

Social Connectedness and Well-being: A PRISMA-Based Bibliometric & Systematic Literature Review (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The ability to build up social relationships has become a pivotal factor which decides whether people achieve happiness both individually and in the form of groups within all psychological and organizational and societal environments. The research conducted a systematic literature review which analyzed 114 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus database considering the period between 2015 and 2025 through PRISMA methodology and bibliometric assessment. The review uses research from different disciplines to depict how social connectedness influences people's psychological states and their emotional responses plus their work performance. The study identified a couple of main research gaps which require further investigation as they involve non-Western areas and longitudinal studies and digital connection methods.

Keywords: Social connectedness; Well-being; Systematic literature review; PRISMA; Bibliometric analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social connectedness is increasingly being recognized as a major influence on both individuals and groups. Growing numbers of studies from various fields such as psychology, sociology, public health, organizational behaviour and human resource management have begun to address the concept of social connectedness as it relates to both well-being and performance (Tran et al., 2022). The definition of social connectedness includes the overall experience of feeling connected to another person, the existence of meaningful, lasting relationships between individuals and the support received by individuals through those relationships; and it is believed to be one of the primary contributors to an individual's overall emotional, psychological and social well-being (Tran et al., 2022). Given the current global phenomena of digitalization, urbanisation and the blurring of the boundaries between work and life, social isolation, feelings of loneliness and weakened connections to others are growing concerns for many. Therefore, the field of social connectedness is a rapidly growing area of research (Reimann et al., 2025).

At present, those variables that characterize the well-being of individuals include psychological, emotional, as well as social aspects. As outlined by Rejikumar et al. (2021), the concept of well-being has become increasingly recognized as an important outcome that affects an individual's level of life satisfaction, mental health, productivity and general quality of life. There is a large amount of empirical evidence indicating that individuals with stronger social connections tend to be happier, more resilient, and experience higher levels of life satisfaction than do individuals with weaker or disrupted social connections, which are associated with stress, anxiety, depression, and reduced functioning. Similar findings have been reported for social connections in

organisational and community contexts; social connections have been shown to be positively associated with employee engagement, creativity, cooperation, and sustainable performance outcomes (Levesque et al., 2023).

The connection between social connectedness and wellbeing has been the focus of an increasing number of studies; however, there is still a lack of coherence, across disciplines, contexts, and styles, in the current body of literature (Feng, Altinay, Alrawadieh, 2022). The studies differ in their conceptualization of social connectedness (e.g., support, belongingness, interpersonal trust, and relational quality) and the measures of well-being outcomes. The heterogeneity of the literature, although beneficial, is associated with challenges in establishing a comprehensive understanding of the field and the identification of major themes, theoretical underpinnings, and trends of emerging areas of study (Tran et al., 2022).

In order to address this issue, the current study aims to carry out a systematic literature review using the PRISMA, and in this regard, it aims to provide a comprehensive and integrative overview of the research on the topic of social connectedness and well-being. Furthermore, the study also aims to use bibliometric approaches to identify the intellectual structure of the research on the topic, the prominent journals and authors, and the thematic trends.

The relationship between social connectivity and well-being has been the subject of an increasing amount of research, but evaluations of this literature typically concentrate on narrative syntheses or on specific disciplinary viewpoints. Few studies have methodically combined bibliometric analysis with a PRISMA-based systematic literature review to describe the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of this field of study. As a result, major research streams, theoretical underpinnings, and new

trends across fields continue to be unclear. In order to close this gap, this study combines bibliometric methods with PRISMA-guided review procedures to offer a thorough and organized summary of social connectivity and well-being research. This study makes three key contributions to the literature. The first research outcome creates an empirical and conceptual synthesis of social connectedness and well-being studies which researchers conducted from 2015 until 2025 according to the PRISMA framework. The study uses bibliometric analysis to determine which authors and journals and research themes hold the most influence in the academic field. The study combines systematic review methods with bibliometric mapping techniques to discover important research gaps and upcoming research paths which have value for theoretical and methodological and practical use.

The aims of this study are to provide a comprehensive and integrative overview of the research on the topic of social connectedness and well-being. The study aims to achieve specific goals which include the following objectives.

1. To examine prevailing empirical and conceptual evidence in between the relationship of social connectedness and well-being;
2. To map the main theoretical perspectives, themes, and research streams in social connectedness and well-being research;
3. To analyse the mechanisms and contexts through which social connectedness impacts on well-being outcomes; and
4. To identify the contexts (organizational, community, and digital) in which social connectedness and well-being have been examined.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is generally defined as the experience of belonging, closeness, and significant relationships that people feel with others (Subbarao, Chhabra, and Mishra, 2023). It includes both the structural and subjective components of social relationships, which refer to the feeling of being socially supported, valued, and included. Social connectedness has been previously defined in prior literature as a multidimensional construct that encompasses social integration, interpersonal attachment, and perceived belongingness (Sun, Dong, and McIntyre, 2017).

