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SHORT COMMUNICATION

# The impact of fibromyalgia on society

## El impacto de la fibromialgia en la sociedad

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**ABSTRACT**

Fibromyalgia is a disease characterized by intense generalized chronic musculoskeletal pain. Its etiology is not known and there is no curative treatment but only symptomatic and focused on pain management. The lack of empathy on the part of family, work, friends and health professionals increases the psychosocial discomfort. Educating the population and health professionals on the behavior of the disease could be an opportunity to improve social ties, including friendships, family, health and work. The development of the community approach in the study of fibromyalgia is of significant importance in the understanding and management of this complex chronic disease. Fibromyalgia not only affects the individual sufferer, but also has a profound impact on their social and family environment. By adopting a community approach, it is recognized that community support and understanding is crucial to improving the quality of life for those living with fibromyalgia. This approach involves building support networks and promoting public awareness of fibromyalgia, which in turn reduces the stigma associated with the disease. In addition, the development of community education programs and support groups can help empower people with fibromyalgia to better manage their symptoms and find effective coping strategies.

**Keywords:** Fibromyalgia; Family Satisfaction; Social Support; Work Condition.

**RESUMEN**

La fibromialgia es una enfermedad caracterizada por un intenso dolor musculoesquelético generalizado que es de tipo crónico. Su etiología no es conocida y no existe un tratamiento curativo sino que solo sintomático y centrado en el manejo del dolor. La poca empatía de parte de la familia, trabajo, amigos y profesionales de la salud aumenta el malestar psicosocial. Educar a la población y profesionales de la salud en el comportamiento que tiene la enfermedad podría ser una oportunidad para mejorar los lazos sociales, dentro de ello amistades, familia, salud y laboral. El desarrollo del enfoque comunitario en el estudio de la fibromialgia reviste una importancia significativa en la comprensión y el manejo de esta compleja enfermedad crónica. La fibromialgia no solo afecta al individuo que la padece, sino que también tiene un impacto profundo en su entorno social y familiar. Al adoptar un enfoque comunitario, se reconoce que el apoyo y la comprensión de la comunidad son cruciales para mejorar la calidad de vida de quienes viven con fibromialgia. Este enfoque implica la creación de redes de apoyo y la promoción de la conciencia pública sobre la fibromialgia, lo que a su vez reduce el estigma asociado a la enfermedad. Además, el desarrollo de programas de educación comunitaria y grupos de apoyo puede ayudar a empoderar a las personas con fibromialgia para que gestionen mejor sus síntomas y encuentren estrategias efectivas de afrontamiento.

**Palabras clave:** Fibromialgia; Satisfacción Familiar; Apoyo Social; Condición Laboral.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fibromyalgia is a condition characterized by intense generalized chronic musculoskeletal pain. Additionally, individuals often experience fatigue, as well as cognitive and psychiatric disorders that coexist with the condition.[1] Its etiology is not known, and currently, there is no curative treatment but only symptomatic and focused on pain management. Fibromyalgia represents a significant public health concern, with a predominant impact on the female sex, affecting familial, social, physical, and occupational aspects that impact their quality of life.[2] The development of this pathology often leads to a pattern marked by fear, avoidance, and a reduction in activities due to the apprehension of exacerbating pain.[4,5] Unfortunately, this can contribute to social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression.[3,5,6]

## DEVELOPMENT

The manifestation of signs and symptoms affecting virtually all systems and organs in the body tends to predispose individuals with fibromyalgia to isolation. However, the lack of empathy on the part of family, work, friends, and health professionals increases the psychosocial discomfort.[3,5,7] Fibromyalgia frequently results in individuals with the condition facing contempt, where skepticism and unfair treatment are usual due to a disbelief in the severity of the pain and suffering caused by the disease.[5,8]

In the work environment, individuals diagnosed with fibromyalgia suggest that this condition and its symptomatology demand additional tasks, resulting in several negative effects on their performance. Prolonged postures and physical exertion are identified as the primary causes of pain, feelings of distress, and sadness in the workplace.[9] It has been observed that individuals displaying symptomatology or stress may lose their job due to the impact of the disease.[10] A study revealed that a significant percentage of workers with severe fibromyalgia symptomatology were either dismissed or forced to resign from their workplaces.[11,12]

Within the healthcare system, the lack of a known etiology for fibromyalgia, the absence of a concrete organic condition, and the lack of confirmatory tests for the disease, along with the presence of psychological conditions, create controversies regarding the disease and its recognition by health professionals.[2,13] This could be exacerbated by the fact that, healthcare professionals nowadays lack updated knowledge on the physiology of chronic pain, leading to questions about the individual's pain. Such attitudes are transmitted to society, contributing to the rejection of individuals with fibromyalgia by their social environment.[14]

In the family nucleus, the situation is not very promising, as this disease predominantly affects women, negatively impacting the family environment. Despite debilitating symptoms, women strive to maintain family routines, and failure to do so increases feelings of guilt for not performing their role satisfactorily.[2] Considering the family as a safe environment, where the individual is not repressed and their limitations are understood, reinforces the person's functionality in daily activities. The perception of a united family could contribute to a decrease in pain control for those individuals.[5,15,16]

### Research on fibromyalgia with a community approach

The development of the community approach in the study of fibromyalgia is of significant importance in the understanding and management of this complex chronic disease. Fibromyalgia not only affects the individual sufferer, but also has a profound impact on their social and family environment.[17] By adopting a community approach, it is recognized that community support and understanding are crucial to improve the quality of life for those living with fibromyalgia.[18,19]

This approach involves building support networks and promoting public awareness of fibromyalgia, which, in turn, reduces the stigma associated with the disease. Additionally, the development of community education programs and support groups can help empower people with fibromyalgia to better manage their symptoms and find effective coping strategies.[20]

Scientific production on fibromyalgia demonstrates substantial global growth (figure 1), with a record of 20092 published documents. However, only 293 of them belong to the field of Social Sciences.

