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Analysis and mapping of global research publications on migrant domestic workers

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Abstract

Recognizing the importance of evidence-based research in informing migration policies and empowering migrant domestic workers (MDWs), this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of MDW research patterns and trends. Using a descriptive cross-sectional study design, research articles on MDWs were retrieved from the Scopus database. The findings reveal a substantial increase in research output in recent years, with notable contributions from journals in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Key contributors include scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, and institutions such as the *National University of Singapore* and the *Chinese University of Hong Kong*. Journals in the field of migration have prominent role in publishing research on MDWs. At the author level, Yeoh, B.S.A, at the *National University of Singapore* was the most prolific author. Academic activities were the main driver of research and that funding was suboptimal in this field. Highly cited articles focused on topics such as transnational motherhood, the international division of reproductive labor, and the negotiation of citizenship rights. Major research hotspots in the retrieved articles included mental health aspects, caregiving especially of the elderly, and struggles for legal rights. Specific nationalities, such as Filipina/o and Indonesian MDWs, have been the focus of numerous studies, shedding light on their narratives, challenges, and agency within transnational contexts. Overall, this study underscores the urgency of addressing the needs and rights of MDWs, advocate for human rights, and enhance understanding of occupational health and safety in the unique context of domestic work.

Keywords Migrant domestic workers, Women, Research analysis, Health

Introduction

Globalization has spurred an influx of individuals seeking improved livelihoods, with migrant workers, defined as those who relocate within or beyond their country in pursuit of employment, becoming increasingly prevalent (Douglas et al., 2019). Among these migrants, particular attention has recently focused on migrant domestic workers (MDWs), predominantly women who migrate to engage in household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving in foreign countries or regions (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2022; Yeoh & Huang, 2000). The majority of MDWs originate from low- and middle-income nations, migrating to host countries across the Arab Gulf,

Europe, the Western Pacific, and Northern America. Currently, there are approximately 67.1 million domestic workers worldwide, with 11.5 million classified as MDWs, comprising 17.2% of global domestic workers and 7.7% of total migrant laborers (United Nations, 2016), the majority of whom are female. This surge in female migrant workers over the past two decades has been termed the “feminization of migration (Gabaccia, 2016).

MDWs occupy a unique employment status characterized by several factors: they are typically bound to a single employer, work within the employer’s private residence, may lack official work documentation due to illegal entry facilitated by human trafficking or smuggling, and in some instances, may be minors, rendering their employment a form of slavery (Basnyat & Chang, 2017). Gender disparities, language barriers, cultural disparities, inadequate regulation in host countries, social discrimination, and limited access to healthcare services further endanger the physical and mental well-being of MDWs (Hall, Garabiles et al., 2019a; Hall et al., 2019), rendering them susceptible to various forms of abuse and human rights violations (Hargreaves et al., 2019). Despite these challenges, the allure of earning abroad remains a compelling aspiration for millions of women, driven by poverty, adversity, and a desire for international experience to enhance social standing and empowerment.

Addressing the needs and empowering MDWs necessitates an understanding of the existing literature on this migrant group. Future migration policies, both in sending and receiving nations, must be informed by evidence-based research. Similarly, funding agencies rely on comprehensive literature reviews to identify research gaps and allocate financial resources accordingly. Despite the significant body of research on migration, (Gao & Wang, 2022; Sweileh, 2018; Sweileh et al., 2018), studies on research trends and patterns, specifically focused on MDWs are scarce (Malhotra et al., 2013). Thus, this study aims to provide academics, researchers, and policymakers in the field of migration, particularly labor migration, with a detailed analysis of MDW research patterns and trends to identify existing research gaps and avenues for future exploration. Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 08, which advocates for sustained economic growth while safeguarding labor rights and promoting decent work conditions, this research also supports the UN’s recognition of migration and mobility as integral components of national and global development (Aniche & order, 2020; Halisçelik & Soytas, 2019). Furthermore, it echoes the call from the International Organization for Migration for a comprehensive assessment of existing research, mapping of literature, and identification of focal points and deficiencies to inform a cohesive global research agenda on migration health (International Organization for Migration, 2017). Lastly, given the escalating numbers of MDWs and the gender disparities inherent in this field, there is an urgent need to spotlight research focal points to empower women, advocate for human rights and equality in labor laws, and enhance understanding of occupational health and safety, particularly in the unique context where home serves as the workplace for MDWs.

