


Bibliometric Overview of Youth Empowerment in Social Science Research

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received Jun, 2025 Revised Jun, 2025 Accepted Jun, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Bibliometric Analysis; Social Sciences; Vosviewer; Youth Empowerment</p>	<p>This study presents a bibliometric overview of youth empowerment research within the social sciences, employing VOSviewer to analyze patterns of authorship, international collaboration, and thematic evolution from 2000 to 2024. A dataset retrieved from Scopus formed the basis for co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, and temporal trend mapping. The analysis reveals Zimmerman M.A. as a central figure in the research network and the United States as the most prolific contributor, with notable partnerships involving countries such as Australia, South Africa, and Kenya. Thematically, the field has transitioned from early emphases on health education and risk prevention toward more contemporary focuses on mental health, leadership, and social justice. Keyword clustering illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of the field, integrating psychological, educational, health, and civic engagement frameworks. Temporal visualizations show a shift in conceptual priorities over time, while density mapping indicates core and peripheral research areas. The study highlights the importance of context-sensitive, inclusive, and forward-looking approaches to youth empowerment and identifies gaps for future investigation, particularly in areas such as digital inclusion and economic agency.</p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i></p> <div></div>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of youth empowerment has garnered growing scholarly attention in recent decades, particularly as societies increasingly recognize the critical role young people play in driving socio-political, cultural, and economic transformations. Youth, defined by the United Nations as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, represent a significant demographic cohort whose potential contributions are vital for sustainable development [1]. Empowerment, in this context, refers to the processes through

which youth gain the ability, agency, and resources to shape their own lives and influence the structures around them [2]. Within the domain of social sciences, youth empowerment has emerged as a multidisciplinary construct intersecting with education, political participation, social justice, public health, and labor economics [3].

Historically, the study of youth has often been problem-focused—viewing young people through lenses of delinquency, unemployment, and vulnerability [4], [5]. However, a paradigmatic shift is evident in contemporary research, where youth are

increasingly framed as agents of change rather than merely subjects of intervention [6]. This reconceptualization aligns with the participatory and rights-based frameworks championed by international development agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 (promoting inclusive societies) and Goal 8 (promoting decent work for all). As such, research on youth empowerment not only reflects theoretical developments within the social sciences but also responds to pressing global policy concerns.

The proliferation of academic literature on youth empowerment has created a complex and expansive body of work. Scholars have approached this topic from various disciplinary standpoints, utilizing diverse methodological frameworks and conceptualizations. For instance, psychological perspectives emphasize self-efficacy and identity development [7], whereas sociological approaches focus on collective agency and structural inclusion [8]. Political science research, meanwhile, explores youth civic engagement, protest movements, and policy advocacy [9]. This diversity presents both richness and fragmentation, necessitating a comprehensive synthesis to understand the dominant trends, thematic concentrations, and scholarly gaps within the literature.

Bibliometric analysis offers a valuable methodological lens to navigate and distill such a diverse and evolving research landscape. By leveraging citation data and publication metadata, bibliometric techniques allow researchers to map the intellectual structure, identify influential authors and institutions, examine collaboration patterns, and track the evolution of conceptual trends over time [10]. This method has become increasingly popular in the social sciences to uncover research dynamics and scholarly influence, especially when dealing with multidisciplinary and multi-thematic areas such as youth empowerment. Despite its relevance, a systematic bibliometric analysis focusing specifically on youth empowerment remains underdeveloped.

Given the growing volume of research and the increasing policy relevance of youth empowerment, there is a compelling need to undertake a structured bibliometric overview. Such an approach can provide a macro-level understanding of how the academic community has approached youth empowerment, which regions and institutions are leading the discourse, what theoretical frameworks dominate, and how these patterns have evolved over time. Moreover, it can inform future research agendas by revealing underexplored areas, neglected populations, and potential interdisciplinary linkages. This study thus positions itself at the intersection of empirical mapping and critical reflection within the social sciences.

