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Mental Health in Transition: A bibliometric perspective in mapping the evolving landscape

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a systematic bibliometric analysis of 9525 Scopus documents on mental health from 2020 to 2025, focusing on its development within the social sciences. Utilizing Bibliomagika for network and trend analysis, the findings highlight a significant growth in mental health research, driven by digital transformation and exacerbated by COVID-19, which has globally intensified mental health issues. The analysis emphasizes emerging research interests. This comprehensive approach aims to guide and assist in establishing future direction by emphasizing its evolution and literature gaps, thereby contributing to a more structured and multidisciplinary understanding of mental health issues.

Keywords: Mental Health; Bibliometric Analysis; Scopus Database; Social Science

1.0 Introduction

Following the breakthroughs in social, environmental, and technological transformation, heightened awareness of the substantial influence of mental health on daily life has garnered more attention (Ghosh et al., 2025). Driven by the circumstances that the prevalence of mental health is constantly elevated and there is no indication of slowing down (Sam et al., 2023). In 2001, around 450 million individuals, or one-fourth of the global population, were diagnosed with mental health disorders, placing them among the major causes of disability (Cheah et al., 2020). Transitioning to the current setting, the World Mental Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reported that approximately one in every eight individuals globally, or around 970 million people, suffer from mental disorders, whilst the figure has surged drastically in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The intensification of mental health challenges is an alarming global trend, highlighting the far-reaching consequences across diverse demographic groups regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (Vigo, Thornicroft & Atun, 2016).

Despite increased understanding of mental health awareness and the provision of treatments (WHO, 2021), mental and emotional issues nonetheless constitute the global public health challenges (Khan et al., 2022). Considering the fact, the World Mental Health Organization (WHO, 2021; 2022) reported that two-thirds of individuals with mental disorders never seek professional assistance. This pattern gap is compounded by experience stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations that are often suffered by those affected. Although WHO (2022) highlights that mental health conditions can be treatable at a relatively affordable cost, globally, health systems remain significantly under-resourced, and disparities in access and quality of care. Addressing these challenges of mental health is essential, as the number has substantially increased over the past decade.

Factors ranging from social, economic, to environmental pressures often impair an individual's health, especially among vulnerable populations (WHO, 2022). Among the determinants are socioeconomic status, loss of income, poverty and inequality, unemployment, and relationship issues (Sam et al., 2023). The continuous development of the global population, urbanization and industrialization, digitalization, and environmental degradation (Trivedi et al., 2008; Wigand et al., 2022) resulted in novel challenges that further exacerbate the burden of mental health. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression (WHO, 2022). These transitions have been attributed to increased antisocial behavior, social isolation, environmental anxiety, and limited access to mental health resources and support (Trivedi et al., 2008). Several existing studies emphasize the importance of mental health; nevertheless, it does not reflect in better health outcomes, where research findings and practical implementations continue to diverge.

Mental health disorders, particularly depression, are gradually becoming a leading cause of disability (Arias et al., 2022), contributing to the global burden of disease. Given the reported figure of $1 trillion annually in lost productivity due to mental conditions (WHO, 2024), it is estimated that by the year 2030, a global cost of $16 trillion may be invested in treating mental disorders, covering both direct and indirect expenses of healthcare (Abdin et al., 2023; Frank, 2022). Globally, about 2% of national health expenditures are allocated to mental health, which somehow remains critically underfunded (WHO, 2021). The imbalance between mental health needs and resources is evident, reflecting the inequitable health systems and treatment gap, particularly in low-and-middle income countries (Mudiyanselage et al., 2022; WHO, 2021), where nearly 85% people with mental health disorders receive no treatment at all (WHO, 2021). This financial burden indicates the urgency of systematic investments in mental health for early intervention, prevention, and awareness of mental health to mitigate the long-term societal and economic impacts.