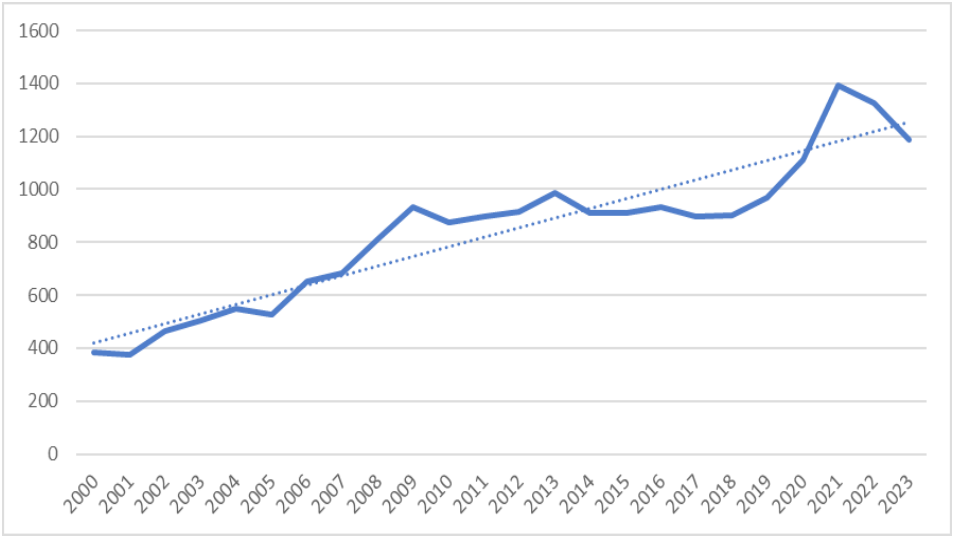


**Figure 1.** Scientific production on fibromyalgia (2000-2023)
**Source:** Scopus

Upon a detailed analysis of publications in the field of social sciences it is evident that the published documents exhibit thematic heterogeneity when examining the co-occurrence of terms (figure 2).

Based on these elements, it can be asserted that the community approach in the study of fibromyalgia is essential for addressing not only the medical aspects of the disease but also its social and psychological dimensions. This approach contributes to improving the quality of life for individuals with fibromyalgia and promotes a deeper understanding and empathy within society.

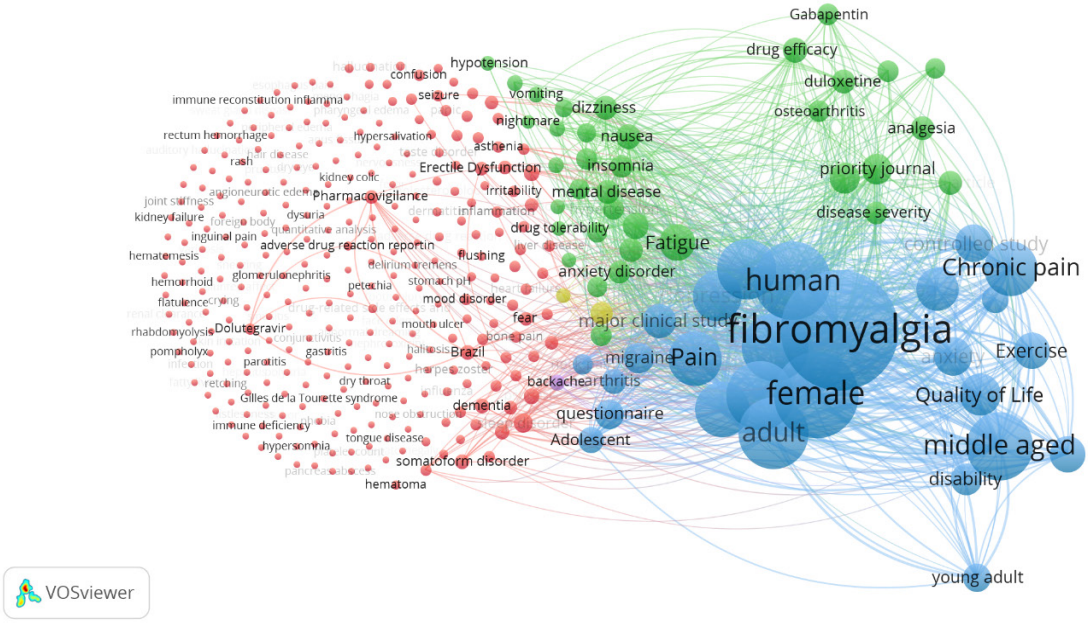


**Figure 2.** Co-occurrence of terms in published documents on fibromyalgia in the field of Social Sciences
**Source:** Scopus

## CONCLUSION

Individuals with fibromyalgia experience significant suffering that negatively impacts their quality of life, and the way the social environment stigmatize the illness. The loss of functionality, financial problems due to job loss, and rejection by society in general, contribute to the manifestation of psychological symptomatology such as fear, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Educating the population and health professionals about the behavior of the disease could be an opportunity to improve social ties, including friendships, family, health, and work.

Researchers are required to generate evidence in this field, as the literature on this topic is scarce. This shortage could be attributed to the limited information available regarding the etiology of the disease.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

*Conceptualization:* Camilo Silva Sánchez.
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*Research:* Camilo Silva Sánchez.
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*Supervision:* Camilo Silva Sánchez.
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*Writing - original draft:* Camilo Silva Sánchez.
*Writing - revision and editing:* Camilo Silva Sánchez.