While there has been a marked increase in scholarly interest in youth empowerment across various domains of social science, the field remains theoretically and thematically fragmented. There is limited integrative insight into how the concept has been operationalized, which methodological approaches are most prevalent, and which institutions and researchers are most influential. Existing literature reviews are often confined to specific sectors such as education, political engagement, or health, lacking a cross-sectoral synthesis. Moreover, no prior study has systematically mapped the bibliometric trends of youth empowerment to identify knowledge clusters, citation networks, or thematic evolutions. This absence of a comprehensive bibliometric perspective limits our understanding of the field's intellectual structure and its potential for interdisciplinary growth. The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of academic research on youth empowerment within the social sciences.

2. METHOD

This study employed a bibliometric analysis to systematically map the structure, development, and thematic trends in academic research on youth empowerment within the field of social sciences. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to assess the scholarly output of a given field by analyzing publication metadata such as

authorship, institutional affiliation, citations, co-authorship networks, and keyword usage [10].

2.1 Data Source and Search Strategy

To ensure comprehensive coverage of scholarly literature, data were retrieved from the Scopus database, which is one of the largest and most reputable abstract and citation databases for peer-reviewed literature across disciplines. The search was conducted in April 2025 using the following query string: TITLE-ABS-KEY("youth empowerment") AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2025. This search string was designed to extract articles that explicitly mention "youth empowerment" in the title, abstract, or keywords, and fall within relevant domains of the social sciences, including sociology, psychology, business, arts and humanities, and economics. The publication year range was restricted to the period from 2000 to 2024 to reflect contemporary developments. Only documents categorized as journal articles, reviews, or conference papers were included; editorials, notes, and letters were excluded to maintain academic rigor.

2.2 Data Cleaning and Preparation

The raw dataset was exported in RIS and CSV formats to facilitate compatibility with bibliometric software. Pre-processing steps included removing duplicate records, standardizing author names (e.g., merging variants such as "Smith, J." and "Smith, John"), and unifying institution names. Non-English documents were retained to capture a globally diverse perspective, although the majority of documents were in English. Only documents with complete bibliographic information (i.e., title, authors, source, abstract, and keywords) were included in the analysis.

2.3 Analytical Tools and Techniques

After retrieval, the bibliographic data were exported in CSV format and imported into VOSviewer for analysis. The data were cleaned to address issues

such as author name variants and inconsistent institution names. Basic standardization procedures were applied to ensure accurate clustering and mapping. No language filters were applied in the data extraction process, although the majority of the documents were in English. The first type of analysis conducted in VOSviewer was the co-authorship analysis, which provided insights into collaboration patterns among researchers and countries. This map highlighted central figures and clusters based on the number of jointly authored publications. It revealed both individual scholarly networks and cross-institutional cooperation within the youth empowerment research community.

Next, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was carried out to determine the most frequently used keywords and to identify major research themes. The analysis included both author keywords and keywords-plus (derived from titles and abstracts). A threshold of five occurrences was set to ensure analytical focus on recurrent and influential terms. The software's full counting method was used, wherein each occurrence of a keyword is given equal weight. The resulting visualization presented clusters of related terms, represented by color-coded groups, where proximity between nodes indicated conceptual similarity or thematic linkage. In addition to mapping keywords, a citation analysis was performed to identify the most cited documents and authors within the field. Citation strength and node size were used as indicators of influence, allowing identification of foundational works that have shaped subsequent studies on youth empowerment. VOSviewer's visualization allowed interpretation of which authors, journals, and sources had the most significant impact on the discourse.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

