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## A bibliometric analysis of the research trend in child abuse and neglect

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### ABSTRACT

Child abuse and neglect is a topic that maintains its significance worldwide. Despite considerable progress in research on the subject, few studies address the overall perspective. This study aims to assess research on child abuse and neglect over a period of time through bibliometric analysis, systematising research areas and highlighting specific research themes. Adopting a quantitative analysis method, 3,773 articles and review articles about child abuse and neglect written between 1980 and 2021 were examined. The findings reveal an increase over the years both in the quantity and impact of articles published on child abuse and neglect. Especially in 2021 there was a noticeable surge in interest among researchers; however, there is a need for studies conducted in different regions to understand the issue of child abuse and prevent its occurrence. Especially in less developed areas, collaborative efforts are essential to increase the quantity and quality of publications. The widespread adoption of standard structured surveys is crucial in understanding how societal and cultural factors impact on the mistreatment of children globally. Findings from this study can guide new research in the field of child abuse and neglect, as well as social work practice.

**Keywords:** bibliometric analysis; child abuse; child maltreatment; child neglect; science mapping

## INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is an extensive public health concern that manifests in enduring health repercussions, both physically and psychologically (Gilbert et al., 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2021). This global issue dates back to ancient civilisations (Krug et al., 2002). Child maltreatment is a concept that includes the abuse and neglect suffered by children under the age of 18. It includes various forms of physical and/or emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect and commercial or other forms of exploitation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), these actions result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) points out that approximately 40 million children worldwide are victims and/or witnesses of child maltreatment. Self-report studies estimating prevalence rates of various types of maltreatment reveal alarming figures. For instance, a study reviewing the results of a series of meta-analyses examining the global prevalence of child maltreatment found that 127 out of 1000 children had been sexually abused, 226 had been physically abused, and 363 had been exposed to emotional abuse; 163 had experienced physical neglect, and 184 had been subjected to emotional neglect (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). It is still not possible to know the true extent of child abuse and neglect; however, studies assert that more than 6 million children are maltreated each year (Wells & Johnson, 2013). This indicates that child abuse and neglect are matters of concern, that experiencing abuse in childhood has negative impacts on child development, and that it predisposes individuals to various illnesses in adulthood (Felitti, 2019; Strathearn et al., 2020).

Child abuse and neglect require intervention from various disciplines. They are phenomena that should be addressed through multidisciplinary approaches, such as social work, law, medicine, and education, and require diligent efforts to ensure the best interests of children. Social workers play an active role in child protection systems and work within multidisciplinary teams to address cases of child abuse. They approach the issue from a holistic perspective, identify risk factors, and conduct protective and preventive interventions for both the child and the family. Social workers strive to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of the child (Kılıç, 2024; Pash, 2017).

Undoubtedly, the most important contribution to the efforts to solve the issue of child abuse will come from initiatives aimed at increasing scientific and managerial knowledge in this field. Over the past 25 years, the volume of literature on child maltreatment has seen a significant increase, as reported by two major electronic databases, PsycINFO and Medline. This expanding body of knowledge has the potential to provide valuable scientific insights for clinicians, researchers, and policymakers on the needs of individuals, both children and adults, affected by child maltreatment (Behl et al., 2003). During the late 1970s to the early 1980s, articles on child physical abuse dominated the literature on child maltreatment. However, more recent trends suggest a dominance of research on child sexual abuse (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Although child sexual abuse has been a topic in forensic and psychoanalytic publications since the late 19th century, the 1970s marked a notable increase in research publications, shifting the perception of child sexual abuse from being an unusual phenomenon to a global public health issue. Over time, the field has diversified in terms of study topics within this area. Child neglect and emotional abuse are recognised as highly prevalent types of child maltreatment, although

studies indicate they have been less commonly explored (Behl et al., 2003). The number of research papers on these topics is on the rise, with a noticeable influence from Western countries, particularly the United States. It is crucial to note a significant knowledge gap in these research fields, especially regarding the effectiveness of interventions for child abuse and neglect, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Tran et al., 2018). This underscores the need for further exploration and understanding of these critical issues on a global scale.

## **THE CURRENT STUDY**

Child abuse and neglect continue to be significant global issues. Policies, programmes and practices in the sensitive and challenging field of child welfare must be based on solid evidence from research literature. Undoubtedly, improving social work practices and achieving the best outcomes for children, families and society is only possible by keeping up with the literature (Barth et al., 2022). In recent years there has been a significant increase in studies investigating child abuse and neglect, transforming this into an interdisciplinary research field. In this context, it is crucial to follow scientific changes and developments in the field of child abuse and neglect (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015; Struck et al., 2021). Accessing and analysing scientific studies, including details such as keywords and citations, has become increasingly important. However, the number of bibliometric analyses related to child abuse and neglect is limited (Kurutkan & Orhan, 2018; Oshodi et al., 2020). Data obtained from bibliometric research are expected to contribute significantly to the development of research agendas and practices.

This study aims to examine the development of research on child abuse and neglect over a period of time and to identify specific research themes through bibliometric analysis. Using bibliometric analysis on child abuse and neglect allows us to understand how the body of knowledge in this area has evolved, the strengths of scientific knowledge, and the topics that require further exploration. By employing the method of bibliometric analysis, we can gain valuable insights into how knowledge in the field of child abuse and neglect is produced, what the strengths of the scientific expertise are, and which areas need more research. The findings of this study can guide future research and social work practices in the field of child abuse and neglect.

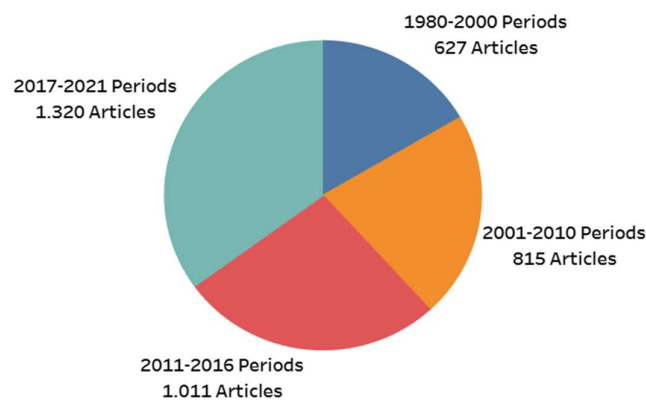
## **METHOD**

This study aims to examine trends in the field of "child abuse and neglect" by revealing authorship, publication, citation, keyword and thematic developments, and to explore the key trends in recent years. The research employs bibliometric analysis, a quantitative analysis method that scrutinises studies published in various academic disciplines using statistical and mathematical tools. Bibliometric analysis is a method used to determine which articles or authors receive the most citations to assess their scientific impact, analyse the number of publications in a specific field or period, examine collaborations and networks among academics to reveal the dynamics of the scientific community, identify the most frequently occurring keywords and topics in the literature to indicate research trends, and suggest new research topics by identifying gaps in the literature. For the implementation of bibliometric analysis, a scientific mapping procedure was prepared, and the SciMAT software was utilised (Akyüz, 2021; Akyüz et al., 2021; Cobo et al., 2011; Yu & Muñoz-Justicia, 2020).



