

Global research trends in baby-led weaning: a bibliometric and visualized knowledge mapping study

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Cite this article: Tapcı AE, Yengil Taci D. Global research trends in baby-led weaning: a bibliometric and visualized knowledge mapping study. *J Controv Obstetr Gynecol Ped.* 2026;4(3):66-72. doi:10.51271/JCOGP-0076

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Received: 21/06/2026

Accepted: 20/07/2026

Published: 30/07/2026

ABSTRACT

Aims: This study aimed to evaluate the global research landscape of baby-led weaning (BLW) through bibliometric and visualized knowledge mapping analyses.

Methods: A bibliometric search was performed in the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection on June 20, 2026. Publications that have been identified with the help of the keywords “baby-led weaning” OR “baby led weaning” have been taken into account regardless of their publication date, language, and types of documents. Various bibliometric measures such as publications number, citations number, productive authors, journals, countries, and keywords have been analyzed.

Results: The total number of documents that were published between 1980 and 2026 amounted to 189. The scientific production rose sharply since 2011, with its peak reached in 2023. Original articles made up the biggest percentage of all publications (67.2%). The *Nutrients* journal produced the greatest number of works, while the most cited document was the work of Brown & Lee on satiety responsiveness and weaning practice. The most productive countries in BLW studies were the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand. Co-occurrence of keywords analysis identified four main thematic areas of research: complementary feeding and infant nutrition; feeding behavior and self-regulation; breast feeding; choking risk. Recent studies have increasingly paid attention to nutrition, adequacy, growth, obesity, and developmental effects.

Conclusion: Research on BLW has grown significantly in the last decade, shifting from descriptive studies to nutrition, behavior, and health outcomes. Further studies should enhance international collaboration and include data from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.

Keywords: Baby-led weaning, bibliometric analysis, feeding behavior, knowledge mapping

INTRODUCTION

Breast milk weaning to complementary feeding is an important aspect of baby nutrition that affects not only baby's growth but also eating habits and health status in the future. It is recommended to start complementary feeding at about 6 months old together with breast milk.^{1,2} Usually, complementary feeding is carried out using spoon-feeding by caregiver; however, there are other ways of doing this.

Baby-led weaning (BLW) is a feeding practice in which the child is given the chance to self-feed properly prepared family foods starting with the introduction of complementary food.³ This strategy is known to aid children in developing independence and the ability to recognize cues for hunger and fullness, as well as the formation of healthy eating habits.⁴

Even though there are many investigations and systematic reviews that assess the possible positive and negative

impact of BLW regarding growth, adequate nutrition, food acceptance, and the risk of choking, the literature is rather heterogeneous.⁵⁻⁷ On the other hand, the number of articles related to BLW has greatly increased during the last ten years.

Even with increasing research, there has been no comprehensive assessment of the development process of the BLW research, key contributors to BLW research, collaboration activities and thematic aspects within this research area. Bibliometric analysis provides a means of quantitative measurement in understanding the development process and structure of knowledge within a particular science discipline. This paper sought to explore the publication trend, influential authors, core journals, collaborative activities and research hotspots within the BLW field.



METHODS

Ethics

This research has only been conducted using public bibliographic sources and has not used human subjects, patient information, biological materials, or any personal information. Ethical approval and consent from human subjects were not necessary for conducting this study.

Study Design

The current work has been performed based on bibliometric and scientometric analysis in order to perform an overall assessment of development, intellectual structure, and recent research trends in scientific literature of BLW. The use of bibliometric tools offers a numerical way to examine scientific production, citation, cooperation, and themes in the scientific area. In addition to the traditional bibliometric indicators, the visualization method was used to investigate connections between the authors, organizations, countries, citations, and keywords.

Data Source

Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database was chosen as the only bibliographic data source. WoS is considered to be one of the largest and best databases for bibliometric analysis as it indexes the journals of the highest quality in various fields of science and contains necessary citation data. It enables users to extract full bibliographic information and citations, thus making it possible to conduct network analysis and study citation connections within the research field.⁸

Search Strategy and Data Collection

A systematic literature search was performed in the WoS Core Collection on June 20, 2026. To identify publications specifically focusing on baby-led weaning, the Topic Search (TS) function was utilized. The following search query was applied: TS=(“baby-led weaning” OR “baby led weaning”). The search strategy was intentionally limited to the terms “baby-led weaning” and “baby led weaning” because these are the most widely accepted and specific terms describing the BLW approach. Broader feeding-related terms were not included, as they may retrieve publications that are not directly related to the BLW concept, thereby reducing the specificity of the bibliometric analysis.