The early literature has generally focused on the study of social connectedness using other related constructs such as social support, social capital, and interpersonal relationships, especially from a psychological and sociological perspective (G. et al., 2021). Social connectedness has gained recognition as an essential human requirement because its distinct value needs to be acknowledged for its vital role in enabling both personal and community progress (Ang et al., 2015).

Various disciplines define social connectedness differently, yet all three concepts explain how people establish social bonds through their contact with others and their sense of belonging and their ability to receive social backing. Researchers in sociology spend their time studying social networks through their social ties, while psychologists define social connectedness through emotional links and the support that people believe they can receive from others. Organizations and management research increasingly view social connectivity as a relational asset, which influences how employees feel and act and their overall health. The collection of perspectives leads to two outcomes, which

create scientific disarray in academic texts while showing how the concept has many different aspects.

Researchers have used various scales and indicators to assess social connectedness, which include measures that assess perceived social support and belongingness and relational quality and network-based measures. Researchers primarily depend on self-reported survey instruments for their studies, while they use qualitative and mixed-method strategies only in very few cases. The use of quantitative methods together with cross-sectional measurement techniques enables researchers to conduct extensive studies, but this approach limits their capacity to examine how social connectedness changes over time through various social and environmental factors.

Theoretical Foundations Linking Social Connectedness and Well-being

A variety of theories have been used to explain the relationship between social connections and well-being (Praveena & Thomas, 2018). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) establishes relatedness as one of three basic psychological needs which people need to achieve their best performance and complete their life activities (Legault, 2017). People need social relationships to satisfy their psychological requirements which they consider their natural human rights thus building social ties to achieve better mental health.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) serve as effective frameworks to comprehend which social connections should be developed through organizational settings. Social connections function as essential resources which protect employees from stress while increasing their job fulfillment (Buchwald & Schwarzer, 2010). Social connections function as the main factor which people use

to measure their well-being throughout their entire existence which these theories demonstrate through their combined effect (Diemer & Regan, 2022).

Self-Determination Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory work together to explain why people need social connections to achieve their well-being. SDT focuses on basic psychological needs while SET investigates reciprocal relations and organizational support and COR theory defines social connections as essential resources which help people handle stress and protect their resources. The connection between these theories which spans both personal and professional environments demonstrates how social relationships predict positive mental health results.

Social Connectedness and Psychological Well-being

The prevailing body of research depicts a strong positive connection between social relationships and psychological well-being which comprises of happiness, life satisfaction, emotional stability, and mental health according to Richter, Leyer, and Steinhüser 2020. The research elaborates that people who have strong social ties experience more positive emotions while their depression and anxiety and stress levels is reduced compared to people who have weak social ties (Munzel, Meyer-Waarden, and Galan, 2018).The scientific research findings demonstrate that social connectedness serves as a protective mechanism which decreases the harmful impacts of difficult life circumstances and emotional distress. The research showed that social disconnection together with loneliness leads to decreased mental health outcomes and higher chances of developing psychological disorders according to Richter, Leyer, and Steinhüser 2020. The study indicates that social connections play an essential role in preserving psychological resilience according to the findings of Chen et al. 2024.

The current study investigates how social connectedness affects psychological well-being through different social connectedness dimensions which include family ties and peer networks and community connections according to Charalampous, Grant and Tramontano 2021. Research demonstrates that close relationships together with social connections have a major impact on psychological well-being which includes happiness and life satisfaction according to Amin et al. 2020.

There are a number of boundary conditions and restrictions to be aware of, despite the literature's generally good conclusions. Many research rely on cross-sectional designs, which restrict causal inference. Furthermore, it seems that the degree to which social connectivity and psychological well-being are related varies depending on the individual, group, and community setting. Additionally, a few research find mixed or context-dependent effects, indicating that social connectivity might not always improve well-being.

Synthesis and Research Gaps

The study reveals research gaps which result from the previous thematic and bibliometric synthesis. The evidence shows that social connectedness plays a vital role in promoting well-being yet there exist research gaps which require different research contexts and better research methods and complete research theories. The existing research findings need more thorough and stronger research methods because the current research findings show which areas need further research.

The evidence shows that social connectedness functions as the main factor which determines well-being across different situations. The researchers identified several gaps which include the absence of studies about non-Western areas and the need for

more longitudinal research and the need to study organizational interventions and the new problems about digital connectedness (Ang et al. 2015). The systematic review of literature employs PRISMA methodology together with bibliometric analysis to identify currently existing gaps within academic research.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a hybrid methodological approach by combining a PRISMA-based systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis. The PRISMA framework establishes three research criteria which enable researchers to execute study selection and synthesis processes while maintaining research standards. The review process uses both methods to create an analytical framework which extends beyond basic descriptive summaries of the research area.

