

Speaking for the Unheard

A Scientometric Examination of the Marginalisation of LGBTQ+ Scholarship Issues in the Global South

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This study investigates the impact of restrictive environments on LGBTQ+ scholarship in the Global South, focusing on publication patterns, research themes and the role of international collaboration in enhancing research visibility. Analysis was conducted on data from 57 countries over a 30-year period (1993–2023) from Scopus using bibliometric and network analyses to explore the barriers scholars face when addressing LGBTQ+ issues in regions where these topics are socially or politically censored. The findings reveal a steady increase in LGBTQ+ research from the Global South, with a strong focus on identity and health-related themes, while political and legal discussions remain underrepresented. Collaborations with Global North scholars significantly boost visibility and citation impact, although issues of equitable power sharing within these collaborations persist. The study concludes that international partnerships, while crucial in amplifying marginalised voices, must ensure equitable contributions from scholars in the Global South to promote a more inclusive and balanced body of knowledge.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ scholarship, Global South, scientometrics, cultural taboos, publication disparities

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Introduction

Internationalisation is a goal that is actively pursued in academic knowledge production (Aguado-López et al., 2016; Demeter et al., 2023). It improves publication performance, visibility and author diversity (Abramo et al., 2009; Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018), it is also proven to be beneficial for the amelioration of research visibility with particular attention to Global North and Global South collaborations as they are able to co-generate results on similar topics from vastly different perspectives (Payumo et al., 2021), even enhancing innovation by building and combining local knowledge (Stek & Van Geenhuizen, 2016). However, it is crucial to emphasise that internationalisation in research is usually understood as the globalisation of academic knowledge production in a historically westernised, Eurocentric scholarly space (Demeter et al., 2023) in which the English language is used and accepted as the “lingua franca” almost exclusively (Li & de Costa, 2021). Disparities between academics from various countries have also come to light as a result of internationalisation, especially when it comes to subjects that question political, religious and cultural standards for a variety of structural, economic and frequently social reasons (Hallward, 2008).

These disparities are most evident in the study of LGBTQ+ issues. Here, it is important to conceptualise what is understood and guides the present study under this term. Although a comprehensive conceptual synchronisation would extend the limits of this paper, LGBTQ+ issues can be generally described as a multidimensional (and, from an academic standpoint, a highly transdisciplinary) approach to the LGBTQ+ identity, the challenges and difficulties LGBTQ+ people face, their rights and the advocacy thereof (Lax & Phillips, 2009), their culture (Parmenter et al., 2020), and their experiences (Richards et al., 2017). It is also evident that no uniform definition can be given to the concept. Within the aforementioned highly abstract approach, however, in this particular research endeavour we understand LGBTQ+ identity as not merely an individual attribute but as a socially constructed concept with reference to the *Butlerian* interpretation of gender (Butler, 2004). It is one that is heavily shaped by theoretical frameworks (Nagoshi et al., 2012), historical variability and societal changes concerning *which* issues relate to the “conventional” perspective on LGBTQ+ identities (Janoff, 2022; Wagaman, 2016), cultural perceptions – with particular attention to the conflict between “acceptance” or “normalisation” in heteronormative societies (Mellini, 2009) – and various other aspects, including race, class and environment (Wagaman, 2016; Russell et al., 2023). One key issue in pinning down LGBTQ+ issues in the myriads of interpretations stems from its highly contextual nature, too, which is exceedingly significant in terms of the scope of our research. In short, Global North narratives of LGBTQ+ identity often centre around rights-based frameworks (e.g. related to particular rights in the fields of family law [marriage], criminal law [the de-criminalisation of homosexuals, for instance] or civil law issues), and institutional recognition, not to mention the plethora of activist action throughout the 1960s and onwards. In contrast, Global South perspectives are more deeply entwined with local traditions, religious structures, and socio-political constraints (Moussawi, 2015). The acts and events that transpired in the other hemisphere

have been brutally repressed in the countries of the Global South, sexuality and gender topics remained as strict societal and cultural taboos, and those who have aimed for an activist, liberal interpretation of LGBTQ+ rights and identities have been actively persecuted (cf. Ozbay, 2021). Furthermore, research has also polemicalised the use of Western frameworks for LGBTQ+ identities in the context of the Global South since it can be viewed as a form of neoliberalist activism or neo-colonialism (Radics, 2019; Day, 2023; Abu-Assab & Nasser-Eddin, 2023).

LGBTQ+ issues are complex and both the historical and, unfortunately, current *weltgeist* often assesses them with an attitude lacking inclusiveness and tolerance. Moreover, LGBTQ+ issues are frequently considered “taboo” in many countries and societies due to prevailing social and religious beliefs (Meyer, 2003; Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Moreno et al., 2020). In many regions, especially those dominated by conservative and populist ideologies (Biroli, 2018; Kováts, 2018) or governed by strict religious laws (Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014), topics related to gender equality, sexual orientation and gender identity face significant censorship and academic suppression (Engeli, 2020; Reinhardt, 2023) causing a “chilling effect” in knowledge production signifying the *fear* of repercussions from which self-censorship emerges. This discriminatory environment creates a skewed global landscape; one in which scholarship from the Global North dominates, while research from the Global South and other underrepresented regions remains underproduced, marginalised, or downright invisible, creating a core-periphery nexus (Collyer, 2012; Demeter, 2019, 2020) between those scholars who *can* and those who *cannot* disseminate knowledge on taboos.

The study of LGBTQ+ issues is well-established in Western academia mainly due to the “human rights turn” in LGBTQ+ movements (Kollman & Waites, 2009). Except for a few adverse tendencies, such as in the case of Hungary, which was the first in the European Union to revoke licences for gender studies programmes (Pető, 2021), LGBTQ+ issues are often discussed in education and in Academia, too. The same cannot be said for much of the Global South. Regionally, especially in North Africa, the Middle East, Russia and Southeast Asia, where cultural and religious taboos are strong – either because of those regions’ respective historical dynamics or political background – scholars face social, political and economic barriers that prevent them from freely engaging with these sensitive topics, with a resultant severe limitation on knowledge production about them. Even when such research is conducted, it often remains inaccessible or unpublished due to institutional and governmental restrictions. Rosky (2017) describes the legislative measures serving as the basis for these restrictions as “anti-gay curriculum laws”, signifying the strong hierarchical and structural pressure scholars must oblige that manifests in the evasion of writing and research on certain subjects.

The present research aims to systematically examine the disparities in knowledge production on LGBTQ+ issues, focusing on how a taboo can affect the themes, volume, visibility and impact of scholarly work in underrepresented regions. Using a scientometric approach, this study analyses publication trends, citation patterns and collaboration networks to highlight the systemic barriers that restrict research on these topics in countries where these issues are socially or politically censored.

The study aims to find the answer to the following research questions (RQ) and hypotheses (H):

RQ1: What are the publication performance trends among scholars from countries where LGBTQ+ people are oppressed?

