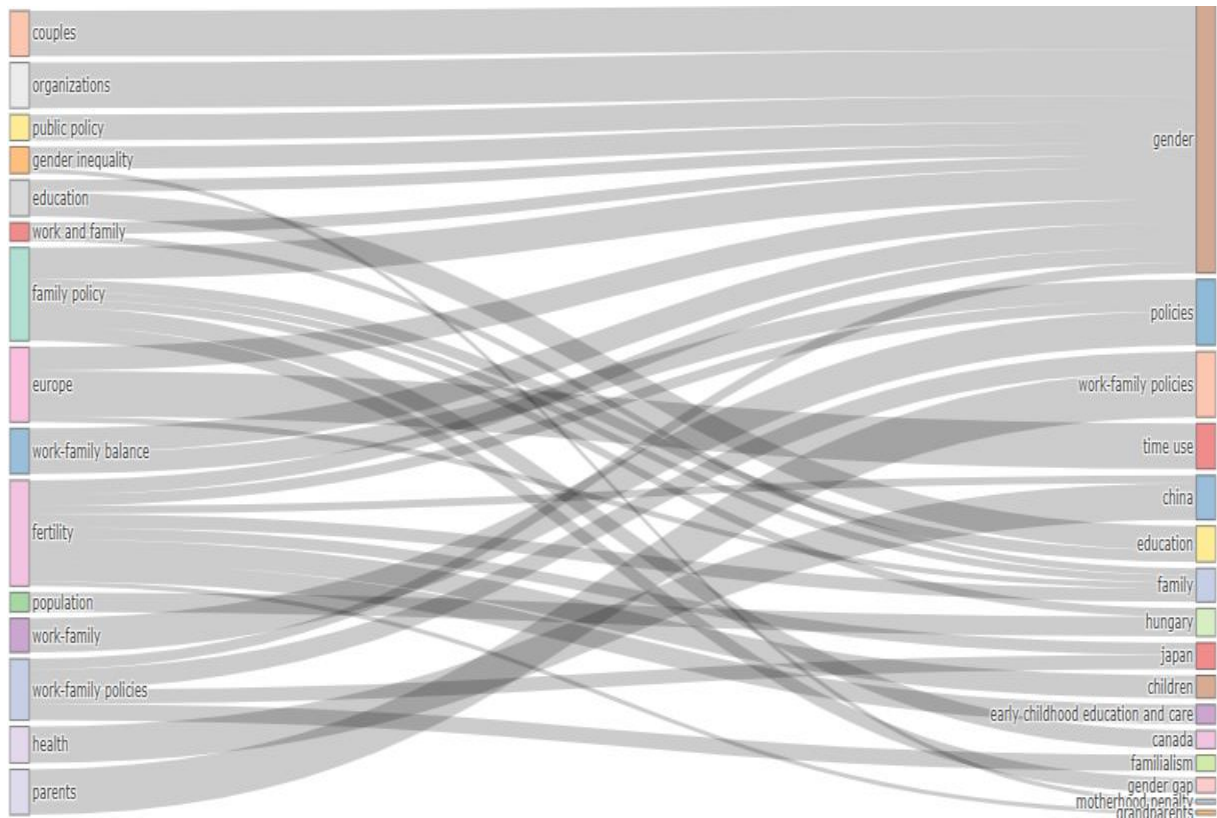


Figure 9. Thematic Evolution Between 1980-2017 and 2018-2025

4.6. Journal and Document Effect

Figure 10 reveals the journals in which academic publications on family policies are published most frequently and have the highest impact through citation levels. The journal that contributed most to the family policy literature in terms of production was the *Journal of European Social Policy* with 42 articles. This was followed by *Community Work & Family* (32), *Demographic Research* (32), and *Social Politics* (32). This distribution demonstrates that family policy studies are closely related to social policy, demography, sociology, and welfare studies and are approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. It also reveals the dominance of European-based journals in this literature.

