

A Bibliometric Analysis of Research Trends in Homeless Population Using the Web of Science (WOS) Database (1989 - 2025)

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ABSTRACT: Homelessness remains a global challenge, which raises questions on the basic requirements (i.e., food, clothing and shelter or habitat) of a human being in society. Globally, 318 million people are homeless, which approximately makes up the entire population of the United States (Annual report, UN-Habitat, 2024). This study attempts a bibliometric analysis of publications on the homeless population, sourced from the Web of Science database between 1989 and 2025. The study used seven impactful research contributions to determine descriptive statistics, including selected country-wise homeless populations; document type, year-wise publication and citation trends; country-wise contributions; Web of Science indexes; author contributions; and most cited publications, Universities, and publishers' contributions. The research trend indicates a steady rise in such publications over the years. While recent publication counts fluctuate slightly, citation levels remain high. Western countries such as the USA, Canada, Brazil, and England have significantly more publications than other countries; there is a visible disparity in the number of publications from other countries in this field. The citation network analysis identifies highly cited, influential studies that have shaped research on the homeless population; the network of journals highlights relationships among the most impactful journals in the dataset through citation links. The author keyword co-occurrence network reflects the most dominant and frequent keywords in this field. The 570 publications received a total of 14230 citations over 36 years, indicating the vitality of the study. The thematic map and co-occurrence analysis of author keywords reveal that research increasingly focuses on public health, healthcare services, mortality, and social outcomes. Meanwhile, topics such as COVID-19, urban housing, women, families, and risk factors are emerging and becoming more specialised. Notably, there are too few studies on laws, policies, and programs for homeless people. The study calls for further research to comprehensively address the structural and individual aspects of homelessness, aiming to inform policies better aligned with SDG 11.1, which seeks to achieve universal access to safe, affordable housing and improved slum conditions by 2030.

KEYWORDS: Homelessness; homeless population; Web of Science (WoS); bibliometric analysis; thematic map

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is the condition in which individuals or households lack a permanent, consistent, and proper place of residence, including those living on the streets, in shelters, or in temporary and insecure housing arrangements (Fowler et al., 2019; OECD, 2024; Richards & Kuhn, 2023; Amore, 2001; Zhao, 2023). It is linked to an absence of other human rights, including the right to work, healthcare, social security, privacy, and education (Clifford et al., 2019; Rukmana, 2020). According to UN-Habitat, homelessness is one of the most acute forms of material deprivation; it refers to the inability of people to enjoy permanent accommodation. Homelessness can include rough sleepers (i.e., people sleeping rough on the street) and those living in inadequate or insufficient housing (e.g., in tents) (OECD, 2024). In the US, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines it as lacking a permanent and proper residence at night, including in places not intended for habitation, such as streets or cars, or in emergency shelters (Department of Housing & Development, 2024). The Census of India 2011 defines "houseless households" as "households that do not live in buildings or census houses but live in the open on roadside, pavements, in hume pipes, under flyovers and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms, etc." (Homelessness, 2024). According to the UN-Habitat Annual Report 2024 (Adequate Housing for All), 318 million people worldwide are homeless. This is nearly the entire population of the USA without a home. Additionally, one in four people faces challenges related to health, safety, and prosperity (Adequate Housing for All, 2024). As per the UN-Habitat survey report - 2018 (Homelessness and the SDGs), 1.6 billion live in inadequate housing conditions, 15 million people are forcibly thrown out each year, and 22 million are displaced on average due to

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climate-related events worldwide (Salcedo, 2018). According to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.1, by 2030, “ensure access for all to safe, affordable housing and basic amenities properly, and modify slums” (SDG 11, 2018). Homelessness is not a single, uniform experience; it’s a multidimensional issue associated with socio-economic and political disturbances in rural and semi-urban areas (Roy & Siddique, 2018). Some people face it briefly due to temporary crises, while a smaller group experiences long-term or repeated episodes, often termed chronic homelessness. (Zhao, 2023). Individuals can get rid of homelessness over time; it is a highly dynamic condition. So, this fluidity makes accurate measurement difficult (OECD, 2025). Common data collection methods, such as point-in-time street counts, collect only those who are homeless at a specific moment, thereby overlooking many individuals who are intermittently homeless or temporarily housed during the count (OECD Monitoring Framework to Measure Homelessness, 2025).

The aim of the study is to comprehend the trends and patterns of global homelessness through bibliometric analysis. This study will help researchers to gain a broader perspective of the homeless population and, therefore, plan future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

