

Review Article

Global research on tobacco taxation and pricing policies: trends, themes and collaboration: a bibliometric analysis

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ABSTRACT

Tobacco taxation is widely recognised as one of the most effective and cost-effective strategies for reducing tobacco consumption and associated health harms. Despite strong global evidence supporting tobacco taxation and its endorsement within the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC), the implementation and research emphasis on tobacco tax and price policies have varied considerably across regions and over time. To examine the evolution of this field, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using publications indexed in the Scopus database between 1965 to 31 December 2024. A total of 8,058 eligible documents were analysed using the Bibliometrix R package, Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer. Bibliometric indicators included annual scientific production, citation impact, author productivity, country-level contributions, international collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping, and thematic evolution. The findings demonstrated a sustained increase in tobacco taxation research, with a marked surge in publications after 2015, although research output remained predominantly concentrated in high-income countries. Keyword co-occurrence and thematic analyses identified three major interconnected research clusters encompassing behavioural and epidemiological studies, product-focused nicotine research, and policy-oriented economic interventions. Taxation, price, and public policy emerged as the most central and rapidly expanding themes within the literature. The global evidence base has evolved toward a more integrated, policy-oriented, and equity-focused research agenda; however, substantial geographic and contextual evidence gaps persist, underscoring the need to strengthen research capacity and international collaboration in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to support effective and equitable tobacco tax policies.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, Pricing policies, Smoking behaviour, Tobacco control policy, Tobacco taxation

INTRODUCTION

The global tobacco epidemic remains one of the most significant public health challenges, causing more than seven million deaths each year and contributing to chronic illness and disability from tobacco-related diseases. Every form of tobacco use poses serious health risks, with no level of exposure considered safe. Approximately 80% of the world's 1.3 billion tobacco users reside in LMICs, where the health and economic impacts of tobacco use are most severe.¹ Beyond its

health consequences, tobacco consumption deepens poverty by diverting limited household income away from essential needs such as food and shelter. This spending behaviour is difficult to curb due to the addictive nature of tobacco.^{2,3}

Among the diverse strategies implemented to reduce tobacco consumption, taxation has consistently proven to be one of the most effective. By raising tobacco product prices through taxation, governments not only curb demand but also generate significant revenue, offering

dual benefits for public health and economic growth. The WHO-FCTC recognizes taxation as a cornerstone of global tobacco control and a critical demand reduction strategy.^{4,5}

Significant increases in excise taxes that lead to price hikes have consistently been shown to be the most effective and cost-effective mechanism for reducing tobacco consumption. Despite robust evidence supporting its effectiveness, tobacco taxation remains one of the least implemented of the WHO-recommended measures. As of 2018, only 38 countries, representing just 14% of the global population, had achieved optimal tax levels. Tobacco industry interference, coupled with persistent scare tactics and lobbying against tax reforms, remains a major barrier to progress. Strong governmental resolve and commitment are therefore essential to counter these vested interests and to protect public health through effective tobacco taxation reform.^{6,7} Tobacco taxes are particularly beneficial for low-income populations by reducing consumption and freeing disposable income, thereby narrowing health and economic inequities. However, their implementation and impact vary substantially across regions. The WHO South-East Asia Region (SEARO), for instance, faces distinct fiscal and policy challenges that influence tax structure, enforcement and effectiveness.⁸⁻¹²

Despite the well-established economic and public health benefits of tobacco taxation, the available evidence remains dispersed and lacks comprehensive synthesis. Several systematic and narrative reviews have examined selected aspects of this evidence base.¹³⁻¹⁵ Studies vary widely in their focus while some address price elasticity in high-income countries, others assess affordability in low- and middle-income settings, resulting in a heterogeneous and incomplete picture of the global evidence base. Moreover, the rapidly evolving landscape of tobacco products, including heated and electronic nicotine delivery systems, has further diversified the research field, complicating policy translation. While several systematic and narrative reviews have summarized regional and country-specific evidence, there has been no comprehensive bibliometric analysis systematically synthesizing global publication trends, collaboration structures, and thematic evolution in tobacco taxation and pricing research.^{11,16}

This study aimed to systematically map global publication trends and identify periods of heightened research attention and key policy triggers. It also sought to identify influential authors, institutions, and collaborative networks driving tobacco tax research, and to explore thematic clusters and regional variations in research emphasis. By systematically mapping the intellectual structure and evolution of tobacco taxation research, this bibliometric analysis provides strategic insights for researchers, policymakers, and public health institutions. Understanding where evidence is concentrated and where gaps persist can inform more

targeted future studies and strengthen the evidence base for effective global tobacco control.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to comprehensively map the intellectual structure, global collaboration patterns, and thematic evolution of tobacco taxation research across nearly six decades.

METHODS

Study design

This study employed a bibliometric research design to analyze the global scientific literature on tobacco taxation and price-based policy interventions, as well as their impact on tobacco consumption. Bibliometric analysis offers a systematic, quantitative approach to examining publication patterns, assessing research productivity, mapping scholarly collaborations, and identifying the conceptual and thematic evolution of a research field over time. The analytical workflow followed established best practices in bibliometric research, comprising structured procedures for data retrieval, screening, cleaning, processing, and visualization.

Data source

The Scopus database was used as the primary source for retrieving bibliographic records. Scopus was selected for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across public health, economics, policy studies, and the social sciences, making it particularly well-suited to capture multidisciplinary research on tobacco taxation and pricing policies. Its broad inclusion of international and regional journals enables a comprehensive global perspective, including contributions from low- and middle-income countries. Additionally, Scopus offers standardized citation metrics and high-quality metadata, which are crucial for conducting robust bibliometric analysis. The dataset comprised all eligible publications indexed in Scopus as of 31 December 2024.

Search strategy

A structured search strategy was developed to identify relevant publications published up to 31 December 2024. The search employed a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary related to “tobacco taxation” and “pricing policies”, including terms such as “tobacco tax”, “cigarette tax”, “excise tax”, “sin tax”, “price policy”, “tobacco pricing”, “tax increase”, and “tobacco consumption”. Boolean operators were applied to ensure comprehensive retrieval of studies examining price-based tobacco control measures and their effects on consumption, demand, or affordability. The detailed search strategy is provided in Supplementary Table 1. Only publications written in English were included. All retrieved records were exported from Scopus in BibTeX format to facilitate processing in bibliometric software.