Methods

Study design

The current study was an observational, descriptive cross-sectional study.

Settings

All research papers published on MDWs available in Scopus database were retrieved and analyzed. Scopus has the advantage of being inclusive of PubMed and having double the number of indexed journals of Web of Science (Elsevier, 2023). Therefore, the use Scopus database alone is justifiable since it will retrieve the maximum number of publications.

Selection of research papers

We followed the recommendations laid out in PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to include quality research papers in our review. Supplement 1 is a PISMA-adapted flow diagram showing the number of retrieved documents in each step in the search strategy (Page et al., 2021), as well as the keywords used in the search query. The retrieved documents were refined based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria. The search string was open for all times up to December 31st, 2023. The types of documents included in the analysis were journal research articles written in English. Other document types, such as editorials, notes, letters, conference abstracts, and review articles were excluded.

Investigated variables

The followings were the variables investigated and addressed in the current study:

1. The annual number of publications.
2. Key contributors to the retrieved publications such as core journals, countries, institutions, and authors.
3. Citation analysis and content analysis of top 10 cited articles.
4. Research hotspots identified through the most frequently encountered terms in the retrieved publications.
5. Content analysis of publications on various nationalities of MDWs.

Data management and visualization

The retrieved publications were exported from Scopus to Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer program for analysis and mapping. The VOSviewer map of research hot spots presents terms as nodes (circles) (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Nodes with larger size are more frequently encountered in the retrieved articles. In the map, closely related terms have similar node color and exist in a cluster. Each cluster represents a research hotspot. The mapping of worldwide geographic distribution of publications was carried using Microsoft Excel Program. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

Bias

To confirm the absence of bias, the retrieved articles were sorted based on the number of citations received and the top 30 cited articles were reviewed to confirm that none was outside the scope of MDWs. Furthermore, the number of articles published by each of the top authors was matched to their actual contribution to the field and tested for correlation (Sweileh et al., 2018). Both approaches confirm the absence of bias regarding false-positive and false-negative results.

Statistical methods

Descriptive statistics and graphics were carried out using the Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. For citation analysis, the mean and the Hirsch index (H-index) (Hirsch, 2005) were used. For mapping the content of the retrieved literature, VOSviewer was used in which the node size, color, and thickness of connecting lines reflect the frequency of occurrence, relatedness, and strength of relatedness respectively (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Results

Annual number of publications and growth pattern

Based on the search query applied, 705 research articles were found. The earliest publication about MDWs appeared in 1988 and was about Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong (French & Lam, 1988). From 1988 to 1996, only 8 (1.1%) articles were published. More than half ($n=359$, 50.9%) of the articles were published between 2018 and 2023 (Fig. 1). The annual number of publications reached the peak in 2021 with 70 (9.9%) articles. Of the total retrieved articles, 579 (82.1%) were published in journals identified in the field of social sciences, 167 (23.7%) in the field of humanities, 101 (14.3%) in the field of medicine, and 51 (7.2%) in the field of psychology with certain potential overlap between different subject areas.

Key contributors

The *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* was the leading journal and published 22 (3.1%) articles, followed by the *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* (21; 3.0%) (Table 1). The top active 10 countries in publishing articles on MDWs were shown in Table 2. Scholars from the United States made the most contribution to the field with 107 (15.2%) articles, followed by scholars from the United Kingdom (UK) ($n=102$, 14.5%). Figure 2 shows the worldwide distribution of the retrieved articles. The South-East Asian region, the Western Pacific region, the region of North America, and Latin American countries have noticeable contribution. In the African region, contributions of South Africa and Ethiopia were visible.

