

Scopus-Indexed Open-Access Research on Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation (2020-2025): A Focused Bibliometric Mapping

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a focused bibliometric mapping of Scopus-indexed open-access journal articles that explicitly connect "social welfare" and "poverty alleviation." Rather than claiming exhaustive field coverage, the article maps a narrowly defined recent corpus. Data were retrieved from Scopus using the exact query "social welfare" AND "poverty alleviation" and processed in RStudio. After staged screening for topical relevance, document type, language, publication year, and open-access status, 40 journal articles indexed for 2020-2025 were retained. The analysis examines annual output, source distribution, citation visibility, collaboration patterns, and keyword-based themes. The results show a small but diverse corpus spread across 36 journals, with publication counts varying between three and ten articles per year. Citation visibility is concentrated in a limited number of papers, while collaboration appears fragmented across small author clusters. The thematic map suggests that China-related welfare and poverty governance form a central cluster within this corpus, whereas Indonesia- and climate-related work appear as developing topics. These findings should be interpreted as indicative of a focused Scopus subset rather than of the entire literature on welfare and poverty.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social welfare and poverty alleviation remain central concerns in contemporary development debates because poverty is increasingly understood as a multidimensional condition shaped by health access, social protection, energy deprivation, institutional capacity, and unequal life opportunities. Recent studies connect poverty reduction to health investment strategies [1], the capacity of social service systems [2], multi-sector social protection partnerships [3], and welfare policy resilience during crises such as COVID-19 [4]. Other work further shows that deprivation among older adults [5] and the welfare consequences of energy poverty [6] have become part of the same analytical conversation. This expanding scope makes the intersection between welfare and poverty policy a relevant site for focused bibliometric mapping.

At the same time, the literature is distributed across multiple instruments and settings. Recent studies discuss conditional cash transfers and food assistance in disaster-affected areas [7], microfinance and household living standards [8], remittances and energy poverty [9], income-support packages and welfare outcomes [10], subsidy arrangements in poverty-alleviation supply chains [11], and the digital transformation of poverty governance [12]. Welfare provision is also shaped by spatial and political conditions [13]. Taken together, these studies suggest a policy-driven and cross-sectoral research space rather than a single coherent disciplinary tradition.

However, the relevant gap is narrower than a complete absence of bibliometric work on poverty or welfare. Related bibliometric studies already exist in adjacent subdomains, such as zakat literature [17] and bibliometric methodology itself [19]-[25]. What remains less visible is a recent mapping of Scopus-indexed journal articles that explicitly connect the terms "social welfare" and "poverty alleviation" within the same searchable corpus. Focusing on this exact linkage does not claim to represent the entire anti-poverty or welfare literature; instead, it captures a more specific interface where welfare language and poverty-reduction discourse clearly overlap.

Methodologically, this study treats bibliometric analysis as a descriptive science-mapping exercise used to examine five operational dimensions of literature development: annual publication output, source distribution, citation visibility, collaboration structure, and keyword-based thematic orientation [19]-[25]. Because the corpus is intentionally narrow, the goal is exploratory description rather than hypothesis testing or exhaustive field generalization. Based on the policy-driven and interdisciplinary character of the topic, the study expects the corpus to be dispersed across journals, organized through relatively small author clusters, and thematically connected to governance, health, energy, and development-policy concerns.

Accordingly, the study asks: within a focused corpus of Scopus-indexed open-access journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, what publication patterns, source distribution, citation visibility, collaboration structure, and thematic orientations characterize research explicitly linking social welfare and poverty alleviation? The contribution of the study is therefore modest but specific: it offers a recent, clearly bounded snapshot of one explicit segment of the literature and clarifies the scope conditions under which its findings should be interpreted.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design and Data Source

This study employed a focused bibliometric design to examine journal articles that explicitly linked the terms “social welfare” and “poverty alleviation.” Bibliographic data were retrieved from Scopus using the exact query “social welfare” AND “poverty alleviation” and exported in CSV format for processing in RStudio. The query was intentionally narrow: it prioritized conceptual precision around explicit term co-occurrence rather than exhaustive synonym expansion. As a consequence, the corpus does not cover adjacent literatures indexed under related terms such as social protection, welfare state, anti-poverty policy, or livelihood security. The initial search returned 3,642 records. Because this high-recall search captured many loosely related results, title-, abstract-, and keyword-level screening was used to retain only records with a direct substantive intersection between the two focal terms, reducing the working dataset to 300 records.

