REVIEW ARTICLE

EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH LITERATURE: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW OF SCHOLAR-FOCUSED RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Sriwahyuni Sriwahyuni[1*], Hasbi Hasbi[2], Suparman Abdullah[3], Muh. Iqbal latief[4]

[1]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. sriwahyunitiro@unimerz.ac.id

[2]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.. Hasbifisip@gmail.com

[3]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. mansosio87@yahoo.com

[4]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.. muhiberkelana@gmail.com

Corresponding Author:*Sriwahyuni Sriwahyuni, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. sriwahyunitiro@unimerz.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores the current state of mental health literature with a focus on scholar-centered research in higher education. A comprehensive bibliometric review was conducted using a range of tools, including VOSviewer, Biblioshiny (R-package), and Publish or Perish, analyzing data from the Scopus database. A total of 1.935 journal articles, spanning publications from 1919 to 2026, were systematically reviewed, with a steady increase in annual publications, particularly in the last decade. The analysis reveals that mental health in higher education settings has become a prominent research area, with key themes such as student well-being, depression, stress, and academic pressure frequently emerging in the literature. The leading countries contributing to this research include the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, with major institutions driving the scholarly output. The study also identifies prominent journals like Journal of American College Health and Educational Psychology Review, which have significantly shaped the field. Additionally, the research emphasizes the critical role of higher education policies in supporting student mental health, particularly post-COVID-19, while highlighting the increasing relevance of digital mental health tools and online interventions. Despite the growing body of literature, gaps remain in addressing intersectional mental health issues, particularly concerning marginalized student populations. The findings suggest that future research should focus on innovative interventions and the broader societal factors influencing student mental health, providing key insights into the evolving landscape of academic and student mental health research.

Keywords: Mental Health, Higher Education, Student Well-being, Bibliometric Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Mental health of students has become an increasingly urgent global issue, especially in the face of rising mental health challenges among the youth[1]. With increasing academic pressures, economic anxieties, and uncertainties about the future, students are now more vulnerable to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress, which can disrupt their overall well-being[2]. In addition to the factors mentioned, the widespread use of social media has also become a significant factor affecting the mental health of the younger generation. Research shows that excessive interaction on social media platforms can worsen feelings of low self-esteem, increase social anxiety, and exacerbate feelings of isolation[3,4]. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this situation, leading to increased stress levels among students, caused by both remote learning and uncertainty about the future[5].

In response to this phenomenon, studies related to student mental health have rapidly developed in recent decades. Previous research has highlighted various mental health issues faced by students, including anxiety disorders, depression, and stress, which have become more prevalent due to high academic demands, social changes, and the impacts of globalization and digitalization[2]. One area that is now drawing attention is the impact of technology and social media use, which can serve both as a tool and a trigger for mental health issues. A study by Zhang [6] revealed that the phenomenon of digital dependency could exacerbate students' mental

health disorders, with different effects depending on the type and intensity of usage.

Furthermore, as technology advances, digital-based interventions to address mental health issues are gaining more attention. Psychological therapy applications (e-therapy), telemedicine, and other internet-based programs are now widely used to support students' mental health, providing easier access and reducing the stigma that often prevents students from seeking help[7]. On the other hand, research also indicates that while digital interventions offer more accessible solutions, their effectiveness and impact on students' mental health still require further study[8].

However, despite the increasing number of studies on student mental health, there are still various gaps in the literature, both in terms of geographic and thematic focus. Research on student mental health varies greatly across countries and cultures, with some countries focusing on physical health and diet, while others prioritize the role of social media and its impact on mental well-being (Altassan, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by conducting a bibliometric analysis of existing literature to explore research trends, recurring themes, and identify opportunities and challenges for future research. This study aims to answer three main questions:

1. What are the trends in student mental health literature over time, including the most frequently cited journals, countries, institutions, and most productive authors?
2. What are the main themes and keywords that frequently appear in literature related to student mental health?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research design.
This study adopts a quantitative approach using bibliometric analysis from the Scopus database. Bibliometrics is an optimal technique for examining the conceptual structure of a research domain and identifying potential future research directions. To conduct a more comprehensive bibliometric analysis, this study integrates bibliometric and content analysis to synthesise research streams from various journals indexed in Scopus, spanning from 1919 to 2026. The primary reason for selecting the Scopus database is that it provides broader citation coverage compared to other databases, including Web of Science (WoS), which is relatively limited and often overlaps with Scopus or includes journals indexed by both[9]. Furthermore, the Scopus database grants access to a more comprehensive range of journals and provides a wider citation network.

