

# A Bibliometric Review of Global Research Trends in Social Well-Being

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Social well-being can be defined as the act of sharing, developing, and sustaining meaningful relationships with others. In general, social well-being is crucial as it serves as a key indicator of a country's development. Without being aware of, actively working on, and nurturing our social well-being, we face the danger of becoming socially isolated.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This article identifies global trends in social well-being studies using the Scopus database. A total of 804 published articles from 1938 until 2023 were included in the analysis. Subsequently, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using Bibliometric Harzing, Perish, and VOS-viewer software. The findings are divided into three levels: i) descriptive analysis of the publications; ii) scientific relevance; and iii) analytical co-occurrence.

**Findings:** As a result, there has been a consistent rise in the number of publications and articles being published, particularly from 2014 to 2023. This can be attributed to the increasing amount of research being conducted in fields such as social science, medicine, and psychology. The top three sources in terms of publication titles are Social Indicators Research, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, and Frontiers in Psychology.

**Research limitations/implications:** This study used the Scopus database for bibliometric analysis specifically using Bibliometric Harzing and Perish as well as Vos-viewer software. Therefore, the articles related to social well-being in other databases were not included.

**Practical implications:** This study is essential because it can help researchers focus their time on exploring topics that have not been thoroughly investigated.

**Originality/value:** Our work highlights the importance of research produced in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom while exposing the low productivity of Ukraine, Uruguay, and Vietnam, with only a single publication from each country.

**Keywords:** *Bibliometrics, Global trends, R-package, Social well-being, Vos-viewer*

## Introduction

The concept of social well-being (SWB) is an essential aspect of both physical and mental health, and it plays a crucial role in ensuring that society can function to its full potential (Van Zyl, 2021). According to Keyes (2002), SWB is a public phenomenon that emphasizes the compatibility between an individual's societal needs and their social realities. In practice, SWB refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the quality of their social interactions, their success in engaging with social organizations and communities, and how others react to them (Keynes et al., 2020).

From this perspective, Keyes (2020) proposed that SWB is influenced by five interrelated factors: (1) social integration (the extent to which an individual is integrated into the community), (2) social contribution (the belief that an individual is an essential part of society and makes a valuable contribution to it), (3) social coherence (the belief that society functions as an integrated and coherent whole, with individuals as active members), (4) social actualization (the perspective that society has the potential to grow and develop through its citizens), and (5) social acceptance (the perspective that people are naturally good and trustworthy towards others). These criteria determine the extent to which individuals can overcome social problems and effectively participate in the social communities they are part of (Keyes et al., 2020).

The self-determination theory suggests that SWB is influenced by the environmental circumstances in which individuals are situated and can only be achieved when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, SWB is not a fixed characteristic, but rather an inherent ability that evolves or adapts in response to societal and cultural norms and environmental demands (Goodenough & Waite, 2020).

SWB is also associated with numerous physical and mental health benefits. Individuals who have a strong connection to their communities, a sense of belonging, and strong social ties are better equipped to handle environmental challenges. They also tend to have higher performance levels and experience greater levels of happiness and well-being (Seligman, 2012). However, studies have indicated that over 50% of the global population has unsatisfactory subjective well-being (SWB) (Rashid & Seligman, 2018; Seligman, 2012). This could have a substantial impact on their long-term psychological well-being.

Individuals with low levels of SWB are more susceptible to developing persistent psychopathological disorders (Seligman, 2012). Previous studies indicate that over 33% of students experience significant psychological distress due to factors such as social isolation, loneliness, limited social interactions, and reduced levels of subjective well-being (Seligman, 2012). These factors contribute to the increasing stress experienced by students, including a demanding academic curriculum, tight time constraints, strained relationships with peers and professors (Basson & Rothmann, 2019), frequent social comparisons, peer pressure, imbalances between studying and personal life, and significant life adjustments such as living away from family (Van Zyl, 2021).

