



## **A Bibliometric Analysis of Psychological Well-Being Research in Sport and Exercise Psychology: Evidence From the Web of Science Database**

Spor ve Egzersiz Psikolojisinde Psikolojik İyi Oluř  
Arařtırmalarının Bibliyometrik Analizi: Web of  
Science Verilerine Dayalı Bir İnceleme

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## A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH IN SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY: EVIDENCE FROM THE WEB OF SCIENCE DATABASE

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the development, thematic structure, and intellectual organization of psychological well-being research within the field of sport and exercise psychology through a bibliometric approach. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection and analyzed using the bibliometric package and its Biblioshiny interface. A total of 306 publications published between 1992 and February 2026 were included in the analysis. The findings reveal that research output is concentrated in a limited number of specialized journals and driven by a clearly identifiable core group of authors, reflecting an institutionalized knowledge production structure. Geographically, scientific production is predominantly centered in North America, Europe, and parts of Oceania, while international collaboration has increased over time. Keyword, trend topic, and thematic mapping analyses indicate a clear temporal shift from theory-driven research focused on coping, personality, and self-determination theory toward more applied and health-oriented themes, including physical activity, mental health, burnout, and mindfulness. Overall, the results demonstrate that psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology has evolved from a performance-centered perspective toward more integrative and multidimensional frameworks, highlighting emerging directions for future research and practice.

**Keywords:** Psychological Well-Being, Sport and Exercise Psychology, Bibliometric Analysis, Research Trends.



## SPOR VE EGZERSİZ PSİKOLOJİSİNDE PSİKOLOJİK İYİ OLUŞ ARAŞTIRMALARININ BİBLİYOMETRİK ANALİZİ: WEB OF SCIENCE VERİLERİNE DAYALI BİR İNCELEME

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, spor ve egzersiz psikolojisi alanında psikolojik iyi oluş araştırmalarının gelişimini, tematik yapısını ve entelektüel örgütlenmesini bibliyometrik bir yaklaşımla incelemektir. Bibliyografik veriler Web of Science Core Collection veritabanından elde edilmiş ve bibliometric paketi ile onun web tabanlı arayüzü olan Biblioshiny kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz kapsamına 1992–Şubat 2026 döneminde yayımlanan toplam 306 çalışma dâhil edilmiştir. Bulgular,

literatürdeki yayın üretiminin sınırlı sayıda uzmanlaşmış dergide yoğunlaştığını ve alanın belirgin bir yazar çekirdeği tarafından şekillendirildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Coğrafi dağılım açısından bilimsel üretimin ağırlıklı olarak Kuzey Amerika, Avrupa ve Okyanusya'nın bazı bölgelerinde yoğunlaştığı; buna karşın uluslararası iş birliğinin zaman içinde artış gösterdiği belirlenmiştir. Anahtar kelime, trend topic ve tematik haritalama analizleri, başta başa çıkma, kişilik ve öz-belirlenim kuramı gibi kuramsal temellere odaklanan araştırmaların, zamanla fiziksel aktivite, ruh sağlığı, tükenmişlik ve mindfulness gibi daha uygulamalı ve sağlık odaklı temalara yöneldiğini göstermektedir. Genel olarak bulgular, spor ve egzersiz psikolojisi bağlamında psikolojik iyi oluş araştırmalarının performans merkezli yaklaşımlardan daha bütüncül ve çok boyutlu çerçevelere doğru evrildiğini ortaya koymakta ve alanın gelecekteki araştırma ve uygulamaları için yol gösterici bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Psikolojik İyi Oluş, Spor ve Egzersiz Psikolojisi, Bibliyometrik Analiz, Araştırma Eğilimler.



## INTRODUCTION

Sport and exercise psychology is an interdisciplinary field that has long focused on topics such as performance, motivation, and mental health by examining the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes individuals exhibit in relation to sport and physical activity. Psychological well-being, however, was initially addressed as a by-product of physical activity or as a secondary gain accompanying performance; in many studies, it was indirectly associated with clinical indicators such as depression, anxiety, and mood states (Lundqvist, 2011; Ekkekakis, 2017). In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition that psychological well-being is not limited to merely "feeling good," but rather represents a multi-dimensional construct encompassing functionality, meaning, self-realization, and interaction with the social context.