This study is timely and necessary due to the growing burden and prevalence of mental health. Despite the expanding body of literature, there remain limited questions on the underlying structure and transition of mental health research. The objective of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive mapping pertaining to mental health, aiming to highlight current research trends and correspondingly address the effective policies and government interventions in enhancing mental health. Over multiple generations, research on health outcomes and mental health has garnered significant interest from scholars, prompted by the intensifying realization that quality of life, productivity, and general well-being are profoundly influenced by mental health (Abdin et al., 2023; Gautam et al., 2024). While prior studies explored numerous circumstances, this study focuses on a specific subject area of social science in documenting the broader trends and changes over time.

Spurred by the endless battling faced by vulnerable communities, the influence of mental health extends beyond the individual well-being, consequently, impacting social cohesion and economic stability - we conducted an extensive review of the existing literature on mental health. The purpose is to comprehensively map the intellectual landscape over the past five years by identifying the emerging trends and evolutions. Therefore, by synthesizing the body of knowledge and highlighting the emerging areas of interest, this paper aims to offer meaningful insights to individuals, researchers, policymakers, and healthcare providers in enhancing the strategic development of mental healthcare, optimizing resource allocation as well as facilitating targeted interventions.

RQ1: What are the current publication patterns in mental health over the past five years?
RQ2: How have the trends and growth patterns in the publication of mental health evolved?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Mental Health

Mental health is widely accepted as a crucial aspect of overall well-being and human functioning. It is a condition of psychological well-being that facilitates individual to manage life's stressors, fulfil their potential, engage effectively in learning, work, and relationships, in a way that they have the ability to make decisions that eventually contribute to their community (WHO, 2022). The term mental health is beyond the absence of mental disorders and remains an intricate phenomenon that is frequently characterized by severe suffering, dysfunctional impairment, and the likelihood of self-harm (Zailani et al., 2022; WHO, 2022). The prevalence of mental health disorders is the most expensive burden that negatively hampers an individual's well-being, possibly much more costly to organizations and governments (Samsudin et al., 2024).

At the moment, the three (3) major aspects of mental conditions that are often referred to as psychological distress – conceptualized as an umbrella term – in reflecting the conditions of depression, anxiety, and stress (Samsudin et al., 2024; Zailani et al., 2022). Arguably, prolonged stress can be harmful to an individual's general well-being, relationships, and work productivity (Ryu & Fan, 2023), which eventually leads to anxiety and depression (mental and physical disorders) and more severe cases of suicidal ideation (Nigatu et al., 2023). In the present global landscape, mental health disorders have reached an alarming level of prevalence and severity, posing an intense implication on the passive development of individuals and society (Schlack et al., 2021). While analysing the critical aspects that substantially impact one's mental health, among the contributing causes are deprivation, poverty, inequality, and socioeconomic

status (Sam et al., 2023). The WHO (2022) indicates that the likelihood of developing mental health disorders is increased when an individual is exposed to unfavourable social and economic conditions, such as economic hardship, poverty, disability, violence, and inequality. These factors impede timely and adequate access to mental healthcare, thus continuing the cycles of social exclusion and psychological distress. For instance, those living in poverty are more inclined to be susceptible to financial stress, poor housing, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare and education – all of which are severely related to poor mental health outcomes.

The growing awareness of the profound impact of mental health is gaining traction across multiple disciplines of study. In most cases, poor mental health is linked to a higher likelihood of suffering emotional exhaustion, difficulty in concentration, and reduced ability to effectively manage daily stressors (WHO, 2022). Indeed, mental health issues often lead to distractions in one's performance, including academic and job performance (Baum & O'Malley, 2003), continuously resulting in loss of productivity (Conway et al., 2014), and relationship problems.

A number of studies are examining mental health from the perspectives of psychological, sociological, economic, and public health, expanding to a deeper comprehension of its causes, implications, and solutions, whilst Vigo et al. (2016) highlight its rising prominence on global research agendas. Mental health may not be broadly understood in the absence of context; thus, these intricate factors highlight the necessity for holistic and equity-oriented approaches. In aiming to bridge the existing knowledge gaps, this study also offers evidence-based policies and interventions in addressing individual vulnerabilities and more extensive structural aspects that influence mental health.