a. Co-Authorship Analysis

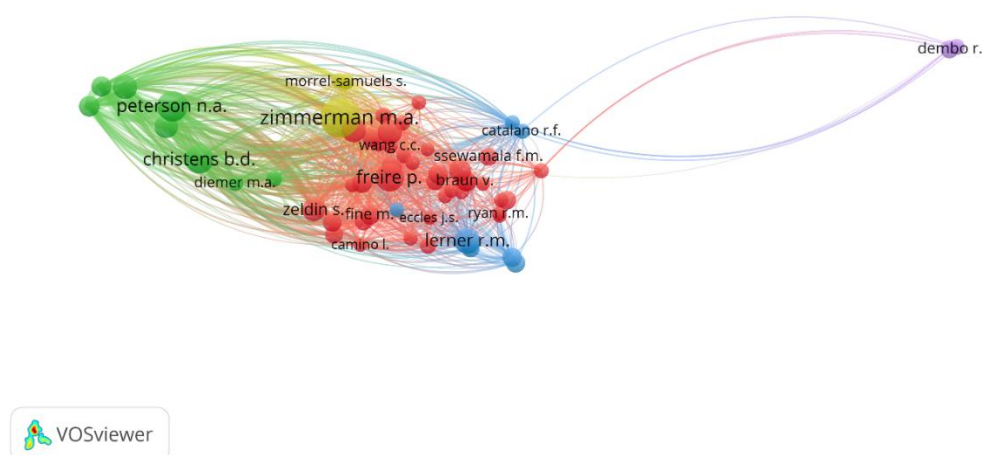


Figure 1. Authorship Network

Source: Data Analysis

The co-authorship network visualized reveals four major clusters of influential authors contributing to youth empowerment research. The central red cluster, which includes key figures such as Zimmerman M.A., Freire P., and Braun V., appears to represent a core intellectual group with strong internal collaboration and thematic coherence, likely focused on psychological empowerment and participatory methodologies. The green cluster, anchored by Peterson N.A. and Christens B.D., suggests a subgroup emphasizing community psychology and structural determinants of youth

empowerment. The blue cluster, featuring authors like Lerner R.M. and Catalano R.F., likely engages with developmental science and positive youth development frameworks. Interestingly, Dembo R., isolated in the purple cluster, shows minimal co-authorship links with the main network, indicating a more independent or niche research trajectory. The dense web of connections between clusters suggests high interdisciplinary collaboration, while the node sizes indicate Zimmerman M.A. as a central figure with substantial influence in the field.

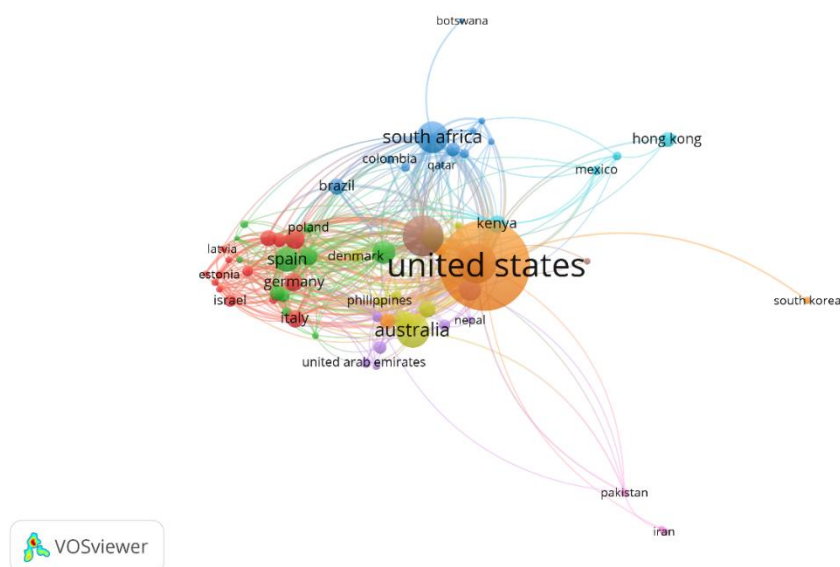


Figure 2. Country Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The country collaboration map generated illustrates the global research landscape in youth empowerment, with the United States emerging as the most dominant contributor, evident from its central position, large node size, and extensive network of connections. The U.S. forms strong collaborative ties with countries across multiple regions, particularly Australia, South Africa, Kenya, Germany, and Spain, indicating its central role in fostering international research partnerships. European countries

like Germany, Spain, and Italy cluster closely, suggesting a well-integrated regional network, likely reflecting EU-funded research initiatives. South Africa appears as a regional hub for African collaborations, connected to both Western countries and neighboring nations like Botswana and Kenya. Meanwhile, countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and South Korea show more peripheral placement and fewer connections, signaling emerging but less integrated research contributions.