Search Strategy, Criteria, and Data Collection

In our data search strategy, we adapted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model to ensure transparency and consistency in the data collection process. Figure 1 presents the detailed flowchart of the PRISMA protocol employed in this study's search strategy. Data were collected from the Scopus database on December 25, 2025, using the search query: ("psychology" OR "mental health") AND ("scholarship" OR "financial aid" OR "grants" OR "funding") AND ("students" OR "learners" OR "scholars"). This search query was designed to capture documents focusing on mental health, funding (e.g., scholarships, grants), and student populations.

To guarantee the inclusiveness of the bibliometric review and content analysis, we followed a structured screening process. This included screening literature relevant to the research topic, evaluating documents based on their eligibility criteria (including full-text search), and cross-verifying citations and relevance to the subject, which were not directly included in the data search query.

The initial records screened in the Scopus database (n = 45,214) were based on article titles, abstracts, and keywords from journals, proceedings, book chapters, and reviews. Three key search criteria were used to ensure article quality and review validity: article universality, publication quality, and relevance. Universality was ensured by including only English-language journal articles. Therefore, we applied the following filters: LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar"), LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j"), LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English").

Subsequently, we excluded documents that did not meet the inclusion criteria, including irrelevant studies, non-article document types, non-journal sources, and documents not written in English (n = 43.279). The remaining records deemed eligible (n = 1.935) were included for further descriptive analysis, bibliometric analysis, and content analysis.

Tools and Data Analysis
Various tools were used to conduct this research. For frequency analysis and chart generation, R-Biblioshiny and Excel were employed to perform calculations and visualise the results. VOSviewer was used to construct and visualise bibliometric networks, examine abstract keywords and authorship, and explore relationships and collaborations across authors, countries, and publications. Harzing's Publish or Perish software was utilised to compute citation metrics and identify highly cited documents, providing insight into the most influential research in the domain [10]. This research adopted a comprehensive methodology, combining bibliometric analysis with content and network analysis

to uncover insights into various facets of the research field. These include publication years, contributing countries and institutions, prominent journals, influential authors, keyword associations among authors, document citations, author citations and co-citations, international collaborations, and emerging research streams.
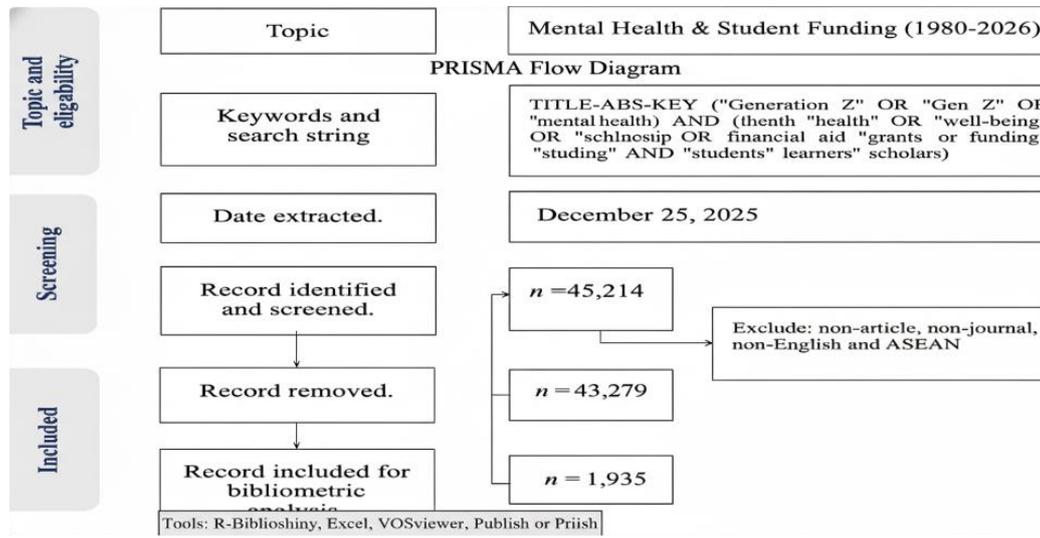

Figure 1. Diagram PRISMA

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis

The author examined a collection of 1,935 journal articles published between 1919 and 2026 for this study, sourced from a total of 963 different publications. These articles were authored by 6,637 authors, with only one article being single-authored. On average, each article had 8.43 co-authors, and 13.59% of the publications had international co-authorship, indicating substantial global collaboration. The annual growth rate of publications was 1.3%, reflecting steady scholarly activity in this area. The average age of the documents was 11 years, and there were 15,353 references across all publications. Each document had an average of 21.53 citations, demonstrating their significant impact on the academic community. Additionally, the authors used 4,392 different keywords, showing the broad range of topics covered. This overall picture suggests that the field is experiencing steady growth, with increasing international collaboration, and is contributing significantly to the academic landscape, as evidenced by the rising citation rates.