Research Design

The research methodology used in this research for a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and empirical research on the relationship between social connectedness and well-being is based on a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology. The research used systematic literature review methodology to achieve transparent research results which could be replicated by others while maintaining methodological strength and minimizing selection bias and subjective judgment during the review process. The research used systematic literature review methodology to establish enhanced methodological strength through its implementation of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses PRISMA methodology. The research used bibliometric analysis methodology through Biblioshiny tool of Bibliometrix R package (Lim, Kumar, & Donthu, 2024).

Data Source and Search Strategy

The review used bibliographic information from a dataset that spans a ten-year period beginning in 2015 and ending in 2025. The data establishes present-day relevance for ongoing scientific studies. The final dataset consisted of 114 peer-reviewed journal articles, which were obtained from 83 different academic sources. The researchers obtained their sources from major psychological, public health, sociological, organizational, and well-being research journals. The authors of this systematic literature review gathered all their data from Scopus database only. The researchers selected Scopus because it provides complete access to high-quality peer-reviewed journals, which allows them to validate the academic standards of their examined studies. The search used social connectedness, social relationships, social support, belongingness, well-being, mental well-being, psychological well-being, life satisfaction as its keywords. The researchers searched the keywords through the articles which included the title, abstract, and keywords.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to ensure their relevance and quality, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed during the screening process. The inclusion criteria were: Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, studies focusing on social connectedness (and similar constructs) and well-being, empirical, conceptual, or review articles, articles published in English and the availability of full-text articles. The exclusion criteria were: Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, dissertations, articles focusing on clinical disorders without reference to social connectedness, studies in which social relationships were not central to well-being outcomes and duplicate articles.

PRISMA-Based Screening Process

The screening and selection of studies were conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) four-stage process. In the identification stage, a preliminary list of studies was obtained using a systematic search of the databases using a list of keywords related to social connectedness and well-being. In the screening stage, the retrieved articles were screened for duplicates and obviously irrelevant studies using the title and abstract of the articles. In the eligibility stage, the full articles of the remaining studies were evaluated according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria for relevance, quality, and appropriateness for the review. Finally, in the inclusion stage, a total of 114 peer-reviewed journal articles were deemed appropriate for the study. At each stage of the PRISMA screening process, studies were excluded based on predefined criteria related to relevance, quality, and scope. Articles were most frequently excluded at the eligibility stage due to insufficient focus on social connectedness or the absence of well-being-related outcomes. A total of 114 articles met all inclusion criteria and were retained for final analysis.

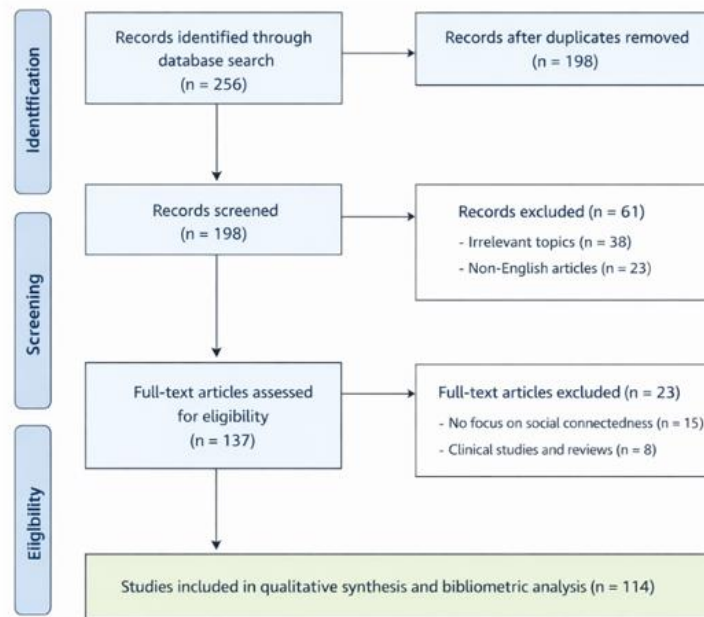


Figure 1- Review data, 2026

Methodological Rigor and Reliability

The temporal analysis of the publications showed a positive trend in the research on social connectedness and well-being from 2015 to 2025. The data showed an annual growth rate of 25.89%. This suggests that the field is growing rapidly. The average document age was 3.31 years. This also suggests that the field is relatively new. In the initial years of the review period, the number of research studies was low. This is because the field of social connectedness was in the initial stages of development. In the initial stages, social connectedness was treated as a secondary variable in studies on well-being or mental health. However, from 2019 onwards, the number of annual publications increased. This could be due to the increased organizational, societal, and academic recognition of the importance of social relationships for psychological health, life satisfaction, and work-related well-being. There were various measures put in place to ensure the study was rigorous and credible, such as the use of a PRISMA protocol-

based study selection method, the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the use of peer-reviewed materials, the use of established bibliometric laws such as Bradford's and Lotka's laws, and the use of Biblioshiny tools.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The dramatic increase in publications, as indicated in Figure two, after the year 2020 can be linked to the disruptions caused in the world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought about the issue of social isolation, loneliness, and digital social interaction. In this case, social connectedness not only acted as a protective factor for individual well-being, but it also became a strategic issue for organizations, policymakers, and human resource management scholars.