The *National University of Singapore* ($n=42$, 6.0%) and the *Chinese University of Hong Kong* ($n=23$, 3.3%) were the most active institution in publishing articles on MDWs. The

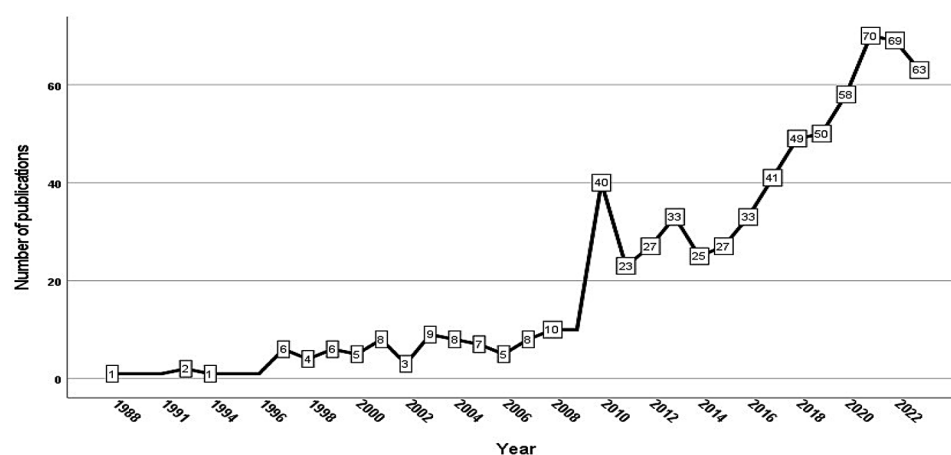


Fig. 1 Linear graphic presentation of the annual growth of research publications on migrant domestic workers

Table 1 Top 10 active journals publishing research articles on migrant domestic workers

Rank	Journal name	Number of publications	% (N= 705)
1	<i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>	22	3.1
2	<i>Asian And Pacific Migration Journal</i>	21	3.0
3	<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	12	1.7
4	<i>Gender Place and Culture</i>	10	1.4
4	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>	10	1.4
4	<i>International Migration</i>	10	1.4
7	<i>International Migration Review</i>	9	1.3
7	<i>Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies</i>	9	1.3
9	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>Critical Asian Studies</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>European Journal of Women's Studies</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>Global Networks</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>Social Politics</i>	7	1.0
9	<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	7	1.0

Table 2 Top 10 active countries publishing research articles on migrant domestic workers

Rank	Country name	Number of publications	% (N= 705)
1	United States	107	15.2
2	United Kingdom	102	14.5
3	Hong Kong	68	9.6
4	Singapore	62	8.8
5	Australia	48	6.8
6	Canada	36	5.1
7	Italy	34	4.8
8	Germany	30	4.3
9	China	24	3.4
10	Netherlands	23	3.3

University of Toronto and the University of Hong Kong were among the top active institutions. The top 10 active institutions were academic institutions. At the author level, Yeoh, B.S.A, at the National University of Singapore was the most prolific author in the field with 25 (3.5%) articles. Regarding funding, the *National University of Singapore* was the most active funding sponsor in the field with 13 (1.8%) articles being funded by the university. Of the total retrieved articles, only 291 (41.3%) articles stated receiving funding.