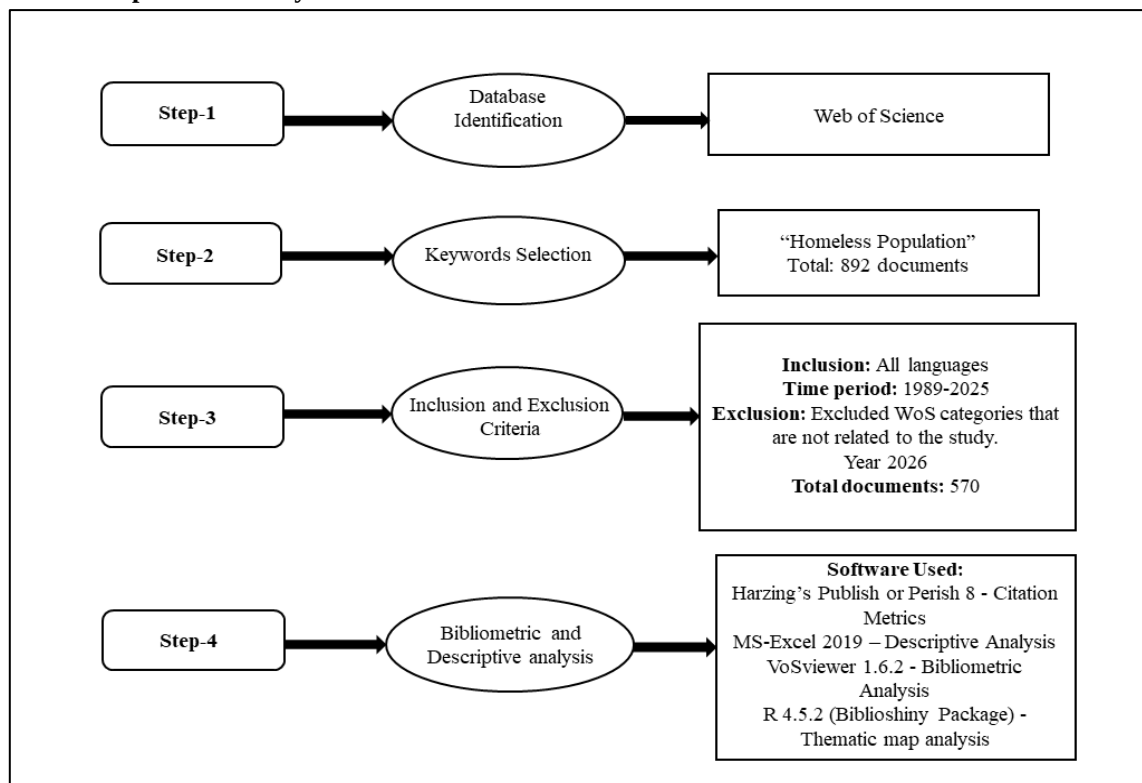
Homelessness encompasses rough sleeping, couch surfing, and living in shelters, women’s refuges, cars, caravans, and tents (Amore, 2013; Zhao, 2023). It is a multidimensional phenomenon (Somerville, 2013; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). Homelessness is not only a lack of shelter or an abode but also a lack of a roof over one’s head. It encompasses deprivation across several dimensions, including physiological (lack of bodily comfort or warmth), emotional (lack of love or joy), territorial (lack of privacy), ontological (lack of rootedness in the world, anomie), and spiritual (lack of hope, lack of purpose) (Somerville, 2013). Homelessness has two wings: those for whom the main causes are “structural” and those for whom the main causes are “individual” (Lee et al., 1990; Main, 1998). Among the particular causes advanced by structuralist researchers are trends in unemployment and poverty, the housing market, the economy as a whole, and, occasionally, large-scale social policies. Researchers focusing on individual factors highlight the prevalence of various disabilities among the homeless, such as psychiatric disorders, alcohol addiction, substance use disorder (SUD), and occasionally a lack of certain “internal, cultural tools” deemed essential for self-support in contemporary society (Zhao, 2023). The main debate is over whether structural or individual causes are primary (Main, 1998). A variety of causes, including the closure of single-room-occupancy hotels, downtown redevelopment, gentrification, and the conversion of low-rent apartments to condominiums, have significantly reduced the number of budget-friendly residences for low-income people (Rukmana, 2020; Takahashi, 1996; Wolch et al., 1988). The declining number of affordable housing units has led many to live with family and friends and forced others into shelters or onto the streets (Mallach, 2009; Rukmana, 2020; Takahashi, 1996). Both religious and spiritual perceptions are notable for people experiencing homelessness when they consider “end-of-life” issues (Webb et al., 2017; Snodgrass, 2014). Homelessness also includes the deinstitutionalisation of state mental hospitals and the reduction of public expenditures on welfare, which have contributed to an increasing number of homeless mentally ill (Dear & Wolch, 1987; Rukmana, 2020). Rapid urbanisation exacerbates homelessness (Rukmana, 2020), but it also reflects a country or state’s policy choices (Anderson & Christian, 2003). Cities that implement inclusive housing, employment security, and social protection measures can successfully reduce homelessness despite rapid urbanisation (Yadav et al., 2025). So, homelessness is not only an individual factor but also a structural phenomenon of a region. Poverty, rapid urbanisation, and the state’s policy failure are the crucial causes of homelessness.

METHODOLOGY

The current study was conducted to assess perceptions of homeless people in the research domain using bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method for analysing academic literature, such as journal articles, research papers, and other scholarly publications. It focuses on measuring publication output and impact across various disciplines, including science, social science, management, and others (Vengadesh et al., 2025). It also examines the characteristics of scientific studies on the relevant subject, including the author, institution, and country of publication, as well as citation links (İyibildiren et al., 2023). In the initial stage of the study, a search was conducted using the keyword “Homeless Population” in the core collection of the Web of Science database. The initial search yielded 892 documents. Exclusion criteria included articles, review papers, editorials, letters, and book chapters; only homelessness-related documents were considered. After exclusions, 570 documents remained for the bibliometric study. Microsoft Excel 2019 was used to conduct the frequency analysis; for citation metrics and analysis, Harzing’s Publish or Perish 8 was used, and VOSviewer 1.6.2 was used for data visualisation. Thematic map analysis was conducted using the R 4.5.2 Biblioshiny package. The trends in publications, collaboration, authorship patterns, productive authors, contributions by countries, most active institutions, top journals by publication, most frequent keywords in publications, and top-cited articles were the most helpful bibliometric variables applied in this research to summarise the findings (Sabri et al., 2022).

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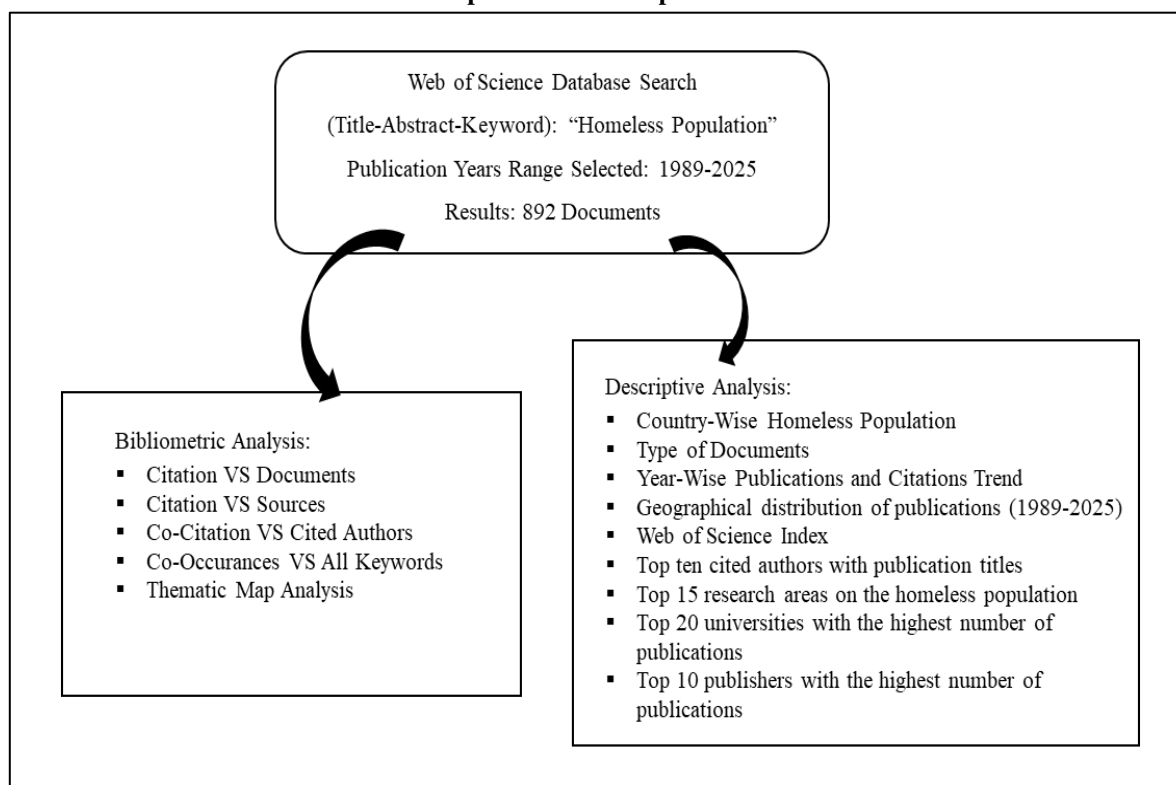
Fig. 1 Formulated Steps in this Study