The Biblioshiny program, based on SciMAT and R, was employed. This program facilitated analyses such as the number of publications per year, authorship analysis and citation analysis. For the visualisation of Biblioshiny's analyses, the Tableau program was utilised. Biblioshiny was further utilised for analyses categorised by publication years, authorship patterns and citation trends. Additionally, strategic diagrams, overlay maps and thematic development maps were generated using SciMAT. These analyses collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the temporal and thematic evolution within the field of research on child abuse and neglect. The combination of Biblioshiny, SciMAT and Tableau enables a multifaceted exploration of the acquired data, shedding light on publication trends, influential authors and thematic shifts over time. This integrative approach ensures a robust and nuanced analysis of the bibliometric data collected for this study (Cobo et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020).

In order to achieve more reliable analysis results, the keywords used in the analysed articles were grouped, taking into account singular/plural forms, synonymy and abbreviation contexts. As a result of this categorisation, 7,927 keywords were reduced to 7,316. Keywords with the same meaning but differing in character formatting were merged using the Sci-Mat program. To observe the thematic development of the research field, the time frame was divided into four periods based on the number of articles: the first period covering 1980-2000, the second period covering 2001-2010, the third period covering 2011-2016, and the fourth period covering 2017-2021. Starting from the first period, the number of articles within each respective period is as follows: 627 for the first period, 815 for the second period, 1,011 for the third period and 1320 for the fourth period, resulting in a total of 3,773 articles within the scope of this study (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Article distribution across periods*

To visualise the findings of SciMAT analysis, strategic diagrams, an overlap map and a thematic evolution map were employed. The strategic diagram represents the identified clusters of predetermined periods on a two-dimensional axis and classifies them according to Callon's density and centrality measures. In strategic diagrams, clusters consisting of interrelated keywords are visually represented in a spherical shape. Each cluster is represented by a central

keyword, naming the cluster after the central keyword, and signifies a theme. Strategic diagram clusters are obtained by increasing their centrality along the x-axis (horizontal) and density along the y-axis (vertical) (Callon et al., 1991). This process allows us to classify all clusters into four general categories corresponding to the four quadrants of the graph (Figure 3). The x-axis measures the significance of the chosen theme. As clusters move to the right on the diagram, their external relationships strengthen and centrality increases. The y-axis measures the development of the chosen theme. As clusters move upward on the diagram, their internal relationships strengthen and density increases. The size of each sphere is proportional to the number of keywords that fall under the cluster. Each cluster in the strategic diagram can be enriched with selected bibliometric measures. The relationships between elements within each cluster can be displayed in a separate network graph. Quality assessments of the clusters are made based on publication numbers, total citation numbers, and h-index values (Akyüz et al., 2021; Cobo et al., 2012). The four categories depicted in the strategic diagram are shown in Figure 3.

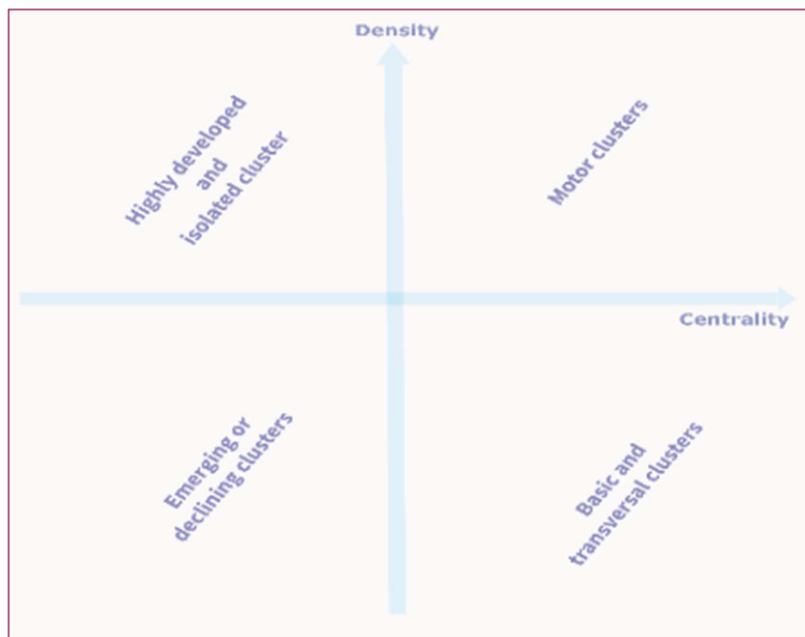


Figure 3: Strategic diagram

**Motor clusters:** These represent the most researched and advanced themes in the respective field. Motor clusters signify well-established and highly developed topics. **Basic and transversal clusters:** These clusters exhibit high relationships with other external themes, but have not developed extensively internally. In other words, while these themes are considered relevant to the research field, they have not fully matured. **Highly developed and isolated cluster:** Despite having limited relationships with other external themes, this category is comprised of themes that are highly developed internally. These themes are considered well developed within the field and are deemed of significant importance. **Emerging or declining clusters:** These clusters represent themes that are weakly or marginally developed in the

respective field. They may indicate emerging areas or topics that are on the decline. These categorisations help to distinguish and evaluate the nature and status of different thematic clusters within the field, providing insights into the dynamics of research themes (Callon et al., 1991; Cobo et al., 2011; Nasir et al., 2020).

The strategic diagrams have been individually analysed and visualised for each of the four predetermined periods. The maximum number of keywords to be displayed in clusters has been set at 10. For the period analysis, the minimum frequency and minimum co-occurrences were set at 5. The performance measure for the diagram is based on the number of documents. In each diagram, the cluster network of prominent clusters with high centrality and density, primarily located in the motor cluster, is presented within the same figure. The quantitative development of keywords used in articles for each period is illustrated in the overlap map. In the thematic evolution map, the relationships between clusters across periods are depicted. In both the strategic diagrams and thematic evolution maps, the relationships between clusters are depicted using lines connecting the clusters. The thickness of the lines is directly proportional to the strength of the relationship. When cluster names and the same keywords are used between clusters, a solid line is used to represent the connection, indicating a direct relationship. On the other hand, if there is a shared keyword usage between clusters but not in the cluster names, a dashed line is used to denote the connection.

This study is based on publicly available data and hence does not require ethical approval from an ethics committee. This study did not include any direct contact or data collection with human participants.

## RESULTS

In the research domain of "child abuse and neglect," a total of 3,773 articles were examined from "articles" or "review articles" spanning the years 1980 to 2021. Among these articles, 3,498 are classified as "article," and 275 as "review article." The collective contribution of authors to these studies amounts to 10,102. Out of these authors, 453 have individually authored a work. These findings provide an overview of the extensive body of research on child abuse and neglect, highlighting the substantial number of articles and the significant contribution of a diverse community of authors in this critical field.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of published articles and the average citations per year in the field of child abuse and neglect. Between 1980 and 1990, there was a noticeable low number of published articles, followed by a consistent increase from 1990 onwards. A significant surge in the number of articles is observed from 2007 onwards. The year 2021 marked the highest number of published articles, reaching 360. Examining the average citations per year, there is an upward trend until 2003, reaching the highest citation rate ( $n=5.91$ ). However, from 2003 onwards, there is a declining trend in the average citation rates. This analysis provides insights into the evolving dynamics of research output and its impact on the field of child abuse and neglect over the years.

