



Review Article

# Mapping the Landscape of Spiritual Well-Being: A Bibliometric Analysis of Web of Science Publications

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine the evolution of the spiritual well-being literature between 1978 and 2025 through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 6,383 academic papers published in the Web of Science database. The research employed performance analysis, conceptual mapping, concurrency and co-citation networks, historiography, and thematic trend analyses. The findings indicate that the number of publications increased rapidly, particularly after 2010 and during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching a peak in 2024. The Journal of Religion & Health, Psycho-Oncology, and Psychology of Religion and Spirituality stood out as the most productive journals, with Duke, Emory, and Boston universities providing the most contributions. The analyses revealed that Kenneth I. Pargament, Harold G. Koenig, and Crystal L. Park, with their high citation impact, formed the intellectual foundation of the field. Thematic analyses revealed that this concept has evolved from its historical clinical and religious contexts to its current psychosocial, cultural, and interdisciplinary dimensions. Findings reveal that spiritual well-being is a multidimensional construct that increases individual psychological balance, life satisfaction, and psychological resilience while reducing social adaptation and occupational burnout.

## Keywords:

Spiritual well-being • Web of Science • bibliometric mapping • thematic trends

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## Introduction

Spiritual well-being is by conceptualizing it as the attainment of meaning and purpose in people's lives, maintaining a sense of hope, and the pursuit of self-actualization through experiences of transcendence (Elkady, 2019; Ellison, 1983; Haugan, 2014). According to Moberg (1984), this concept is not limited to religious rituals; it can also be directly related to the search for existential meaning, harmony with nature, inner peace, and an individual's love of life. The World Health Organization's (2022) definition of mental health as an integral part of general health has made the spiritual dimension more visible in the psychology and health literature. In particular, the positive psychology approach has explored the relationships between spiritual well-being and concepts such as happiness, hope, and optimism, which are central to human life (Seligman, 2011). In this regard, Ellison's (1983) definition addresses spiritual well-being in its vertical dimensions, as the relationship with God, and its horizontal dimensions, as the relationship with the environment and oneself. In this regard, one of the most significant contributions to measuring spiritual well-being is the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ekşi & Kardaş, 2017), which provides robust psychometric findings in the field with its dimensions of transcendence, harmony with nature, and anomie. Similarly, the measurement tool adapted by Apak (2025) for healthcare professionals demonstrated that the concept is also valid at the professional level in finding meaning in work life and meeting spiritual needs.

Studies conducted in different countries, such as Türkiye, have demonstrated that spiritual well-being is important in supporting psychological health, emotional resilience, and life satisfaction. Various studies have identified spiritual well-being as a protective factor that strengthens individuals' internal balance, particularly when coping with complex emotional situations or life challenges. In this context, a study by Tunç and Ümmet (2024) found that it partially mediates life satisfaction and general psychological health, demonstrating its role in regulating emotional well-being and coping mechanisms. Other studies have highlighted how spiritual practices such as forgiveness, mindfulness, prayer, or reflective meaning-making strengthen individuals' coping skills, particularly in therapeutic or counseling contexts (Koç, 2024). Furthermore, when combined with strong social support systems, spiritual well-being can strengthen a sense of existential purpose and protect against emotional decline during times of crisis, such as chronic illness or trauma (Novakov, 2024).

Beyond findings, specific to a region like Türkiye, international literature has emphasized the multidimensional nature of spiritual well-being, with studies demonstrating its importance in both religious and secular settings (Fisher, 2010; Gomez & Fisher, 2003; Hill, 2000; Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 1997; Unterrainer et al., 2014). These studies frame spiritual well-being as a construct encompassing values, hope, belonging, psychological resilience, and transcendence, reflecting individual and col-

lective dimensions of human experience. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that perspectives on spiritual well-being vary across cultural contexts, particularly between Eastern and Western societies. In Western psychology, spiritual well-being is generally approached through existential psychology, object relations, and positive psychology, emphasizing individual purpose, psychological flexibility, and self-actualization (Nagai, 2007). In contrast, Eastern approaches, rooted in Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism traditions, emphasize collective harmony, self-transcendence, and interconnectedness with nature and community (Hyland, 2022). These cultural differences can be reflected in how spiritual experiences are conceptualized. Comparative studies of Eastern and Western approaches demonstrate that integrating both perspectives enriches our understanding of spiritual well-being as a culturally sensitive and context-dependent construct (Weathers, 2018). Recent studies in the literature have further emphasized its importance in maintaining inner peace, promoting social harmony, and developing meaning in life, especially in rapidly changing or stressful environments (Edis & Bal, 2024; Taş & Uğurlu, 2025). Therefore, it can be said that spiritual well-being is increasingly being considered a fundamental variable in both the health and education (Apak, 2025). In general, it can be said that spiritual well-being constitutes a holistic structure that nourishes individuals' internal psychological structure and supports social integration and societal resilience.

### **Psychological Health and Its Relationship with Well-Being**

Spiritual well-being is one of the most critical internal resources supporting psychological health and increasing life satisfaction (Hashemian & Khademi, 2015; Tunç & Ümmet, 2024; Zubairi & Sawari, 2018). Aslani et al. (2018) and Hill (2000) found in various studies that this state of well-being is strongly associated with positive emotions, hope, meaning, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, in a study with breast cancer patients, Novakov (2024) found that spiritual well-being strengthens individuals' sense of purpose and hope through social support, which in turn increases psychological resilience and reduces the negative effects of the disease experience. Another similar study in the literature that the well-being of pregnant women was positively associated with life satisfaction and psychological resilience. In contrast, negative emotions and stress were associated with lower levels of spiritual well-being (Edis & Bal, 2024). Another study by Gomez and Fisher (2003) confirmed that spiritual well-being functions as a protective factor at different stages of life. A study conducted on university students determined that spiritual well-being is negatively correlated with digital game addiction and that high levels of spiritual well-being serve as a buffer against addictions (Taş & Uğurlu, 2025). Similarly, research shows that behavioral or chemical addictions, such as social media addiction and substance abuse, are inversely proportional to spiritual well-being (Braun et al., 2016; Dermatis & Galanter, 2016; Wood et al., 2016). Therefore, based on studies in the literature, it

can be argued that spiritual well-being is a powerful internal mechanism that supports individuals' psychological health and helps them avoid risky behaviors.

At this point, focusing on the academic distinction between spiritual well-being and religiosity will prevent potential conceptual conflicts. While religiosity often encompasses institutional practices, doctrines, and religious affiliation, spiritual well-being considers a broader and more personal search for meaning, connection, and transcendence beyond formal religion (Fisher, 2010; Pegoraro, 2022). This distinction allows for overarching frameworks applicable to religious and secular communities and makes spiritual well-being a versatile construct for psychological research and intervention. Psychological approaches—particularly positive psychology—have contributed significantly to the rise of research on spiritual well-being by emphasizing strengths such as hope, meaning, and self-transcendence (Pargament, 2007; Seligman, 2011). Therapies based on acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based living often integrate spiritual elements, demonstrating the psychological benefits of spiritual well-being in clinical and counseling settings. This integration can support long-term resilience and well-being across life domains. The World Health Organization has also emphasized the importance of spirituality, recommending that spiritual well-being be considered the fourth dimension of health, alongside physical, mental, and social well-being (Chirico, 2016). This recognition highlights the importance of considering spiritual dimensions in mental health services and public health policies. A widely accepted theoretical model in this field is Fisher's Four Domains Model, which defines spiritual well-being through four fundamental relationships: personal (with oneself), social (with others), environmental (with nature), and transcendent (with a higher power or ultimate concern) (Fisher, 2011). This model highlights the importance of a holistic, multidimensional understanding of spiritual well-being applicable across cultures and belief systems.