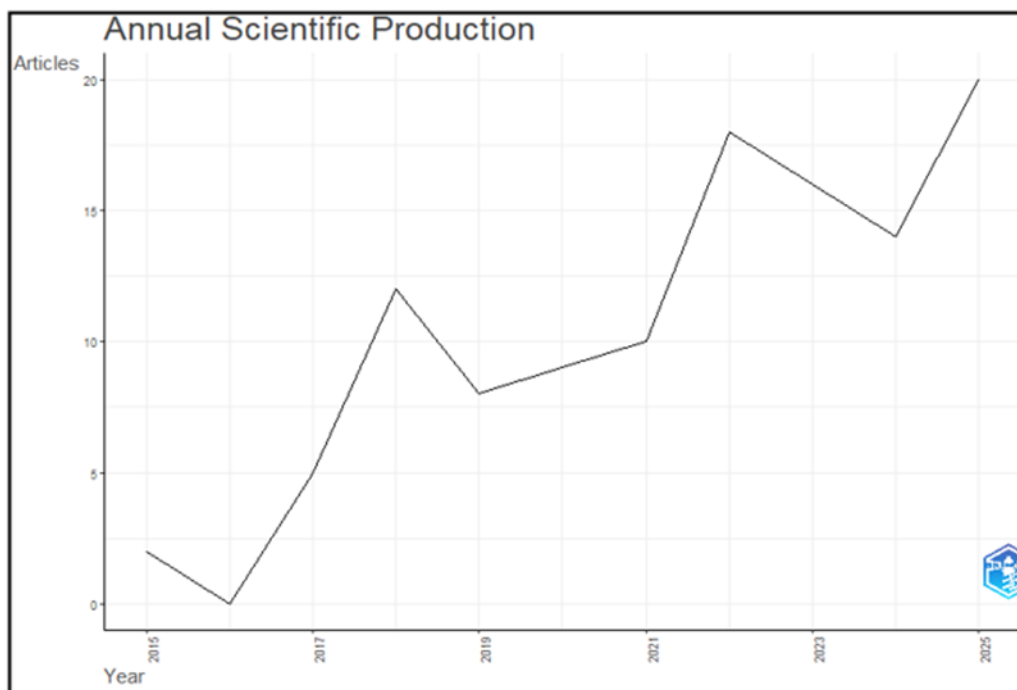


Figure 02 - Annual Scientific Production

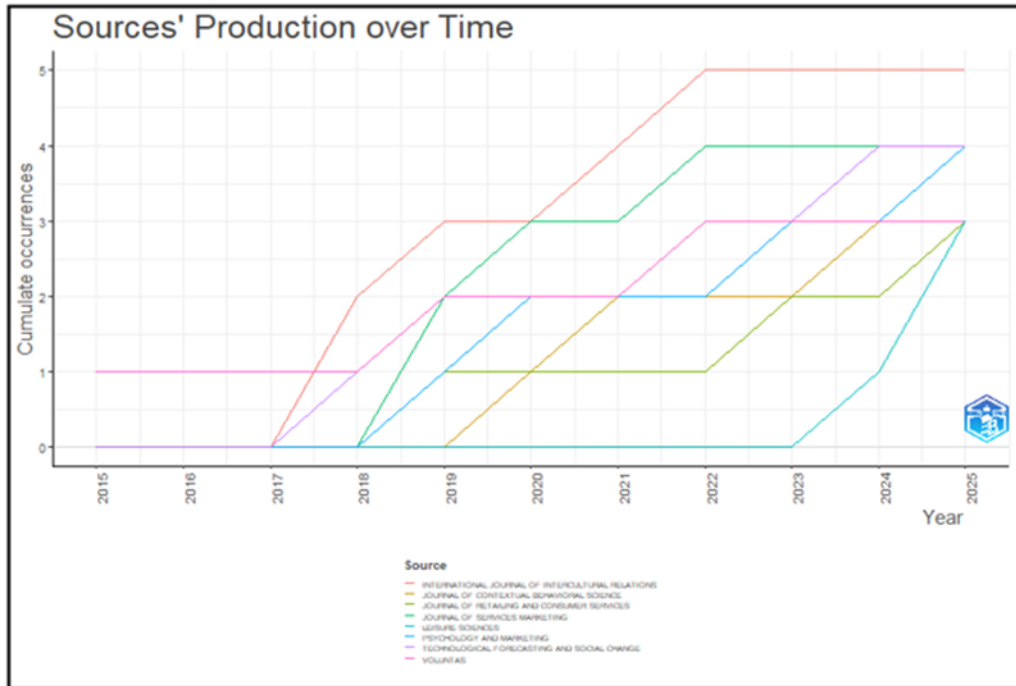


Figure 03 – Sources Production over time

The citation analysis shows how research in this field has developed over time and its current status. The data shows an average of 23.49 citations per document which establishes that multiple research studies received high scholarly recognition. The research pattern becomes visible through its citation density which shows two developments: researchers are studying social connectedness and well-being at greater depths while their findings create major advancements in theoretical frameworks and research discussions. Figure four shows that the data set contains highly cited research studies which explore the following topics: The psychological mechanisms through which social connectedness impacts mental well-being, The role of social support and belonging in managing stress and burnout, Social relationships in the workplace and employee well-being, Community or societal connectedness as a determinant of life satisfaction. The high citation rate shows that social connectedness research exists across multiple academic fields because research studies receive citations from

psychology and sociology and organizational behavior and public health and human resource management.

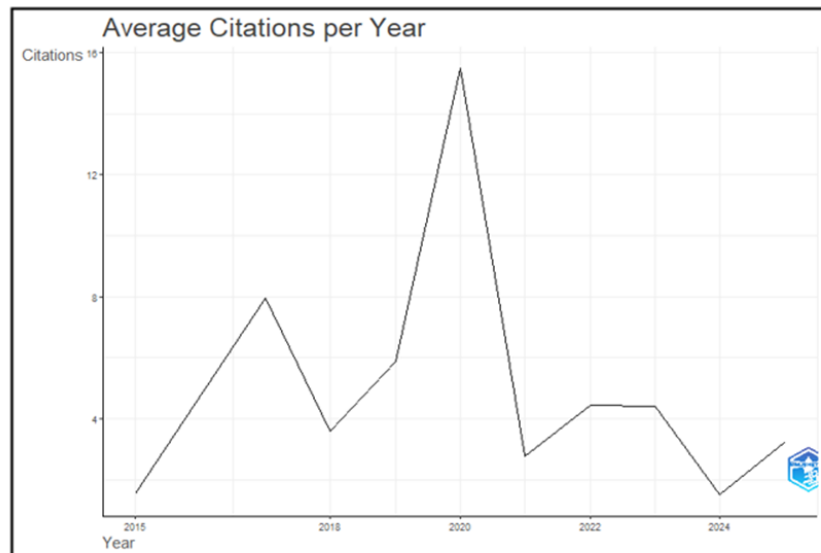


Figure 04 – Average citations per year

As presented in the figure five, the productivity of authors was analyzed in accordance with Lotka's Law, which is a theoretical concept that describes the pattern of scientific productivity among authors. The analysis shows that the majority of the authors contributed only a single article, while a few authors contributed more than one article in the particular scientific field. This is in accordance with the theoretical concept of Lotka's Law. Thus, the particular scientific field is characterized by the following features: a large number of authors who contributed a single article, a small number of authors who contributed more than a single article in the particular scientific field, the large number of authors who contributed a single article is in accordance with the interdisciplinary character of the scientific field, where researchers from adjacent scientific fields, such as health psychology, organizational studies, education, etc., deal with the concept of social connectedness as a part of their broader research interests.

