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Mental Health Research: A Two-Decade Bibliometric Mini-Review (2000-2024)

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Abstract

This mini review summarizes key findings from a bibliometric study covering mental health research from 2000 to 2024, comprising 483 publications from 279 sources. The original study examined publication growth, influential journals, prolific authors and institutions, global collaboration patterns, thematic evolutions and trending topics. Notably, research output surged after 2018, with Psychiatric Services, BMC Psychiatry and The Lancet as leading journals. Prominent contributors included Alonso J and Haro J, while the University of Toronto and Harvard University emerged as key institutional hubs. Co-occurrence and thematic mapping revealed four dominant themes mental health services, depression, public health policy and socioeconomic determinants alongside emergent focus areas such as COVID-19's mental health impact and cognitive behavioural therapy. This review highlights the progression from policy and system-level studies to more intervention-oriented, global and socially contextualized research, while highlighting the need for greater cross-national collaboration and inclusion of low and middle-income countries.

Keyword: Mental health research; Bibliometric analysis; Global collaboration; Socioeconomic determinants; COVID-19 impact

Introduction

Over the past two decades, mental health research has gained unprecedented visibility within public health, policy and academic discourse. The increasing prevalence of psychiatric disorders, the global impact of socioeconomic inequalities and the exacerbating effects of crises such as COVID-19 have accelerated both scientific inquiry and policy engagement. Bibliometric analysis provides a structured approach to quantify this growth, identify knowledge hubs and track thematic evolution over time. The bibliometric study under review addresses a gap in the literature by mapping mental health research trends across both clinical and policy-oriented domains. Using Scopus and Web of Science data from 2000 to 2024, this study offers a panoramic view of influential actors, collaborative networks and emerging thematic directions.

Methods Overview

The original analysis retrieved literature using structured keywords related to mental health, policy, services and socioeconomic factors. The data were filtered to include only high-quality, peer-reviewed documents in English, yielding 483 records after duplicate removal (**Figure 1**). Biblioshiny (R package) was used for quantitative and network analyses,

producing insights into authorship patterns, institutional collaborations, keyword co-occurrences, thematic clusters and trending topics.

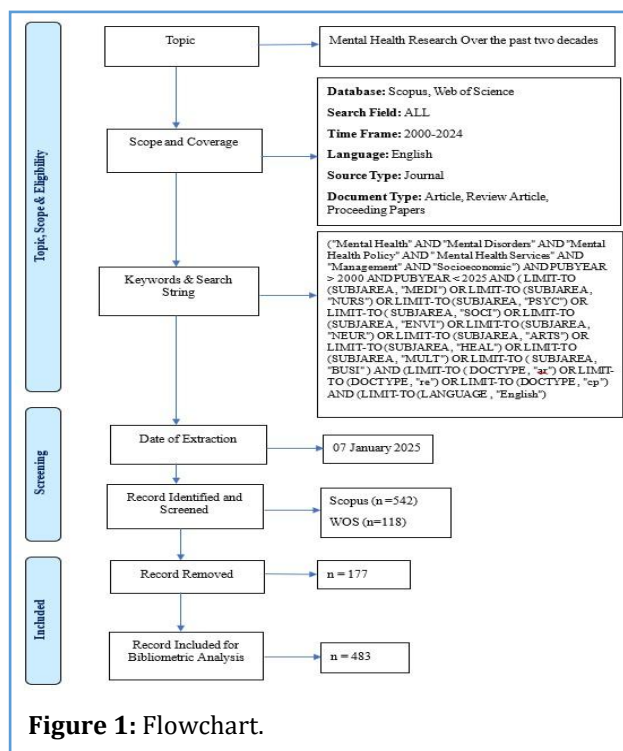


Figure 1: Flowchart.



Key Findings

Publication trends

Annual growth in publications averaged 9.5%, with a marked acceleration post-2018 likely driven by policy reforms, expanded global advocacy and the pandemic's mental health consequences. The research domain demonstrated both resilience and adaptability, with 2024 marking the highest recorded output [1].

Leading journals

The top publication venues included Psychiatric Services (highest citations, TC=1096), BMC Psychiatry (TC=1106 despite a later start) and The Lancet, which hosted globally influential works on the burden of mental illness. Journals such as BMJ Open and the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health showed rising impacts, reflecting broader intersections between environmental determinants and mental well-being [1].

Prolific authors and influential works

Alonso J (11 publications) and Haro J (10 publications) led in productivity, while highly cited works included the Global Burden of Disease series and the Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health [2,3]. These seminal contributions have shaped epidemiological baselines, service design and sustainable development frameworks for mental health. [1].

Institutional hubs

The University of Toronto (63 publications) and Harvard University (44 publications) functioned as central hubs, driving both knowledge production and global collaboration. Other high-output institutions included the Tehran University of Medical Sciences and the University of London, illustrating geographically diverse but still Western- and high-income-centric research leadership [1].

Thematic evolution

Thematic mapping revealed four principal knowledge clusters:

- **Motor themes:** Human, mental health service, major clinical study, young adult, cross-sectional study.
- **Emerging or declining themes:** Socioeconomic status, adults, disorders, care, depression.