Data cleaning and preprocessing

Data preprocessing was undertaken to ensure the dataset's accuracy, completeness, and internal consistency. This process involved identifying and removing duplicate records, standardizing author names and institutional affiliations, and harmonizing journal titles to address variations in indexing practices. Titles and abstracts were reviewed to exclude publications that did not align with the scope of tobacco taxation, pricing policies, or tobacco

consumption outcomes. All data cleaning procedures were conducted in R using the Bibliometrix package. During this stage, duplicate entries, incomplete records, and non-relevant publications were systematically excluded. Overall screening and selection process is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents flowchart adapted for bibliometric research and shows no. of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the final dataset.

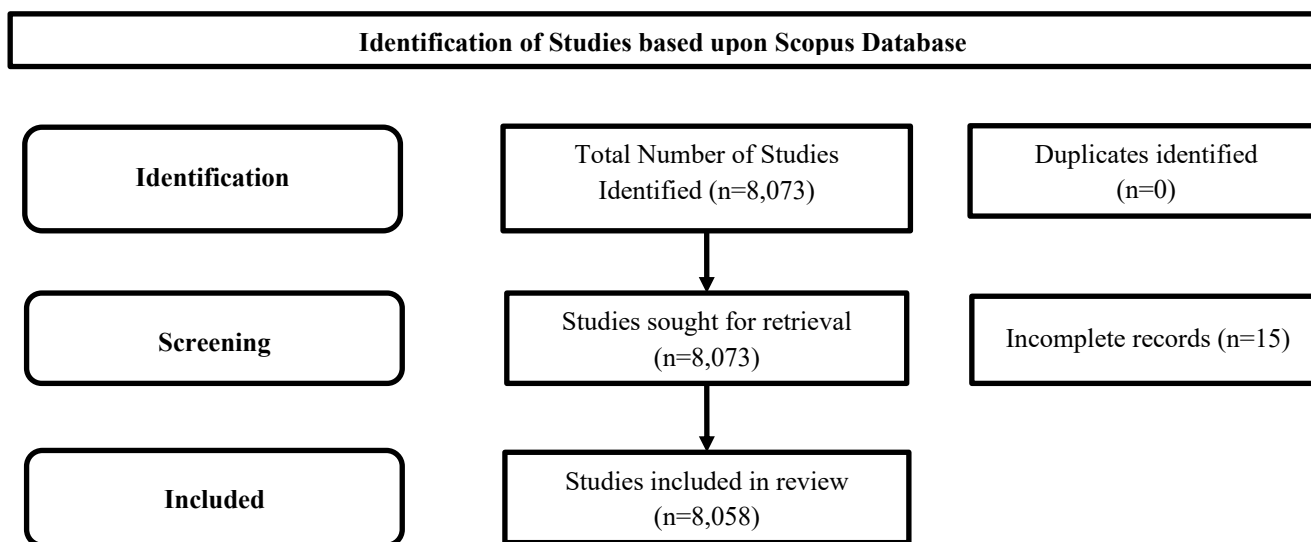


Figure 1: Flowchart of study selection and data screening process.

SOFTWARE AND TOOLS

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix R package (version 5.1.1), an open-source framework widely used for scientometric and bibliometric research. Visualization of analytical outputs was supported through Biblioshiny, the web-based interface of Bibliometrix, enabling interactive exploration of publication trends, thematic structures, and productivity patterns.¹⁷ Network visualizations and co-occurrence maps were generated using VOSviewer, which facilitated the examination of collaborative relationships among authors, institutions, and countries, as well as conceptual linkages among keywords.¹⁸ To visualize country-level research output and international collaboration patterns, Datawrapper was used to generate high-quality geographic maps suitable for scientific reporting.¹⁹

DATA ANALYSIS AND VISUALIZATION

The data analysis involved a comprehensive bibliometric evaluation of global research on tobacco taxation and price-based policies. Key bibliometric indicators were used to assess research productivity and impact, including annual scientific production, publication growth rates, and the average number of citations per year. Temporal

analyses were performed to examine trends in publication output and citation impact over time. Geographic analyses were conducted to map the global distribution of research and identify leading countries based on publication volume and citation performance.

Scientific collaboration was examined through co-authorship analysis at the author and country levels, with bibliometric network maps used to visualize the strength and structure of collaborative relationships. Additionally, co-word analysis was conducted to identify major research themes and emerging topics related to tobacco taxation, price elasticity, affordability, consumption behaviour, and illicit trade. Keyword co-occurrence patterns were used to generate thematic clusters, which were further classified into motor, basic, niche, and emerging themes using Bibliometrix's thematic mapping techniques. Visualization methods including line graphs, bar charts, geographic maps, collaboration networks, and thematic maps, were employed to clearly communicate patterns, trends, and the intellectual structure of research on tobacco taxes and consumption.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study analyzed secondary data obtained from publicly available bibliographic databases and did not involve human participants or individual-level data.

Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of a bibliometric analysis of 8,058 publications on tobacco taxation and pricing policies, published between 1965 and 2024.

Table 1 provides an overview of the key descriptive characteristics of the bibliometric dataset analysed in this study. The annual publication growth rate was 10.82%, with an average document age of 11.7 years. A total of 7138 unique keywords were identified across the datasets. The dataset included contributions from over 23,694 authors, of whom 842 published single-authored documents. The dataset showed an average of 5.06 co-authors per document, with 24.42% of documents involving international co-authors.

Figure 2 illustrates the annual scientific production on tobacco taxation and price policy research from 1965 to 2024. The publication trend was minimal until the late 1980s, followed by a gradual rise through the 1990s. An evident and sustained surge in publications occurred between 2015 and 2020, marking a period of strengthened research on tobacco tax policies. Though a slight fluctuation in the trend was observed after 2020, the overall output remains high. This expanding body of literature underscores the growing recognition of tobacco taxation as the most effective demand-reduction strategy, particularly in LMICs where the burden of tobacco use is highest.