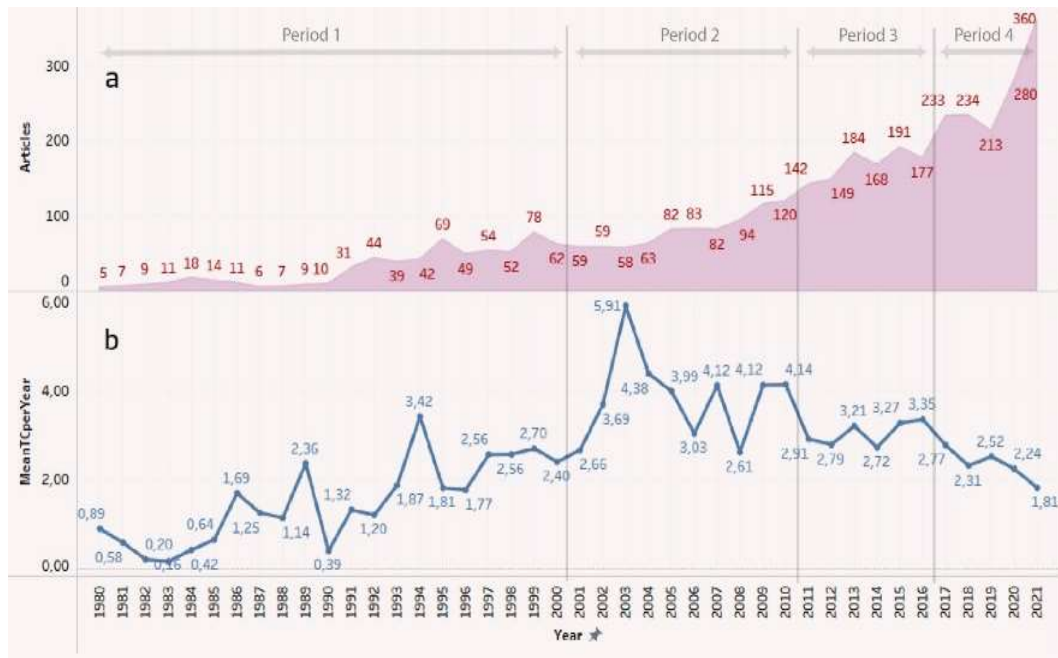


Figure 4: (a) Distribution of published articles over the specified years and (b) Average citations per year

Figure 5 displays the total citations for the top twenty most cited articles. According to the data, the article with the highest number of citations ( $n=2705$ ) is "Bernstein et al., 2003," identified by the DOI number 10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00541-0. Following this, the article "Bernstein et al., 1994" with the DOI number 10.1176/ajp.151.8.1132 received the second-highest number of citations ( $n=2083$ ). Information for the other articles in the top twenty is presented in Figure 5 as indicated. This analysis provides insights into the influential articles in the field based on their citation impact, contributing significantly to the body of knowledge on child abuse and neglect.

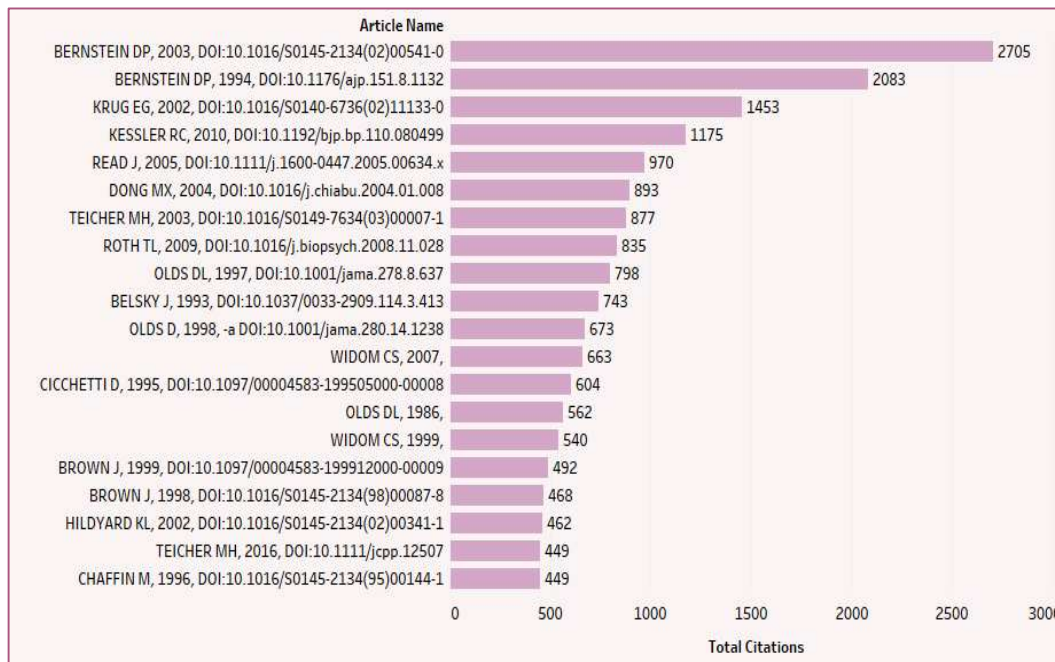


Figure 5: Total citations of the top 20 most cited articles

Figure 6 provides the names of the top 20 authors who have produced the highest number of articles in the field of child abuse and neglect, along with the total citation counts attributed to each author. Fallon B. stands out as the most prolific author in the field, contributing to 63 studies. However, the most impactful author in this domain is Widom C.S., who, with 59 publications, has garnered a remarkable 7,122 total citations and the highest h-index (n=39). Following Widom C.S., the next influential author is Dubowitz H., with 2,701 citations and an h-index of 25. These statistics offer insights into both the prolificacy and impact of authors in the field of child abuse and neglect, providing a comprehensive view of their contributions and influence.

