

## Scholarly communication of bibliotherapy literature in South Africa: a bibliometric analysis

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*Many scholars have underscored the importance of reading and its associated benefits. Indeed, substantial evidence supports the notion that engaging with diverse forms of literature can function as a therapeutic intervention. This process is known as bibliotherapy. Despite its importance and long history, bibliotherapy appears to lack full recognition in South Africa. This study analysed publication trends in bibliotherapy literature in South Africa, to determine if it is practised. Data were drawn from the two major dominant databases, namely Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. The study employed VosViewer software to discover additional keywords that could be used together with the term "bibliotherapy" to locate relevant and associated keywords pertaining to the concept of bibliotherapy. Data from each database were captured and analysed separately on an Excel spreadsheet. The study established that from the 2909 publications out of the two databases (1395 from WoS (1972-2022) and 1514 from Scopus (1946-2022)), only 16 were from South Africa, indicating a low level of publications. Furthermore, the publications were from the field of psychology and information science, which shows the interdisciplinary nature of bibliotherapy in the two fields of study. A potential avenue for fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between the fields of psychology, linguistics, criminology, and information science is highlighted.*

**Keywords:** Bibliotherapy, bibliometrics, scholarly communications, self-help books, literature, South Africa

### 1 Introduction and background to the study

According to McCulliss (2012), the concept of "bibliotherapy" has a lengthy historical lineage, tracing back to ancient times, despite being used in an unconscious manner. Miller (2018) explains that the concept bibliotherapy was formally coined for the first time by Samuel McChord Crothers in 1916. Moreover, the utilisation of the concept as a therapeutic tool can be traced back to approximately 300 Before Christ (BC), when it was initially employed by the ancient Romans and Greeks. During that period, ancient Greece designated the passageways of libraries as venues for the restoration and rejuvenation of the human psyche. It also indicates that bibliotherapy has historically been linked to libraries and subsequently expanded to include hospitals for individuals with mental illness, as well as correctional facilities for incarcerated individuals. During the 1940s, the practice of bibliotherapy initially had a restricted scope, primarily confined to hospitals (Christine & Davis 2017). However, it gradually expanded to encompass a broader range of settings, such as jails, rehabilitation centres, and penal facilities (Tukhareli 2015). Additionally, that was the commencement of the bibliotherapy prescription. Subsequently, Samuel Bagster, a philosopher credited with the initial publication of a Hebrew bible, introduced bibliotherapy as a therapeutic modality within medicine institutional settings (Miller 2018).

In this regard, it has been more than a century since bibliotherapy gained global recognition, with its implementation observed on several continents, including Asia and Europe (Pettersson 2018). As Ngeope and Manamela (2022) would attest, bibliotherapy is frequently used as a non-medical intervention to promote mental well-being and has psychoeducational and psychosocial advantages. Furthermore, it was offered to patient rehabilitations during hospitalisation in industrialised nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. Additionally, the outcomes indicated bibliotherapy as a successful treatment in the mentioned countries. In a study conducted by Pettersson (2018), it was demonstrated that bibliotherapy has the potential to assist individuals from diverse backgrounds and reading backgrounds on a global scale. Similarly, Christine and Davis (2017) indicate that bibliotherapy was often practised in hospitals as an adjunct treatment for First World War (WWI) veterans. However, there is insufficient knowledge and utilisation of bibliotherapy on the African continents. Moreover, the issue of uncertainty and limited publication productivity of bibliotherapy in the African context is a cause for concern. This is because bibliotherapy is a therapeutic approach and has been in existence for a considerable period of time, regardless of not being effectively implemented to its full potential.

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This resulted in Ilogho, Amos, Adekeye and Gesinde (2020) conducting a study to investigate challenges hindering bibliotherapy practices in Africa.