Figure 3 illustrates the temporal evolution of average citations per year for publications on tobacco taxation and pricing policies. The figure shows minimal and irregular citation activity from the mid-1960s through the late 1980s, reflecting the early developmental stage of research in this area. A gradual increase in citation impact emerges during the 1990s, followed by a more pronounced and sustained upward trend from the early 2000s onward. Average citations per year rise steadily with several peaks observed after the mid-2000s, reaching their highest levels in the late 2010s and early 2020s.

Figure 4A and 4B illustrate the global distribution of research output by country and the corresponding authors' publication patterns. The findings indicate a highly uneven distribution of scientific publications worldwide, with the United States contributing the most, accounting for more than 1,500 articles, largely through single-country publications alongside substantial international collaborations. Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia also emerge as major contributors, with relatively higher shares of multiple-country publications and strong international engagement. China and India contribute a moderate volume of outputs with a mix of domestic and collaborative research. In contrast, most countries across Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and

Southeast Asia fall within the lower publication categories (0-500 or 500-1000 articles), highlighting the limited representation and research contribution from many LMIC regions.

Figure 5 illustrates international collaboration patterns, with the United States being the most central and productive contributor, followed by major collaborative hubs such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, China, and the Netherlands. European countries form a dense cluster with strong intra-regional ties, while Asia-Pacific countries, including China, India, Japan, and South Korea, show moderate connectivity. Additionally, collaboration from LMIC countries remains limited, with only a few moderately connected nodes such as South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and Thailand, and sparse links from many African and smaller regions.

Figure 6 represents the keyword co-occurrence network, showing three major thematic clusters in the literature. The green cluster centers on the keywords: smoking, tobacco use, and smoking cessation, reflecting epidemiological and behavioural research themes. The blue cluster focuses on terms, tobacco, nicotine, e-cigarettes, and related substance-use keywords, indicating growing attention to alternative nicotine delivery systems. The red cluster highlights terms such as public policy, taxation, price, and the tobacco industry, representing research on regulatory, economic, and policy interventions. Connections across clusters indicate substantial overlap among behavioural, health, and policy dimensions, with policy-related terms dominating the network's most interconnected areas.

Figure 7 represents the distribution of author keywords used across the included studies. Figure 7A presents a tree map quantifying keyword frequency, showing that the most commonly used terms were smoking (n=683, 10%), tobacco (n=580, 9%), and public policy (n=540, 8%). Other frequently occurring keywords included tobacco control (n=376, 6%), smoking cessation (n=317, 5%), and tobacco industry (n=202, 3%). Economic and fiscal concepts such as taxation, price, economics, and behavioural economics were also prominent, highlighting the strong emphasis on pricing and fiscal measures within the literature. Keywords related to e-cigarettes, adolescents, and electronic nicotine delivery devices appeared with moderate frequency, indicating growing attention to emerging products and specific population subgroups. whereas Figure 7B complements these findings through a word cloud visualisation that reinforces the field's policy-oriented and population-health focus by highlighting terms such as tobacco, smoking, tobacco control, public policy, and public health. The visibility of economic terms (e.g., taxation, price, cost-effectiveness) and equity-related keywords (e.g., adolescents, youth, health disparities, socioeconomic status, LMICs) further underscores the evolving scope of tobacco pricing research toward behavioural outcomes,

vulnerable populations, and changing tobacco and nicotine markets.

Figure 8 presents a thematic map based on keyword co-occurrence, plotting themes by centrality (relevance) on the x-axis and density (development) on the y-axis. In the upper-right quadrant, motor themes include keywords such as smoking, tobacco, and tobacco control, indicating that these are well-developed and highly central themes driving the research field. Themes such as public policy, tobacco industry, and prevention are positioned near the center of the map, reflecting moderate relevance and development, and suggesting their role as transversal or emerging connectors within the literature. The lower-left quadrant, declining or emerging themes, contains smoking cessation, tobacco use, and epidemiology, which show lower centrality and density during the study period. No prominent themes were observed in the niche or basic

theme quadrants, indicating that research in this field is largely concentrated around core tobacco control and policy-oriented topics.

Figure 9 displays the temporal evolution of key research themes, with an evident shift in focus over the past three decades. The early 1990s to mid-2000s concentrated on themes such as drug self-administration, nicotine replacement therapy, rational addiction, and smoking prevalence. From 2010 onward, research broadened toward public health and policy-oriented themes, including smoking cessation, tobacco control, second-hand smoke and socio-economic status. The recent trend (2018-2024) shows the emergence of higher-impact topics related to taxation, excise tax, public policy, noncommunicable diseases, LMICs, and commercial determinants of health, reflecting the growing emphasis on structural and policy-level interventions.

