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## RESEARCH ARTICLE / REVIEW ARTICLE

# Analysis of Social Work Practice Research Trends in the Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Era: A Bibliometric Study

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**Abstract:** Abstract This study examines issues and research trends related to social work practices in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era using bibliometric analysis. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database using the search string ("social work practice" OR "social work service") AND ("post COVID" OR "post COVID-19"), filtered by year range 2022–July 2024, subject areas of social sciences and psychology, document type: article, and language: English, yielding 139 articles. The publications were analyzed using VOSviewer software to identify topic trends, collaborative networks, and thematic developments. The results show that post-pandemic social work practice research clusters into two major thematic nodes: a social work node encompassing sub-themes of social care, advocacy, disability, rights, and inclusion; and a COVID-19 node encompassing coronavirus, anxiety, resilience, academic themes, child welfare, infection, control measures, and child protection. The study further identifies the emergence of new themes — notably digital technology integration and adaptive intervention model development — and reveals a significant geographic gap, with ASEAN-region scholars, including Indonesian researchers, largely absent from this body of literature. These findings provide benchmarks for academics, practitioners, and policymakers in developing research agendas and social work practices relevant to the post-COVID-19 community context.

**Keywords:** Bibliometric; COVID-19; Post-Pandemic; Social Work Practice; VOSviewer

## 1. Introduction

Since 2022, the world has entered a post-COVID-19 pandemic era (Leach et al., 2021). In this period, people are learning to adapt to new conditions and to recover from the pandemic's broad impact (Wang et al., 2021). Economic life has gradually resumed, with growth returning across various sectors of economic activity (Chen et al., 2024). Governments and world health organizations continue to monitor COVID-19 conditions while also shifting focus toward societal recovery and reconstruction (Hoang, 2021).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has receded, social problems generated during the pandemic continue to affect communities (Debele & Sima, 2021). A major challenge is the widening social and economic disparity in society (Miranda et al., 2022). Lockdown and social restriction policies



hit economically vulnerable groups — including informal workers, small and medium enterprises, and poor communities — particularly hard, causing widespread income loss (Gunadi et al., 2021). Moreover, the pandemic caused a rise in domestic violence, depression, and other mental health disorders, especially among children and adolescents subjected to prolonged social isolation (Usher et al., 2021).

Social workers play a vital role in the post-COVID-19 recovery process (Okafor, 2021). Positioned as frontline providers of support and services to vulnerable groups, social workers fulfil multiple roles (Devlieghere & Roose, 2020)(Lotta et al., 2022): (1) providing emergency assistance — basic needs, access to health services, and psychosocial support; (2) implementing long-term recovery programs including counseling, skills training, and economic empowerment; and (3) connecting communities with required resources and services (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2021; Beltran et al., 2023). (Yu et al., 2021) emphasize that the strategic role of social workers is essential in ensuring holistic, sustainable recovery for post-pandemic societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of social work practice in several respects (Mishna et al., 2021). During the pandemic, practice shifted toward mental health, remote service delivery, cross-sectoral collaboration, and innovative intervention models (Bacter et al., 2021; Pascoe, 2021). In the post-pandemic phase, social work practices focus on rebuilding resilience of individuals, families, and communities, with rising unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, and social isolation as central concerns (Alizadeh et al., 2023; Usher et al., 2021; Waters et al., 2021).

Prior bibliometric studies have mapped themes in social work education (Beltran et al., 2023), palliative care social work during COVID-19 (Roulston et al., 2023), and journal responses to the pandemic broadly (Cheung, 2021; Nicholas et al., 2023). However, no bibliometric study has comprehensively mapped post-pandemic social work practice research drawing specifically on Scopus publications from 2022–2024. The present study fills that gap, extending prior mapping efforts by focusing specifically on the post-pandemic transition period and its implications for professional transformation — rather than the pandemic period per se.

This bibliometric study aims to map and analyze the development of scientific literature on social work practices during the post-COVID-19 recovery era. Through analysis of topic trends, keywords, institutional affiliations, and research collaborations, the study reveals dominant issues and research priorities. Findings can provide critical input for developing social work interventions, programs, and policies that are more responsive to post-pandemic challenges, and can encourage closer collaboration between academics and practitioners in addressing the pandemic's long-term impacts.