Looking at the South Africa context, bibliotherapy is rarely used as a medical adjunct but rather for leisure purposes. In an opinion piece published in *The Sowetan*, Ngoepe (2022) explains that the existing reading habits in South Africa are associated with formal education. If individuals are unable to read proficiently during periods of good health and mental stability, it raises the question of how they will be able to engage in reading activities during times of illness, psychological distress, or incarceration. In addition, the utilisation of books for bibliotherapy purposes should be considered a common practice. However, it is worth noting that the implementation of bibliotherapy in South Africa tends to be disregarded or given insufficient attention because of a lack of reading culture in the South African context (Le Roux 2017).

This absence of reading culture can be considered equivalent to the lack of bibliotherapy. In order to engage in bibliotherapy, it is necessary to establish a practice of normalising reading. Alternatively, Ngoepe and Manamela (2022) indicate some individuals mostly practise bibliotherapy unconsciously most of the time and produce it insufficiently. Consequently, the populace remains unfamiliar with the act of reading, as well as the therapeutic potential that literature possesses. It is therefore necessary to establish, through bibliometric analysis of bibliotherapy literature, if it is indeed produced and visible in South Africa.

## 2 Problem statement

Despite the importance of bibliotherapy, as alluded to above, it is not fully recognised in South Africa. Hence, this study sought to analyse the publication trends of bibliotherapy literature in South Africa. Furthermore, a walk through several public hospitals by the researchers revealed that bibliotherapy is not used for healing, but rather to complement prescribed medication. This is compounded by the lack of libraries in many hospitals to support bibliotherapy, except in a few, such as Tara Hospital (Ngoepe & Manamela 2022). However, it should be noted that in South Africa, bibliotherapy is unconsciously applied in prisons for the rehabilitation of offenders through projects such as correctional centres and book clubs.

## 3 Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a bibliometric analysis of bibliotherapy literature in South Africa. The specific objectives were to:

- identify most publishing authors on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa
- analyse subject areas published on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa
- identify the most-producing journals on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa
- identify top publishing affiliations on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa

## 4 A brief history of bibliotherapy

The term 'bibliotherapy' has a long history dating back to ancient days, although it was practised unconsciously. It was first practised around 300 BC by the ancient Romans and Greeks, as people could make use of text as a therapeutic tool (McCulliss 2012). During that time, ancient Greece labelled library entrances as healing for the 'soul.' which is an indication that bibliotherapy has always been associated with libraries and later developed in hospitals for mentally ill patients and in prison facilities for prisoners. Christine and Davis (2017) elaborate that during the 1940s, bibliotherapy was limited to hospitals and spread over time to include prisons, rehabilitation facilities, and correctional facilities. Furthermore, the scope of bibliotherapy expanded from the medical setting to diverse settings such as school libraries, prisons, public libraries, and community groups (Tukhareli 2015).

This was the beginning of the prescription of books for therapy. The concept of bibliotherapy was formally coined for the first time by Samuel McChord Crothers in 1916 (Brewster 2017). Since then, Samuel Bagster (a philosopher who first published a Hebrew Bible) initiated the idea of using literature as medicine in institutions (Miller 2018). Therefore, its historical use contemporaneously developed after the presentations published by "The Atlantic Monthly" on bibliotherapy by Crothers to students, librarians, professional meetings, and school librarians and gained capacity. It has been more than 100 years since the use of bibliotherapy spread over the world, with continents such as Asia and Europe applying it. As Ngoepe and Manamela (2022) would attest, across developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, bibliotherapy is often employed as a non-medical intervention to advance mental well-being, for its psychoeducational and psychosocial benefits, and for the recovery of patients during hospitalisation. The outcomes indicated that bibliotherapy is a successful treatment in the mentioned countries.