H1: The quantity of publications has grown in recent years, however, there is a significant Matthew effect in terms of visibility – the Matthew effect refers to Robert K. Merton's (1968) foundational theory in the field of science sociology which underlines how academic recognition and resources tend to accumulate among already well-established scholars or institutions, while those with less initial visibility struggle to gain recognition. It has been examined countless times in the field of thematic scientometric papers and serves as an instrumental point in addressing RQ1.

RQ2: What are the key themes of LGBTQ+ research for scholars from countries where such people are oppressed?

H2: Very few, or no themes entailing political or legal questions concerning LGBTQ+ issues in the given region.

RQ3: Can international collaboration with scholars from countries where LGBTQ+ people are oppressed elevate the visibility and gather attention to the issues in their respective countries/regions?

H3: International collaborations, especially with the Global North, highly increase research visibility and citeability.

Given the significant socio-political barriers LGBTQ+ researchers face in the Global South, this study seeks to quantify the extent to which these barriers shape research output and visibility. Furthermore, it examines the role of international collaborations, particularly those involving Global North scholars, in amplifying the reach and impact of LGBTQ+ scholarship. To do so, a robust scientometric approach is employed, allowing for the analysis of publication patterns, citation impact and thematic trends over the past 30 years.

Materials and methods

Setting out the scope

This paper sets out a territorial scope for the examination. Given that the term *Global South* is difficult to define due its vagueness and its opaque characteristics, this study is built on professional and academic reports reviewing the current state of LGTBQ+ issues around the world. Three datasets were used to filter out the countries to be analysed:

1. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) Annual Reports from 2020 to 2024. HRW is one of the most renowned NGOs in the field of human rights protection. The HRW publishes a comprehensive country-based report (World Report) each year where specific attention is paid to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in the respective countries. The HRW has been documented for its accuracy,

- its broad influence, and its significance in advocating for human rights around the world (Steinberg & Herzberg, 2018) making it a trusted and reliable source as the basis of this examination.
2. The Amnesty International database. Established in 1961, Amnesty International (AmI) is one of the most prevalent human rights organisations in the world (Goering, 2006). Clark (2001) notes that the AmI's works and reports play a critical part in the shaping of the reception of human rights defence, as well as in policy-making. AmI has a dedicated database on its website under "Countries" where comprehensive reports are stored about each countries' human rights assessment.
 3. The EQUALDEX database. EQUALDEX is a collaborative, crowdsourced platform that maps the status of LGBTQ+ rights around the world. The platform uses a sophisticated point-based assessment of the state of LGTBQ+ rights and issues in every country around the world based on indices related to equality, legal status and public opinion. This database is one of the most trusted sources concerning the history and the current state of LGBTQ+ issues.

After reviewing the reports, 72 countries were selected. The dataset was then reviewed in Scopus for data accessibility, at which point 15 countries were excluded due to a lack of useable data (irrelevant document types, no documents registered for the respective country, or missing relevant document information such as title, abstract, or metric data). The final dataset consisted of the following countries (N = 57). When selecting the countries for inclusion, we paid particular attention to common themes in the three databases in order to come up with a more or less uniform set of countries that are equally regarded as 1. Global South countries that are 2. indisputably discriminatory against the LGBTQ+ population. It is essential to highlight that we do not claim, in any sense at all, that these countries are the only nations that could be the focus for study of LGBTQ+ identities in the Global South. For example, there were a few countries that were regarded ambiguously by the three separate databases, however, future research should very much focus on resolving these, for instance, South Africa was not included in the dataset because its evaluation differed severely. EQUALDEX gave South Africa an extremely generous score: an equality index of 71, a legal index of 81 and a public opinion index of 51. In comparison, the United Kingdom had been given an equality index of 72, a legal index of 83 and a public opinion index of 60; similar scores despite evidently different approaches to LGBTQ+ issues as underlined in both the HRW and AmI databases where South Africa has been noted for rising controversies and even physical attacks based on sexual biases which would have qualified it for inclusion. We also opted to exclude Latin American and Caribbean countries as the databases conferred vastly differing opinions and reports on these countries. For instance, EQUALDEX seemed to give the countries in these regions extremely low scores (except for Brazil), while the HRW and AmI databases were fundamentally more positive in general, despite mentioning substantial concerns in the region. Future agenda could focus on these particular regions, however, as all three databases highlighted systemic problems, especially with regard to the lack of legal protection and recognition despite some progressive efforts having been made. Lastly, certain countries, such as Niger, were excluded not on the basis of their eligibility but on the total absence of any research on it in Scopus.

The inclusion of most African and Middle Eastern countries stems from the radical provisions set forth against LGBTQ+ people often prohibiting same-sex relations or in even more extreme cases criminalising it with drastic punishment such as imprisonment (cf. Zambia and Tanzania). Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia were selected based on the conservative religious environment and the targeting of LGBTQ+ people through harassment and threats, as well as aggressively stepping up against LGBTQ+ advocacy through governmental measures and police forces. China has been included as all the reports and databases indicated a rapid and drastic decline in LGBTQ+ rights. HRW, for instance, reported that “LGBT people and rights activists have experienced increased harassment and censorship” (HRW, 2024), and that there has been a systemic and forced shutting down of LGBTQ+ advocacy and help centres. Although Russia and Turkey are sometimes categorised as developed countries and as parts of the Global North (Repinskiy, 2020; Gençay et al., 2019), their status is still debated. In relation to LGBTQ+ issues, however, it is evidently clear that neither of the two countries exhibit any characteristics that are present in the majority of the countries in the Global North. For decades, Russia has been highlighted as a country with deeply homophobic legislative measures (Wilkinson, 2014), with atrocities against the LGBTQ+ community happening frequently and manifesting in torture, physical and emotional violence and the framing of non-heterosexuality as a threat (Khlusova, 2017; Scicchitano, 2019). Lastly, Turkey (Türkiye) has been included because of the increasingly hostile environment there in recent years, especially under the regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who in May 2023 said explicitly that “LGBT is a poison injected into the institution of the family. It is not possible for us to accept that poison especially in a country where 99% of its people are Muslims” (AmI Report, 2023). Sansal (2021) also underlines that LGBTQ+ people face extreme discrimination and violence in the country, and despite there being no explicitly anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, members of the community do not have adequate legal protection, which makes them extremely vulnerable and marginalised as a group (Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016) (Table 1).

Table 1:
List of countries examined

N	Africa	Middle East and Asia	Europe	Oceania
1	Nigeria	China	Russian Federation	Papua New Guinea
2	Ghana		Turkey	
3	Kenya	Malaysia		
4	Zimbabwe	Indonesia		
5	Uganda	Pakistan		
6	Egypt	Iran		
7	Tanzania	Bangladesh		
8	Ethiopia	Lebanon		
9	Cameroon	United Arab Emirates		
10	Morocco	Saudi Arabia		
11	Malawi	Sri Lanka		

N	Africa	Middle East and Asia	Europe	Oceania
12	Tunisia	Jordan		
13	Botswana	Qatar		
14	Senegal	Kuwait		
15	Rwanda	Oman		
16	Zambia	Palestine		
17	Namibia	Myanmar		
18	Swaziland	Afghanistan		
19	Cote d'Ivoire	Brunei Darussalam		
20	Democratic Republic of Congo			
21	Lesotho			
22	Benin			
23	Burkina Faso			
24	Mali			
25	Togo			
26	Algeria			
27	Burundi			
28	Liberia			
29	Sierra Leone			
30	South Sudan			
31	Congo			
32	Eritrea			
33	Gambia			
34	Gabon			
35	Mozambique			
36	Mauritania			

Source: Compiled by the author based on HRW, AmI and EQUALDEX reports.