2.2. Screening and Selection Procedure

The corpus was refined in several sequential steps to maintain a comparable and inspectable dataset. First, only journal articles were retained ($n = 240$) so that document type would be consistent across records. Second, only English-language publications were retained ($n = 228$) to support consistent text processing and interpretation. Third, the publication window was limited to 2020-2025 ($n = 77$) in order to focus on recent literature indexed in Scopus at the time of data retrieval. Fourth, the dataset was restricted to open-access articles ($n = 40$) so that each retained document could be fully checked during corpus construction. This final step was practical rather than epistemic; it improved retrievability but also introduced accessibility bias, which is acknowledged as a limitation. The article selection process is summarized in a screening flow chart in Figure 1.

2.3. Data Analysis

The final corpus was processed in RStudio using the Biblioshiny interface for descriptive science mapping. The analysis focused on annual scientific production, source productivity, citation visibility, authorship and collaboration patterns, and keyword-based thematic structure. In this study, citation counts are used as visibility indicators rather than as mature measures of long-run influence, because recent publications have had unequal time to accumulate citations. Likewise, the collaboration network and thematic map are interpreted heuristically as parameter-sensitive visualizations of a small corpus, not as definitive representations of the entire field. For that reason, the study does not claim formal validation through field laws or clustering robustness statistics; instead, it uses the bibliometric outputs to describe patterns within a clearly bounded dataset.

2.4. Scope and Limitations

This study should be read as a focused corpus mapping rather than a comprehensive review of all research on welfare and poverty. Its scope is limited by the use of a single database (Scopus), an exact-term query, English-language filtering, open-access filtering, a recent publication window, and a relatively small final corpus of 40 articles. Screening was conducted as a manual corpus-construction procedure and no inter-rater reliability test was performed. These choices increase precision around the targeted term intersection, but they also limit representativeness and generalizability. The findings therefore indicate patterns inside this restricted dataset rather than the full global literature.

