

Bibliometric Analysis of Poverty among the Elderly: A Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper will carry out a bibliometric review of the literature on poverty in old age, its trends of publication, the countries most active, as well as the core themes. The sources of data were the Scopus database from 1971 to 2024, which provided 216 valuable journal articles. Through the analysis, it is clear that research production has been on a gradual increase in the last five decades, especially in the developed world like China, United States, as well as the United Kingdom. The VOSviewer analysis of the keywords reveals the main themes, such as health, financial security, as well as the importance of social support, which explains the multidimensionality of elderly poverty. The findings also show that there is a considerable gap in developing world studies, which is why future research should be conducted to fill in these underrepresented areas.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, elderly, financial security, poverty, social support, sustainable development goals, VOSviewer

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INTRODUCTION

The question of elderly poverty has become an increasingly important topic around the world as the world is aging fast (Kang et al., 2022). The elimination of poverty, especially among such vulnerable populations as the elderly, is one of the pillars of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1, to which the

elimination of poverty is to be achieved. This objective underlines the elimination of poverty in all its manifestations and the provision of all people, including the elderly, with sufficient resources as well as social security. Nonetheless, the coexistence of aging populations and poverty is one of the major barriers to this objective because older adults have a tendency to have special needs given their dependence on fixed incomes, health-related costs, as well as a lack of workforce in the labor market.

The socio-economic factors, health status, as well as sufficientness of social safety nets influence elderly poverty (Agblobi et al., 2020; Mohd et al., 2018; Quartey et al., 2016). The study highlights the role of pensions in alleviating poverty among the elderly, whereas health problems along with chronic diseases, are other factors that decrease the financial strength of the elderly due to medical costs as well as scarce resources within the context of other needs (Ma et al., 2022). This issue is especially acute in rural settings where healthcare access is low (Zhang et al., 2018).

In addition to that, other influential factors in reducing poverty in the elderly are the family structure as well as intergenerational support (Tan et al., 2023). The economic burdens can be relieved by the financial and emotional help of children, yet changes in society and urbanization are slowly undermining such traditional systems of support (Acharya, 2023). This problem is more critical in the countries that lack strong social security frameworks, wherein older people are less provided with resources to fall back on in retirement (Niimi & Horioka, 2021; Vu et al., 2021).

Although this topic is of global concern, the research on the subject is generally viewed in a one-dimensional, mono-faceted manner with no overall investigation available on this matter. In a bid to fill this gap, this paper has conducted a bibliometric analysis in order to investigate the trends in research, geographical contributions, as well as important thematic areas pertinent to the elderly poverty research. In particular, the research questions that the study discusses are the following:

RQ1. What is the current state of research on elderly poverty?

RQ2. Who are the key contributors to the elderly poverty literature?

RQ3. What are the emerging themes in this field?

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a bibliometric method of conducting a systematic analysis of the research trends as well as thematic patterns in the literature about poverty among the elderly. The Scopus database was analyzed as it is known to have good coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature and is also reputed to be one of the largest as well as the most credible sources of scholarly literature (Schotten et al., 2017; Sharif et al., 2020). The Scopus database has been chosen because of its comprehensive multidisciplinary database,

meaning that it is sure to include high-quality publications in various fields that will be pertinent to this research. It also has advanced search capabilities as well as standardized indexing, which make it especially useful to this study, providing an opportunity to conduct a powerful bibliometric analysis.

The search string employed was as follows: TITLE (“elderly” OR “older age” OR “old-age” OR “old age” OR “old people” OR “older people” OR “ag*ng population” OR “population ag*ng” OR “retiree” OR “retirement” AND “poverty”). The timeframe of the search was 1971 to 2024 to achieve a comprehensive overview of the direction of research over more than 50 years. On 6 September 2024, the search was done, and a preliminary search resulted in 323 documents. The final set of 216 articles was analyzed after filtering and eliminating 8 unrelated documents and English-language journal articles.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As illustrated in Figure 1, a review of the trends in publication indicates that the study on poverty among the elderly has slowly become more popular in the past 50 years. A notable increase in research output began in the 2000s, with a significant surge post-2010, reflecting growing awareness of the implications of aging populations in poverty. This trend aligns with the increasing global concern about the financial security of the elderly, especially considering the expanding aging population. The steady rise in research suggests that the issue of elderly poverty is being recognized as a critical socio-economic challenge worldwide, prompting a sustained academic focus.