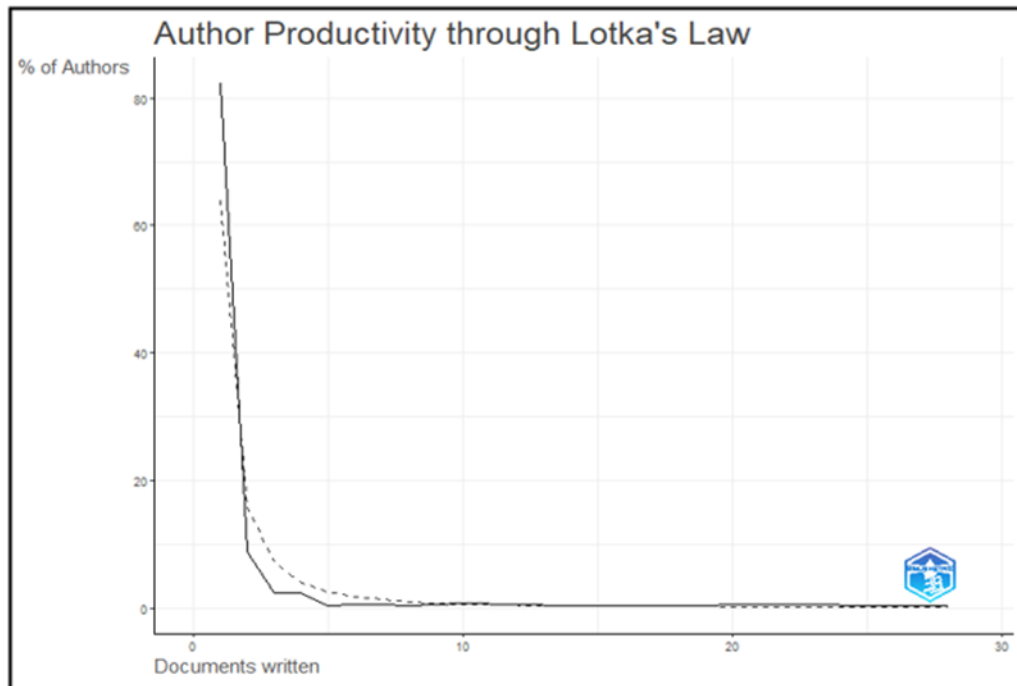


Figure 05 – Author Productivity Lotka's Law

The author production over time analysis further illustrated by figure four demonstrates that scholarly interest in social connectedness and well-being has indeed grown. The early authors of research in this domain helped lay the conceptual groundwork by stressing the importance of social support, relationships, and belongingness as antecedents of well-being. Over time, a new generation of authors began to publish research in this domain, broadening its scope to include: Digital/virtual social connectedness, workplace relationships and team dynamics, organizational practices that foster belongingness, cross-cultural aspects of social connectedness. It is noteworthy that prolific authors represent continuity of research activity, not simply single-shot contributions, which suggests the development of specialized research streams.

The distribution of the journals was analyzed using Bradford's Law, which states the distribution of scholarly articles among different journals. The results suggest that a

small group of journals has a large number of articles on the topic of social connectedness and well-being, while a large number of journals have a small number of articles on the topic.

The major categories of the core journals include: Psychology and mental health, organizational behavior and human resource management, social sciences and well-being studies. The core journals represent the “intellectual center of the field,” which influences the dominant theoretical approaches. The large number of peripheral journals reflects the interdisciplinary spread of the topic, suggesting that social connectedness is a “bridging construct.” from a research strategy perspective, Bradford’s Law points to the location of high-impact research on the topic of social connectedness and well-being, as well as the location of future research on the topic.