A review of the literature indicates that the concept of psychological well-being has not always been framed within a clear conceptual structure in the context of sport and exercise psychology. Particularly in competitive sport settings, psychological well-being has often been used interchangeably with performance outcomes, mental health, and general life satisfaction, leading to conceptual ambiguities and measurement inconsistencies (Lundqvist, 2011; Giles et al., 2020). This fragmented structure complicates the comparison of findings and limits the development of comprehensive conclusions within the literature.

Parallel to these conceptual developments, the scope of the field has expanded considerably over the historical transition from sport psychology to exercise psychology (Vealey, 2006). Research that initially focused on elite athlete performance and competitive contexts has gradually evolved to incorporate perspectives related to physical activity, lifelong exercise behavior, and general well-being (Gill et al., 2021). This transformation has paved the way for psychological well-being to be considered not only as a performance-related outcome but also as a fundamental component of sustainable participation in sport and exercise.

Recent comprehensive reviews have demonstrated that the relationship between physical activity, mental health, and psychological well-being has become an area of increasing research interest. In particular, a marked increase in publication volume has been observed over the past three decades, with research themes shifting from performance and clinical indicators toward broader psychosocial and contextual approaches (Sabé et al., 2022). Despite this rapid growth, however, studies that comprehensively reveal the structural organization, thematic orientations, and temporal evolution of the literature remain limited. Although the number of studies examining psychological well-being in sport and exercise contexts has increased substantially over the past decades, there remains a lack of comprehensive bibliometric analyses that systematically examine the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and global research patterns within this field. Therefore, the present study aims to provide a bibliometric overview of psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology.

At this point, bibliometric analyses offer a systematic means of examining the structural, conceptual, and intellectual characteristics of a large body of literature. Mapping trends, central themes, and research directions within the field can provide clearer insight into how psychological well-being research is positioned within sport and exercise psychology. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the development, thematic structure, and temporal evolution of psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology from a bibliometric perspective

## METHOD

### Study Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design based on bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric analysis is a systematic method that employs quantitative indicators of scientific publications to examine the structural, conceptual, and intellectual characteristics of a research field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This approach enables the assessment of publication trends, knowledge production patterns, and thematic orientations within a specific research area over time.

## Data Sources and Search Strategy

The bibliographic data used in this study were obtained from the Web of Science Core Collection, a database widely preferred in bibliometric research due to its high indexing standards. The analyses were conducted exclusively using Web of Science data in order to ensure a comprehensive and consistent examination of scientific production on psychological well-being within the field of sport and exercise psychology.

The search strategy was designed to capture the use of the concept of psychological well-being in the context of sport and exercise psychology. Accordingly, the keywords “*psychological well-being*”, “*well-being*”, “*mental health*”, “*sport psychology*”, and “*exercise psychology*” were combined and searched within the title, abstract, and keywords fields. Original research articles and review papers published from the earliest relevant publication up to February 2026 were included in the analysis.

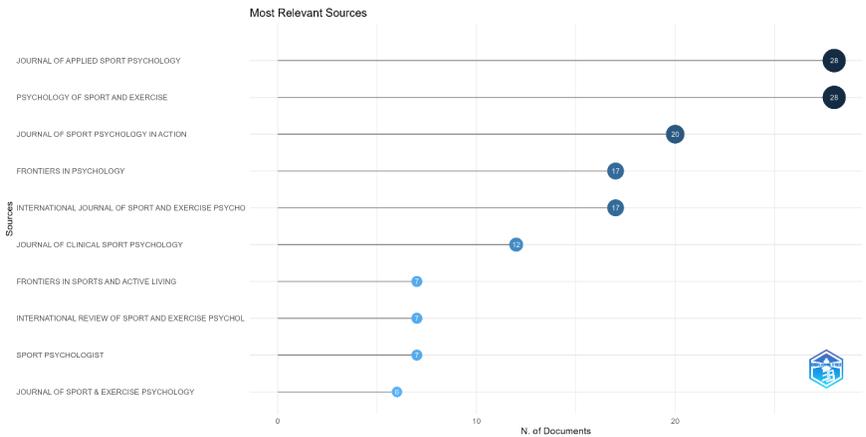
Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were considered, while conference abstracts, editorials, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed publication types were excluded. This selection was made to enhance the methodological consistency and comparability of the bibliometric findings.