## 2. Literature Review

This study employs descriptive bibliometric analysis combined with network visualization (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2021; Cevher, 2023). Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach in scientific studies that analyzes and maps scientific publications — including journals, articles, and proceedings — to measure the impact, productivity, and development patterns of a particular field (Cevher, 2023). This method draws on bibliometric indicators such as the number of publications, citation frequency, co-citations, author collaboration, and keyword co-occurrence to identify trends, structures, and development dynamics within a discipline (Donthu et al., 2021). The bibliometric visualization method provides a structural overview of a research area (Öztürk et al., 2024; Garfield, 2009). Bibliometric indicators were selected — specifically publication counts, citation frequency, and total link strength — because these are the established standard metrics for measuring research output, scholarly influence, and intellectual connectivity in VOSviewer-based bibliometric studies (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

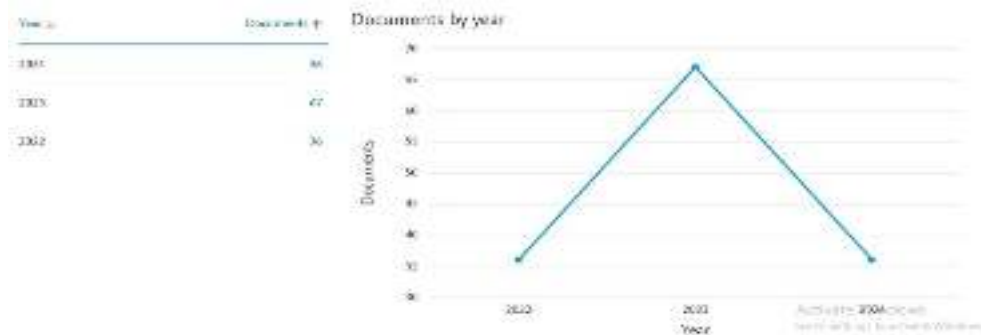


rapid overview of dominant discourse themes (Syahri & Salahudin, 2024). Figure 1 presents the results.

**Figure 1.** Word Cloud Analysis of Topics in Post-COVID-19 Social Work Practice Research  
**Source:** Research, 2024

Figure 1 reveals that the dominant issues studied include pandemic, research, services, development, practice, education, community, government, children, challenges, and economics. At the broadest level, four major thematic priorities emerge: pandemic, research, service, and practice. This finding is consistent with the broader literature confirming that COVID-19 significantly reshaped social work priorities toward mental health, digital practice, and community resilience (Owens et al., 2024; Banks et al., 2024).

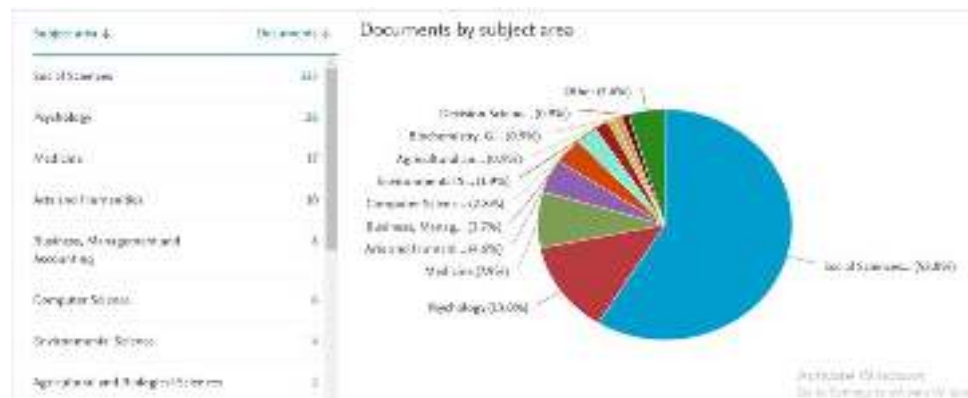
Figure 2 presents the annual distribution of publications across the study period. The COVID-19 pandemic was declared effectively concluded by the end of 2021 (Bergquist & Stensgaard, 2020; Ioannidis, 2022; Rohilla et al., 2023), making 2022 the first full year of post-pandemic scholarship.