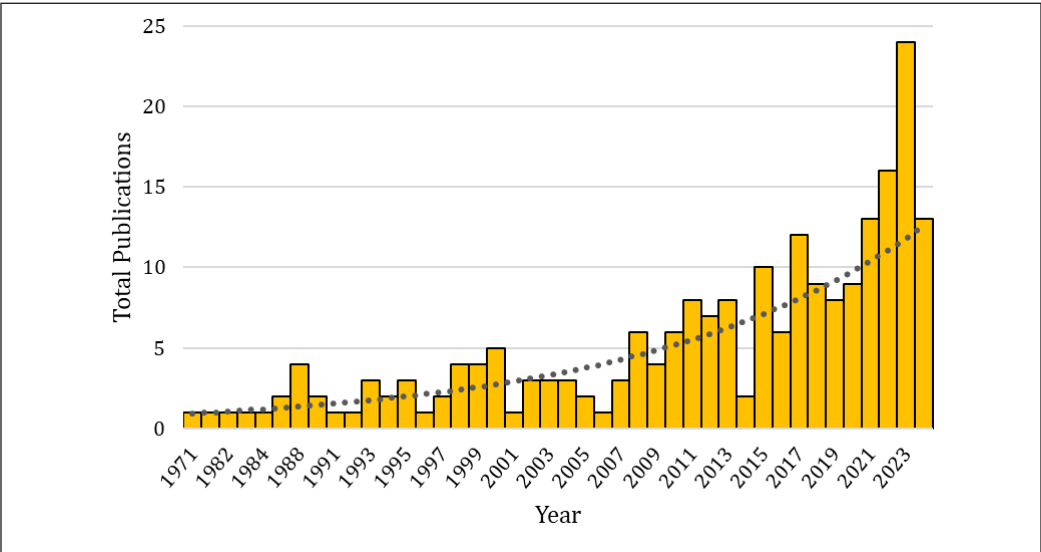


Figure 1. Publication trends
Source: Author’s work

Next, Figure 2 highlights the dominance of developed nations in this field, with the United States, China, and the United Kingdom leading in research output. Besides that, Australia, South Korea, and Germany also contribute significantly. These findings suggest that scholars from advanced economies are more actively engaged in this area. The prominence of researchers from the United States and the United Kingdom likely reflects their focus on welfare systems and social protection debates. China’s growing output likely corresponds to its shift towards an aging population and the related socio-economic challenges. However, the underrepresentation of research from developing countries, where elderly individuals may face greater vulnerability due to weaker social safety nets, underscores a critical gap in the literature.

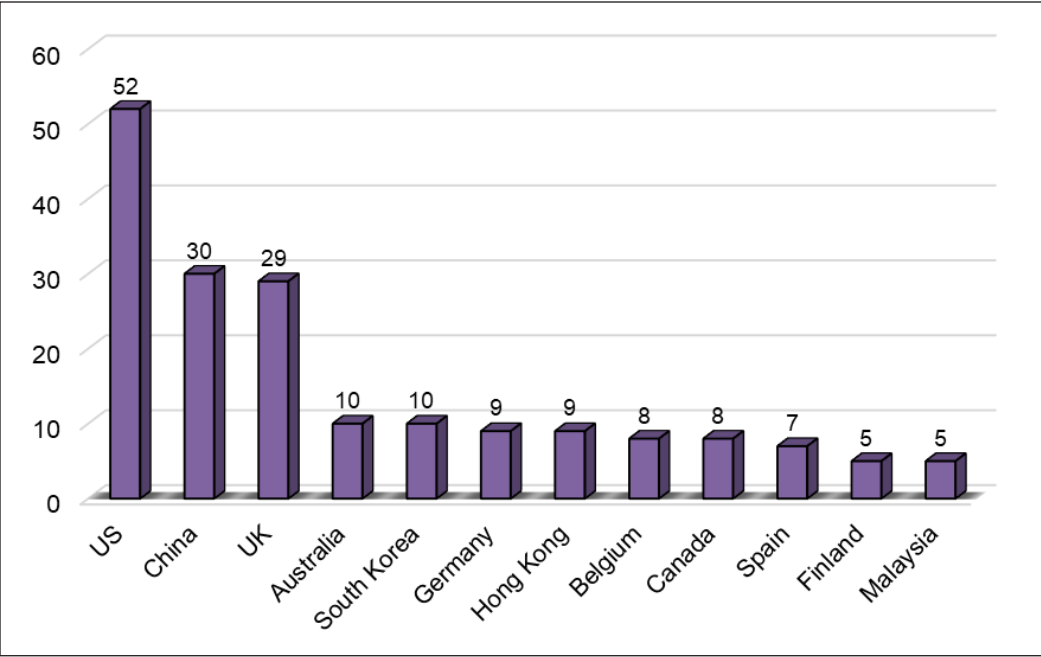


Figure 2. Most productive countries
Source: Author’s work

The visualization of the interrelated themes of research on elderly poverty is complete as represented by the keyword analysis using VOSviewer in Figure 3. The keywords that have the most significant presence in the center of the network are the words “elderly” and “poverty”, which demonstrate that they are essential in defining the research focus. These key terms are surrounded by groups of related themes which demonstrate the multi-dimensional aspect of the issue. Financial and social security have also become the most prevalent themes and the words “social security,” “pensions,” as well as “social pension,”

demonstrate the significance of institutional systems in reducing elderly poverty. These terms highlight the need to rely on the financial systems and welfare programs to take care of the ageing populations.