Figure 2. Dataset

Figure 3 In this study, the author examined journal articles published between 1919 and 2026, focusing on the development of scholarly work during this period. The first article was published in 1919, and there were several years with no publications, particularly in the early years. However, the number of publications started to rise gradually, with notable growth after the 1980s. The most significant increase in publications occurred after 2017, with a sharp rise in the number of articles in the following years. The highest number of publications was recorded in 2025, with 223 articles published, followed by 210 articles in 2024. A total of 1,935 articles were identified from the Scopus database. The analysis of the publication trends showed an annual growth rate of 1.3%. On average, each article received 21.53 citations per document, with 8.43 co-authors

per document. The total number of references across all articles amounted to 15,353. This upward trend highlights the growing academic interest and research activity in the field, particularly in recent years.
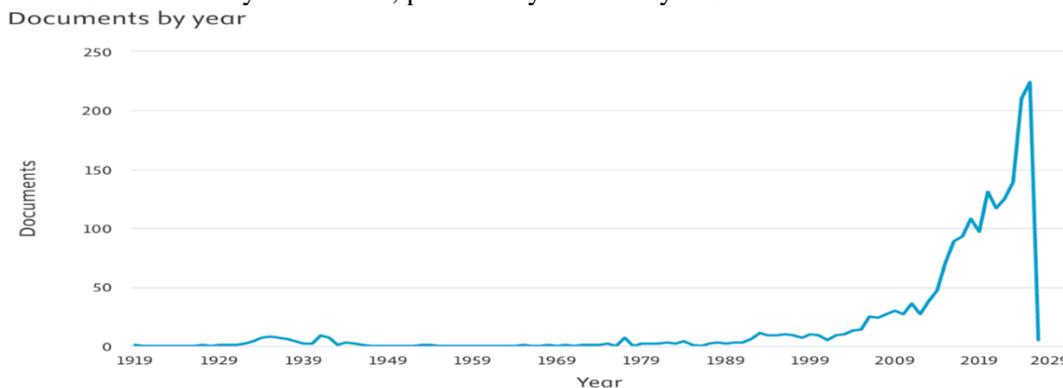

Figure 3. Number of publications per year

Research trend analysis

The chart illustrates the various subject areas relevant to Generation Z health research. The largest portion of the research focuses on Social Sciences, accounting for 27.9% of the total, highlighting the significant interest in understanding the societal factors that influence Generation Z's health. Medicine follows closely behind, contributing 25.4%, indicating that physical health remains a major focus of academic inquiry. Psychology also plays a central role, with 19.7% of the publications dedicated to understanding the mental health of Generation Z, reflecting the growing attention to mental health issues in this demographic. Smaller but still significant portions of research cover fields such as Nursing (6.1%), Arts and Humanities (5.7%), and Health Professions (2.5%), indicating an interdisciplinary approach to understanding Generation Z's health. Other subject areas, including Business and Management (2.6%), Neuroscience (1.3%), and Biochemistry (1.1%), show a more specialized focus, suggesting that research is not limited to traditional health disciplines but spans a wide range of topics related to the well-being of Generation Z.
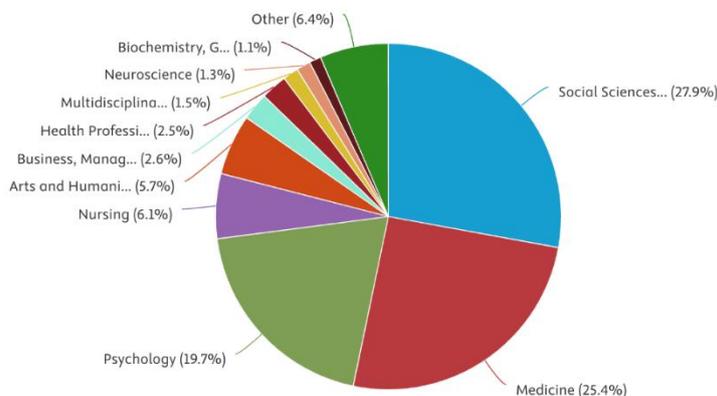