b. Keyword Network

Co-Occurrence

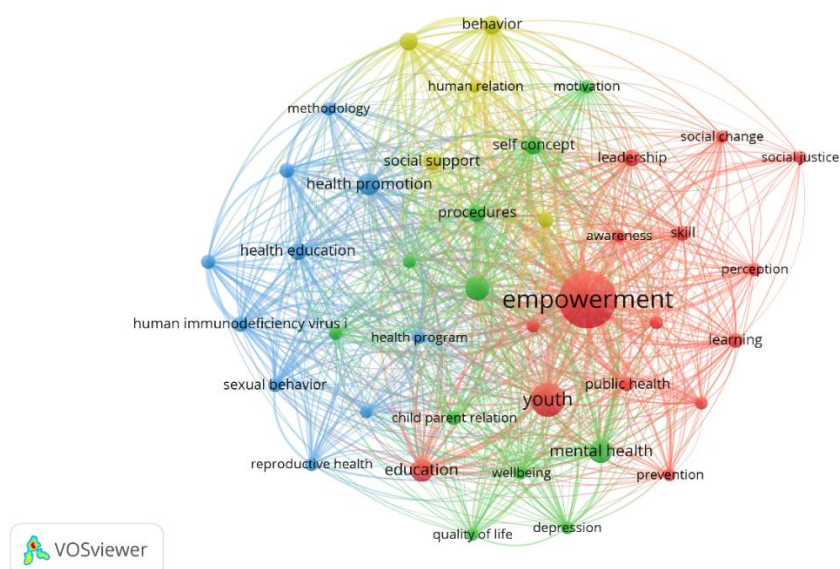


Figure 3. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The keyword co-occurrence network map offers a comprehensive overview of the dominant themes and conceptual interrelations within youth empowerment research in the social sciences. At the center of the network are the keywords "empowerment" and "youth", which unsurprisingly emerge as the most frequently co-occurring and interconnected terms. Their large node size and dense linkage reflect their foundational status in the literature, serving as central anchors to a variety of thematic pathways ranging from public health to social justice. The proximity of "mental health", "education", and "public health" to these core nodes further reinforces the multifaceted and interdisciplinary nature of youth empowerment discourse. The red cluster, which contains keywords like "leadership", "awareness", "social change", "learning", and "social justice", appears to emphasize transformative and participatory dimensions of

youth empowerment. This group of terms suggests a research stream focused on the sociopolitical empowerment of youth, often explored in the context of civic engagement, rights-based advocacy, and participatory learning. The frequent co-occurrence of "skill" and "perception" within this cluster also implies an interest in the development of internal capacities that enable young people to take active roles in their communities.

In contrast, the blue cluster represents a strong focus on health-related empowerment, with recurring terms such as "health education", "sexual behavior", "human immunodeficiency virus", "reproductive health", and "health promotion". This cluster reflects a public health-oriented stream of research, particularly prominent in interventions targeting sexual and reproductive health education, HIV/AIDS prevention, and

general wellness programs for adolescents. It shows how empowerment is operationalized through behavioral change, risk reduction, and improved access to health information and services. The green cluster occupies a bridging position between health and psychosocial development, including terms such as "procedures", "social support", "health program", and "self-concept". This group illustrates research that connects individual psychological empowerment with broader social and structural supports. It represents an integrative dimension where empowerment is conceptualized as both an internal sense of agency and a product of external enabling environments, such as community support systems and family dynamics.

The yellow cluster includes terms like "motivation", "human relation", "methodology", and "behavior", suggesting a more

methodological and psychological orientation to empowerment research. These keywords indicate studies focusing on behavioral science, motivational theory, and human interaction as they relate to youth agency and empowerment processes. The presence of "methodology" in this cluster also reflects ongoing discussions about how empowerment is measured, defined, and evaluated across diverse research contexts. The keyword map affirms that youth empowerment is a deeply interdisciplinary construct, encompassing public health, psychology, education, sociology, and political science. The interconnectedness of terms across clusters shows that while there are distinct thematic streams, there is also substantial overlap, pointing to the integrative potential of empowerment as both a theoretical and applied research framework.