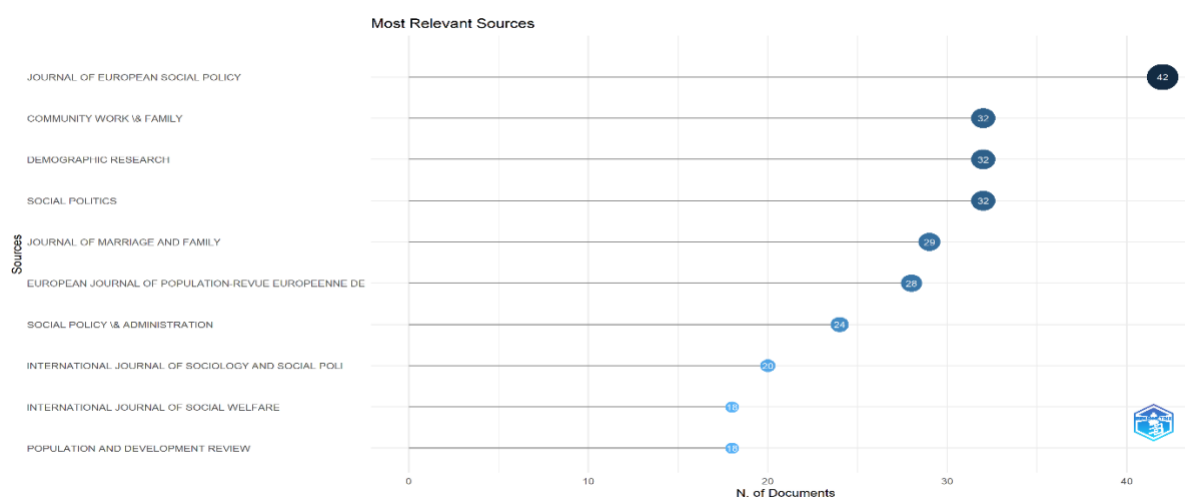


Figure 10. Most Relevant Sources

The most frequently cited academic journals (Figure 11) in the field of family policies are also shared. The most cited source is Population and Development Review with 1,413 local citations. This journal is followed by the Journal of European Social Policy (1,341), the American Sociological Review (1,333), and the Journal of Marriage and Family (1,324). Ultimately, journals that are positioned within the framework of fields such as gender, demography, social policy, and sociology have been found to have high impact. Population and Development Review and the Journal of European Social Policy, which are particularly influential in terms of both number and citation count, are among the journals that hold a central position for family policy.

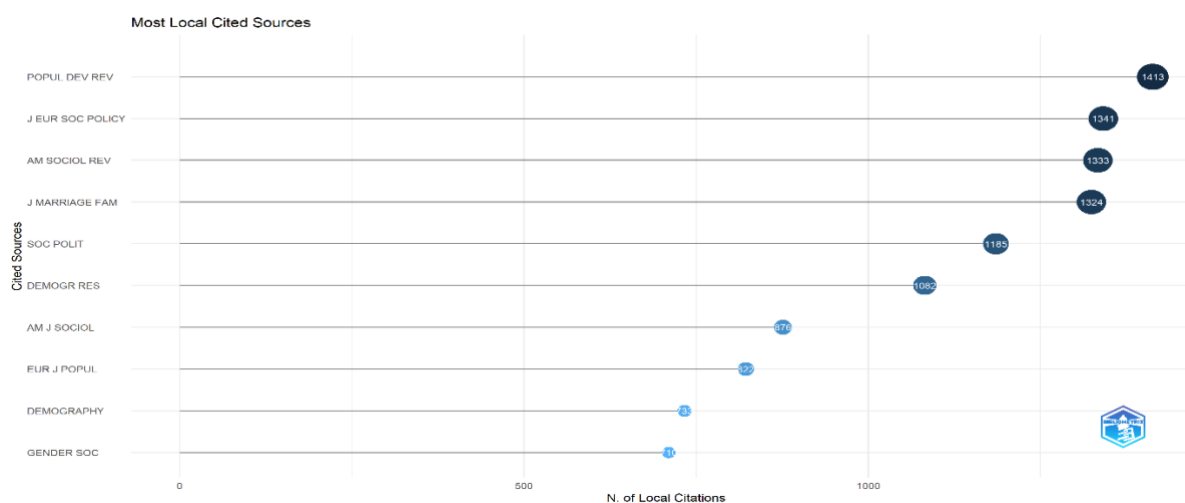


Figure 11. Most Influential Journals

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study has made visible the transformation of the literature over time by examining how the field of family policies, gender, and work-family relations developed in the period 1980–2025 with a comprehensive bibliometric framework. The research aimed to conduct a general, holistic, and current assessment of the literature on family policies. Bibliographic data on the topic "family policies" was obtained from WoS, a significant database in academic literature. The data were analyzed using the R bibliometrics-biblioshiny package. Firstly, the main results reveal that 1,396 studies on family policies were conducted between 1980 and 2025 (August), achieving a stable annual growth rate of 7.97%. The number of studies has shown a steady increase, particularly since 2006. The findings show that the