Data collection

Data was extracted from the Scopus database, which was selected for its extensive international coverage, robust metadata, and its inclusion of both high-impact and regional journals. Data were collected from a 30-year period (1993–2023). This period was chosen for three reasons: firstly, from a bibliometric standpoint, the mid-1990s and 2000s marked significant increases in the indexing of metadata that can be used for scientometric endeavours, mainly due to the technological advancements that commenced in this period (Thelwall, 2008). Second, from a more topical perspective, the 1990s marked one of the most progressive decades with regard to the “human rights turn” concerning LGBTQ+ rights and issues – including among other matters, the adoption of more inclusive language in certain political and governmental environments, the transnational network widenings of LGBTQ+ activism that has resulted in “cross-border progress”

in advocacy and policy-making in certain parts of the Global South (Swiebel, 2009; Kollman & Waites, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Kelland (2018) also underlines this period as critical in institutionalising LGBTQ+ activism. 1993 was also a symbolic year as the starting point for our investigation, the year in which the now seemingly enigmatic Vienna World Conference on Human Rights was organised and held by the United Nations, and where “organizations of lesbian women and gay men” were accredited for the first time in history (Sanders, 1996). Thirdly, in thematic scientometric research, periods reviewing three decades are often employed to present results on trends and the evolution of themes (see Smith, 2009; Hanafizadeh & Marjaie, 2020; Wu & Ren, 2019; Raj & Sahoo, 2024).

A highly specific search query was crafted to extract publications focusing on LGBTQ+ issues from underrepresented regions. The search string was developed using key terms related to LGBTQ+ topics. This keyword list was chosen based on existing literature and ongoing global discourse on gender and sexuality issues. Additionally, the search was limited to the above listed countries, and the search string to documents falling under the “Social Sciences” category. The search string used in Scopus is as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(“LGBTQ” OR “LGBTQ+” OR “LGBTQA” OR “LGBT” OR “sexual orientation” OR “gender identity” OR “transgender” OR “trans rights” OR “gay rights” OR “homosexuality” OR “queer” OR “gender studies” OR “same-sex marriage” OR “queer studies” OR “gender nonconformity” OR “bisexuality” OR “intersex”) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “SOCI”)).

The findings then were limited to the examined 57 countries. The search resulted in an initial dataset of 2,511 publications. These records were subjected to a rigorous screening process based on the following criteria:

- Document type: Selection of journal articles and book chapters, excluding other types of documents.
- Duplication: Duplicate records were removed to ensure that each publication appears only once in the final dataset.
- Topic relevance: Publications that did not explicitly address LGBTQ+ issues in their title, abstract, or keywords or were not geographically relevant were filtered out. This stage was particularly important for ensuring the relevance of the dataset to the core themes of this study.

Table 2:
Analysed dataset of publications

Step	Records remaining	Records removed
Initial dataset	2,511	0
After document type removal	2,243	268
After duplication removal	2,243	0
After relevance and geographic relevance check	1,105	1,138
Final dataset	N = 1,105	

Source: Compiled by the author.

Data analysis

The analysis is divided into interconnected components: publication trends, citation analysis, topic modelling and collaboration networks.

Bibliometric analysis (BA):

Publication trends, citation impact, and global visibility (RQ1 and H1)

To address the first research question a temporal bibliometric analysis (BA) was conducted, using the metadata of Scopus, charting the yearly distribution of publications across the dataset. The objective of the BA was to reveal how research output on LGBTQ+ issues has evolved over time in countries where such topics are culturally restricted. Publication counts were calculated per year, and these trends were analysed across the selected countries. It was intended to reveal whether there has been an increase in research production over time and the interest of scholars in restrictive environments concerning LGTBQ+ topics.

Topic modelling:

Thematic analysis (RQ2 and H2)

The latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) technique was employed to perform a thematic analysis of the dataset, focusing on revealing the key research themes in LGBTQ+ scholarship across the selected regions. The objective of the LDA was to determine the dominant topics within LGBTQ+ research in the dataset, and to explore how these topics differ from one another. The thematic analysis was expected to show that certain topics – such as gender identity or LGBTQ+ rights – are significantly underrepresented in more culturally restrictive countries compared to others.

Collaboration network analysis (CNA) (RQ3 and H3)

To investigate the role of collaborations in facilitating the visibility of scholars from restricted regions, this study conducts an in-depth co-authorship network analysis. The CNA serves as a means to investigate whether scholars from restrictive environments collaborate with international researchers and how these collaborations influence the visibility and impact of their research. Co-authorship data was extracted from Scopus, and a collaboration network was constructed using VOSviewer. This tool visualises co-authorship links and collaboration intensity between scholars from different countries. The analysis was conducted based on the relatedness of countries extracted from the affiliations of the scholars in the database, where co-authored documents with more than 10 countries represented were excluded. The minimum number of documents and citations of a country were both set to 1. After manually clearing the data, 94 countries

were identified, the largest set of connections consisted of 92 countries. The key topics based on keyword were also analysed through co-occurrence analysis (KCA). The KCA was conducted on the criteria that the minimum number of keyword occurrence was set to 5. This combined analysis is aimed to reveal whether scholars from culturally restricted regions benefit from collaborations with scholars from the Global North or whether they remain isolated within regional publication circuits.

If not indicated otherwise, visualisations were made via Python's matplotlib and VOSviewer.

Preliminary limitations and justification of certain data collection actions

First of all, it is imperative to highlight that the use of Scopus as the exclusive data source may not comprehensively convey all the research published on LGBTQ+ issues in the examined countries. Scopus is known for its “discriminatory” nature with regard to journals that are published in non-English language countries (Demeter, 2020; Alonso-Álvarez, 2024). Thus, while the exclusive focus on papers published in indexed journals does deliver substantial results, it does not present the full research landscape. It is also critical to outline a specific case in terms of data analysis and the outlining of the results: the inclusion rather than the separation of Chinese research. As seen in Figure 2 below, China's dominance in this particular research segment aligns with the country's overwhelming growth in contribution to Scopus-indexed articles. Elango (2018) mentions that China registered the highest growth in scientific publications among the most productive countries between 1996 and 2015, and the country is widely accepted as the second in the world after the United States in academic knowledge production. This growth, albeit much more conservative, can be seen in the field of social sciences as well (Liu et al., 2021; Elango, 2018). From a strictly quantitative standpoint, it would be rational to claim that China's inclusion in the data analysis could distort results. However, as the paper is built on a more complex scientometric analysis, the country's inclusion is justified by a multitude of factors. Firstly, China ranks consistently low in all three databases. Separating China, therefore, could not be validated based on the data collection criteria. Secondly, the political climate in China has been notorious for imposing both soft and hard censorship stipulations on research regarding LGBTQ+ issues (Cui, 2023b). As Cui (2023a) notes, the Chinese research environment is profoundly heteronormative, and queer issues are scarcely discussed because academics fear repercussions. Discourse on LGBTQ+ issues is strictly oppressed in social media, too. The research of Bernot et al. (2024) shows that LGBTQ+ activism is under severe state-sponsored surveillance and censorship on Chinese platforms, while Cui et al. (2022) and Liu (2022) highlighted that accounts discussing LGBTQ+ topics are systematically shut down and silenced. In view of these details, we opted for the non-separation of Chinese contributions, nonetheless, and we understand that it may alter the exclusively quantitative results.

