

Universitas Negeri Padang & Ikatan Konselor Indonesia

Editorial Office: Jurusan Bimbingan dan Konseling | Faculty of Education | Universitas Negeri Padang

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Volume 14 Number 2 2025



KONSELOR

ISSN 1412-9760 (Print) | ISSN 2541-5948 (Online)

Editor: Afriyadi Sofyan

Publication details, including author guidelines

URL: <https://counselor.pjj.unp.ac.id/index.php/konselor/about/submissions>

Mapping a Decade of Bullying Research in Counseling: A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer

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Article History

Received: Saturday, May 17, 2025

Revised: Saturday, May 31, 2025

Accepted: Tuesday, June 17, 2025

How to cite this article (APA)

Pasmawati, H., Afriyati, V., Astarini, D., Awlawi, A. H., & Azis, A. R. (2025). Mapping a decade of bullying research in counseling: A bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer. *KONSELOR*, 14(2), 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.24036/02025142117-0-86>

The readers can link to article via <https://doi.org/10.24036/02025142117-0-86>

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Mapping a Decade of Bullying Research in Counseling: A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer



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Abstract: This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research trends on bullying within the counseling field, based on 174 peer-reviewed articles indexed in the Scopus database between 2014 and 2024. Bibliometric techniques—including keyword co-occurrence mapping, co-authorship network analysis, and citation tracking—were conducted using VOSviewer to identify dominant themes, influential authors and journals, and patterns of scholarly collaboration. The analysis revealed eight major keyword clusters, primarily centered around childhood adversity, mental health outcomes, and counseling-based intervention strategies. Prominent contributors included authors such as Espelage, D.L., and journals such as *Children and Youth Services Review*, *School Psychology International*, and the *Journal of Counseling & Development*. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia emerged as the most productive countries, with medicine, psychology, and social sciences dominating the subject areas. Research output peaked in 2021 and 2023. Despite the overall growth in scholarly interest, topics such as cyberbullying and anti-violence education remained underrepresented, indicating important gaps for future exploration. These insights offer a clearer understanding of the field's evolution and provide valuable direction for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers committed to advancing bullying-related interventions in counseling contexts.

Key Words: Bullying; Counseling; Bibliometric analysis; Mental health; Intervention strategies

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a global and persistent psychological issue that has garnered increasing concern due to its profound and long-lasting effects on individuals' mental health and social functioning. Numerous studies have shown that victims of bullying are at elevated risk for anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and social withdrawal, all of which can severely impair overall well-being and life quality (Abimannan et al., 2021; Gaunt et al., 2024; Rachamin et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2021). The consequences of bullying are not confined to individual victims alone but also affect broader social environments such as schools, families, and peer groups, making it a multifaceted issue requiring systemic responses (Avşar & Ayaz-Alkaya, 2024; Tian et al., 2023)

In recent years, bullying has evolved beyond traditional face-to-face interactions, giving rise to cyberbullying—a digital form of harassment that carries distinct characteristics and severe

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psychological impacts (Kiliç et al., 2022; Sainz & Martín-Moya, 2023). Cyberbullying is particularly damaging because it can occur anonymously, persist indefinitely, and reach victims at any time, making it harder for adults and institutions to detect and intervene (Chillemi et al., 2020; Jeong et al., 2024). These dynamics amplify the emotional distress experienced by victims and add layers of complexity to the bullying phenomenon in the digital era.

Moreover, bullying not only affects victims but also has significant implications for perpetrators and bystanders. Research has found that individuals who bully others are at greater risk of engaging in antisocial behavior and developing conduct disorders, while bystanders who witness bullying without support may suffer psychological distress and feelings of helplessness (Cosgrave et al., 2021; Kannammal et al., 2023; Salem et al., 2023). These findings underscore the systemic nature of bullying and the importance of comprehensive, multi-tiered interventions.

Within the field of counseling, bullying represents a critical area of concern due to its widespread prevalence and psychological impact. Counselors play essential roles in addressing bullying by supporting victims, mediating conflicts, guiding perpetrators toward behavioral change, and educating communities on prevention (Cosgrave et al., 2021; Feijóo et al., 2024; Jones, 2020). As such, counseling offers a valuable setting for both immediate intervention and long-term recovery, especially when tailored interventions are grounded in evidence-based practices.

Given the growing complexity and societal relevance of bullying, it is crucial to adopt systematic methods for analyzing the evolving body of research in this area. A thorough understanding of how bullying is studied in the counseling domain can help highlight key themes, dominant contributors, and emerging gaps. Bibliometric analysis serves this purpose by offering a structured, quantitative approach to mapping scientific publications, identifying influential works, and revealing research trends across time and disciplines (Donthu et al., 2021; Múzquiz et al., 2023; Zupic & Čater, 2015)

Within the field of counseling, bullying is recognized as a critical issue due to its pervasive nature and substantial psychological consequences. Counselors frequently encounter individuals affected by bullying in various roles: as victims grappling with trauma, as perpetrators exhibiting aggressive or antisocial behavior, and as bystanders who may experience guilt, anxiety, or helplessness. This triadic involvement underscores the complexity of bullying and the importance of counseling as a multifaceted intervention setting (Mayer et al., 2021a; Valido et al., 2022). Counseling provides a safe and structured environment where individuals can process their experiences, develop coping strategies, and rebuild self-esteem. For victims, counseling plays a pivotal role in emotional healing and resilience-building. For perpetrators, it offers an opportunity to address underlying behavioral and emotional issues, such as anger, insecurity, or learned aggression. For bystanders, counseling can help reduce passive tolerance of bullying and empower them to become active agents of prevention and support (Shoham et al., 2021; Valido et al., 2022).

Furthermore, bullying is not only a topic of clinical concern but also a major area of academic inquiry within counseling research. Understanding the dynamics of bullying and developing evidence-based interventions are essential to improving counseling outcomes. Consequently, ongoing research is necessary to inform best practices, design effective school- and community-based programs, and guide policy decisions that support mental health and social well-being. Over the past decade, academic interest in bullying has grown substantially, resulting in a large and diverse body of literature exploring its causes, psychological and social effects, and intervention strategies across various contexts. Researchers have examined bullying from multiple perspectives, including developmental psychology, education, social work, and public health (Gerard et al., 2019; Múzquiz et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2023). This increasing volume of research reflects global concern about the pervasive nature and consequences of bullying.

