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# Bibliometric Analysis and Publication Status of Public Health Specialization Theses in Turkey

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this study is to determine in which fields of public health specialists conduct medical specialty thesis and to examine the status of theses turned into articles in national and international journals. **Materials and Methods:** Databases of National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education was used for the study examining the bibliometric analysis and publication status of medical specialty theses conducted in Public Health Departments until the end of 2022. **Results:** Approximately 40% of the theses were centered around three main topics, namely occupational health, non-communicable diseases-disability-cancer, and child-adolescent health. More than 60% of theses were planned as cross-sectional study. 29.2% of the theses have been published, and this rate increases to 47.3% in studies receiving project support; 41.6% in studies conducted using laboratory findings; 36.1% in studies using examination findings data; and 33.3% in studies using radiological imaging data. Less than 30% of the published theses were published in SCI, SCI-E, Scopus group journals. **Conclusion:** While the rate of publication for public health theses has demonstrated an upward trend over the years, it remains relatively low. Solutions should be devised to foster the publication of specialty theses. Spreading thesis studies across the duration of education, as opposed to a condensed timeframe, and augmenting financial support from universities for scientific research can enhance studies in terms of data collection methods and outreach. **Keywords:** Public Health. Publications. Academic Dissertations.

# Türkiye'de Halk Sağlığı Uzmanlık Tezlerinin Bibliyometrik Analizi ve Yayın Durumu

## ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmanın amacı, halk sağlığı uzmanlarının hangi alanlarda tıpta uzmanlık tezi yaptıklarını belirlemek ve tezlerin ulusal ve uluslararası dergilerde makaleye dönüşme durumunu incelemektir.**Gereç ve Yöntem:** Halk Sağlığı Anabilim Dallarında 2022 yılı sonuna kadar yapılan tıpta uzmanlık tezlerinin bibliyometrik analizi ve yayın durumlarının incelendiği çalışma için Yükseköğretim Kurulu Ulusal Tez Merkezi veri tabanları kullanılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Tezlerin yaklaşık %40'ı iş sağlığı, bulaşıcı olmayan hastalıklar-engellilik-kanser ve çocuk-ergen sağlığı olmak üzere üç ana konu etrafında toplanmıştır. Tezlerin %60'ından fazlası kesitsel çalışma olarak planlanmıştır. Tezlerin %29,2'si yayınlanmış olup, bu oran proje desteği alan çalışmalarda %47,3'e; laboratuvar bulguları kullanılarak yapılan çalışmalarda %41,6'ya; muayene bulguları verileri kullanılarak yapılan çalışmalarda %36,1'e; radyolojik görüntüleme verileri kullanılarak yapılan çalışmalarda ise %33,3'e yükselmektedir. Yayımlanan tezlerin %30'undan azı SCI, SCI-E, Scopus grubu dergilerde yayımlanmıştır. **Sonuç:** Halk sağlığı tezlerinin yayınlanmasını teşvik etmek için çözümler geliştirilmelidir. Tez çalışmalarının yoğun bir zaman dilimi yerine eğitim süresine yayılması ve bilimsel araştırmalar için üniversitelerden alınan mali desteğin artırılması, veri toplama yöntemleri ve erişim açısından çalışmaları geliştirebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halk Sağlığı, Yayınlar, Akademik Tezler.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Writing a thesis is one of the essential stages that a medical specialization student must complete to become a specialist in Turkey (Resmi Gazete, 2022). Activities such as research planning, data collection, data interpretation and discussion during thesis writing contribute to learning how to evaluate and interpret existing literature and access information sources. The ability to interpret literature and learn to access information sources empowers individuals to keep their knowledge up-to-date and stay abreast of new developments throughout their professional lives.

The study should be shared with other researchers to contribute to the global realm of science and research. Theses need to be published in order to share the work with other researchers. The most well-known of these sharing methods are presenting the work at scientific meetings or publishing in the journals. This sharing not only has the potential to inspire fellow researchers but also serves to enhance the existing literature and facilitate widespread access to the knowledge generated through the thesis. Similar to other forms of scientific research, theses often encounter obstacles during the publication process. Key challenges include a lack of comprehensive guidance on article writing within undergraduate and graduate programs, inadequacies in foreign language skills, and a shortage of incentives to encourage publication. Addressing these issues is vital to facilitate the dissemination of valuable research findings and promote active participation in the scholarly publishing domain (Çökmüş, 2010).