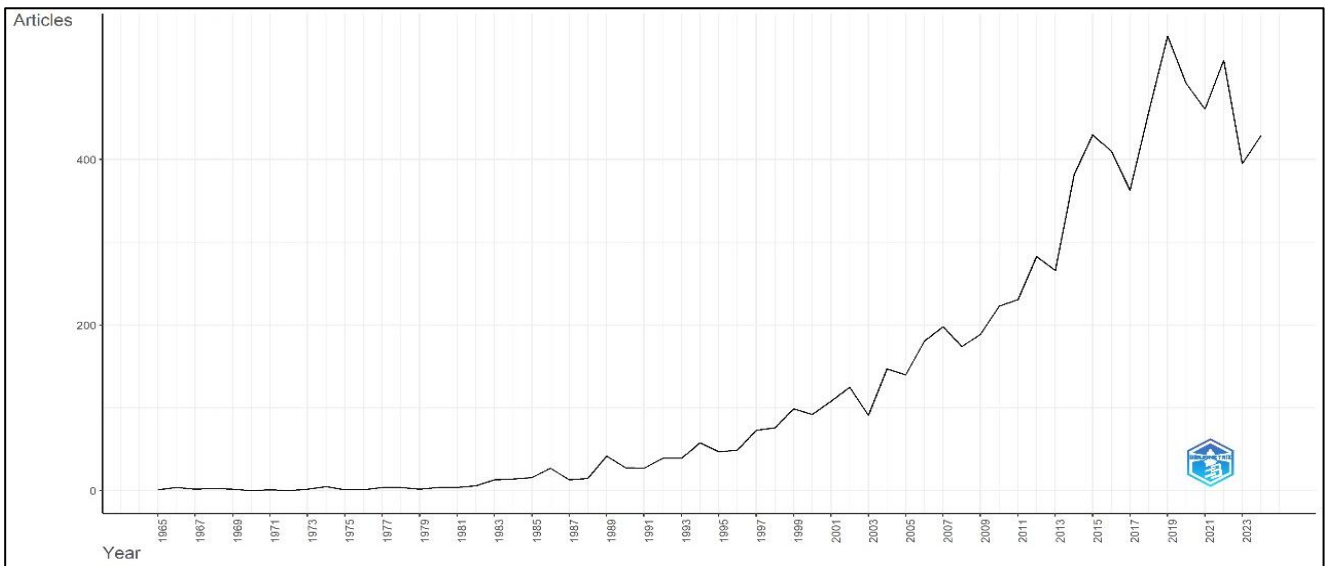


Figure 2: Annual scientific production on tobacco taxation and pricing policies.

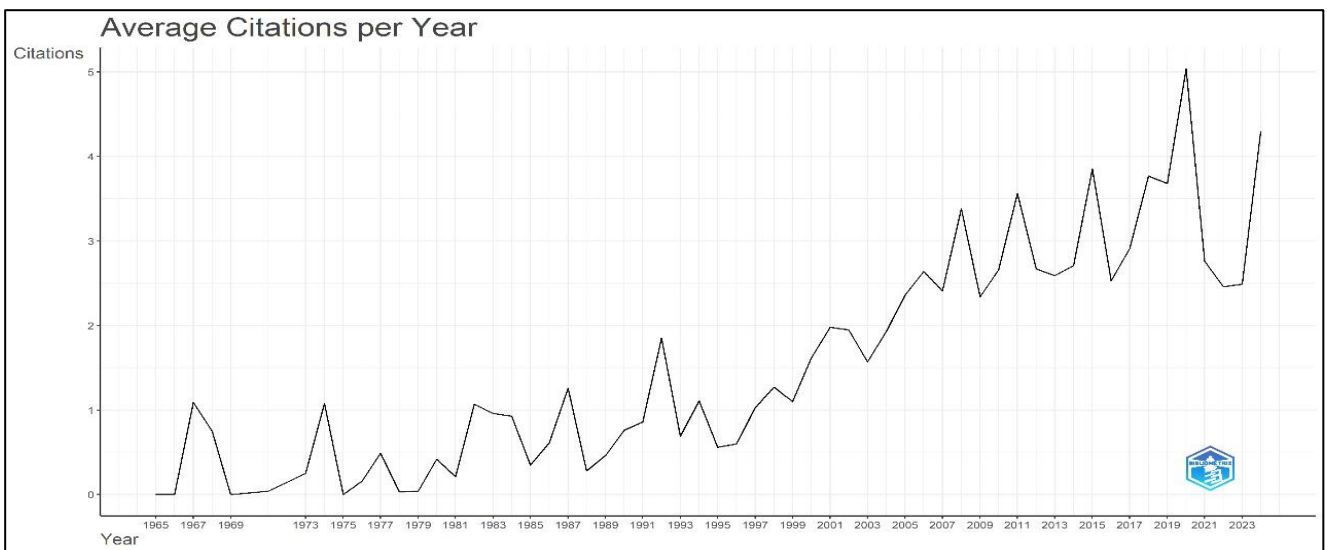


Figure 3: Average citations per year for tobacco taxation research.