In a study conducted by Pettersson (2018), it was shown that bibliotherapy could help people across the globe with different reading experiences. Additionally, bibliotherapy is able to improve their reading comprehension. Other authors link

bibliotherapy to war trauma. For example, Christine and Davis (2017) indicate that bibliotherapy was often practised in hospitals as an adjunct treatment for WWI veterans. In addition, it was applied to children for the first time in 1946, immediately after the Second World War (WWII). Hence, Mosako and Ngoepe (2020) are of the view that pictures can be used for teaching children to read and at the same time serve as a therapy. During WWI in the United States, booksellers and doctors used books to treat patients with traumatic stress disorder at the Alabama Military Hospital (Stip 2021). Similarly, Estrada, García-Prieto and Conde-Vélez (2020) conducted a study on bibliotherapy as a therapeutic instrument in the health-disease process in childhood. Half of the studies conducted came from the United States, four were in Europe, South America carried out five studies, and North America carried out seven studies. As indicated by the scholars above, as to where bibliotherapy is recognised and published, sadly, the African continent is not mentioned. According to Ilogho, Alaola, Adekeye, Gesindea, Adeusia and Ifijeh (2020), the majority of bibliotherapy literature and studies come from the most advanced nations like the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and, more recently, Asian countries.

As a result, this is questioning the bibliotherapy practices on African continents. Furthermore, the uncertainty and applicability of bibliotherapy in Africa are concerning since it has existed for a long time but has not been optimally practised. Hence, Ilogho et al. (2020) conducted a study to identify challenges hindering the lack of bibliotherapy practices in Africa. Regarding the South African context, there are no clear indications of the application of bibliotherapy. According to Le Roux (2017), there are regular complaints about the lack of reading culture in the South African context. This is emphasised by Ngoepe (2022) in a recent opinion piece in The Sowetan, which states that reading in South Africa is associated with formal schooling. This implies that reading is rarely used for leisure or for bibliotherapy. If people cannot read when they are well and sound, how will they read when they are sick, stressed, or in jail? While books are often used for anxiety, free time, self-care, work, and love, bibliotherapy practice is often overlooked in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, for example, Ngoepe and Manamela (2022) indicate that bibliotherapy is mostly unconsciously practised by a few individuals and insufficiently produced.'

## 5 Conceptual framework

According to Adom, Hussain and Agyem (2018), the significance of a conceptual framework is to provide the foundation for the study. A conceptual framework refers to the integration of the interlinking concepts of a study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon to be studied (Jabareen 2009). Considering the nature and objectives of this study, it was important to consider the notation of a conceptual framework (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport 2011: 35). In addition, a study that has a clear conceptual framework determines a profound scientific structure and direction for the study (Ngulube 2005). Hence, the researcher opted for a conceptual framework, as there were insufficient existing theories to create a solid framework regarding the phenomenon.

Moreover, opting for a conceptual framework helped identify and construct the researcher's worldview when investigating the phenomenon. It also provides an overview of the various factors that will affect the development of the study. According to Kivunja (2018), researchers use conceptual frameworks to rigorously understand and explain their world. As a result, the researcher deemed it critical to link concepts of metrics, one of the bibliometrics laws, and the indicators to formulate the conceptual framework for the study (see figure 1).

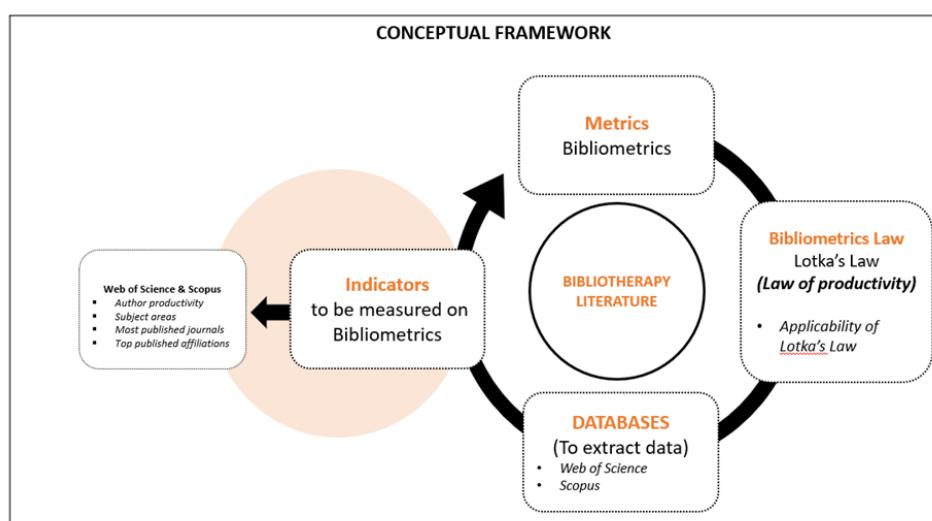


Figure 1: Conceptual framework consolidated by researchers (2024)