Moreover, during pandemics, individuals' SWB can have detrimental consequences on their physical health, achievements, personal relationships, and overall life satisfaction. This is due to the negative impact of social isolation, fear of infection, and uncertainty (Brooks et al., 2020). These issues lead to significant deterioration in psychological functioning, which in turn harms social cognition, academic performance, productivity, and learning capacity (Ebert et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to determine global patterns in SWB research, which can enable researchers to further explore this issue in various contexts.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Definition of Social Well-Being***

The World Health Organization states health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*” (WHO 1948). The

concept revolves around three key conceptualisations of well-being: physical, mental, and social. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consensus over the definition and theoretical foundation of well-being, as well as the relationships between its various components (Elliot et al., 2022). In general, well-being is defined as anything that contributes to making people's lives better (Elliot et al., 2022).

Based on this definition, specific forms of well-being can be understood by considering two separate yet interrelated domains. First and foremost, well-being can be understood in terms of internal mental and emotional conditions, which is a fundamental component of what is commonly known as subjective well-being (Elliot et al., 2022). In this instance, internal well-being pertains to the subjective experiences of individuals, encompassing their emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences. Secondly, the concept of well-being can be seen in terms of the external social contexts and an individual's capacity to get and derive satisfaction from social resources (Smith, 2019; Williams et al., 2019).

In addition, Washington State University has defined SWB as, "*our ability to interact successfully within a community and throughout a variety of cultural contexts while showing respect for ourselves and others. Social well-being encompasses our interpersonal relationships, social support networks, and community engagement*" (Lalrinzuali, 2020). Meanwhile, the United States Institute of Peace defined SWB as, "*an end state in which basic human needs are met and people are able to coexist peacefully in communities with opportunities for advancement.*" The University of Wallong also defines social well-being as, "*the extent to which you feel a sense of belonging and social inclusion; a connected person is a supported person in society*" (Lalrinzuali, 2020).

Keyes (1998) developed a theory of subjective well-being (SWB) that outlines five (5) distinct dimensions. These dimensions include: 1) social integration, which refers to the assessment of the quality of one's sense of belonging within a society; 2) social acceptance refers to how society perceives and categorizes individuals based on their character and qualities; 3) social contribution is the assessment of an individual's perceived value within a society; 4) social actualisation involves evaluating the potential and direction of a society; and 5) social coherence is the perception and understanding of how one's society functions. Each of the dimensions discussed below.

### ***The Concept of Social Well-Being***

Keyes (1998) clarifies that subjective well-being (SWB) is the progression of a relationship and functioning in society. He states that individuals who actively participate in their communities' experience more social integration and make more social contributions compared to those who have never been involved. Additionally, Keyes (1998) states that SWB consists of five dimensions: social integration, social contribution, social acceptance, social actualization, and social coherence.

The first dimension, social integration, includes an individual's evaluation of the quality of their relationships with society and themselves. This definition not only takes into consideration personal relationships with peers, but also the significance of one's sense of community and belonging as vital components of social well-being. The second dimension, social acceptance, includes an individual's interpretation and acceptance of others based on their character, as well as feelings of confidence and comfort in interacting with them.

Keyes (1998) emphasizes the significance of social acceptability, which involves both accepting and tolerating others, as well as the extent to which an individual feels welcomed and supported by their community. This is because individuals with a high level of social acceptance are perceived to demonstrate comfort and confidence in their interactions with others, as well as a sense of belonging to a larger social community.

The third dimension, social contribution, refers to an individual's evaluation of their own social values and belief in having something valuable to share with society. It encompasses how individuals perceive that their actions in society are valued by the community and contribute to the nation (Gull et al., 2022). The fourth dimension, social actualization, relates to an individual's belief in the evolution of society and the possibility of progress and actualization through it. Lastly, social coherence consists of an individual's perception of the quality, organization, and soundness of the living world (Lalrinzuali, 2020).

### ***Importance of Social Well-Being***

The physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being are widely recognized as important factors for maintaining good health. However, health research and practice have predominantly focused on physical and mental well-being, neglecting the significance of social factors. This oversight has a negative impact on the formulation and implementation of health policies and practices. Well-being is connected to various aspects of life, including physical health, longevity, social prosperity, satisfaction, and occupational success (Diener & Chan, 2011). Scholars who follow the hedonic view believe that well-being is determined by how satisfied someone is with their life and their ability to effectively manage both positive and negative emotions (Sari, 2020). On the other hand, eudemonic scholars argue that well-being is influenced by how well someone is performing and actively participating in meaningful endeavors. Genuine well-being is centered around fulfilling one's potential (Sari, 2020). Therefore, subjective well-being (SWB) aligns more with the eudaimonia perspective (Keyes, 1998).