3.0 Methodology
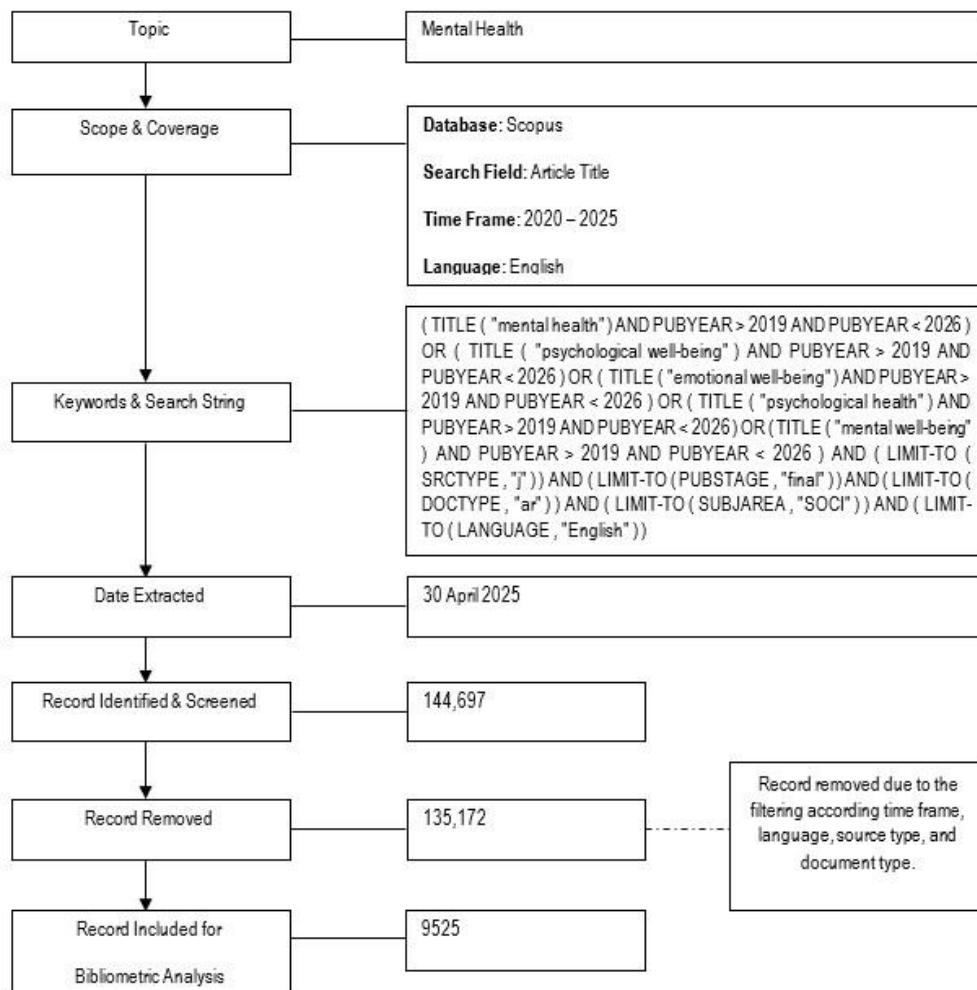
Figure 1. Flow diagram of the search strategy

A systematic literature review allows researchers to monitor and assess the growing trend, new concepts, and areas of interest that are disparate and interdisciplinary (Tranfield et al., 2003), such as mental health, which either emerges as more significant or becomes less valuable. It is also one of the techniques for systematically doing scientific mapping to assess certain regions extensively, offer visual analysis, and identify clusters of exploration from previous studies (Wahyuni et al., 2019). Remarkably, over the past years, the body

of literature on mental health has risen drastically. This study represents the research findings on mental health using bibliometric analysis.

The data for this review were extracted following the systematic technique in ensuring validity, transparency, and consistency (Tranfield et al., 2003). Considering Scopus is a recognized database, data drawn from it were used in this study. This study addressed the existing body of literature by identifying relevant keywords used to examine mental health. The fundamental values of this study are captured under the phrase "mental health". The synonyms and related terms were identified, and the final search string included ("psychological well-being") OR ("emotional well-being") OR ("psychological health") OR ("mental well-being").