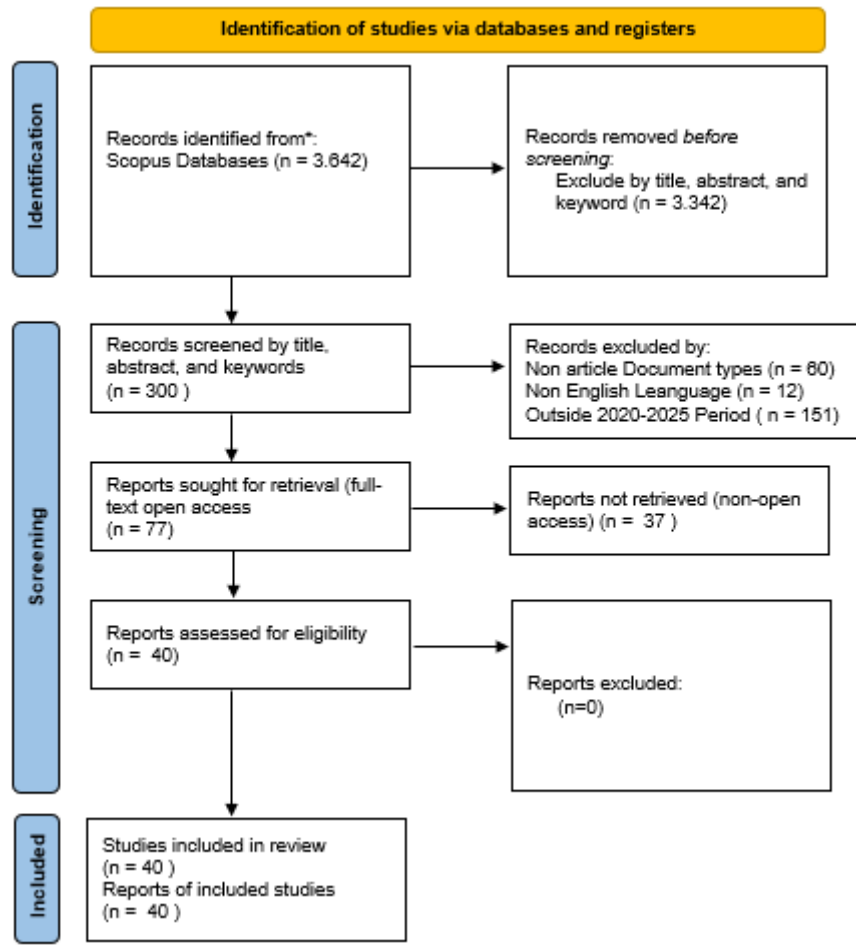


Figure 1. Screening flow for construction of the bibliometric corpus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Profile of Articles

Before discussing the bibliometric visualizations, it is important to restate the character of the dataset. The final corpus consists of 40 Scopus-indexed open-access journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. This is a small and sharply filtered sample, so the purpose of the results section is not to generalize about the whole field but to describe the structure of this explicit term-based subset. Even with that limitation, the corpus still captures a diverse interface between welfare studies, poverty policy, public health, sustainability, governance, and development research.

The corpus is distributed across 36 journals and includes case-based as well as conceptual contributions from multiple regional contexts. This spread suggests that the intersection of social welfare and poverty alleviation does not form a stable single-journal core within the present dataset. It is better understood as a dispersed conversation assembled from several neighboring domains. To keep the emphasis on synthesis rather than raw listing, Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the corpus instead of reproducing the full article-by-article inventory.

Table 1. Summary profile of the bibliometric corpus

Indicator	Summary
Initial Scopus retrieval	3,642 records from the exact query “social welfare” AND “poverty alleviation”
Working set after title/abstract/keyword screening	300 records with a direct substantive intersection between the two focal terms
Final corpus	40 English-language open-access journal articles indexed for 2020-2025
Journal dispersion	36 journals; most frequent source: Sustainability (Switzerland) with 3 articles
Publication range	3 to 10 articles per year across the final corpus
Authorship profile	Mean 4.1 authors per article, indicating mostly small collaborative teams

Indicator	Summary
Citation visibility	Median 5.5 citations per article, with citations concentrated in a limited number of papers

Table 1 indicates three important features of the corpus. First, it is small but heterogeneous, with 40 articles dispersed across 36 outlets and a mean of 4.1 authors per article. Second, citation visibility is uneven: the median article received 5.5 citations, while a small number of papers account for a large share of the total citation count. Third, year-to-year counts vary within a narrow range, which cautions against treating the dataset as evidence of a mature or fully consolidated research field.

3.2. Bibliometric Mapping of Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation Research

To answer the research question, the bibliometric mapping is interpreted as a descriptive overview of this bounded dataset. The following outputs are therefore read cautiously: they are useful for identifying tendencies inside the corpus, but their meaning depends on the small sample size, the exact search vocabulary, and the filters applied during selection.