RESEARCH FINDINGS

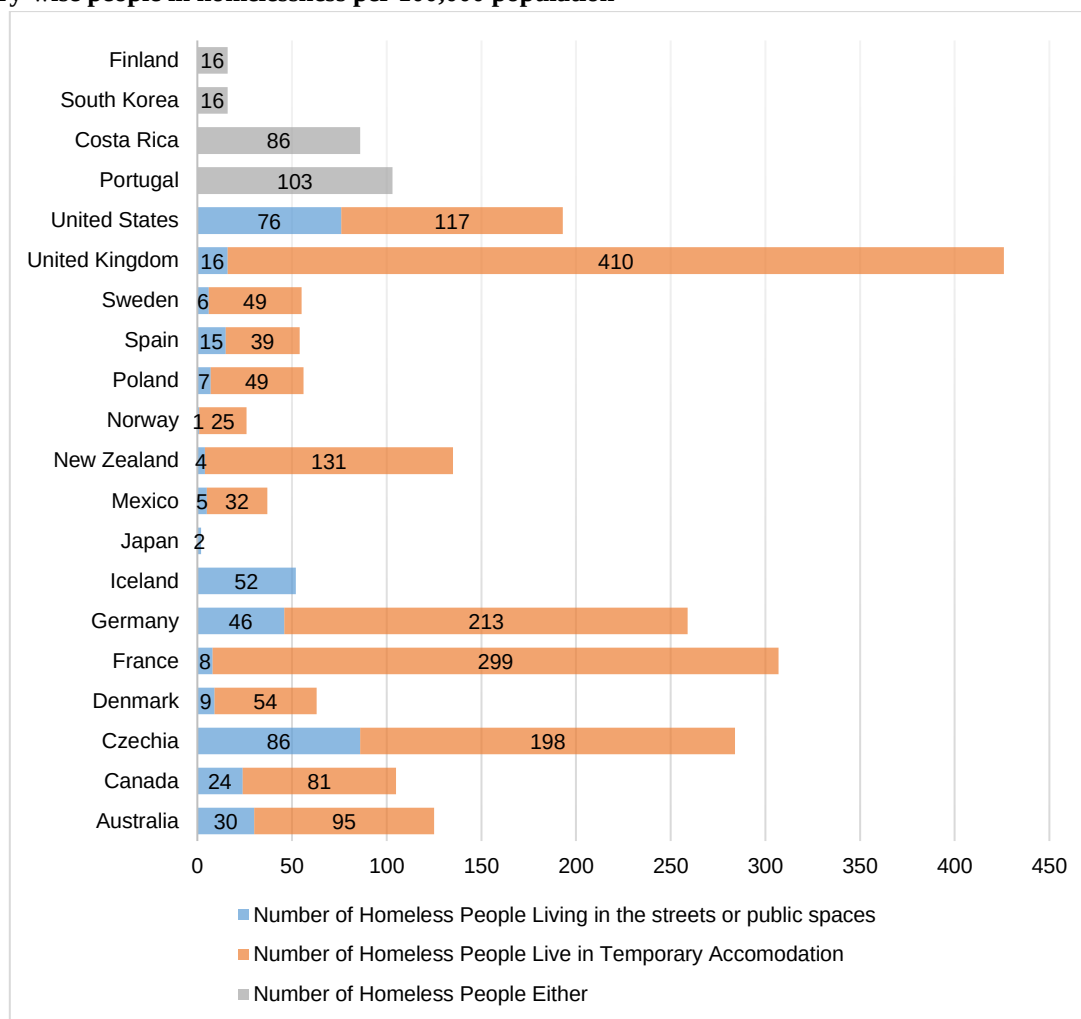
From these 570 documents, results were retrieved as per the schematic plan for bibliometric and descriptive analysis, as revealed in Figure 2.

Fig. 2 Schematic Plan for Bibliometric and Descriptive Review Map



Source: Author's compilations adopted (Abideen et al., 2020; Vengadesh et al., 2025)

Fig. 3 Country-wise people in homelessness per 100,000 population



Note: Data for the UK include only England and are expressed in households.

Data source: OECD, 2024

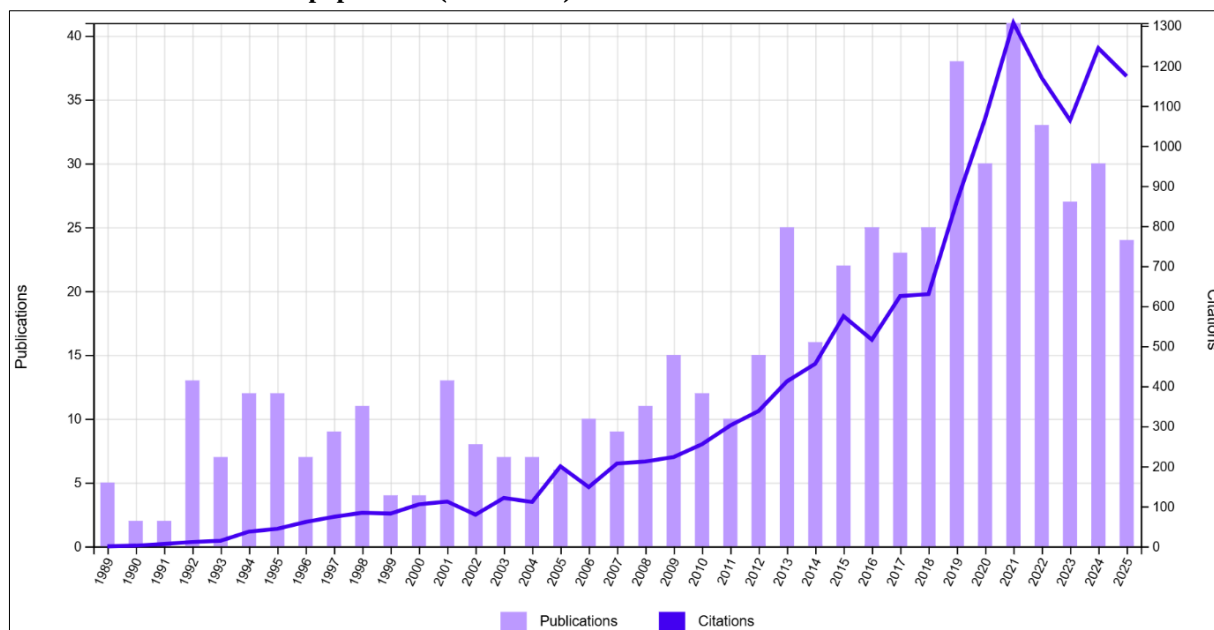
The population experiencing homelessness at a single point in time, per 100,000 people. Data are collected by counting people living on the street or staying in shelters on a single night each year. The United Kingdom (426) had the highest rate of homelessness, followed by France (307), Czechia (284), the United States (193), and others.