significant increase in the number of publications, especially after the 2000s, has led to an increasing discussion of the subject in both academic and public spheres. An examination of author productivity and international scientific collaborations reveals the existence of an institutionalized research community in the field. The sustained contributions of figures such as Thevenon, Neels, Misra, and Saxonberg, the high production volume of the US and European countries, and the fact that the international co-authorship rate has reached a quarter of the original, demonstrate that the literature is nourished not only by individual efforts but also by a strong academic network. This demonstrates a significant expansion of interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly on social policy and gender issues. Thematic analysis findings further highlight the epistemic aspect of the literature. Themes such as family policies, gender, care services, work-family balance, and women's employment have long constituted the fundamental conceptual backbone of the field. Conversely, trend analyses indicate that comparative research on parental leave, gender equality, flexible working models, and welfare regimes has become increasingly prominent in recent years. This shift confirms that both demographic changes and transformations in working life directly impact academic production. The bibliometric map and visuals depicting conceptual flows demonstrate that the literature is strengthening not only in volume but also in conceptual coherence and interconnections. Conceptual relationships, particularly concentrated around concepts such as family policies, gender, and work-family balance, highlight the decisive impact of social policy designs on gender roles and care work. This demonstrates the literature's dynamic structure, sensitive to political trends.

The European Union Lisbon Strategy can be a significant predictor of the increase in research in the literature on family policies since the mid-2000s. Within this strategy, targets related to employment, gender equality, and demographic conditions within family policies have come to the fore, and issues such as women's employment have become more concrete (European Commission, 2006). Similarly, since the 2000s, interest in social and political issues such as childcare, family-work balance, and other issues has intensified in the academic literature, in line with the discussion of flexible working styles (Plantenga & Remery, 2009). In similar periods, the OECD Babies and Bosses reports emerged, and assessments of work-family life balance and employment opportunities were discussed (OECD, 2007).

Particularly after the 2008 crisis, efforts to align social policy with economic growth were brought to the forefront. Family policies emerged as policy guidelines reflecting human capital investments, women's new roles, and a strategy to increase the labor supply (Esping-Andersen, 2009). Therefore, socioeconomic developments have spearheaded theoretical and practical developments in family policies. Despite the increase in the number of studies, there have been fluctuating lags in citations due to the publication cycle (Wang et al., 2013). Among the most cited works by influential authors in the field of family policies are those of Mill, Voydanoff, and Williams, and these works are considered foundational in the literature on family policies, gender roles, and work-family balance. The analysis reveals that Thevenon stands out both in terms of productivity and, in part, in terms of citation impact. Considering the productivity of authors' countries of origin, countries such as the US, Germany, Spain, the UK, and Sweden stand out. The US and European countries' active presence in the social sciences and their extensive international partnerships have inevitably led to their dominance of academic literature. Results regarding publishers indicate that Population and Development Review ranks first in terms of citations in the family policy literature, shaping the theoretical framework focused on demography and development, while the Journal of European Social Policy leads in terms of the number of publications. Furthermore, "family policies," "gender," "employment," and "childcare" occupy central positions in the keyword network. The clear predominance of the term "family policies" indicates that this topic is used both as a primary focus and theoretical framework in the literature. This demonstrates that family policies are directly or indirectly linked to employment, demographic

conditions, gender equality, and social welfare policies (Gauthier, 2007). The high frequency of gender-focused terms such as gender, women's employment, mothers, and women has demonstrated that the impact of family policies on women's labor force participation and social roles is a dominant research line in the literature (Lewis, 2006).

Keyword trends have diversified particularly after the pandemic, and themes such as remote work, redistribution of caregiving, and intergenerational care support have become prominent in recent years. Thematic findings serve as guidelines for future researchers. Topics such as flexible working and part-time work have gained prominence in certain subfields but have less centrality in the general literature. These topics are gaining renewed importance, particularly with the rise of flexible employment models after the pandemic (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Therefore, a recommendation emerges for future researchers to address the research gap regarding factors such as flexible working and part-time work. The conceptual evolution results indicate that the field of family policies, while focused on welfare regimes and fertility policies in the 1980s–2010s, has evolved today to focus on labor markets, gender equality, and care services.