Figure 4. Subject Area

The chart presents the most relevant sources in Generation Z health research based on the number of documents published. The American Psychologist leads with 47 documents, followed by BMC Medical Education with 37 documents, reflecting significant contributions to psychology and medical education. PLOS ONE ranks third with 35 documents, showcasing its broad interdisciplinary focus. Other notable sources include the Journal of Educational Psychology and the Journal of Applied Psychology, contributing 31 and 30 documents, respectively, highlighting their influence in the fields of education and psychology. Teaching of Psychology follows with 29 documents, emphasizing psychological education, while Academic Medicine (22 documents), International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (18 documents), Academic Psychiatry (16 documents), and Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning (14 documents) contribute to research across medical, environmental, psychiatric, and pharmacy-related fields. This distribution underscores the interdisciplinary nature of Generation Z health research, with a prominent focus on psychology, education, and medical disciplines.
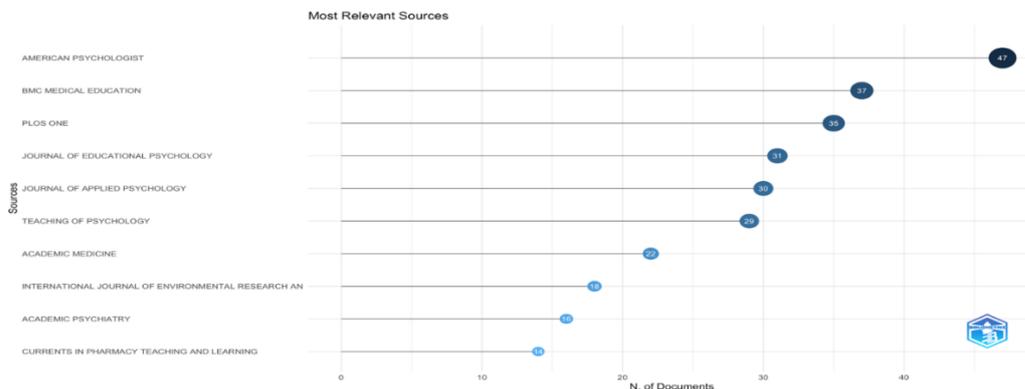
Figure 5. Most Relevant Sources

The figure above shows the local impact of the sources in Generation Z health research based on the H-index. The sources with the highest H-index, reflecting their impact within the research community, are Academic Medicine and The Lancet Psychiatry, both of which have a H-index of 12. These sources are followed by BMC Medical Education and Teaching of Psychology, both with a H-index of 11, indicating their strong influence in the field. The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health and Academic Psychiatry each have a H-index of 10, further demonstrating their significant contribution to Generation Z health research. Other notable sources such as American Psychologist, Journal of Professional Nursing, eClinicalMedicine, and Nurse Education Today have a H-index of 9, while other journals with a lower impact, such as the Journal of Clinical Psychology and Nursing Education Today, have an H-index of 8. These results highlight the key sources that are shaping the current landscape of Generation Z health research and their respective impact in the academic community.
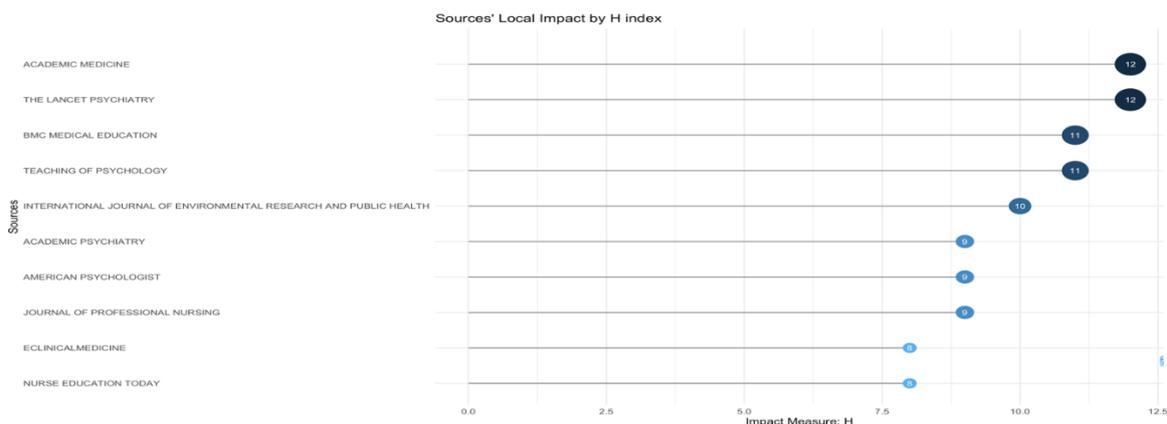