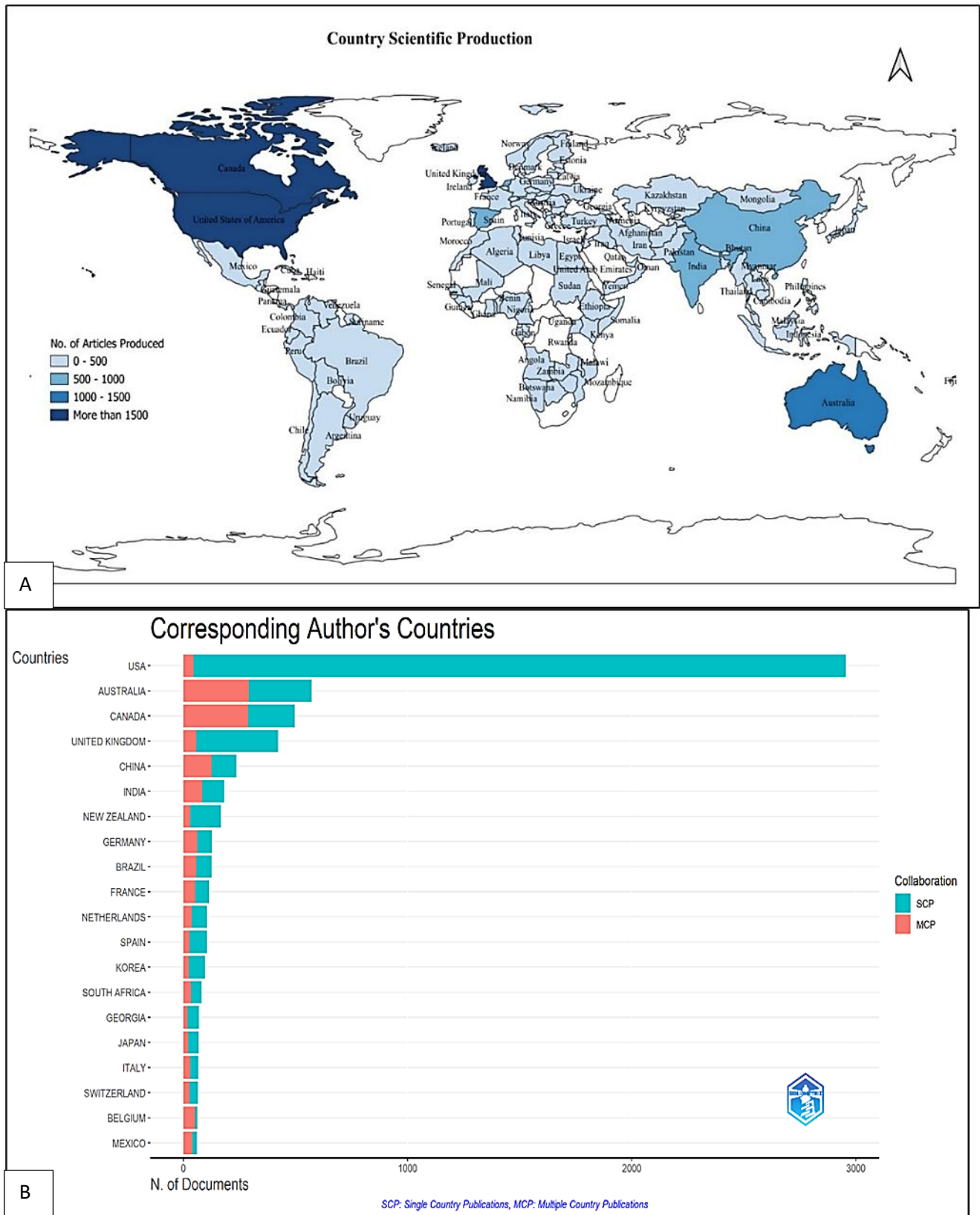


Figure 4 (A and B): A-maps global scientific output, with darker shades indicating higher publication volume; B-shows corresponding author countries.

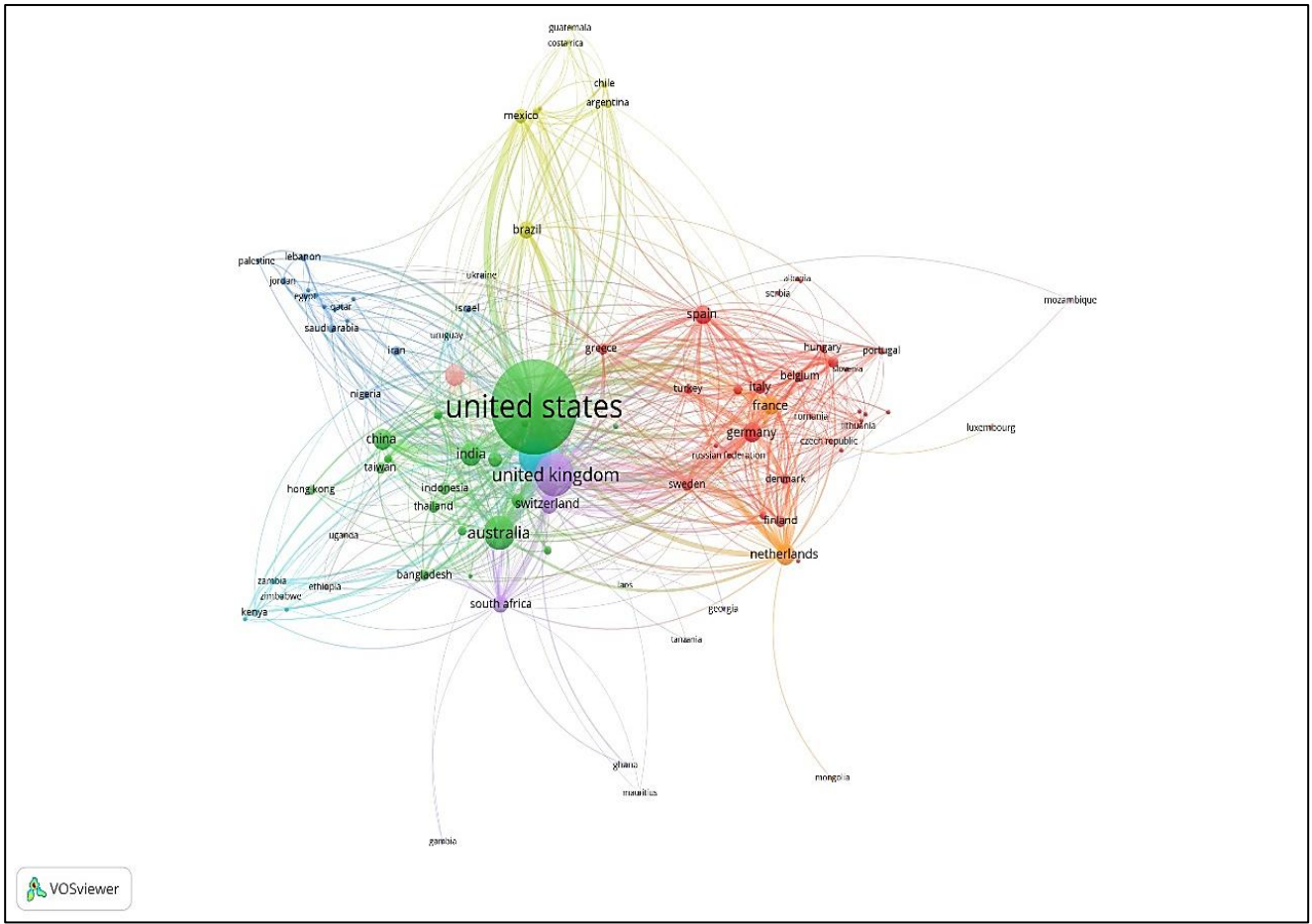


Figure 5: International collaboration network in tobacco tax research.