Despite this significant growth, there remains a notable gap in the literature when it comes to structured and systematic mapping of bullying research, specifically within the field of counseling. While general studies on bullying offer valuable insights, they often lack focus on how bullying is understood, addressed, and theorized within counseling practice and scholarship. Without a dedicated overview of this specific domain, it becomes difficult for counselors, educators, and researchers to track key developments, identify gaps in knowledge, and align intervention efforts with the evolving needs of the field (Niedhammer et al., 2024). Consequently, a targeted bibliometric analysis is needed to

comprehensively map the intellectual landscape of bullying research in counseling. This would not only help in identifying influential works and emerging topics but also support the development of more evidence-based, context-specific interventions and policies tailored to the counseling setting.

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a powerful and systematic method for evaluating the structure and development of scientific literature. By quantitatively examining patterns of publication, citation, and collaboration, this approach enables researchers to identify influential studies, prolific authors, and core journals within a field. It also facilitates the mapping of co-authorship networks, institutional collaboration, and keyword co-occurrence to uncover thematic clusters and research trends (Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, 2021; Zupic, I., & Čater, 2015). In the context of counseling and bullying, bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer allow for visualizing the intellectual landscape and detecting how scholarly discourse has evolved (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; van Eck & Waltman, 2010). These capabilities make bibliometric analysis an essential technique for synthesizing complex bodies of literature and guiding future research directions.

The primary objective of this study is to systematically examine the body of scholarly literature on bullying within the context of counseling by employing bibliometric analysis. This investigation specifically focuses on how bullying is conceptualized, addressed, and discussed in peer-reviewed counseling-related research. The dataset was obtained from the Scopus database, one of the most comprehensive and reputable indexing platforms for academic publications across disciplines. A total of 174 journal articles were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria, which limited the scope to English-language, peer-reviewed publications published between 2014 and 2024. The analysis was carried out using VOSviewer (version 1.6.19), a specialized software tool designed for visualizing and constructing bibliometric networks.

This tool enabled the generation of multiple network maps that illustrate relationships among authors, keywords, countries, institutions, and cited sources. Specific bibliometric techniques applied include keyword co-occurrence analysis to identify thematic clusters, co-authorship network analysis to trace collaborative relationships, and citation analysis to determine the most influential works and journals in the field. By mapping these various dimensions, the study aims to provide a structured overview of research patterns, highlight emerging topics and underexplored areas, and offer practical insights for researchers, counselors, and policymakers. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-informed practices and support the advancement of strategic interventions against bullying within the counseling domain.

RESULTS

Procedure and Data Collection Process

This study employed a bibliometric approach to analyze trends in bullying research within the counseling context. Data collection was conducted through a systematic search in the Scopus database. The exact search string used was: ("bullying" AND "counseling") applied to the article title, abstract, and keywords to ensure relevance. The search was performed on December 20, 2024. To maintain the quality and focus of the study, several filters and inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2014 and 2024 were included, reflecting a decade-long overview of research trends. Document types such as conference papers, editorials, book chapters, and non-English publications were excluded to ensure the consistency and reliability of the dataset. Following these criteria, 174 articles were retrieved and selected for analysis. The selection process was carefully performed to ensure that the articles specifically addressed bullying within a counseling framework, enhancing the relevance of the bibliometric findings (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Materials, Data Source and Tools

The Scopus database was chosen as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage, high indexing standards, and interdisciplinary reach across social sciences, psychology, education, and health sciences (Burnham, 2006). Scopus hosts a wide range of leading peer-reviewed scientific publications,

making it a reliable and comprehensive source for bibliometric studies. For the data analysis, VOSviewer version 1.6.19 was used. VOSviewer is a specialized software tool designed for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, including keyword co-occurrence, co-authorship, and citation relationships (Dewi, I. S., & Jauharyah, 2021; Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, 2010). It offers user-friendly visualization capabilities such as network maps, density maps, and overlay visualizations that help in identifying research clusters and trends effectively ((Muhammad, I., Mukhibin, A., do muhamad Naser, A., & Dasari, 2022; Muhammad & Triansyah, 2023)).

Bibliometric Analysis

Several bibliometric techniques were applied to analyze the data: Keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to identify frequently appearing keywords and thematic clusters, highlighting core topics in bullying and counseling research. Co-authorship network analysis examined collaboration patterns among authors, institutions, and countries to understand research dynamics and influential contributors (Smolina, S. G., Khafizov, D. M., & Erlich, 2020). Source (journal) analysis identified the most productive and influential journals publishing articles related to bullying and counseling. Institution and country mapping visualized the geographical distribution and institutional contributions in the research area (Ahmi, A., & Mohamad, 2019; Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Thresholds were set to focus on significant patterns: for example, only keywords that appeared at least 5 times were included in the mapping to ensure meaningful clusters and reduce noise. The units of analysis consisted of authors, articles, keywords, source titles (journals), institutions, and countries (Panduan Lengkap VOSviewer: Menguasai VOSviewer Dengan Cepat Dan Tepat. Penerbit Adab., 2023; Santoso, 2023).

The analysis produced several types of visual outputs, including: Network maps, which display nodes (authors, keywords, journals) and links representing relationships or collaborations. Density visualizations, showing areas with a high concentration of research activity or keyword frequency. Overlay visualizations, which map temporal trends and the evolution of topics over the studied period. All analytical procedures adhered to accepted standards in bibliometric research to ensure validity and reliability (Milosevic et al., 2023; Zupic, I., & Čater, 2015). The combination of Scopus's comprehensive data and VOSviewer's visualization capabilities enabled a robust and insightful analysis of bullying research trends in counseling.

RESULTS

Visualization of topic areas using VOSviewer

This study analyzed 174 scientific articles published between 2014 and 2024 that addressed the topic of bullying within the context of counseling. These articles were retrieved from the Scopus database through a rigorous selection process based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The results of the annual trend analysis indicate a gradual increase in publications over the past decade, with peaks recorded in 2021 (20 articles) and 2023 (21 articles). In contrast, the year with the fewest publications was 2018, with only 9 articles. This pattern suggests sustained and growing scholarly interest in bullying-related counseling research, particularly in recent years.

