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# TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN WORKPLACE BULLYING RESEARCH: A BIBLIOMETRIC PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a pervasive and detrimental behavior that manifests in various forms, including verbal, physical, psychological, and cyberbullying. It creates a hostile work environment that can severely impact employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall workplace dynamics. Meanwhile, this study aims to explore workplace bullying research-related publishing patterns and trends in the most commonly used author keywords in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. The eminent software, ScientoPy and VOSviewer, are used to run and execute relevant publication data retrieved from Scopus and WoS. The results showed a positive trend in the growth of workplace bullying literature in both databases since 2000. The top three research areas that dominate this topic are "Business & Economics", "Psychology", and "Government & Law". Based on a country analysis, the United States has become an active publisher, followed by the United Kingdom and Australia. Importantly, this study emphasized that the scholarly practices prevalent in workplace bullying research have impressively propagated. The trends will assist researchers in recognizing various fields in identifying the core areas, proactive institutions, and productive authors published in this knowledge for supplementary investigation. Besides, by examining the most popular keywords, the results of these studies enable researchers to discover the possibilities for future research that may be conducted, particularly concerning the annual growth rates, which have been trending in the last five years.

**Keywords:** workplace bullying, work environment, workplace violence, occupational health, bibliometric perspective.

## INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying has become a significant concern in modern organizational environments, where it can affect the psychological well-being of employees, as well as their overall job satisfaction and productivity. According to Einarsen et al. (2020), workplace bullying can be defined as repeated and persistent negative actions that are directed at an individual or group within an employment system. Workplace bullying can also take many forms, including verbal abuse, social isolation and undermining professional competence. Despite increasing awareness, many organizations still struggle to identify and address bullying effectively because this culture of workplace bullying leads to a toxic work culture that can have widespread negative consequences (Hodgins et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the causes and effects of workplace bullying is essential to developing effective interventions and promoting a healthier and safer workplace.

Workplace bullying has received increasing attention across various employment sectors due to its significant impact today. Typically, workplace bullying aims to demean, intimidate or isolate an employee in the workplace (Iqbal & Febrian, 2025). Although sometimes perceived as minor conflicts or "normal" workplace stress, research from Marlowe et al. (2021) shows that workplace bullying is a serious issue with long-term consequences. Workplace bullying can take many forms, including open humiliation, spreading rumors, social isolation, or deliberately diminishing an employee's responsibilities to undermine their confidence (Vijayakumar & Rajagopal, 2024). This often happens in a subtle way, making it difficult to detect and making victims hesitant to report their experiences if they have been bullied. However, such actions not only cause emotional distress for the individual but also contribute to a toxic and unsafe work environment.

Workplace bullying does indeed leave some negative effects on the victims. This effect will indirectly further damage the workplace culture itself. The work organization will experience some conflict when workplace bullying permeates the workplace culture (Quinn et al., 2025). The effects can be seen through increased absenteeism, decreased motivation, internal conflict and high employee turnover rates. Over time, the organization's reputation will also deteriorate, thus reducing trust among employees and customers. Therefore, addressing workplace bullying requires a serious commitment from employers to the well-being of employees. According to Rayner & Lewis (2020), clear policies can create a safe work environment and employers need to provide training on workplace ethics and effective communication as important steps to prevent bullying incidents. By understanding its causes and consequences, organizations can take proactive steps to foster a healthy work environment for all employees.

In addition, workplace bullying remains an organizational challenge that requires awareness, commitment and coordinated intervention. Its impact, which includes employee well-being on organizational performance, highlights the need for proactive strategies based on research and ethical practices. By fostering effective communication, enforcing clear policies and supporting victims of bullying in the organization (Fauzan & Sulaeman, 2024). In this way, employers can make the workplace environment safer, healthier and more productive.

Workplace bullying also has a negative impact on public perception as it reflects an unhealthy and unethical work environment within an organization. The public tends to view such organizations as lacking effective leadership and failing to protect the well-being of employees (Haricharan, 2023). This can damage the

organization's reputation to some extent and at the same time reduce public trust. The public will also inevitably have a perception to avoid working for such organizations. In the age of social media, reports of workplace bullying can spread quickly and create negative perceptions of entire industries. As a result, the public will become more sensitive to employers who ignore issues of mental health and employee welfare (Dwyer et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, although there is no specific law specifically addressing workplace bullying, there are several existing laws that can be applied. Among them are the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 which obliges employers to ensure a safe working environment, including psychological well-being (OSHA, 1994). The Penal Code can be used if bullying involves threats, harassment, or emotional harm (Penal Code, Act 574). In addition, the Industrial Relations Act 1967 also allows employees to file complaints about unfair treatment in the workplace. Collectively, these legal provisions provide basic protection for employees from workplace bullying (MOHR, 2022).

However, there has been a lack of exploration conducted to analyze the research trends in the field of workplace bullying within challenges and opportunities, particularly in identifying specific domains within this field that have received limited attention. Hence, the present studies employs bibliometric analysis to discern research trends within the realm of workplace bullying research. This focus remains strong despite increasing interest in this field of study (Iyer et al., 2020; Shankar et al., 2021). As a result, it has been noted that most research has focused on managing and delivering records supporting materials and documentation (Farooq et al., 2021).

In order to address the issue of excessive information availability and the breadth of different research topics, bibliometric analysis assists scholars and researchers in gaining a broad or even microscopic view of the overall progress and steady and continuous flow status (Gazali et al., 2021). Information retrieval is crucial to the cross-disciplinary field; this process can analyse aspects of information science and publication trend analysis. The bibliometric technique visualises vast publishing outputs necessary for deriving valid conclusions, such as the evolution of publications, study fields, and influential authors (Sofyan & Abdullah, 2022).