This multidimensional structure not only supports individual psychological balance but can also positively influence the relationships individuals establish with their social environment and their social functioning. A study conducted by Apak (2025) with healthcare workers found that spiritual well-being facilitates finding meaning in work life and has a burnout-reducing effect. The findings of Ramaswamy et al. (2023) suggest that spiritual resources such as hope, resilience, and meaning play a decisive role in an individual's psychological adaptation process when faced with stressful life events. Koç's (2024) study in counseling emphasizes that spiritual well-being strengthens clients' coping skills, particularly supporting feelings such as hope and life meaning. Pargament (2007) states that spiritual well-being increases individuals' psychological resilience under challenging experiences such as crisis, trauma, and loss. Furthermore, research shows that this construct reduces levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Ando et al., 2010; Walsh et al., 2017) and is pos-

itively associated with psychological flexibility, social support, and hope (Ekşi & Kardaş, 2017; Gonzalez-Sanguino et al., 2020). The World Health Organization's (2022) definition of mental health is not merely the absence of illness but also the ability of individuals to realize their potential and contribute to society. It also points to the importance of spiritual well-being at the societal level. In this context, spiritual well-being is considered a practical internal resource that increases individuals' life satisfaction and psychological resilience while reducing the risk of addiction (Cotton et al., 1999; Keyes, 2002; Lépine & Briley, 2011; Unterrainer et al., 2010). In general, spiritual well-being is a multidimensional internal resource that increases an individual's psychological resilience, reduces stress and depression, strengthens social relationships, and supports social functioning. It is a critical state of well-being at individual and societal levels.

### **The Present Study**

Previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses have primarily focused on clinical outcomes or specific populations. For example, Bai and Lazenby (2015) systematically examined spiritual well-being and its relationship with quality of life in adult cancer patients. Gonçalves et al. (2015) examined the effectiveness of spiritual and religious interventions on mental health outcomes. Similarly, Garssen et al. (2021) presented a comprehensive meta-analysis of longitudinal studies examining religious/spiritual factors and mental health. However, despite this concept having an interdisciplinary nature, especially in the literature of psychology, psychiatry, health, and social sciences, it can be said that it has not yet been comprehensively addressed in terms of its conceptual framework, methodological approaches, and application areas. Studies examining the effects of spiritual well-being at the individual (psychological health, life satisfaction, resilience to addictions), occupational (burnout and job satisfaction), and social (social connectedness, production of meaning) levels are increasing; However, these studies are presented in a thematically dispersed manner, and a comprehensive mapping of the field is still lacking (Edis & Bal, 2024; Taş & Uğurlu, 2025; Yiğit & Çakmak, 2024). , unlike previous research, this study offers a macro-level, data-driven bibliometric analysis that reveals the field's historical, conceptual, and intellectual structure over the last fifty years. Despite the rapid increase in publications in the field, no comprehensive bibliometric study systematically analyzes this production's historical, philosophical, and thematic development. This necessitates a qualified analysis that will reveal the developmental trends of the concept, its leading researchers, interdisciplinary collaborations, and future thematic developments. In this context, this study aimed to fill this gap by analyzing 6,383 documents published in the Web of Science database between 1978 and 2025 using bibliometric mapping techniques to reveal the structural, conceptual, and intellectual dimensions of the spiritual well-being literature. Using analyses such as conceptual

clustering, co-citation analysis, historical mapping, and author collaborations, the study aimed to systematically organize the conceptual fragmentation in the field by revealing the intellectual anatomy of the literature and to provide researchers with a theoretical and practical framework for the future. Furthermore, this study generates interdisciplinary knowledge by showing how spiritual well-being is systematically addressed in application areas such as health, education, and psychological counseling (Peteet & Amonoo, 2023; Riba et al., 2019). Based on the current findings, several research gaps were identified. This bibliometric analysis is a fundamental reference for researchers to identify underexplored areas and design interdisciplinary, culturally sensitive, and methodologically innovative studies in the field. The research questions are defined as follows.

1. What has been the distribution of scientific output and publication trends concerning the concept of spiritual well-being over the years?
2. Who are the leading authors, institutions, and countries contributing to the field's scientific output?
3. What are the prominent conceptual themes, keyword clusters, and trends in the spiritual well-being literature?
4. How is the literature structured regarding common citation networks and author collaborations?
5. In an interdisciplinary context, how is the contribution of spiritual well-being to application areas such as health, education, and counseling distributed?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study used bibliometric analysis to comprehensively and systematically evaluate scientific output in spiritual well-being. Bibliometric analysis is an effective method for uncovering trends in interdisciplinary literature because it allows for a detailed examination of a research field's structural and conceptual dimensions. This analysis method allows for the examination of publication trends related to the relevant concept, leading authors and institutions, international collaboration networks, and thematic changes over the years (Cobo et al., 2011; Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

### **Procedure**

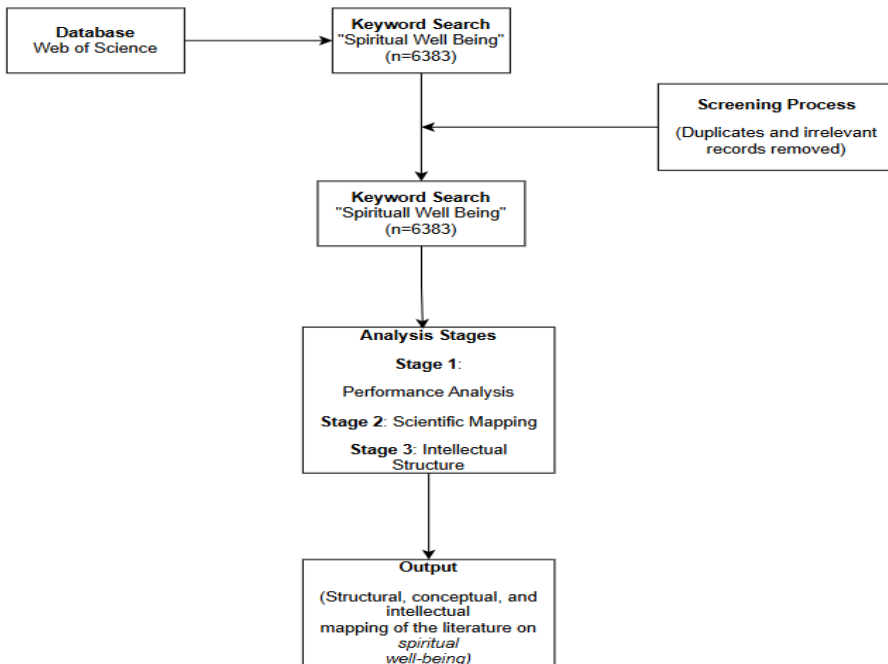
Before starting the research, four basic criteria were considered when determining the studies to be included in the analysis: (1) the study's focus on spiritual well-being,

publication in peer-reviewed sources, (2) availability in the Web of Science (WoS) database, (3) publication between 1978 and 2025, and (4) direct relevance to the research topic. Although the WoS database was not used as an inclusion criterion, it was selected as a data source due to its broad interdisciplinary scope, high citation reliability, and frequent use in bibliometric research (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021). In this context, a comprehensive search was conducted in WoS using the keyword “spiritual well-being,” eliminating irrelevant or duplicate records, and only publications meeting the specified criteria were included in the analysis.

### Data Collection Process

The dataset examined in this study was obtained from the Web of Science (WoS). Data were retrieved on August 28, 2025, dated after this date were excluded. The keyword “spiritual well-being” was used in the WoS search process, and publications covering 1978–2025 were included in the database. This keyword was chosen to ensure conceptual consistency throughout the dataset because it is the most widely accepted and directly relevant term in the literature. However, this decision also represents a methodological limitation. Related terms such as “spiritual health,” “spiritual well-being,” or “existential well-being” were not included in the search strategy. These terms

**Figure 1.**  
*Research flow diagram*



often occur in different disciplinary contexts and may refer to overlapping or closely aligned constructs. The search resulted in 6,383 academic studies. Duplicate or irrelevant entries were carefully eliminated, and only publications that met the specified criteria were included in the analysis. This provided a comprehensive assessment of the development of the literature in the field of spiritual well-being over a broad time period. The flow chart of this process is presented in Figure 1 below.