Figure 6. Journal local impact related to the topic

Most influential countries, affiliates, and productive author

Table 3 shows the distribution of health research on Generation Z by country. The United States leads the list with 1,076 publications (55.61%), followed by the United Kingdom with 193 publications (9.97%). The United States significantly contributes to the research in this area, and the United Kingdom also has a strong presence. Undefined sources represent 162 publications (8.37%), with a lower citation rate compared to the others. Australia follows with 145 publications (7.49%), showing a substantial interest in the topic. Canada ranks fifth with 133 publications (6.87%), while China has 54 publications (2.79%), but it leads in total citations, with 3,496 citations and a high 64.74 citations per publication, reflecting a significant global impact. South Africa contributes 42 publications (2.17%), and Germany has 36 publications (1.86%). Spain and the Netherlands contribute fewer publications, with 27 (1.40%) and 26 (1.34%), respectively, but still make valuable contributions in this field. This distribution indicates that countries like the United States and the United Kingdom dominate the field, while others, like China, stand out for their impact despite fewer publications. The variation in citation rates highlights the global nature of Generation Z health research, suggesting that partnerships between these countries could help bridge research gaps and amplify the global impact of this important area of study. The figure above shows the most relevant affiliations based on the number of articles published about mental health research focused on scholars, as part of the bibliometric review titled "Exploring the Current State of Mental Health Literature: A Bibliometric Review of Scholar-Focused Research and Future Research Directions." The University of California leads with 79 articles, showcasing its significant contribution to the field. Next, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine published 61 articles, reflecting its strong focus on mental health

research. The University of Oxford Medical Sciences Division follows with 55 articles, further reinforcing its role in advancing mental health studies. The University of Queensland and The University of Sydney both published 45 articles, indicating their active participation in the research. King's College London comes in with 44 articles, and University of Toronto with 42 articles, both institutions making substantial contributions. Other notable institutions include The Ohio State University, The University of Hong Kong, and University College London, with 39 and 37 articles respectively, demonstrating their important roles in the academic landscape. This distribution highlights the key academic institutions that are driving forward the research on mental health, particularly in scholar-focused contexts, and underscores the global collaboration in this field.
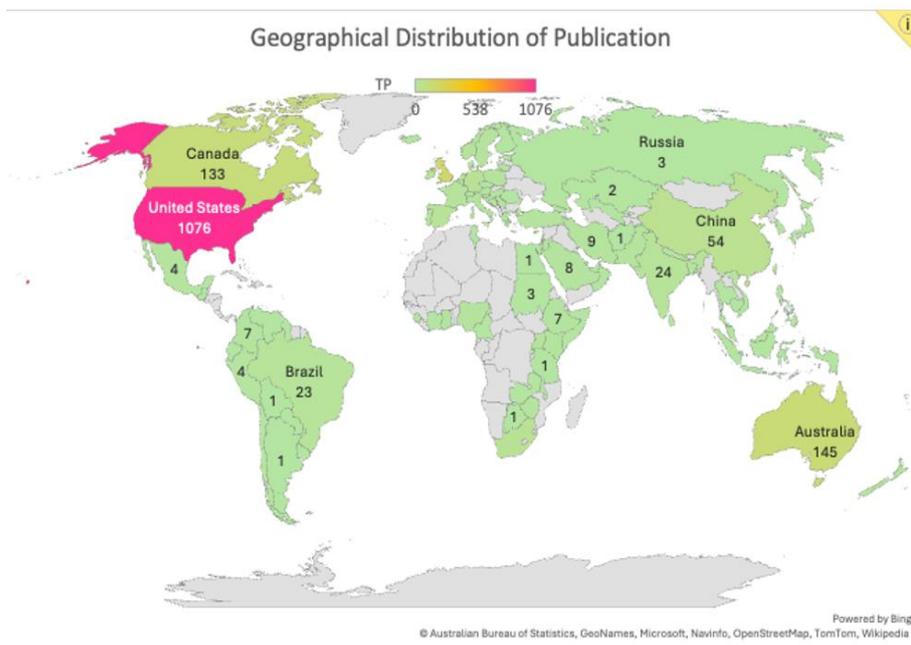
Figure 7. Most influential countries
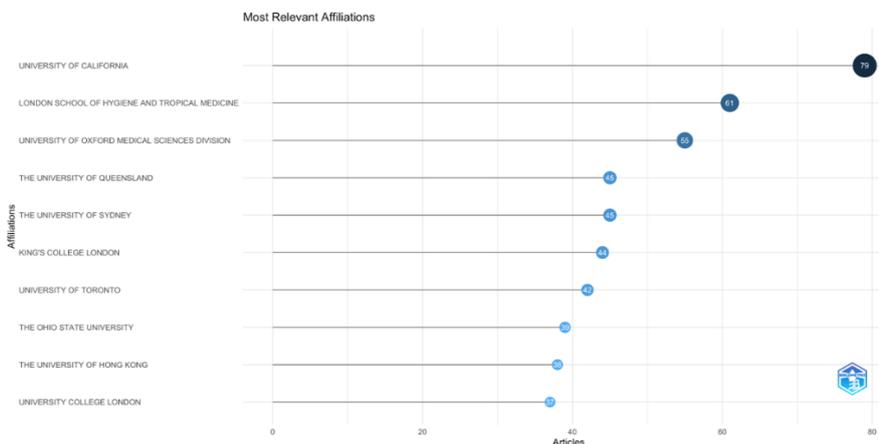
Figure 8. The top 10 Relevant Affiliations