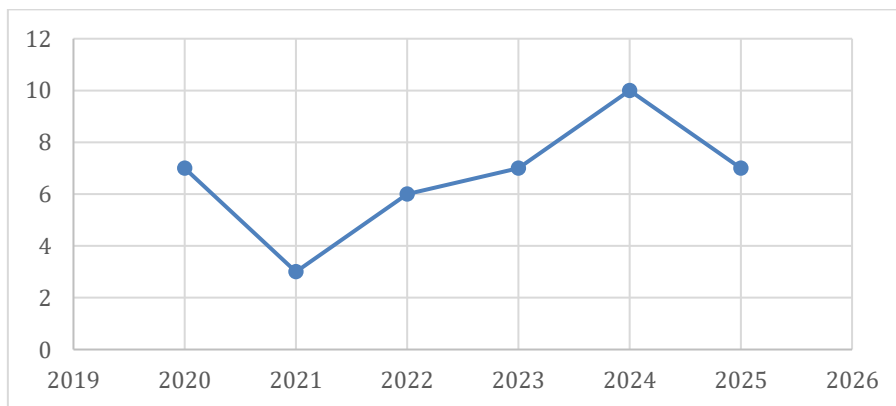


Figure 2. Annual scientific production

As presented in Figure 2, annual scientific production within the final corpus varies from three to ten articles per year across 2020-2025. The pattern suggests continued presence rather than a strong linear growth trajectory. The peak of ten articles in 2024 may indicate increased recent attention to the topic, but in a corpus of only 40 articles the year-to-year differences should be interpreted as modest fluctuations rather than decisive evidence of field-wide expansion.

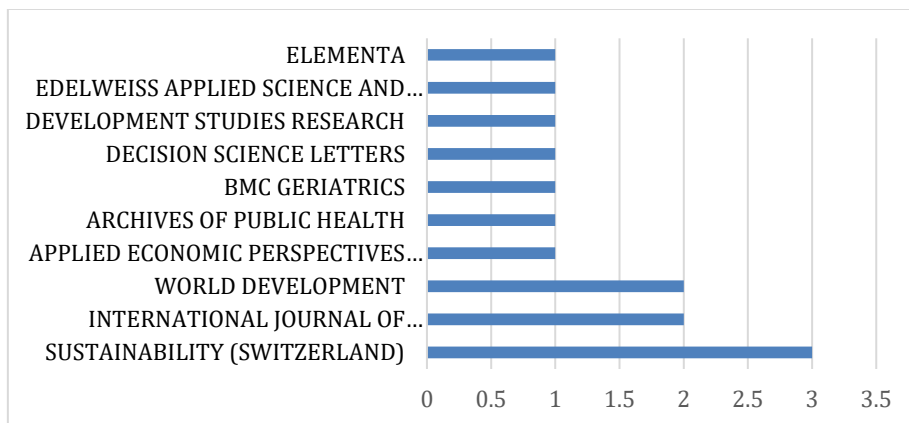


Figure 3. Most relevant sources

Figure 3 shows that the literature is distributed across a wide range of journals. Sustainability (Switzerland) contributes three articles, while International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health and World Development contribute two articles each. The remaining outlets appear once each. This distribution suggests that the present corpus lacks a dominant journal core and instead reflects the intersection of sustainability, public health, development studies, and policy scholarship. In bibliometric terms, source dispersion here is more informative than source concentration.

The authorship pattern points in the same direction. Most authors appear only once in the corpus and repeated publication activity is limited. Rather than indicating a stable epistemic community, this pattern suggests that scholars

enter the topic through specific subthemes or case settings and then disperse across adjacent research agendas. With a small corpus, authorship concentration should therefore be read as weak and fragmented rather than as evidence of a consolidated author hierarchy.