The bibliometric characteristics of the obtained studies were examined in different dimensions. In this context, trends in publication output by year, the most productive authors and leading institutions, international collaboration networks, prominent journals, and the most cited publications were analyzed. Furthermore, the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of spiritual well-being have been revealed through co-citation analyses, thematic maps, historiography, and trending topics by year. Thus, the scientific orientations of the field, prominent research centers, and potential future research topics have been systematically visualized. General information about the data used is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.**

*Main Information*

<i>Description</i>	<i>Results</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Results</i>
<i>Main Information About Data</i>		<i>Document Types</i>	
Timespan	1978:2025	Letter	18
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	2149	Letter Early Access	2
Documents	6383	Meeting Abstract	125
Document Average Age	7.42	Note	13
Average citations per doc	20.13	Proceedings Paper	124
<i>Document Contents</i>		Correction	14
Keywords Plus (ID)	5390	Review	443
Author's Keywords (DE)	11.240	Review: Book Chapter	3
<i>Authors</i>		Review: Early Access	18
Authors	21714	Review: Retracted Publication	1
<i>Authors Collaboration</i>		Article; Early Access	221
Single-authored docs	1.332	Article; Proceedings Paper	68
Co-Authors per Doc	4.23	Article: Retracted Publication	4
International co-authorships %	17.06	Book	1
<i>Document Types</i>		Book Review	18
Article	5185	Editorial Material	53
Article; Book Chapter	77	Editorial Material; Book Chapter	4

The data presented in Table 1 comprehensively outline the fundamental characteristics of the bibliometric dataset in the field of spiritual well-being. A total of 6,383 documents published between 1978 and 2025 appear in 2,149 different sources, with an average of 7.42 years and an average number of citations per document of 20.13. The publications examined used 5,390 Keywords Plus and 11,240 author keywords, with a total of 21,714 different authors contributing. Author collaboration indicators show 1,332 single-author documents, with an average of 4.23 co-authors per article

and an international co-authorship rate of 17.06%. Regarding document type distribution, 5,185 were articles, 443 were reviews, 125 were conference abstracts, and 124 were conference papers. Furthermore, contributions in various other types, such as editorial materials, book chapters, letters, and book reviews, are also included, reflecting the diversity of publications in the field. These findings reveal that academic production in spiritual well-being is increasing in scope and level of collaboration.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data obtained in the study was performed using Bibliometrix (R-package), which is run through R software and its graphical interface, Biblioshiny. These software packages are powerful tools widely preferred internationally for managing and visualizing bibliometric data, allowing researchers to systematically examine large data sets (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis process was structured in three stages. In the first stage, raw data from the Web of Science (WoS) database were converted into a processable BibTeX format. In this context, data cleaning was performed to remove duplicate or off-topic records, and only publications directly related to the theme of spiritual well-being were included in the analysis set. In this process, inclusion criteria were based on whether the publication contained a clear conceptual, empirical, or theoretical focus on spiritual well-being as defined in the core literature (e.g., Ellison, Pargament, Fisher). Studies that used the term peripherally, lacked focus on spiritual well-being as a central construct, or referred only tangentially to spirituality without a well-being component were excluded. Duplicate entries were identified and eliminated using automated filtering and manual review of titles, abstracts, and metadata. This multi-stage screening process aimed to ensure thematic accuracy and dataset integrity. In addition, bibliographic metadata such as publication year, author name, country, institution, journal, and citation information were standardized. In the second stage, performance analysis was applied. In this stage, fundamental productivity indicators such as changes in publication output over the years, the most productive authors, institutions, countries, the most publishing journals, document types, and average citation counts were calculated. The performance analysis provided descriptive findings about the scientific volume of the field and its development trends over time. Scientific mapping techniques were used in the third stage. In this context, author collaboration networks, inter-country co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrence analyses were examined to determine conceptual structures, thematic mapping, and the temporal development of trending topics. Furthermore, co-citation and historiography analyses were applied to reveal the field's intellectual structure and historical development lines (Cobo et al., 2011; Zupic & Čater, 2015). As a result, the comprehensive application of performance analysis and scientific mapping methods has enabled scientific production in the field of spiritual well-being to be detailed in terms of its quantitative aspects and its intellectual, thematic, and collaborative dimensions. This approach allows us to un-

derstand both the historical development of the field and its future directions (Donthu et al., 2021). In addition, trend topic analysis was used to identify the most frequently used concepts by year and time of entry into the literature. Thematic map analysis was used to divide the concepts into four categories according to their level of development and importance in the field: “core themes,” “driving themes,” “niche themes,” and “declining themes.” Historical citation networks (historical writing) were used to identify landmark studies and authors in the development of the field. The analyses were performed using the `biblioAnalysis()`, `networkPlot()`, `thematicMap()`, `trendTopics()`, `histNetwork()`, and `conceptual Structure()` functions of the Bibliometrix package.

## Results

### *Distribution of studies by publication year and journal*

The findings of the analysis conducted to determine the annual scientific productivity of the studies are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**  
*Annual Scientific Production*

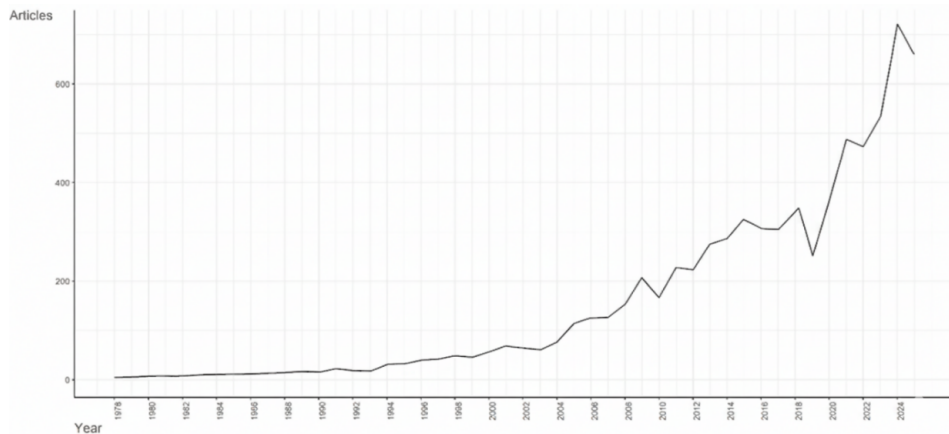
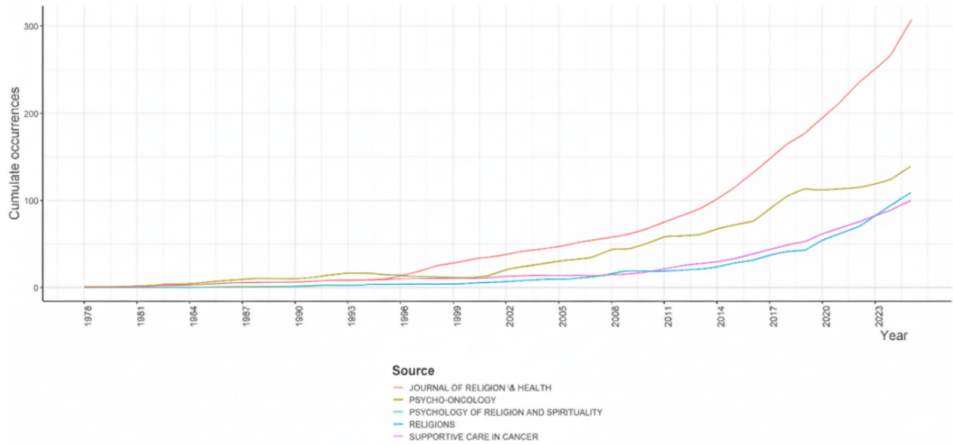


Figure 2 shows a significant increase in scientific output over the years. Between 1978 and 1990, the number of publications remained quite limited (e.g.,  $n = 1$  in 1978,  $n = 2$  in 1980, and  $n = 3$  in 1989), while production increased relatively at the beginning of the 2000s ( $n = 32$  in 2000 and  $n = 45$  in 2004). By 2010,  $n = 120$ , in 2015,  $n = 238$ , and in 2018,  $n = 358$ , the number shows a steady increase. There has been a particularly striking acceleration since 2020:  $n = 369$  in 2020,  $n = 486$  in 2021,  $n = 531$  in 2023, and  $n = 714$  in 2024, reaching its peak.