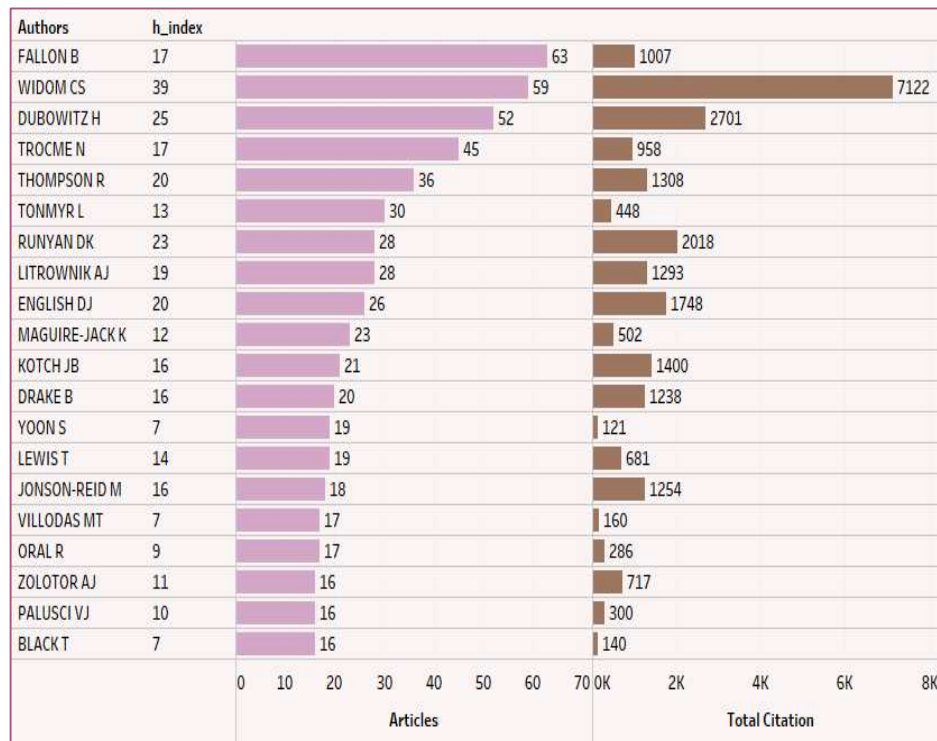


Figure 6: Articles and total citation counts for the top 20 most prolific authors

Figure 7 presents a word cloud and table derived from the top ten keywords based on their usage frequency in the articles included in the analysis. The size of the terms in the word cloud is proportional to their usage counts. Notably, terms such as "Child Abuse" (n=1,474), "Neglect" (n=1,156), "Child Abuse and Neglect" (n=429), and "Child Neglect" (n=336) are prominently featured, reflecting their high frequency of use in the analysed articles. Additionally, the term "Maltreatment" is also notably prevalent, with a usage frequency of (n=898). This visualisation provides a snapshot of the key themes and focuses within the analysed articles, highlighting the significance and recurrence of specific keywords related to child abuse and neglect.



Figure 7: Word cloud of key terms

Figure 8 illustrates an overlapping map indicating the periodic development of keywords in the research field. The number of keywords has increased parallel to the number of published articles. In the first period (1980-2000), 1,149 keywords were used, of which 546 continued to be used in the next period, while 603 were not transferred to the following period (stability index = 0.48). In the second period (2001-2010), 1,809 keywords were introduced, with a total of 2,355 keywords used, including those carried over from the previous period. From the second period, 1,337 keywords went out of use, with 1,018 transferred to the next period (stability index = 0.43). In the third period (2011-2016), with the introduction of 2,217 new keywords, a total of 3,235 keywords were used. Out of these, 1,837 became obsolete, and 1,398 were transferred to the next period (stability index = 0.43). In the last period (2017-2021), 2,564 keywords were introduced, and the total number of keywords used in the period reached 3,962. This analysis provides insights into the evolution of keywords over different periods, revealing the dynamics and trends in the research field of child abuse and neglect.



Figure 8: Overlapping map

The strategic diagram for the period 1980-2000 is depicted in Figure 9 (a). The largest cluster in the diagram, representing neglect and mothers, with the highest centrality and density, is further illustrated with its clustering network in Figure 9 (b). In this period, a total of 1149 keywords resulted in the emergence of 7 clustering groups. Among these clusters, "neglect" and "mothers" are identified as motor clusters, "health" and "sexual abuse" as basic and transversal clusters, the "sample" cluster as highly developed and isolated, and "behavior" and "child" clusters as emerging or declining.

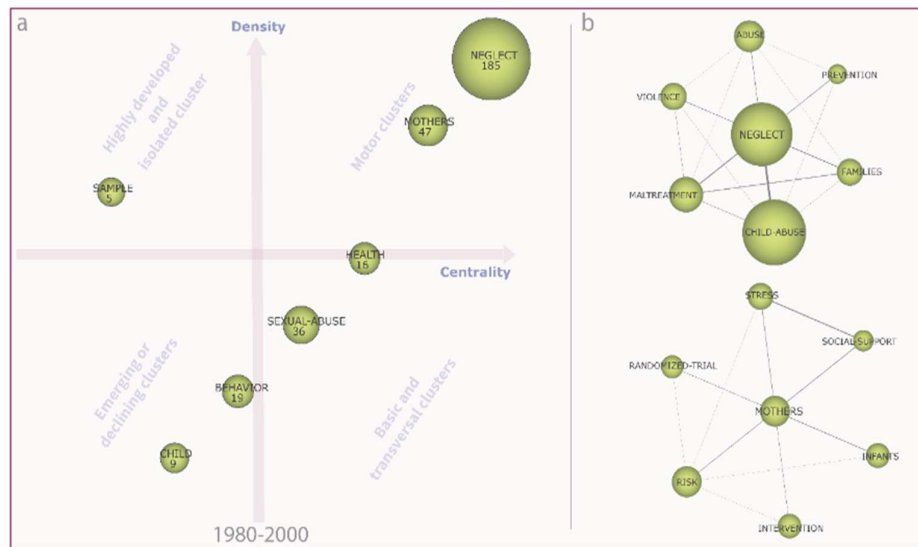


Figure 9: (a) Strategic diagram for the period 1980-2000, (b) Clustering networks for "Neglect" and "Mothers"

The clustering network visually displays the relationships between keywords within each cluster. The "neglect" and "mothers" clusters are identified as motor clusters in the first period, showcasing strong relationships both within the cluster and with other clusters, making them fundamental areas of research. The "neglect" keyword holds a central position within its cluster and has direct connections with keywords such as "prevention," "families," "violence," "maltreatment," and "child-abuse," indicating common usage in documents. An indirect relationship exists with the "abuse" keyword, indicating shared usage through a third keyword. The most substantial relationship is with the "child-abuse" keyword. All keywords within the cluster are interrelated. On the other hand, the "child" and "behavior" clusters are newly emerging clusters in this period. The clustering network for the "mothers" cluster is illustrated in Figure 9 (b).

Figure 10 (a) presents the strategic diagram for the period 2001-2010, featuring the largest cluster represented by the "neglect" cluster with the highest centrality and density. Figure 10 (b) displays the clustering networks specifically for the "neglect" and "abuse" clusters, with the "neglect" cluster as the largest and the "abuse" keyword representing the second-largest cluster in terms of usage. During this period, a total of 18 clusters emerged from 2,355 keywords. Notably, the "child-abuse," "shaken-baby-syndrome," "randomised-trial" and "women" clusters are categorised as motor clusters. Additionally, there are 5 basic and transversal clusters, 5 highly developed and isolated clusters, and 3 emerging or declining clusters. The thematic network in the "child-abuse" cluster exhibits strong internal and external relationships. Examining the internal relationships within the "child-abuse" cluster, it is observed that keywords such as "maltreatment," "child-neglect," "neglect," "risk," "physical-abuse," and "sexual-abuse" are directly associated. The central keyword, "child-abuse," is most strongly linked to the "neglect" keyword.