Topic Search searches for those articles that contain the specified keywords in the titles, abstracts, author keywords and Keywords Plus. There were no limitations set on the date, language, country, field of study or document type when conducting the first search in order to ensure the breadth of the dataset.

As a result of the search, 189 publications were identified. All retrieved records, including the earliest publications, were manually reviewed for relevance and confirmed to be directly related to the BLW concept. The search strategy was highly specific to the research topic; therefore, all retrieved publications met the eligibility criteria and were included in the bibliometric analysis. No duplicate records were identified in the exported dataset. Thus, the final dataset consisted of 189 publications.

Statistical Analysis

The entire dataset of citations was exported to a plain text file format from Web of Science. Information that had been captured in the process included publication title, name of the author(s), year of publication, journal title, affiliation, country of origin, abstract, author keywords, Keywords Plus, cited references, citation numbers, document type, funding details, and source journal.

The records were then processed before any analysis could be done. Minor issues such as differences in spelling of author names, affiliation, and keywords were corrected to improve the reliability of network visualization and bibliometric analysis.

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA), and science mapping analyses and network visualizations were performed using ChatGPT.

Bibliometric Indicators

A few bibliometric parameters were employed to assess the scientific productivity and impact of BLW literature. These include the following:

- Annual publication output
- Annual citation trends
- Most productive authors
- Most influential authors based on citation counts
- Leading journals publishing BLW-related research
- Most productive institutions
- Most productive countries
- Most highly cited publications
- Most frequently cited references

Productivity in publication was gauged by the number of publications, while impact in science was measured by citations using citation-based parameters. Citations were directly retrieved from the WoS database.

Science Mapping Analysis

To analyze the intellectual and social structure of the field, a number of science mapping tools were used.

Co-authorship Analysis

Co-authorship analysis was conducted in order to analyze the co-authorship network of researchers, their affiliations and countries. It provided an opportunity to visualize the research collaborations and influential participants in the research of BLW.

Co-citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis was used to identify the basic studies and knowledge bases, which defined the development of the BLW research. Citations of articles together made them intellectually related and formed thematic clusters.

Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliographic coupling analysis was conducted to identify current research themes and thematic similarities among papers. Papers with common citations were regarded as thematically similar and clustered.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using author keywords and indexed keywords. Frequently co-occurring terms were mapped to identify major research themes, research hotspots, and emerging topics within the field. The analysis also provided insights into the thematic evolution of BLW research over time.

Visualization Procedures

Network maps were generated for:

- Author collaboration networks
- Institutional collaboration networks
- Country collaboration networks
- Co-citation networks
- Bibliographic coupling networks
- Keyword co-occurrence networks

In the resulting maps, the nodes were bibliometric entities (such as authors, institutions, countries, references, or keywords), and the links were the relations between nodes. The larger the node, the more important was it, while the thicker the link between two nodes, the stronger the relation between them. To measure the strength of a relation, the Total Link Strength (TLS) was utilized.

RESULTS

A total of 189 publications on BLW were retrieved from the WoS Core Collection. The publications covered the period between 1980 and 2026. The total number of citations was 3115, with a mean citation count of 16.48 citations per publication.

Publication Trends

In relation to the annual publication volume, a small number of articles were seen to be produced before the year 2010. A significant rise is witnessed after 2011 and this reflects the growing interest in BLW. The largest annual volume of publications was reported for the year 2023, where 21 articles were published, followed by 2025, where 19 publications were reported, 2022, where 18 articles were published, and 2024, where 17 articles were published (Figure 1).

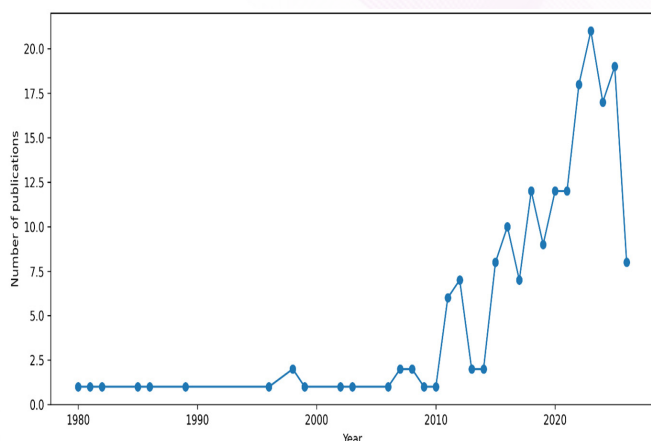


Figure 1. Annual publication output on baby-led weaning

Document Types

Most documents were primary research articles. Out of the total 189 references, 127 articles and 26 reviews were found.