From the 174 articles, more than 300 unique keywords were identified. After applying a minimum occurrence threshold of five, several frequently appearing keywords—excluding "bullying" and "counseling"—were found, including mental health, adolescents, school-based intervention, cyberbullying, childhood adversity, and resilience. Visualization using VOSviewer software generated eight primary clusters based on keyword co-occurrence. Each cluster represents a distinct but interconnected research theme. For example, the red cluster highlights a focus on childhood adversity and its impact on mental health, while the green cluster emphasizes school-based intervention strategies.

The visualization is presented in three formats: network visualization (illustrating the relationships between keywords), overlay visualization (depicting the temporal evolution of research trends), and density visualization (indicating the concentration and intensity of research topics).

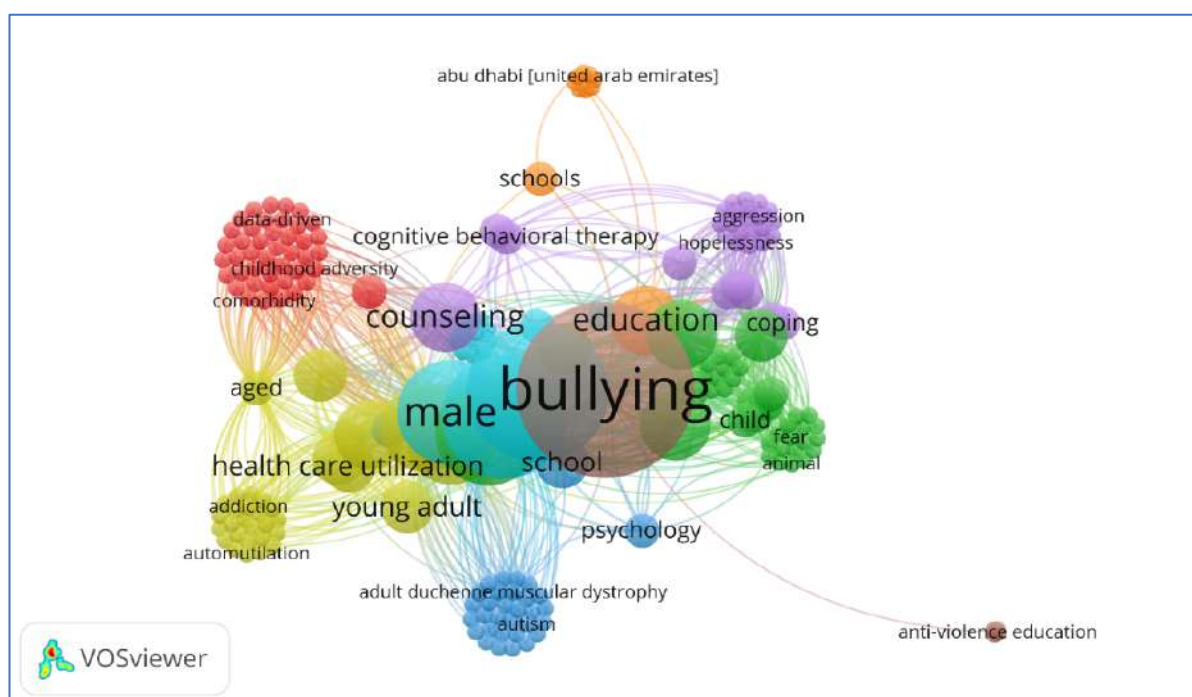


Figure 1. Visualization of topic areas using VOSviewer network visualization

Figure 1 presents a detailed mapping of the most frequently used terms across publications on bullying in the counseling context. Each node in the network visualization represents a keyword, with node size reflecting its frequency of occurrence and the connecting lines (edges) indicating the strength of co-occurrence between terms across articles. The keyword “bullying” appears as the most central and dominant term, prominently positioned at the core of the network. Closely linked are other frequently occurring keywords such as counseling, education, school, and male, highlighting their frequent association in the literature on bullying.

Utilizing VOSviewer’s clustering algorithm, eight thematic clusters were identified, each marked by a distinct color and representing a particular focus area. For instance, the red cluster emphasizes clinical and developmental concerns, including terms like childhood adversity and comorbidity. The purple cluster centers on psychological interventions, featuring keywords such as cognitive behavioral therapy and hopelessness. The green cluster focuses on emotional and behavioral responses, with terms such as coping and aggression. Interestingly, the brown cluster, which appears more peripheral, includes topics like anti-violence education, suggesting this area is still relatively underexplored within the mainstream discourse.

This study employed a keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer to identify dominant themes and conceptual groupings in the literature. A total of 332 distinct keywords were extracted from the 174 analyzed articles. After excluding generic terms such as bullying and counseling, the top 10 most frequently occurring keywords were: mental health, adolescents, violence, intervention, school, children, prevention, education, trauma, and psychological well-being. These keywords underscore the strong emphasis in the literature on psychological impacts, counseling strategies, and the school environment as a central context for intervention.

As visualized in Figures 2 and 3, the co-occurrence network and density maps further illustrate the relationships and intensities among these keywords. The four dominant clusters identified were: Cluster 1 (Red): Childhood adversity and comorbidities, Cluster 2 (Green): Mental health outcomes and

trauma, Cluster 3 (Blue): School-based interventions and resilience, & Cluster 4 (Yellow): Cognitive-behavioral therapy and prevention

The size of each node in these visualizations indicates the frequency of the term, while the proximity between nodes signifies the closeness of thematic relationships. Overall, the visualization provides a comprehensive overview of key research directions, central topics, and emerging gaps in the field—offering valuable insights for future scholarly inquiry.