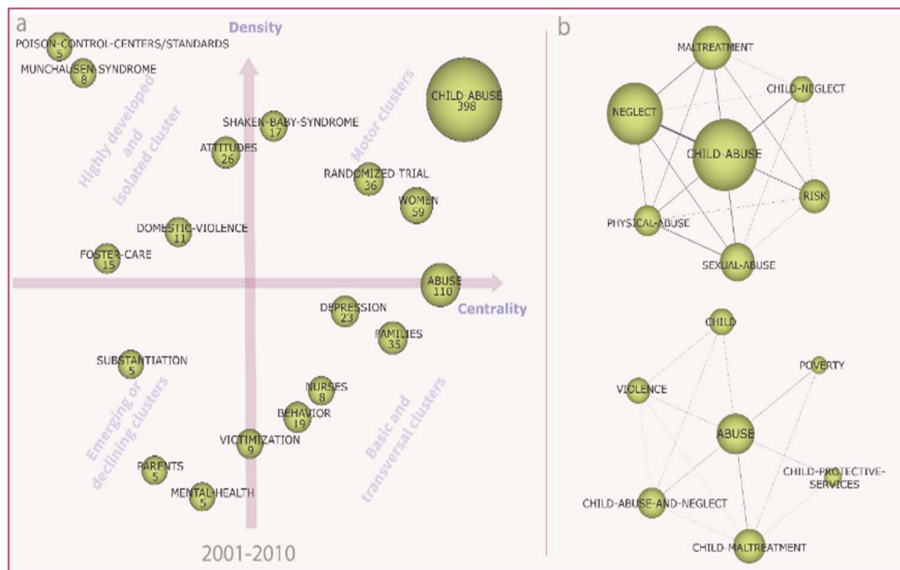


Figure 10: (a) Strategic diagram for the period 2001-2010, (b) Clustering networks for "Child Abuse" and "Abuse"

Figure 11 (a) illustrates the strategic diagram for the period 2011-2016, showcasing the largest cluster represented by the "neglect" keyword, with the highest centrality and density. Figure 11 (b) displays the clustering networks specifically for the "neglect" and "risk-factors" clusters, where the "neglect" cluster is the largest, and the keyword "risk-factors" represents the second-largest cluster in terms of usage and centrality. During this period, a total of 23 clusters emerged from 3,235 keywords. Notably, the "neglect," "domestic-violence," "child-welfare" and "risk-factors" clusters are categorised as motor clusters. Additionally, there are 8 basic and transversal clusters, 8 highly developed and isolated clusters, and 3 emerging or declining clusters. The thematic network within the "neglect" cluster exhibits strong internal and external relationships. Examining the internal relationships within the "neglect" cluster, it is observed that keywords such as "domestic-violence," "child-welfare" and "risk-factors" are directly associated. The "neglect" cluster is the most central and dense in the motor cluster, indicating its significance in the thematic landscape.

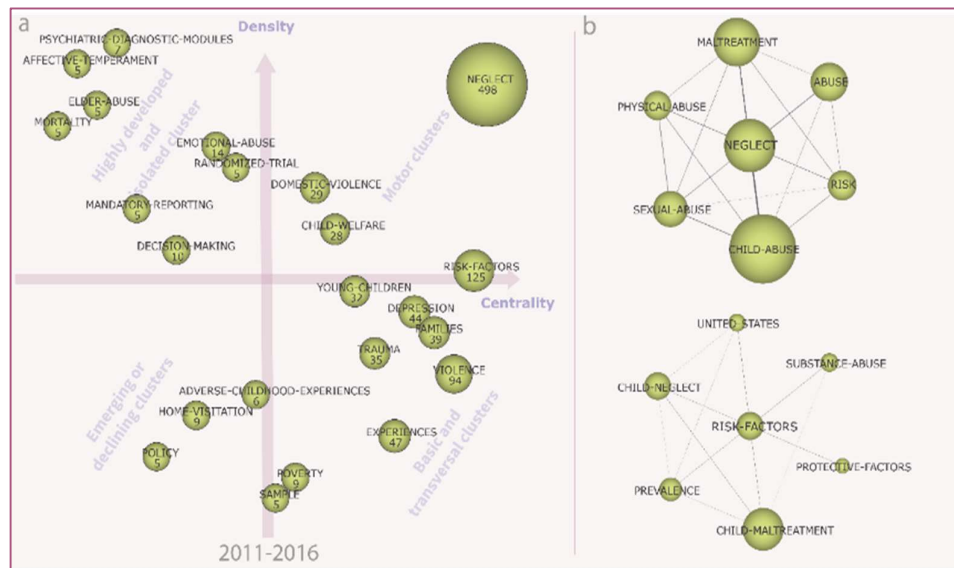


Figure 11: (a) Strategic diagram for the period 2011-2016, (b) Clustering networks for "Neglect" and "Risk Factors"

In the strategic diagram for the 2017-2021 period (Figure 12 (b)) presents the clustering network for the themes "child abuse" and "prevalence". The analysis for this period was conducted with a minimum frequency of 3 and a minimum co-occurrence of 5. The performance measure for the diagram is based on the number of documents. In this period, a total of 3,962 keywords resulted in 20 thematic clusters. Among these, the "child abuse," "prevalence," "adverse-childhood-experiences" and "domestic violence" clusters are situated in the motor clusters, while there are 6 clusters in basic and transversal clusters, 6 in highly developed and isolated clusters, and 4 in emerging or declining clusters. The "child abuse" cluster stands out with the strongest internal and external relationships and the highest number of documents. It is followed by the "prevalence" cluster. It is observed in the strategic diagram that clusters with higher centrality also have a larger number of documents.

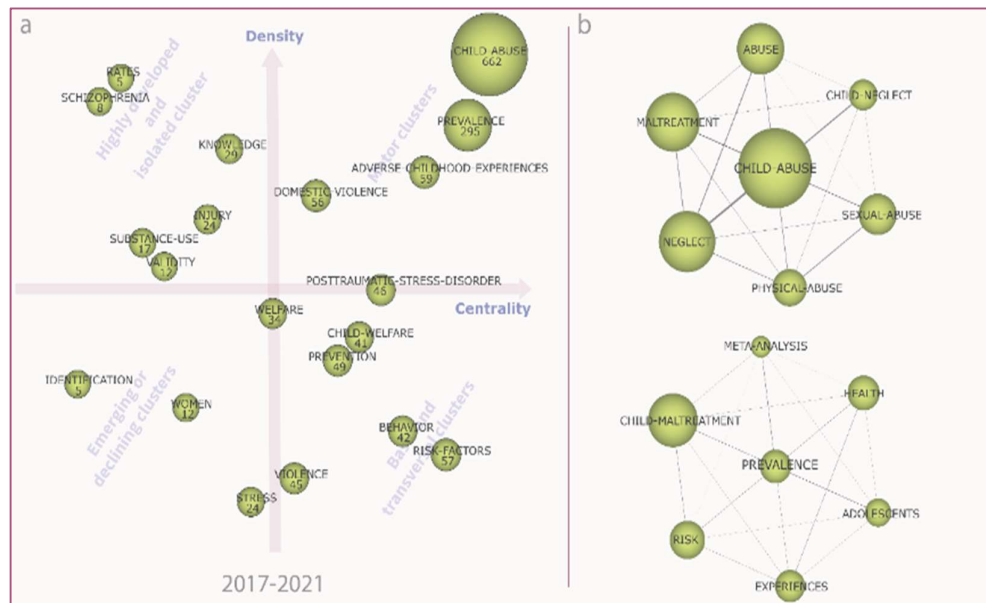


Figure 12: Strategic diagram for the period 2017-2021 Period, (b) Clustering networks for "Child Abuse" and "Prevalence"

Figure 13 presents the thematic development map for the research periods. The performance metric is based on coreDocuments-documentsCount. The straight lines connecting clusters indicate that they are used together, while dashed lines imply that the themes connected by them are not used together, but are shared by other themes. The thickness of the lines is proportional to the intensity of the relationship.