Although the 2025 count appears lower ( $n = 651$ ), this does not indicate a decline in research activity. Instead, it reflects the fact that data collection occurred before the

full completion of the publication year. Therefore, the slight drop is due to incomplete annual data and should not be interpreted as a reversal in the increasing trend. This reflects the state of the dataset as of 28 August 2025. After determining the change over the years, the production of sources over time was examined, and the findings are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**  
*Production of Sources Over Time*

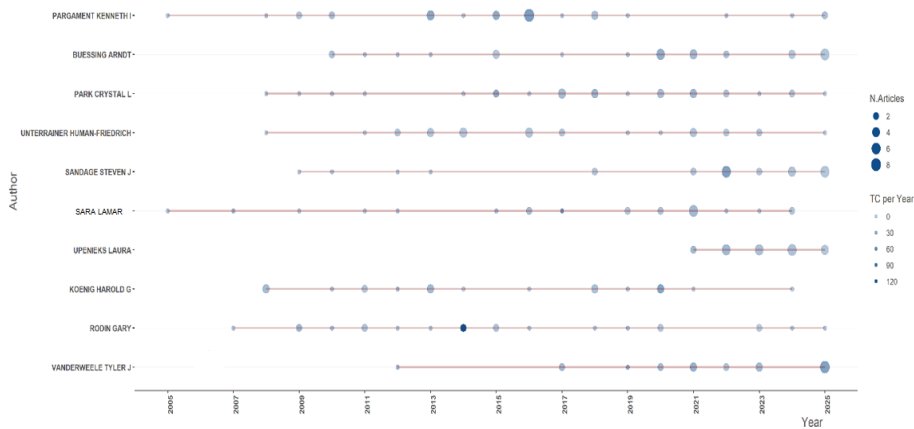


When examining Figure 3, a significant increase in the production of sources over the years is observed. The highest production was recorded in the Journal of Religion & Health, with the number of publications rising from  $n = 1$  in 1985 to  $n = 16$  in 2010,  $n = 126$  in 2020, and  $n = 308$  in 2025. Psycho-Oncology journal started with  $n = 1$  in 1995, reaching  $n = 25$  in 2010,  $n = 81$  in 2020, and  $n = 100$  in 2025. Psychology of Religion and Spirituality began publishing in 2009 with  $n = 1$ , rising to  $n = 28$  in 2015,  $n = 71$  in 2020, and  $n = 118$  in 2025. The journal Religions joined the production in 2010 with  $n = 2$ , reaching  $n = 15$  in 2015,  $n = 46$  in 2020, and  $n = 107$  in 2025. Finally, the journal Supportive Care in Cancer contributed in 2005 with  $n = 1$ , reaching  $n = 25$  in 2015,  $n = 45$  in 2020, and  $n = 93$  in 2025. The general trend indicates an acceleration in all journals after 2010 and a further increase starting in the 2020s, with the Journal of Religion & Health leading the way and other journals significantly increasing their contributions after 2020.

#### ***Authors Working on the Research Topic and Citation Distribution***

After examining the production of sources over time, the study moved on to the authors working on the researched topic and the citation distribution section, reviewed the authors' production processes over time, and presented the findings in Figure 4.

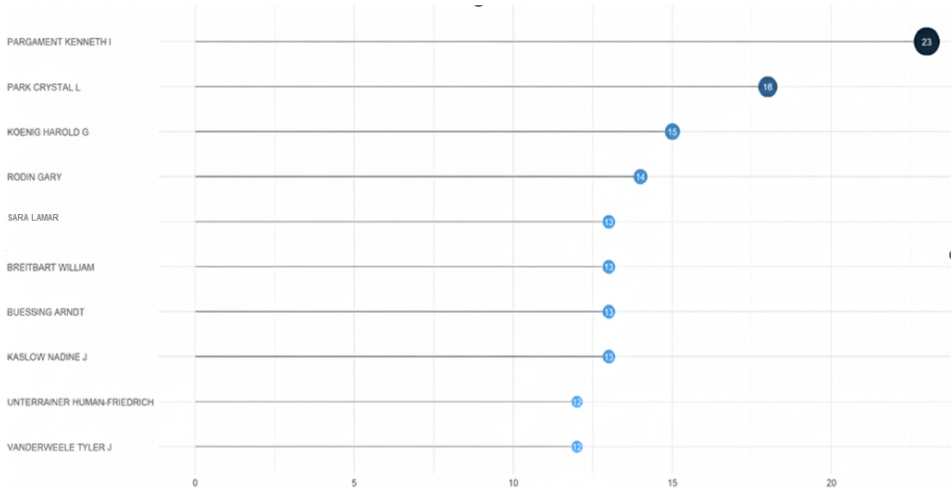
**Figure 4.**  
*Authors' Production over Time*



Significant differences in the authors' scientific output over the years are evident when examining the figure. Sara Lamar began contributing to the field in 2005 with  $n = 1$ , showing an increase in 2007 ( $n = 1$ ), 2015 ( $n = 1$ ), 2016 ( $n = 2$ ), and in 2017 ( $n = 1$ ). She continued her production with  $n = 2$  in 2019 and  $n = 2$  in 2020, reaching her highest level with  $n = 6$  in 2021. Although more limited contributions ( $n = 1-2$ ) were observed between 2022 and 2024, she continued her production with  $n = 2$  in 2025. Buessig Arndt contributed from 2010 onwards, reaching its highest level in 2020 with  $n = 5$ . Koenig Harold G. stood out particularly in 2008 with  $n = 3$  and in 2013 with  $n = 3$ . Pargament Kenneth I. showed a remarkable intensity in 2013 with  $n = 4$ , 2015 with  $n = 3$ , and 2016 with  $n = 8$ . Park Crystal L. made regular contributions with  $n = 2$  in 2015,  $n = 4$  in 2017, and  $n = 3$  in 2018. Rodin Gary showed significant output with  $n = 2$  in 2009 and  $n = 2$  in 2014. Sandage Steven J. stood out in 2022 with  $n = 6$ . Unterrainer Human-Friedrich reached  $n = 4$  in 2016, following increased production in 2013 and 2014 ( $n = 3-4$ ). Upenieks, Laura has made recent contributions and has shown rapid growth since 2021, increasing her output to  $n = 5$  in 2022 and  $n = 6$  in 2024. VanderWeele Tyler J. has shown a steady and rising contribution with  $n = 2$  in 2017,  $n = 1$  in 2019,  $n = 3$  in 2021, and  $n = 7$  in 2025. Overall, the intensity of production has varied among authors over the years, with Sara Lamar, Pargament, and VanderWeele standing out with their pioneering contributions, while newer authors such as Upenieks have rapidly increased their production in recent years.