## Data Analysis

The bibliographic data were analyzed using the bibliometrix package developed in the R software environment and its web-based interface, Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis included the annual distribution of publications, the most productive journals, authors, and countries, author productivity patterns (Lotka’s Law), journal distribution structure (Bradford’s Law), keyword frequencies, trend topic analysis, and thematic mapping to examine the structural and conceptual characteristics of the literature. Through these analyses, the temporal development, conceptual core, and thematic evolution of psychological well-being research within the field of sport and exercise psychology were identified.

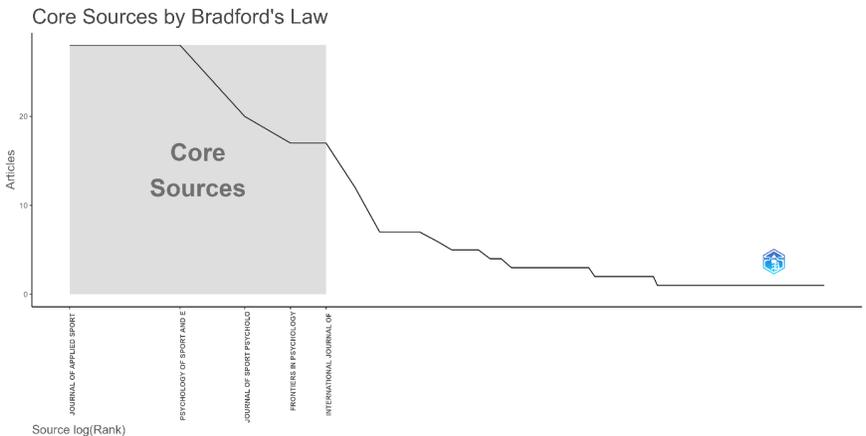
## Findings

“The bibliometric dataset consisted of 306 documents published between 1992 and 2026, indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection and distributed across 114 sources. A total of 882 authors contributed to the literature, with an average of 3.63 co-authors per document and an international collaboration rate of 32.35%.”



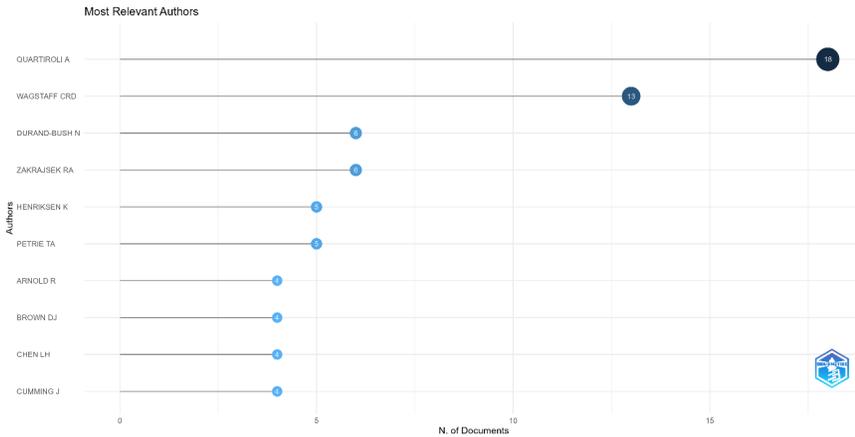
**Figure 1.** Distribution of the most productive journals addressing psychological well-being in the sport and exercise psychology literature.

Figure 1 illustrates the most relevant journals contributing to the literature on psychological well-being in sport and exercise psychology. The distribution of publications indicates that research output is concentrated in a limited number of core journals. In particular, the Journal of Applied Sport Psychology and Psychology of Sport and Exercise emerge as the leading sources, followed by the Journal of Sport Psychology in Action and Frontiers in Psychology. This pattern reflects a Bradford-type concentration, suggesting that scholarly production in this field is primarily anchored in specialized sport and exercise psychology journals.



