

REVIEW

A Bibliometric Overview of Global Studies on Sexual Violence Against Children

Una visión bibliométrica de los estudios globales sobre la violencia sexual contra los niños

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence against children is any form of sexual behavior or action carried out by an adult or an older child toward a child, whether through coercion, manipulation, or threats. Worldwide studies on child sexual violence have revealed a steadily increasing trend in terms of complexity, prevalence, and worldwide attention. This study aims to trace global trends in the problem of sexual violence against children. Global research patterns on child sexual violence, especially among children in elementary school, are mapped via the bibliometric analysis approach. Bibliographic information was gathered from Scopus database. Journal articles, literature reviews, and conference proceedings were among the publications examined. Software such as VOSviewer, Bibliometrix, and CiteSpace were then used to analyze the data to assess temporal patterns, author-institution links, and the discovery of recurrent research themes. A total of 9,038 documents were selected from an initial dataset of 12 463 and analyzed using VOSviewer and Publish or Perish (PoP). While there have been fluctuations in recent years, the overall number of publications increased by 18,94 % between 2020 and 2024. Network analysis of research topics identified six distinct clusters, each encompassing interconnected themes. The most frequently addressed topics include sexual violence, violence against women, child sexual abuse, trauma from domestic violence, and pedophilia. The United States and the United Kingdom remain the top contributors, while countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh also play significant roles. Topics with potential for further research include major depressive disorder, asylum seekers, and drug use. These findings provide valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, offering opportunities to contribute to the prevention of child sexual violence and the creation of a safe and supportive environment for children.

Keywords: Sexual Violence; Children; Global Studies; Bibliometrics.

RESUMEN

La violencia sexual contra los niños es cualquier forma de conducta o acción sexual llevada a cabo por un adulto o un niño mayor hacia un niño, ya sea mediante coerción, manipulación o amenazas. Los estudios a nivel mundial sobre la violencia sexual infantil han revelado una tendencia creciente en términos de complejidad, prevalencia y atención global. Este estudio tiene como objetivo rastrear las tendencias globales del problema de la violencia sexual contra los niños. Los patrones de investigación mundial sobre la violencia sexual infantil,

especialmente entre los niños de primaria, se mapean mediante el enfoque de análisis bibliométrico. La información bibliográfica se recopiló de la base de datos Scopus. Se examinaron publicaciones como artículos de revistas, revisiones de literatura y actas de congresos. Posteriormente, se utilizó software como VOSviewer, Bibliometrix y CiteSpace para analizar los datos y evaluar los patrones temporales, los vínculos entre autores e instituciones, y el descubrimiento de temas recurrentes de investigación. Se seleccionaron un total de 9,038 documentos de un conjunto inicial de 12 463 y se analizaron utilizando VOSviewer y Publish or Perish (PoP). Aunque ha habido fluctuaciones en los últimos años, el número total de publicaciones aumentó un 18,94 % entre 2020 y 2024. El análisis de redes de temas de investigación identificó seis grupos distintos, cada uno con temas interconectados. Los temas más abordados incluyen la violencia sexual, la violencia contra la mujer, el abuso sexual infantil, el trauma por violencia doméstica y la pedofilia. Estados Unidos y el Reino Unido siguen siendo los principales contribuyentes, mientras que países como Indonesia, Pakistán y Bangladesh también desempeñan roles significativos. Los temas con potencial para investigaciones futuras incluyen el trastorno depresivo mayor, los solicitantes de asilo y el consumo de drogas. Estos hallazgos brindan información valiosa para investigadores, profesionales y responsables de políticas, ofreciendo oportunidades para contribuir a la prevención de la violencia sexual infantil y a la creación de un entorno seguro y de apoyo para los niños.

Palabras clave: Violencia sexual; Niños; Estudios globales; Bibliometría.

INTRODUCTION

A child is someone who has not yet reached the age of eighteen years, including a child who is still in the womb.⁽¹⁾ Child protection involves all activities to guarantee and protect children and their rights so that they can live, grow, develop, and participate optimally in accordance with human dignity and worth, as well as receiving protection from violence and discrimination. Children are in a position where they are physically and psychologically unable to protect themselves; therefore, the state is obligated to provide protection.^(2,3)

Philosophically, children are defined as the young generation who will become potential and resilient successors of the nation in the future. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that a child is a resident aged between 0 and 18 years.⁽⁴⁾ Throughout their lives, children are entitled to services that enhance their abilities and social lives; they also have the right to care and protection from conception until birth. Children who have received education at school should be protected by their school environment.⁽¹⁾ Children are a group that is very vulnerable to harassment and sexual violence because people always perceive them as weak or helpless and highly dependent on adults. Sexual violence against children can occur anytime and anywhere. The ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asia Tourism) states that child sexual violence is an interaction between one child and an older child, a wiser child, or an adult, such as a sibling, parent, or stranger. The child is made an object of sexual gratification by the perpetrators of violence.⁽⁵⁾

It is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the prevalence of child abuse because of underreporting and underestimation. According to a 2009 study conducted in high-income nations, between 4 % and 16 % of children experience physical abuse, and 10 % experience psycho-logical abuse annually. Prevalence estimates of child sexual abuse vary from 3 % to 17 % for boys and from 8 % to 31 % for girls, on the basis of four predetermined forms of sexual abuse.⁽⁶⁾ Child sexual abuse is a very serious global issue. According to reports from UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1 in 2 children aged 2-17 years experiencing various forms of violence each year, including sexual, physical, and emotional violence. These data also reveal that violence against children occurs not only at home but also in schools, communities, and even through the internet. This violence has long-term impacts, such as mental and physical health issues, poor educational outcomes, and significant economic losses.⁽⁷⁾