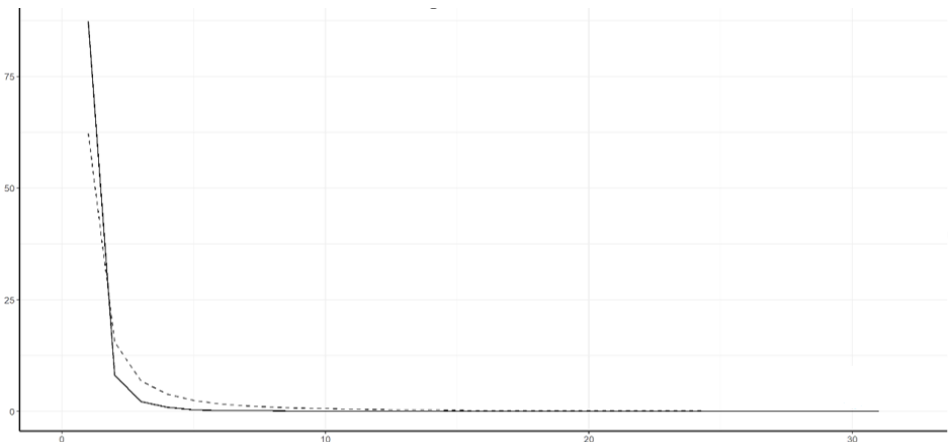
The analyses conducted on the effects of authors' H local h-index are presented in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5.**  
*Authors' Local Impact by H index*



When examining the figure, it is evident that the authors' local impact within the field differs in their h-index. Pargament Kenneth I. demonstrates the highest impact, standing out with  $h = 23$ . He is followed by Park Crystal L. ( $h = 18$ ) and Koenig Harold G. ( $h = 15$ ). Rodin Gary ( $h = 14$ ) has a high level of impact, while Sara Lamar ( $h = 13$ ), Breitbart William, Buessing Arndt, and Kaslow Nadine J. share the same value. Unterrainer Human-Friedrich and VanderWeele Tyler J. contribute at the  $h = 12$  level. These findings show that a few leading authors in the field (particularly Pargament, Park, and Koenig) stand out and have a high citation impact. At the same time, other authors also contribute to the field with a noteworthy level of impact.

**Figure 6.**  
*Author Productivity Through Lotka's Law*

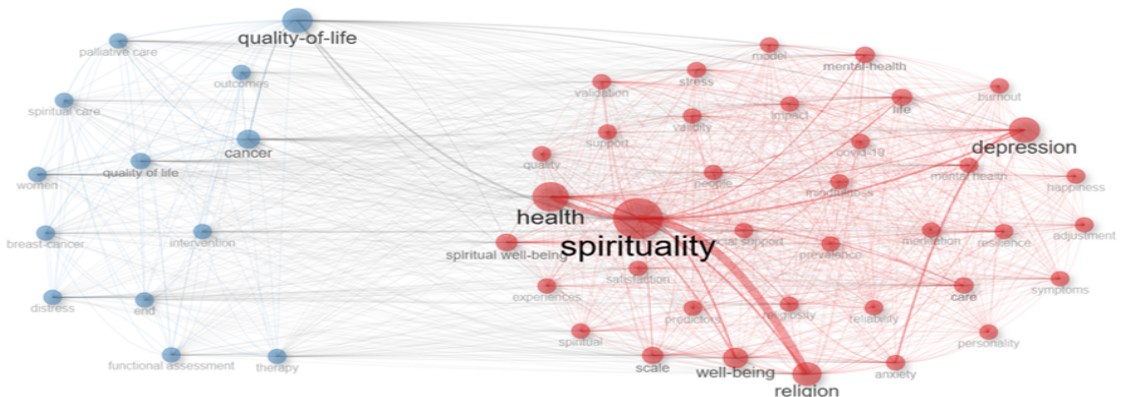


The analysis was conducted according to Lotka’s Law, as the distribution of author productivity shows that a small number of authors produce many publications. At the same time, the majority contribute only marginally to the field. The results obtained confirm this distribution, and the details are presented below.

As shown in Figure 5, the vast majority of authors have produced only 1-2 articles, and this group represents the most significant portion of total production. As productivity increased, the number of authors decreased rapidly; those with five or more publications constituted a small minority, while authors with more than 10 publications formed the core group of producers in the field. The very few authors who reached the 20–30 publication level are the leaders of knowledge production in the field. The observed distribution largely coincides with the theoretical distribution predicted by Lotka’s Law, confirming the classic scientific publication model: “a minimal number of authors produce a large amount, while the majority are limited to individual contributions.” These findings show that scientific productivity exhibits a classic distribution, with a few authors making high-level contributions and the majority participating in the field with more limited output. This situation confirms the productivity model predicted by Lotka’s Law.

After examining Lotka’s Law, we moved on to the co-occurrence network, because while Lotka analysis reveals the productivity levels of authors and the distribution of scientific contributions, the co-occurrence network shows the content-related dimension of this productivity and the relationships between the concepts addressed by the authors. Thus, not only who published how much, but also which themes emerged and how these themes were connected were evaluated holistically. The findings are and demonstrated in Figure 7.

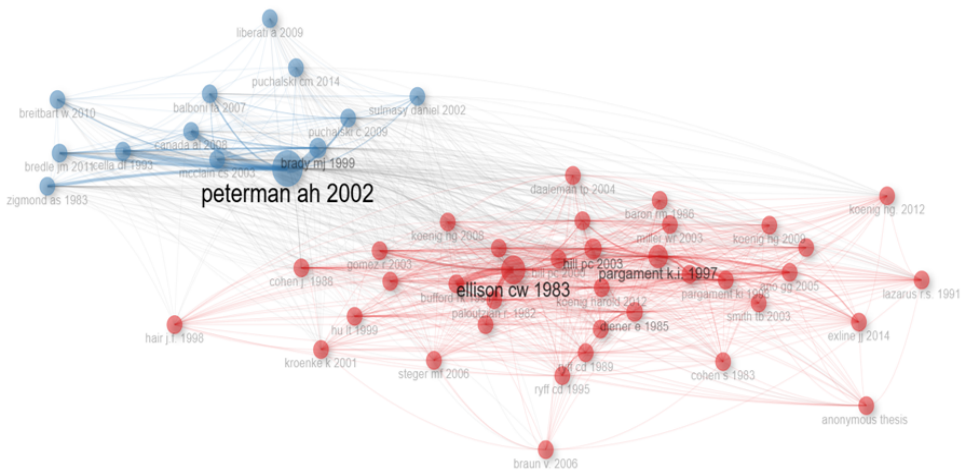
**Figure 7.**  
*Concurrency Network*



The synchrony network presented in Figure 7 visualizes the relationships between the concepts most frequently used in the spiritual well-being literature. The idea of “spirituality,” located at the center of the map, establishes strong connections with both health and religion themes, while showing close relationships with psychological variables such as depression, stress, anxiety, and mental health. Furthermore, the “quality-of-life” and “cancer” clusters form a separate group on the left side, highlighting concepts such as quality of life, treatment processes, and functional assessment, particularly in cancer and palliative care studies. On the right side, concepts centered around “depression,” “mental health,” and “well-being” are concentrated, drawing attention to the fact that this area forms an axis more closely linked to mental health and psychosocial dimensions. The network structure reveals that spiritual well-being strongly intersects with clinical health areas (cancer, palliative care, quality of life) and psychosocial themes (depression, stress, mental health, well-being).

After examining the co-occurrence network, the shared citation network was analyzed, and the findings are outlined in Figure 8.

**Figure 8.**  
*Common Citation Network*

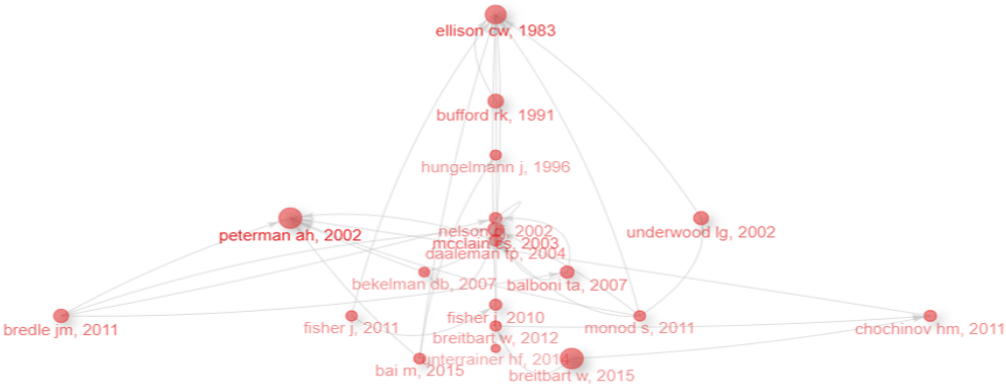


The co-citation network presented in Figure 8 illustrates the intellectual structure of the spiritual well-being literature and the fundamental studies upon which the field is based. Two main clusters stand out in the network: In the blue cluster, Peterman AH (2002) plays a central role and is particularly associated with research in quality of life, palliative care, and health psychology. In the red cluster, the studies by Ellison CW (1983) and Pargament KI (1997) stand out with their strong centrality values, receiving intense citation as fundamental sources defining the theoretical framework of spiritual well-being and religious coping strategies. Authors such as Koenig, Ryff,

Lazarus, and Cohen are important connection points in this core network. Overall, the network structure reveals that the field developed based on health-based measurement tools (Peterman) and conceptual/theoretical models (Ellison, Pargament), showing that these two axes form the historical and intellectual foundation of spiritual well-being research.