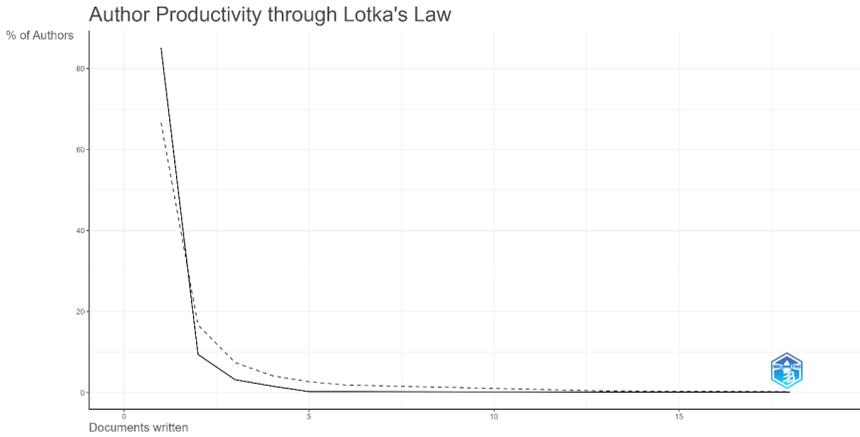
**Figure 2.** The core journal structure of the psychological well-being literature in sport and exercise psychology according to Bradford’s Law.”

Figure 2 presents the application of Bradford's Law to the dataset, revealing a clear core-periphery structure in the literature. A small group of core journals accounts for a disproportionately large share of publications, while the remaining articles are distributed across a progressively larger number of peripheral sources. This distribution confirms the concentration of psychological well-being research within a limited set of specialized sport and exercise psychology journals.



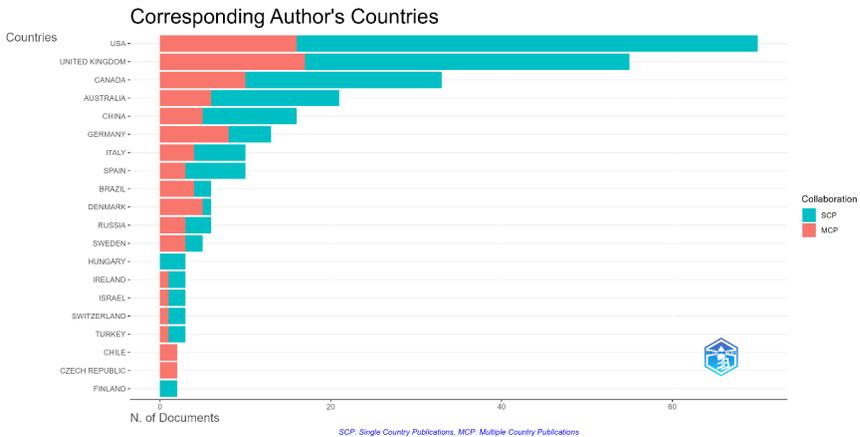
**Figure 3.** Most relevant authors contributing to psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology.

Figure 3 displays the most relevant authors in the literature on psychological well-being in sport and exercise psychology. The distribution of publications indicates that research output is concentrated among a limited number of authors, with a small group accounting for a substantial share of the total number of documents. This pattern suggests the presence of an identifiable intellectual core within the field.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of author productivity in psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology according to Lotka’s Law.

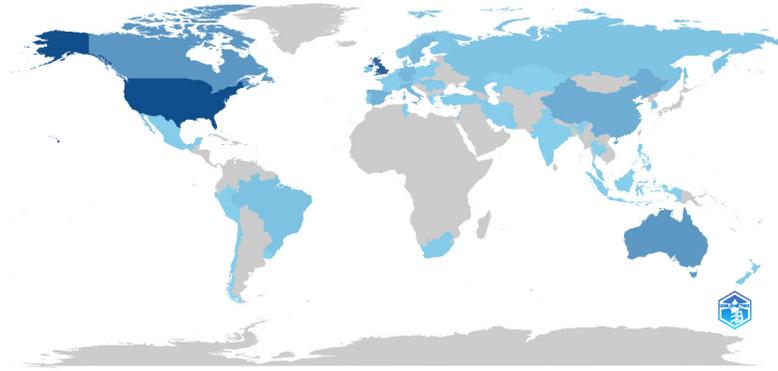
Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of author productivity in the dataset based on Lotka’s Law. The observed pattern demonstrates that the majority of authors contributed a limited number of publications, while a small proportion of authors accounted for a disproportionately large share of the total research output. This finding confirms that author productivity in the field follows a highly skewed distribution consistent with classical bibliometric theory.