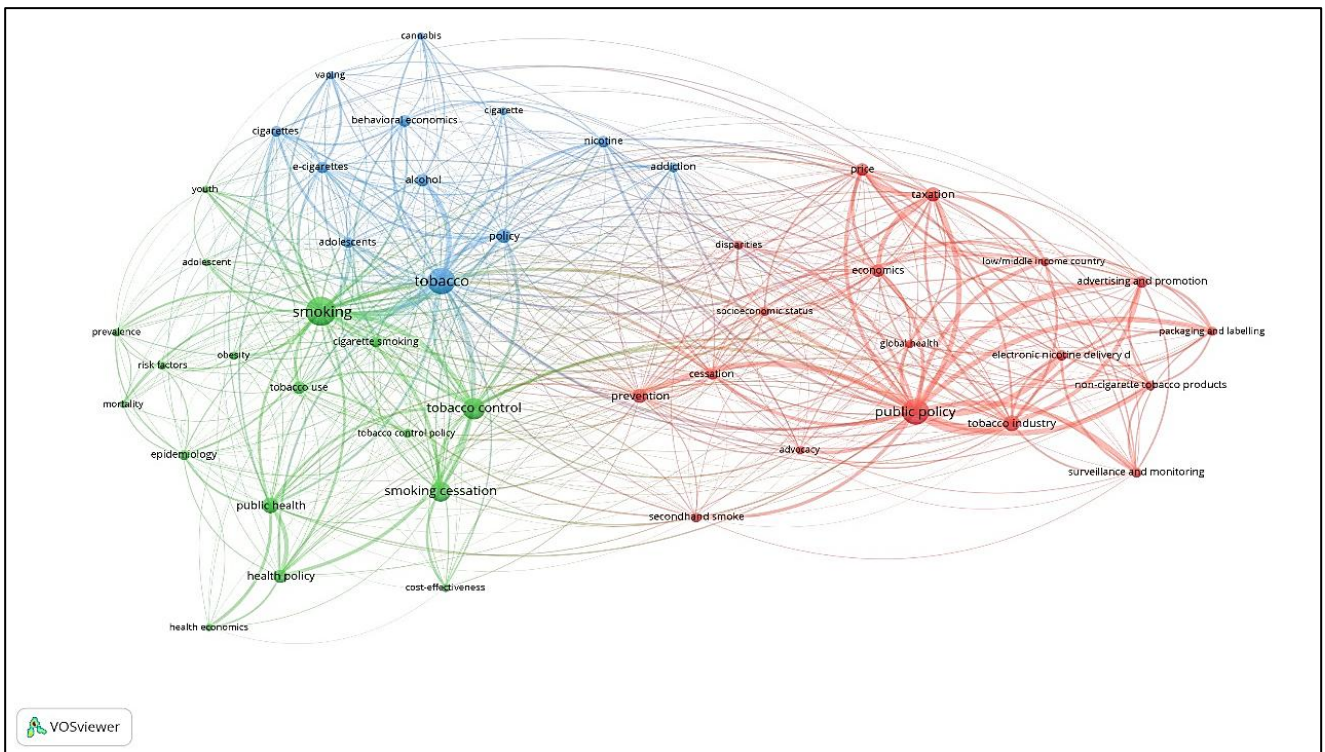


Figure 6: Keyword co-occurrence network showing major thematic clusters.

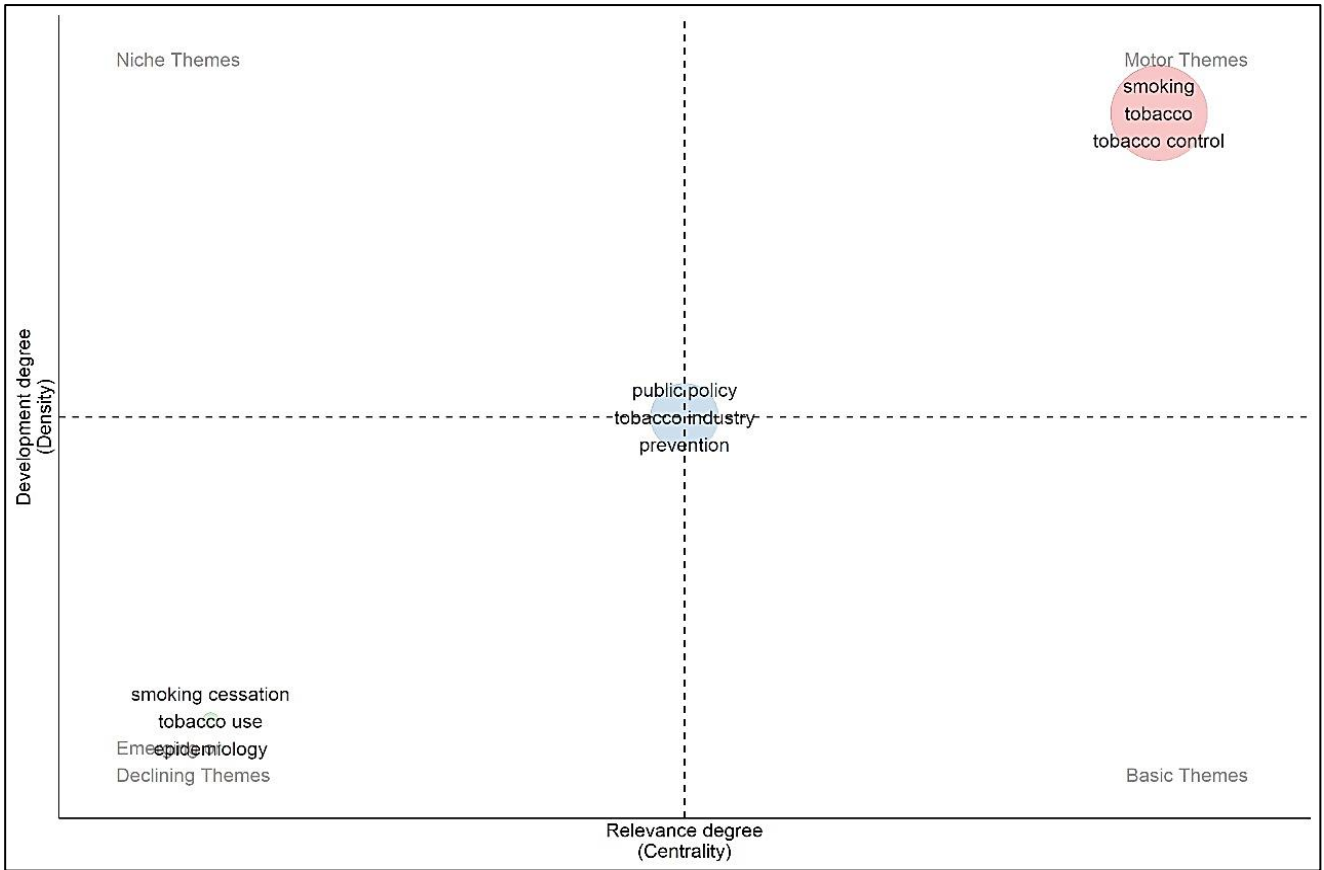


Figure 8: Thematic map of motor, basic, niche, and emerging research themes.