The worrying fact is that many children who are victims of sexual abuse are under 10 years old.⁽⁸⁾ The phenomenon of sexual violence against children is increasing and occurring in almost every country. The number of cases of sexual violence is increasing not only in terms of the number of cases or quantity but also in terms of quality. The worst possibility is that the perpetrators of sexual violence come from the family environment or the child's surroundings, namely, the home environment, the child's social environment, the child's school, and educational institutions.⁽⁴⁾

Sexual violence has become a very concerning issue considering the number of cases and their variations. News coverage related to child sexual abuse seems never-ending. Even cases of child sexual abuse have become a global issue that must be addressed immediately considering the traumatic impact, which is difficult to heal.⁽⁹⁾ According to the records of the women's and children's protection information system in 2021, during the last 10 months, there were 11 149 cases of violence against children. Therefore, if divided over 10 months, there are 1 000 cases per day. These data show that cases of sexual abuse against children are not trivial.⁽⁹⁾

Bibliometric analysis of this issue is very important for understanding the global landscape and research trends related to sexual violence against children. With this approach, we can identify the main research focuses, gaps in the literature, and prevention efforts that have been undertaken. Moreover, this approach helps policymakers and education practitioners design more effective strategies on the basis of scientific evidence.^(10,11)

This research aims to map global trends in the issue of sexual violence against children via a bibliometric approach. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the academic literature and the development of better policies to protect children from sexual violence. Research on these trends is also necessary to understand the patterns and main causes of sexual violence, especially amid social changes such as the in-creasing use of technology and online media, which in-crease the risk of internet-based violence. By mapping these trends globally, researchers and policymakers can identify the most vulnerable areas and create more effective prevention programs.

Moreover, the lack of detailed data on sexual violence against children in many countries, especially in developing regions, poses challenges in designing appropriate policies. This research helps fill the data gap, providing the evidence-based insights necessary to support holistic child protection.

METHOD

The bibliometric analysis approach is used to map global research trends in child sexual violence, particularly among elementary school-aged children. Biblio-graphic data were collected from the main scientific database, Scopus. The publications analyzed included journal articles, literature reviews, and conference proceedings. The data obtained were then analyzed via various software, such as VOSviewer, Publish or Perish, and Tableau. VOSviewer was used to evaluate temporal trends and relationships between authors and institutions, as well as to identify dominant research themes.

Quantitative methods such as mapping worldwide co-operation and measuring the number of publications each year are used in this analysis, along with qualitative methods that analyze abstracts and keywords to find new subjects and regions that need more focus. This process also includes data validation through the removal of du-plicate articles to ensure accuracy. More detailed geographic visualizations, such as maps displaying the distribution of publications by nation, are provided by Tableau. A thorough examination of publication trends, contributions from different countries and organizations, and shifts in the study topics related to child sexual violence is produced by utilizing this combination of software.

The first step in conducting bibliometric analysis is the systematic collection of relevant scientific publications. To ensure a comprehensive dataset, meticulous criteria and stages of data collection were employed. A combination of relevant keywords was used to gather scientific literature as part of the research conducted. The keywords used here are “sexual violence,” “child sexual abuse,” and related terms. This research focuses on scientific publications on the basis of Scopus data. The search criteria used included the following: 1) articles published in the last 5 years (2020-2024), 2) English-language journal articles, 3) articles that completed the publication process, and 4) open access articles. These keywords were used in the search of the Scopus database on November 2, 2024. At that stage, a final result of 12 463 documents was obtained. A selection was subsequently made by establishing several completeness criteria, including abstracts, keywords, and full articles. From this process, 9 038 relevant articles were obtained and used for bibliometric analysis. The following is an overview of the article selection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to identify research and co-authorship trends, research topics, and factors influencing child sexual abuse. These objectives were achieved through bibliometric analysis via VOSviewer, Publish or Perish, and Tableau software. Data were obtained from the Scopus database and exported to Mendeley. Based on the results of the bibliometric analysis, several pieces of in-formation are presented, including 1) a citation analysis of data from the PoP, 2) trends in research on child sexual violence issues over the past 5 years (2020-2024), and 3) a network of research topics related to child sexual violence. For a comprehensive understanding, the following ex-planation provides detailed insight.

Citation Data Analysis

Table 1 shows that over the past 4 years, there have been a total of 9308 articles relevant to the keywords “sexual violence” and “child sexual abuse,” with full pa-pers, abstracts, and keywords displayed in the Scopus database. The total number of citations from all the articles is 62 287, with an average number of citations per year of 15 571,75 citations and an average number of citations per paper of 6,69. The average h-index for each author is 68, with the highest number of citations being 104.