**Figure 2.** Annual Publication Distribution — Social Work Practice Post-COVID-19  
**Source:** Scopus Database, 2024

Figure 2 confirms the substantial upward trend: from 36 publications in 2022 to 67 in 2023 an 86% increase reflecting intensifying scholarly attention to post-pandemic social work transformation. This trajectory parallels trends documented in related bibliometric analyses of COVID-19's impact on social science disciplines more broadly (Donthu et al., 2021; Al Husaeni & Nandiyo, 2022).

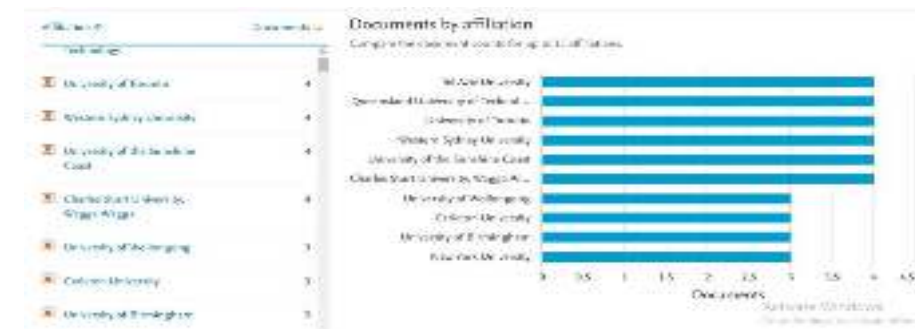
Figure 3 presents the subject area distribution of the 139 publications.



**Figure 3.** Subject Area Distribution — Social Work Practice Publications Post-COVID-19  
**Source:** Scopus Database, 2024

Social science dominates at 58.80%, followed by psychology (13.09%) and medicine (7.90%). This distribution reflects that COVID-19's impact is primarily experienced through social and psychological dimensions of human life, aligning with the interdisciplinary conceptual frameworks applied by social work researchers and practitioners. The spread across psychology and medicine further underscores the complex, multi-domain challenges the pandemic posed to the social work profession.

Figure 4 presents the top ten institutional affiliations of contributing authors.



**Figure 4.** Top Institutional Affiliations — Post-COVID-19 Social Work Practice Research  
**Source:** Scopus Database, 2024

Figure 4 shows that leading affiliates include Tel Aviv University (4 articles), Queensland University of Technology (4), University of Toronto (4), Western Sydney University (4), University of the Sunshine Coast (4), Charles Sturt University (4), University of Wollongong (3), Carleton University (3), University of Birmingham (3), and New York University (3). Notably, ASEAN-region universities, including Indonesian institutions, are entirely absent from this list — a striking gap given the region's large socially vulnerable populations and established social work professional communities (Higashida & Ranaweera, 2021). This geographic imbalance underscores an urgent need for contextually grounded regional research contributions (Nwafor et al., 2023).

Citation analysis further reveals that the ten most-cited articles in this corpus were predominantly published in 2022 (Table 2). The most influential work — "Digital Social Work: Conceptualising a Hybrid Anticipatory Practice" (Pink et al., 2022, 64 citations) — underscores the centrality of digital transformation as the defining professional challenge of the post-pandemic era. The second most-cited (Ferguson et al., 2022, 48 citations) directly addresses child protection adaptation in the post-pandemic world. The third (Kingstone et al., 2022, 25 citations) confirms through semi-structured interviews that professional self-adaptation is essential in crisis conditions. Taken together, the top-cited works converge on three professional transformation imperatives: digital adaptation, child welfare focus, and practitioner well-being — findings that align with and extend those of Cheung (2022), who identified mental health and digital technology as the dominant COVID-19 response themes across major social work journals.