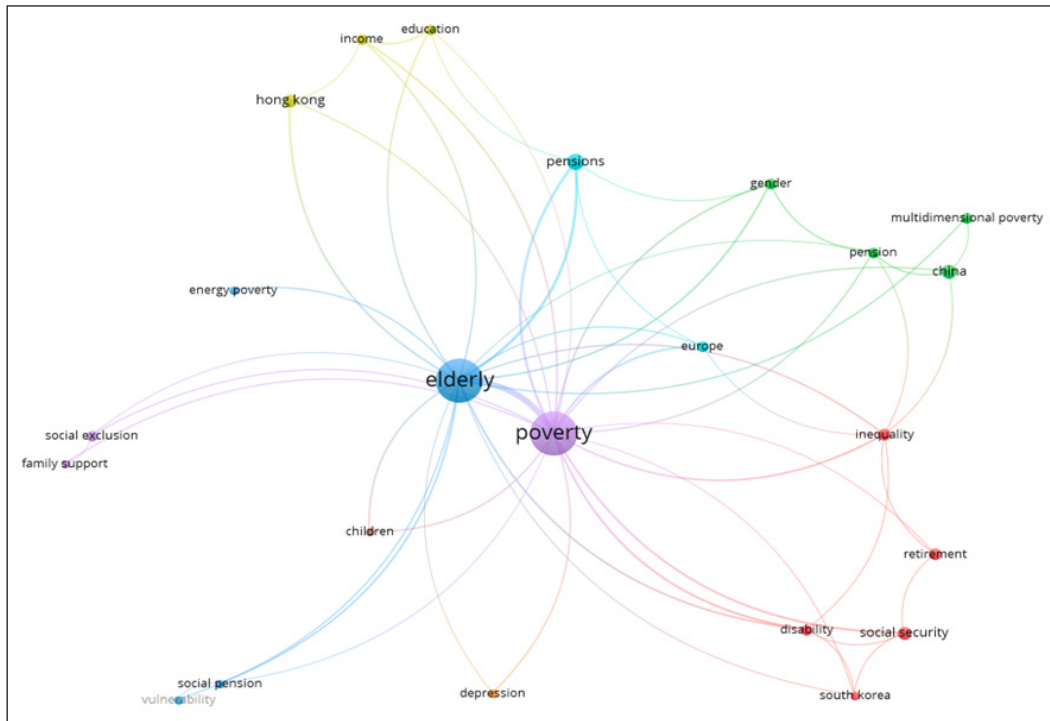


Figure 3. Keyword analysis using VOSViewer

Source: Author's work

The keywords such as “disability,” “depression” as well as “vulnerability” are also prominent themes in health and vulnerability, with the three keywords weakening the boundary between health problems and economic challenges amongst the elderly. Poor health not only leads to poverty but also enhances poverty by raising the medical costs and income-earning potential. Also, there are such words as inequality and multidimensional poverty, which refer to the greater socio-economic discrepancies of older adults, indicating that the researchers tend to think of poverty as multi-dimensional, not merely income-related.

Another matter of interest is social and family dynamics, which is demonstrated by such keywords as “social exclusion,” “family support,” as well as “children.” These words draw attention to the intergenerational relationship and the support of the community in reducing or increasing the risk of poverty in the elderly. The dependency on the family system is especially imperative in societies where institutional support is absent.

Lastly, it is seen that concentrations on the areas of interest are based on regions like “South Korea,” “China,” “Hong Kong,” and “Europe,” which display a focus on developed as well as emerging economies with large aging populations. This is in tandem with the results in Figure 2 that show the overrepresentation of developed country researchers. The geographical bias in literature shows that more research is required on elderly poverty in unexplored areas, especially in developing nations with a fast-aging population.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a bibliometric review of the elderly poverty research, which will offer a perspective on trends and geographical contributions to this topic as well as the thematic emphasis. The analysis demonstrates a gradual increase in academic focus over the last 50 years, and a significant spike in publications since 2010, as a result of increased awareness of aging societies as well as their socio-economic issues on a global scale. The results indicate that the research is concentrated in developed nations, and especially in the United States, China and the United Kingdom. Thematic areas that are essential and have been identified by the keyword analysis comprise financial security, health and social support, which are vital in examining the intricacies of old age poverty. Nevertheless, the fact that fewer studies have been conducted on region-specific issues in the developing countries where weaker social safety nets compound the vulnerabilities indicates the need to conduct future research. By filling these gaps with extensive and varied research, one can gain a better insight into the issue of elderly poverty and can influence policies to guarantee aging population economic security as well as well-being across the world.

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