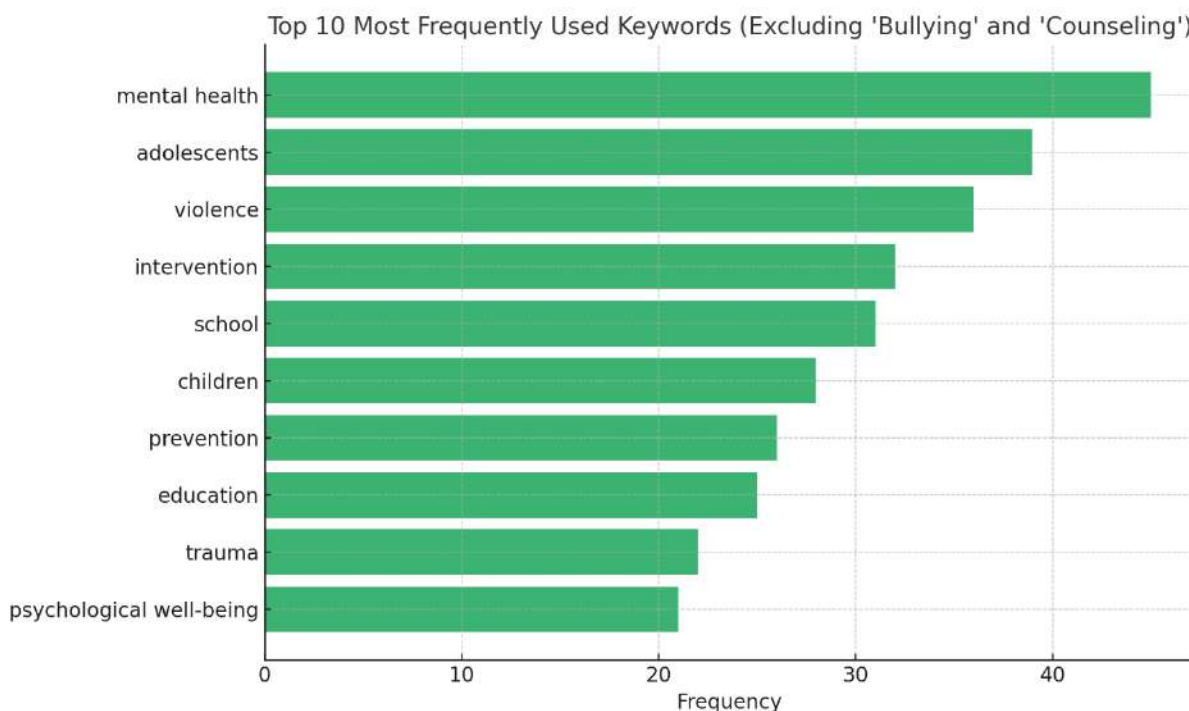


Figure 2. The TOP 10 Most Frequently Used Keywords

These results reinforce prior research by demonstrating that bullying studies within the counseling domain are predominantly concentrated on the psychological aspects of victimization and intervention—particularly within educational and developmental settings. While there is a strong emphasis on mental health outcomes and intervention strategies, relatively underexplored areas such as cyberbullying and anti-violence education remain marginal. This is evident in the smallest cluster (Cluster 8 – Brown), which contains only five articles, signaling a gap that warrants further scholarly attention.

In addition to keyword co-occurrence analysis, this study also examined author productivity to identify key contributors to the field of bullying and counseling. Based on VOSviewer's analysis of author occurrence and co-authorship networks, the five most prolific authors in terms of publication count are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The top five most prolific authors in terms of publication count

Author	Number (Publications)
Espelage, D.L.	6
Swearer, S.M.	5
Smith, P.K	5
Nickerson, A.B.	4
Yosep, I	3

Table 1 presents the publication counts of several leading authors actively conducting research on bullying within the counseling domain. Among them, Espelage, D.L. emerges as the most prolific contributor, with six publications, reflecting a substantial role in shaping scholarly discourse and

counseling practices focused on bullying. Swearer, S.M. and Smith, P.K. follow with five publications each, confirming their influence as core researchers in the field. Nickerson, A.B. with four publications and Yosep, I. with three complete the list of top contributors. These authors have consistently published works on school-based bullying, mental health outcomes, and intervention strategies—especially within counseling and psychological frameworks. Figures such as Espelage and Swearer are widely recognized for their pioneering work in bullying prevention, and their contributions over the past decade are frequently cited across the literature. Although VOSviewer does not directly report h-index values, citation data from Scopus indicate that authors like Espelage and Smith have achieved high scholarly impact, reinforcing their status as thought leaders. The co-authorship network visualization generated through VOSviewer reveals several tightly connected author clusters, centered around highly productive and collaborative scholars. These visual patterns highlight international and interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly among researchers from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Such collaborations underscore the collective nature of bullying research in counseling and the importance of sustained scholarly partnerships for producing high-impact studies.

In summary, the analysis of author productivity in Table 1 underscores the presence of core contributors whose work significantly shapes the field. However, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of influence and impact, this analysis should be complemented by citation network mapping and journal impact assessments—identifying both key publication venues and the authors' reach within the academic ecosystem.

Table 2. Cluster results of bibliometric analysis

Cluster	Color	Item	Total
1	Red	Cluster 1	43
2	Green	Cluster 2	38
3	Blue	Cluster 3	33
4	Yellow	Cluster 4	33
5	Purple	Cluster 5	29
6	Light Blue	Cluster 6	20
7	Orange	Cluster 7	12
8	Brown	Cluster 8	5

Table 2 presents the results of the keyword co-occurrence cluster analysis, identifying eight distinct thematic clusters within the literature on bullying in the counseling context. These clusters are generated using VOSviewer's clustering algorithm, with each cluster color-coded and sized according to the number of associated keywords—indicating the relative concentration of research focus across the field.

Cluster 1 (Red): Comprising 43 items, this is the largest cluster and likely represents the dominant theme in the literature. It centers around psychological constructs such as childhood adversity, mental health, anxiety, and comorbid conditions, emphasizing the internalized impact of bullying and the need for clinical attention.

Cluster 2 (Green): With 38 items, this cluster focuses on school-based interventions, highlighting the role of educational institutions in prevention and support. Keywords such as school, teacher, prevention, and education policy appear prominently.