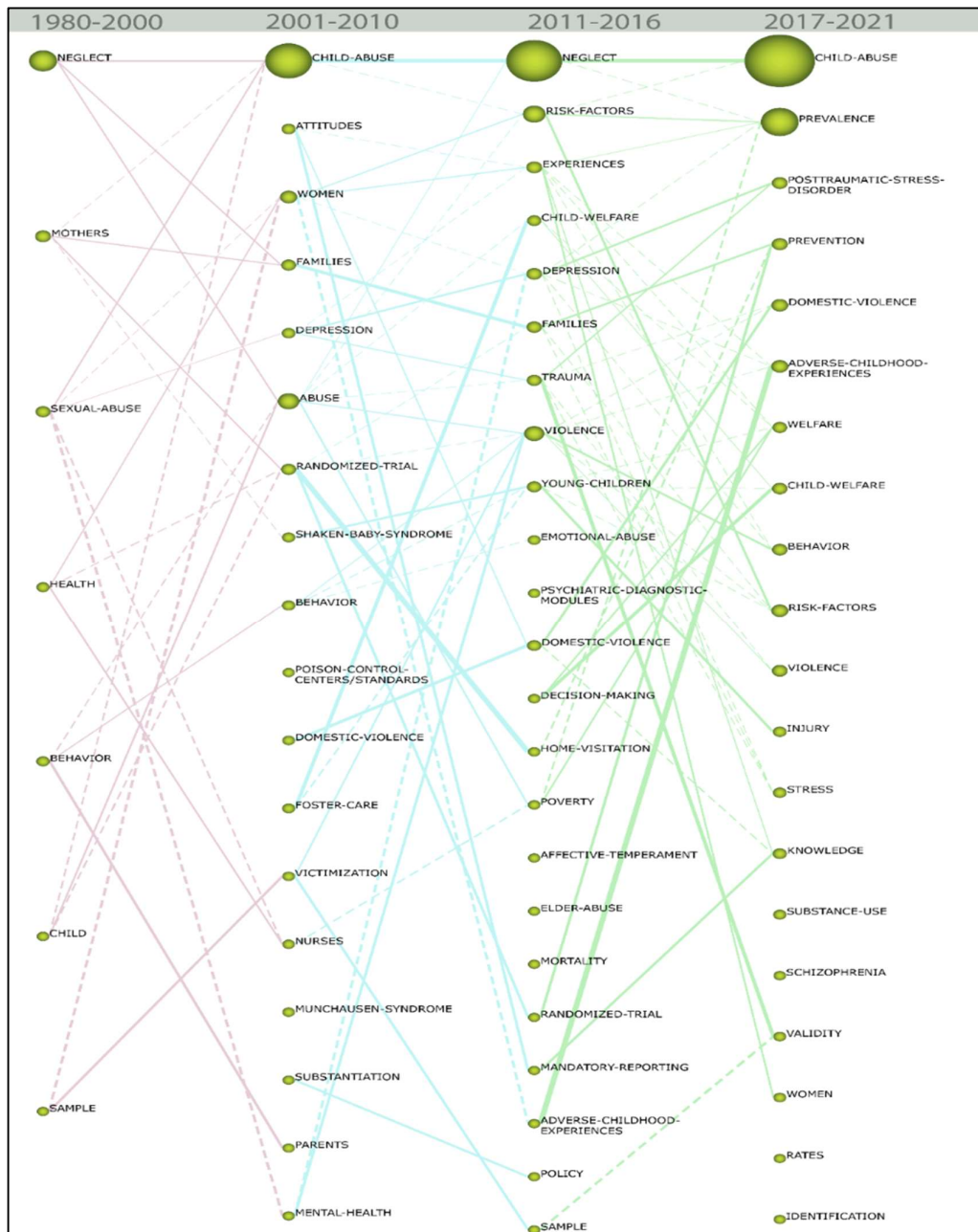


Figure 13: Thematic development map (1980-2021)

In the first period, the "neglect" cluster stands out as the most prolific and influential, having the highest number of publications. In the second period, the "child abuse" cluster takes the lead, along with the "families" and "abuse" clusters, showing direct relationships. The key term "neglect" in the second period loses its centrality and becomes an element within the "child abuse" cluster. Moving to the third period, the "child abuse" cluster maintains a strong relationship with the "neglect" cluster. However, the key term "child abuse" loses its centrality and becomes a part of the "neglect" cluster. In the final period, there is a reversal, with the "neglect" key term once again losing its centrality and being incorporated into the "child abuse" cluster.

In the first period, the "behavior" cluster is directly related to the "behavior" and "parents" clusters in the subsequent period. In the second period, the "randomised-trial" cluster is significantly associated with the "home-visitation" cluster in the third period, and the "adverse-childhood-experiences" cluster is in intense relation. There are strong relationships among clusters in the third and fourth periods. In the final period, the clusters "substance use," "schizophrenia," "rates" and "identification" have no connections with any clusters from the previous period. They emerge for the first time in this period.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This bibliometric analysis evaluates research trends on child abuse and neglect from 1980 to 2020. The findings reveal an increase in both the quantity and impact of articles published in the field of child abuse and neglect over the years, with a particularly notable surge in interest among researchers in 2021. These results indicate a growing scholarly interest in issues related to maltreatment of children in the literature.

The analysis also highlights variations in research publications on child abuse and neglect across countries, with the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia being the most prolific contributors. It suggests that developed countries are more active in conducting research in this field. Additionally, it underscores the need for collaborative efforts and shared studies to assess child maltreatment in low- and middle-income countries, where this area of research may be overlooked or underrepresented. While this study does not specifically examine the number of publications by country, the most cited and impactful articles originate from these aforementioned countries. Child abuse and neglect pose significant challenges for all societies, and though there have been strides in raising awareness, there remains a call for epidemiological studies in different regions. Existing epidemiological studies mostly stem from developed countries, and there is a need for research that addresses this issue in various cultural and linguistic contexts. The study emphasises the importance of encouraging researchers from less-developed regions to contribute to the literature through publications in their native languages. Bridging language and cultural gaps can enhance collaboration and support researchers in less-developed regions, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and prevention of child abuse and neglect globally.