Table 1. Citation data analysis	
Publication Years	2020-2024
Citation years	4 (2020-2024)
Papers	9308
Citations	62287
Cites/year	15571,75
Cites/paper	6,69
Cites/author	20866,55
Papers/author	3680,79
Authors/paper	4,06
h-index	68
g-index	104
hl, norm	34
hl, annual	8,50
hA-index	33

Trend of Research on The Issue of Sexual Violence Against Children

Research on child sexual violence has significantly in-creased in recent years. The sharp increase in the number of studies began in 2021, with a rise of up to 24,7 % com-pared with the previous year. This reflects increasing attention to the issue of child sexual violence and efforts to mitigate its negative impact. In 2022, the number of studies reached its peak, indicating that this issue is receiving more focus in scientific research. The analysis of trends in child sexual violence over the past five years, as shown in figure 1, indicates an increase in awareness and urgency to address this issue. Many studies focus on various aspects of child sexual violence, ranging from causal factors and long-term impacts to prevention efforts. This trend indicates a stronger commitment from researchers and policymakers to seek more effective solutions in addressing child sexual violence.

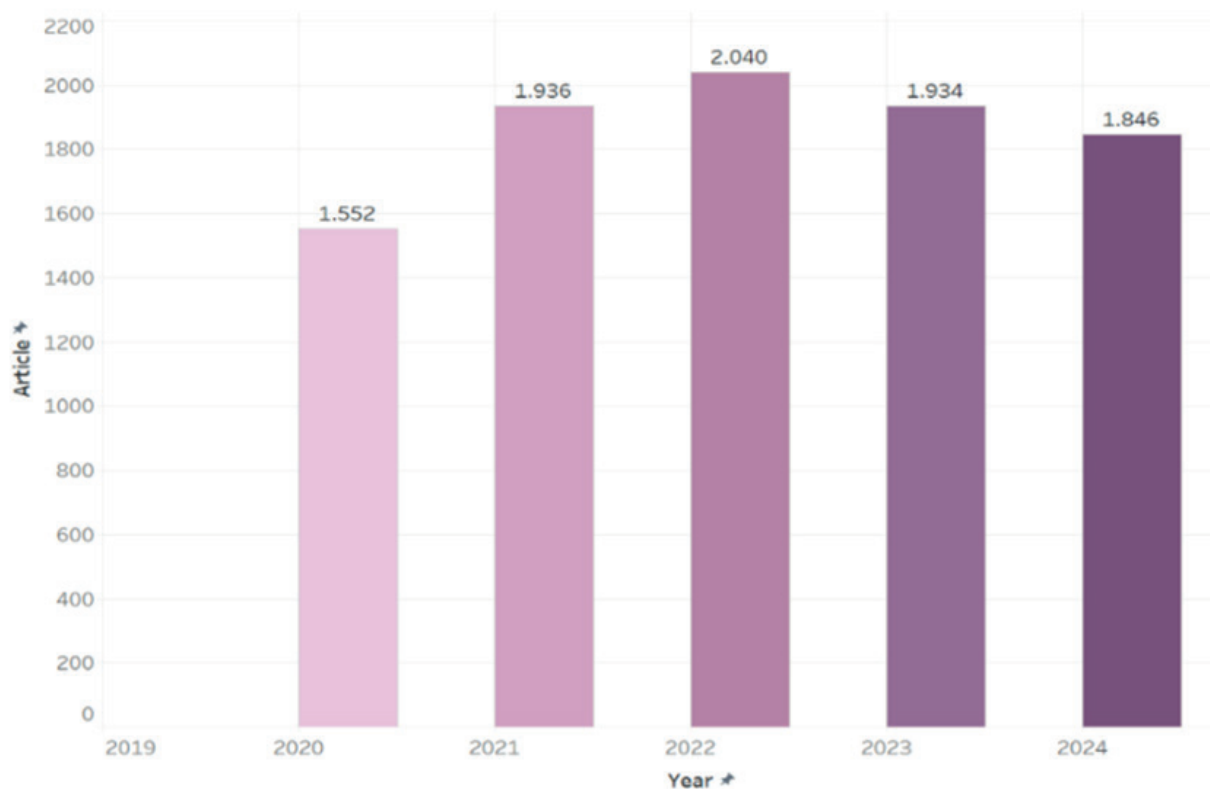


Figure 1. Trends in Research Publication on Child Sexual Violence 2020–2024

Research Topic on Sexual Violence Against Children

The network of interconnected topics was identified based on research addressing the issue of sexual

violence against children. The number of topics identified amounted to 9 308 articles from 2020 to 2024. Network visualization with keywords, as shown in figure 1, displays the issue of child sexual violence on the basis of the processed keywords.

This bibliometric clustering maps the image in detail, and the clusters provide an overview and general insights. Each circle represents frequently occurring keywords, and its size depends on the topic related to other articles. Research themes related to child sexual violence are grouped into six main clusters based on the colors that appear in the visual network, namely, green, blue, yellow, red, orange, and purple. Each color has certain characteristic similarities, which can be cross-checked through item analysis in VOSviewer.

The six groups of topics that emerge based on the color of the circles are sexual violence (green circles), female violence (blue circles), child sexual abuse (green circles), trauma (red circles), domestic violence (orange circles), and pedophilia (purple circles). Additionally, from the network visualization figure 2, the interconnections between one research issue and another are also apparent, showing which issues have been extensively studied and which are still rare, thus identifying research variables that have the potential for further investigation.⁽¹²⁾