Following our preliminary search, a total of 144,697 documents were obtained. These results were filtered according to document type of "article" to ensure the quality of the selected literature that is pertinent to the mental health area. Further considering the purpose of the study, the search was limited to the language of "English", the source type of "journal", the subject area of "social sciences", and within the time frame of "2020-2025". This yielded the 9525 records, which constituted our final sample. The data extraction process for this study is shown in Figure 1. Using bibliometric analysis, we performed a comprehensive analysis of 9525 records related to mental health in the social sciences.

4.0 Findings
In addressing the research question, the research findings have been divided into two (2) sections. All the findings were presented in descriptive terms, providing a comprehensive summary of the information and publication patterns.

4.1 Document Profile
With the purpose to answer RQ1, Table 1 presents the profiles of the identified mental health literature over the past five years, from 2020 to 2025, indicating a significant and continuously evolving body of research, consisting of 9,525 publications authored by 40,140 contributors. The increase over the six-year citable period is consequently spurred by the global mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak. Impressively, with a total of 83,043 citations and 7,327 cited documents, the field exhibits influential academic impact, averaging 8.72 citations per paper and 11.33 citations per cited paper. The relevancy and consistent contributions from researchers are highlighted by impact indicators, including h-index, g-index, and m-index.

Table 1. Main information

Main Information	Data
Publication Years	2020 – 2025
Total Publications	9525
Citable Year	6
Number of Contributing Authors	40140
Number of Cited Papers	7328
Total Citations	83,043
Citation per Paper	8.72
Citation per Cited Paper	11.33
Citation per Year	16608.60
Citation per Author	2.07
Author per Paper	4.21
Citation sums within h-Core	23,675
h-index	87
g-index	143
m-index	14.500

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Table 2. Languages

Languages	TP	%
English	9525	100.00%
Portuguese	28	0.29%
Spanish	14	0.15%
French	6	0.06%
German	5	0.05%
Russian	3	0.03%
Chinese	2	0.02%
Italian	2	0.02%
Persian	2	0.02%
Turkish	2	0.02%
Ukrainian	2	0.02%

Notes: TP=total number of publications
Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Particularly, only articles and journals were included in this study to ensure academic rigor and consistency. This limitation improves the reliability of the findings by prioritizing high-quality, original, and comprehensive research. Regarding the language, the initial search method limited the dataset to English-language; however, the analysis showed the presence of other languages, including Portuguese, Spanish, French, and German. This occurrence may be prompted by inconsistencies of metadata or multilingual abstracts and titles indexed in the database. Nevertheless, as reported in Table 2, English dominated 100% of total publications, whilst non-English languages represented a minimal percentage of less than 1% (<1%).

Table 3. Subject Area

Subject Area	TP	%
Social Sciences	9525	100.00%
Psychology	3127	32.83%
Medicine	2961	31.09%
Arts and Humanities	888	9.32%
Nursing	549	5.76%
Business, Management and Accounting	438	4.60%
Computer Science	404	4.24%
Health Professions	395	4.15%
Environmental Science	349	3.66%
Neuroscience	266	2.79%
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	224	2.35%
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	195	2.05%
Engineering	191	2.01%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	150	1.57%
Energy	139	1.46%
Decision Sciences	58	0.61%
Earth and Planetary Sciences	44	0.46%
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics	39	0.41%
Mathematics	37	0.39%
Dentistry	12	0.13%
Immunology and Microbiology	10	0.10%
Chemical Engineering	9	0.09%
Veterinary	8	0.08%
Chemistry	3	0.03%
Physics and Astronomy	2	0.02%
Multidisciplinary	1	0.01%

Notes: TP=total number of publications
Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

Table 3 illustrates that the published articles are classified by subject area. There are 26 subject categories with publications on mental health. The distribution of research subjects on mental health is dominated by social sciences (9525, 100%), followed by psychology (3127, 32.83%) and medicine (2961, 31.09%). Notably, psychology and medicine are two significant disciplines that contribute to the discourse, emphasizing that mental health is a solid foundation in the behavioural and clinical sciences. Approximately, over 200 documents on mental health were identified in arts and humanities, nursing, business, management and accounting, computer science, and health professions. This demonstrates the expanding awareness of mental health as a multifaceted issue with implications across multiple academic disciplines.