**Figure 5.** Distribution of corresponding authors’ countries and collaboration patterns in psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology.

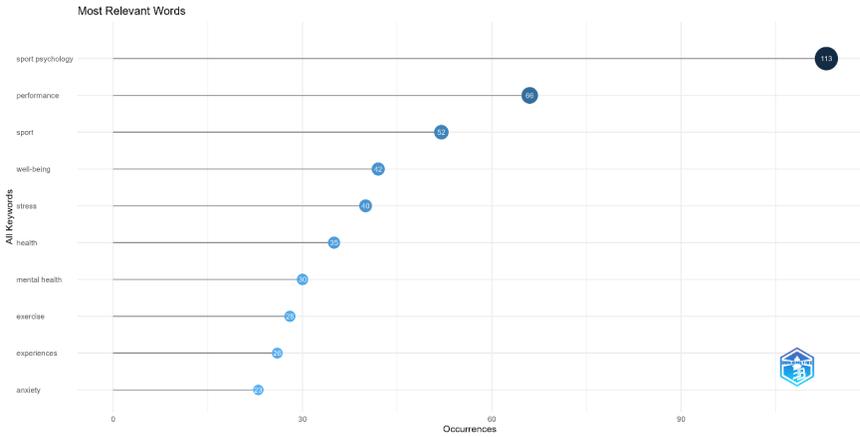
Figure 5 illustrates the geographical distribution of corresponding authors contributing to psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology, distinguishing between single-country publications (SCP) and multiple-country publications (MCP). The findings indicate that research output is predominantly concentrated in a limited number of countries, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada emerging as the leading contributors. In addition, the presence of multiple-country publications highlights the role of international collaboration in shaping the global structure of the field.

#### Country Scientific Production



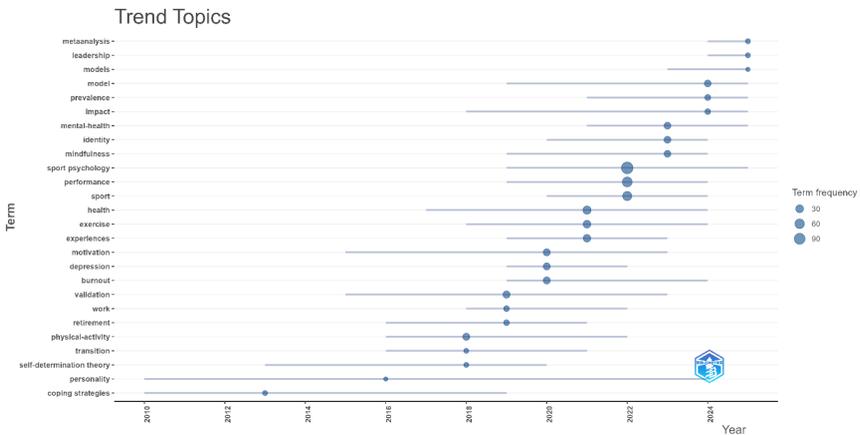
**Figure 6.** Global distribution of scientific production in psychological well-being research within sport and exercise psychology.

Figure 6 presents the global distribution of scientific production related to psychological well-being in sport and exercise psychology. The geographical pattern indicates that research output is unevenly distributed across regions, with higher levels of scientific production observed in North America, Europe, and parts of Oceania. This spatial distribution highlights the global reach of the field while also revealing regional disparities in research activity.