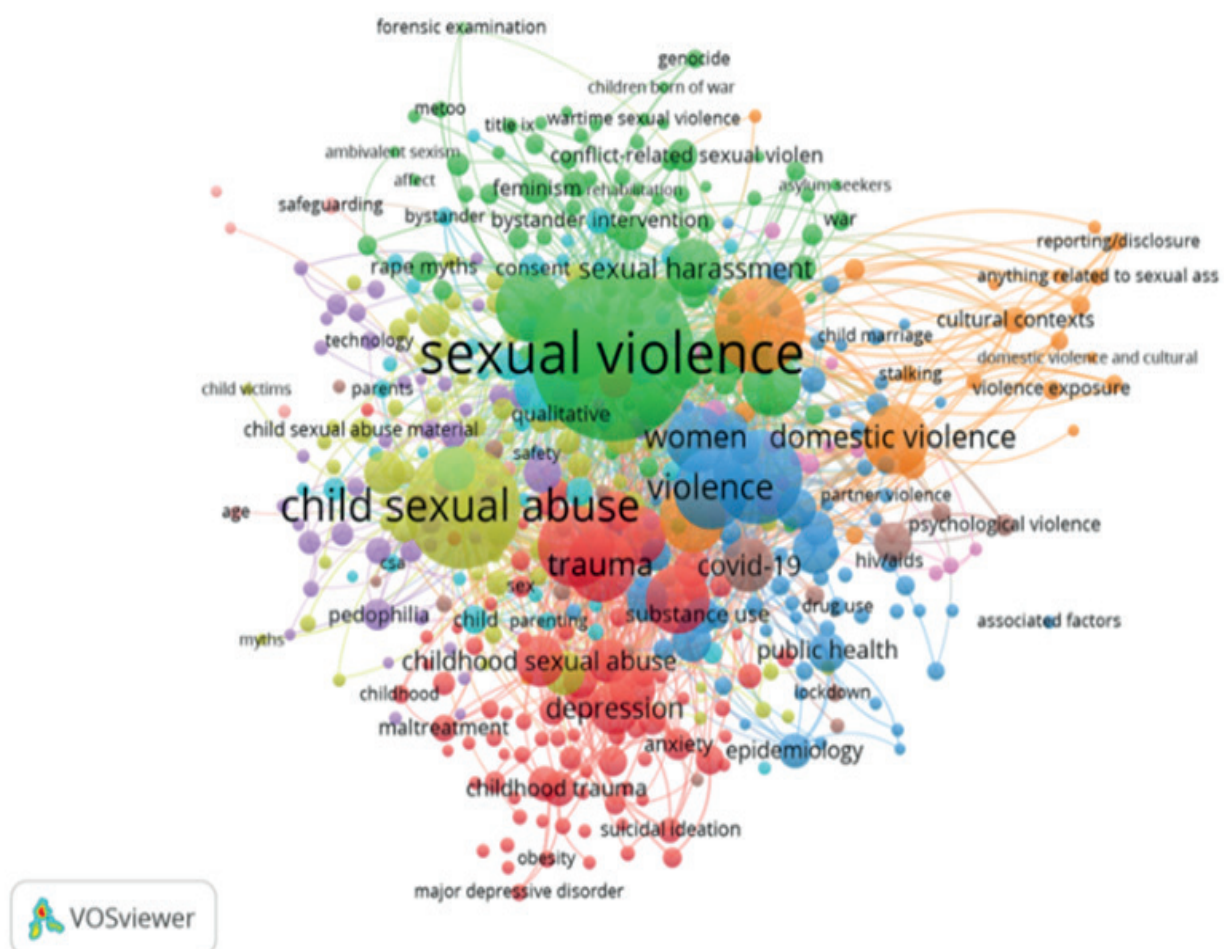


Figure 2. Trends in Research Publication on Child Sexual Violence 2020–2024

The size of the circles in figure 2 indicates that these keywords appear most frequently and are related to many other keywords.^(13,14) The most prominent topics are sexual violence, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and trauma.^(15,16,17) Small circles with distant link distances indicate that these issues still rarely appear and have a weak relationship with the main keywords, making them suitable for further validation or research.

Research Trends Over Time

Research on child sexual violence has significantly increased in recent years. The sharp increase in the number of studies began in 2021, with a rise of up to 24,7 % compared with the previous year. This reflects increasing attention to the issue of child sexual violence and efforts to mitigate its negative impact. In 2022,

the number of studies reached its peak, indicating that this issue is receiving more focus in scientific research.

The analysis of trends in child sexual violence over the past five years, as shown in figure 3, indicates an increase in awareness and urgency to address this issue. Many studies focus on various aspects of child sexual violence, ranging from causal factors and long-term impacts to prevention efforts. This trend indicates a stronger commitment from researchers and policymakers to seek more effective solutions in addressing child sexual violence.

Based on the overlay visualization image from VOSviewer, the yellow circles highlight the latest research topics that are currently gaining attention compared with previously researched topics. This yellow color represents the current research trends that are relevant to global needs and concerns. In the context of the issue of sexual violence against elementary school children, recent research has focused largely on the relationships with major depressive disorder, child abuse material, asylum seekers,^(18,19) and patterns of drug use.⁽²⁰⁾ This visualization shows that the approach to this issue is becoming more specific and encompasses various social, psychological, and even political aspects, indicating a more comprehensive effort to understand its impacts and causes.^(21,22)