Table 4 shows the top authors who have contributed to Generation Z health research, along with their key publications and citation impact. [No Author ID found] leads with 17 publications, making up 55.61% of the total. This indicates a strong influence in the field, although no specific author ID is provided for this contributor. Jimerson, S.R. follows with 7 publications, accounting for 9.97% of the research, showcasing his significant role in the field, while Williamson, E.G. has 5 publications. Other contributors such as Birrell, L., Bonell, C., Espelage, D.L., Evans-Lacko, S., Hill, G., and Mannix, D. each have 4 publications, making valuable contributions to the research landscape. These authors demonstrate a mix of contributions with varying citation impacts. This distribution shows the diverse range of experts contributing to the field, and underscores the importance of their work in the expanding area of Generation Z health research.
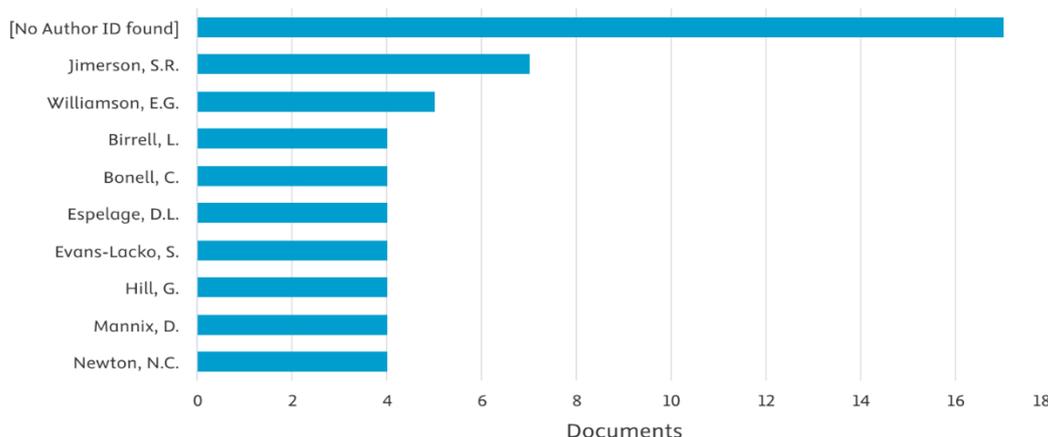
Figure 9. Most Productive Authors

Citation analysis

Several key studies have made significant contributions to the field of mental health research. Santomauro (2021) leads with 4,045 citations, reflecting the wide-reaching impact of his work, particularly with a high normalized citation rate of 77.53. West (2016) follows closely with 1,695 citations and a normalized citation rate of 34.25, focusing on psychological aspects. Lai (2019), with 1,272 citations and a normalized citation rate of 36.57, also contributes substantially to mental health research. Other important studies include Freeman (2017), Nomaguchi (2020), and Wasserman (2015), with citation counts ranging from 467 to 543, offering insights into mental health interventions, stress, and social factors. Ajzen (2004), with 457 citations, significantly advances understanding of behavioral aspects, while Bleiker (2008) and Galante (2018), with 426 and 374 citations, respectively, focus on psychological stress and coping mechanisms. Finally, Payne-Sturges (2018), with 303 citations, examines the environmental factors affecting mental health. These studies highlight the growing academic focus on mental health, showcasing diverse areas of research that contribute to understanding the complex nature of mental well-being.