Cluster 3 (Blue): Containing 33 items, this cluster addresses resilience, coping strategies, peer support, and social-emotional learning, indicating a focus on interpersonal and behavioral responses within peer dynamics.

Cluster 4 (Yellow): Also with 33 items, this cluster is characterized by counseling strategies, particularly those related to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), emotional regulation, and therapeutic settings, representing clinical interventions directly implemented by mental health professionals.

Cluster 5 (Purple): Comprising 29 items, this cluster includes terms like trauma, hopelessness, and therapy, suggesting a thematic focus on emotional and psychological interventions, overlapping slightly with clinical psychology and psychopathology.

Cluster 6 (Light Blue): With 20 items, this cluster introduces emerging or interdisciplinary themes, including cyberbullying, social media, and digital risks, reflecting newer research directions that respond to technological change.

Documents by year

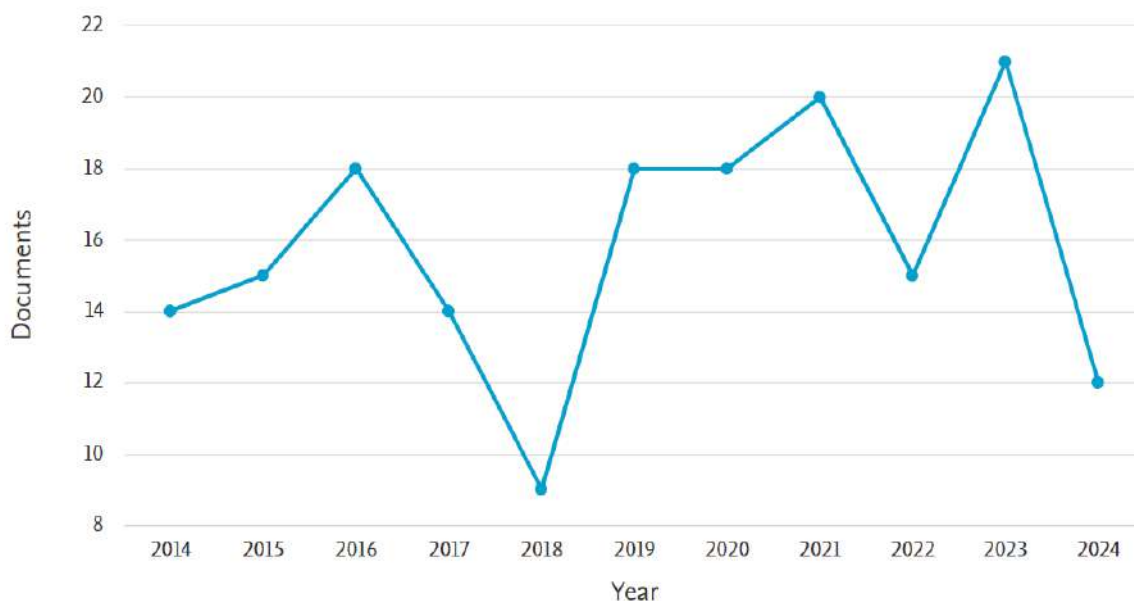


Figure 5. Articles on bullying and counseling have been published.

Figure 5 illustrates the annual distribution of publications on bullying within the counseling context from 2014 to 2024. The data reveal a generally fluctuating but upward trend in scholarly output over the decade, with noticeable peaks and troughs. The number of documents remained relatively stable in the early years (2014–2016), ranging from 14 to 18 articles. A sharp decline occurred in 2018, reaching the lowest point with only 9 publications. However, this was followed by a strong rebound in 2019 and a consistent level of productivity through 2020 and 2021, with 18 and 20 articles, respectively. Another dip was observed in 2022, followed by the highest publication count in 2023, which reached 21 articles. The year 2024 shows a decrease to 12 documents, although this may be due to the partial nature of data collection at the time of analysis. These patterns suggest sustained academic interest in bullying and counseling, with increased attention during recent years, possibly reflecting growing concern over mental health, school safety, and digital-era bullying.

These visualizations are invaluable for identifying clusters or hotspots, providing insight into the areas where a particular event is most widespread or significant. Figure 4 helps in identifying trends and patterns in data concentration by emphasizing data density. This presentation depicts a bibliometric mapping visualization display. In addition, Figure 5 illustrates the development of research trends from year to year. Based on the data above, it is illustrated that research on bullying and counseling has increased significantly in 2021 and 2023.

The above Griffith also provides information on the number of studies on bullying from 2014–2024 totaling 174 documents with details of 2024 12 articles, 2023 21 articles, 2022 15 articles, 2021 20 articles, 2020 18 articles, 2019 18 articles, 2018 9 articles, 2017 14 articles, 2016 18 articles, 2015 15 articles, 2014 14 articles. If calculated by the country for the keywords *bullying* and *counseling*, there are the top 10 countries that have publications on *bullying and counseling* are. The countries are the United States 75 articles, the United Kingdom 20 articles, Australia 11 articles, Canada 9 articles, Indonesia 9 articles, China 8 articles, Germany 6 articles, South Korea 6 articles, Ghana 5 articles, and India 4 articles.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