SWB is important to individuals because it allows them to interact effectively with their environments, promoting their overall growth and functioning as human beings. According to Keyes (1998), SWB reflects an individual's satisfaction with their interactions and relationships within their community and society. Moreover, SWB specifically focuses on an individual's subjective assessment of their social relationships, the reactions they receive from others, and their involvement with social institutions and groups (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Thus, cultivating a satisfactory level of social well-being enables individuals to develop strong interpersonal relationships. Additionally, having a supportive social network helps individuals build assertiveness skills and feel comfortable when interacting with others in social settings.

### **Research Methodology**

This study utilized the system mapping research (SMS) literature-based method, which involves bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric coupling, co-citation, and direct citation analyses are considered reliable and accurate practices for mapping research literature. The study extracted bibliometric data related to SWB from the Scopus database. Scopus is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive databases, encompassing academic publications from 1788 until the present, with a total of 82.4 million records. Therefore, all the bibliographic

information about SWB was obtained solely from this database. The articles were searched using the Scopus database in October 2023. The search criteria focused on the topic of SWB and were refined by a timespan from 1938 to October 2023, with article title terms including "social well-being." A total of 804 documents related to SWB were found. These articles were then analyzed using Harzing and Perish, as well as VOS-Viewer developed by Van Eck & Waltman (2010), and Ms Excel.

**Result and Discussion**

This study aims to evaluate and analyze the patterns of social well-being (SWB) publications, providing both visual and statistical analysis. The analysis will be conducted based on the Scopus database, using VOS-Viewer Version 1.6.19.

**Publication by Year Analysis**

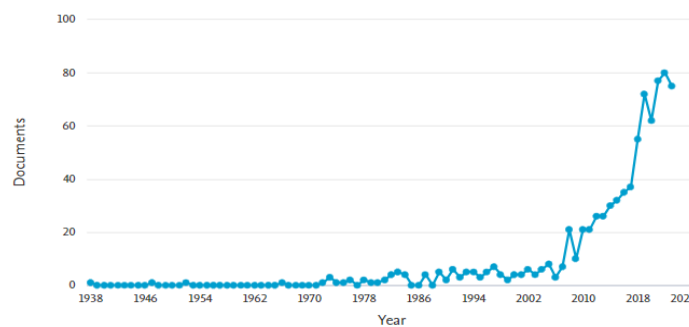


Figure 1: Publications by Year

The search result using query string keyword of "social wellbeing" OR "social well-being" OR "social wellness" OR "societal well\*being" OR "societal wellness" yielded 804 results in Scopus database. This study reviewed 804 publications from 1938 to 2023, for a period of 85 years. Based on Figure 1, first publication was in 1938. Nevertheless, in the next 8 years, there were no publication was made and in 1947 a second publication was fulfilled. Then a single publication was made in year 1952, 1966 and 1972. From year 2008 there were gradual and continual increase in SWB publications with average annual of 10 papers per year. From year 2010 the number of publications steadily increased every year till reach optimum publications of 80 papers in year 2022. The year 2023 currently recorded 75 publications and will increase till the end of the year cycle.

**Document Type Analysis**

We also analyse the document gathered from the Scopus database based on the document type, subject area, and source title. The document type can be either journal article, chapter in book, review, conference paper, editorial, book and vice versa. Figure 2 presents the chart of the document type analyses from this study. Journal articles represent (76%, 611) of the articles published in the SWB followed by book chapter (6.8%, 55), review paper (6.1%, 49) and conference paper (4.9%, 39) articles.