Table 1 Document Type (1989-2025)

Document Type	Number of Works	Percentage (%)
Article	514	90.18
Review	36	6.32
Editorial material	13	2.28
Letter	5	0.88
Book chapter	2	0.35
Total	570	100

Document profiles involve recording and analysing a document's characteristics. In this study, 570 documents were retrieved, of which the majority (90.18%) were research articles. The second most common type was review articles (6.32%). Other publication types included editorials (2.28%), letters (0.88%), and book chapters (0.35%). Details on the types of retrieved documents are shown in Table 1.

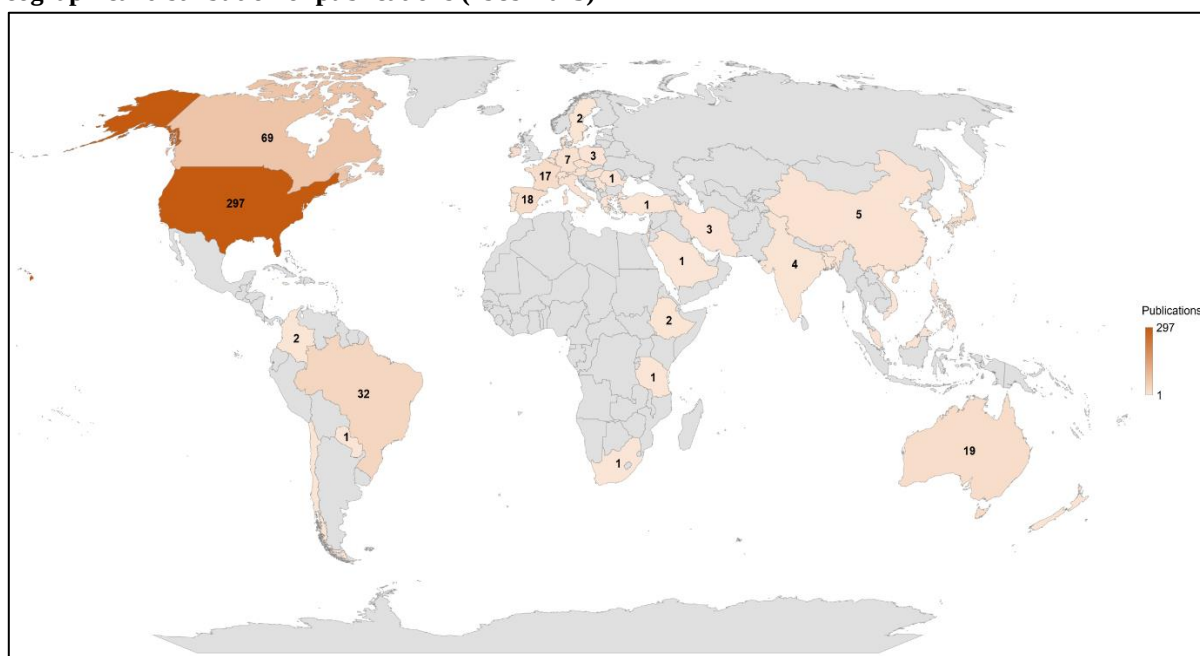
Fig. 4 Research trend of homeless population (1989-2025)



Source: Web of Science database

The temporal analysis (Figure 4) shows that research on the homeless population has grown steadily over time. In the early years (1989–2005), both the number of publications (5-6) and citations (10-200) were low, indicating limited attention. From around 2006 onwards, the number of publications (over 10) increased gradually, indicating growing interest among researchers. After 2015, there was a sharp rise in both publications (more than 25) and citations (more than 550), with citations increasing more rapidly and reaching a peak (1300) around 2021. Although the number of publications has fluctuated slightly in recent years, citation levels remain high. This trend suggests that homelessness has become more established and continues to have a strong impact on research.

Fig. 5 Geographical distribution of publications (1989-2025)



Data Source: Web of Science database

In Figure 5, the map (prepared in MS Excel 2019) shows the number of publications from 49 countries, grouped into five distinct categories, each coloured differently. With a sum of 570 documents, the USA came out on top, followed by Canada (69), England (64), Brazil (32), and Australia (19). The grey colour on the map indicates that there were no publications on the homeless population in those countries or regions in the WoS database.

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Table 2 Web of Science Index (1989-2025)

Web of Science Index	Publication	Percentage (%)
Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)	372	65.26
Science Citation Index (SCI)	191	33.51
Index to Scientific & Technical Proceedings (ISTP)	3	0.53
Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI)	2	0.35
Business Health Culture Index (BHCI)	2	0.35
Total	570	100

"Indexed in Web of Science" indicates that a journal, book, or proceeding has undergone editorial review and is listed in this comprehensive global database (Eugene et al., 2000). It is considered for tracking academic impact, conducting literature searches, and evaluating research (Web of Science; an overview - IAES, 2024). Table 2 reveals that most publications are indexed in SSCI, accounting for about 65.26% (372 papers), indicating a strong focus on social science research. The SCI is the second-largest category, accounting for 33.51% (191 papers), and it demonstrates a significant contribution from scientific studies. The remaining indexes, ISTP, AHCI, and BHCI, contribute only a very small share (each below 1%). There is limited representation in conference proceedings, arts and humanities, and business or health-related fields. Overall, the dataset is heavily dominated by social science publications.