The relationships between authors and the intellectual development process of the field are presented in Figure 9.

**Figure 9.**  
*Historical network of references in the field of spiritual well-being*



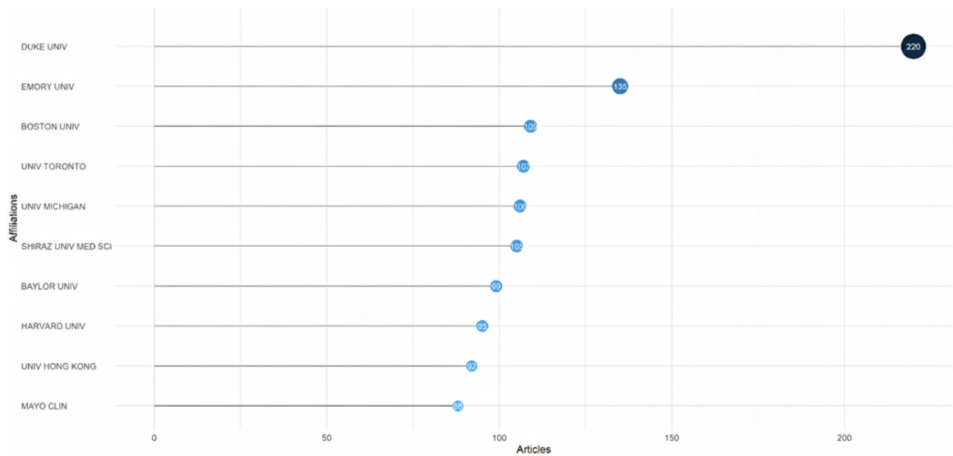
The historical writing network presented in Figure 9 shows the extent to which authors have influenced each other in spiritual well-being and how the literature has developed based on the fundamental works. At the center of the network are the works of Ellison (1983) and Peterman (2002), which stand out as pioneering contributions that form both the field’s conceptual foundations and measurement tools. Ellison’s 1983 work established the theoretical framework for spiritual well-being, while Peterman’s 2002 contribution particularly guided the field of health and quality of life. Around these central authors, names such as Hungelmann et al. (1996), Nelson (2002), Underwood (2002), and Balboni et al. (2007) have made impressive connections, contributing to the development of both the clinical and social dimensions of the field. On the other hand, more recent studies such as Bredle et al. (2011), Fisher (2011), Monod et al. (2011), and Chochinov et al. (2011) are located at the edges of the network, providing more limited but specific contributions by focusing on particular sub-themes. Overall, the network structure reveals that spiritual well-being research has historically been shaped by the strong influence of a few pioneering authors, with subsequent years seeing the addition of studies that diverge in clinical,

methodological, and applied dimensions.

### *Distribution of broadcasting organizations and countries*

After examining the production of sources over time, the authors working on the subject under investigation and the citation distribution section were examined. The productivity status of different higher education institutions was discussed, and the findings are presented in Figure 10.

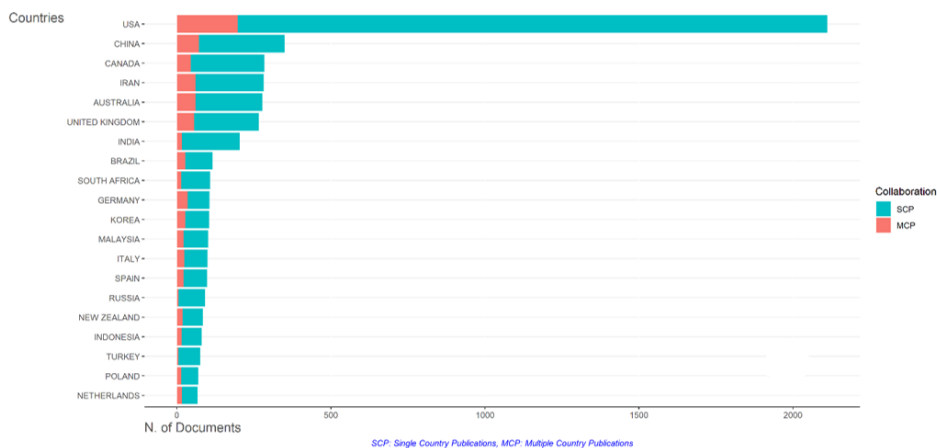
**Figure 10.**  
*Comparison of universities in terms of the number of publications*



When examining Figure 10, Duke University ( $n = 220$ ) ranks first among the institutions producing the most publications. It is followed by Emory University ( $n = 135$ ) and Boston University ( $n = 108$ ). The University of Toronto, the University of Michigan, and Shiraz University of Medical Sciences contributed similarly with  $n = 106$ . Baylor University ( $n = 99$ ) and Harvard University ( $n = 93$ ) are also notable institutions, while the University of Hong Kong ( $n = 72$ ) and the Mayo Clinic ( $n = 48$ ) made lower but still significant contributions. Overall, it is evident that US-based universities (Duke, Emory, Boston, Michigan, Harvard, Baylor) dominate the field, while institutions from Canada (Toronto), Asia (Hong Kong), and the Middle East (Shiraz) also make notable contributions.

After examining the productivity of different higher education institutions, the authors' countries were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Figure 11.

**Figure 11.**  
*Corresponding Authors' Countries*



When examining the figure, it is evident that the United States is the clear leader in distributing responsible author countries for the relevant publications ( $n = 2100$ ). The United States is followed by China ( $n = 400$ ), Canada ( $n = 300$ ), and Iran ( $n = 300$ ). In addition, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, India, and Brazil have made notable contributions (around  $n = 200$ ). Europe, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, and Poland have made more limited contributions, while Asia, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Türkiye have shown significant but lower production levels. The graph also shows the distinction between single-country publications (SCP) and multi-country collaborative publications (MCP), with the MCP ratio being notably higher in the US and China. This finding reveals that the center of global research production is concentrated in the US, but that Asian and European countries have also been making increasingly significant contributions in recent years.

### ***Most Frequently Used Concepts and Their Distribution***

Following the examination of the productivity levels of various higher education institutions, the section on the most used terms related to the research topic and their distribution was addressed. Trending issues were evaluated, and the findings are presented and summarized in Figure 12.