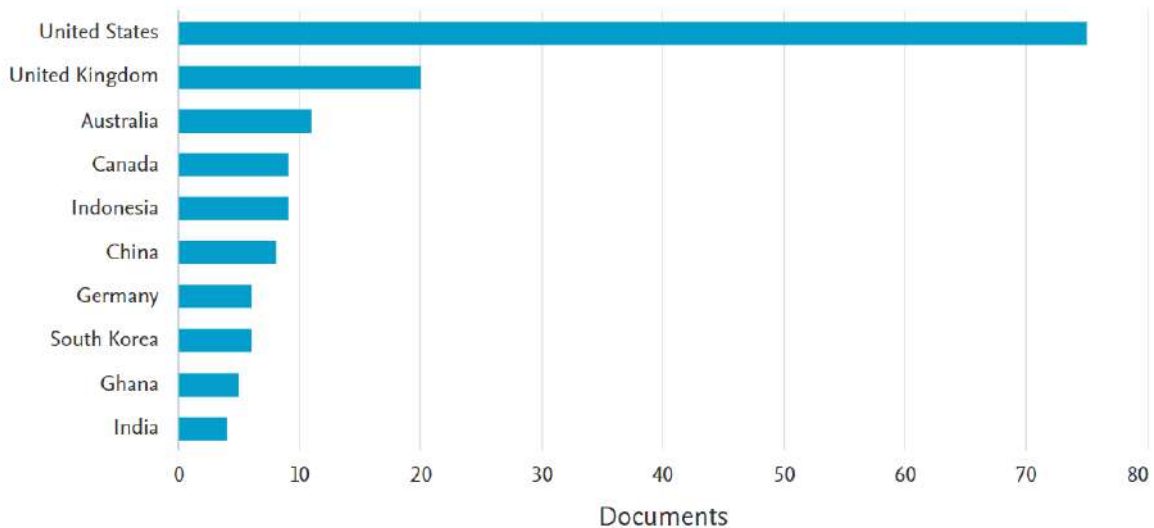


Figure 6. Top ten region countries that study bullying in counseling

Figure 6 illustrates the geographical distribution of publications on bullying in counseling by country or territory. The United States leads overwhelmingly with approximately 75 documents, indicating its dominant role in contributing to the global body of research on this topic.

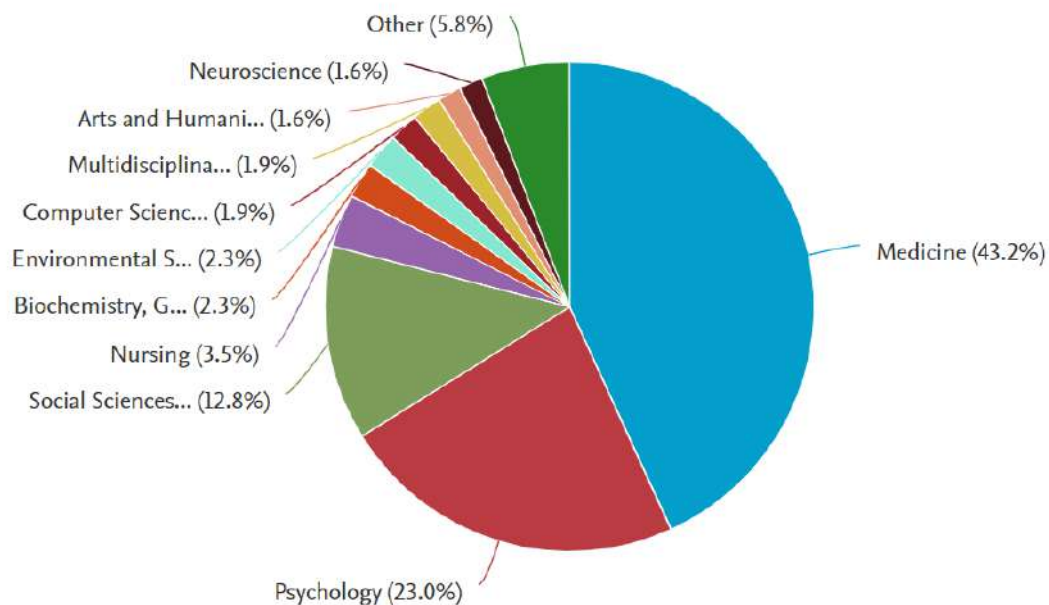


Figure 7. Visualization of subject areas from Scopus analysis

The United Kingdom follows at a distant second with 20 documents, suggesting a strong but significantly smaller research output. Other notable contributors include Australia (11 documents), Canada (9), and Indonesia (9)—demonstrating growing attention to bullying-related issues in both Western and developing contexts. Countries such as China, Germany, South Korea, Ghana, and India each contributed between 4 to 8 publications, showing more limited but emerging engagement. This

distribution suggests that while bullying and counseling are increasingly global concerns, the research landscape remains concentrated in English-speaking and high-income countries, highlighting potential disparities in scholarly participation and the need for broader international collaboration, especially from underrepresented regions.

Figure 7 presents the disciplinary distribution of publications related to bullying in counseling, as categorized by subject area. The data show that the majority of research falls under the domain of Medicine, which accounts for 43.2% of the total publications, highlighting a strong clinical and healthcare-oriented focus in the study of bullying. Psychology follows with 23.0%, reflecting its central role in addressing the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of bullying and counseling. Social Sciences contribute 12.8%, indicating growing interdisciplinary attention to the social dimensions of bullying, including school environments, peer relationships, and policy implications. Additional contributions come from fields such as Nursing (3.5%), Biochemistry, Genetics, and Molecular Biology (2.3%), and Environmental Science (2.3%), reflecting the increasingly diverse perspectives applied to understanding bullying behavior. Smaller proportions are also observed in Computer Science, Multidisciplinary studies, Arts and Humanities, and Neuroscience, each accounting for under 2% of the total. The presence of publications in such a wide range of disciplines suggests that bullying in counseling is not only a psychological or educational issue, but a complex, cross-cutting topic with implications for public health, ethics, communication, and technology.

Based on Figure 7, the research on the most dominant bullying and counseling studies in the field of Medicine is 111 articles, Psychology is 59 articles, Social Sciences is 33 articles, Nursing is 9 articles, Biochemistry, Genetics, and Molecular Biology is 6 articles, Environmental Science is 6 articles, Computer Science is 5 articles, Multidisciplinary is 5 articles, Arts and Humanities is 4 articles and the field of study Neuroscience is 4 articles.