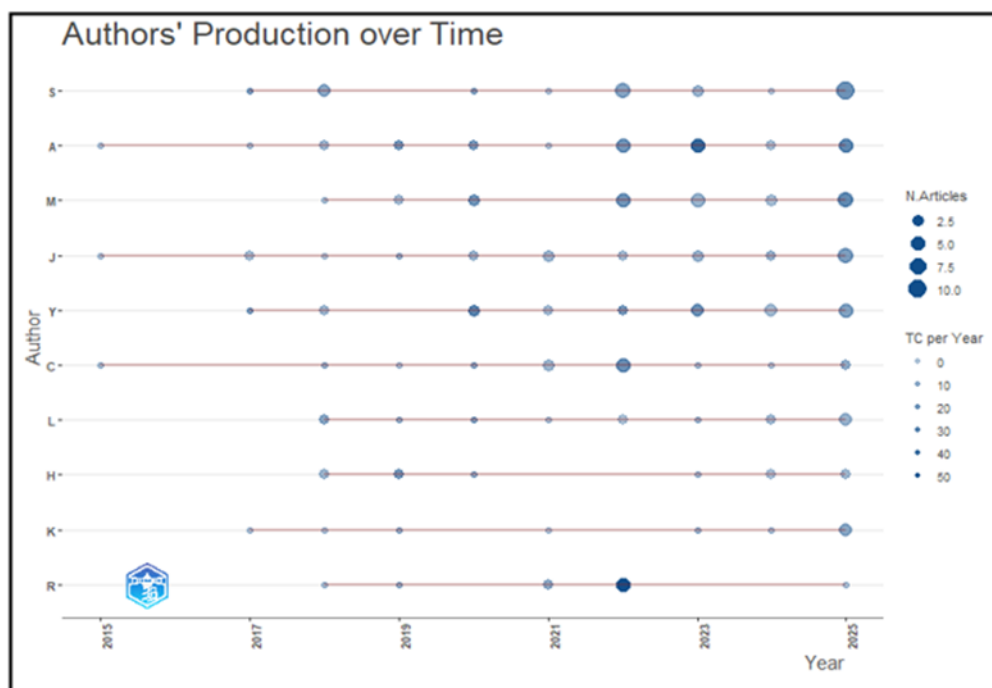


Figure 06 – Authors' Production over time

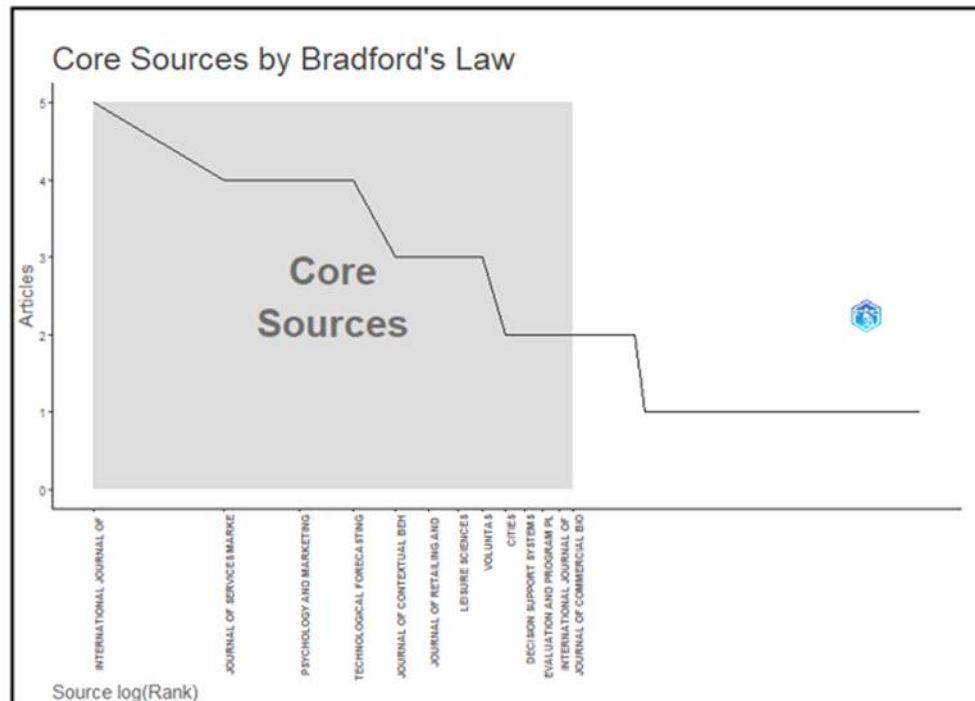


Figure 07 – Core sources Bradford's Law

Three Fields Plot is a comprehensive visualization of the interrelations between authors, keywords, and sources, providing insights into the thematic structure of the literature. It reveals several dominant thematic clusters:

Psychological and Emotional Well, being - These studies mainly focus on different aspects of happiness, fulfillment, and mental health, including effects of loneliness and stress. This theme's research is primarily psychology, and public health, based.

Workplace and Organizational Context - The studies focusing on social connectedness at work are growing, as employee well, being, engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational membership are being explored. The fact that these studies have been published in management and HRM journals demonstrates the significance of social connectedness.