Although public health is one of the oldest fields of medicine, it is open to improvement, new knowledge and new areas of research because it cannot be separated from social events (TUKMOS, 2016). New health policies, the discovery of a new source of environmental pollution, a new natural disaster, a new political event in neighbouring countries, the discovery of a new oncogene, a new infectious disease, and many other events cause social consequences and can be one of the main research topics of public health. In this respect, public health research areas are dynamic and open to innovations.

The purpose of this study is to determine in which fields of public health specialists conduct medical specialty thesis and to examine the status of theses turned into articles in national and international journals.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Databases of National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education was used for the study examining the bibliometric analysis and publication status of medical specialty theses conducted in Public Health Departments until the end of 2022. All theses that were available on the database website and had full-text access were examined (https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/giris.jsp) From the database, it was found that the first specialization thesis in public health in Turkey was conducted in 1973. It is seen in the database that this first thesis was written by Mehmet Erdoğan (M.D) on infectious diseases in children at the Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Dicle University. All 854 medical specialty theses were included in the study. Theses in 2023 were not included in the study, considering the process of publication. The year of publication, Turkish and English titles, the university where the thesis was conducted, the province of the university, the province where the research was carried out, the number of advisors, the academic title of the advisor, the subject of the thesis, research type, sample size, data collection method, total number of pages, number of pages of the discussion section, number of sources and the status of project support received were recorded. In the second stage, the study scrutinized the status of theses transformed into articles. Within this framework, the publication status of the thesis, the year of publication, the duration between thesis writing and publication, the database where the journal was indexed and the total number of authors were meticulously recorded.

Twenty-four National Public Health Congress Books were analyzed and 30 main subjects were identified. These subjects are women's and reproductive health, inequalities, non-communicable diseases-disabilitycancer, communicable diseases and vaccination, child and adolescent health, occupational health, health management-health policies-health systems, health promotion, health education, environmental health, school health, mental health, nutrition, migrant health, research, health health service economics, demography, oral and dental health, accident-injurypoisoning, elderly health, tourism health, anthropometric measurement studies, rational drug use, alcohol and substance use disorder, violence, quality of life, medical education, health worker training, disaster-emergencies and scale development. Based on the titles and abstracts for each thesis, the most appropriate one of these topics were selected by two researchers, first separately, then by comparison and joint decision-making. Research type was grouped as descriptive, cross-sectional, case-control, cohort, methodological, qualitative, interventional, systematic review-meta-analysis, ecological and bibliometric. In theses in which more than one research type was used, the research type that was higher in the evidence pyramid in terms of evidence value was recorded.If there is more than one thesis advisor, the title of the advisor with the higher degree was recorded.

While researching the publication status of theses, Google (https://www.google.com/), Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com.tr/), PubMed (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih). gov/pubmed/), TR Index TÜBİTAK ULAKBİM (https://trdizin.gov.tr/) and Dergipark (https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/) were used. The search was made by entering the names and surnames of the thesis authors and advisors, the Turkish/English title of the thesis and keywords into the search fields. The publication status of theses is grouped as published/not published.It was checked in which group database the publications were indexed. Indexes are categorized as SCI / SCI Expanded/Scopus, other international indexes, national indexes and national non-refereed journals.If a journal is indexed in both national and international indexes, the language of the publication was taken into consideration and the international index was accepted if it was published in English and the national index was accepted if it was published in Turkish.

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social

Sciences (SPSS) version 26 (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive findings are presented in percentage distributions for categorical variables, and in mean±standard deviation or median (minimum value-maximum value) for continuous variables.

#### RESULTS

From 1973, the first year of public health specialty thesis in Turkey, to the end of 2022, a total of 854 medical specialty theses were conducted. The first three years in which the most theses were made were 2017, 2022 and 2020, respectively. Figure 1 shows the number of public health specialty theses by year.

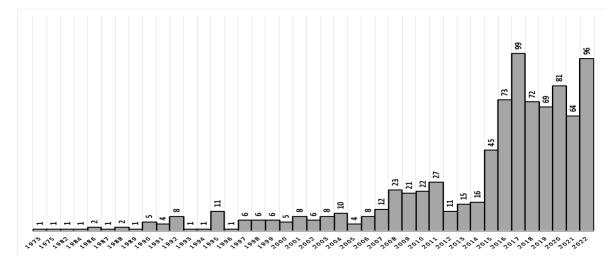


Figure 1. Change in the number of thesis by year

It was determined that 57.6% (n=484) of the theses were conducted by women. It has been observed that more than 50% of the theses were conducted in 12 departments. The top five universities with the highest number of theses were Istanbul University (n=53), Hacettepe University (n=48), Çukurova University (n=48), Dokuz Eylül University (n=43), and Gazi University (n=34). The first five provinces with the highest number of theses are Ankara (n=125), Istanbul (n=97), Izmir (n=82), Adana (n=48), and Samsun (n=33).