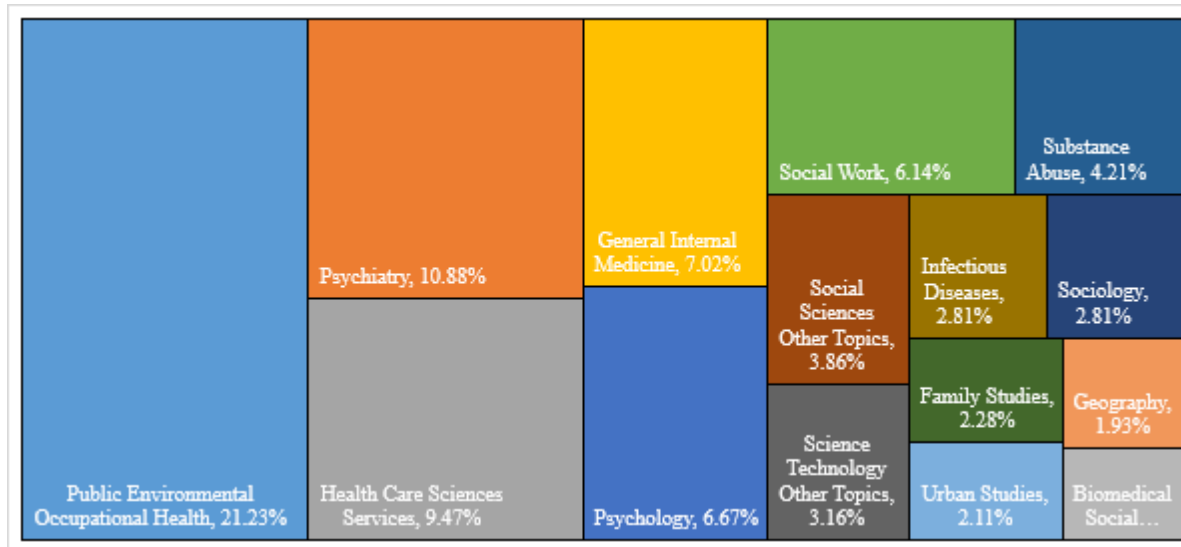
Table 3 Top ten cited authors with publication titles (1989-2025)

Title	Authors	Total Number of Citations	Average Number of Citations Per Year
The Economic Burden of Schizophrenia in the United States in 2002	Wu et al. (2005)	415	18.86
Mortality in a Cohort of Homeless Adults in Philadelphia	Hibbs et al. (1994)	295	8.94
Homelessness as an Independent Risk Factor for Mortality: Results from a Retrospective Cohort Study	Morrison and David S (2009)	284	15.78
The New Homelessness Revisited	Lee et al. (2010)	267	15.71
HIV And Tuberculosis Infection in San Francisco's Homeless Adults - Prevalence and Risk Factors in a Representative Sample	Zolopa et al. (1994)	200	6.06
Geriatric Syndromes in Older Homeless Adults	Brown et al. (2012)	184	12.27
Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-In-Hand: Pathways to Homelessness Among Women Veterans	Hamilton et al. (2011)	159	9.94
The Age Structure of Contemporary Homelessness: Evidence and Implications for Public Policy	Culhane et al. (2013)	153	10.93
Prevalence and Risk of Homelessness Among Us Veterans	Fargo et al. (2012)	143	9.53
Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis: The Case of Public Exposure to Homelessness	Lee et al. (2004)	143	6.22

In Table 3, the most-cited authors are listed with their publication titles. Wu et al. (2005) have the most citations, with the publication titled "The Economic Burden of Schizophrenia in the United States in 2002" associated with health outcomes among homeless people (415), followed by Hibbs et al. (295) and their work "Mortality in a Cohort of Homeless Adults in Philadelphia" reveals demographic risk factors of homeless adults. The study of Morrison and David S. (2009) (284) "Homelessness as an Independent Risk Factor for Mortality: Results from a Retrospective Cohort Study" was a deep research on the life-threatening factors of mortality in homeless people.

So, these all indicate that the publications are mostly regional, issue-oriented publications for homeless individuals.

Fig. 6 Top 15 research areas on the homeless population (1989-2025)



The tree map (Figure 6) refers to the Public Environmental Occupational Health category, which has the highest share of publications on the homeless population (21.23%). This branch deals with public health, basically physical health, disability and also Biological hazards among people who are roofless. Psychiatry is second (10.88%), and Health Care Sciences Services is third (9.47%). The overall map shows that health-related publications on the homeless population exceed those in other research areas.

Table 4 Top 20 universities with the highest number of publications (1989-2025)

Serial Number	Name of University	Number of Publications
1	University of California System	41
2	University of Toronto	30
3	University of Pennsylvania	22
4	University of Texas System	20
5	Washington University	20
6	University of California, Los Angeles	19
7	Saint Michael's Hospital, Toronto	15
8	University of California, San Francisco	15
9	University of London	15
10	Harvard University	14
11	University of Texas Southwestern Medical Centre	14
12	Yale University	14
13	State University System of Florida	13
14	University of Alabama System	13
15	David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA	12
16	University of California, Los Angeles Medical Centre	12
17	Fundação Oswaldo Cruz	10
18	Pennsylvania Commonwealth System of Higher Education Pcshe	10
19	Universidade De Sao Paulo	10
20	University of British Columbia	10

The top 20 universities by publication count are shown in Table 4. The University of California System has published the most publications on the homeless population (41), followed by the University of Toronto (30) and the University of Pennsylvania (22). That signifies these universities were very concerned about this issue on the WoS platform.

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Table 5 Top 10 publishers (1989-2025)

Serial Number	Publishers	Number of Publications
1	Springer Nature	84
2	Elsevier	61
3	Taylor & Francis	47
4	Sage	46
5	Wiley	43
6	Oxford University Press	26
7	Lippincott Williams & Wilkins	17
8	Public Library Science	15
9	American Public Health Association	13
10	Frontiers Media Sa	13

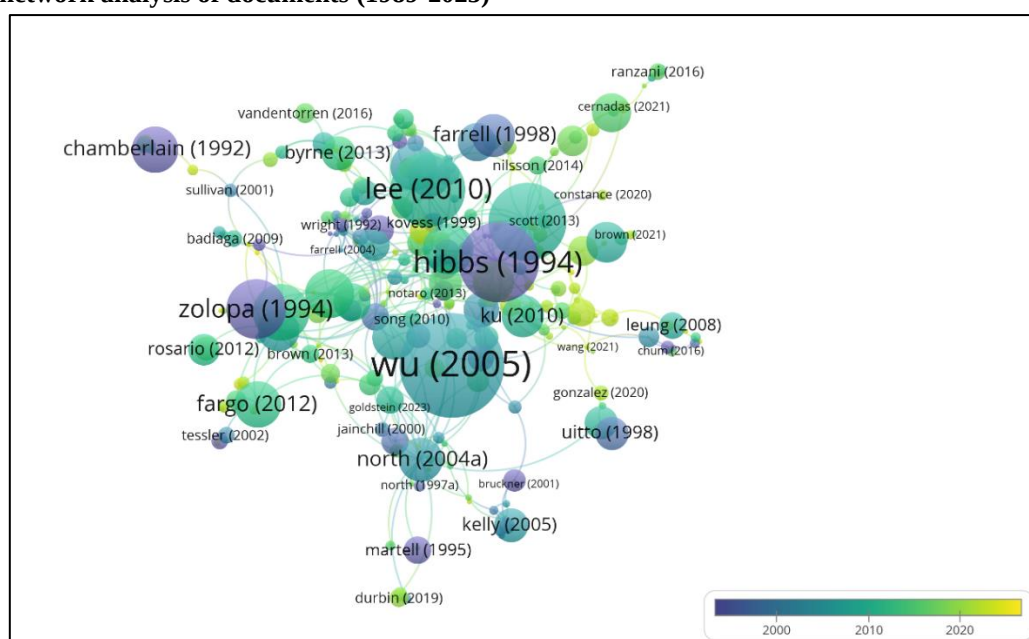
In Table 5, Springer Nature has published the most documents on the homeless population (84), followed by Elsevier (61). The other publishers have fewer than 50 documents.