The list of most-cited articles provides insights into the research interest in the field of child abuse and neglect, shedding light on the evolution of scholarly attention over the years. Until 2003, there was a trend of increasing citation averages, reaching its peak in that year, followed by a subsequent decline. While this might suggest a decrease in the effectiveness of studies in the field, an alternative explanation could be the steady rise in the number of publications between 1990 and 2001. The increasing number of available sources may have led to a higher volume of citations but a lower average per publication. The top-cited articles, notably those by Bernstein et al. in 1994 and 2003, highlight the widespread interest in their development and validation of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF). This standardised tool serves as a screening measure for maltreatment histories, proving valuable in both clinical and non-referred groups. The work of Bernstein and colleagues addresses the need for reliable instruments to retrospectively assess child abuse and neglect, filling a crucial gap in the field. The third most-cited article, "The World Report on Violence and Health" by Krug et al. (2002),

reflects the global attention garnered by the World Health Organization's (WHO) inaugural World Report on Violence and Health. This report provides a summary of key points, emphasising the childhood adversities and various mental health disorders at different life-course stages and across diverse demographic groups. This work emphasises the enduring impact of childhood adversities on mental health. In conclusion, the list of most-cited articles indicates a sustained interest in the effects of child maltreatment, emphasising the need for standardised tools, global perspectives, and a comprehensive understanding of the long-term consequences of childhood adversities on mental health. Additionally, the use of structured tools in the provision of child protection services, especially in developing countries, is crucial for evidence-based practices, and specialists need these tools (Shiller & Strydom, 2018).

Upon examining the publication counts and citation rates of the mentioned researchers, it becomes evident that the author with the highest citation count does not have the highest number of publications. This observation suggests that the h-index alone may not be an adequate indicator of an individual's engagement in the field. Several factors can contribute to a low citation rate for a particular study. A study's low citation rate can be attributed to various causes. For instance, a high volume of research on the same topic during a specific period may dilute the citations to a single work. Conversely, a lack of interest in a particular subject within the research community during that time could also result in lower citation rates. Therefore, a low h-index for a theme does not necessarily imply a low-quality study, but may indicate limited attention from a smaller community of researchers. For example, a publication addressing the role of women as caregivers during a period when women were predominantly viewed only as mothers might not receive the attention it deserves. A study exploring the link between family violence and child abuse during a time when women's roles were narrowly defined may not attract the recognition it merits. In such cases, the low h-index may reflect a lack of interest from the research community rather than the quality of the research. In conclusion, while the h-index provides insights into an author's impact, it should be interpreted in the context of the research landscape and prevailing societal perspectives. A low h-index for a particular theme does not automatically imply inferior research quality, but may be indicative of the prevailing interests and priorities within the academic community during a specific period.

Keywords are crucial for understanding the focus of a publication and they serve as essential tools for researchers to access relevant studies on online platforms (Cals & Kotz, 2013). In this study, the number of keywords appears to have increased in parallel with the published article count. The emergence of 2,564 new keywords in the most recent period (2017-2021) suggests a growing interest in the field and a diversification of research topics. "Child abuse" and "neglect" stand out as the most frequently used keywords, strongly linked to common types of child maltreatment, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. Among the most commonly used keywords in the articles, terms such as "risk," "prevalence" and "prevention" indicate a concentration of research trends in these areas. Studies on these topics will guide policies and programmes aimed at protecting children from abuse and neglect.

The 1980-2000 and 2011-2016 periods form the core of the strategic diagram with the "neglect" cluster, emphasising the significant public health issue of child neglect. Child neglect is the most frequently reported form of maltreatment to child protection centres, and its effects on

children are extensive. Annual prevalence rates vary between 20.6% and 29.4% depending on the age of the child (Clément et al., 2016). Child neglect is a complex issue associated with multiple factors at personal, interpersonal, social and societal levels, often co-occurring with other forms of abuse. Neglect and abuse are commonly intertwined (Long et al., 2012), with emotional neglect being consensually acknowledged as prevalent across all forms of neglect and abuse (Barnett et al., 1993). Given these considerations, it is expected that child neglect holds a central and intense position in research, demonstrating strong relationships with other clusters. Its direct associations with keywords like "prevention," "families," "violence" and "maltreatment" draw attention to studies focusing on preventing neglect within families.

Referring to a child almost always involves mentioning a mother (primary caregiver), underscoring the importance of the mother-infant interaction, as highlighted by the author Daniel Stern, who stated, "When a baby is born, a mother is born" (Karabekiroğlu, 2009). Research on risk factors related to child neglect often distinguishes characteristics between parents who neglect and those who do not, with a predominant focus on mothers rather than fathers. The responsibility for children's neglect is predominantly attributed to mothers, and most reports of neglect are directed towards mothers (Beissel, 2007). Factors such as low income, low education, poor marital relationships, stressful lives and insufficient social support have been associated with neglect (Brown et al., 1998; Schumacher et al., 2001). A study by Karadağ et al. (2021) found that mothers of neglected children were younger, economically disadvantaged, perceived less social support, experienced more childhood physical and emotional abuse, and reported dissatisfaction with their maternal role compared to control group mothers. These mothers also expressed a lack of satisfaction with their maternal role and struggled to balance maternal roles with other responsibilities. Neglect leaves lasting marks on various aspects of children's development. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of neglect studies, providing timely support to families experiencing neglect, and creating intervention programmes for families are crucial. Research should also prioritise understanding the environmental factors that influence parents' capacity to respond to their children's needs. A study conducted by Chinakidzwa et al. (2014) found that children living in rural areas of South Africa were aware of the signs of abuse and the steps to take if they were abused. However, as a result of internalising their living conditions and the poverty they experienced, they did not recognise neglect and saw it as a normal part of their daily lives. It is understood that theoretical and practical studies on child neglect are particularly important in underdeveloped regions.

During the period 2001-2010, 18 clusters emerged, signalling a diversification in studies related to various forms of abuse, including physical and sexual abuse. Notably, "Shaken-Baby-Syndrome" began to capture the attention of the field. The interest in this form of abuse increased and publications expanded as awareness grew. The origins of attention to abusive head trauma can be traced back to an American paediatric radiologist who reported cases involving infants with long bone fractures and subdural bleeding. Initially, Caffey did not associate these findings with abuse, suggesting they could result from minor accidents. However, in 1962 Kempe's observations on "battered baby syndrome" marked the first scientific article on child abuse. Shaken-Baby-Syndrome represents a clinical disorder and a form of abuse where violent shaking by a caregiver leads to retinal and subdural haemorrhages, subdural hematomas and other less-defined symptoms. Preventing Shaken-Baby-Syndrome

relies on parental education and the vigilant observation of clinical staff (Mian et al., 2015). The increased interest and publications during the 2001-2010 period highlight the importance of raising awareness about this type of abuse. Another notable cluster during this period was Munchausen syndrome. However, this cluster exhibited weak interactions with other sub-networks in the field. In subsequent periods, Munchausen syndrome did not maintain a significant presence. Munchausen syndrome by proxy (MSBP) represents a covert form of child abuse. While many professionals are familiar with sexual or physical abuse, this particular form often goes unnoticed. Diagnosing MSBP is challenging, requiring experienced and vigilant professionals. Despite its rarity, MSBP constitutes a severe form of child abuse with high mortality rates. Proper management and effective treatment planning for these cases necessitate teamwork (Foto-Özdemir et al., 2013; Rosenberg, 2003).