When the theses were analyzed according to the provinces where the data were collected, it was seen that they were mostly conducted in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, respectively, in parallel with the provinces where the universities are located. While 2.5% (n=21) of the theses were carried out using national data, 1.9% (n=16) were conducted in more than one province. While almost 95% of theses were carried out with a single advisor, the title of the advisor in nearly 70% was professor (Table 1).

		n	%
Number of thesis advisors (n=854)	Non-specified	21	2.5
	One	808	94.6
	Two	24	2.8
	Three	1	0.1
The academic title of the advisor (n=833)	Professor	573	68.8
	Associate professor	165	19.8
	Assistant professor	62	7.4
	Lecturer	33	4.0

#### Table 1. Information on thesis advisors.

Approximately 40% of the theses were centered around three main topics, namely occupational health, non-communicable diseases-disabilitycancer, and child-adolescent health. More than 60% of theses were planned as cross-sectional study. The median sample size was 380 (minimum:6 - maximum:416,707). In more than 90% of theses, data was collected by survey (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of main subject	, research type and data collection methods.
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		n	%
	Occupational health	144	16.9
	NCD-disability-cancer	115	13.5
	Child and adolescent health	66	7.7
	Women's and reproductive health	65	7.6
	Communicable diseases and vaccination	65	7.6
Main subject (n=854)	Environmental health	52	6.1
	Alcohol and substance use disorder	48	5.6
	Mental health	47	5.5
	Health services research	40	4.7
	Elderly health	27	3.2
	Other	185	21.6
Descende desce (m. 974)	Cross-sectional	528	61.8
	Descriptive	135	15.8
	Interventional	49	5.7
	Methodological	43	5.0
Research type (n=854)	Qualitative	30	3.5
	Case-control	26	3.0
	Cohort	17	2.0
	Other	26	2.9
	Survey	771	90.3
Data collection method* (n=854)	Records	122	14.3
	Examination	97	11.4
	Laboratory	77	9.0
	Environmental measurement	50	5.9
	Interview	35	4.1
	Radiologic imaging	3	0.4

NCD: Non-communicable diseases

\*Row percentage is calculated

Figure 2 presents the distribution of topics by gender. While the first two places are occupational health and non-communicable diseases-disability-cancer for both genders, women's and reproductive health comes third for women and environmental health comes third for men. While women and reproductive health was the ninth most frequently chosen topic by men, environmental health was the seventh most frequently chosen topic by women.

19.8% of the theses (n=169) received project support. The median number of pages for the theses is 117 (with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 684), the median number of pages for the discussion section is 13 (ranging from 0 to 72), and the median number of references used is 117 (with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 467). 29.2% of the theses (n=249) have been published, and this rate increases to 31.2% in

studies conducted by men; 47.3% in studies receiving project support; 41.6% in studies conducted using laboratory findings; 36.1% in studies using examination findings data; and 33.3% in studies using radiological imaging data. The median number of authors in publications is three (minimum number of authors: 1 - maximum number of authors: 11), and the median order of the thesis author's name in publications is one (minimum order: 1 - maximum order: 4). In 7.6% of the publications (n=19), the thesis author is not the first author. Approximately 5% of the 249 theses that were published did so in the same year, and it was observed that theses were published on average within 3.2±2.3 years. Less than 30% of the published theses were published in SCI, SCI-E, Scopus group journals (Table 3).

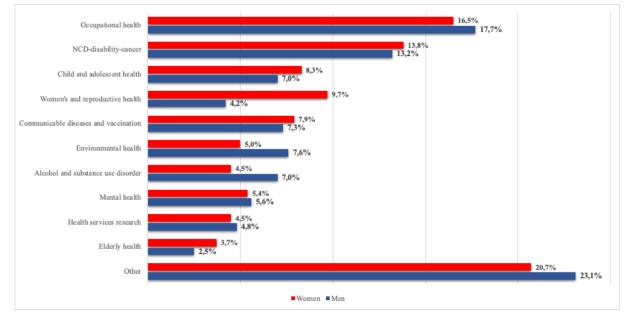


Figure 2. Distribution of main subject by gender.

		n	%
The duration between thesis writing and publication	In the same year	13	5.2
	One year later	50	20.1
	Two years later	42	16.9
	Three years later	54	21.7
	Four years later	34	13.7
	Five to ten years later	50	20.0
	After ten years	6	2.4
Index	SCI, SCI-E, Scopus	74	29.7
	Other international indexes	45	18.1
	National indexes	128	51.4
	National, non-peer-reviewed journals	2	0.8

Table 3. Publication period of public health theses and the indexes in which they were published (n=249).