**Table 2.** Top 10 Most Cited Articles — Social Work Practice Post-COVID-19 (Scopus)

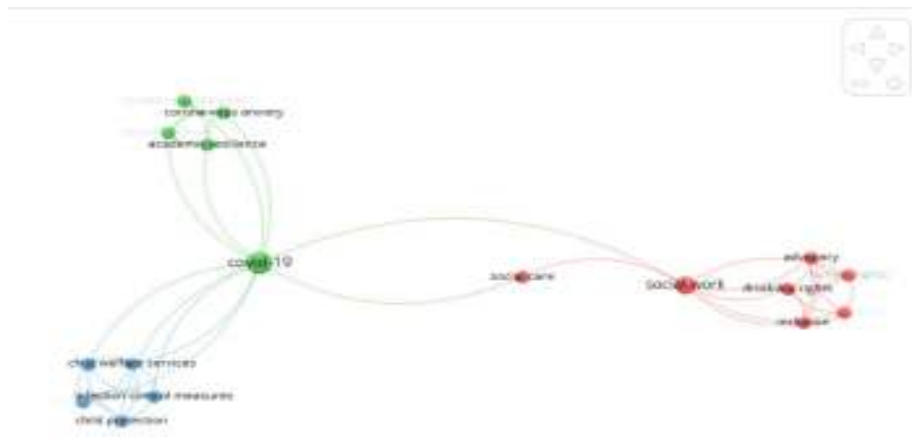
No.	Document Title	Authors	Journal	Year	Citations
1	Digital social work: Conceptualising a hybrid anticipatory practice	Pink et al.	Qualitative Social Work	2022	64
2	Social work and child protection for a post-pandemic world	Ferguson et al.	Journal of Social Work Practice	2022	48
3	Exploring the impact of the first wave of COVID-19 on social work practice: England, UK	Kingstone et al.	British Journal of Social Work	2022	25

No.	Document Title	Authors	Journal	Year	Citations
4	Mental well-being and quality of working life in UK social workers before and during COVID-19	McFadden et al.	British Journal of Social Work	2022	21
5	Social work practice during COVID-19: Client needs and boundary challenges	Mishna et al.	Global Social Welfare	2022	18
6	Responses to COVID-19 in major social work journals: A systematic review	Cheung	Research on Social Work Practice	2022	17
7	Spirituality for coping with trauma of a loved one's death during COVID-19	Biancalani et al.	Pastoral Psychology	2022	16
8	Recruitment in response to a pandemic: Pivoting community-based strategy to Facebook	Archer-Kuhn et al.	International Journal of Social Research Methodology	2022	16
9	The impact of COVID-19 on social workers: An assessment of peritraumatic distress	Miller & Grise-Owens	Journal of Social Work	2022	14
10	Development and validation of a higher-order thinking skills assessment scale for pre-service teachers	Zhou et al.	Thinking Skills and Creativity	2022	13

Source: Processed from Scopus Database, 2024

### 3.2. Thematic Mapping and Research Gaps

"Mapping research themes and identifying gaps" is a central component of bibliometric study (Syahri & Salahudin, 2024). By mapping emerging research themes and identifying under-researched areas, researchers and stakeholders can understand research patterns, distinguish areas receiving significant attention from those less explored, and direct future research efforts accordingly. Figure 5 presents the VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence network, which maps research themes into two major clusters.

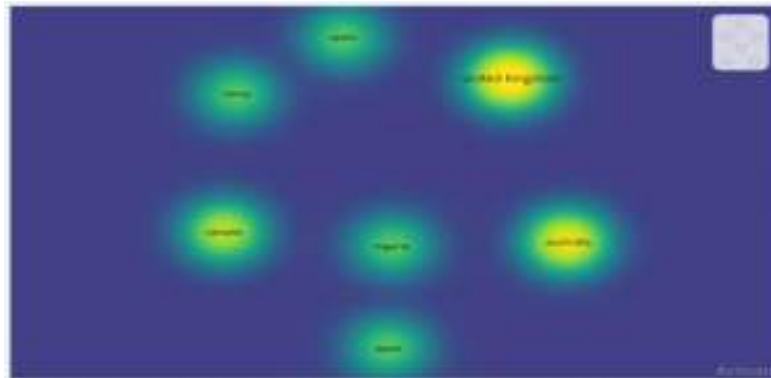


**Figure 5.** VOSviewer Keyword Co-occurrence Network: Research Themes in Post-COVID-19 Social Work Practice  
 Source: Scopus Database, 2024