## METHOD AND DATA

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research technique that systematically analyzes and evaluates scientific publications and their attributes, allowing the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships within a specific field of study (Leydesdorff & Vaughan, 2006). This analytical approach examines bibliographic data, including citations, to gain valuable insights into the scholarly communication process and the influence of scientific research (Waltman, 2016). Bibliometrics made it easier for researchers to identify research gaps, emerging research prospects, and significant research areas (Abdullah & Othman, 2022). It indirectly enables them to summarise the significant trends of a particular study field. The current studies primary goal was to identify patterns in workplace bullying-focused publications.

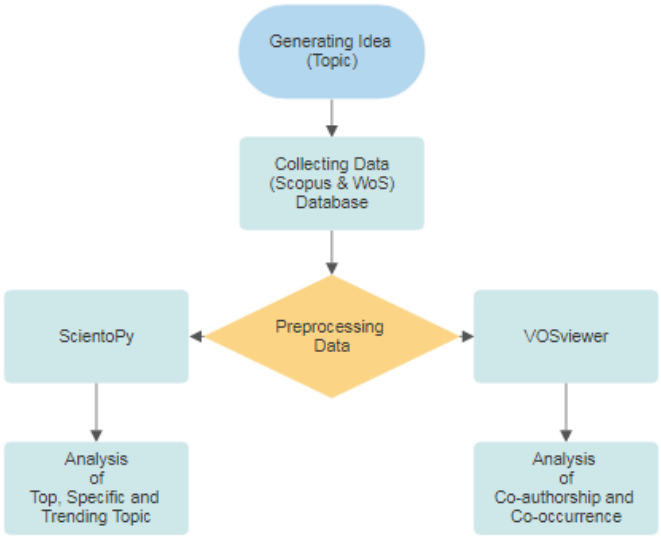
In this studies, two software programmes were utilised: ScientoPy and VOSviewer to accomplish bibliometric analysis. ScientoPy is a free and an open-source scientometric analysis program built on Python software developed by Ruiz-Rosero et al. (2017) that sorts data according to the most well-liked, specific, and trending topics and subsequently tested for usability and effectiveness in a later studies by Ruiz-Rosero et al. (2019). Pabon et al. (2020) demonstrated that this software helps detect and eliminate duplicate datasets and clean up non-standard data formats. ScientoPy, as demonstrated by Ruiz-Rosero et al. (2019), can automatically categorise and report on the top themes based on author or index keywords,

as well as identify the most prolific authors and countries involved in the research, using bibliographical information. VOSviewer is another piece of software used to map the co-occurrence of authors' keywords. VOSviewer is a software application that assists in constructing and visualising bibliometric networks (Abdullah et al., 2020; Roslan et al., 2023).

Figure 1 depicts the data processing sequence in this analysis and it consists of a systematic strategy that has been divided into three primary parts. First, the title should be determined, and the datasets be developed and gathered. The second phase involves integrating the databases and obtaining the ScientoPy-analysable parameters. In the last stage, ScientoPy and VOSviewer parameters are used to evaluate and analyse the results.

**Figure 1**

*Selection Strategy and Research Protocol*




Given the multifaceted nature of the studied topic, the literature on workplace bullying studies is spread across many different fields. As a result, it was necessary to use accessible and numerous bibliographic databases to search for and find pertinent material on this subject. Two primary databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), were used to collect the data for this studies. The Scopus and WoS database is preferred since it is a multidisciplinary database with more articles in social science, education-related journals, management and other documents in various academic disciplines (Sweileh, 2022; Visser et al., 2021). The Scopus and WoS databases also attract most scholars to obtain publications for their review purposes (Abdullah et al., 2023). These databases span multiple fields (Martín-Martín et al. 2021), and searching them would aid researchers in locating the most significant number of citations on primary sources for bibliometric studies (Pranckutė, 2021).

After defining the databases, the search query "workplace bullying" was chosen. The following fields were scanned for topic-related terms: all fields for Scopus (322 scripts) and all fields for WoS (106 scripts). This inquiry was completed on August 18, 2025. The search timeframe was set between 1998 to 2025

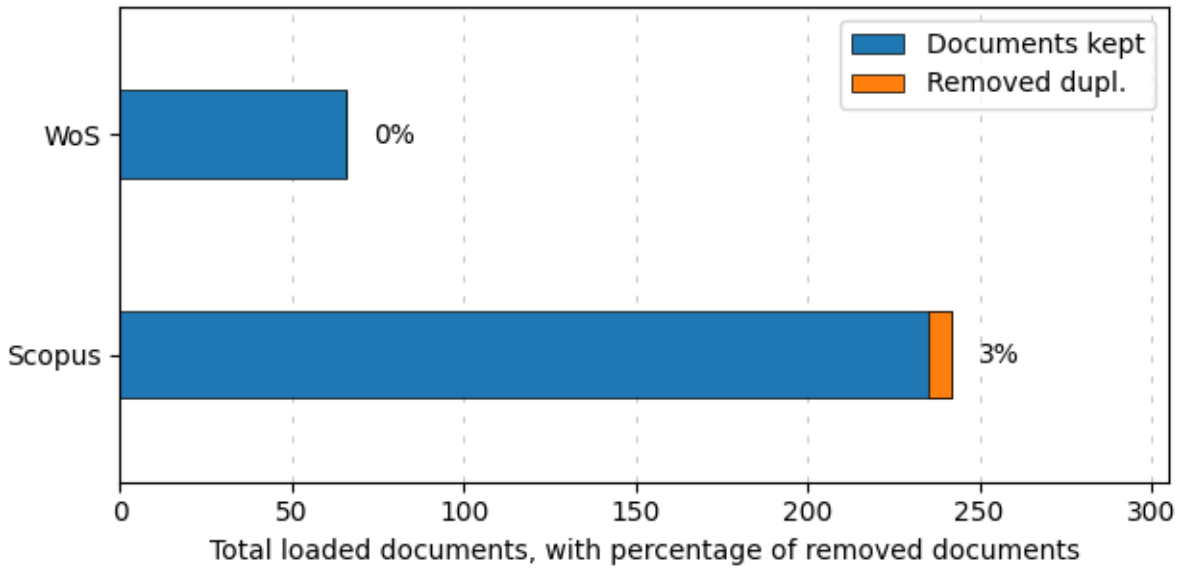
During the second stage, ScientoPy was used to preprocess the data. The secondary dataset is then established for the following analysis stage. ScientoPy uses the following criteria during the pre-processing steps; (i) normalising the author's name: it is replaced with a semicolon for metadata retrieved from the Scopus database, it is stripped of dots, commas, and special characters for metadata retrieved from both