Table 3. Thematic Clusters and Emerging Topics

No	Cluster Name	Main Keywords	Research Focus
1	Childhood Adversity	Childhood adversity, comorbidity, trauma	Mental health impact of early-life experiences
2	Emotional Reactions	Coping, aggression, fear, and the child	Behavioral/emotional response to bullying
3	Psychological Interventions	Cognitive behavioral therapy, hopelessness, and counseling	Therapeutic and counseling-based treatment approaches
4	Educational Context	School, education, psychology	Role of schools and education in bullying prevention
5	Regional/Institutional	Schools, Abu Dhabi	Geographic/institutional research on bullying
6	Anti-Violence Education	Anti-violence education	Underexplored values/policy-based approaches
7	Clinical Risk Factors	Addiction, automutilation, healthcare utilization	Health-risk behaviors and clinical responses in victims
8	Special Populations	Autism, Duchenne muscular dystrophy	Bullying's impact on vulnerable populations

Table 3 presents a clear thematic mapping of research on bullying and counseling, categorized into eight distinct clusters. Each cluster represents a specific research focus identified through keyword analysis, offering a practical overview of current trends and areas of scholarly attention. For instance, clusters on childhood adversity, mental health interventions, and cyberbullying highlight the psychological and technological dimensions of bullying, while clusters on school-based counseling, family environment, and policy emphasize institutional and social responses. The inclusion of clusters focusing on gendered experiences and addictive behaviors further illustrates how bullying intersects with identity and risk factors. This operational classification helps researchers, educators, and policymakers identify key areas for intervention, design targeted prevention programs, and prioritize future research directions.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals key trends in bullying research in counseling over the past decade, based on a bibliometric analysis of 174 articles published between 2014 and 2024. These findings show a dominant focus on the psychological effects of bullying, counseling-based interventions, and the role of schools and social environments in addressing these issues. This focus is in line with previous literature that emphasizes the importance of understanding the mental health consequences of bullying and the need for effective counseling strategies ((Kiliç et al., 2022; Miller, 2023; Wahab et al., 2017). The growing attention to school-based approaches also highlights the important role of educational institutions as frontline agents of prevention and intervention.

The analysis also reveals a strong pattern of collaboration among researchers, often involving interdisciplinary and international cooperation. This trend supports previous research showing that collaboration improves the quality of research and expands the scope of investigation (Mayer et al., 2021b; Roberts et al., 2018). In addition, the most prolific researchers seem to play a central role in this collaborative network, influencing the direction of research towards a more comprehensive and integrative approach ((Yosep et al., 2023), reinforcing the importance of collective efforts in addressing the diverse nature of bullying.

In addition, the study identifies the most influential journals and institutions that contribute to the field of bullying and counseling research. Institutions from countries with high research productivity play an important role in shaping global knowledge and promoting evidence-based practices (Ayano et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2024)). These findings reflect the geographical distribution of research and emphasize the importance of access to academic resources in advancing scientific contributions. However, compared to the dominant themes of mental health and school-based interventions, emerging topics such as cyberbullying and anti-violence education models are still underexplored (Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, 2021; Smolina, S. G., Khafizov, D. M., & Erlich, 2020). In addition, research exploring bullying from the perpetrator's perspective is also scarce, suggesting a research gap that should be noted in future investigations.

This analysis reveals an important pattern of collaboration between authors and institutions in the field of bullying and counseling research. The extensive and dynamic network of cooperation shows that studies are often conducted through partnerships spanning a wide range of disciplines and countries. This trend points to the increasing recognition of bullying as a complex and global problem that requires a diverse research approach. The prevalence of such collaborative efforts underscores the importance of building research communities that bridge national and academic boundaries to produce richer and more comprehensive insights (Doty et al., 2023; Hammersley et al., 2016; Paljakka, 2024). The analysis also reveals a strong pattern of collaboration among researchers, often involving interdisciplinary and international cooperation. This trend supports previous research showing that collaboration improves the quality of research and expands the scope of investigation ((Glänzel, W., & Schubert, 2004; Velasco Vizcaíno et al., 2021)). In addition, international collaborations have been shown to significantly increase scientific impact and citation rates, especially in the fields of psychology and education (Freska, N. W., & Kep, 2023; Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisé, 2013; Sticca, F., & Perren, 2013). Such cooperation facilitates the exchange of knowledge across cultural and contextual boundaries, allowing researchers to address bullying from a more diverse and inclusive perspective.

In addition, the most prolific researchers seem to play a central role in this collaborative network, influencing the direction of research towards a more comprehensive and integrative approach (Hikmat et al., 2024), reinforcing the importance of collective efforts in addressing the diverse nature of bullying. Previous bibliometric studies have also found that high-output authors tend to occupy influential positions in a network of co-authorship and often serve as thought leaders in shaping thematic direction (Abramo, G., D'Angelo, C. A., & Di Costa, 2009; Glänzel, W., & Schubert, 2004; Ponce de Leon et al., 2019). Their ongoing contributions help consolidate knowledge in the field and promote standardization of intervention frameworks, especially in fast-growing topics such as cyberbullying and school-based counseling strategies.

Bibliometric analysis reveals that certain journals and institutions are at the forefront of publishing research on bullying and counseling. Leading journals such as the *Child and Youth Services Review*, the *Journal of School Violence*, and *Aggression and Violent Behavior* consistently publish

high-impact studies that shape the scientific discourse in this field. These journals not only maintain a rigorous peer-review process but also offer visibility and credibility for emerging research topics. On the institutional side, universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, such as Harvard University, University College London, and the University of Melbourne, are among the top contributors in terms of volume and influence. Their dominance in the field is often attributed to ongoing funding, international research collaboration networks, and the availability of advanced research infrastructure (Gonzalez, A., & Masten, 2015; Lu et al., 2023).

The concentration of regional research productivity is greatly influenced by geopolitical and academic access factors. Countries with greater economic resources and higher education investment tend to generate more research output, in part due to better access to databases, journal subscriptions, and funding opportunities. This gap often puts researchers from low- and middle-income countries at a disadvantage, both in contributing and accessing cutting-edge knowledge (Polanin, J. R., Espelage, D. L., Grotzinger, J. K., Ingram, K., Michaelson, L., Spinney, E., ... & Robinson, 2022; Sticca, F., & Perren, 2013). In addition, the dominance of English as the lingua franca of academic publishing can marginalize scholars from non-English-speaking regions, affecting their ability to disseminate locally relevant findings on bullying in the global discourse. This inequality of access can tilt the research landscape toward topics and perspectives prioritized by high-income countries.