The conceptual framework used in this study was derived from various literary constructs, including metrics, bibliometrics law, databases, and indicators. Chellappandi and Vijayakumar (2018) state that metrics are derived from the application of mathematical techniques to the content of scientific studies. It was later expanded to serve as a catch-all, rather than an umbrella for other metrics. These discipline metrics include, for example, scientometrics, webometrics/cytometrics, librametrics, almetrics, patentometrics, and bibliometrics.

The study was conducted using bibliometrics for the purposes of this study. Furthermore, the conceptual framework incorporated one of the bibliometrics laws – Lotka's law. According to Qui, Zhao, Yang and Dong (2017), Lotka's focus is on publication productivity, for example, by countries, authors, or any given subject area/discipline. Following the selection of the bibliometric law, the next step is to select databases. The Web of Science and Scopus databases were chosen by the researchers to conduct the study. Publication trends, authors, subject areas, journals, and affiliations were among the indicators.

## 6 Methodology

This quantitative study used the bibliometrics research design to analyse bibliotherapy literature. Data were drawn from the two major databases, namely WoS and Scopus. The study employed VosViewer software to discover additional keywords that could be used together with the term "bibliotherapy" to locate relevant and associated keywords pertaining to the concept of bibliotherapy. Additionally, an entire data set was exported via a CVS Excel file to identify alternative keywords for 'bibliotherapy' in the form of displaying network visualisation from the VosViewer. The displays of network visualisation for the term "bibliotherapy" that were exported included the keywords "self-help books", "reading therapy," and 'poetry therapy.' The following keyword was used together with the main keyword "bibliotherapy" during the bibliographic searching of data.