4.2 Publication Trends
This section discusses RQ2 by outlining the five-year trends and growth patterns in the evolution of mental health research. It offers information related to the development and transition in mental health. Table 4 shows the five most recent years of publications on mental health, indicating a constant and evolving research landscape spanning from 2020 to 2025. In the last five years, the lowest publication was in 2020 with 1251, and the highest was in 2024 with 2245. The decline in the total number of publications observed in 2024 (2245) to early 2025 (721) due to the data being extracted prior to the second quarter of April 2025. Hereby, the number is anticipated to increase further as more articles have not yet been published.

Table 4. The recent five years of publication

Year	TP	NCA	NCP	TC	C/P	C/CP	h	g	m
2020	1251	4782	1197	23991	19.18	20.04	59	102	9.833
2021	1498	6128	1404	27371	18.27	19.50	65	112	13.000
2022	1857	8137	1693	17453	9.40	10.31	43	59	10.750
2023	1953	8619	1650	9980	5.11	6.05	31	45	10.333
2024	2245	9370	1215	3860	1.72	3.18	18	28	9.000
2025	721	3104	169	388	0.54	2.30	7	11	7.000
Total	9525	40140	7328	83043	8.72	11.33			

Notes: TP=total number of publications; NCA=Number of contributing authors; NCP=number of cited publications; TC=total citations; C/P=average citations per publication; C/CP=average citations per cited publication; h=h-index; g=g-index; m=m-index.

Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

As presented in Table 4, the number of publications addressing mental health issues has surged significantly from 1,251 in 2020 to 2245 in 2024, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound psychological effects. The influential academic approach was needed subsequently due to the global health crisis, which exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions and triggered severe emotional distress, anxiety, and social isolation. Specifically, in the field of social science (Kaur et al., 2023), the evolving trend emphasizes the significance of consistent multidisciplinary efforts to investigate mental health factors, interventions, and policy implications.
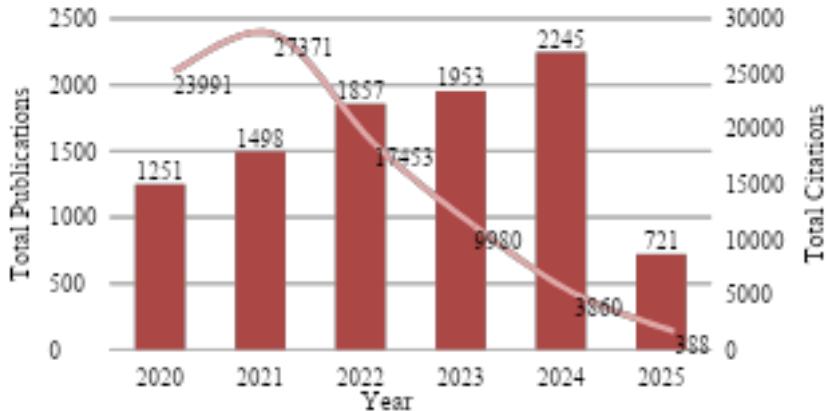
Figure 2. Total Publications and Citations by Year
Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024)

5.0 Discussion

This bibliometric analysis revealed a dynamic and expanding body of literature on mental health between 2020 and 2025, comprising 9525 publications authored by over 40,140 contributors. The period showed a strong citation performance with more than 83,043 citations and an average of 8.72 citations per paper, reflecting a high degree of academic influence and engagement with the topic. English dominated the language of publication, ensuring accessibility across global research communities, while the majority of articles were rooted in the social sciences, followed by psychology and medicine. Notably, an interdisciplinary trend was observed, with contributions emerging from fields such as nursing, computer science, business, and the arts. A sharp increase in publications occurred between 2020 and 2024, reaching a peak in 2024, largely influenced by the global mental health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A slight drop in output in early 2025 may reflect delayed indexing or shifting research attention post-pandemic.