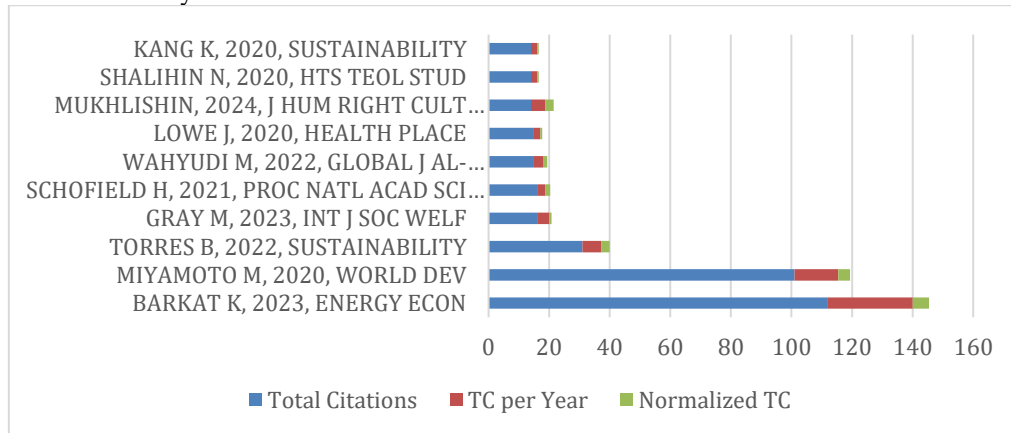


Figure 4. Most cited documents within the corpus

Figure 4 identifies the most cited documents within the corpus, with Barkat et al. (2023) and Miyamoto (2020) receiving the highest raw citation counts. These counts are useful for locating the most visible papers in the current dataset, but they should not be treated as fully comparable impact measures because article age, journal audience, and disciplinary citation practices differ substantially. What the figure shows more reliably is that attention is concentrated around topics such as energy poverty, environmental sustainability, welfare systems, and poverty-related public policy.

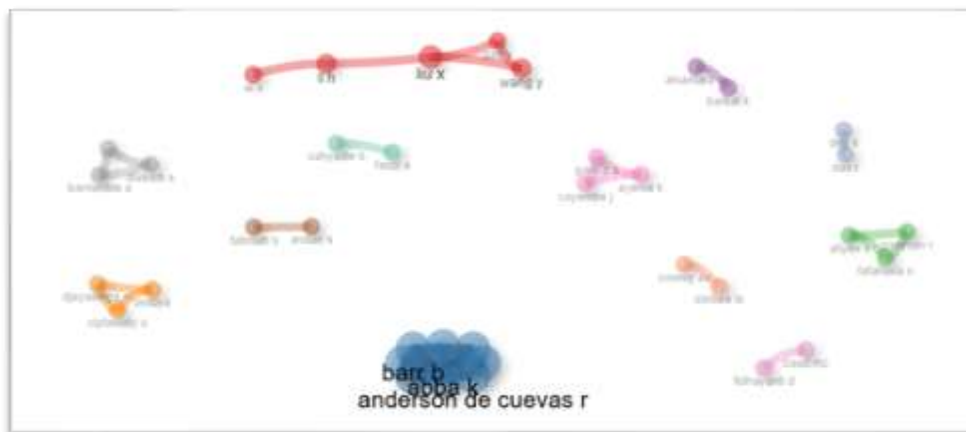


Figure 5. Authors' collaboration network

The collaboration network in Figure 5 is composed of small and relatively separate clusters. This pattern is consistent with a corpus built from case-based and policy-specific studies rather than from a dense, cumulative research program. Fragmentation in this context may reflect topical heterogeneity, regional specialization, and the narrow exact-term query used to define the corpus. Accordingly, the network is better interpreted as evidence of decentralized collaboration around specific problems than as a sign of disciplinary immaturity alone.



Figure 6. Thematic map of social welfare and poverty alleviation research

Figure 6 presents the thematic map generated from keyword co-occurrence. Because thematic mapping is sensitive to corpus size and algorithmic settings, the quadrants should be read heuristically rather than ontologically. Within that caution, the map places social welfare, poverty, and China in a highly central and relatively developed position, indicating that these terms co-occur frequently and occupy an important place in the vocabulary of the selected articles. This centrality may reflect substantive concentration in Chinese poverty-governance studies, but it may also be reinforced by Scopus indexing patterns and English-language publication incentives.

The cluster linking poverty alleviation, Indonesia, and climate change appears near the central area but remains comparatively less developed. Within the present corpus, this suggests an emerging line of discussion around environmental vulnerability, local policy adaptation, and poverty governance in Indonesia and similar settings. By contrast, themes such as welfare provision in India or zakat-related studies appear more peripheral. That peripheral position does not mean those topics are unimportant; rather, it indicates that they are less connected to the dominant keyword structure of this narrowly filtered dataset.