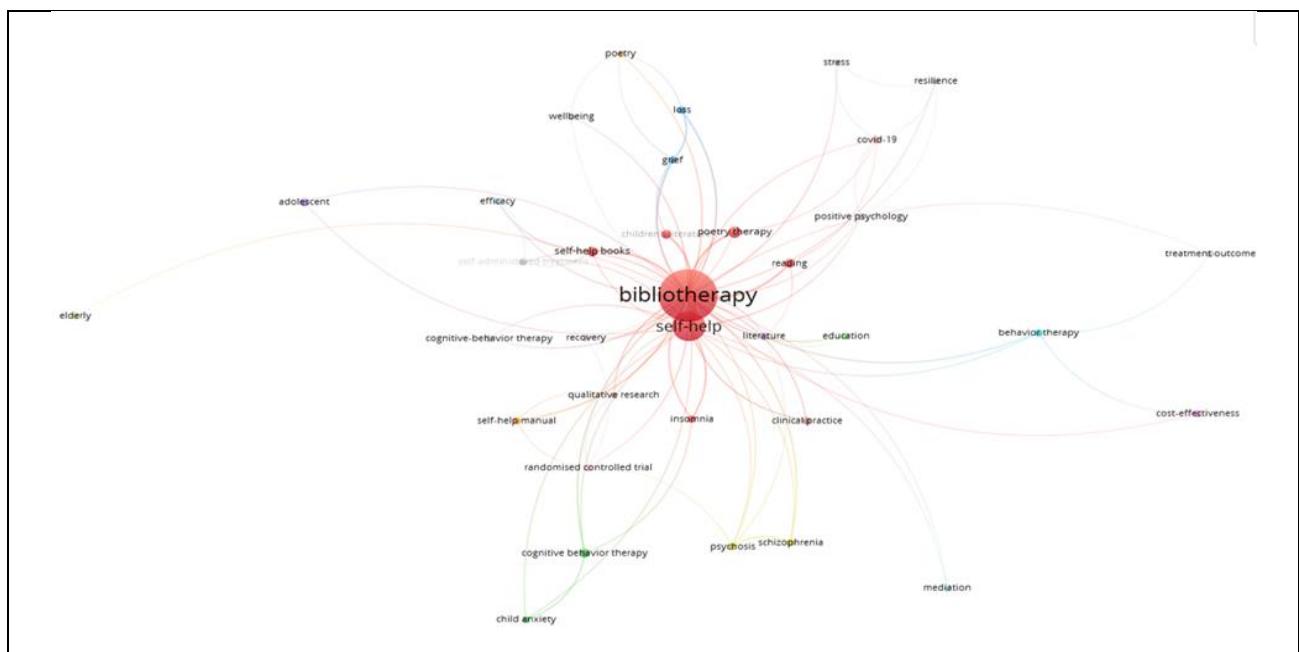


Figure 2: Identified keywords from the VosViewer software

Moreover, further retrieval of the required documents in case of this study, the Boolean operators 'AND', 'NOT.' and 'OR' remained one of the bibliographic tools to execute data. The bibliographic search queries were conducted in English, regardless of the type and characteristics of a database. For the purpose of the study, the Boolean operator 'OR' was used when conducting a bibliographic query during data retrieval. In this regard, the WoS database followed a bibliographic query: "Bibliotherapy\* (Topic) OR "Self-help books" (All Fields) OR "Reading therapy" (All Fields) OR "Poetry-therapy" (All Field) and 2023 (Exclude – Publication Years) and English (Languages) and SOUTH AFRICA (Countries/Regions). Alternatively, the Scopus database followed a bibliographic query "(KEY (bibliotherapy\*) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Self-help books") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Reading therapy ") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Poetry therapy") AND PUBYEAR > 1945 AND PUBYEAR < 2023 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY, "South Africa"))".

The extracted data from a WoS database indicated a total number of 1395 publications on bibliotherapy globally with the first entry in 1972 to 2022. This includes a total number of 200 authors, 72 countries, 29 subject areas, 158 journals and

161 from the affiliations. For the purpose of this study, data were extracted from the year of inception of bibliotherapy literature in 1972 to the year of the study (2022). From the Scopus database, a total number of 1514 publications were extracted on bibliotherapy literature from the inception year (1946) to 2022. This includes a total number of 159 authors, 73 countries, 25 subject areas, 161 journals, and 161 from the affiliations. All in all, from a total of 2909 publications out of the two databases, only 17 were from South Africa, with 11 from WoS and six from Scopus. Only data for publications from South Africa were analysed through Excel spreadsheet. In the case where a paper was co-authored, the article was allocated to each author and institution.

## 7 Presentation of findings

Findings for this study are presented as per the objectives of the study.

### 7.1 Most-published authors on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa

Table 1 reflects extracted data from the WoS database indicated the most-published authors on bibliotherapy in South Africa. The retrieved data were refined through a manual search of each author from the 10 retrieved publications by looking at their affiliations. This allowed the researchers to obtain information of the authors who contributed bibliotherapy publication outputs in South Africa. As a result, the list prioritised only South African authors who have published on bibliotherapy. Furthermore, the repository data showed the South African authors published on bibliotherapy, together with the affiliations and a total number of one publication each.

This included Chapman, M., Joubert, C., Hay, J., Theron, L., Cockcroft, K., Wood, L., Strong, P., Lotter, G., Donald, DR., Theron, L., and Stein, DJ. However, Theron, L. from the University of Pretoria is the only author who has produced two publications. Chapman, M., Joubert, C., Hay, J., and Stein, DJ. published individually, whereas Theron, L., Cockcroft, K., Wood, L., and Donald, DR. published collectively. In that regard, Table 1 represents author productivity on bibliotherapy publications in the South African context.