Table 1. The top ten most cited documents

Paper	DOI	T C	TC/Y	Normalized TC
Santomauro, 2021.	10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02143-7	4045	809,00	77,53
West, 2016.	10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31279-X	1695	169,50	34,25
Lai, 2019.	10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30289-5	1272	181,71	36,57
Freeman, 2017.	10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30328-0	543	60,33	23,42
Nomaguchi, 2020.	10.1111/jomf.12646	526	87,67	24,57
Wasserman, 2015.	10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61213-7	467	42,45	14,57
Ajzen, 2004.	10.1177/0146167204264079	457	20,77	5,74
Bleiker, 2008.	10.1017/S0260210508007821	426	23,67	8,29
Galante, 2018.	10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30231-1	374	46,75	12,44
Payne-Sturges, 2018.	10.1177/0890117117719620	303	37,88	10,08

Note(s): TC=total citations; C/Y=average citations per years

Keyword analysis

Table 6 shows the frequency of keywords related to mental health research in the Scopus database. "Mental health" emerges as the most common keyword, appearing in 135 articles, indicating its central role in health research. "Education" follows with 56 occurrences, highlighting the importance of educational contexts in mental health research, while "Higher education" appears in 48 articles, further supporting the link between mental health and academic settings. Keywords like "educational psychology" (41), "students" (37), and "educational psychology (including vocational guidance)" (35) show the strong association between education and mental health, especially in academic and career guidance contexts. Other frequent

keywords include "COVID-19" , reflecting the pandemic's impact on mental health, and "medical education", indicating the intersection of health education and mental well-being.

Figure. 10 Top Keywords

The figure presents a keyword co-occurrence network that plots the development degree (density) against the relevance degree (centrality) of various research themes in mental health. In the Motor Themes category, located in the top-right corner, "mental health," "education," and "higher education" are central themes with high relevance and growth. These themes highlight the growing importance of mental health research in educational settings, demonstrating that this area is becoming a significant and influential part of the field. In the Basic Themes section (bottom-right), "college students," "depression," and "well-being" are key themes, foundational in understanding mental health, particularly for young adults. These topics, though essential, may not be as interdisciplinary as other themes. Moving to the Niche Themes section (top-left), keywords like "academic achievement" and "school mental health" represent more specialized areas, related to performance and mental well-being in academic contexts. While these themes are impactful, they are more specific and still developing. The Emerging or Declining Themes section (bottom-left) shows "educational psychology (including vocational guidance)", suggesting that it is either emerging or in decline in terms of research focus. Lastly, Other Themes like "medical education," "medical students," and "stigmas" are in the middle, indicating their growing relevance but with a more specific focus. Overall, this visualization demonstrates that research on mental health in educational contexts is expanding, with a focus on student well-being, depression, and the role of higher education institutions in shaping the research landscape.

Figure. 11 Thematic Maps

DISCUSSION

Educational Framework and Student Development

Cluster 1 emphasizes the integration of mental health strategies within the educational framework, which is essential for addressing the increasing mental health challenges in higher education. The role of educational psychology has expanded as researchers acknowledge its impact on student development, particularly in promoting emotional resilience. Many universities have started to incorporate mental health services directly into the curriculum to support students' psychological well-being[2]. Educational programs that offer a balance between academics and mental health are essential for fostering a more holistic student experience. Notably, universities that adopt proactive mental health policies improve not only academic outcomes but also the overall life satisfaction of their students[11]. This comprehensive approach to education highlights the growing recognition of the importance of emotional well-being in academic success.

Furthermore, the adoption of mental health services within the academic environment has seen positive results in enhancing students' ability to manage stress and thrive in a competitive educational system[12]. By integrating peer mentoring programs, counseling services, and stress management techniques, universities provide much-needed support for students, especially those facing academic and personal challenges. These systems have proven effective in mitigating the pressures of academia, providing students with the tools to handle emotional and academic stressors more effectively[13]. The expansion of mental health support within education systems not only improves students' well-being but also leads to better academic outcomes and higher retention rates in higher education.