Citation analysis and content analysis of top 10 cited articles on MDWs

The retrieved articles received 13522 citations and an H-index of 53. The top 10 cited articles on MDWs cover a range of topics related to the experiences, challenges, and impacts of migrant women engaged in domestic work. "I'm here, but I'm there: The meanings of Latina transnational motherhood" explores the concept of transnational motherhood among Latina immigrant women in Los Angeles, focusing on how they redefine motherhood due to spatial separation from their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997a). "Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor" discusses the global politics of reproductive labor, particularly the three-tier transfer of labor involving migrant Filipina domestic workers (Salazar Parreñas, 2000). "Negotiating

Country/Territory	Number of publications
United States	107
United Kingdom	102
Hong Kong	68
Singapore	62
Australia	48
Canada	36
Italy	34
Germany	30
China	24
Netherlands	23
Israel	22
Philippines	21
Spain	19
Taiwan	19
Indonesia	15
Japan	13
Macao	12
Belgium	11
India	11
Sweden	11
Austria	9
Finland	9
Ireland	9
South Africa	9
Switzerland	8
Ethiopia	7
France	7
New Zealand	6
Norway	6
Argentina	5
Colombia	5
Greece	5
South Korea	5
Turkey	5
Brazil	4
Egypt	4
Ghana	4
Lebanon	4
Malaysia	4
Portugal	4
Thailand	4
Bangladesh	3
Cyprus	3
Czech Republic	3
Romania	3
United Arab Emirates	3
Viet Nam	3
Chile	2
Kuwait	2
Lithuania	2
Luxembourg	2
Mexico	2
Brunei Darussalam	1
Hungary	1
Jordan	1
Mali	1
Oman	1
Peru	1
Russian Federation	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Slovakia	1
Solomon Islands	1
Sri Lanka	1
Uganda	1
Yemen	1

Fig. 2 Worldwide distribution of research publications on migrant domestic workers. The map was created by Microsoft Excel

public space: Strategies and styles of migrant female domestic workers in Singapore” examines the marginalized position of migrant domestic workers in Singapore and their negotiation of public space (Yeoh & Huang, 1998). “From registered nurse to registered nanny: Discursive geographies of Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, B.C.” explores the occupational limitations faced by Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, highlighting discursive constructions of identity (Pratt, 1999). “Migrant female domestic workers: Debating the economic, social and political impacts in Singapore” analyzes the socio-economic and political implications of migrant domestic workers in Singapore (Yeoh & Huang, 1999). “A very private business: Exploring the demand for migrant domestic workers” investigates the demand for migrant domestic workers in the UK and the role

focused on the caregiving, especially the elderly, by MDWs; and (3) the third green cluster focused on the social aspects, specifically, the struggle for citizenship by MDWs.

The health-related research hotspot explored (1) the mental health challenges and psychosocial impact experienced by MDWs, including stress, depression, anxiety, and coping strategies [43]; (2) the working conditions, occupational hazards, safety concerns, and experiences of aggression faced by MDWs in various countries [13, 44]; (3) the social support and coping mechanisms, which investigated the role of social support networks, coping mechanisms, and their impact on the mental well-being of migrant domestic workers [10, 45]; (4) the caregiving and elderly care that focused on the caregiving responsibilities, challenges, and relationships between MDWs and elderly care recipients [46, 47]; and finally (5) access to healthcare and behavior, which examined healthcare access, utilization, health behaviors, and the impact of stress on the health and quality of life of MDWs [48, 49]. For the caregiving research hotspot, the research publications collectively contributed to understanding the complex dynamics of caregiving and highlight the interconnectedness between MDWs, caregiving, and employment conditions (Akalin, 2007; Asis & Carandang, 2020; Ayalon et al., 2013; Basnyat & Chang, 2017; Tay & Kong, 2020). For the final research hotspot focusing on citizenship and legal issues of MDWs, articles within this cluster collectively contributed to a deeper understanding of the legal challenges and citizenship issues confronting MDWs, highlighting areas for policy reform and advocacy efforts (Cheng & Choo, 2015; Gabriel & Macdonald, 2014; Henderson, 2021; Husni & Suryani, 2018; Ito, 2016; Karachurina et al., 2019; Kontos, 2013; Lutz & Palenga-Möllenberg, 2012; Stasiulis & Bakan, 1997; Tan, 2010).