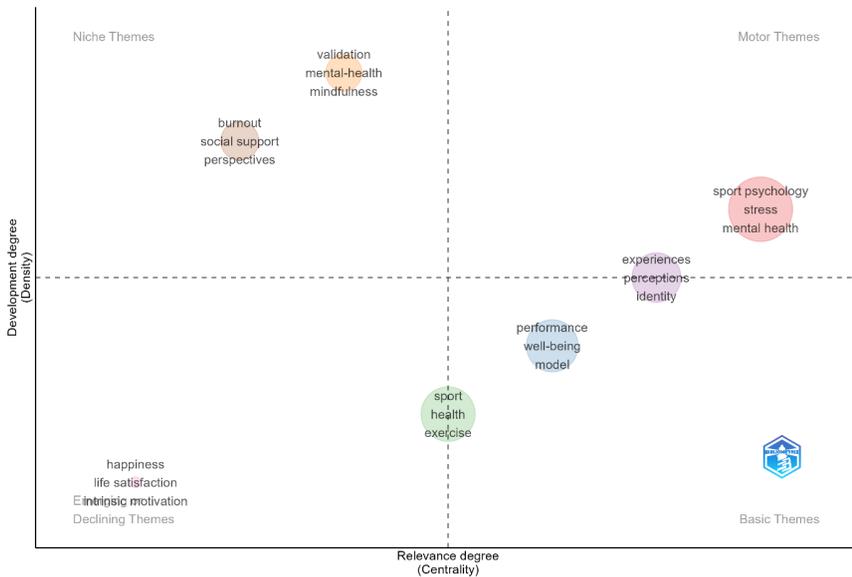
**Figure 7.** The Most Frequently Used Keywords in the Psychological Well-Being Literature within the Context of Sport and Exercise Psychology

Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of the most frequently used keywords in publications addressing psychological well-being within the field of sport and exercise psychology. The findings indicate that *sport psychology*, *performance*, and *sport* constitute the core concepts of the literature, while keywords such as *well-being*, *stress*, *mental health*, *exercise*, and *anxiety* also emerge prominently. This distribution suggests that research on psychological well-being is addressed not only through performance-oriented perspectives but also within broader frameworks encompassing stress, mental health, and emotional experiences.



**Figure 8.** Trend Topics in the Psychology of Sport and Exercise Well-Being Literature

Figure 8 illustrates the temporal evolution of the most prominent research topics in the literature addressing psychological well-being within sport and exercise psychology between 1992 and 2026. The analysis reveals an early emphasis on foundational concepts such as coping strategies, personality, and self-determination theory, which laid the theoretical groundwork of the field. From the mid-2010s onward, a noticeable shift toward applied and health-oriented themes is observed, including physical activity, burnout, depression, and mental health. In more recent years, the growing prominence of topics such as mindfulness, leadership, identity, and performance highlights an expanding research focus that integrates psychological well-being with performance enhancement and psychosocial functioning. Overall, the trend topic analysis demonstrates a clear transition from theory-driven approaches to more integrative, applied, and context-specific investigations of well-being in sport and exercise settings.



**Figure 9.** Thematic Map of Research on Psychological Well-Being in Exercise and Sport Psychology

Figure 9 presents the thematic map of the exercise and sport psychology literature on psychological well-being based on authors' keywords. The map is structured along two dimensions: relevance degree (centrality) on the x-axis and development degree (density) on the y-axis. Motor themes, located in the upper-right quadrant, include *sport psychology*, *stress*, and *mental health*, indicating well-developed and highly influential research streams that drive the field. Basic themes, such as *performance*, *well-being*, *model*, *sport*, *health*, and *exercise*, appear in the

lower-right quadrant, reflecting foundational topics with high relevance but relatively lower internal development. Niche themes, including *mindfulness*, *validation*, *burnout*, and *social support*, are positioned in the upper-left quadrant, representing specialized but conceptually mature research areas. Finally, declining or emerging themes, such as *happiness*, *life satisfaction*, and *intrinsic motivation*, are located in the lower-left quadrant, suggesting topics with limited centrality and weaker structural integration within the current literature.

## Discussion

Research on psychological well-being in sport and exercise psychology demonstrates a clearly structured and institutionalized knowledge production pattern. Scholarly output in the field is largely concentrated within a limited number of specialized journals that explicitly focus on sport- and exercise-specific theoretical and applied perspectives (Lindahl et al. 2015). This concentration suggests that academic debates on psychological well-being are primarily shaped within discipline-specific publication venues, reinforcing the central role of sport-contextual dynamics rather than broader, general psychology frameworks.