Table 6 VOSVIEWER - “Type and Unit of Analysis.”

Type of Analysis	Unit of Analysis	Criteria Applied
Citation	Documents	Minimum No. of Citations of a Document = 570/434 Documents
Citation	Sources	Minimum No. of Documents of a Source = 285/23 Sources
Co-citation	Cited authors	Minimum No. of Citations of an author = 12071/58 authors
Co-occurrence	Author keywords	Minimum No. of Occurrences of a Keyword = 1060/39 keywords

In Table 6, the configuration of the bibliometric analysis conducted in VOSviewer specifies the types and units of analysis, as well as the inclusion criteria. In the citation analysis at the document level, only documents with at least 570 citations were considered, resulting in 434 documents and indicating a focus on highly influential publications. At the source level, citation analysis included journals with at least 285 documents, reduced the dataset to 23 prominent sources, and highlighted the most productive journals in the field. For co-citation analysis, cited authors were selected based on a minimum threshold of 12071 citations, which generated 58 key authors who are often cited together and represent major intellectual contributors. In the co-occurrence analysis, keywords were included only if they appeared at least 1060 times, resulting in 39 keywords that reflect the most dominant research themes. Overall, the application of these high thresholds suggests that the analysis emphasises the most significant and impactful elements within the dataset, ensuring clarity and relevance while potentially excluding less prominent contributions.

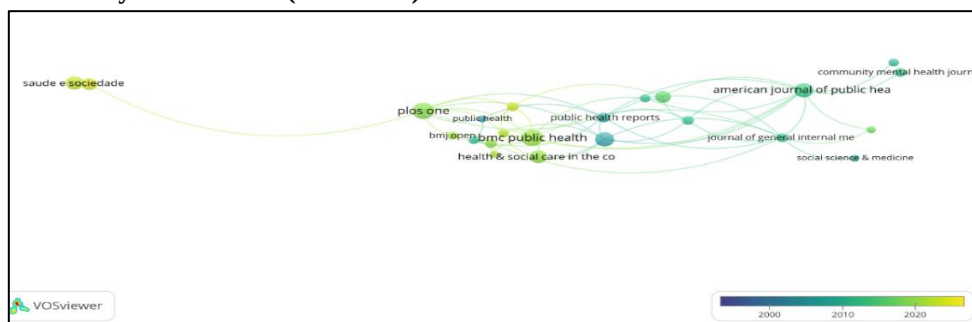
Fig. 7 Citation network analysis of documents (1989-2025)



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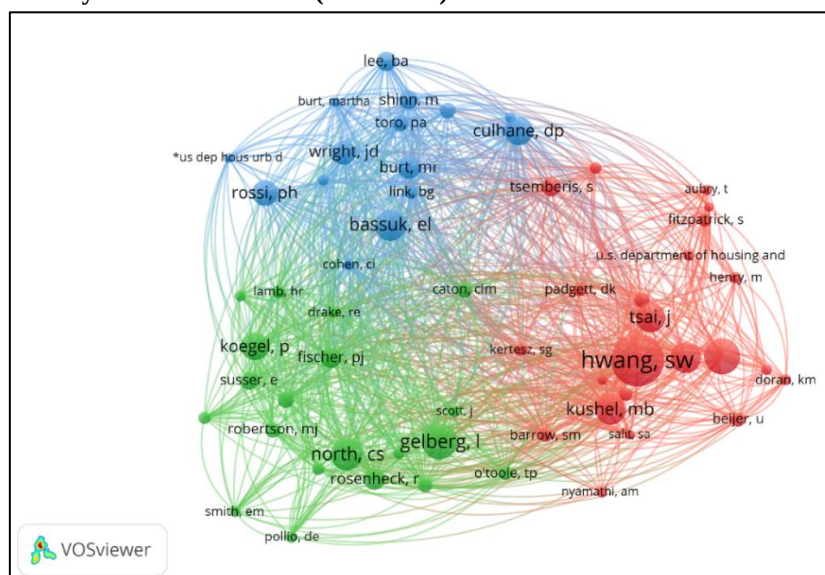
The citation network of documents (Figure 7) reveals the intellectual structure and evolution of the research field by highlighting the most influential works and their interconnections (Vengadesh et al., 2025). The size of nodes indicates each document's citation impact, with larger nodes such as Wu (2005), Hibbs (1994), and Lee (2010) representing highly cited, influential studies that have shaped research on the homeless population. The connecting links depict citation relationships, illustrating how later research builds upon earlier key works. The network is densely connected, reflecting a well-integrated discipline with strong knowledge exchanges among major publications. The colour gradient from blue and purple (older) to green and yellow (more recent) shows the field's chronological development. Foundational studies such as Hibbs (1994) and Zolopa (1994) form the early core, while works such as Wu (2005) and Lee (2010) serve as important bridges. Recent studies in green and yellow cluster around the core, indicating the ongoing influence of earlier key works. Overall, the network reveals a vibrant evolution from foundational research to current developments, with several key documents influencing the research direction and ongoing development

Fig. 8 Citation network analysis of sources (1989-2025)



In Figure 8, a citation network of sources (journals) highlights relationships among the most influential journals in the dataset based on citation links. Node sizes indicate each journal's citation impact, while connecting lines show citation relationships. The colour gradient reflects the average publication year (Vengadesh et al., 2025). The network centres on key journals such as BMC Public Health, PLOS ONE, and Public Health Reports, which are represented as larger, more connected nodes. These highlight their significant influence and central role in disseminating research on the homeless population. These journals are closely connected to others, such as the American Journal of Public Health and the Journal of General Internal Medicine, with strong citation relationships and shared academic interests. The map also displays a temporal pattern; darker shades show earlier contributions, while lighter green and yellow tones represent more recent activity. For example, journals like Social Science & Medicine and Community Mental Health Journal appear more recent. They reflect shifting research interests and growing interdisciplinary engagement. Additionally, Saúde e Sociedade is more isolated on the left, suggesting weaker citation links to the core group. So, the overall network visualisation reveals a core-periphery structure, with a central cluster of highly interconnected, influential public health journals dominating the field. A few peripheral journals contribute more selectively, illustrating both concentration and diversification in scholarly communication.