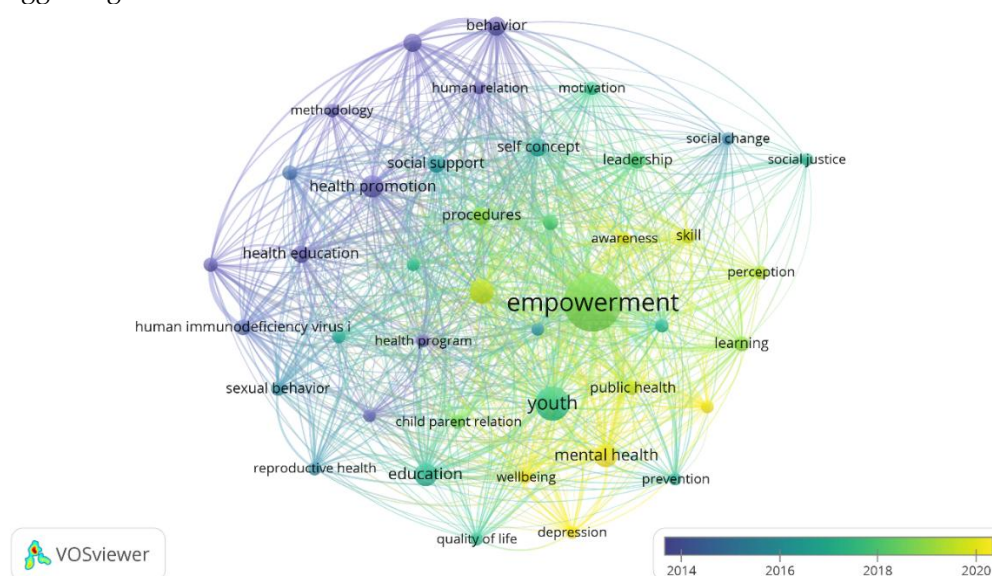


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The overlay visualization map illustrates the temporal

evolution of keywords in youth empowerment research, with

color coding representing the average publication year from 2014 (purple) to 2020 (yellow). Central keywords such as “empowerment”, “youth”, and “education” are marked in greenish-yellow, indicating consistent and sustained usage in recent years. The clustering of yellow and light-green terms such as “learning,” “mental health,” “public health,” and “prevention” around these central nodes suggests a recent research focus on integrative health and developmental themes. This trend signals a shift toward youth empowerment as a holistic construct linked with wellbeing, psychosocial resilience, and proactive public health strategies. In contrast, keywords like “methodology,” “health education,” “sexual behavior,” and “human immunodeficiency virus” appear in darker shades of blue and purple, indicating that these topics were more prominent in earlier phases of the research

timeline (around 2014–2016). These terms reflect earlier public health-oriented research agendas, particularly those concerned with behavior modification and risk prevention. While these themes remain relevant, their decreasing color intensity suggests they are no longer at the cutting edge of current youth empowerment discourse and may be giving way to broader developmental and socio-emotional priorities. Emerging keywords such as “leadership,” “awareness,” “skill,” and “social justice” appear in lighter green and yellow tones, pointing to their increasing prominence in publications from 2018 onward. This reflects a growing emphasis on agency, advocacy, and civic engagement in youth empowerment research. These recent developments mark a shift from individual-level behavioral models to more participatory and transformative frameworks.