Trending topics

Early focus (2003-2010) emphasized data analysis, medical research and health programs. From 2010 onward, the emphasis expanded to socioeconomic

factors, demographic determinants and cross-national contexts (China, United States). Post-2020, research pivoted toward pandemic-related topics (COVID-19, cognitive behavioral therapy), signifying responsiveness to acute global health disruptions [1].

Collaboration patterns

The bibliometric analysis revealed a multilayered collaboration landscape spanning authors, institutions and countries. At the author level, collaboration was strong within research teams, with an average of 11.8 co-authors per publication, although only 5.37% of the papers involved international co-authorship. High collaboration density was observed among leading researchers such as Alonso J, Haro J and Stein D, who served as central nodes within tightly knit author clusters. Notably, authors such as Scott K and Kessler R demonstrated high betweenness centrality, acting as bridges between otherwise distinct research groups and facilitating cross-disciplinary and cross-regional knowledge exchange.

Institutional collaboration was dominated by prestigious academic hubs. Harvard Medical School and Harvard University formed the most prominent cluster, frequently partnering with other leading institutions such as the University of Toronto, the University of California System, Columbia University, University College London and the University of Cape Town. Harvard and Toronto exhibited high degree centrality, indicating widespread partnerships, while Johns Hopkins University and Cape Town functioned as key bridging institutions linking multiple research networks.

At the country level, the United States emerged as the dominant hub, with strong bilateral links to France, the United Kingdom, Canada, China and Brazil. The UK and France demonstrated substantial regional influence, while emerging research nations such as Brazil, India and South Africa actively participated in global partnerships, albeit with fewer high-strength connections. Collaboration density was generally higher among developed nations, indicating the need for increased engagement from low and middle-income countries to enhance inclusivity and diversify the global mental health research agenda [1].

Discussion

The reviewed analysis highlights the dual trajectory of mental health research: Expanding scope and deepening specialization. Since its early emphasis on system-level policies and healthcare accessibility, the field has embraced multidisciplinary perspectives, integrating public health, sociology, epidemiology and clinical sciences.



This rapid post-2018 growth aligns with global advocacy efforts, notably WHO's Special Initiative for mental health and reflects rising societal prioritization. The pandemic acted as both a catalyst and a stress test, propelling research on resilience, service adaptation and tele-mental health.

Persistent gaps include:

- **Geographic representation:** The dominance of high-income country institutions limits the diversity of perspectives, especially on culturally embedded mental health models.
- **Collaboration depth:** Low international co-authorship rates hinder broader knowledge exchange and comparative analyses.
- **Socioeconomic integration:** While recognized as a determinant, socioeconomic status remains underdeveloped in thematic density, signaling a need for more nuanced and intersectional approaches.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this bibliometric analysis carry important implications for policymakers, researchers and funding agencies. For policymakers, the identification of influential research hubs, high-impact journals and key thematic areas provides a foundation for shaping targeted mental health strategies and allocating resources effectively. Researchers can leverage insights into thematic gaps such as underexplored socioeconomic determinants and limited cross-regional perspectives to design studies that address pressing global needs. For funding agencies, the mapping of active institutions and collaborative networks can guide investments toward projects and partnerships that promise the greatest impact. Strengthening international research collaboration, particularly with low and middle-income countries, can foster innovation, enhance cultural relevance and ensure equitable participation in the global mental health discourse.

Future Directions

The future of mental health research should focus on developing equitable, sustainable networks that bridge the divide between high-income nations and low and middle-income countries, ensuring that diverse cultural perspectives inform both study design and practical implementation. Strengthening global collaborations will improve inclusivity and enrich the evidence base with a wider range of contextual insights. Methodological advancements can be achieved by integrating quantitative bibliometric techniques with qualitative meta-syntheses, producing deeper thematic

understanding. There is also a strong need to adapt and scale proven interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy into community-based, culturally appropriate models. Furthermore, longitudinal studies that track the influence of research priorities on policy, service delivery and mental health outcomes will be critical in assessing the real-world impact of current research trends.

Conclusion

This mini review of the bibliometric analysis reveals a vibrant and rapidly evolving mental health research landscape. The field's trajectory from policy-oriented origins to a globally responsive, intervention-focused discipline reflects both its adaptability and societal relevance. While leading journals, authors and institutions continue to drive scholarly momentum, expanding cross-national collaboration and integrating underrepresented perspectives remain vital for the next phase of growth.

Author Contributions

- **Randhir Singh Ranta:** Conceptualized and designed the study, supervised the research process, contributed to data interpretation and critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
- **Tanuj Sharma:** Led the data acquisition, performed bibliometric analysis, contributed to data interpretation and drafted significant portions of the manuscript.
- **Aditi Sharma:** Assisted in data collection, contributed to methodological development, assisted in drafting the manuscript and provided substantial revisions.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Clinical trial number

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Ethics, consent to participate and consent to publish declarations

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