Ultimately, this study presents a holistic map of the literature's thematic structure, geographical concentration, and temporal trends by presenting a global survey of scientific production in the field of family policies over the period 1980–2025. Overall, the study presents a holistic overview of the historical development of production in the field, the influence of defining studies, thematic trends, and the network structure among researchers. The findings reveal that the literature has evolved over time to become more systematic, comparative, and policy-focused. In this context, the study provides a strong reference point for both understanding past trends and anticipating future research topics. By identifying the most productive countries, most influential authors, most cited studies, and prominent themes, a comprehensive framework for the field's intellectual structure is presented. Using bibliometric methods, the study synthesizes existing knowledge and highlights research gaps in the areas of policy, gender, and employment. The findings suggest that future research should focus on underrepresented geographies, further examine flexible working and new employment patterns, assess the long-term impact of post-pandemic political shifts, and systematically analyze emerging themes. In this respect, the study contributes to the theoretical framework and provides strategic information for policymakers and academics.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

This study has been prepared in accordance with the principles of scientific research and publication ethics. The study does not require ethics committee approval.

Authors' Contributions Statement

The authors contributed equally to the article.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Extended Summary

Family policies, particularly after the 1980s, emerged as a strategic priority for modern welfare states in the context of socio-economic sustainability, driven by the proliferation of liberal approaches. Family policies, including childcare services, parenting arrangements, fertility incentives, flexible working models, and social assistance mechanisms that address disadvantaged groups, have become increasingly popular, aiming to increase women's employment opportunities. Furthermore, the structural consequences of these policies directly impact not only family well-being but also the labor market. Since the early 2000s, numerous international organizations, including the EU, OECD, and ILO, have placed family policies at the forefront of their focus on addressing issues such as aging populations, low fertility rates, inequalities in women's employment, and inadequate care services (Gauthier, 2007). In response to the adoption of family policies by international organizations in practice, there has been a rapid increase in academic research. The prioritization of gender equality and fertility targets within the EU's Lisbon Strategy (European Commission, 2006), the OECD's Babies and Bosses report series (OECD, 2007), and the UN's Beijing+10 process have been decisive in this increase. Furthermore, the opening up of international databases such as the OECD Family Database and Eurostat has strengthened the methodological infrastructure of comparative research (Plantenga & Remery, 2009).

Family policies are constantly evolving as a reflection of current socio-cultural and economic transformations. In this context, the family, as one of the fundamental building blocks of society, is a primary factor requiring careful attention in the context of social policy. Policy requirements addressing the changing demands of society, particularly over the last two decades, are crucial. Therefore, the needs of the family, which lies at the core of social structure, must be carefully monitored. Modernization and its subsequent advances, coupled with women's participation in the workforce, urbanization, and individualization, have led to a transformation in family relations (Mokhira, 2025). The intensification of digitalization, along with the shift in family communication structures and the transformations experienced in family roles, have raised various questions (Shrivastava, 2025). In this context, the macro- and micro-level changes in internal relations related to the concept of family reflect the need for social solutions (Kagıtcıbaşı, 2017). Social-political solutions have become necessary to ensure the continuity of the family structure. In response to these structural changes, countries are developing a wide range of protective and supportive social policy instruments (Thévenon, 2011). Factors such as childcare, maternity leave, family assistance, employment incentives, and gender equality, which have emerged by focusing on the family, aim to ensure family unity (Lewis, 2006). In countries like Turkey, where tradition is prioritized, family values are at the

forefront, and social policy instruments implemented through the state and hybrid policies that take cultural transformations into account have become important (Gedikkaya, 2023).

In recent years, family policies have prioritized demographic issues, women's employment, and children's well-being, particularly in light of the decline in fertility rates (Esping-Andersen, 2002). Broadly speaking, family policies address disadvantages related to factors that impact the family's foundation, such as health, education, employment, and housing (Koçak & Demir, 2023). In this context, family policies are a strategic political tool that supports individual and societal well-being and the stability of this well-being. Family policies are multidimensional and comprehensive, extending from marriage to fertility and increasing family well-being (Murry & Lippold, 2018). Family policies both provide support to family members and have a broad theoretical basis. With the intensification of industrialization, urbanization, and liberalization, social security functions for families have been disrupted, and countries have begun to implement new social regulations. Socioeconomic structural transformations and waves of migration, particularly those caused by industrialization and the service sector, have led to a shift in family structure, making it necessary to update the social security mechanism (Trask, 2022). The demographic impasse that countries face and the decline in the number of young and productive populations poses a threat to the sustainability of the labor market, making it crucial to update family policies. The impact of neoliberal welfare approaches on the family has been analyzed, sparking discussions within the social and economic dimensions (Buğra, 2020).