Taken together, the bibliometric mapping indicates that the selected literature forms a small, interdisciplinary, and unevenly connected corpus. Its strongest signals lie not in field-wide maturity but in the coexistence of multiple policy themes—energy, health, governance, environment, migration, and religious social finance—within a common language of welfare and poverty reduction. The results, therefore, support a cautious interpretation: the corpus reveals how one explicit vocabulary cluster is organized, not how the entire field of poverty or welfare research is structured.

3.3. Discussion

The revised findings support a more restrained conclusion than the original version. What emerges from the corpus is not a comprehensive map of the welfare-poverty literature, but a focused snapshot of recent Scopus-indexed open-access articles that explicitly combine the two focal terms. Under these scope conditions, the dataset suggests that the topic is policy-oriented and cross-sectoral, yet too small to sustain strong claims about field-wide growth or disciplinary consolidation.

One notable pattern is source dispersion. Because the 40 articles are spread across 36 journals, the corpus appears to function as an interface literature connecting sustainability, public health, development studies, and social policy rather than as a self-contained domain. This is consistent with the multidimensional character of poverty, which is increasingly discussed through energy access, health outcomes, data governance, climate vulnerability, and social protection [1]-[13]. It also explains why the current mapping resembles a bridge across neighboring debates more than a bounded academic specialty.

Citation visibility in the corpus is similarly concentrated and should be interpreted with caution. High citation counts help identify papers that are currently prominent within the dataset, but they do not automatically translate into consensual intellectual influence. In a recent and heterogeneous corpus, citations may reflect journal reach, interdisciplinary accessibility, or problem salience as much as theoretical centrality. The safest inference is therefore that issues such as energy poverty, environmental sustainability, and welfare governance currently attract comparatively strong attention within this selected literature.

The thematic map offers useful but limited insight into conceptual orientation. The central position of China-related keywords may partly reflect substantive emphasis on poverty governance, resettlement, and state-led intervention, but it may also be shaped by database coverage and publication-language effects. Similarly, the Indonesia-climate change cluster should be treated as an emerging tendency inside the dataset, not as definitive evidence of a major field realignment. This cautious reading is important because low-N thematic maps can change materially when search terms, thresholds, or database coverage change.



These limitations are not merely technical; they define the interpretive boundary of the study. The use of Scopus alone, the restriction to English-language open-access articles, and the exact-term query all produce a corpus that is precise but incomplete. In that sense, the study is closer to a bounded science-mapping exercise—comparable to narrower bibliometric studies in adjacent subfields such as zakat literature [17]—than to a full intellectual history of welfare and poverty research. Future studies should therefore broaden the query vocabulary, compare multiple databases, include non-open-access records, and test whether the present patterns remain visible in a larger corpus.

Even with these caveats, the mapping still has value as an orienting device. It shows where recent scholarship explicitly connecting social welfare and poverty alleviation is currently concentrated and where thematic linkages remain thin. For researchers, that means the corpus can help identify underconnected areas for comparative work. For policymakers, its value is indirect: it highlights recurring topics in the literature, but it does not by itself establish the effectiveness of any specific intervention.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides a focused bibliometric mapping of Scopus-indexed open-access journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 that explicitly link social welfare and poverty alleviation. Within this sharply defined corpus, the literature appears small, interdisciplinary, and dispersed across journals, with citation visibility concentrated in a limited number of papers and collaboration organized through relatively separate clusters. The thematic map suggests that China-related welfare and poverty governance occupy a central place in the selected vocabulary, while Indonesia- and climate-related work appear as a developing topic. These findings should be read as characteristics of the chosen corpus rather than as definitive statements about the entire field.

The main contribution of the study is therefore not exhaustive coverage but transparent scope: it clarifies how one explicit segment of recent Scopus literature is organized and where its strongest thematic signals lie. The main limitations are equally clear: single-database coverage, an exact-term query, English-language and open-access filters, a recent time window, and a final corpus of 40 articles. Future bibliometric work should broaden keyword strategy, compare multiple databases, incorporate non-open-access records, and examine whether the present patterns persist under less restrictive corpus construction. For policy audiences, the present article is best used as a directional overview of topics receiving attention in this limited literature, not as direct evidence for specific policy prescriptions.

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