Nationalities of investigated MDWs

Analysis showed that there were 153 (21.7%) articles about Filipino/Filipina MDWs. The collection of articles on Filipina/o MDWs delves into the experiences of Filipina/o, examining various aspects such as the international division of reproductive labor, discursive constructions shaping labor market experiences, representations of workers in receiving countries, negotiations of class identities, and determinants of health and well-being (Chin, 1997; Hall, Garabiles et al., 2019b; Holroyd et al., 2001; Lan, 2003; Pratt, 1999; Salazar Parreñas, 2000). They reveal the complexities and challenges faced by Filipina domestic workers, including their intermediary role within the global division of labor, marginalization within host societies, and adverse working conditions impacting their physical and mental health. These studies underscore the need for greater awareness, advocacy, and policy interventions to address the rights, well-being, and empowerment of migrant domestic workers, particularly those from the Philippines.

There were 87 (12.4%) articles about Indonesian MDWs. The articles on Indonesian migrant domestic workers offer insights into various aspects of their experiences and challenges. One article focused on women migrants' narratives of transnational migration to Saudi Arabia, highlighting their consumption desires and practices, religious influences on mothering practices, and the larger struggles within Indonesian state relations with women and Islam (Silvey, 2006). Another article analyzed representations of foreign female domestic workers in Malaysia, uncovering how state officials, employers, and agencies depict these workers, obscuring their status as protected laborers (Chin, 1997). A separate study examined the gender politics of scale in activist approaches to MDWs' rights, showcasing how activists construct and deploy different

scales in advocating for these workers (Silvey, 2004). Another article explored migration governance in Asia, particularly the role of private recruitment agencies in shaping migration flows and circumventing formal cooperation with origin countries (Goh et al., 2017). Additionally, an investigation into grassroots movements and networks in Hong Kong sheds light on Indonesian MDWs' agency, gender roles, and class formation within transnational political spaces (Rother, 2017). Finally, research on technology usage among Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore reveals their negotiation of social relations and agency within the constraints of Singapore's migration regime (Platt et al., 2016). These studies collectively offer nuanced understandings of Indonesian migrant domestic workers' lives, challenges, and agency within transnational contexts. There were 19 (2.7%) on Sri Lankan, 18 (2.6%) Latino/Latina MDWs, and 17 (2.4%) Ethiopian MDWs.

Discussion

In the current study, research trends and patterns were investigated using the Scopus database. Despite that domestic work is an old phenomenon, research on MDWs started in the late 1980s and was not visible until after 2010. The increased research activity on MDWs in the last decade was secondary to human rights advocacy groups and feminist activist groups (Brigham, 2004; Figueiredo et al., 2018; Huang & Yeoh, 2007; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Momsen, 2003), the increasing number of MDWs in the context of labor migration (Bastia et al., 2019; M. Gallotti & I. J. G. Branch, Switzerland, International Labour Organization., 2015; Marchetti et al., 2021), and the feminization of migration which led to the increase in the number of females in the field of domestic work (Pande, 2021).

The current study indicated that research on MDWs was mainly published by journals in the field of migration. However, journals in the field of human rights, law, and occupational health were under-presented. The field of MDWs is a multidisciplinary field that involves social, legal, health, and human rights researchers. The under-presentation of journals in the field of law and health keeps the problems of MDWs uncovered and unseen.

The current study showed that research from the Middle East region was relatively low given the high number of MDWs in the Arab Gulf countries. Approximately 27.4% of MDWs across the world are found in Arab states, particularly the Arab Gulf (M. Gallotti & I. J. G. Branch, Switzerland, International Labour Organization., 2015). However, only 13 (2.0%) articles on MDWs were contributed by researchers in Arab countries. Research articles on MDWs from scholars in Arab countries discussed issues such as human trafficking (de Regt, 2010; Demetriou, 2019; Jureidini, 2010; Shah et al., 2002), health issues (Abder-Rahman et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2012; Zahreddine et al., 2014), and abuse and discrimination (Amin, 2022). Therefore, more research is needed on health, human rights, cultural adaptation, and psychology of MDWs in Arab countries. It is also important that male MDWs in the Arab States be adequately addressed by researchers, given that about half of all male migrant domestic workers are in the Arab States, working as gardeners, drivers, and security guards (M. Gallotti & I. Branch, 2015). The Asia Pacific region is another world region with a high percentage of MDWs, with a relatively high proportion being illegal and financially exploited by employers (GLOBE, 2022; International Labour Organization, 2022). The majority of Asian MDWs travel from

Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand to the Arab Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei for domestic work (Lim & Oishi, 1996).

The article on transnational motherhood among Latina migrant domestic workers garnered an exceptionally high number of citations, indicating the profound significance of this topic (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997a). The challenges and narratives surrounding working migrant mothers and their families back home, particularly regarding the children left behind, are complex and deeply impactful. These mothers often experience significant emotional strain due to the separation, grappling with feelings of guilt, sadness, and longing as they are unable to actively participate in their children's daily lives and milestones (Pineros-Leano et al., 2021). Moreover, the experience of transnational motherhood involves reimagining traditional notions of maternal roles within the context of migration, as migrant mothers must find ways to maintain connections with their children across geographical distances, often through frequent communication and financial support. Financial pressures also weigh heavily on migrant mothers, who undertake domestic work abroad as a means to provide better financial support for their families but must balance financial obligations with personal well-being (Gamburd, 2000). Additionally, they may face social stigma both in their host countries and home communities, perceived as neglectful mothers or inadequate workers (Parrenas, 2001). Children left behind by migrant mothers may experience feelings of abandonment and loneliness, struggling with the absence of parental figures in their lives. Despite these challenges, many migrant mothers demonstrate resilience and adaptability, developing creative coping strategies to maintain strong bonds with their children, such as sending audio and video messages and organizing periodic visits whenever possible (Qu et al., 2020). Understanding the complexities of transnational motherhood among migrant domestic workers is crucial for developing policies and support systems that address their unique needs and challenges while recognizing their agency and contributions to both their host and home communities.

Research articles on MDWs working in Singapore received relatively a higher number of citations. In 2019, there were approximately 262 thousand MDWs in Singapore relative to 215 thousand in 2013 (Statista, 2022). The majority of MDWs working in Singapore originates from neighboring Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, India, Thailand, and Bangladesh (Dutta et al., 2018). Reports of abuse of MDWs working in Singapore were present in national news where MDWs reported to emotional abuse, violence, intimidation, and invasion of privacy (Strangio, 2022). The presence of relatively large numbers of MDWs and the absence of protective regulations placed the Singaporean scholars and academic institutions in the leading positions in the field. The highly cited articles emphasize the vulnerability of Asian MDWs, particularly the Filipino and Indonesian. Despite the fact that not all MDWs are legally employed, none of the top-cited articles discussed issues related to undocumented MDWs or the smuggling and human trafficking of MDWs (Raijman et al., 2003; Siruno et al., 2022). It is possible that these issues are difficult to research given that most MDWs are living-in and difficult to reach by researchers. It is also possible that MDWs themselves are not willing to talk since most of them are part of poor societies. Of particular interest is the top-cited article, which discussed Latina mothers working as MDWs in the United States and how they adapt and practice motherhood for children left behind in their original

countries (Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo & Ernestine Avila, 1997). This is a serious social and health problem facing migrant workers who leave their family members behind in their original countries (Cortes, 2015; Peng & Wong, 2015). The price that family members left-behind pay may be greater than the benefits of remittances sent by the migrant parent(s).