Meeting abstracts, editorials, letters, book reviews, and other forms of literature made up a smaller portion of the dataset. This indicates that this field largely depends on research work, with a relatively increasing number of synthesis articles (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of document types

Document type	n
Article	127
Review	26
Meeting abstract	13
Editorial material	10
Book review	3
Letter	2
News item	2
Other	6

Leading Journals

The most productive journal was *Nutrients* with 17 publications, followed by *Appetite* with 12 publications and *Maternal and Child Nutrition* with 10 publications. Although *BMJ Open* published only five records, it accumulated 382 citations, indicating a strong citation impact. Similarly, *Maternal and Child Nutrition* produced 10 papers and received 382 citations (Table 2, Figure 2).

Table 2. Most productive journals

Journal	Publications	Citations
Nutrients	17	341
Appetite	12	207
Maternal and Child Nutrition	10	382
Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics	7	143
BMJ Open	5	382
Children-Basel	5	38
Nutrition Bulletin	4	63
Journal of Pediatric Nursing	4	13
Archives of Disease in Childhood	3	94
Revista Paulista de Pediatria	3	42

BMJ: British Medical Journal

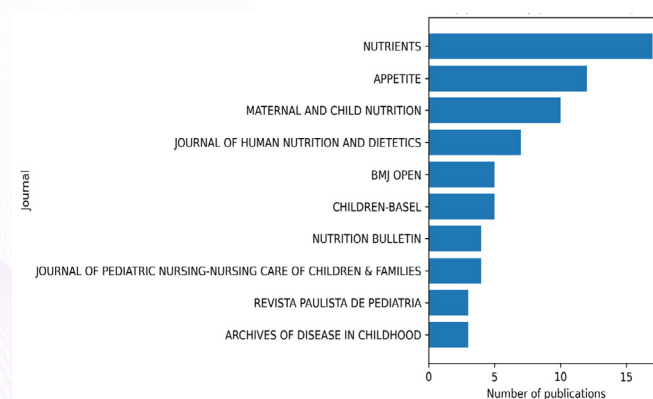


Figure 2. Top journals by publication output

Most Cited Publications

The most cited publication was "Early influences on child satiety-responsiveness: the role of weaning style" by Brown and Lee,³ published in *Pediatric Obesity* in 2015, with 128

citations. The second most cited study was the randomized clinical trial by Taylor et al.⁶ in JAMA Pediatrics in 2017, with 123 citations. Other highly cited publications focused on maternal feeding practices, infant growth, food preferences, choking risk, and feasibility of BLW (Table 3).

Table 3. Most cited publications

Rank	Title	Source	Year	Citations
1	Early influences on child satiety-responsiveness: the role of weaning style ³	Pediatric Obesity	2015	128
2	Effect of a baby-led approach to complementary feeding on infant growth and overweight ⁶	JAMA Pediatrics	2017	123
3	A descriptive study investigating the use and nature of baby-led weaning in a UK sample of mothers ⁹	Maternal and Child Nutrition	2011	111
4	Baby knows best? The impact of weaning style on food preferences and body-mass index ²¹	BMJ Open	2012	101
5	How feasible is baby-led weaning as an approach to infant feeding? ¹⁰	Nutrients	2012	93
6	Healthcare professionals' and mothers' knowledge of, attitudes to and experiences with baby-led weaning ²²	BMJ Open	2012	89
7	Baby-led introduction to solids (BLISS) study ²³	BMC Pediatrics	2015	89
8	How different are baby-led weaning and conventional complementary feeding? ¹⁹	BMJ Open	2016	89
9	Baby-led weaning: what a systematic review of the literature adds on ⁵	Italian Journal of Pediatrics	2018	79
10	Weaning of infants ²⁴	Archives of Disease in Childhood	2003	73

JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association, UK: United Kingdom, BMJ: British Medical Journal

Productive Authors

The most productive authors were Taylor RW and Heath ALM, each with 21 publications. They were followed by Daniels L with 14 publications, Haszard JJ with 13 publications, and Fleming EA with 12 publications. These findings indicate that BLW research is strongly shaped by a relatively concentrated group of researchers, particularly from New Zealand-based infant nutrition research networks (Table 4).