A similar concentration pattern is evident at the level of authorship. Scientific production appears to be driven by a relatively small group of researchers, indicating the presence of a well-defined intellectual core within the field. While the majority of authors contribute only sporadically, a limited number of researchers account for a substantial share of the overall output. This highly skewed distribution of productivity reflects classical bibliometric principles and highlights a concentrated structure of knowledge generation guided by established research groups and academic foci.

From a geographical perspective, research activity on psychological well-being is unevenly distributed across regions. Scientific production is predominantly concentrated in countries with well-established academic infrastructures, particularly in North America, Europe, and parts of Oceania. At the same time, the presence of internationally co-authored publications indicates that cross-national collaboration plays an increasingly important role in shaping the global development of the field (Sabé et al., 2022; Khoo et al. 2021). This pattern reflects both the expanding international reach of sport and exercise psychology research and the persistence of regional disparities in research capacity and engagement.

The conceptual structure of the literature further reveals that psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology is organized around a performance-oriented core while increasingly extending beyond this focus. Keywords related to stress, mental health, anxiety, and exercise have gained prominence, suggesting a broadening of research perspectives toward psychosocial and emotional

dimensions of well-being. This expansion reflects a growing tendency to integrate performance-based approaches with mental health and well-being frameworks.

Temporal analyses indicate that the field has undergone a notable shift in its research orientation. Early studies predominantly emphasized theoretical foundations such as coping strategies, personality, and self-determination theory. From the mid-2010s onward, research attention increasingly moved toward applied and health-related themes, including physical activity, burnout, depression, and mental health (Lundqvist, 2011). More recent trends highlight the growing relevance of topics such as mindfulness, leadership, identity, and performance, pointing to integrative frameworks that connect psychological well-being with performance enhancement and psychosocial functioning.

Finally, thematic mapping reveals a multi-layered research structure within the field. Core themes related to sport psychology, stress, and mental health occupy a central and highly developed position, underscoring their influence in shaping the literature. Foundational themes such as performance, well-being, health, and exercise remain highly relevant but comparatively less developed, indicating ongoing opportunities for theoretical refinement. In contrast, niche themes including mindfulness, burnout, and social support reflect specialized yet conceptually mature research streams, while the peripheral positioning of constructs such as happiness and life satisfaction suggests that some traditional psychological concepts have not yet achieved strong structural integration within sport and exercise psychology research.

## Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual, geographical, and thematic structure of research on psychological well-being in sport and exercise psychology. The findings indicate that knowledge production in the field is characterized by a relatively institutionalized structure, shaped by a limited number of specialized journals, a clearly identifiable intellectual core of authors, and geographically concentrated research hubs.

At the conceptual level, the literature is organized around a performance-oriented foundation while increasingly incorporating broader psychosocial and mental health perspectives. Temporal and thematic analyses further reveal a clear shift from theory-driven approaches toward more applied, integrative, and context-specific research agendas, reflecting the growing recognition of psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct within sport and exercise settings.

Overall, the results highlight the evolving nature of psychological well-being research, emphasizing its transition from narrowly defined performance outcomes

to more holistic frameworks that integrate mental health, emotional processes, and psychosocial functioning. This evolution underscores the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives and sustained international collaboration for advancing future research and practice in sport and exercise psychology.

### Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this study is its systematic and multidimensional bibliometric examination of psychological well-being research in sport and exercise psychology over an extended period. By jointly analyzing publication output, journal structure, author productivity, geographical distribution, and thematic patterns, the study offers an integrated view of the field's structural and conceptual development. The use of advanced techniques such as trend topic analysis and thematic mapping further enables the identification of temporal shifts and central research themes.

Despite these strengths, some limitations should be noted. The analyses were limited to publications indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection, potentially excluding relevant studies from other databases. Moreover, bibliometric approaches capture structural and thematic patterns but do not assess the methodological quality or content depth of individual studies. Finally, keyword-based analyses depend on authors' terminology, which may constrain the representation of certain conceptual nuances.

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