During the period 2011-2016, there was an increased focus on the topics of "domestic violence," "child welfare" and "risk factors" within the field. Domestic violence within the family, where the child is a witness, is considered a form of child abuse because of its direct impact on the child's overall development (Callaghan et al., 2018). The emergence of studies examining the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in child protection has been gradual. Addressing domestic violence as a child abuse issue is crucial. The presence of mothers who do not distance themselves from violent partners should trigger action in the child protection system (Humphreys, 1999). Despite the increasing number of publications on domestic violence, the lack of common terminology and definitions makes it challenging to understand the scope of the problem. Concepts such as exposure to domestic violence, the nature of domestic violence, and why exposure is equivalent to child maltreatment remain unclear, emphasising the need for clarification in the field (Holden, 2003). The importance of domestic violence as a topic persisted in the period 2017-2021. Major societal disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have altered crime trends, with an increase in certain types of crimes, including domestic violence. Data from Turkey during the COVID-19 outbreak indicates a rise in cases of violence against women (Toprak et al., 2020). Understanding the underlying mechanisms of domestic violence and child abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, mitigating negative effects, and developing programmes and interventions are crucial aspects of research in this field (Peterman et al., 2020).

In the recent period of 2017-2021, the clusters "prevalence" and "adverse childhood experiences" stand out. To understand the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among children, it is necessary to examine family characteristics. The identification of predictive factors related to high exposure to adverse childhood experiences can inform early interventions at the national level (Crouch et al., 2019). It is indicated that there are a variety of risk and protective factors for maltreatment at multiple levels of the social ecology (Maguire-Jack & Font, 2017). According to the ecological approach, child abuse is not the result of a single action but rather a product of numerous factors (Belsky, 1980). Approaching studies on child abuse and neglect from an ecological perspective will provide a broad perspective on the prevalence of child abuse, the identification of risk factors and prevention efforts. Prevention strategies based on the ecological approach involve interventions not only at the individual and family levels where the issue of child abuse arises, but also addressing the problem within the societal context. In the ecological approach to evaluating child abuse and neglect, all levels – meso and

macro – are essential. Comprehensive assessment involves examining each level to gain a thorough understanding of the issue.

This study noted that the focus of research shifted over four distinct periods since 1980. During some periods, there has been an effort to understand a specific type of "ill-treatment towards a child" (neglect, Munchausen by proxy syndrome, shaken-baby syndrome), while in other periods, the research in the field has been directed towards understanding risk factors, developing protective interventions and testing their effectiveness. Additionally, a subject that received less attention in one period might likely become more crucial in the subsequent period. Similarly, the increase in knowledge in the field might have led to changes in the language used. An interesting observation in the change of keywords is the centrality of the term "mothers" in the first period (1980-2000), which was replaced by the term "women" in the second period (2001-2010). In the third (2011-2016) and fourth (2017-2021) periods, neither term became the most central keyword, but "domestic violence" emerged as a prominent keyword. Likewise, in the thematic map, the theme of "mothers" in the first period transformed into the theme of "families" in the second and third periods and the theme of "prevention" in the last period. This transformation may be related to the evolving understanding and recognition of women beyond their roles as mothers within societies over time. Furthermore, it may be associated with the realisation that child abuse and neglect are not solely linked to mothers, but to family interactions. It could also signify an understanding that in households with neglect or abuse, mothers are more likely to experience violence. In this context, it seems plausible to suggest that earlier periods focused more on recognising and identifying abuse, while over time the field recognised it as a result of family dynamics and aimed to develop prevention strategies.

Understanding the interaction of different factors in child abuse and neglect is crucial. Solutions focused on a single factor to prevent child abuse and neglect will be inadequate. Studies emphasising the interaction of sociocultural systems around individuals and families allow for the comprehensive evaluation of the issue, enabling the development of effective interventions. However, it has been noted that there is a gap in culture-specific studies and digital abuse in the field of child abuse and neglect. A study analysing the content of 1,133 articles between 1977 and 1998 found that despite an increasing interest in ethnic origin, it was not sufficient (Behl et al., 2001). It is indicated that ethnic origin has a significant impact in articles where it is used in analyses and is considered an important variable, emphasising that African Americans and Native Americans are not adequately represented in research samples (Miller & Cross, 2006). To improve the quality of prevention and intervention studies, there is a need for research on the similar and different aetiologies and consequences of different forms of child maltreatment among various cultural and ethnic groups (Ammerman, 1998).

We are living in an era where digital media tools such as computers, mobile phones and the internet are used extensively. The effects of digital media are becoming increasingly prominent as time goes by. Alongside many benefits, mobile and online technologies also bring risks such as cyberbullying, contact with strangers, sexual messaging and pornography. The types and prevalence of risks posed by digital media tools for children, the responsibility of different disciplines, and the beneficial use of digital tools for children and parents are prominent issues

in this field (Karaman & Ayhan, 2021; Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Research addressing this topic will guide professionals in the field, policymakers, and parents.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Prospective studies are crucial for identifying risk factors related to child abuse and neglect, evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions and understanding long-term outcomes. Furthermore, such research can help identify situations where children are at risk of abuse and neglect in advance, allowing for early intervention opportunities. These types of studies play a critical role in developing child protection policies and programmes, raising awareness in the community, and creating effective strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect. Both retrospective and prospective types of research provide important information on the long-term consequences of childhood abuse. In this context, it is an undeniable fact that retrospective findings are also of great value and if they are ignored, very valuable information regarding the field of child maltreatment will be lost (Kendall-Tackett & Becker-Blease, 2004). Such studies allow scientists to identify specific psychological or health consequences that childhood victimisation may lead to. However, it would be useful to test these hypothetical relationships detected in retrospective studies with prospective studies (Widom et al., 2004).

Bibliometric studies on child abuse are of great importance for specialists in terms of both enhancing academic knowledge and improving practical applications. Bibliometric studies assess the breadth and depth of the existing research literature on child abuse. This allows social workers to understand which topics are being intensely researched, where the gaps are and which areas require further investigation. This helps social workers keep their practices and intervention strategies up to date. The analysis of the scientific literature on child abuse can contribute to the shaping of social work policies and the development of practices. Furthermore, it can assist social workers in comparing their own country's practices with those of other countries and making adaptations when necessary.

For future studies, it is recommended that research from regional databases be included that can incorporate the production of researchers from countries whose primary language is not English. Additionally, expanding the scope beyond articles to include conference abstracts and reviews would be beneficial. This would allow for a more comprehensive examination of recent developments in research and the incorporation of conclusions resulting from the analysis of secondary sources.

### **LIMITATIONS**

There are some limitations related to the research. Changes and challenges in defining child abuse and neglect over time may have influenced the way the subject is addressed. When the criteria for the inclusion of articles change, it is possible that different results will emerge if this study is replicated. Furthermore, the choice of database can also influence the obtained results. Including studies conducted in non-English-speaking countries may lead to different results.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study the data were selected exclusively from open-access and ethically compliant sources using the Web of Science database, a reliable and internationally recognised academic database. The data used in the bibliometric analysis were collected solely for academic purposes and do not contain any personal information. No bias or preference was applied in the selection of articles.

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