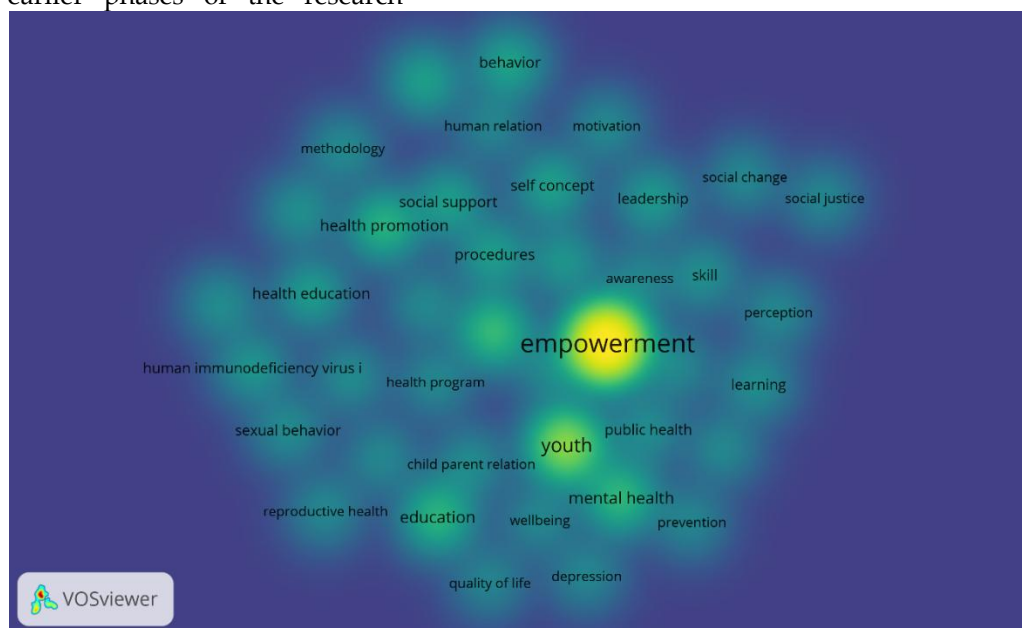


Figure 5. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The density visualization map highlights the most intensively studied concepts in youth empowerment research, with brighter colors indicating higher frequency and stronger interconnectivity of keywords. At the center of the map, “empowerment” and “youth” shine in bright yellow, confirming their centrality and dominance in the research field. The intense density around these terms reflects their frequent co-occurrence with a wide array of related concepts, suggesting that they are not only foundational topics but also extensively integrated across various thematic areas. Other terms such

as “education,” “mental health,” and “public health” also appear with moderate density, indicating their significant but slightly more specialized presence. In contrast, keywords like “sexual behavior,” “reproductive health,” “social change,” and “social justice” appear in dimmer green hues, suggesting they are part of the broader research conversation but less frequently emphasized or studied in combination with the central terms. These lower-density regions may represent emerging or more niche subfields within youth empowerment studies.

c. Citation Analysis

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title
548	[11]	A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth
371	[12]	Empowering community settings: Agents of individual development, community betterment, and positive social change
365	[13]	Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness: Participatory HIV prevention by South African youth
344	[14]	Measuring children's participation in recreation and leisure activities: Construct validation of the CAPE and PAC
339	[15]	Healing traditions: Culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian Aboriginal peoples
326	[16]	A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion
236	[17]	Youth empowerment and high school gay-straight alliances
234	[18]	Using methods that matter: The impact of reflection, dialogue, and voice
221	[19]	Making volunteers: Civic life after welfare's end
209	[20]	Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice: The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) Project

Source: Scopus, 2025

3.2 Discussion

This bibliometric analysis reveals the structural, thematic, and temporal dynamics of youth empowerment research in the social sciences over the past two decades. Through the lens of co-

authorship networks, country collaborations, and keyword mapping, several key patterns emerge, each offering valuable insights into the intellectual development, collaborative practices, and evolving priorities of this field.

One of the most notable findings is the centrality of Zimmerman M.A., who emerges as a pivotal figure in the co-authorship network. His positioning reflects both high productivity and strong collaborative ties across multiple clusters. Zimmerman's foundational contributions, particularly his psychological empowerment theory [21], have laid the groundwork for much of the contemporary discourse, serving as a bridge between public health, education, and community-based research. The co-presence of authors like Peterson N.A., Christens B.D., and Freire P. in interconnected clusters suggests a vibrant scholarly ecosystem that blends community psychology, participatory action research, and liberation pedagogy [22], [23]. Meanwhile, the isolation of Dembo R. in a distant cluster may reflect niche research trajectories or limited cross-disciplinary integration, which is not uncommon in bibliometric landscapes.

The country collaboration map highlights the global distribution of youth empowerment research, with the United States occupying a dominant role in terms of output and centrality. This is consistent with broader bibliometric trends in social science, where U.S.-based institutions often lead both in volume and citation impact [24]. The strong collaborative links between the U.S. and countries such as Australia, South Africa, Germany, and Kenya point to a North-South research dynamic. South Africa and Kenya's integration into these networks is particularly significant, suggesting increasing representation of Global South perspectives in youth empowerment discourses, particularly those centered around health, education, and post-colonial civic development [25]. However, the relatively peripheral positioning of countries like Pakistan, Iran, and South Korea suggests that while youth empowerment is gaining traction globally, regional imbalances in research infrastructure, funding, or access to

international publication platforms may still pose barriers to broader scholarly integration [26].