databases, and (ii) removing duplicate samples with the same title and authors (Ruiz-Rosero et al., 2019). The pre-processing information is recorded in Table 1. Based on Table 1, the ScientoPy pre-processing script has shown that Scopus databases are more than WoS, and after duplicate removal, there are also more papers in Scopus papers than in WoS. This studies used a raw source dataset of 428 papers from the WoS and Scopus databases. In this studies, 120 of the 428 loaded papers were eliminated due to ScientoPy's analysis. Following data reconciliation, this studies examined 301 papers from both databases, containing 66 papers from WoS and 235 papers from Scopus, after removing 7 from Scopus and 0 duplicate papers from WoS. Finally, the 301-piece data set was analysed, and the necessary statistical reports, graphs, and tables were generated using bibliometric data visualisation tools, ScientoPy and VOSviewer.

**Table 1**
*Information on Pre-processed Data Analysis*

| Information | Number | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Loaded papers | 428 | |
| Omitted papers by document type | 120 | 28.00 |
| Total papers after omitted papers removed | 308 | |
| Loaded papers from WoS | 66 | 21.40 |
| Loaded papers from Scopus | 242 | 78.60 |
| Duplicated papers found | 7 | 2.30 |
| Removed duplicated papers from WoS | 0 | 0.00 |
| Removed duplicated papers from Scopus | 7 | 2.90 |
| Duplicated documents with different cited by | 6 | 85.70 |
| Total papers after duplicate removal | 301 | |
| Papers from WoS | 66 | 21.90 |
| Papers from Scopus | 235 | 78.10 |

**Figure 2**
*Pre-processing of Metadata from Scopus and WoS Databases*



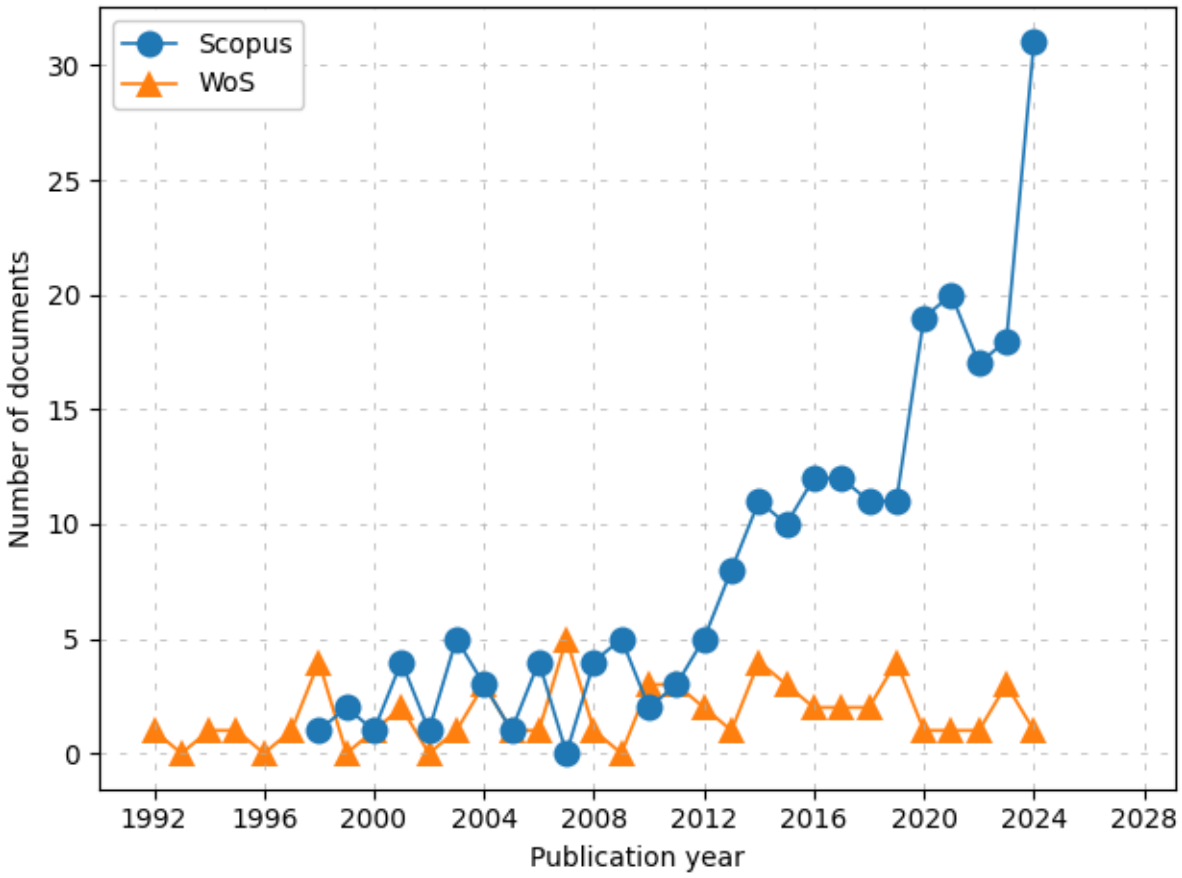
Scholars around the world use many bibliometric software programmes intending to provide information to readers with various interesting infographics and graphical visualisations (Ishak et al., 2024). Even if several software programmes are available for conducting bibliometric analysis, choosing a solution that corresponds to the studies objectives and questions is essential. This emphasises assessing the research questions before selecting a software application. The success of software in bibliometric analysis ultimately depends on the researcher's capacity to answer the research questions posed in the studies (Abdullah et al., 2023; Roslan et al., 2023).