Country Contributions

The United Kingdom was the leading contributing country with 39 publications, followed by the United States with 24 publications and New Zealand with 21 publications. Spain and Italy each contributed 16 publications. These findings show that BLW research has been mainly produced in high-income countries, especially English-speaking research environments (Table 5, Figure 3).

Keyword Analysis and Research Themes

The most frequent author keyword was “complementary feeding” with 87 occurrences, followed by “baby-led weaning” with 76 occurrences and “weaning” with 31 occurrences. Other frequent terms included “infants,” “infant nutrition,”

Table 4. Most productive authors

Author	Publications
Taylor RW	21
Heath ALM	21
Daniels L	14
Haszard JJ	13
Fleming EA	12
Brown A	10
Wheeler BJ	8
Bialek-Dratwa A	8
Conlon CA	7
Beck KL	7

Table 5. Most productive countries

Country	Publications
United Kingdom	39
United States	24
New Zealand	21
Spain	16
Italy	16
Poland	10
Brazil	8
Portugal	6
Canada	6
Australia	6

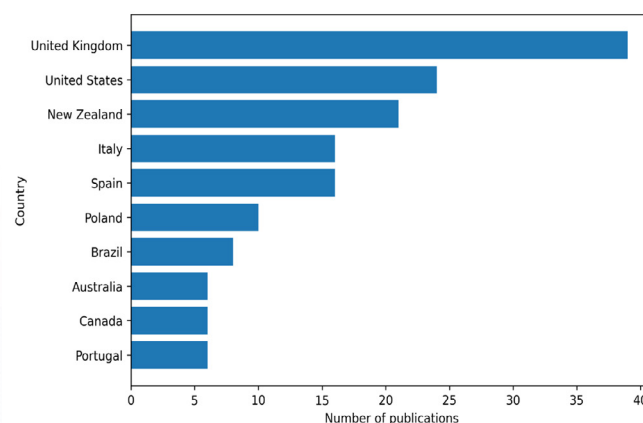


Figure 3. Top contributing countries

“breastfeeding,” “choking,” “infant feeding,” “obesity,” and “feeding behavior” (Table 6).

The keyword structure suggests that the field is organized around four major thematic areas: complementary feeding practices, infant nutritional adequacy, feeding behavior and self-regulation, and safety concerns such as choking. The presence of terms such as “obesity,” “neophobia,” “growth,” and “energy intake” indicates that recent research has moved beyond describing BLW practices and increasingly examines developmental, nutritional, and behavioral outcomes.

Figure 4 shows the keyword co-occurrence network created using the author’s keywords. Four clusters have been found. While the biggest one was based on complementary feeding and baby nutrition, other clusters covered breast feeding practices, baby feeding behaviors, development outcomes,

Table 6. Most frequent keywords

Keyword	Frequency
Complementary feeding	87
Baby-led weaning	76
Weaning	31
Infants	16
Infant nutrition	14
Infant	13
Breastfeeding	13
Choking	9
Infant feeding	9
BLW	7
Knowledge	6
Nutrition	6
Child nutrition	6
Obesity	6
Neophobia	5

BLW: Baby-led weaning

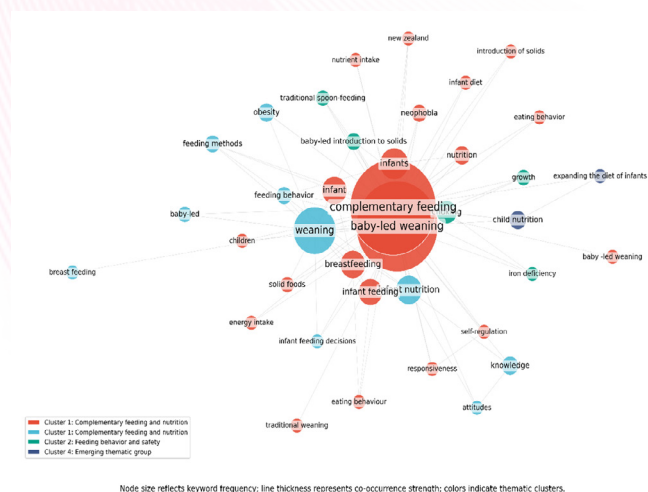


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network of baby-led weaning research

and issues related to baby safety such as choking. The key role played by “baby-led weaning” and “complementary feeding” in the conceptual structure of the field is shown by their centrality.