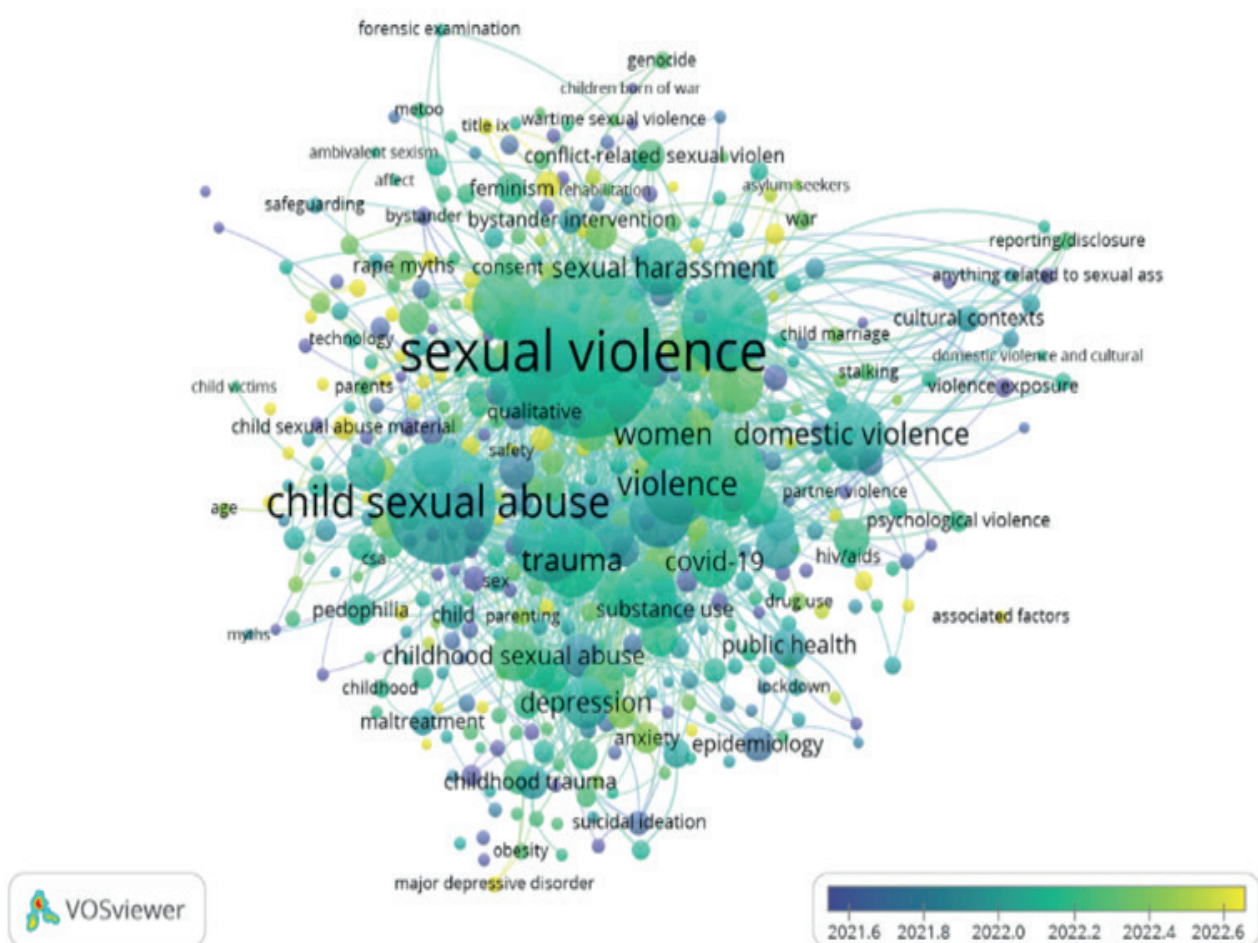


Figure 3. Overlay visualization of research topics

Research on child sexual violence is complex, with a consistent annual increase in the number of publications. This not only reflects the increasing attention of re-searchers toward this issue but also the expanding diversification of topics. For example, the connection between child sexual violence and mental disorders such as major depressive disorder or the impact on vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers has become a new focus of exploration. In this visualization, it appears that sexual violence is no longer seen merely as an individual problem but rather as part of a structural issue influenced by various social and economic factors. The combination of colors that appear on the visual map also emphasizes that this issue involves multiple disciplines, making it relevant to study them from various perspectives.