## RESULTS

### Publication Growth

The number of peer-reviewed publications is an excellent indicator of a scientific topic's growth. Since 1992, Figure 3 demonstrates a significant increase in articles on workplace bullying research. Compared to WoS, Scopus publications have grown steadily, with a sharp rise after 2012 and has also taken the lead from the overall number of documents compared to WoS. Interestingly, according to this data, WoS publications began publishing in 1992, while Scopus publications began publishing in 1998.

**Figure 3**
*Timeline Graph*



From the data in Table 2, it shows the latest five years for publications in Scopus and WoS. From 2020 to 2024, it was discovered that Scopus produced a total of 105 publications, whereas WoS produced 7 publications. The year 2024 has the most Scopus publications, which is 31 publications, while the year 2023 has the most WoS publications, which is 3 publications. Interestingly, regarding this data, the number of publications in Scopus is much higher than the number of publications in WoS.

**Table 2**
*Five Years Publication Trends*

| Year of Publication | Scopus | WoS |
|---|---|---|
| 2020 | 19 | 1 |
| 2021 | 20 | 1 |
| 2022 | 17 | 1 |
| 2023 | 18 | 3 |
| 2024 | 31 | 1 |
| Total | 105 | 7 |

This studies also sought to determine where workplace bullying documents were published by analysing document types and language data. Table 3 shows the different types of documents where publications on workplace bullying have been published. As can be seen, the highest of the publications is articles, with 244 articles (80.79% of the total documents). Following the articles is a book chapter (n = 23, 7.62%), and a review (n = 21, 7.35%). Proceedings paper, conference paper and book representing the other three document categories and each has shown that these 3 documents are less than 10 documents from the total number of other document types.

**Table 3**
*Document Type*

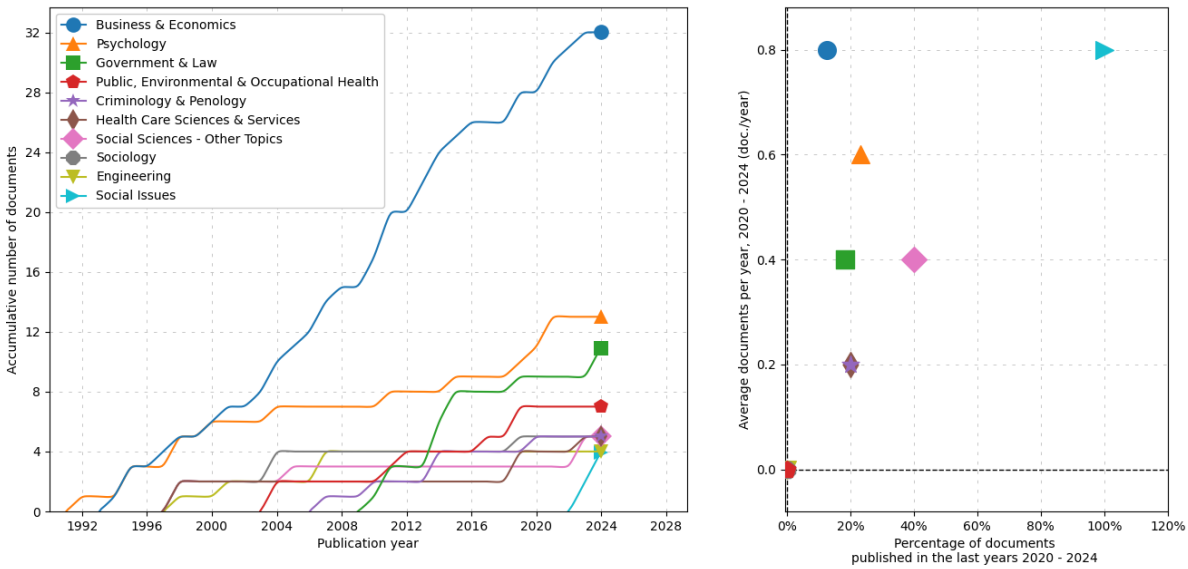
| Document Type | Total Publications | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Article | 244 | 80.79 |
| Book Chapter | 23 | 7.62 |
| Review | 21 | 6.95 |
| Proceedings Paper | 7 | 2.32 |
| Conference Paper | 6 | 1.99 |
| Book | 1 | 0.33 |
| Total | 302 | 100.00 |

**Subject Area**

Likewise, it is critical to conduct a review of relevant research articles. This strategy enables the essential disciplines in which research on workplace bullying has been undertaken to be identified. Figure 4 depicts an evolution graph of the top ten subject areas that can be used to categorise workplace bullying research in the Scopus and WoS databases. Business and economics has been identified as the most extensively investigated field, with over 30 publications. Another fascinating subject is psychology with 13 publications, and the third-ranked subject area is government and law with 11 publications.