As shown in Figure 5, research themes cluster into two major nodes. The social work practice node encompasses sub-themes of social care, advocacy, disability, rights, and inclusion. The COVID-19 node comprises two sub-groups: one centered on coronavirus, anxiety, resilience, and academic themes; another on child welfare, service, infection, control measures, and child protection. Importantly, the network reveals a critical gap: social work practice is directly connected to the social care cluster but is not yet directly bridged to several COVID-19 sub-themes — particularly anxiety, resilience, child welfare, and child protection. This gap represents a significant research opportunity, as these sub-themes identify areas where social work interventions are critically needed but where bibliometric evidence of practice-oriented research

remains sparse. This finding extends similar gap identifications in Syahri and Salahudin (2024) and Roulston et al. (2023), whose mapping efforts focused on different disciplinary or contextual frames.

Figure 6 presents the country-of-affiliation distribution of authors contributing to this corpus.



**Figure 6.** Author Affiliation by Country — Post-COVID-19 Social Work Practice Research  
Source: Scopus Database, 2024

The dominant contributing countries are the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Spain, Nigeria, China, and Qatar. This geographic concentration indicates that post-pandemic social work research remains largely anchored in English-speaking and European contexts. ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, have produced no visible contributions to this global body of literature — a critical gap given the region's large populations of socially vulnerable groups significantly affected by the pandemic (Haimah et al., 2022; Higashida & Ranaweera, 2021). For local academics and institutions, this represents both an urgency and an opportunity to conduct and publish contextually grounded post-pandemic social work practice research that can contribute to global knowledge.

Collectively, these findings indicate that post-pandemic social work practice is undergoing fundamental professional transformation — a conclusion supported by the convergence of digital social work themes, mental well-being concerns, child protection priorities, and the emerging imperative for resilience-building, adaptive interventions (Pink et al., 2022; Ferguson et al., 2022; McFadden et al., 2022; Mishna et al., 2022). Linking these bibliometric findings to their professional implications: for curriculum development, the prominence of digital social work and practitioner well-being themes suggests that social work education programs should integrate digital practice competencies, trauma-informed care approaches, and pandemic-resilient service delivery frameworks as core professional standards. For policy reform, the dominance of cross-sectoral collaboration themes and the prominence of child protection and community resilience issues suggest that governments should invest in digital social service infrastructure and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms as part of post-pandemic recovery frameworks (Ashcroft et al., 2022; Nwafor et al., 2023).

#### 4. Conclusion

This bibliometric study systematically maps social work practice research published in Scopus during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period (2022–July 2024), analyzing 139 articles using VOSviewer and NVivo-12. Three principal findings emerge. First, there has been a significant and growing body of scholarship on post-pandemic social work practice, with publications nearly doubling from 2022 to 2023, reflecting the heightened academic and professional urgency of

addressing pandemic-driven transformations. Second, thematic analysis reveals research clustering around two major nodes — social work and COVID-19 — with digital practice, child protection, mental well-being, and community resilience as defining sub-themes. The most influential works converge on digital social work and professional adaptation as central post-pandemic imperatives. Third, pronounced geographic gaps persist: ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, are significantly underrepresented, pointing to an urgent need for regionally grounded research.

These findings carry practical implications across three domains. For curriculum development, social work education programs should integrate digital practice competencies, trauma-informed care, and pandemic-resilient service delivery frameworks as core professional standards. For practice standards, professional bodies should formalize guidelines for remote and hybrid social work practice, boundary management, and technology-mediated client accessibility, informed by the growing evidence base on these topics. For policy reform, governments should invest in digital infrastructure for social services, cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms, and targeted support programs addressing the mental health and economic recovery of pandemic-affected populations.

The study has limitations. Data are limited to the Scopus database and English-language literature, which may underrepresent contributions published in other languages or indexed in alternative databases. The study period ends in July 2024, and the research landscape continues to evolve rapidly. Future research should conduct multi-database comparisons, incorporate non-English literature, and develop empirical or mixed-methods studies measuring actual behavioral change in social work practice following the pandemic. Comparative studies across ASEAN and Global South contexts are especially needed to address the geographic imbalances identified in this study.

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