The findings of the current study showed several research gaps in the field. Despite the fact that the majority of MDWs are women, research on women's health issues was limited. Health-related issues of female MDWs should be the responsibility of both the sending and receiving countries (Malhotra et al., 2013). The working conditions negatively affect the general and sexual health of female MDWs (Anjara et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2020). Occupational stress and distance from family generate emotional stress and depression among MDWs with no or limited access to mental healthcare services. MDWs should receive pre-departure training on coping with stress and building resilience to stressful events at work (Regmi et al., 2020). A second research gap in the field is the relationship and communication of MDWs with family members left behind, especially children. Information about family members left behind in the context of migration needs to be collected to understand and evaluate the pros and cons of migration and leaving family behind (Hugo & Ukwatta, 2010). A third research gap is about MDWs in the Middle East. Reports of abuse and human rights violations of MDWs in the Middle East have been published (Al Rifai et al., 2015; Fernandez, 2018; Shewamene et al., 2022; Wickramage et al., 2017). More publications are needed to implement appropriate protective national regulations regarding MDWs. The "Human Rights Watch" reported thousands of human rights violations against female MDWs by their employers in Lebanon and other Arab countries. Such violations included long working hours with no breaks; less than average monthly wages; sexual and verbal abuse, and a lack of protective regulations under the Lebanese labor code (Blog, 2019). The Kafala or sponsorship system plays a negative role in the mistreatment of MDWs in several Arab countries (Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016; Parreñas & Silvey, 2021). In many cases, the passport of the MDWs is confiscated, and the movement of the MDWs is restricted by the employer and the recruiting agency (Parreñas, 2021; Rak, 2021).

The finding that the National University of Singapore was the most active funding sponsor in the field of MDWs, supporting 1.8% of the articles, sheds light on the dynamics of research funding in this area. It suggests that academia, particularly institutions in Singapore, plays a significant role in driving research in the field of MDWs. This involvement of academia in funding research aligns with the academic community's commitment to addressing pressing social issues and advancing knowledge in relevant domains. However, the fact that approximately 41% of publications received funding indicates a potential gap in research funding for MDWs. While academia, represented by institutions like National University of Singapore, may provide some financial support for research projects, the overall level of funding appears to be insufficient to meet the needs of researchers in the field. This suggests that research publications in the area of MDWs may not be primarily driven by governmental bodies or external funding agencies. The lack of adequate funding for MDW research raises concerns about the scope and depth of studies conducted in this area. Insufficient funding may limit researchers' ability to conduct comprehensive investigations, gather robust data, and address complex issues facing MDWs. It may also hinder efforts to explore innovative solutions,

develop effective interventions, and influence policy decisions. Overall, while academia, exemplified by institutions like the *National University of Singapore*, plays a crucial role in supporting research on MDWs, there appears to be a need for increased funding from governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and other external sources. Adequate funding is essential to ensure that researchers have the resources they need to conduct high-quality studies, generate meaningful insights, and contribute to positive outcomes for MDWs and the communities they serve. The finding that several journals in the field of migration were among the top active journals publishing research on migrant domestic workers suggests a strong alignment between the research focus and the editorial scope of these journals. This alignment indicates that editorial decisions may have played a role in driving research publications in this area. When journals specialize in a particular field or topic, they are more likely to attract submissions related to that subject matter. In the case of migrant domestic workers, researchers may have chosen to submit their work to migration-focused journals because these outlets offer a targeted audience of scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in migration issues. Additionally, editorial boards of migration journals may actively seek out and encourage submissions on topics such as labor migration, gender dynamics, and human rights, which are central to the study of MDWs. Furthermore, the prominence of migration-focused journals among the top active list suggests that these outlets may have provided a platform for researchers to disseminate their findings and contribute to the ongoing discourse within the field. By publishing in these journals, researchers may have sought to reach a broader audience and engage with the academic community working on migration-related issues. Overall, while other factors such as funding priorities and academic mentorship may have influenced the research agenda on migrant domestic workers, the presence of migration-focused journals among the top active list suggests that editorial decisions likely played a role in driving research publications in this area.