Results

Based on the precise data from the dataset, the analysis of LGBTQ+ research publications from 1993 to 2023 reveals a clear growth trend, with specific years marking notable shifts. The research output began modestly, with only 2 publications in 1993, followed by a dip in the mid-1990s. There were minimal contributions during this period indicating that LGBTQ+ research was significantly limited. The slow growth persisted throughout the decade, culminating in a sharp increase in 2011 with 22 publications.

From 2015 onward, the number of publications showed substantial growth, reaching 61 publications by 2016, nearly twice the quantity of papers compared to the previous year. Between 2018 and 2020, a significant rise is observed, with publications increasing from 67 in 2018 to 116 in 2020, marking a circa 42% increase in just two years. The upward trend continued, with 2023 recording the highest number of publications at 222, indicating an ever-increasing interest in LGBTQ+ issues.

The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for the publications from the earliest year to the most recent year in our dataset is approximately 17%, indicating that the number of publications had been growing steadily at this rate per year over the period analysed (Figure 1).

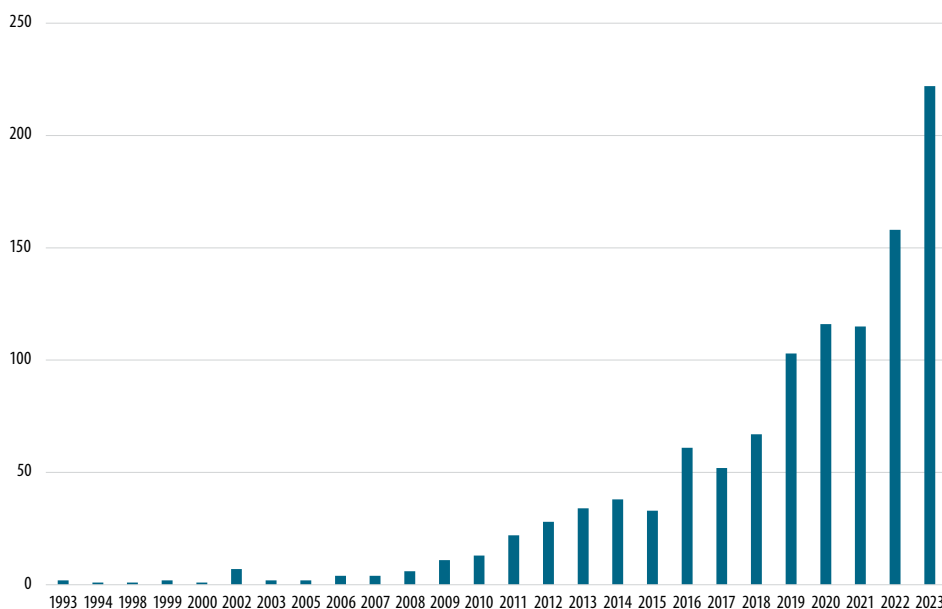


Figure 1:
The growth of LGBTQ+ issues scholarship in underrepresented regions
*between 1993 and 2023 ($R^2 = 0.64$, $p < 0.001^{***}$)*

Source: Compiled by the author based on Scopus data.

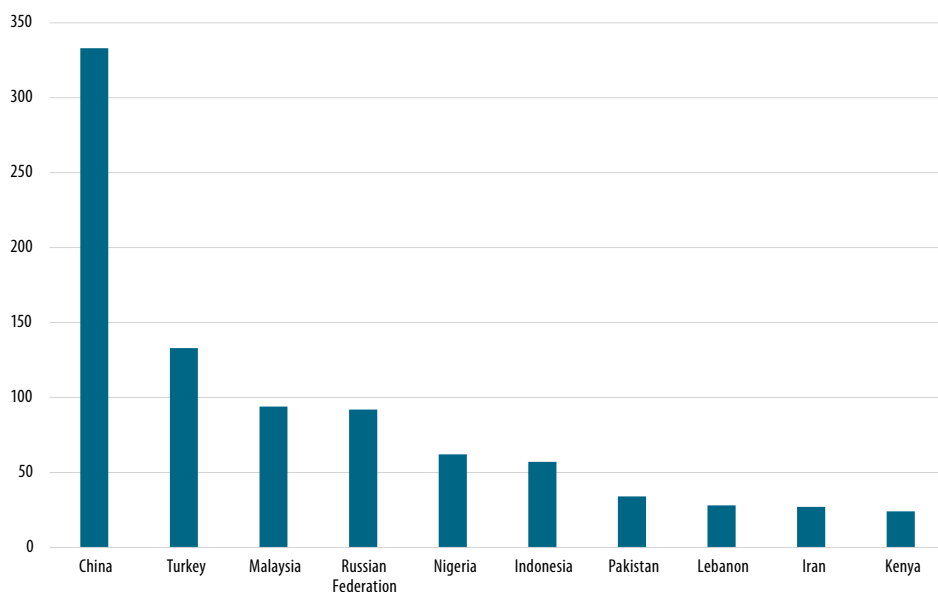


Figure 2:
Distribution of contributions by country between 1993 and 2023
 Source: Compiled by the author based on Scopus data.

According to the country-based distribution analysis, China leads with 333 publications, showing a dominant presence in the field compared to other countries. Turkey follows with 133 publications, almost a third of China's. Malaysia and the Russian Federation have similar contributions, with 94 and 92 publications respectively. The remaining countries, including Nigeria (62), Indonesia (57), Pakistan (34), Lebanon (28), Iran (27) and Kenya (24), show a significantly smaller number of publications. This indicates a wide disparity in publication output among countries and regions where LGBTQ+ people are oppressed, with China contributing the most publications by a large margin. This, however, could also be a result of the fact that China's population, which is approximately 1.408 billion, far surpasses other countries in the analysis. Based on non-correlative, purely illustrative and general population by output rates, Russia's (~ 141 million), Indonesia's (~ 282 million), Pakistan's (~ 252 million) and Nigeria's (~ 237 million) population rank them among the top 10 in both population number and the number of outputs. In this context, Turkey (~ 88 million) and Malaysia (~ 36 million) being in the top 3 most productive nations shows that population is one of the, but certainly not the most important conflating factor in the evaluation of research production on LGBTQ+ issues (Figure 2).