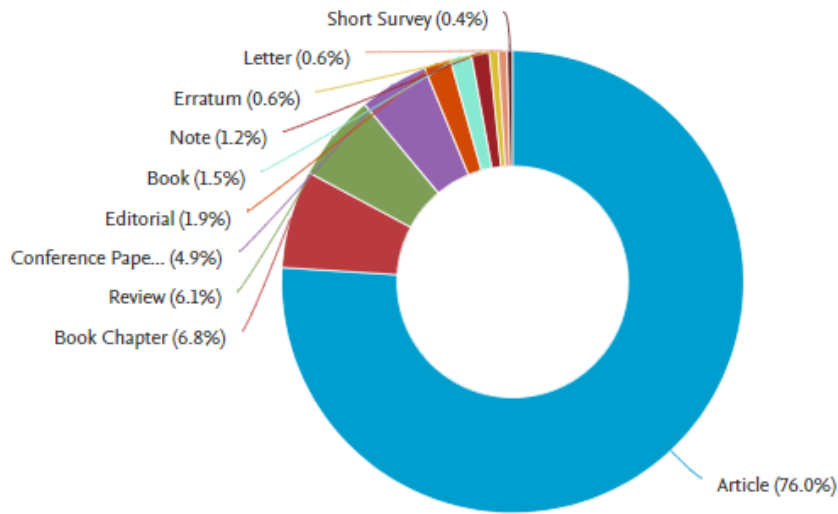


Figure 2: Document Type of the Published Articles

**Documents by subject area Analysis**

On the other hand, there are various document types by subject area were published articles in SWB. Refer to Figure 3, based on the subject area, publications are generally related to social sciences with the highest total of 351 publications representing 25.7% of total publications. Then, Medicine (246 publications), psychology (183 publications) which represents 30.60% and 22.76% respectively. While for Arts and Humanities and Environmental Sciences published 85 and 80 articles in their area per se. While Chemistry, Veterinary and Material Sciences among the lowest publications related to SWB.