Total Publications by Country

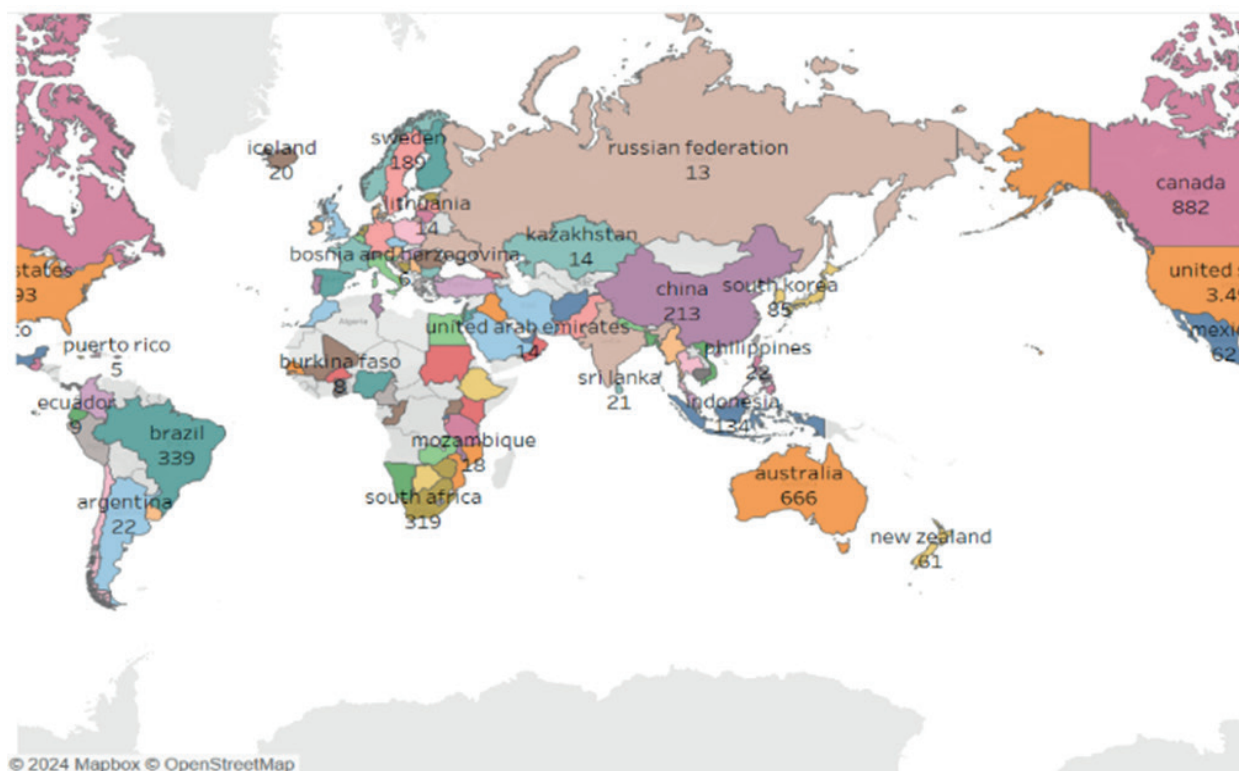


Figure 4. Geographic distribution of published research on child sexual violence worldwide

The analysis of the geographical distribution of child sexual violence publications in figure 4 shows the most active countries in research in this field. The geographical analysis of publications reveals interesting patterns in global research contributions.⁽²³⁾ The United States leads with 3 492 publications, followed by the United Kingdom with 1 166 publications and Canada with 882 publications. This shows the dominance of developed countries in publications related to the issue of child sexual violence. Indonesia ranks 20th with 134 publications. The significant contributions from low-income countries such as Pakistan (81 publications), Bangladesh (53 publications), and Zambia (24 publications) in the list reflect the substantial involvement of countries affected by child sexual violence. This pattern can be compared with trends re-ported in other global health studies.^(24,25)

Figure 5 shows the international research collaboration network on child sexual violence. This graph shows that the United States and England emerge as the main centers in this research network, as indicated by the larger node sizes. These findings indicate that both countries have a significant number of publications and collaborations in child sexual violence research. This network shows ex-tensive and complex collaborations between various countries, with connecting lines indicating research collaborations.⁽²⁶⁾

The collaboration pattern in this image shows the involvement of countries from various continents, such as America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.^(27,28) Developing countries such as Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, and Indonesia also play important roles in this network, which may reflect the prevalence of sexual violence issues in these countries and collaborative research efforts to address this problem.⁽²⁹⁾ The pattern of country contributions to child sexual violence research reflects broader dynamics in global health research.⁽³⁰⁾

As shown in the following bibliometric analysis of publications. There is a significant imbalance between developed and developing countries in terms of research outcomes, even though the health issues being studied are more common in developing countries. Analysis of relationships within the collaborative network reveals several interesting collaboration groups. The image above shows that the United States has the largest circle compared with other countries.^(31,32) This indicates that the United States is the country with the highest level of cooperation with other countries.⁽³³⁾ Compared with other countries, the United States is the most influential regarding the issue of child sexual violence in the world because it has the highest number of links and citations.

Author Collaboration Networks in Research

The visualization in the image shows the collaboration network among authors in research on child sexual abuse. The graph shows a large group representing a group of researchers who frequently collaborate. The most connected large group is marked with circles of a larger scale than other circles, namely, Orchowski, Lindsay M (red circle), Edwards, Katie M (green circle), Hebert, Martine (yellow circle), Katz, Carmit (pink circle).^(34,35,36) These findings indicate that they are the leading re-searchers in the field with extensive collaborative

net-works. Each with their own network of collaborators. The collaboration pattern shows that several large research groups are interconnected.⁽³⁷⁾