Overall Interpretation

The bibliometric analysis of the literature on BLW reveals a fast-growing but fairly narrow-spectrum of studies. The earlier works were few, whereas the surge since 2011 can be explained by the rising interest in alternative forms of complementary feeding from the scientific and medical communities. The most significant research papers dealt with feeding methods, satiety responses, food preferences, infant development, choking hazards, and perspectives of mothers and professionals. Given the domination of studies conducted in the UK, New Zealand, and the US, further research is required in other parts of the world.

DISCUSSION

This work represents the first bibliometric analysis of the global scientific literature in the context of BLW. During the

analysis of 189 papers indexed in the WoS Core Collection, it was possible to determine publication trends, influential authors, journals, collaborations, and main themes, which contributed to the development of BLW studies. As a result, it is possible to note that there is an increasing interest in BLW among the scientific community in recent years, and that the development of this area moved from descriptive studies to outcome research.

Among the most significant discoveries was the considerable growth of the number of publications since 2011. While the notion of self-feeding of infants existed before, BLW has received international attention due to the emergence of groundbreaking research works by Brown and Lee⁹ that described the experiences of mothers, practices of feeding, and eating habits of infants using this method.⁴ The constant growth of publications since 2015 is associated with growing professional interest towards responsive feeding practices and growing public attention to alternative feeding methods for infants. This pattern has been revealed in other emergent spheres of pediatric nutrition where parental practices are also studied.²

This acceleration reflects not merely the publication of a new study but the field’s first empirical and operational definition. Brown and Lee’s⁹ 2011 descriptive study was among the first to systematically characterize BLW alongside mothers’ actual feeding practices, providing subsequent researchers with a shared conceptual framework and terminology. The emergence of this standard definition allowed a previously scattered, case-based literature to develop into comparable and replicable research questions. Furthermore, although the WHO’s guiding principles on responsive complementary feeding, published in 2003, had already laid the conceptual groundwork, it was only after 2011 that these principles became concretely linked to baby-led feeding practice through empirical research.^{1,9} Accordingly, 2011 can be interpreted as a threshold at which a theoretical foundation was translated into clinical and behavioral research.

The dominance of primary studies in literature implies that BLW is still an evolving field in which evidence continues to be generated. The lower proportion of review studies means that although more evidence is being developed in BLW, there are still chances to conduct evidence synthesis or meta-analysis studies in the field. This finding is in line with earlier systematic reviews that identified the scarcity of high-quality randomized controlled trials in BLW research as well as methodological heterogeneity in this area.^{5,10}

The journal analysis showed that *Nutrients*, *Appetite*, and *Maternal and Child Nutrition* are the top journals for publications. *Nutrients*, *Appetite*, and *Maternal and Child Nutrition* journals have been known to be significant platforms for publishing research on infant nutrition, feeding practices, and infant exposure to diets. It was surprising to see how *BMJ Open* had shown high citation rates despite having fewer publications, implying that some BLW studies have been published in general and accessible multidisciplinary journals.¹¹

The citation analysis identified studies by Brown and Lee⁹ and the BLISS trial conducted by Taylor and colleagues as the intellectual foundations of the field. Brown and Lee's⁹ work substantially contributed to understanding parental feeding practices, satiety responsiveness, and infant autonomy during complementary feeding.³ Similarly, the BLISS randomized controlled trial represented an important milestone because it addressed concerns regarding growth, nutritional adequacy, and safety through a more rigorous study design.⁶ The prominence of these studies in the citation network suggests that contemporary BLW research continues to build upon questions related to self-regulation, food acceptance, and nutritional outcomes.

The country-based analysis has shown that the UK, the USA, and New Zealand are the most productive countries. This is not surprising, because many pioneering BLW studies come from research teams based in those countries.^{3,6,9} Furthermore, the healthcare system in these countries has increasingly focused on responsive feeding and family-based nutrition counseling, which could help increase the interest of academics in baby-led feeding strategies. Still, low productivity of the countries with developing economies is an indication of a critical lack of literature. The feeding styles depend heavily on culture, economic environment, food supply, and the healthcare system; hence, research conclusions drawn from the experience of rich countries cannot necessarily be applied universally.¹²⁻¹⁶