The first three years with the highest number of theses turning into publications were, respectively, 2017 (n=37), 2016 (n=36), and 2018 (n=22). When looked at proportionally, it is observed that 75% of the theses

conducted in 2001 and 2005 were published; however, there is a gradual decrease after the year 2016. Figure 3 illustrates the publication rates of public health specialty theses over the years.

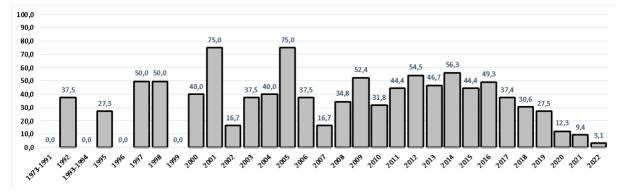


Figure 3. Publication rate of public health specialization theses over the years.

It was observed that more than 50% of the published theses were conducted in ten universities. These universities are, in order, Dokuz Eylül University (n=21), Çukurova University (n=18), Gazi University (n=15), Erciyes University (n=13), Hacettepe University (n=11), Ege University (n=10), Marmara University (n=10), Ondokuz Mayıs University (n=10), Istanbul University (n=9), and Pamukkale University (n=9). The publication rates of the top ten most researched topics are presented in Table 4.

According to this, among the top ten most researched topics, the top three topics with the highest publication rates were health service research, alcohol and substance use disorder, and elderly health. Three topics with high publication rates stand out among the thesis topics, even though they are less studied. Specifically, 80.0% (n=4) of health education studies, 57.1% (n=12) of scale development studies, and 57.1% (n=4) of migrant health studies were published as an article.

### Table 4. Publication rates of the top ten most researched topics.

Торіс	n	%
Health service research (n=40)	18	45.0
Alcohol and substance use disorder (n=48)	16	33.3
Elderly health (n=27)	9	33.3
Non-communicable diseases-disability-cancer (n=115)	34	29.6
Women's and reproductive health (n=65)	19	29.2
Child and adolescent health (n=66)	19	28.8
Mental health (n=47)	13	27.7
Communicable diseases and vaccination (n=65)	17	26.2
Occupational health (n=144)	37	25.7
Environmental health (n=52)	13	25.0

In Table 5, the publication rates of the theses according to the research type are presented. Accordingly, it is observed that the publication rate is

significantly higher than the average for theses conducted in cohort, methodological, and case-control types.

## Table 5. Rates of publication of theses according to research type.

		n	%
Research type	Cohort (n=17)	8	47.1
	Methodological (n=43)	16	37.2
	Case control (n=26)	9	34.6
	Cross-sectional (n=528)	157	29.7
	Descriptive (n=135)	35	25.9
	Interventional (n=49)	12	24.5
	Qualitative (n=30)	7	23.3

# DISCUSSION

In the study, which examined 854 medical speciality theses conducted between 1973, when the first public health thesis that can be accessed digitally was conducted, and the end of 2022, it was observed that more than 90% of the theses were conducted in the province where the university was located, more than 90% used questionnaires as data collection method, less than 20% received project support and less than 30% were published as an article. It was observed that the publication rate of theses receiving project support, as well as those based on laboratory examinations, radiological findings, and cohort, methodological, and case-control study designs, was higher than the average. Although public health is related to many areas affecting the society, it is seen that almost half of the studies are focused on more traditional issues such as occupational health, non-communicable diseases, child health, women's health. Studies on a new infectious disease, which remains on the public agenda and in the media for a certain period of time and whose negative health consequences may appear years later tend to decrease over time. Similarly, research on migrants following a wave of migration or on disaster victims after a natural disaster also declines over time.

On the other hand occupational health, noncommunicable diseases, child health and women's and reproductive health are the topics that always concern a large percentage of the society and it is more possible and easier to reach the determined population.

In our study, it was seen that more than 75% of the theses were descriptive and cross-sectional. In a study examining all public health theses (medical specialization, master's, doctorate) conducted in our country between 2009 and 2019, it was seen that more than 80% of the theses were cross-sectional descriptive (Uzun, Baysan & Bekar, 2021). Although this rate is similar to our study, subgroup rates were also examined in the relevant study and it was seen cross-sectional-descriptive studies that type decreased and experimental studies increased in the doctoral group. This situation may be related to the greater economic needs for experimental research and the availability of more financial support in doctoral programs.