**Figure 4**

*Subject Area Evolution Graph*




From the data in Table 4, showing the latest five years for publication trends from 2020 to 2024, it was found that business & economics and social issues subject share the same number of publication with an average of 0.8 publications, while for psychology subject with an average of 0.6 publications produced, and for government & law and social sciences - other topics subject share the same number of publication just produced an average of 0.4 publications.

**Table 4**

*Five Years on Top Ten Subject Area*

| Subject Area | Total Publications (5 years) | Average |
|---|---|---|
| Business & Economics | 4 | 0.8 |
| Psychology | 3 | 0.6 |
| Government & Law | 2 | 0.4 |
| Public, Environmental & Occupational Health | 0 | 0 |
| Criminology & Penology | 1 | 0.2 |
| Health Care Sciences & Services | 1 | 0.2 |
| Social Sciences - Other Topics | 2 | 0.4 |
| Sociology | 0 | 0 |
| Engineering | 0 | 0 |
| Social Issues | 4 | 0.8 |
| Total | 17 | 3.4 |

**Publishing Countries**

Since 1992s, research on workplace bullying has been conducted in various countries. Figure 5 shows the country network visualisation of workplace bullying research. Based on Figure 5, United States in the middle, has more connections than other countries. In addition, United Kingdom and India also show a lot of connection after the country of United States. Next, in Figure 6, United States, United Kingdom and Australia were identified as the top three publishing countries in workplace bullying research. While, the three lowest-ranked countries are Italy, Malaysia and Spain. United States is at the top of the first chart in this studies about workplace bullying. This is because United States has proven to be the leading researcher in this field. However, there are still not many countries that contribute towards the publication of workplace bullying research. Thus, the studies of workplace bullying should be explored deeper and further in many countries.

**Figure 5**
*Network Visualisation for Publishing Countries*

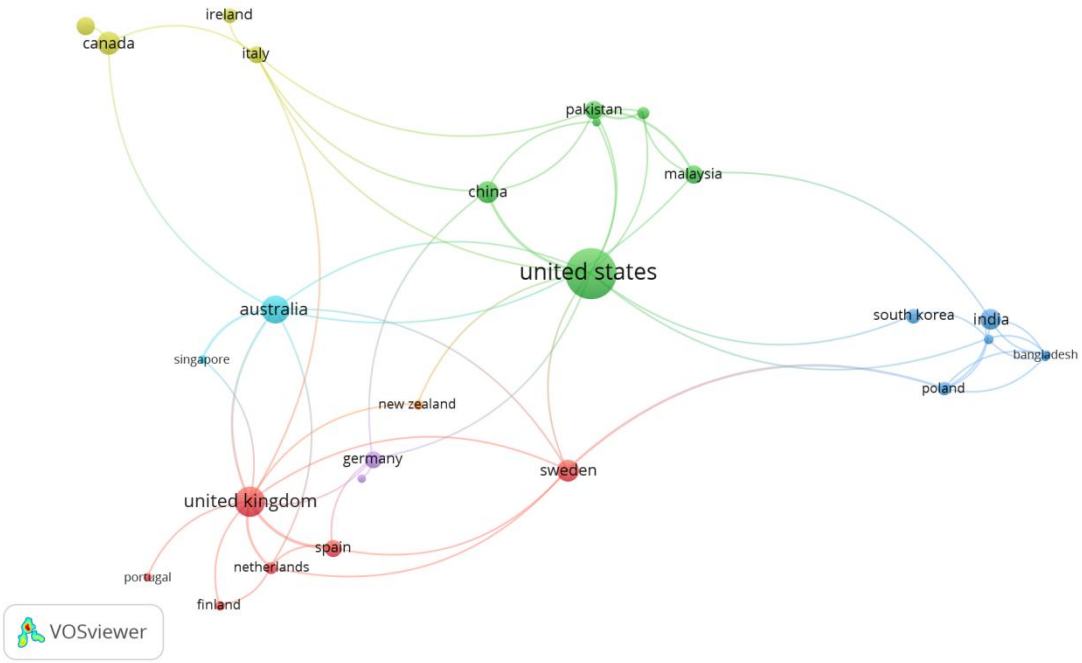
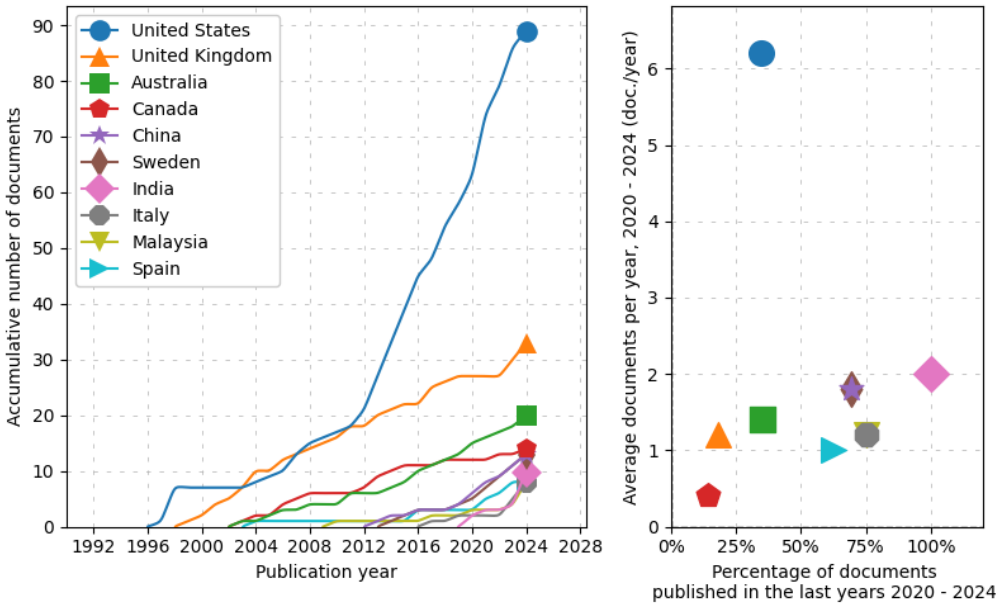