The dominance of certain institutions in bullying research has significant implications for the direction and framing of scientific discourse. When elite universities and well-funded research centers control most publications, they often establish the theoretical framework, methodology, and even policy implications that define the field. While this can help standardize research practices, it can also marginalize alternative viewpoints and culture-specific interventions that are not aligned with the dominant paradigm (Calvo-Morata et al., 2020)). Institutional dominance may inadvertently reinforce a one-size-fits-all approach to bullying prevention and counseling interventions, which may not be appropriate for all contexts. Therefore, recognizing and diversifying voices in academic publishing is essential to developing a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of bullying.

Despite overall progress in bullying research, some important themes remain underrepresented in the existing literature. In particular, cyberbullying, which is becoming increasingly relevant in the digital age, is still not sufficiently explored in the context of counseling interventions. The shift in bullying behavior to online platforms poses new challenges that require updated prevention strategies and support mechanisms (Fathoni et al., 2024; Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, 2014). Similarly, the school-based model of non-violence education, which emphasizes the development of safe, inclusive, and empathetic learning environments, has not been well integrated into mainstream counseling research, despite its proven relevance in reducing school-based aggression (Daza et al., 2023).

Another critical gap involves research on bullying from the perpetrator's point of view. Current literature tends to focus on victims and prevention strategies, while ignoring the psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to perpetrator behavior. Understanding the motivations and backgrounds of individuals involved in bullying is essential for designing comprehensive and rehabilitative interventions (Dewi & Tience Debora Valentina, 2020). Addressing these gaps can improve the effectiveness of counseling approaches by combining a perpetrator-focused model alongside victim-centered support.

The lack of representation of these themes can be attributed in part to the limitations of bibliometric analysis itself, which often relies on publication volume and frequency of citations as indicators of scientific importance. Such metrics tend to favor established topics and may overlook newer or specific issues that have not yet garnered significant citations. As a result, emerging fields such as cyberbullying or school-based restorative practices may seem less prominent, although they are highly relevant in practice (Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, 2021; van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This highlights the need for researchers to actively explore underrepresented areas and bibliometric methods complemented by qualitative analysis for a more complete understanding of research trends.

The thematic mapping produced in this study illustrates how the issue of bullying in the context of counseling has evolved across multiple dimensions, represented through eight distinct thematic clusters identified via keyword co-occurrence analysis. Each cluster reflects a specific research focus

that collectively shapes the current landscape of scholarly inquiry, ranging from psychological and digital aspects to institutional responses. Clusters such as childhood adversity, mental health interventions, and cyberbullying highlight growing concerns regarding long-term psychological impacts and bullying in digital environments ((Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, 2014; Robinson et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the emphasis on school-based counseling, family environment, and anti-violence education underscores the significance of structural and systemic approaches in prevention and intervention efforts (Hammersley et al., 2016; Hirsch et al., 2018). Furthermore, clusters related to gender-based experiences and addictive behaviors suggest that bullying is deeply intertwined with personal identity, social vulnerability, and psychosocial risk factors (Daza et al., 2023; Swearer, S. M., Espelage, D. L., Vaillancourt, T., & Hymel, 2010). This thematic classification offers a comprehensive framework that is useful for researchers in identifying research gaps, for educators and counselors in designing targeted interventions, and for policymakers in formulating evidence-based strategies (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Zupic, I., & Čater, 2015). Based on these findings, future research is encouraged to explore cross-cultural perspectives, evaluate the effectiveness of school-based counseling programs, and develop adaptive digital counseling innovations. Special attention should also be given to vulnerable populations, such as individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, and children with a history of trauma, to ensure that intervention strategies are inclusive, relevant, and sustainable.

This research is not without limitations. First, it relies exclusively on bibliometric data from indexed journals, which may exclude valuable insights published in local, non-English, or non-indexed sources. As a result, these findings may not fully capture the diversity of global perspectives on bullying and counseling, especially from underrepresented regions. Second, while citation-based metrics are useful for identifying influential works and authors, they may reflect popularity rather than actual relevance or practical impact. Finally, the dynamic and evolving nature of bullying-related issues, especially those related to technological and cultural change, may not be fully represented in the data sets analyzed, requiring ongoing monitoring and complementary methodological approaches.

The underrepresentation of these themes may partly be attributed to the limitations of bibliometric analysis itself, which often relies on publication volume and citation frequency as indicators of scholarly importance. Such metrics tend to favor well-established topics and may overlook newer or niche issues that have not yet accumulated significant citations. Consequently, emerging fields like cyberbullying or school-based restorative practices may appear less prominent, even though they are highly relevant in practice (Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, 2021; Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, 2010). Moreover, this study is limited by its dependence on indexed journal sources, which may exclude insights from local, non-English, or non-indexed publications, particularly from regions where bullying research is still developing. This creates a visibility gap that disproportionately favors research produced in high-income, English-speaking countries. In addition, there is a notable lack of empirical literature focusing specifically on cyberbullying within counseling frameworks, especially in non-Western contexts (Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisé, 2013; Sticca, F., & Perren, 2013). Cultural context also remains an underexplored variable; most dominant studies are grounded in Western individualistic perspectives, potentially marginalizing collectivist or indigenous models of conflict resolution and mental health support (Swearer, S. M., Espelage, D. L., Vaillancourt, T., & Hymel, 2010; Venner et al., 2021). These limitations suggest the need for a broader, more inclusive research base that integrates emerging topics and culturally responsive approaches into the scholarly discourse on bullying and counseling.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis presents a thorough summary of bullying studies conducted in the counselling field within the last ten years. Particularly for high-income countries, the results expose a substantial focus on psychological well-being, school-based interventions, and cooperative research networks. Even although the subject has developed with more research output, there are still notable gaps—particularly in understudied areas including cyberbullying, anti-violence education, and offender viewpoints. The predominance of Western-centric models emphasises even more the need of using

culturally inclusive strategies. Though they are becoming more and more important, emerging ideas like digital counselling and restorative practices still need further research particularly in non-Western settings. By use of keyword clustering, topical mapping offers insightful analysis of the changing study terrain and points of view for focused intervention development. Notwithstanding constraints on database coverage and citation-based measures, this study provides a basis for next investigations. Scholars are urged to seek cross-cultural viewpoints, target underprivileged communities, and combine creative approaches to forward the field of bullying and counselling in a more inclusive, context-sensitive, and powerful direction.

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