Social Support and Community Connectedness - This theme deals with interpersonal relations, community connections, and social capital as a basis for personal and collective well-being. The interface between sociology and psychology is also evident in this theme.

The Three-Fields Plot also shows how some authors and journals serve as bridges between themes, which in turn supports the integrative nature of the research domain.

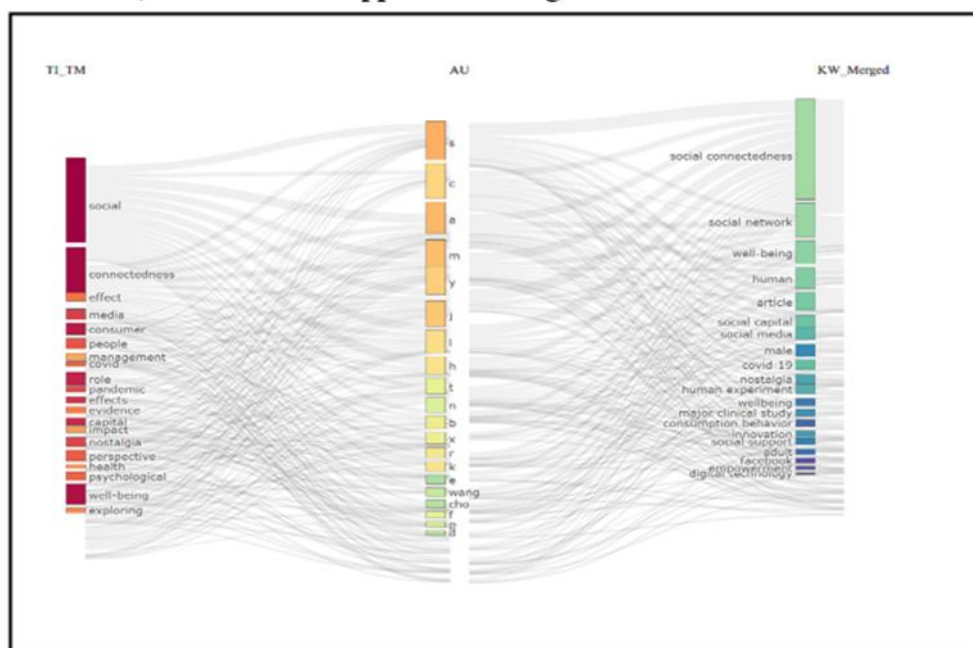


Figure 08 - Three-Fields Plot

To better understand the intellectual structure of the literature, a keyword co-occurrence network analysis was performed using author keywords. Figure nine shows the visualization of the network of frequently occurring keywords that are related to social connectedness. The size of each node corresponds to the frequency of keyword occurrence, and the links correspond to the strength of co-occurrence relationships. Different colours are used to represent thematic clusters in the literature.