Fig. 9 Co-citation network analysis of cited authors (1989-2025)



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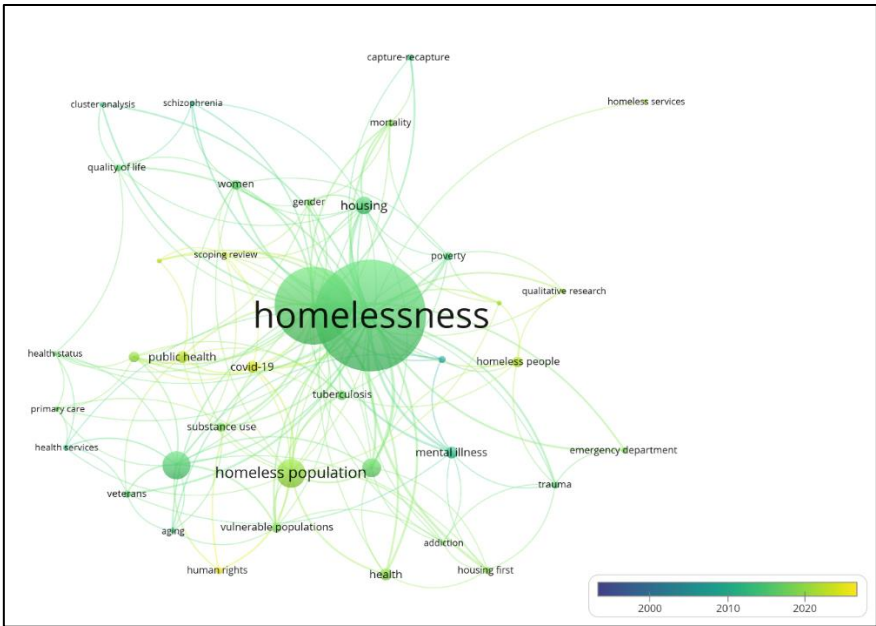
The co-citation network of cited authors (Figure 9) illustrates the field's core structure by grouping frequently co-cited authors into distinct clusters, each representing shared research themes and theoretical perspectives. The network's dense connectivity indicates strong relationships among researchers and a robust knowledge base (Vengadesh et al., 2025). Key authors such as Hwang, SW, Gelberg, L, Koegel, P, Bassuk, EL, and Culhane, DP appear as prominent nodes, reflecting their high co-citation rates and influential roles. The visualization displays three main clusters, which are the red cluster, led by Hwang, SW and Tsai, J, focuses on homelessness, health outcomes, and social services; the green cluster, with Gelberg, L, Koegel, P, and North, CS, centres on vulnerability, mental health, and service access for marginalised groups; and the blue cluster, including Bassuk, EL, Culhane, DP, and Rossi, PH, emphasises foundational and policy research related to housing systems and structural factors. The strong connections between clusters demonstrate interdisciplinary integration, with various thematic areas overlapping and informing each other. Overall, the network underscores a few highly influential authors at its core, surrounded by interconnected groups of researchers, that highlight the depth and coherence of research on the homeless population.

Table 7 Citation Metrics (1989-2025)

Papers	570
Citations	14230
Cites per year	384.59
Cites per paper	24.96
Cites per author	4924.39
Papers per author	210.23
Authors per paper	4.2
h-index	57
g-index	89
hI, norm	31
hI, annual	0.84
hA-index	11

The citation metrics are summarised in Table 7 above. A total of 570 documents on “Homeless Population” were published between 1989 and 2025 (36 years) and retrieved from the WoS database. A total of 14230 citations were recorded for these publications. The publication “The Economic Burden of Schizophrenia in the United States in 2002” by Wu et al. (2005) received the highest number of citations (415), with an average of 18.86 per year.

Fig. 10 Co-occurrence network analysis of author keywords (1989-2025)



The author keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 10) shows that “homelessness” is the dominant and most influential research theme, occupying the central position with the largest node and the highest number of connections to other keywords (Vengadesh

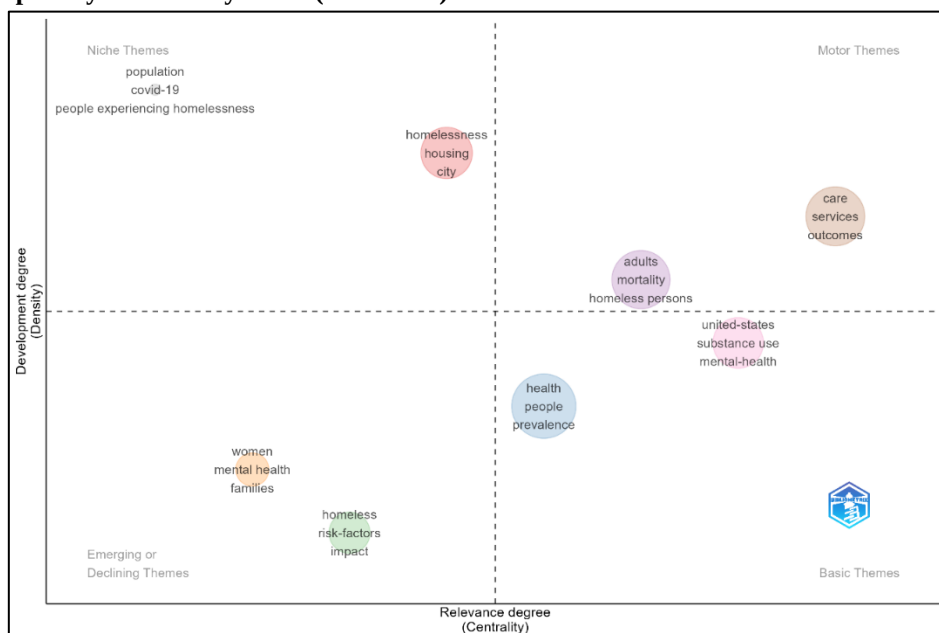
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et al., 2025). The network demonstrates that homelessness is strongly associated with a wide range of interconnected topics, including “housing,” “public health,” “homeless population,” “mental illness,” “poverty,” “substance use,” “health services,” and “vulnerable populations”. The dense web of links surrounding the central node suggests that homelessness is studied as a multidimensional issue that intersects with health, social welfare, and economic conditions rather than as an isolated phenomenon. The overlay colours indicate the temporal evolution of research themes, with darker blue-green nodes representing earlier topics and yellow-green nodes reflecting more recent areas of interest. Traditional themes such as “mental illness,” “health services,” “primary care,” and “quality of life” appear to form the foundational body of research, emphasising the health and psychosocial challenges faced by homeless populations. More recent keywords, including “COVID- 19,” “human rights,” “vulnerable populations,” “qualitative research,” and “homelessness services,” suggest a growing scholarly focus on structural inequalities, rights-based approaches, and the impacts of public health crises on homeless communities. Several thematic clusters can be identified within the network. One cluster links “housing,” “poverty,” “gender,” “women,” and “mortality”, highlighting research on housing insecurity and demographic vulnerabilities. Another cluster connects “mental illness,” “addiction,” “trauma,” “emergency department” use, and health, reflecting studies that examine the relationship between homelessness and adverse health outcomes. A public health- oriented cluster includes “public health,” “tuberculosis,” “COVID- 19,” “primary care,” and “health services”, indicating concerns about disease burden, healthcare access, and population “health management” among homeless individuals. The presence of keywords such as “housing first” and homelessness services " also reflects increasing interest in intervention strategies and policy responses. The complete network visualisation shows that most publications retrieved from WoS are associated with health-related outcomes. Policy- related themes are absent from the selected literature in the Web of Science database.

