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Mapping the Landscape of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Research in Africa: A 20-Year Bibliometric Analysis (2004-2024)

Topic: Research

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BACKGROUND

Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (PRM) is pivotal in enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities, but research output from Africa has been insufficient.

This study aims to analyze the bibliometric trends of PRM research in Africa, assessing publication growth, collaboration patterns, and addressed topics.

METHODS

Data were extracted from three indexing platforms; Scopus, Web of Science and Medline, using a tailored search query focusing on PRM-related keywords, African affiliations, and publications from 2004 to 2024. A total of 17,801 articles were retrieved initially which included rehabilitation-related keywords but were not specifically related to PRM. All abstracts were screened and 7,065 articles specifically relevant to PRM were included for further analysis. The publication items were analyzed using 'Microsoft Excel' and Bibliometric analysis was conducted using 'R (Bibliometrix package)' to provide an overview of publication trends, citation networks, co-authorship networks and thematic development.

RESULTS

The analysis identified 7,065 publications from 47 African countries, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of 4.27%. The number of publications increased significantly, rising from 55 in 2004 to 892 in 2024, highlighting the growing research output in the field. Egypt, South Africa, and Nigeria have played a significant role in both national and international collaborations, contributing 57%, 53%, and 24% of the total output respectively. International partnerships accounted for 48.69% of publications, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia being the most frequent collaborators.

Thematic analysis revealed that rehabilitation, stroke, disability, and quality of life were the most commonly used keywords in PRM research, reflecting a strong emphasis on functional outcomes and patient well-being.

Our analysis also indicated that rehabilitation research in Africa was primarily centered around rehabilitation, physiotherapy, disability, pain management, and public health concerns. However, technology-driven and specialized rehabilitation approaches, such as telerehabilitation, virtual reality, and gait disorders, remain notably absent from dominant research themes.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights Africa's growing yet uneven contribution to PRM research. International collaborations boost output, but local capacity and funding are crucial for regional rehabilitation needs. Findings would guide policymakers, researchers, and funders in prioritizing understudied areas and strengthening PRM research infrastructure across the continent

Statement of Disclosures

None

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