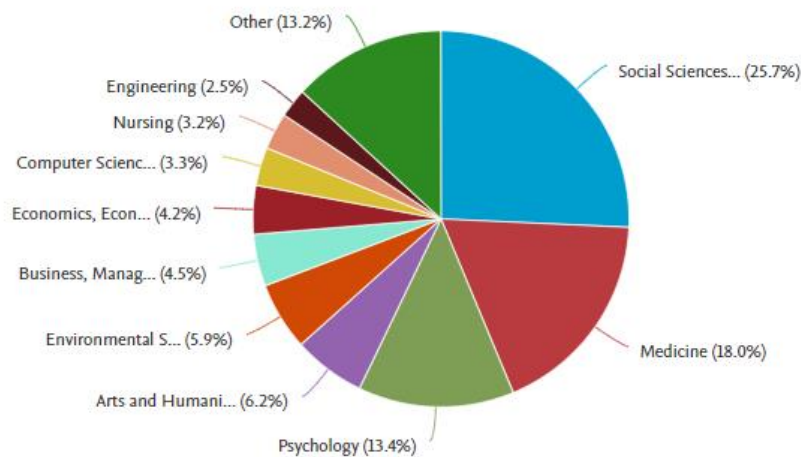


Figure 3: Publications by Subject Area

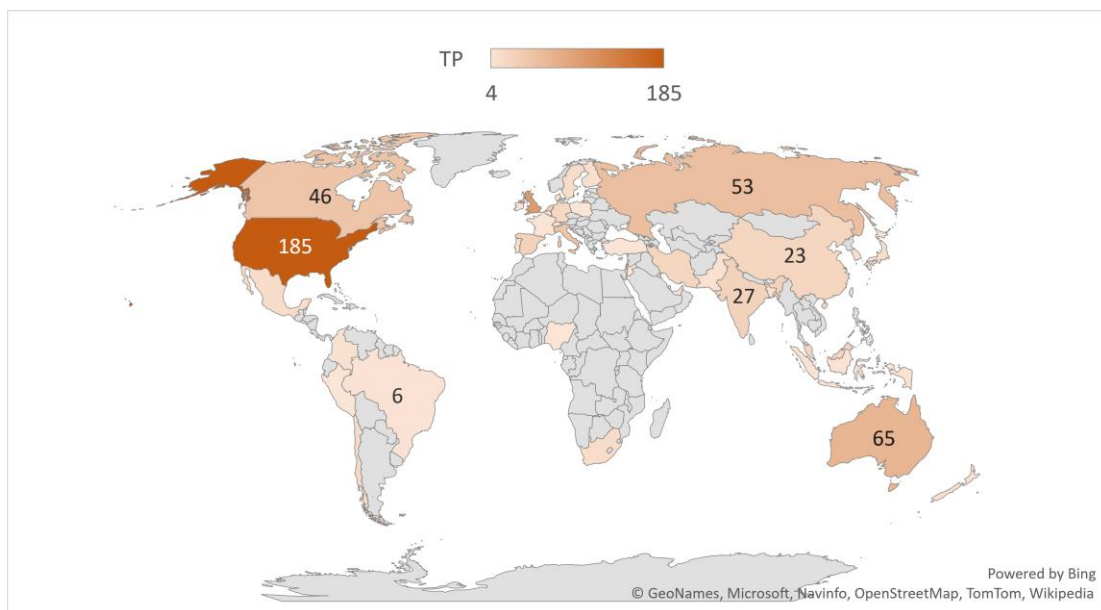
**Source Title Analysis**

The studies of SWB also were published in numerous journals, proceedings, and books. Table 1 below shows the top source title that the articles on SWB have been published based on the

minimum number of five (5) publications produced by each source title. It can be seen from the table that the Social Indicators Research host the highest paper on SWB with 20 publications far away advanced from the other source title.

Table 1: Top Source title

Source Title	Total Publications	% (N=804)
Social Indicators Research	20	0.025
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	8	0.010
Frontiers In Psychology	7	0.009
BMJ Open	6	0.007
Current Psychology	6	0.007
Journal of Public Health Policy	6	0.007
Rudn Journal of Sociology	6	0.007
Social Science and Medicine	6	0.007
Sustainability Switzerland	6	0.007
Plos One	5	0.006
Psicologia Della Salute	5	0.006
Russian Education and Society	5	0.006
Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya	5	0.006



United States	185	South Africa	15	Brazil	6
United Kingdom	98	Sweden	14	Ireland	6
Australia	65	Finland	12	Israel	6
Russian Federation	53	South Korea	12	United Arab Emirates	6
Canada	46	Switzerland	12	Singapore	5
Italy	46	Japan	11	France	4
Spain	29	Hong Kong	10	Jordan	4
India	27	Portugal	10	Nigeria	4
Netherlands	27	Pakistan	9	Peru	4
Malaysia	25	Colombia	8	Poland	4

China	23	New Zealand	8	Turkey	4
Iran	23	Bangladesh	7		
Germany	21	Belgium	7		
Chile	16	Denmark	7		
Mexico	15	Indonesia	7		

Figure 4: Countries contributed to the Articles in Social Well-Being (SWB)

### ***Geographical Distribution of Publications Analysis***

In total, there are 41 countries contributed to the articles on SWB, where the top 10 publishing countries were coloured in the Figure 4. The country has been counted based on the affiliation of the authors. For example, if the articles is co-authored by four authors where two of them are from Russian Federation and another two from Malaysia, it will be counted as one (1) from Russian and one (1) from Malaysia. Based on the results, we found that the United States produced the most publications followed by United Kingdom, Australia, Russian Federation, Canada, Italy, and Spain.

### ***Active Institutions Analysis***

We also analyse the top affiliation of the author. Most of the research on SWB is comes from Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Russian Academy of Sciences, UNSW Sydney, University College London, and The University of Queensland heading the other institutions around the globe. This data represents total of 143 affiliation conformed with authors of the articles.