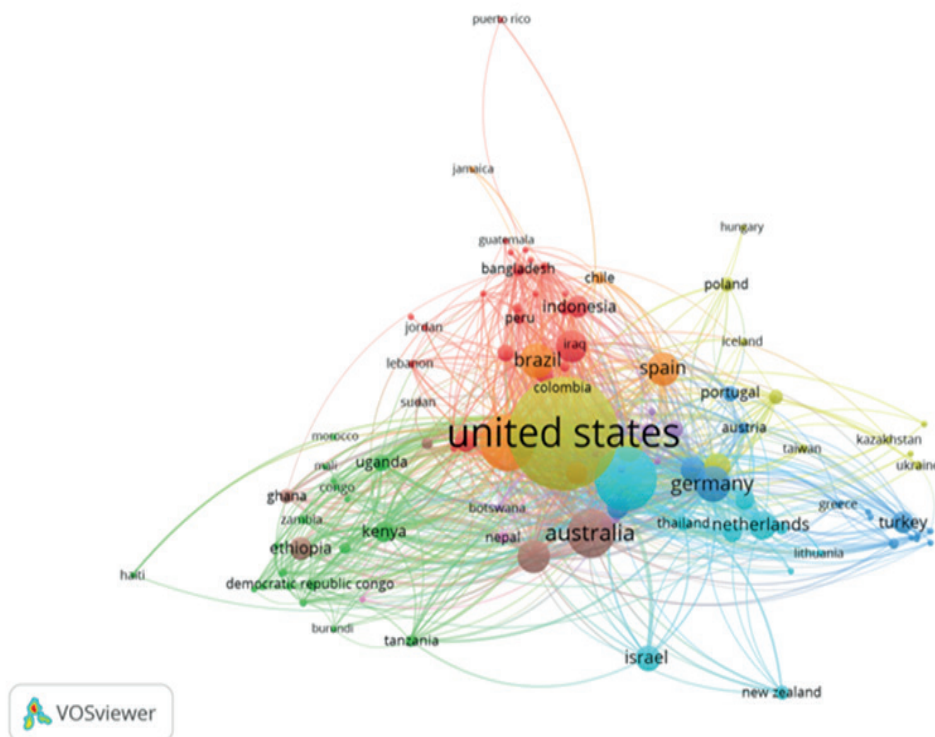


Figure 5. Global collaboration network in research on the issue of child sexual violence