**Figure 12.**  
*Trend Topics*

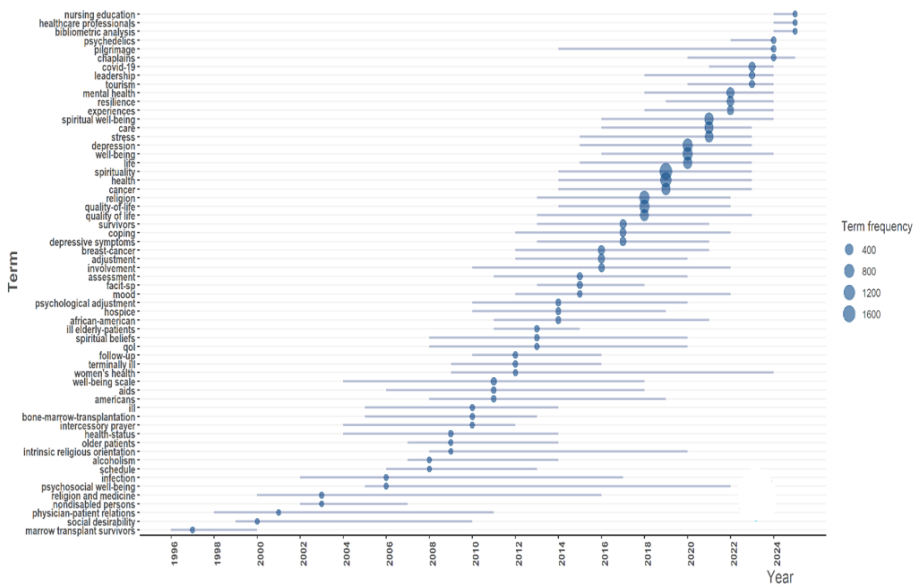
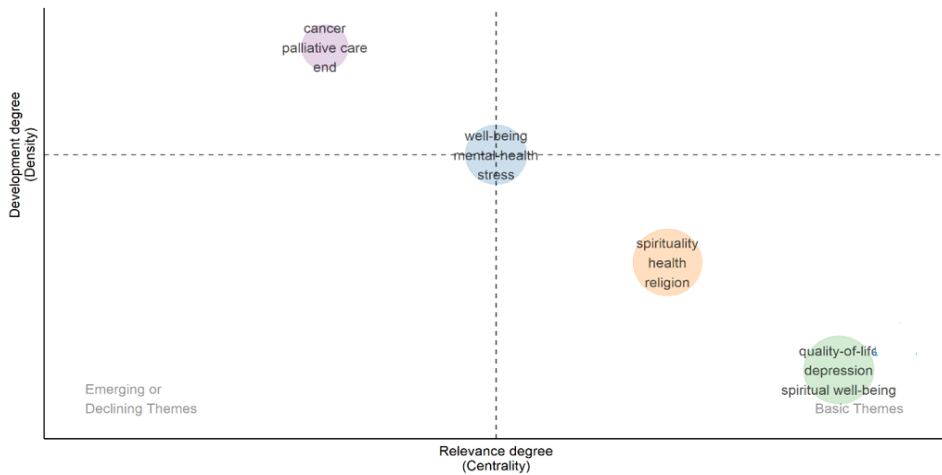


Figure 12 shows that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, topics such as marrow transplant survivors, physician–patient relations, social desirability, and religion and medicine—which are limited and clinically contextual—were more prominent. After 2010, the focus shifted to a broader range, with terms such as psychosocial well-being, quality of life, coping, depression, stress, spiritual well-being, and mental health beginning to be used with high frequency. After 2015, concepts such as cancer, spirituality, healthcare professionals, well-being, and religion have been particularly prominent at the center of the field. By the 2020s, new research themes, including COVID-19, leadership, tourism, psychedelics, and bibliometric analysis, have emerged, demonstrating interdisciplinary developments in the health context and at the intersection with the social sciences. Overall, the focus of research has shifted from focusing on the clinical and individual levels to broader concerns of social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions. In recent years, the field has diversified and further enriched itself due to the impact of the pandemic and the adoption of new methodological approaches (e.g., bibliometric analysis).

After reviewing trending topics, the thematic map was examined, and the findings are outlined in Figure 13.

**Figure 13.**  
Thematic Map



This thematic map shows the distribution of concepts in the research field according to their centrality (relevance degree/centrality) and density (development degree/density) levels.

- *Niche Themes (top-left)*: Topics such as “Cancer, palliative care, end” are themes studied in more specific and limited subfields, but have high density. This indicates that these concepts are explored in depth by specific groups of researchers, but have weak connections to the general field.
- *Motor Themes (top-right)*: While no distinct cluster emerges as a motor theme in this area, this blank section on the map generally indicates central and developed themes. Concepts that will be concentrated on here in the future will become the guiding themes of the field.
- *Core Themes (bottom-right)*: Concepts such as “quality of life, depression, spiritual well-being” are highly central, but relatively low in intensity. This indicates that these topics are fundamental building blocks in the research field, playing a central role in many studies, but still require further development from a methodological or theoretical perspective.
- *Emerging/Declining Themes (bottom-left)*: This area has no distinct theme. This indicates that research topics remain vibrant and the field is not experiencing a steady decline.
- *Intermediate Cluster (middle section)*: The themes “Well-being, mental health, stress” are positioned at an intermediate level regarding centrality and intensity.

They are frequently used in studies in the field, but have not yet become as dominant as the motor themes. In addition, the “Cancer, palliative care, end” cluster is relatively dense but has limited centrality, representing a focus area that retains its importance in specific clinical contexts.

In general, this thematic map reveals that topics such as quality of life, mental well-being, depression, stress, and spirituality are at the center of the field; niche areas are found along the “work, values, behavior” axis; and contextual clinical focuses stand out along the “cancer and palliative care” axis. Moreover, a thematic interpretation of the keyword and co-citation clusters reveals that spiritual well-being is addressed in clinical and non-clinical contexts. Clinical studies frequently focus on patient populations such as cancer patients, palliative care settings, and chronic illness management, where spirituality is linked to coping and quality of life. In contrast, non-clinical research emphasizes psychosocial variables such as stress, depression, life satisfaction, and meaning-making in general populations. Additionally, the literature includes studies across different age groups, with a noticeable emphasis on adult populations in counseling, workplace, and health contexts, while emerging research in adolescents and children highlights the developmental aspects of spiritual well-being concerning hope, resilience, and social support. Although the bibliometric tools do not categorize studies by age group or clinical status, the distribution of keywords and thematic patterns allows for such an interpretative classification.

## Discussion

This study aimed to systematically reveal current trends in the literature by examining the structural, thematic, and historical development of academic production in the field of spiritual well-being. In this context, bibliometric analysis conducted with R Studio shows that the number of publications, which has been quite limited since 1978, increased rapidly after 2010 and in the 2020s, reaching a peak in 2024. The *Journal of Religion & Health* had the most publications, followed by *Psycho-Oncology*, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *Religions*, and *Supportive Care in Cancer*. The increase in publications in the field of spiritual well-being in recent years reveals the significant scientific interest in this concept. The acceleration in publication production, especially after 2010, reflects the intellectual development in the literature (Demir, 2019). Carey et al. (2023) also examined the productivity of the *Journal of Religion & Health* over the last 60 years. They noted that the increasing number and diversity of publications contribute to the growth and development of the interdisciplinary field. Senel and Demir’s (2018) study also revealed that publications are largely US-centric and that authors like Koenig play a central role in the field. Similarly, Pargament et al. (2006) reported a significant increase in publications on spirituality and health between 1965 and 2000. Lucchetti and Lucchetti (2014)

show that research conducted worldwide between 1999 and 2013 increased rapidly, particularly in developing countries. This trend suggests that spiritual well-being is receiving increased attention within a religious context and in healthcare, psychiatry, counseling, and education (Stiliya et al., 2024). Yiğit and Çakmak (2024) also identified a similar growth trend in psychological well-being, noting an increase in studies on social isolation and the search for meaning, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. A bibliometric analysis by Adli et al. (2024) reveals a rapid increase in publications on spiritual leadership and business life, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings demonstrate that spiritual well-being is being addressed multidimensionally across different contexts and has become a rapidly growing research area.