The upward path in publication output and citation metrics underscores mental health as a research priority within the academic community. The high h-index and m-index values signal the presence of sustained and impactful research activity. The dominance of the social sciences suggests that mental health is increasingly approached through a sociocultural, economic, and policy-oriented lens, moving beyond purely clinical paradigms. At the same time, the consistent presence of psychology and medical research confirms the continued importance of initial behavioural and biomedical perspectives. The inclusion of mental health discourse in peripheral disciplines such as computer science and management reflects the complex interaction between mental well-being and digital transformation, organizational behaviour, and broader societal systems.

These findings align with the global mental health movement that emphasizes the need for integrated, cross-disciplinary solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a powerful catalyst, accelerating academic inquiry into the psychological, emotional, and social consequences of isolation, grief, and uncertainty. This evolution within the literature supports the WHO's call for mental health to be recognized as an essential component of public health and sustainable development. The bibliometric trends reveal how mental health has transitioned from a niche subfield to a central concern in health, social policy, education, and digital innovation research. Despite the substantial progress, several gaps persist. First, the overwhelming use of English in published literature highlights a linguistic bias that may marginalize regional mental health narratives from non-English speaking countries. Second, while social science dominance is encouraging, the relatively lower representation of interdisciplinary frameworks that include cultural studies, environmental studies, or law suggests untapped areas for exploration. Furthermore, there is limited bibliometric insight into the practical translation of this knowledge into real-world mental health interventions, programs, or policies.

Given the rising trend of mental health literature, future developments may increasingly converge with digital and artificial intelligence technologies. Predictive models, mental health apps, and online interventions are likely to dominate the next wave of inquiry, raising ethical questions about privacy, efficacy, and access. Another possible frontier is the role of climate change and geopolitical conflict in shaping collective and individual mental health, especially in vulnerable populations. As mental health discourse evolves, it may also intersect more heavily with global justice, migration, and inequality narratives.

Several recommendations can be drawn from this analysis. Future bibliometric studies should consider integrating multiple databases, including Web of Science and PubMed, to create a more comprehensive representation of the global literature. There is also a need to encourage publication in multiple languages to democratize access and participation. Researchers may benefit from exploring

under-researched themes such as the mental health of marginalized communities, the digital divide in mental health access, and the long-term psychological outcomes of pandemic-era policies. Furthermore, tracking citation bursts and keyword emergence may help identify thematic shifts in near real-time, enabling policymakers and funders to respond more proactively to emerging needs.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This bibliometric analysis offers a comprehensive overview of the mental health research landscape from 2020 to 2025, highlighting the field's remarkable growth, scholarly influence, and interdisciplinary expansion. The increase in publication volume, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the global urgency and academic responsiveness to mental health crises. The dominance of the social sciences, psychology, and medicine in mental health literature reflects a multifaceted approach, while emerging contributions from fields such as computer science and business point to the broadening relevance of mental health across disciplines.

Despite the encouraging trends, the analysis reveals notable gaps, including linguistic bias and limited visibility of region-specific perspectives from non-English speaking countries. Additionally, future studies should aim to integrate broader datasets and explore how academic research translates into tangible interventions and policies. Overall, this study not only maps the evolution of mental health scholarship but also underscores its critical importance in shaping public discourse, guiding policymaking, and advancing global well-being. It serves as a valuable reference for researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders to identify existing strengths and chart future directions in mental health research.

Acknowledgements

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes significantly to the mental health research landscape by offering a comprehensive bibliometric analysis focused on the social sciences domain between 2020 and 2025. By systematically mapping 9,525 Scopus-indexed articles, it captures the evolution, emerging trends, and research patterns influenced by global phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformation. The findings underscore the increasing interdisciplinarity in mental health studies, reflecting integration with psychology, medicine, and even non-traditional domains such as computer science and business. This paper serves as a strategic reference point for academics, policymakers, and health practitioners by identifying key research gaps, underexplored areas, and impactful contributions, thereby guiding future inquiry and facilitating evidence-based decision-making in mental health policy and practice.

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