Mental Health Challenges in Students

Cluster 2 highlights the mental health challenges faced by college students, with a particular focus on the effects of food insecurity, financial stress, and academic pressures. Food insecurity is increasingly recognized as a significant contributor to students' emotional distress, including heightened levels of depression and anxiety[14]. A study on Bangladeshi students revealed that food insecurity negatively impacts both academic performance and psychological well-being[15]. Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions that provide nutritional support alongside mental health resources, which would help alleviate the stressors that exacerbate students' mental health challenges[16]. Given the strong link between food insecurity and mental health, universities must prioritize food security initiatives to improve student outcomes.

Moreover, financial stress is another pressing issue that affects students' mental health, especially in the context of rising tuition fees and living costs[17]. Studies suggest that students experiencing significant financial strain are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression. Mental health interventions that address both financial and psychological challenges are essential for promoting well-being and academic success. Furthermore, universities can play a crucial role by offering financial aid and support programs, which not only reduce financial stress but also positively impact students' emotional health[14]. These findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach that integrates financial, academic, and mental health support for students.

Well-being and Mental Health Policy in Higher Education

Cluster 3 examines the role of mental health policies in supporting students' well-being within higher education institutions, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic intensified the mental health challenges for students, including stress, anxiety, and depression, leading universities to implement more robust mental health policies[18]. Many institutions have expanded their mental health services to include virtual counseling, wellness apps, and peer support groups, which have been critical in providing support during periods of social distancing[5]. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of institutional policies that adapt to evolving needs and focus on accessible, scalable solutions for student well-being[19].

Additionally, the integration of mental health education into university curricula is an essential strategy for promoting well-being among students. Programs designed to enhance students' mental health literacy can help them recognize signs of distress in themselves and others, encouraging early intervention and reducing the stigma associated with mental health challenges[5]. The importance of these initiatives is underscored by research showing that students who receive mental health education are more likely to seek help when needed. As universities continue to prioritize mental health, the evidence supports the need for continued investment in both preventive and responsive mental health services to safeguard students' well-being[20].

Medical Education and Mental Health in Healthcare Students

Cluster 4 focuses on medical students and the mental health challenges they face due to the rigorous nature of their education. Medical students often experience high levels of burnout, stress, and depression, which are exacerbated by the demands of their coursework, long hours, and patient interactions[21]. These students face unique mental health risks, as the stress they endure during training can carry over into their professional lives. Research suggests that medical humanities programs, which include components such as emotional intelligence training and empathy exercises, can help students develop better coping mechanisms and reduce the psychological toll of their education[22]. These programs aim to foster well-being while preparing students for the emotional demands of a healthcare career.

To address these challenges, medical schools are increasingly integrating resilience training and mental health support into their curricula[23]. Universities have adopted various strategies, including mindfulness workshops, peer support systems, and access to counseling services, to reduce burnout and support students' mental health. Studies show that students who participate in these programs report improved emotional well-being, better stress management, and a greater sense of connectedness with their peers[24]. By focusing on both the academic and emotional needs of medical students, institutions can reduce mental health issues and better prepare future healthcare professionals to care for others while maintaining their own well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the development of mental health literature among students, particularly in the context of the growing use of technology and social media. Through bibliometric analysis, it was found that, although there has been a significant increase in research on student mental health in recent years, many gaps remain that need attention. Most of the existing studies focus on the negative impacts of social media and digitalization on students' psychological well-being, as well as the rising issues of anxiety, depression, and stress due to academic and social factors. However, research related to the use of technology as a digital intervention, such as psychological therapy apps and telemedicine, still requires further investigation to ensure their effectiveness and accessibility in diverse cultural and social contexts. This study also highlights significant regional variations in the focus and approach of student mental health research, with some countries emphasizing social and cultural issues affecting mental health, while others focus more on technology-based interventions. Therefore, to address these gaps, more research is needed that takes local contexts into consideration and develops more affordable and accessible technology-based interventions for students worldwide. Furthermore, integrating mental health into higher education policies and university programs is crucial to ensure students' overall well-being. In light of these findings, this study makes an important contribution to the development of policies and practices that are more inclusive in supporting student mental health. Moving forward, developing policies that integrate psychological support with the appropriate use of technology, as well as raising awareness about the importance of mental health, will be critical in creating a healthier academic environment and supporting students' well-being globally.

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