In our study, it was observed that approximately 70% of public health theses were conducted under the supervision of a professor. This rate was reported as 49.7% in orthopedics theses, 48.1% in psychiatry theses, and 45.8% in anesthesiology and reanimation theses in previous studies (Baysan, Yapar, Tokgöz, Yapar, Baysan & Tolunay, 2021; Erim & Petekkaya, 2020 ; Güç Z, 2020). The reason for this decrease in clinical branches may be that clinician professors prefer to work in private health institutions.

It is believed that the low rate of theses turning into articles is attributed to various reasons, primarily including lack of time, financial burden, and excessive workload. In particular, the process of getting used to a new environment and a different workflow from the university may prevent the early conversion of the thesis into a publication, especially for physicians who are appointed with compulsory service after speciality education. The desire to turn the thesis into a publication may be associated with the desire to become an academician and may be ignored for those who do not plan to become academicians. The low rate of international publications may also be related to the language barrier and possible economical problems. Another reason for the low publication rates especially in SCI, SCI-E, Scopus group journals may be that international journals reject some study results as being related to local problems.

In a study conducted by Özgen et al. in 2011, analyzing all medical specialty theses conducted in Turkey between 1980 and 2008, a total of 22,625 theses were examined and it was determined that the rate of publish as an article for all branches was 6.2%. In the study, it was determined that the rate of publish as an article for medical specialty theses in the field of public health is 1.5% (Özgen, Eğri & Aktaş, 2011). In our study, it was observed that the trend of converting theses to publication has increased over the years. In our study, it was observed that 29.7% of the public health specialty theses converted into an articles. In a

study investigating the publication rate of specialty theses in the field of anesthesia and reanimation, it was found that 25.7% of the theses were published and 44.3% of those published were in the SCI and SCI-E groups. (Güç, 2020). Although a low rate of 11.5% of the theses in the Department of Family Medicine were published as articles, 34.1% of these published theses were found to be indexed in the SCI and SCI-E journals (Üçer&Keten, 2016).

In our study, it was determined that the average publication year of the theses published as an article was over three years. When compared with other studies examining theses conducted over 30 years, this average is observed to be 3.1 years for specialty theses in the field of anesthesia and reanimation, 3 years for specialty theses in the field of ecology and hydroclimatology, and 2.8 years for specialty theses in the field of psychiatry (Güç, 2020; Kardeş, 2019; Erim&Petekkaya, 2020). The median duration of over three years for publication, as found in our study, may explain why the publication rate of theses in 2021 and 2022 is below 10%, as these theses might not yet have had sufficient time to be converted into publications.

As of 2011, there has been a significant increase in the number of public health positions in the Medical Specialization Examination in Turkey, with a further acceleration in 2012. This may help explain the upward trend in the number of theses between 2015 and 2017, following the four-year training period in public health (Kılıç, Şahan & Bahadır, 2014). In our study, it was observed that almost all researchers collected data solely from the city where the university was located, with few studies conducted in other provinces or across multiple provinces. This might be attributed to rising transportation and accommodation costs, challenges in obtaining permission, or a reluctance to venture beyond one's familiar surroundings. Furthermore, the limited number of examination/laboratory/imaging studies could be linked to the escalating costs of such studies and the challenges in obtaining ethics committee permissions. The prolonged duration required for the interview and analysis stages of qualitative studies may explain why they are less preferred in thesis studies that must be completed within a limited timeframe.

# CONCLUSION

While the rate of publication for public health theses has demonstrated an upward trend over the years, it remains relatively low. Solutions should be devised to foster the publication of specialty theses. Spreading thesis studies across the duration of education, as opposed to a condensed timeframe, and augmenting financial support from universities for scientific research can enhance studies in terms of data collection methods and outreach. This could ensure that the research derived from specialty theses in the field of public health in Turkey gains greater prominence on the international stage. It is crucial to delve into the reasons behind the low publication rates and develop solutions. A comprehensive casecontrol study, conducted through professional organizations to reach all public health specialists in the country, would offer valuable insights and contribute to addressing this issue.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

#### **Author Contributions**

**Plan, design:** HÖ, DL; **Material, methods and data collection:** HÖ, DL; **Data analysis and comments:** HÖ, DL; **Writing and corrections:** HÖ, DL.

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#### **Ethical Approval**

It is not within the scope of the study requiring ethics committee approval.

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