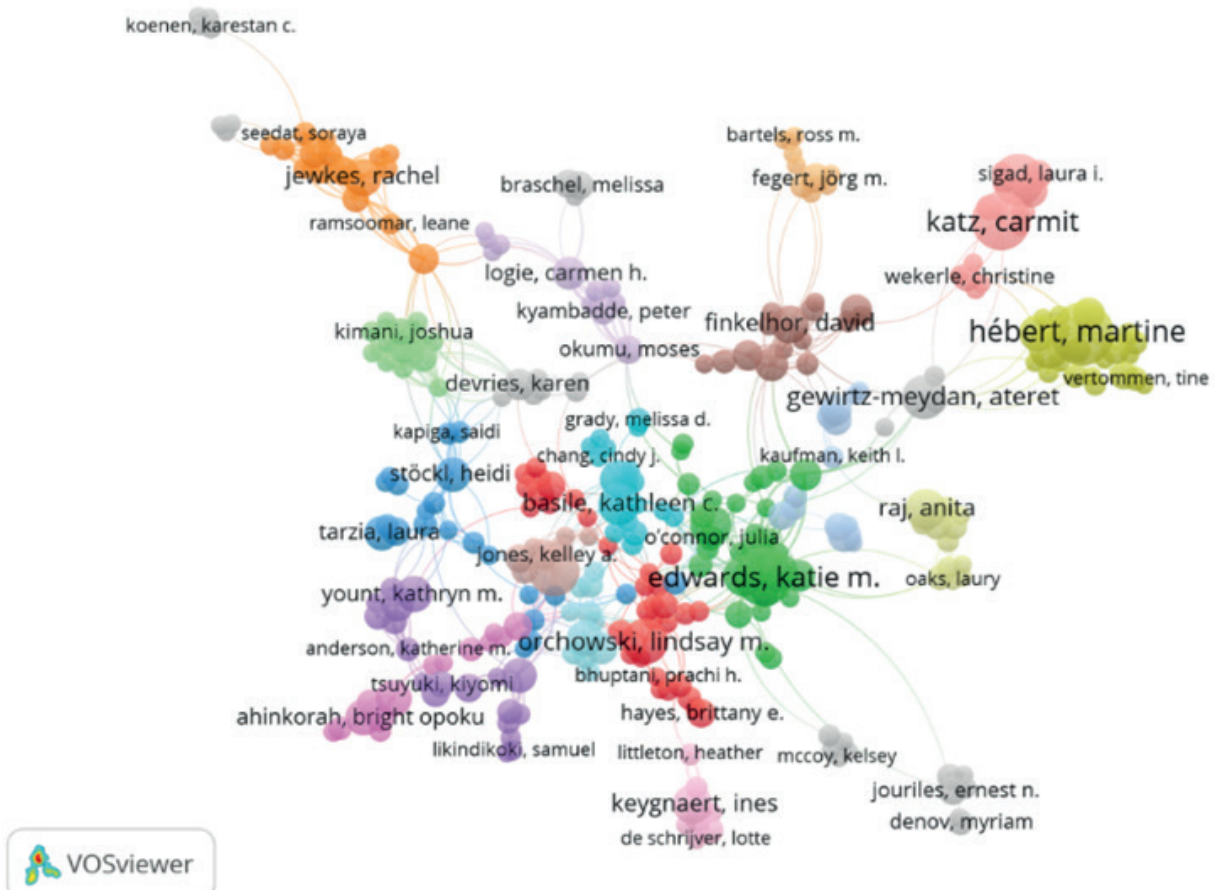


Figure 6. Author collaboration networks in research

Total Publications by Most Influential Journal

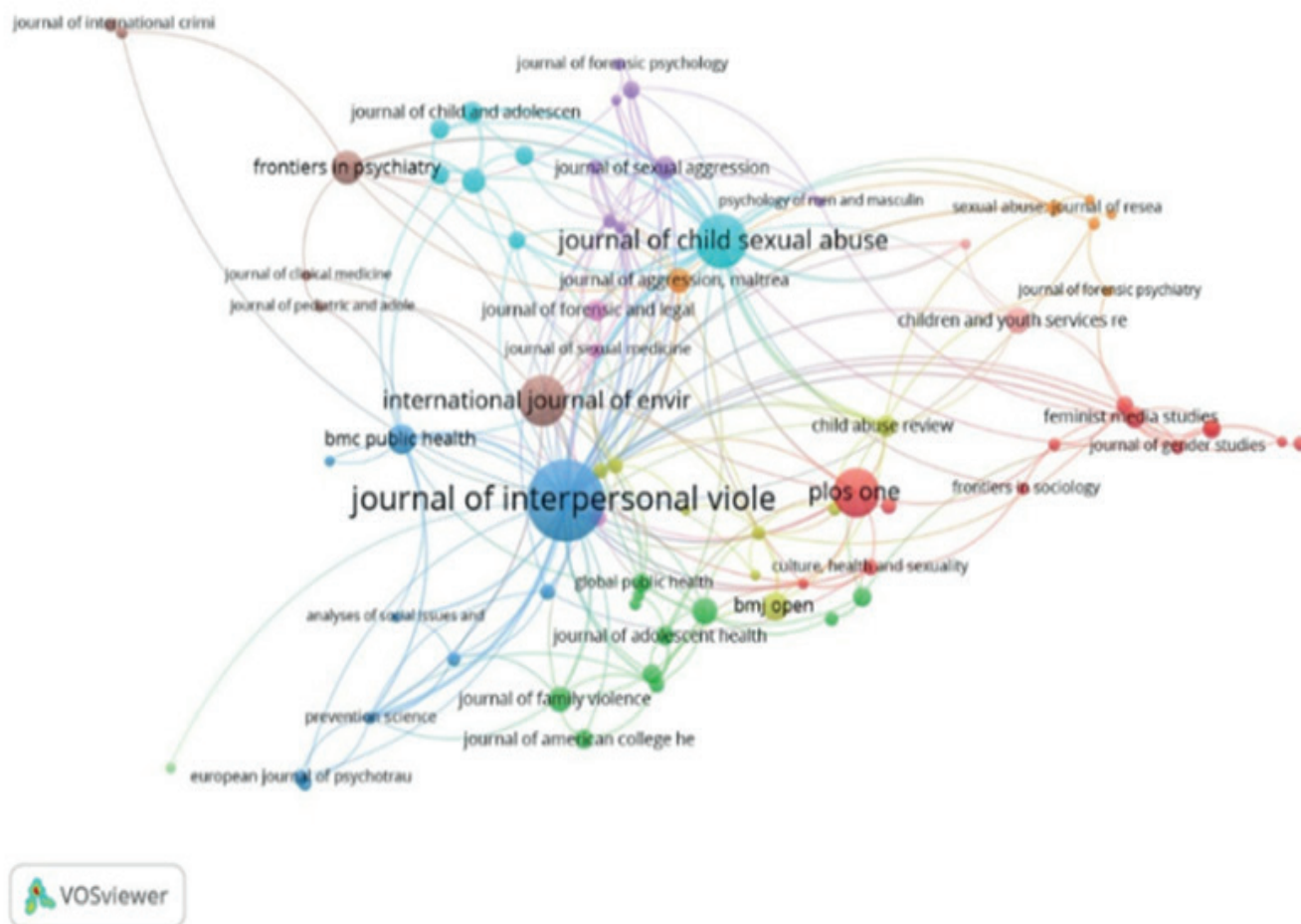


Figure 7. Total publications by most influential journal

The visualization image displays a publication network focusing on research related to child sexual violence. The map depicts the main journals published in this field. Each circle represents a journal, where the size of the circle reflects the number of publications produced. The color of each circle indicates a group or cluster of journals that have a close relationship on the basis of citation patterns or collaboration in research. Journals in the same cluster tend to discuss similar topics or have interrelated references.

The relationships between circles, represented by connecting lines, illustrate the strength of the relationships or the intensity of collaboration between journals. Thus, this map shows not only the number of publications but also the patterns of thematic and collaborative links in research on child sexual violence.

The lines between the circles represent the relationships between journals, with thicker lines indicating closer collaborative relationships.^(38,39) Different colors indicate different groups, and different colored connections represent collaborations between different journals. Based on the visualization of the image reveals that the Journal of Interpersonal Violence (blue circle) is the publisher that has published the most articles, followed by PLOS ONE (red circle) and the Journal of Child Abuse (turquoise circle).^(40,41)

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted on 9,038 articles obtained from the Scopus database over the past 4 years. (2020-2024). The main conclusions from this biblio-metric analysis are as follows: 1) Research on the issue of child sexual violence has increased by approximately 24,7 % since 2020. Overall, the number of publications during the period from 2020-2024 shows a total increase of 18,94 %, although there have been fluctuations in the last few years. 2) There are topics that are most frequently discussed, namely, sexual violence, woman violence, child sexual abuse, domestic violence trauma, and pedophilia. Research has always evolved over time, discussing topics such as major depressive disorder, child abuse material, asylum seekers, and drug use. The United States has become a country with a high level of cooperation with other countries and is the most influential country regarding the issue of child sexual abuse in the world. Although the United States and the United Kingdom continue to lead in terms of the number of publications, this reflects the dominance of developed countries

in research related to child sexual violence. Indonesia ranks 20th, contributing a total of 134 publications. The network of collaborating authors who have published the most articles includes Orchowski, Lindsay M., Edwards, Katie M., Hebert, Martine, Katz, and Carmit (pink circles). The Journal of Interpersonal Violence (blue circle) is the publisher that has published the most articles.

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