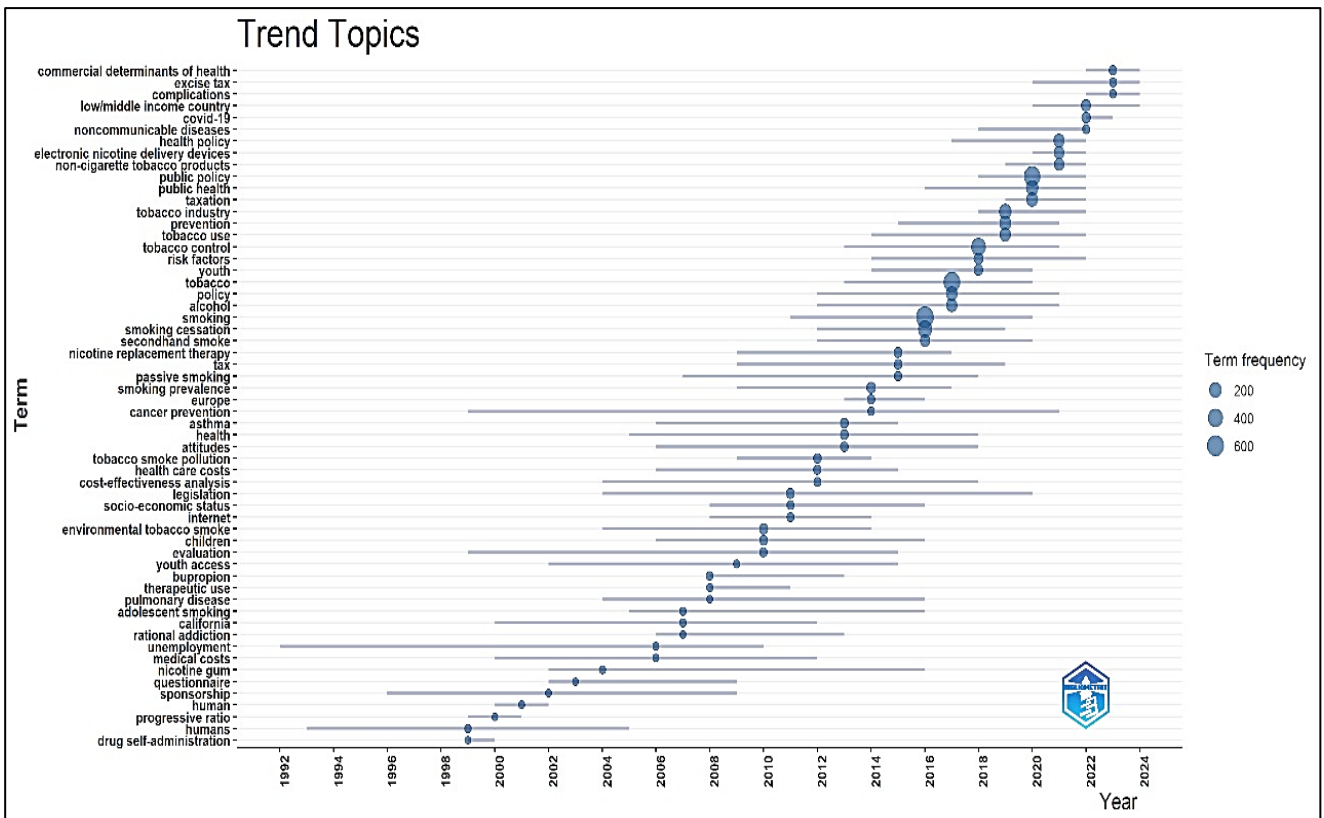


Figure 9: Temporal evolution of tobacco taxation research over time.

Table 1: Descriptive summary of the bibliometric dataset on tobacco taxation and pricing policies.

Indicators	Description
Timespan of publications	1965-2024
Total documents	8,058
Total sources (journals and books)	1,349
Annual publication growth rate (%)	10.82
Average document age (years)	11.7
Unique keywords identified	7,138
Total authors	23,694
Single-authored documents	842
Average co-authors per document	5.06
International co-authorship (%)	24.42

DISCUSSION

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of nearly six decades of global research on tobacco taxation and pricing policies. The findings indicate a significant growth in research focused on tobacco taxation and pricing policies, with a notable and sustained increase in publications between 2015 and 2020. This growth corresponds with a heightened global focus on evidence-based tobacco control, particularly following the adoption of the WHO-FCTC and the Sustainable Development Goals. Both initiatives emphasize taxation as a key strategy for reducing tobacco.²⁰⁻²² In earlier periods, research output was minimal in the late 1980s, followed by a gradual increase throughout the 1990s, indicating the initial developmental phase of this research area. The slight fluctuations in publication trends observed after 2020 may be partly due to changing research priorities and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analysis of author productivity reveals that a significant proportion of publications are authored by single contributors, with a notable decline in the number of researchers producing multiple studies in the field of tobacco taxation and pricing. The rapid decrease in the proportion of authors as publication counts increase suggests that this field is driven by a relatively small core of highly productive and influential researchers, alongside a wider group of occasional contributors, a pattern consistent with established bibliometric productivity laws, including Lotka's law.^{23,24}