To examine visibility, the citations received for the papers were analysed. Using descriptive statistical analysis, it was revealed that the mean number of citations is 10.52, but this figure is significantly influenced by a small number of highly cited papers, suggesting a skewed distribution. The standard deviation of 34.74 further reflects the substantial variability in citation numbers, indicating that some papers are cited many times while

Table 3:
Descriptive statistical analysis of citations of publications

Metric	Value
Count	1,105
Mean	10.52
Standard deviation	34.74
Minimum	0
25 th percentile	1
Median (50 th percentile)	3
75 th percentile	11
Maximum	1,001

Source: Compiled by the author based on Scopus data.

others receive very few citations. At the lower end of the spectrum, the minimum number of citations is 0, meaning some papers have not been cited at all, a common occurrence in many academic fields. In fact, 25% of the papers have only 1 or fewer citations, as indicated by the 25th percentile. This low citation count highlights the difficulty many papers face in gaining visibility or influence within the academic community. The median citation count is 3, which means that half of the papers have received 3 or fewer citations, illustrating that the majority of papers are cited sparingly. Moving toward the higher end, the 75th percentile indicates that 25% of the papers have garnered more than 11 citations. These more frequently cited papers represent a significant portion of the field's academic influence. Notably, the most cited paper in the dataset has been cited 1,001 times, which is an outlier that contributes heavily to the average but is not representative of the broader trend (Table 3).

Moving on to RQ2, the LDA analysis reveals a diverse range of topics across the corpus, each characterised by a distinct set of top words.

In Topic 1, key terms such as “gender”, “study”, “research” and “sexual” indicate a focus on gender-related research, with a strong emphasis on identity and social constructs. The inclusion of words like “transgender” and “health” further suggests that studies in this topic may explore the intersection between gender identity and healthcare issues, particularly for transgender individuals. The word “individual” reflects a more micro-level analysis, perhaps centring on personal experiences within these social frameworks. Topic 2 is dominated by the term “HIV”, signalling a central concern with health, particularly in relation to sexual behaviour and men who have sex with men (MSM). The recurring appearance of the word “social” suggests that this topic could involve the social dimensions of health, particularly in understanding the dynamics of HIV transmission in marginalised communities. The word “student” may point to studies involving younger populations or educational settings, reflecting research that spans healthcare, behaviour and awareness campaigns among at-risk groups. Topic 3 introduces “queer” and “identity” as prominent terms, indicating a thematic focus on queer theory and the social construction of identity. The word “right” suggests an emphasis on advocacy or legal struggles, which is supported by the presence of “social” and “discourse”, hinting at the exploration of public debates around queer identities. The word “space” could refer to both physical and social spaces

where identity and rights intersect, suggesting research that examines the environments in which LGBTQ+ individuals express their identities. In Topic 4, words like “right”, “human”, “lesbian” and “gay” point to a discussion around human rights, likely focusing on legal or civil issues affecting lesbian and gay populations. The inclusion of “law” further reinforces the idea that this topic explores legal frameworks, potentially examining the implementation of LGBTQ+ rights in various jurisdictions. The presence of “abstract” and “available” may suggest a more academic or theoretical approach, in which researchers discuss the availability of rights or protections for these groups. Topic 5, again, centres around “HIV” and “sex”, but this time with a sharper focus on MSM populations, as indicated by the words “MSM” and “men”. The appearance of numerical markers like “0” and “1” could suggest statistical or clinical research, possibly involving data on infection rates or the effectiveness of preventive measures. The frequent use of the word “use” might point to studies on the usage of health services, such as HIV testing or treatment. Topic 6 shifts towards gender and queer theory, with the term “woman” appearing alongside “queer” and “gender”. This topic seems to be concerned with the representation and social status of women and queer individuals, possibly within media or cultural studies, as suggested by the word “medium”. The presence of “Chinese” and “China” indicates a geographical focus, perhaps exploring LGBTQ+ issues within the Chinese society or culture. Topic 7 explores social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals, with terms like “study”, “LGBT” and “attitude” dominating the topic. The inclusion of “homosexual” and “gay” suggests a specific focus on how societal views shape the experiences of these groups, potentially looking at prejudice, discrimination, or acceptance. The repetition of “individual” reinforces the personal aspect of these studies, suggesting that this research may analyse the impact of societal attitudes on personal identity and well-being. In Topic 8, terms like “attitude”, “woman”, “men” and “sexual” point to a nuanced exploration of gender and sexual attitudes, possibly focusing on the intersections of heterosexuality, homosexuality and gender relations. The frequent use of “lesbian” and “gay” suggests that this topic may examine societal perceptions of these identities, while the word “heterosexual” introduces a comparative element, perhaps exploring heteronormative biases. Topic 9 is heavily focused on social aspects, with terms like “social”, “community” and “medium” suggesting an exploration of social networks, media representations, or community dynamics. The appearance of “transgender” and “health” indicates that this topic might involve healthcare access or the portrayal of transgender individuals within social and media contexts. Finally, Topic 10 delves into identity politics, particularly concerning gay men, as indicated by the words “men”, “gay” and “identity”. The recurring terms “sexual” and “homosexuality” suggest a focus on sexual orientation and its social implications, while words like “article” and “study” point to academic discussions surrounding these issues. Overall, this LDA analysis reveals a rich and diverse set of themes, with strong emphases on healthcare, identity and social justice issues in the LGBTQ+ community, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of research in this domain (Table 4).

The LDA intertopic distance map indicates that Topic 2 and Topic 5 are both large and widely spaced, suggesting that they represent distinct, highly prevalent themes. Given the prominence of terms like HIV and MSM in the salient term chart, it can be assumed that these topics focus on healthcare, particularly around HIV prevention and treatment

Table 4:
The 10 identified topics based on LDA

Topic	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Word 4	Word 5	Word 6	Word 7	Word 8	Word 9	Word 10
1	gender	study	research	sexual	social	individual	health	people	transgender	identity
2	HIV	sexual	health	sex	men	among	social	MSM	student	study
3	queer	gender	identity	right	article	social	study	space	discourse	transgender
4	right	human	lesbian	gay	law	sex	study	article	available	abstract
5	HIV	sex	MSM	men	among	0	1	study	use	sexual
6	woman	medium	gender	social	queer	study	people	group	Chinese	China
7	study	LGBT	attitude	social	people	group	homosexual	individual	gay	homosexuality
8	toward	attitude	study	woman	men	sexual	gender	lesbian	gay	heterosexual
9	social	medium	transgender	community	study	male	health	people	sex	point
10	men	gay	identity	sexual	homosexuality	article	queer	gender	study	right

Source: Compiled by the author based on Scopus data.

among men who have sex with men, reflecting on the significant public health challenges faced by MSM populations, which is a key area of focus in LGBTQ+ research.