Table 2: Most Active Institutions

Institution	Total Publication	% (N=143)
Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna	11	1.37%
Russian Academy of Sciences	9	1.12%
UNSW Sydney	9	1.12%
University College London	8	1.00%
The University of Queensland	8	1.00%
University of Manitoba	7	0.87%
The University of British Columbia	7	0.87%
The University of Sydney	7	0.87%
University of Glasgow	6	0.75%
Northwestern University	6	0.75%
The Australian National University	6	0.75%
King's College London	6	0.75%
University of Toronto	6	0.75%
University of Tehran	6	0.75%
Beijing Normal University	6	0.75%
Iran University of Medical Sciences	6	0.75%
University of Melbourne	6	0.75%
Tehran University of Medical Sciences	6	0.75%
Stockholms universitet	6	0.75%
North-West University	6	0.75%
The University of Manchester	5	0.62%

### ***Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis***

The key terms of the data collected were analysed using VOS-Viewer software to comprehend the research areas and SWB tendency. The co-occurrence network map based on keyword





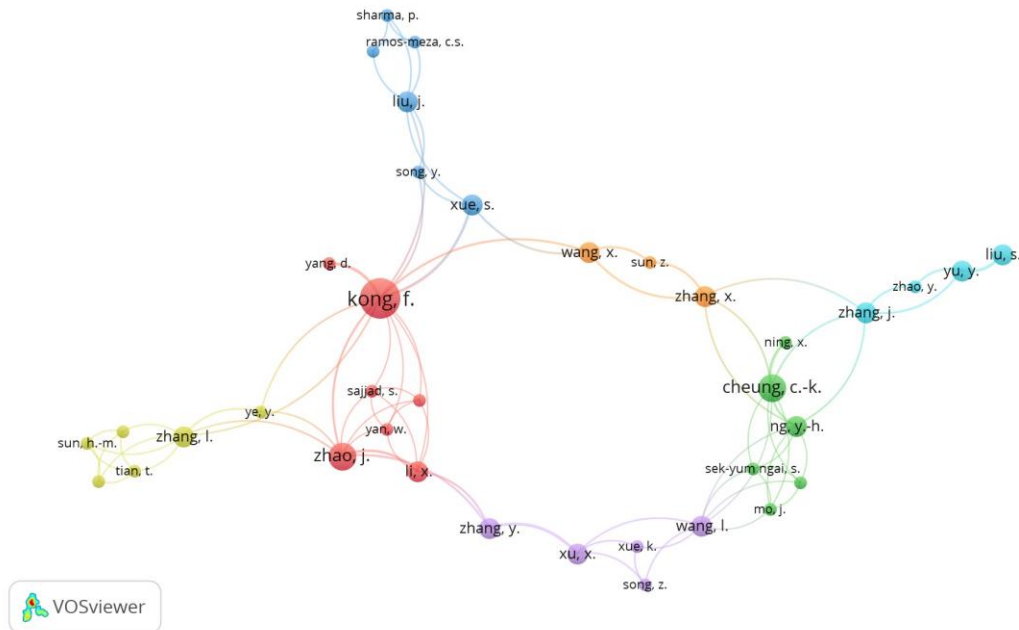


Figure 6: The Co-Authorship Network Visualization Map in Social Well-Being (SWB)

Among the seven (7) authors, Kong, F. and Zhao, J. is the most productive authors with five (5) articles respectively. The most productive group led by Kong, F. including authors Zhao, J., Yang, D., Sajjad, S., Yan, W., Li, X and Yang, D. who were focusing on multiple aspects of the SWB. It also shown there is connection of the co-author network of Kong, F., Xue, S and Wang, X. It indicates that there is a collaboration between each other which finally linked one cluster to another cluster in the visualization map.

**Conclusion**

This study analyzed and visualized the literature on subjective well-being (SWB) in order to guide future research in this field. The analysis was based on 804 articles published between 1938 and 2023. The results indicate that most of the research on SWB is published in high-impact journals in the areas of social science, medicine, and psychology. The main contributors to SWB research are authors and institutions from the United States. The analysis also revealed that the primary keywords used by authors in this field are social well-being, human, mental health, and quality of life. The overlay visualization map of these keywords provides valuable insights for future SWB research. The significant increase in publications over the past five years suggests that the study of social well-being is gaining increasing attention among researchers and has become a critical area of study, closely tied to emotions, psychological concerns, and mental health. However, it should be noted that this study has limitations, as it only utilizes data from the Scopus database. Future researchers should consider using a wider range of data from other databases. Additionally, this study focuses solely on SWB in general, and future researchers could explore other dimensions of SWB that are relevant to current circumstances.

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