Pronounced country-specific disparities in research output are evident with the United States leading the volume of publications, followed by Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This trend reflects the strong research infrastructure, consistent funding availability, and long-standing policy engagement in tobacco control within high-income countries.^{25,26} In contrast, most countries in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia fall into categories with lower publication output, despite facing a disproportionate burden of tobacco use and related morbidity and mortality. While countries like China and India contribute moderately to research, the

overall representation from LMICs remains limited, highlighting significant gaps in global research production.²⁷ While research activity shows a steady rise beginning in the mid-1990s and a pronounced surge after 2015, the comparatively limited contribution from LMICs underscores an important evidence gap, particularly given the need for context-specific research to inform tobacco tax design, implementation, and enforcement across diverse economic and regulatory settings.²⁸ Despite the global nature of tobacco taxation policy, the relatively low proportion of internationally co-authored publications suggests missed opportunities for cross-country learning and coordinated responses, particularly in addressing transnational tobacco industry strategies and cross-border price differentials. The wide range of publication sources, including academic journals, books, and policy-oriented outlets, reflects the applied nature of tobacco taxation research; however, it also raises important questions about the effectiveness of knowledge translation from academic evidence into fiscal and legislative action.

The keyword co-occurrence network reveals a strong interlinkage across three thematic clusters, namely behavioural and epidemiological research, product-focused nicotine studies, and policy-oriented economic interventions, which highlights the multidisciplinary nature of tobacco research. These clusters indicate an integrated tobacco control framework in which smoking behaviour, health outcomes, and policy instruments are examined together rather than in isolation. The prominence of core terms such as smoking, tobacco, and smoking cessation reflects the field's sustained focus on understanding patterns of tobacco use and cessation. This is consistent with epidemiological evidence identifying smoking as a major preventable risk factor for noncommunicable diseases and premature mortality.^{29,30} Behavioural research remains central to this literature, particularly in evaluating how price-based interventions influence initiation, continuation, and quitting behaviours.³¹

Policy and economics-related keywords, including public policy, taxation, price, and the tobacco industry, occupy a central position across the network, underscoring the growing emphasis on structural interventions. This pattern aligns with global evidence that taxation and price

increases are among the most effective tobacco control measures, as endorsed by the WHO-FCTC.²² The recurrence of these terms across analyses suggests that fiscal policies serve as a key mechanism linking behavioural change to population-level health gains. Treemap and word cloud analyses further reinforce the centrality of economic interventions. Repeated references to taxation, cost-effectiveness, and behavioural economics indicate a sustained interest in understanding both rational and non-rational responses to price changes. This is consistent with established evidence on rational addiction and demand elasticity, which shows that tobacco consumption is particularly sensitive to price among youth and low-income groups.^{26,32}

Additionally, the recurrent appearance of keywords related to adolescents, youth, health disparities, socioeconomic status, and LMICs highlights increasing attention to equity in tobacco control research. Prior evidence suggests that tobacco taxation yields disproportionate health benefits for disadvantaged populations by reducing consumption and preventing initiation, despite concerns about regressivity.^{33,34} The increasing focus on LMICs is especially relevant given their rising burden of tobacco-related morbidity and mortality and continued targeting by the tobacco industry.

Temporal thematic analysis highlights a clear evolution in research priorities. Prior studies have focused on nicotine dependence, self-administration, and rational addiction models, reflecting an emphasis on individual-level mechanisms. From the late 2000s onward, the literature expanded to include public health, second-hand smoke, and socioeconomic determinants, paralleling the global scale-up of comprehensive tobacco control policies following the implementation of the WHO-FCTC. In the most recent period (2018-2024), there has been growing attention to taxation, excise policy, commercial determinants of health, and noncommunicable diseases, signalling a shift toward addressing industry practices and structural drivers of tobacco use.^{35,36} The limited emphasis on tax administration, enforcement capacity, and illicit trade in the thematic analysis suggests an underexplored area of research, despite these factors being central to the successful implementation of tobacco tax policies, particularly in LMIC contexts.

This study provides a comprehensive mapping of nearly six decades of global research on tobacco taxation and pricing policies, drawing on a larger dataset indexed in Scopus. The long temporal coverage allows robust assessment of publication trends, thematic evolution and shifts in research focus over time. The use of established and reproducible bibliometric tools such as Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer enabled systematic evaluation of research productivity, collaboration networks and conceptual structures. The integration of multiple analytical approaches (trend analysis, co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping and thematic evolution) offers a multidimensional understanding of the intellectual

landscape of tobacco taxation research. The inclusion of policy, economic, behavioural and equity related dimensions highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the field and provides insights that are directly relevant for public health policy and fiscal decision making.

Limitations include restriction to publications indexed in the Scopus database and to English-language literature, which might have led to the underrepresentation of research from non-English-speaking countries and certain low- and middle-income regions. Additionally, bibliometric analysis focuses on publication patterns, citation structures and thematic prominence but does not assess causal inference, methodological quality or policy impact. Citation based indicators may be influenced by time since publication and disciplinary citation practices, potentially favouring older or highly cited research from higher income regions. Though keyword-based analyses are useful for identifying dominant and emerging themes, they depend on author curated terminologies and indexing practices, which may vary across journals and time periods. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a robust and high-level synthesis of the global evidence base on tobacco taxation and pricing policies. Future research should prioritise expanding evidence generation in LMICs, fostering international research collaborations, and integrating bibliometric findings with systematic reviews and policy evaluations to better support context-specific tobacco tax design and implementation. Future research should also examine the role of tobacco tax revenue earmarking for health financing and universal health coverage, an area of increasing policy interest but limited empirical synthesis within the current literature.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis demonstrates substantial expansion and increasing policy relevance of global research on tobacco taxation and pricing interventions. The literature has progressively shifted from individual-level behavioural models toward integrated policy and equity-focused frameworks, reflecting the central role of taxation in comprehensive tobacco control. Nonetheless, persistent geographic disparities in research output underscore the need for stronger research capacity and evidence generation in LMICs. Addressing these gaps is essential to support effective, equitable, and sustainable tobacco tax policies worldwide.

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