Scientific productivity in the field of spiritual well-being has increased over the years, and authors such as Kenneth I. Pargament, Harold G. Koenig, and Crystal L. Park can be considered pioneers in this field due to their high citation impact and volume of publications. This is evident in the analysis of Lotka's Law conducted in this study. While a few authors have published extensively, most remain limited to single contributions. The conceptual coherence network revealed that the theme of "spirituality" has strong associations with both clinical health (cancer, quality of life) and psychosocial variables (depression, stress, well-being). Co-citation and historiographical analyses indicated that works such as Ellison (1983) and Peterman (2002) formed the intellectual foundation of the literature, and subsequent research has evolved around these pioneering texts. Bibliometric analyses of the spiritual well-being literature suggest that the field has undergone rapid development, with certain authors and themes emerging as prominent. Among the leading authors, names such as Pargament, Koenig, and Park stand out with their high citation impact, and these studies have shaped the theoretical framework (Munjal & Sachdeva, 2024; Rocha & Fry, 2023). Bibliometric studies reveal a notable increase in publication volume, especially after 2010, and this increase has further accelerated in the post-COVID-19 period (Adli et al., 2024; Anidaisma et al., 2023). The development of sub-concepts such as spiritual leadership, workplace spirituality, and spiritual intelligence has been detailed using network analysis and conceptual clustering techniques, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of the field (Narendran & Gourlay, 2016; Rajni et al., 2022). Furthermore, co-occurrence and co-citation networks have revealed that concepts such as spirituality, mental health, cancer, and quality of life are central themes in both health and psychosocial contexts (Stiliya et al., 2024; Zulkepli et al., 2023). The analyses confirm the classic Lotka distribution in the literature, where a few authors are highly productive, while the vast majority contribute only once (Thoyib & Rochman, 2024). Therefore, the intellectual structure of the field is shaped by theoretical contributions and applied focuses. At the same time, current topics such as social adaptation, the search for individual meaning, and workplace burnout have dom-

inated the research agenda. In this context, the dominance of US-based authors and institutions, particularly those with psychology, health, and theology backgrounds, suggests that Western, individualistic, and psychospiritual frameworks largely shape the field's theoretical orientation. However, a growing number of publications from countries such as China, Iran, and India reveal alternative perspectives, often collectivist, culturally embedded, and religiously grounded. For example, studies from Iran usually deal with Islamic psychological constructs, while studies from China reflect Confucian and holistic health paradigms.

When examining the findings on the concept by institution, Duke, Emory, Boston, and Michigan universities are among the higher education institutions that produce the most publications on spiritual well-being. Institutions from diverse regions, such as Toronto, Shiraz, and Hong Kong, have also made significant contributions. A country-by-country analysis reveals that the United States is clearly at the forefront, followed by countries such as China, Canada, Iran, and Australia. Furthermore, the increase in multi-country co-authored publications demonstrates that the research field is becoming increasingly international and interdisciplinary. Analyses of the country and institutional distribution of publications in spiritual well-being indicate that US-based production dominates the literature. For example, Demir (2019) highlights that Duke University, led by Koenig, produces the most publications in this field, with the US accounting for over 60% of the total. Bibliometric analyses by Dissanayake et al. (2024) and Srivastava et al. (2024) also highlight the increasing contributions of China, Canada, and Iran outside the US. Institutions such as Emory, Harvard, and Boston University stand out with their research in the context of health and psychological counseling. At the same time, Middle East-based institutions, such as Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, are also contributing to clinically based research. Furthermore, Setiawan and Limakrisna (2024) note that Asian production, particularly in India, China, and Indonesia, has recently increased, contributing significantly to global knowledge production.

Trending topics in the spiritual well-being literature employ psychosocial rather than clinically focused terms, and interdisciplinary themes, such as COVID-19, leadership, and bibliometric analysis, have emerged in recent years. The thematic map reveals that concepts such as “quality of life,” “depression,” and “spiritual well-being” are fundamental cornerstones with high centrality in the field but require further methodological development. Topics such as “work, values, behavior” are niche but receive extensive coverage, while contexts such as “cancer” and “palliative care” are enduring themes with clinical significance. As the motor theme domain has not yet been clarified, new theoretical approaches are needed to determine the field's future direction. Conceptual trends and thematic developments in spiritual well-being research demonstrate how the field is evolving. While the 1990s focused more on clinical themes, recent years have seen the

emergence of more comprehensive and psychosocial themes such as “well-being,” “mental health,” “quality of life,” and “spiritual well-being” (Karakus et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2021). Thematic analyses indicate that this transformation has increased the diversity of topics and interdisciplinary approaches (Oviedo, 2024; Ribaudo and Takahashi, 2008). In this context, concepts such as “depression,” “stress,” and “palliative care” are frequently reported as key building blocks in thematic maps; however, their relatively low density suggests that these areas still have room for theoretical and methodological development (Rosmarin et al., 2011; Weaver et al., 2006). To this end, research conducted explicitly in Korea has revealed that the concept of “spiritual well-being” is positively correlated with hope, self-esteem, and health, and negatively correlated with depression and anxiety (Yoo, 2013). These trends suggest that, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, new subthemes such as “leadership” and “bibliometric analysis” have been incorporated into the field of spiritual well-being, expanding the field not only in terms of health but also in cultural and managerial dimensions (Ai et al., 2011; Montaudon Tomas et al., 2022). As a result, the field has become conceptually richer, culturally inclusive, and methodologically diverse (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Weaver et al., 2006).

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal that the spiritual well-being literature has undergone significant conceptual and methodological transformation over the past forty years. They reveal a substantial increase in publications related to this concept from 1978 to the present, with production accelerating particularly after 2010. Institutionally, researchers based in the United States, as well as institutions such as Duke University, Emory University, and Boston University, have been among the first to conduct research in this field. However, significant contributions have also emerged from Asia and Europe in recent years. Author productivity and citation distribution analyses reveal the pioneering role of figures such as Pargament, Koenig, Park, and Unterrainer as key contributors to the field. At the same time, a new generation of researchers is contributing to the current development of the concept. Thematic analysis findings reveal that spiritual well-being has historically shifted from clinical and religious contexts to contemporary psychosocial, cultural, and interdisciplinary approaches. Concepts such as spiritual well-being, quality of life, and mental health are central but require further methodological development. These results show that the field has evolved into a multidimensional structure encompassing individual spiritual balance, social adaptation, professional resilience, and cultural diversity.

## **Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is that only studies published in WoS were included, rather than in indexes such as Scopus and PubMed. Furthermore, due to the nature

of bibliometric methods, the depth of content, methodological diversity, and qualitative dimensions of the studies could not be assessed; only structural, thematic, and citation relationships among publications were examined. Furthermore, the search strategy used only the keyword “spiritual well-being.” While this term is widely accepted in the literature and was deliberately chosen for its conceptual clarity, the exclusion of semantically related terms such as “spiritual health,” “spiritual well-being,” or “existential well-being” may have narrowed the dataset. These terms are often used to refer to similar constructs across disciplinary contexts. Consequently, the study may have overlooked relevant literature, limiting the field’s thematic coverage and comprehensive mapping. Furthermore, the keywords used directly influenced the scope of the dataset, leading to the exclusion of some relevant studies. Finally, examining publications up to 2025 does not reflect subsequent developments in the field.

### **Future Research Directions**

This study provides a structural, thematic, and intellectual map of the spiritual well-being literature and suggests some important directions for future research. First, analyses using broader datasets encompassing not only Web of Science but also diverse databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the concept on a global scale. Furthermore, supporting bibliometric analyses with qualitative meta-syntheses and mixed methods is expected to contribute to a more in-depth examination of the reflections of spiritual well-being in individual experiences, its differences across cultural contexts, and its effectiveness in practice. Furthermore, increasing interdisciplinary studies could enable a holistic approach by strengthening the interaction between psychology, psychiatry, theology, education, and the health sciences. Cross-cultural comparative examinations of emerging research themes in the post-COVID-19 era, such as leadership, digital addiction, pandemic stress, and spiritual well-being in virtual communities, could bring innovative perspectives to the field. The limited number of studies on spiritual well-being in developing countries suggests that new studies in this context will fill a significant gap in elucidating the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of the concept.

In light of this study’s findings, several specific research areas can be suggested. First, the thematic map reveals that concepts such as work, values, and behavior are positioned as niche but underdeveloped themes with potential for expansion. Future studies could investigate how spiritual well-being influences ethical decision-making, job satisfaction, and workplace dynamics in various cultural or institutional contexts. Second, the relatively low density of core clinical concepts such as depression, stress, and palliative care suggests that these areas could benefit from more theoretically grounded and longitudinal studies, particularly in post-pandemic contexts. Further-

more, the absence of distinct “motor themes” in the strategic diagram suggests that the field may lack a dominant theoretical backbone; therefore, future research could aim to develop and test integrative models that combine psychosocial, spiritual, and cultural variables to explain well-being.

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**Data Availability.** The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during

the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Ethical Procedures and Process.** This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Since the study did not involve direct experiments on humans or animals and did not collect any sensitive biomedical data, ethical approval from university ethics committees was not required.

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