**Figure 6**
*Country Evolution Graph*

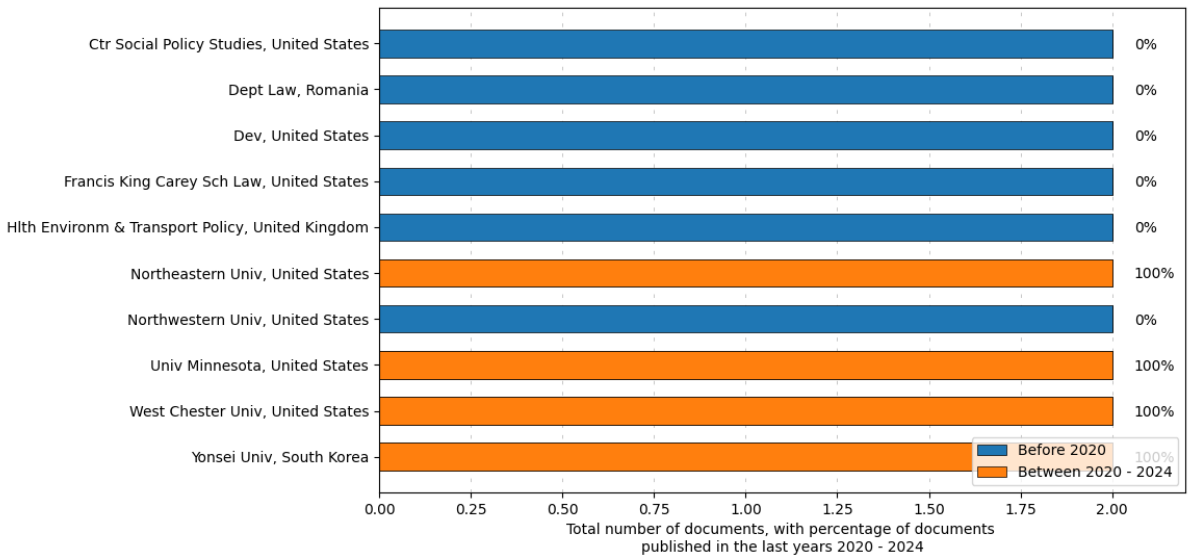



**Institutional Analysis**

Figure 7 pertains to the top ten institutions that publish academic works on workplace bullying research. Scholars from all institutions listed were credited with the same number of publications, which was two. An intriguing feature of the top ten institutions in 32 years is that there are seven institutions from United States. Thus, Northwestern University in United States, University of Minnesota in United States, West Chester University in United States and Yonsei University in South Korea is the most active for the last 5 years with 100% of publications in workplace bullying studies. This shows that publications related to workplace bullying research are still growing over time.