Other terms like attitude, gender and social suggest a strong focus on social perceptions and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals. The clustered proximity of Topics 1, 7, 4, 6 and 10 on the distance map indicates overlapping themes, likely revolving around the intersection of gender identity, social dynamics and rights advocacy. Terms like “queer”, “woman”, “right” and “transgender” suggest that these topics are exploring gender identities and rights, possibly in the context of legal battles or social movements for equality. Topic 9 is isolated and relatively small, indicating a more *niche* theme. Given the presence of terms like identity and risk in the salient terms, this topic might address mental health, identity formation, or the psychosocial risks faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in specific contexts. The overall salience of terms like study, student and research also hints at a considerable amount of academic research focusing on LGBTQ+ issues in educational settings, perhaps examining the attitudes of students or the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in curricula.

To sum up, the LDA analysis underlines the complexity of LGBTQ+ research, with key topics revolving around healthcare access, gender identity, social attitudes and rights advocacy. The distribution of topics indicates a balance between health-related research and socio-cultural studies, highlighting the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by

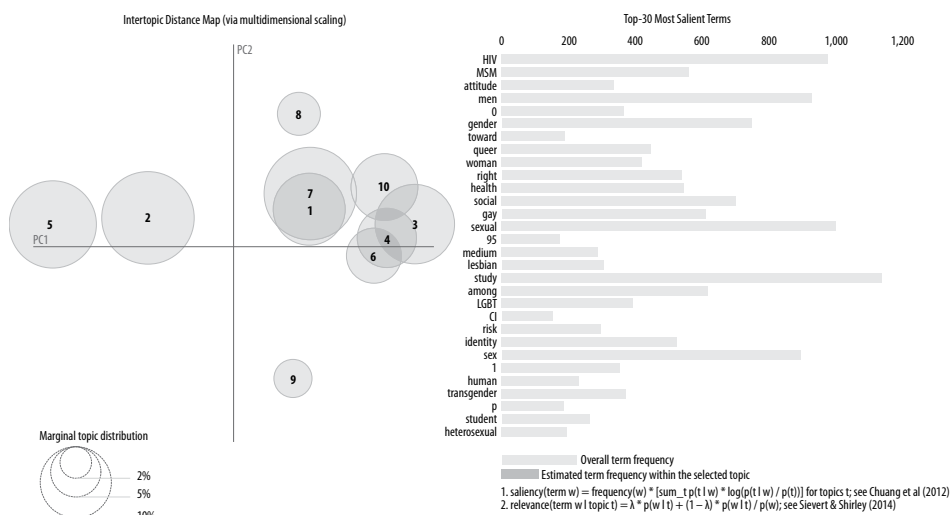


Figure 3:
Intertopic distance map of the LGBTQ+ issues themes
in the publications of authors from the Global South

Source: Compiled by the author with Python's *gensim* based on Scopus data.

LGBTQ+ individuals. The varied size and spacing of topics reflect both distinct and overlapping areas of inquiry, suggesting that while certain themes are highly specialised, others are interconnected within broader social and legal contexts (Figure 3).

Having identified the key topic, a more conventional keyword analysis was conducted via KCA. The KCA revealed distinct clusters of themes related to LGBTQ+ research, each represented by a specific colour:

- Red cluster: Focused on gender identity, homosexuality, homophobia and gender-related issues. Keywords such as “homosexuality”, “gender identity” and “religion” are highly interconnected, suggesting significant research into the intersection of gender identity, religion and societal attitudes.
- Blue cluster: Focused on HIV and public health, with terms like “human immunodeficiency virus”, “HIV testing” and “social stigma”. This cluster highlights the strong relationship between HIV prevention, stigma and healthcare access in LGBTQ+ populations, particularly for marginalised groups like sex workers.
- Green cluster: Focused on clinical and epidemiological studies, with key terms such as “human immunodeficiency virus”, “major clinical study” and “cross-sectional studies”. This suggests substantial research on the medical and epidemiological aspects of HIV/AIDS in LGBTQ+ populations, examining prevalence, risk behaviours and intervention strategies.
- Yellow cluster: Focused on self-concept, quality of life and mental health, with terms like “self-concept”, “mental stress” and “quality of life”. This indicates research on the psychosocial impacts faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly how stigma and discrimination affect mental health (Figure 4).

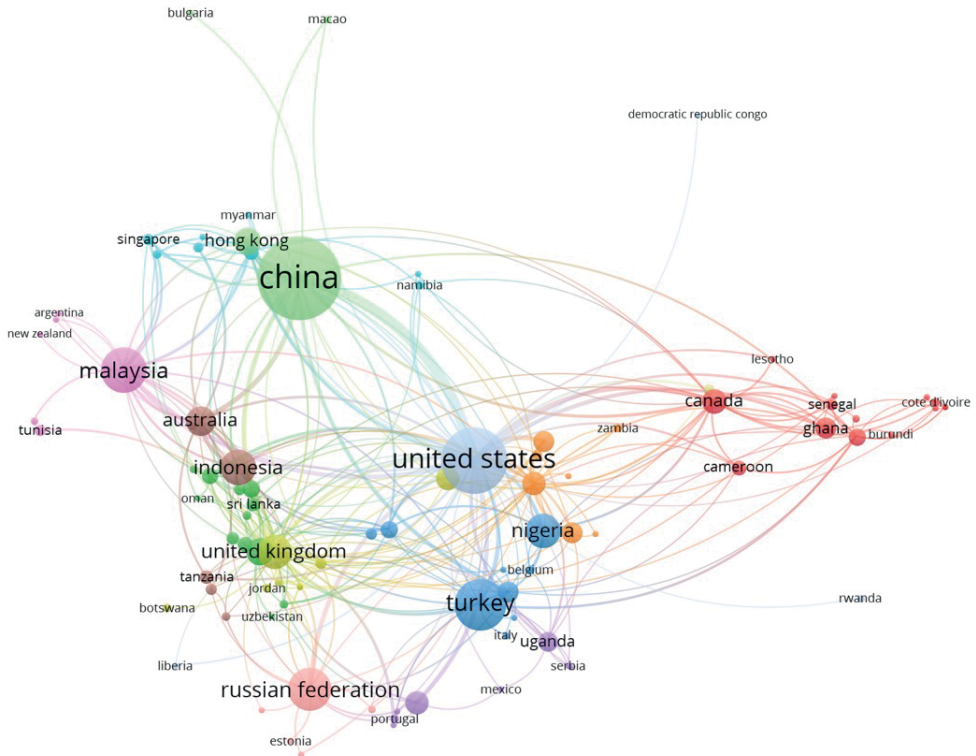


Figure 5:

Co-authorship country analysis of publications concerning LGBTQ+ issues

Source: Compiled by the author with VOSviewer based on Scopus data.

respective publication. Co-authored papers were divided into three sections based on their co-authorship specifics:

- Global North (GN) and Restricted Global South (RGS) collaborations: A collaborative work where at least one author is from a Global North country and one from a Restricted Global South country (e.g. one of the 57 examined countries).
- Unrestricted Global South and Restricted Global South collaborations: Collaborative work where at least one author is from an Unrestricted Global South (UGS) country (neither a GN, nor a RGS country, i.e. India, Brazil, Argentina, or South Africa) and one from an RGS.
- Restricted Global South collaborations: All authors come from one RGS country or different RGS countries.