The keyword co-occurrence network further reinforces the interdisciplinary nature of youth empowerment research. The clustering of terms like "mental health," "education," "leadership," and "social justice" around the central concepts of "empowerment" and "youth" reveals the field's multi-thematic complexity. The red cluster, which focuses on leadership, learning, and social transformation, aligns with civic and political models of empowerment, wherein youth are positioned as agents of social change rather than mere beneficiaries of intervention [27]. In contrast, the blue cluster's emphasis on sexual health, HIV prevention, and health education reflects a more public health-oriented paradigm, which has historically dominated empowerment work, particularly in developing contexts where youth face elevated health risks [28].

Interestingly, the green and yellow clusters bridge these extremes, integrating psychosocial concepts like "self-concept," "motivation," and "social support" with practical empowerment outcomes such as skills, awareness, and behavioral change. This demonstrates the emergence of hybrid frameworks that move beyond siloed disciplinary approaches. Such integration is reflective of contemporary models of positive youth development, which argue for a holistic view of empowerment that encompasses both individual competencies and structural enablers.

The overlay visualization, which adds a temporal dimension to keyword mapping, reveals a clear shift in thematic priorities over time. Earlier research, centered around terms like "sexual behavior," "HIV," and "methodology," dominated the 2014–2016 period, reflecting an initial focus on behavioral

health and intervention science. However, keywords such as “mental health,” “learning,” “leadership,” and “social justice” appear increasingly in more recent years (2018–2020), indicating a progressive turn toward participatory, rights-based, and psychosocial empowerment frameworks. This transition mirrors broader societal movements emphasizing youth voice, identity, and agency, particularly in the context of movements like Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter, and post-COVID mental health reform [17].

The density visualization reinforces these findings by showing where the intellectual “heat” of the field lies. Terms like “empowerment,” “youth,” “education,” and “mental health” appear in high-density areas, confirming their centrality in scholarly discourse. Conversely, keywords like “reproductive health,” “social justice,” and “leadership” appear in lower-density regions, signaling emerging yet underexplored domains. This suggests that while the field has a solid core of well-studied themes, there remain significant opportunities to diversify and expand the conceptual reach of youth empowerment research.

Several important implications emerge from these findings. First, the dominance of Global North scholars and institutions underscores the need for greater epistemic inclusivity. Youth empowerment is inherently context-specific, and future research must amplify indigenous perspectives, grassroots narratives, and non-Western epistemologies to avoid a one-size-fits-all model. Second, the strong presence of health-related terms reveals that despite the growing civic and social focus, biomedical paradigms still shape much of the research, particularly in international development contexts. Bridging the gap between structural health interventions and participatory empowerment frameworks remains a pressing challenge.

Third, the evolving presence of mental health, learning, and social justice themes suggests an ongoing redefinition of what it means to empower youth in the 21st century. Increasingly, empowerment is not just about providing resources or opportunities, but about fostering agency, identity, resilience, and voice. This shift requires methodological innovation to capture the dynamic and subjective nature of empowerment processes. Lastly, the bibliometric approach itself offers value beyond mapping. By highlighting research gaps, collaborative clusters, and thematic trajectories, it can inform strategic agenda-setting for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. For example, the limited integration of “climate change,” “digital literacy,” or “entrepreneurship” within the current keyword landscape points to new frontiers of empowerment research in a rapidly changing world. These gaps can be prioritized for future inquiry, especially given the evolving socio-economic and technological realities facing today’s youth.

4. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure, collaborative patterns, and thematic evolution of youth empowerment research within the social sciences. The findings reveal that the field is anchored by foundational figures such as Zimmerman M.A. and dominated by contributions from the United States, while also displaying increasing global collaboration, particularly with countries from the Global South. Thematic mapping demonstrates a shift from early focuses on health education and risk prevention toward more recent emphases on mental health, leadership, and social justice, signaling a broadening of the empowerment discourse to include psychosocial and civic dimensions. Despite its multidisciplinary growth, the field still shows underexplored areas such as digital inclusion, environmental justice, and economic empowerment. As youth continue to play a pivotal role in shaping global

futures, this study highlights the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and forward-looking research agendas that

recognize youth not merely as beneficiaries, but as empowered agents of change.

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