Current family policies have been theoretically evaluated within dimensions such as social assistance, taxes, childcare, and family leave (Woods, 2012). Social assistance provides financial support to integrate low-income families into the socioeconomic order, thereby increasing family income, while tax credits are a mechanism that increases the earnings of actively working families (Cecchini, 2021). Within family policies, childcare is a strategic element implemented to prevent disruptions to family employment (Lee & Sirgy, 2024). Family leave, on the other hand, is a benefit parents receive to contribute to their children's development. Consequently, the development, updating, and careful implementation of social policies are crucial for families with low incomes and/or facing various challenges related to childcare, fertility, parenting time, and gender equality (Dickey & Miller, 2023). In today's societies, family policies, as a fundamental element of social welfare systems, are strategic tools that support the holistic development of both individuals and society and contribute to the strengthening of an egalitarian and inclusive social structure. Therefore, evaluating academic developments alongside practical outcomes has become crucial to understanding the evolutionary development of the concept from past to present.

The research aims to explore the literature trend to draw current and holistic conclusions on family policies. The research aims to conduct an evolutionary, current, and holistic assessment of family policies within a theoretical context. The research employs a bibliometric analysis technique to uncover thematic development, evolutionary transformation, productivity levels, and influencing factors related to the family policy literature. The bibliometric analysis technique is an effective tool for holistically evaluating quantitative data from academic studies in a specific field and mapping the literature. Performance analysis of academic trends and scientific mapping techniques are used within the systematic literature review. The data source for the research analysis is the Web of Science database, a valid and reliable platform for academic research. The search strategy was filtered by "family policies" (topic - title, abstract, keywords, and keywords plus) to draw a holistic and general conclusion. Furthermore, to reveal evolutionary inferences from the past to the present, data was obtained from 1980 (the first year of the study) to 2025, without any year-based restrictions. Similarly, to ensure a holistic and general conclusion, no restrictions were placed on document type. A total of 1,396 studies were analyzed.

The analysis process was conducted using Biblioshiny, the user-friendly interface of the Bibliometrix package running in the R environment. First, as part of the performance analysis, the number of publications by year, the most productive authors, institutions, and countries, as well as the most cited publications, were determined. Then, scientific mapping techniques were applied to reveal the thematic structure of the literature and its evolution over time. In this context, keyword frequencies, co-occurrence relationships, thematic maps, trend topics, and conceptual evolution analyses were conducted. High standards of the data source, meticulous execution of the data cleaning process, and transparent reporting of the analysis steps were essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. However, the method has some limitations. Using only WoS data may lead to the exclusion of some studies from other databases such as Scopus or Google Scholar. Furthermore, the relatively low number of publications in languages other than English led to limited reflection of linguistic diversity in the analysis. In conclusion, this methodological design combines both quantitative and network-based analyses to evaluate the family policy literature from a holistic perspective. Thus, it reveals the historical development of the field, its thematic focuses and the influential actors in knowledge production in a multi-dimensional manner.

The analysis findings reveal that academic production in the field of family policies has exhibited a significant upward trend since 2006, and that this trend is directly linked to international policy documents, the broad accessibility provided by open databases, and the strengthening of gender equality-focused approaches. Keyword analyses reveal that concepts such as "family policies," "gender," "employment," and "childcare" are central to the literature, while the thematic structure is particularly concentrated around gender, parental leave, and care services. Furthermore, niche concepts such as "flexible working," "part-time work," and "work-family conflict," identified in the thematic analysis, despite their low centrality in the general literature, have resurfaced in discussions of flexible employment patterns, work-family balance, and the transformation of working life following the pandemic. The United States, Germany, and Spain are among the top countries in publication production; at the journal level, the Journal of European Social Policy leads in terms of publication count, while Population and Development Review leads in terms of citation count. These findings demonstrate that the field is shifting from its historical focus on welfare regimes to focus on gender equality, inclusive care policies, flexible working models, and crisis-adaptive social policy designs. Recently, issues of digitalization, remote work, the diversification of care services, and demographic sustainability have become more prominent in the literature, demonstrating that family policy research is a dynamic field that adapts rapidly to socioeconomic changes and is open to interdisciplinary and comparative analyses on a global scale.