After filtering out entries where the country category was not clearly evident or was missing ($N = 6$), the four different categories: 1. single-authored; 2. GN–RGS collaboration; 3. UGS–RGS collaboration; and 4. RGS collaboration were examined based on their

Table 5:
Comprehensive analysis of collaborations and their impact

Category	Count	Average citations	Average N of co-authors	Open Access (%)
GN + RGS Collaboration	185	20.03	5.8	37.84
RGS Collaboration	307	6.53	3.6	27.69
UGS + RGS Collaboration	226	15.89	5.5	39.38
Single-Authored	381	6.07	1 (N/A)	19.95

Source: Compiled by the author based on Scopus data.

count, citations, average number of co-authors (only categories 2–4), and their Open Access (OA) status.

The data reveals that GN + RGS collaborations have the highest average citations (20.03) and the highest average number of co-authors per paper (5.8), suggesting that collaborations between the Global North and Restricted Global South tend to attract more scholarly attention and involve larger teams. In contrast, RGS collaborations have the lowest average citations (6.53) among collaborative works and fewer co-authors on average (3.55), indicating more localised collaborations with less external influence. UGS + RGS collaborations fall between these extremes, with a moderate average of 15.89 citations and 5.49 co-authors per paper. The Single-Authored category has the lowest average citations (6.07) with a lower open access percentage (19.95%) compared to collaborative works.

To assess the impact of different types of collaborations on research visibility, both a t-test and a Mann-Whitney U test were performed. The t-test revealed that non-RGS collaborations, which include partnerships with GN and UGS scholars, received significantly higher citation counts than RGS-only collaborations ($p < 0.0001$), indicating a clear visibility advantage for research involving out-of-RGS international partnerships. Further, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare GN + UGR collaborations specifically to other collaboration types, confirming that this group had a notably higher citation impact ($p < 0.001$). This non-parametric test was essential to account for the asymmetry in citation distributions and reinforced the conclusion that Global North collaborations significantly boost visibility (Table 5).

Discussion

Overview of the results and hypotheses

The publication trends on LGBTQ+ research in the Global South resemble a plant forcing its way through concrete – emerging and expanding despite the heavy

socio-political barriers that persist. As outlined in the findings, the growth of academic output on LGBTQ+ issues in the Global South have been steady but constrained. To address H1: the quantity of publications has grown in recent years, but a significant Matthew Effect persists in terms of visibility – our analysis of publication trends reveals compelling evidence in support of both parts of this hypothesis. Our results show that while the volume of publications has grown, their visibility and impact have been disproportionately skewed toward a small number of highly cited papers. Our citation analysis conveyed that there is an asymmetrical distribution in knowledge produced, which illustrates that despite the fact that more publications are emerging from the Global South, only a small fraction of those achieve significant academic visibility. The existence of this citation disparity directly supports the second part of H1: there is a pronounced visibility gap in the academic discourse on LGBTQ+ issues from the Global South.

Our second hypothesis (H2) concerned whether research in the Global South focuses predominantly on gender identity while largely neglecting political or legal questions. We conducted a multifocal analysis to investigate H2 and found that more than 60% of the publications analysed were focused on health-related issues, with HIV/AIDS being a particularly dominant theme. This preponderance is not surprising; given that health topics, especially in relation to HIV/AIDS, are often considered less aligned with global public health priorities, they are also less politically and culturally sensitive. In contrast, we found a near-total absence of publications addressing political or legal issues related to LGBTQ+ rights. Based on the comprehensive problems set forth by the databases we used, the lack of focus on political activism, legal frameworks, or human rights struggles suggests that scholars in these regions are most likely not *unwilling*, but rather, *unable* to engage with the more contentious political dimensions of LGBTQ+ issues due to the high risks associated with such research. This avoidance was particularly pronounced in the Middle East or North Africa where the examined reports, the HRW and Aml reports in particular, highlight that political or legal questions surrounding LGBTQ+ rights could lead to severe repercussions, including social ostracisation, professional consequences, or even, in extreme cases, imprisonment (see Izugbara et al., 2022 and Solomon & Bekker, 2023 for a more focused paper on Iran, Turkey and Egypt).

Lastly, from a quantitative approach, the role of international collaborations in elevating the visibility of scholarship on LGBTQ+ issues in the Global South is evident from the data. Our analysis confirms H3; international collaborations, especially those involving scholars from the Global North, significantly increase both the visibility and the citation impact of LGBTQ+ research originating from culturally and politically restricted regions. As quantitative evidence based on the t-test and the Mann-Whitney U test suggests, partnerships with scholars from the Global North do more than simply *amplify* the academic output from the Global South; they actively enhance the visibility of research in global academic discourse, resulting in more citations and wider dissemination. In terms of scholarly influence, these international collaborations appear to act as a gateway for research on LGBTQ+ issues in the Global South, helping to overcome barriers that typically inhibit the dissemination of such research, including local political censorship, cultural taboos and restricted access to prominent publication platforms.

Situating the findings from a critical angle on knowledge production

In previous research endeavours, the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ research in the Global South is often framed as a problem of *access*: to resources, publishing opportunities, or institutional support. However, this framing assumes that once access is *granted*, meaning that once Global South scholars are “let in” to the dominant knowledge economy, equity follows (cf. Chitando & Mateveke, 2017). The present study challenges this assumption.

Our assertion is that the deeper issue is not just access or opportunity regarding the dissemination of academic research on LGBTQ+ issues, but much rather, an epistemic legitimacy, a more holistic problem. For instance, the question of publishing on LGBTQ+ issues in the Global South should also focus on *who* gets to define what counts as valuable knowledge, which topics are prioritised, and under what conditions research from the Global South is deemed “worthy” of global recognition. This, however, touches upon the long-standing history and critical attitudes on how knowledge is produced and how the Western hegemony – in a *Feyerabendien* sense which suggests that science is a form of ideology – has pinned down what constitutes academic knowledge (cf. also Demeter, 2020; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). The dominance of Global North institutions in LGBTQ+ research is not accidental and cannot solely be traced back to structural and societal oppression of the knowledge dissemination in the Global South. It reflects an established and historically “well-preserved” colonial, westernised structure in Academia where certain voices are positioned as producers of theory and others as subjects of analysis (Menon et al., 2021). Although this dynamic is not unique to LGBTQ+ research (see Dawson, 2020), the particular subject and its strong link to identity politics, activism and policy-making makes our focus a particularly strong case for the way in which power operates in academic discourse. In this regard we posit that the relative absence of political and legal discussions in Global South LGBTQ+ research is not just an artifact of censorship, although, as demonstrated above, these factors contribute exceedingly thereto. Much rather, it is also an indicator of how knowledge legitimacy is structured. A key question arises here: if the goal of LGBTQ+ research is to challenge normative power structures, then what does it mean when the production of that research is itself constrained by those very structures?