The prevalence of articles focusing on Filipina and Indonesian MDWs in the bibliometric analysis likely arises from several interconnected factors. Firstly, both Filipina and Indonesian migrant workers constitute substantial proportions of the global domestic worker population, owing to the significant numbers of individuals from these countries engaged in labor migration. As major sending countries for migrant workers, particularly in the domestic work sector, their large presence in destination countries across various regions makes them prominent subjects of study. Additionally, Southeast Asia has a robust tradition of academic research on migration, driven by the region's historical, economic, and social dynamics. Consequently, academic institutions and journals in Southeast Asia may prioritize research on MDWs from these countries, contributing to the higher number of articles focusing on them. Moreover, Filipina and Indonesian migrant domestic workers are employed in a diverse array of destination countries across different continents, including Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Their global presence attracts attention from researchers worldwide, resulting in a greater volume of literature examining their experiences, challenges, and contributions to host societies. Issues related to Filipina and Indonesian migrant domestic workers, such as labor rights violations, social integration, and health concerns, have gained international visibility due to advocacy efforts, media coverage, and policy debates. This visibility may drive academic interest and research funding, leading to a higher number of publications focusing on these specific migrant groups. Finally, the availability of researchers

proficient in the languages and cultures of the Philippines and Indonesia may also contribute to the abundance of literature on Filipina and Indonesian MDWs. Scholars from these countries or with connections to these regions may be more inclined to study and publish research on migrant workers from their respective countries of origin.

While this bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the research landscape concerning migrant domestic workers (MDWs), it is important to recognize several limitations. Firstly, there is the potential for database bias, despite using Scopus, a comprehensive database, as some publications on MDWs may not have been indexed or included in the analysis. This could be due to variations in indexing practices across disciplines and regions. Secondly, the analysis focused solely on articles written in English, which may have excluded significant research published in other languages, leading to an incomplete representation of the global research landscape on MDWs. Thirdly, the inclusion criteria were limited to journal research articles, excluding other potentially relevant document types such as editorials and conference abstracts, which may have resulted in the omission of important perspectives or findings. Additionally, there may be a temporal bias, as efforts were made to include articles published up to December 31st, 2023, potentially overlooking recent publications and emerging research developments. Furthermore, despite efforts to minimize bias through rigorous methodology, the interpretation of data and identification of research hotspots involved subjective judgment, which could have led to variations in results among different analysts. Lastly, the analysis revealed regional imbalances in research output, with certain geographic areas being underrepresented, which may skew the overall understanding of MDW research trends and priorities.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis reveals several significant findings regarding research on MDWs. Firstly, there has been a notable increase in research activity surrounding MDWs over the past decade, propelled by factors such as human rights advocacy and the feminization of migration. Secondly, while journals in the field of migration have been the primary contributors to MDW research, there is an evident underrepresentation in areas like human rights and health, suggesting potential avenues for further exploration. Thirdly, despite the global scope of MDW research, certain regions, notably the Middle East, remain underrepresented despite hosting a significant population of MDWs, indicating the necessity for region-specific research to address context-specific challenges. Additionally, articles focusing on MDWs in specific countries, such as Singapore, have received relatively higher citation counts, emphasizing the importance of localized research in generating scholarly impact. However, despite the growing body of literature, significant research gaps persist, particularly concerning women's health, family communication dynamics, and the experiences of MDWs in the Middle East. Addressing these gaps is crucial for informing policy and advocacy efforts aimed at improving the rights, well-being, and working conditions of MDWs globally. Future research should prioritize investigating the physical and mental health challenges faced by female MDWs, examining the impact of migration on family dynamics, especially communication and relationships between MDWs and their family members left behind, and focusing on the Middle East region, where MDWs are significantly present, yet underrepresented in research. Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers in fields such

as migration, health, law, and human rights can provide more comprehensive insights into the multifaceted challenges facing MDWs, ultimately informing evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at advancing the well-being and rights of this vulnerable migrant population.

Supplementary Information

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Supplementary Material 1

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Author contributions

W.S started the idea, did the analysis, wrote and submitted the manuscript.

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