**Figure 7**

*Institutional Bar Trends*

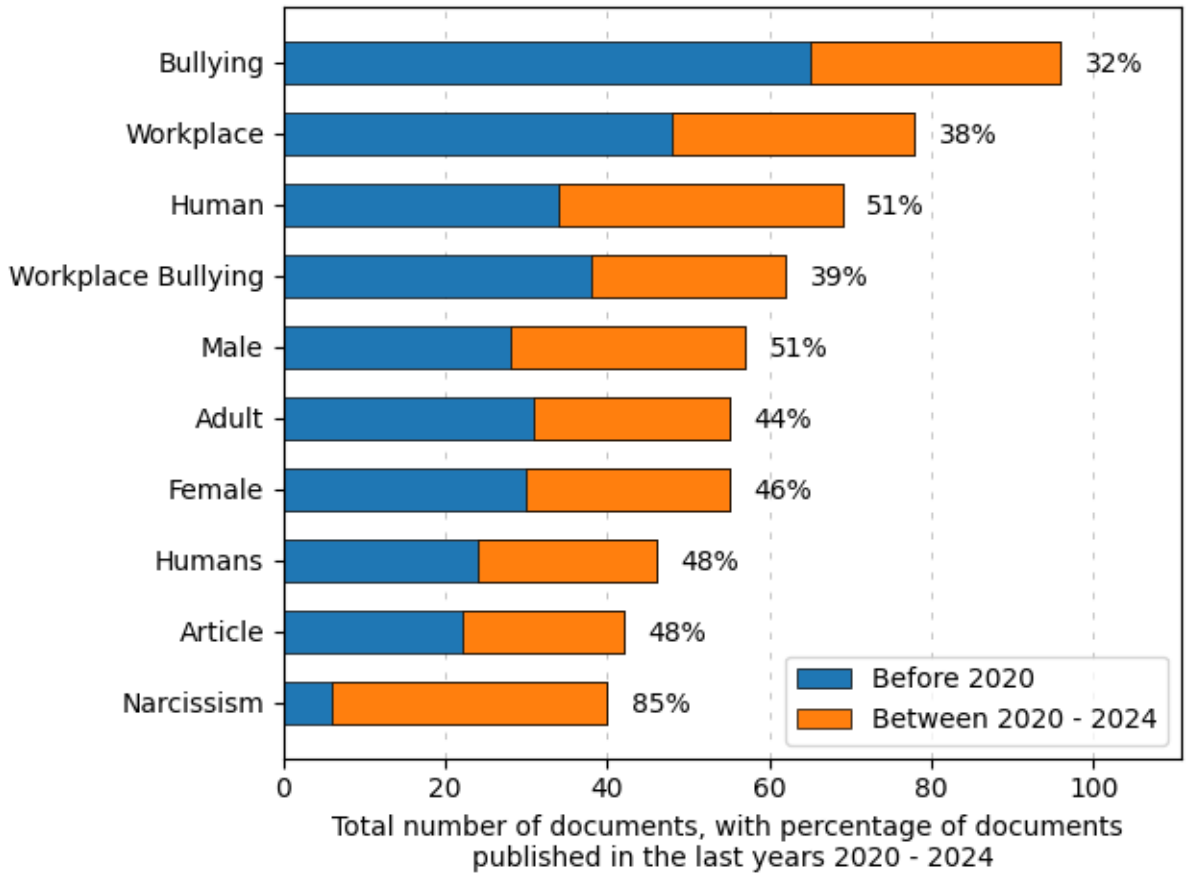



**Author Keywords**

Analysis Author keywords refer to the terms used by authors to represent the content of their documents accurately. Most authors mention their studies topic as a keyword in their document. The authors' keywords aided readers and future researchers in identifying the publications' significant ideas and arguments (Roslan et al., 2024). Numerous electronic search engines, databases, and journal websites use author keywords to identify and deliver relevant articles to prospective readers. Readers need to understand that keywords produce links to other relevant publications (Abdullah et al., 2022). In this case, Scientopy might track the evolution or trends of a studies topic or search argument using the authors' keywords. This section analyses the authors' top keywords in previous research on workplace bullying. In order to complete the procedure, the authors' keywords were used to find research trends. It has been suggested to use an appropriate term, such as "workplace bullying". These manual tasks assist in organising data and eliminating term duplication, resulting in more robust results.

Figure 8 exhibits 10 previously researched keywords. As illustrated in Figure 8, the top three used term is "bullying" followed by "workplace" and "human". Data processing was given importance to this broad phrase directly related to the subject. Important keywords are made available to assist readers and future researchers in determining which ones to employ while conducting document analysis (Abdullah et al., 2022). While Figure 8 illustrates the first 10 keywords, ScientoPy enables us to view an infinite number of keywords (Ruiz-Rosero et al., 2019). Also, Figure 8 displays the percentage of documents published in the preceding five years (2020– 2024) to illustrate a relative increase. We can observe from this indicator that "narcissism" has the highest proportion with 40 (85%) publication between 2020-2024. It is self-evident that the issue has increased significantly over the last five years compared to other keywords. Additionally, "human" and "male" also has been a hot topic, with 35 and 29 (51%) publications published from 2020 to 2024. Thus, this studies depicted that human and male has sparked scholars' curiosity.

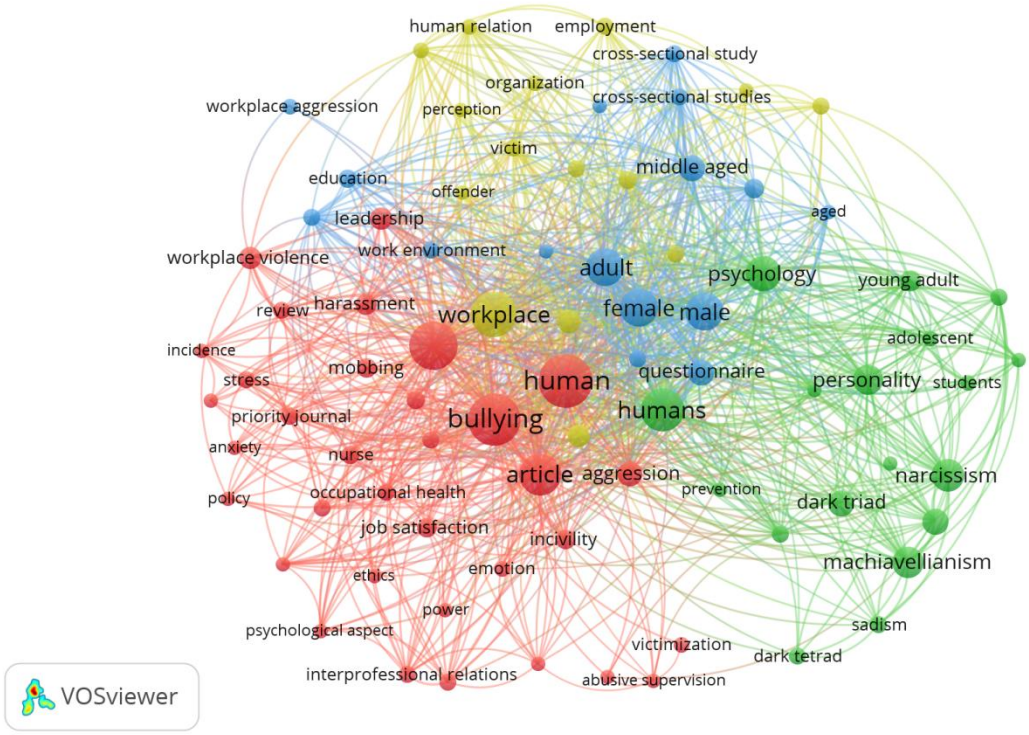
**Figure 8**
*Author Keywords Bar Trends*




Furthermore, this studies used cluster mapping to ascertain the co-occurrence of the authors' keywords to denote themes or issues relevant to workplace bullying reasearch (see Figure 9). Before using the VOSViewer to generate a network map, the dataset was pre-processed with SientoPy (a combination of Scopus and WoS metadata). Additionally, this studies used a thesaurus file to map the co-occurrence of the authors' terms before mapping them. Concatenating related terms, spelling variants, and singular or plural terms requires the use of the thesaurus file.