The dominance of these three countries is most plausibly linked to the field's foundational research infrastructure. Brown and Lee's⁹ UK-based descriptive study and the BLISS randomized controlled trial conducted by Taylor and colleagues⁶ in New Zealand became reference points that shaped the methodological standards of BLW research. Conducting a large-scale, multi-year RCT such as BLISS requires substantial academic funding and pediatric nutrition research infrastructure, which helps explain why such studies remain concentrated in a limited number of high-income countries. Moreover, the early adoption of responsive feeding approaches within the healthcare systems of these countries allowed academic interest to grow alongside clinical practice. The predominance of English-language databases such as WoS may further reinforce this pattern, since studies conducted in other languages may be underrepresented in bibliometric visibility. This pattern should therefore be considered not only a matter of research capacity but also one of publication and language bias.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis provides valuable insight into the thematic evolution of BLW research. The prominence of terms such as "complementary feeding," "infant nutrition," "breastfeeding," and "infant feeding" indicates that BLW research remains closely integrated with broader discussions regarding infant nutrition. At the same time, keywords including "obesity," "food preferences," "self-regulation," and "choking" suggest a growing emphasis on evaluating the long-term consequences and safety of infant-led feeding approaches. Earlier studies largely focused on describing parental experiences and feeding practices, whereas more recent investigations have increasingly explored developmental outcomes, eating behaviors, nutrient intake, and growth trajectories.^{7,17}

However, the appearance of choking-related terms is especially relevant. The problem of choking has become one of the most frequently debated issues concerning BLW since its inception. Nevertheless, at present there is no suggesting that, provided that proper food choices are made and safe feeding techniques are used, BLW would increase the risk of choking compared to the conventional complementary feeding techniques.^{7,10} In addition, the issue of nutrition adequacy-specifically iron intake and energy expenditure-is becoming increasingly investigated.^{6,17-20}

Based on the collaboration networks observed in this study, BLW studies seem to be centered in quite interconnected academic communities. Although such concentration of BLW researchers might ensure methodological conformity and accumulation of knowledge, international collaboration would bring additional diversification into future research findings. Collaboration between researchers in different cultural and socio-economic settings could prove beneficial in terms of assessing implementation of BLW on an international level and verifying the advantages associated with BLW.

These findings point to several priorities for advancing BLW research. First, replicating RCT designs similar to BLISS across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts is critical to testing the generalizability of current findings.⁶ Second, although Brown and Lee's⁹ work on satiety-responsiveness provided early evidence of BLW's effects on infant appetite regulation, long-term follow-up studies are still needed to determine whether these effects persist into childhood and adolescence.⁴ Third, updating the WHO's complementary feeding guiding principles offers an opportunity to establish a standardized definition of BLW for research and intervention purposes, which could reduce methodological heterogeneity across studies.¹ Finally, international collaborations that include researchers from low- and middle-income countries should be prioritized, both to test cultural applicability and to reduce the geographic and country-based publication inequities observed in this field.

Limitations

Various limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, although exploratory searches using the same search strategy were also performed in PubMed and Scopus and yielded largely overlapping records with only a limited number of additional publications, the bibliometric analysis was conducted exclusively using the WoS Core Collection. Therefore, publications indexed only in other databases may not have been captured, which should be considered when interpreting the findings. Secondly, citation numbers are dynamic and are subject to change due to the publication of new publications. Thirdly, bibliometrics measures scientific productivity and impact but not the methodology or clinical relevance of articles. Fourthly, the differences in terms used could affect some network analysis despite the standardization of the dataset.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the body of knowledge on BLW has seen considerable development in the last ten years and developed into a broad research area involving multiple disciplines

including nutrition, feeding behaviors, developmental aspects, and child health. It appears from the results that in the future, research on BLW will shift from descriptive studies towards assessment of the efficacy, safety, and effects of infant-led complementary feeding practices on child health.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethics Committee Approval

This research was conducted using only publicly available bibliographic sources and did not involve human subjects, patient information, biological materials, or any personal information. Ethical approval was not required for the conduct of this study.

Informed Consent

Since this study is a bibliometric study, informed consent is not required.

Peer Review Process

This manuscript was subject to external peer review.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Financial Disclosure

The authors received no financial support for the conduct or publication of this research.

Author Contributions

Concept and Design: AET, DYT; Data Collection: AET, DYT; Data Analysis and Interpretation: AET, DYT; Drafting of the Manuscript: AET; Critical Revision of the Manuscript: DYT; Final Approval of the Manuscript: AET, DYT.

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