One of the defining struggles of LGBTQ+ research, especially in the Global South, is that it is rarely allowed to “just be”, to put it in simple terms. It is constantly *forced* to justify its existence, its importance and its validity. Unlike fields that are accepted as “neutral” sites of knowledge production (for example strictly quantitative sciences), LGBTQ+ studies are persistently tied to advocacy, legitimacy battles and cultural pushback, a field where conceptual structures and frameworks are strongly tied and rarely interrogated (Borgstrom, 2020; Grundy & Smith, 2007). The question arises, however, as to who gets to decide what constitutes *justification*? For Global North researchers, the mere production of knowledge about LGBTQ+ questions is no longer inherently transgressive in many academic contexts (see Kortegast et al., 2020). In the Global South, however, LGBTQ+ research remains a fragile intellectual pursuit, constantly under scrutiny and vulnerable to political instrumentalisation (Radics, 2019); the work of scholars in the Global

South, therefore, is not just evaluated on its intellectual contributions but on whether it conforms to or resists dominant political narratives. This burden of justification may produce a scholarly self-censorship, where researchers pre-emptively – as a precautionary measure – avoid politically sensitive topics, not just because of external censorship, but because of the constant demand for them to defend the legitimacy of their work. The core finding of the present research and its results, in a critical sense, is presenting that, paradoxically, LGBTQ+ research in the Global South is often shaped as much by what *isn't* said as by what is.

Reinforcing exclusion through inclusion

Thoughts on the dilemma of collaboration and enabling

Claiming that collaboration in research has an amplificatory effect on marginalised voices is not a novel idea (Wang et al., 2024; Brito et al., 2023). However, collaboration is not an inherently liberating process. It can also function as a mechanism of control and enabling. The finding that Global North collaborations increase citation visibility, but not epistemic power, strongly suggests that these partnerships often operate within a paradox: they *allow* Global South scholars in, but only on particular terms, topics and roles. This phenomenon is not novel either. Historically, marginalised scholars have been included in dominant knowledge structures in ways that reinforce their own subordination (Fricker, 2007; Demeter, 2020; Liberali, 2024; Settles et al., 2020). Using Demeter's (2020) theory, the issue in our particular field of LGBTQ+ issues and the scholarship related thereto, is not just that Global South researchers receive fewer citations. It is that their work is often cited in ways that reinforce their peripheral status. When Global South scholarship is referenced, it is frequently as *evidence* of oppression rather than as a *suo jure* theoretical or methodological contribution, reducing Global South researchers to chroniclers of lived experiences rather than *active participants* in shaping the study of LGBTQ+ issues.

Therefore, collaboration can be a two-edged sword and a site of contestation, where the conditions of participation often reproduce the very inequalities they claim to dismantle. True collaboration requires not just the scientometric understandings of co-authorship metrics but rather the shared intellectual authorship, where Global South scholars are recognised as agenda-setters, not just as participants in the Western research agenda. It is crucial to accentuate though that we do not claim that collaboration is detrimental. On the contrary, as demonstrated above, collaborations are beneficial in terms of visibility and academic impact. However, the need for more equitable and inclusive partnership structures should also be raised. We advocate that Global North scholars must be careful and mindful not to *dominate* these collaborations, but rather work in ways that *elevate* and *empower* their Global South counterparts. This is of critical importance, as after all, one may find it odd that the inclusion of scholars who have not experienced the difficulties, and have most likely not lived in the examined countries, or, in certain cases, do not even speak the respective languages, and are certainly less informed than their Global South counterparts of the complex socio-cultural, political and legal background of the particular

countries essentially make a contribution that is more successful metrics-wise. In this regard, we recommend that the historical trend of colonial science (parachute research), where scholars from the Global North enter collaborations merely for data extraction or to boost their own academic portfolios, must be avoided (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022). We also suggest that collaborations on sensitive topics involves shared leadership, mutual decision-making, and a respect for, as well as the promotion of the local knowledge and perspectives that Global South scholars bring to the table. This is particularly important in regions where LGBTQ+ issues are deeply taboo or politically sensitive; giving local researchers an international platform is crucial for producing contextually relevant, impactful scholarship that can drive social change.

Conclusions

This study set out to analyse the influence of taboos on LGBTQ+ scholarship in the Global South through a 30-year scientometric examination of publication trends, research themes and collaboration networks. The results show a consistent, though modest growth in LGBTQ+ scholarship from these regions, with notable increases since the 2010s, despite the political and cultural challenges that scholars continue to face. One significant finding of the study is the limited scope of research themes, which overwhelmingly focus on identity and health, particularly HIV/AIDS, while political and legal topics remain scarce. This thematic limitation underscores the influence of restrictive environments where researchers must navigate sensitive topics with extreme caution. Furthermore, the study highlights the crucial role those international collaborations, particularly with scholars from the Global North, play in increasing the visibility and citation impact of LGBTQ+ research from the Global South. These collaborations not only help bypass local censorship but also facilitate access to global academic networks. However, concerns about unequal power dynamics in these collaborations remain, with Global North scholars often holding a disproportionate influence. As such, there is a pressing need for more equitable and inclusive partnerships that empower Global South researchers to lead.

Ethical considerations

This research is based entirely on data from Scopus and does not involve human subjects. No personally identifiable information (PII) was collected, ensuring full compliance with ethical standards. Careful attention was paid to not misrepresent scholars or their work, particularly those operating in politically sensitive environments.

Limitations

While Scopus provides extensive international coverage, it may underrepresent regional or non-English publications, potentially skewing the dataset towards more globally

recognised journals. Moreover, scholars in restrictive environments may self-censor, especially on sensitive LGBTQ+ topics, leading to thematic gaps that reflect socio-political constraints rather than scholarly interest. Additionally, the exclusion of non-indexed local publications limits the study's ability to fully capture the breadth of LGBTQ+ research in these regions. Finally, the focus on 57 countries, while justified by data availability, may exclude relevant regions, affecting the generalisability of the findings.

Furthermore, the data collection is exclusive in terms of publication types and disciplines. While it is established in scientometric research that articles are to be preferred for analysis as they are, in general, they are more accessible and provide comprehensive metadata and follow a more standardised form than other types of publications (such as book chapters or conference proceedings) (Riehl, 2024). Nonetheless, articles do not capture the full scientific spectrum (see Brigham, 2014), therefore, future research may focus on a more inclusive choice in data collection with reference to the topical analyses mentioned in this paper.

Lastly, this paper specifically focuses on social sciences and LGBTQ+ issues. Though it can be confidently established that such issues gained increased attention in this particular field which then transpired in a more rapid and visible growth in publications in this category than in others, it may be useful to investigate the presence of the subject in other subject categories such as in the fields of arts and humanities or in multidisciplinary sciences.

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