Based on Figure 9, it can be deduced that the most frequently used keywords were "bullying", "workplace bullying", "human", "male", and "female". These keywords are inextricably linked. The keyword "workplace bullying" was grouped in the same clusters (red colours) with "bullying", and "human". "workplace bullying" is also closely linked to "workplace".

**Figure 9**
*Network Visualisation of The Co-occurrence*




## DISCUSSION

Formal research on workplace violence, including bullying, began in Scandinavia in the early 1980s, with a key figure in the field being the Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann, who introduced the concept of "ganging" to describe psychological violence in the workplace (Leymann, 1990). His work laid the foundation for understanding workplace bullying as a significant issue, leading to a range of legal interpretations and case studies that would follow for future researchers.

Meanwhile, workplace bullying has been increasingly recognized as a critical issue that can affect employee well-being and organizational productivity over the past few decades. Previous studies have shown that approximately 30% of employees have experienced some form of workplace bullying, characterized by repeated and damaging mistreatment that can include threats, humiliation, and intimidation (Garrick & Buck, 2022). This issue has been reinforced by a growing body of statistical analysis focusing on various aspects of resilience and mental health in the workplace.

This bibliometric review highlights the growing focus on workplace bullying and its impact on workers, particularly in relation to resilience and psychological health. For example, previous research has shown that resilience can moderate the psychological health of individuals experiencing chronic stress, such as burnout in their healthcare environment (Schmuck et al., 2022). The interaction between resilience and workplace bullying has emerged as a critical area for research, with findings showing that high resilience correlates with improved job performance and well-being among employees. Despite the recognition of workplace bullying, there is still a significant gap in empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Fauzan & Sulaeman (2024) emphasized the need for systematic investigation of bullying interventions as essential to reducing the adverse effects of bullying on individuals and organizations. Therefore, current trends indicate a need for more comprehensive studies aimed at

understanding how different interventions can effectively reduce the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying.

Through psychological implications, workplace bullying is often critical and often results in impaired mental health and anxiety of employees and has been shown to decrease self-esteem among victims (Mikkelsen et al., 2020). Longitudinal studies have also linked chronic and severe bullying to serious health conditions including coronary heart disease. The psychological outcomes of these studies not only affect the individuals involved but also have major consequences for the organization, such as decreased productivity, higher absenteeism rates, and increased employee turnover (Hoel et al., 2020).

However, emerging trends in workplace bullying research today may also focus heavily on cyberbullying via email links among employees. This is because cyberbullying is also part of the frequency of workplace bullying for victims, which can pose unique challenges in the digital age. This form of bullying can cause severe psychological distress and socioeconomic consequences for victims and organizations (Zhao et al., 2024). As the workplace becomes increasingly digital, addressing cyberbullying in the workplace becomes essential to ensure employee well-being and organizational integrity. Furthermore, while various best practices for addressing workplace bullying continue to evolve, a comprehensive strategy is needed to address and mitigate its impact, and needs to be maintained to prevent these impacts from reaching critical levels. Therefore, the period from 1990 to 2024 has witnessed significant changes in the understanding and awareness of workplace bullying and ensuring that this step paves the way for future developments in this field.

## CONCLUSION

Bullying in the workplace is an ethically unacceptable behavior of humans. Workplace bullying also has a negative impact on both individuals and organizations. Therefore, organizations have a moral and legal obligation to actively prevent, identify, and eradicate it, also transforming their workplaces into environments of respect, dignity, and psychological well-being for the safe work environment to protect employee rights and organizational health. Thus, this study on workplace bullying is very interesting to investigate further because it involves employees' emotions today.

By continuing to explore these important topics, this research looks at how often specific articles are published and how often they use certain keywords to see their use in workplace bullying research. In the meantime, this study can yield some results from its analysis. The results indicated that publications on workplace bullying research have increased significantly since 2010. Notably, Scopus publications have expanded consistently compared to WoS, with a sharp increase following 2012. With 32 publications, business & economics have been identified as the most thoroughly explored research area. United States, United Kingdom and Australia have been designated as the research area’s top three publishing countries. Scholars from all institutions listed were credited with the same number of publications, which was two. The keyword “bullying” is the most frequently used by previous researchers, followed by “workplace” and “human”. Workplace bullying was clustered in the same group with “bullying” and “human”. Remarkably, “workplace bullying” and “workplace” are inextricably intertwined.

Certain limitations to this studies may help direct future studies. Publications in the Scopus and WoS databases were analysed and mapped for this research. As a result, the findings of this studies were limited to deducing the most critical themes or keywords associated with workplace bullying research found in those databases. Therefore, if future research wishes to expand on the foundation or address broad subjects, a systematic literature review or meta-analysis is recommended to provide the most relevant evidence

synthesis possible. Nonetheless, scholarly dissemination in the workplace bullying research field is provided to potential readers and future researchers keen on this topic.

This studies provides a novel perspective by demonstrating that research on workplace bullying is not restricted to the use of workplace bullying alone but has drawn scholars to explore workplace bullying within the framework of challenges and opportunities from research results beyond the research field. Therefore, the studies will aid researchers from various fields in identifying essential publication trend factors for systematically disseminating workplace bullying research. In addition, this studies findings motivate researchers to collaborate and develop new research paradigms for evaluating workplace bullying research by analysing the most often-used terms through empirical studies.

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