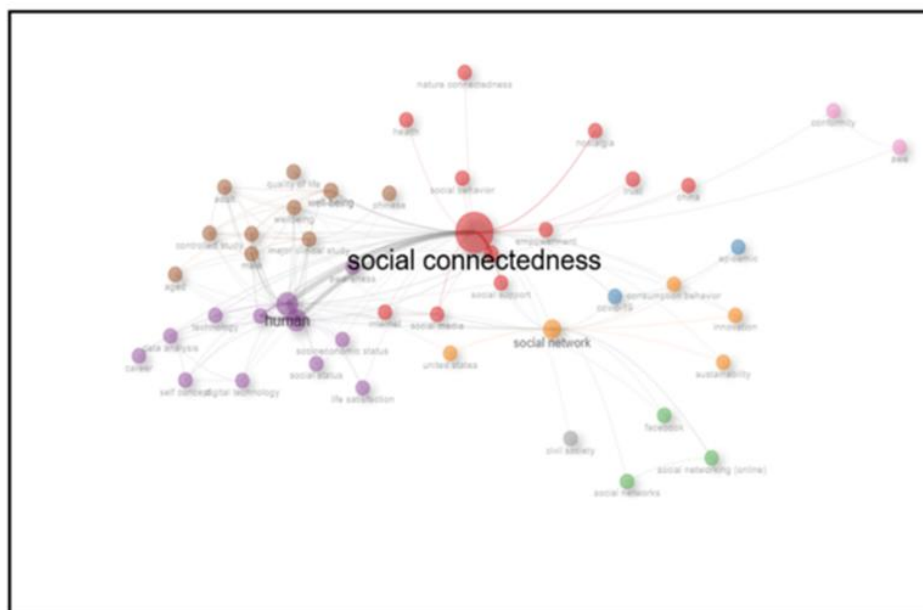


Figure 09 - keyword co-occurrence network

Research Gaps and Emerging Directions

Despite the considerable expansion of the literature, a number of gaps are apparent: a lack of research in non-Western and developing countries, insufficient consideration of the role of HR policies and organizational interventions in promoting social connectedness, a lack of longitudinal research on causal pathways, and the need to include digital connectedness and technology-based relationships in the field (Tran et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps would strengthen the depth and application of the literature, especially in light of changing work arrangements and societal trends.

Synthesis of Key Findings

In conclusion, the analysis proves that the study of social connectedness and well-being is an emerging research domain with tremendous growth, interdisciplinary scope, and high impact (Choi & Valente, 2022). The use of the laws of bibliometry and the science of mapping reveals that this research domain has matured with the following

characteristics: high publication growth, high scholarly impact concentrated among core publications, a small group of prolific authors with high impact, and growing diversity of themes, especially within the organizational domain.

Although methodology was not the main concern, it was found that the majority of the reviewed articles employed a quantitative approach, especially in the form of a cross-sectional survey. The scales that were employed in measuring social connectedness and well-being were found to be consistent, although it was also found that there was a lack of longitudinal, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches, and an interest in experimental approaches, as discussed in a study by Amoah and Amoah (2021).

To summarize, it has been found that there is an expansion of research on social connectedness and well-being, with a strong core of influential authors and journals that feature an emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration and themes that focus on psychological, organizational, and community-related topics (Cernas-Ortiz and Wai-Kwan, 2021). In essence, these findings collectively support that social connectedness is an essential construct in well-being research.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has investigated the impact of social connectedness on well-being through PRISMA approach and bibliometric mapping. It features integration of 114 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025. Social connectedness as represented by belongingness, social support, and meaningful social relations, was found to be the most important factor influencing psychological, organizational, and social well-being in the studies reviewed.

The review also notes that the three main theories, Self, Determination Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory, have been firmly established. They suggest that social relationships should be regarded as basic resources for human functioning. The bibliometric analysis shows an accelerated and increasingly influential research area with rapid publication growth, intense scholarly impact in core journals, and expanding interdisciplinary participation. The thematic trends show a shift from individual psychological well, being to organizational and community contexts, especially as a response to modern societal disruptions.

Despite the progress made so far, we still see a number of notable literature gaps. For example, there is hardly any research in non, Western countries, most studies use cross, sectional approaches, and there is a notable lack of focus on digital and technology, related social connectedness. These issues will be fixed in upcoming longitudinal, cross, cultural, and interventional studies. Simply, this review integrates dispersed literature, determines the body's intellectual structure, and points to social connectedness as the key concept in modern well, being research, thus providing a strong basis for future theoretical and applied studies.

Despite its contributions, this review has certain limitations. The analysis was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English and primarily indexed in major academic databases, which may have excluded relevant grey literature. Additionally, the reliance on published studies may introduce publication bias. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and provide opportunities for future research.

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