THEMATIC MAP ANALYSIS

The thematic map (Figure 11) presents the most significant and relevant research on the homeless population over time, showing how the field has evolved across all keywords. In this analysis, density (development degree) is shown on the y-axis and centrality (relevance degree) on the x-axis. Together, these dimensions indicate which topics are well-developed, influential, emerging, or marginal within the field (Sharma et al., 2025). Thematic evolution was analysed using the Biblioshiny package in R. A threshold of 8 clusters and 500 words was set for the all-keywords section. The analysis covered the period from 1989 to 2025 (36 years).

Fig. 11 Thematic map analysis of all keywords (1989-2025)



Themes are categorised into four quadrants based on their density and centrality. Each bubble on the map represents a specific theme. The upper-right quadrant highlights the most important and commonly addressed motor themes in the discipline. The lower-right quadrant features significant but underdeveloped themes. Niche themes, which focus on specialised topics, are positioned in the upper-left quadrant, while emerging themes- those that are still weakly developed but increasing in importance are located in the lower-left quadrant. The lower-right quadrant also includes basic themes that cover essential concepts (Sharma et al., 2025).

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In the Motor Themes quadrant (upper-right), the cluster with “care,” “services,” and “outcomes” stands out as a key motor theme, highlighting that recent homelessness research is increasingly centred on healthcare access, social support systems, and intervention effectiveness. Similarly, the cluster around “adults,” “mortality,” and “homeless persons” indicates a growing academic focus on the health risks and mortality rates among homeless populations. These themes are well-developed and influential, guiding the overall direction of homelessness research.

The Basic Themes quadrant (lower-right) features core topics that are less elaborated. Keywords like “mental health,” “substance use,” “United States,” “health,” “people,” and “prevalence” highlight fundamental aspects of homelessness research. While these themes are commonly associated with the field, they still need further theoretical or methodological development. Their inclusion shows that homelessness studies often intersect with public health, addiction, and mental health concerns, particularly within urban American settings.

In the Niche Themes quadrant (upper-left), these are well developed internally but less connected to the core study of the homeless population. The cluster, including “population,” “COVID-19,” and “people experiencing homelessness”, signifies specialised research that gained prominence during the pandemic. Another niche group centred on “housing,” “city,” and “homelessness” highlights focused urban and housing policy studies. While these themes are advanced, they remain somewhat isolated from the broader body of homelessness research.

Lastly, the Emerging or Declining Themes quadrant (lower-left) features topics like “women,” “families,” “mental health,” “homelessness,” “risk factors,” and “impact.” These may be emerging fields or older topics that are losing researchers' interest. Their lower density and centrality imply they are not yet fully integrated into the main research trends. Nonetheless, themes related to women and families could indicate a growing recognition of the gendered and familial aspects of homelessness that merit further investigation.

Overall, the thematic map demonstrates that homelessness research is becoming more focused on public health, healthcare services, mortality, and social outcomes. Meanwhile, topics such as “COVID-19,” “urban housing,” “women,” “families,” and “risk factors” are emerging areas in the literature. However, there remains a noticeable gap in studies addressing laws, policies, and schemes targeting homeless populations.

CONCLUSION

The growing number of homeless people, i.e., 318 million (The UN-Habitat Annual Report 2024), raises questions about the basic requirements (i.e. food, clothing, and shelter or habitat) of a human being in society. This large number reflects state policy failures, rapid urbanisation, natural hazards (cyclones, tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, landslides, etc.), mental or psychological disorders, physical disability, illness, substance abuse, and spiritual perceptions are the major factors that led people to become homeless worldwide. In this paper, 570 documents were retrieved from the Web of Science database (1989-2025) using bibliometric analysis. The majority of documents were research articles (514). Trend analysis showed an increase in publications on homeless populations, from 5 in 1989 to more than 500 in 2025, indicating the topic's growing significance. Western countries, such as the USA, Canada, Brazil, and England, have significantly more publications than countries, such as South Africa, Qatar, India, Bangladesh, and China; there is a visible country-wise publication disparity in this field. The most productive institute in this research area was the University of California system, with 41 publications, while the most productive author was Wu et al. (2005), whose publication, “The Economic Burden of Schizophrenia in the United States in 2002”, received the highest number of citations (415). The 570 publications received a total of 14230 citations over 36 years, indicating the vitality of the study. The network map of author keywords shows that most WoS-retrieved publications are associated with health-related outcomes rather than with inclusive housing policies, rehabilitation and laws. The thematic map also demonstrates that homelessness research is increasingly driven by public health, healthcare services, mortality, and social outcomes, while issues related to COVID- 19, urban housing, women, families, and risk factors occupy more specialised and developing positions within the literature. However, there is a lack of studies on laws, policies, and schemes for the homeless population. Although research on the homeless population has increased, its growth has been slow over the 36-year period reviewed. Most publications focus on health-related issues like health vulnerabilities and substance use, but there is a lack of studies on governance failures, gender aspects, and policy responses. Therefore, this paper urges researchers to examine gender dimensions of homelessness, assess the government's role and policy structures, and analyse how current policies affect the livelihood of homeless people. Studies should also link the issue of homelessness with UN Sustainable Development Goal 11.1, which seeks to provide all people with safe, affordable housing and basic amenities, and to improve slum conditions by 2030.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The first author made substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work, or to the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data. Both authors drafted the work or revised it critically for important intellectual content. The second author

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approved the version for publication. Both authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

The authors declare that this study adheres to ethical standards and principles. They confirm that this paper has not been published before, is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and has no other simultaneous submissions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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