**Table 1: Published authors on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the WoS database (N=10)**

Published authors	No of publications per authors	Affiliations	Document type
Chapman, M	1	Durban University of Technology	Article
Joubert, C	1	North West University	Article
Hay, J	1	North West University	Article
Theron, L.	2	University of Pretoria	Article
Cockcroft, K	1	University of Witwatersrand	Article
Wood, L	1	North West University	Article
Strong, P.	1	North West University	Article
Lotter, G	1	North West University	Article
Donald, DR.	1	University of Cape Town	Article
Stein, DJ	1	University of Cape Town	Article
Total: 10			

According to the data taken from the Scopus database in Table 2, there are six authors who have published on bibliotherapy in South Africa. This encompasses two published articles and one review. As a result of the extracted data, the only identified authors published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the Scopus database were Carmen, J., Hay, JF., Lochner, C., Stein, DJ., Ross, A., and Cooper, PJ. In addition to that, Lochner, C., Stein, DJ., and Ross, A; Carmen, J. and Hay, JF. published collectively, and Cooper, PJ. published individually. Table 2 provides a list of the South African authors who had the greatest number of publications produced.

**Table 2: Published authors on bibliotherapy in South Africa from Scopus database (N=6)**

Published authors	No of publications per authors	Author affiliations	Document type
Carmen, J	1	North West University	Article
Hay, JF	1	North West University	Article
Lochner, C	1	University of Cape Town	Article
Stein, DJ	1	University of Cape Town	Article
Ross, A	1	Stellenbosch University	Article
Cooper, PJ	1	Stellenbosch University	Review
Total: 6			

## 7.2 Subject areas published on bibliotherapy in South Africa

Table 3 depicts various subject areas retrieved from the WoS database. The field of psychology was the most prevalent subject area with the highest publications productivity in the concept of bibliotherapy. Regardless of output, the field of psychology education leads with the highest number of publications (2). This is followed by clinical neurology, education educational research, literature, psychiatry, and religion, all of which contributed one publication each. Consequently, the publication production in South Africa was observed over a total of six subject areas.

**Table 3: Subject areas published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the WoS database (N=6)**

NO	SUBJECT AREAS	TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS
1	Psychology educational	2
2	Clinical neurology	1
3	Education educational research	1
4	Literature	1
5	Psychiatry	1
6	Religion	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	

Table illustrates 4 the subject areas that were retrieved from the Scopus database to identify where the majority of the bibliotherapy literature was published. The classes and distribution of the literature throughout three subject areas are presented. However, medicine was identified as the most prevalent subject area for bibliotherapy publications with a total of two articles. This was followed by an equal contribution of one publication each from neuroscience and social science. Table 4 indicates the three subject areas in which bibliotherapy was produced in South Africa. Surprisingly, there was none in information and library science, which is a worrying factor.

**Table 4: Subject areas published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from Scopus database (N=3)**

NO	SUBJECT AREAS	TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS
1	Medicine	2
2	Neuroscience	1
3	Social Science	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>NB:</b>	The article ' <i>Excoriation (skin-picking) disorder: a systematic review of treatment options</i> ' was published in both medicine and neuroscience.	

### 7.3 Most-published journals on bibliotherapy literature in South Africa

Referring from the WoS database, the analysis found the most notable journals that addressed bibliotherapy as a concept in South Africa. Moreover, Table 5 indicates the number of publications produced by each journal determining the order of the list. In this regard, the study discovered five journals, with the School Psychology International leading the list with a total of two publications. The remaining journals each produced one publication on bibliotherapy. The journals included South African Journal of Education, current writing text and reception in South Africa, HTS teologiese studies – theological studies, and CNS Spectrums journal. Subsequently, Table 5 encapsulates the various journals that produced publication on bibliotherapy within the South African context.

**Table 5: Journal published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the WoS database (N=5)**

No	Publishing journal	No of publications
1	School psychology international	2
2	South African journal of Education	1
3	Current writing-text and reception in South Africa	1
4	HTS teologiese studies-Theological studies	1
5	CNS Spectrums	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	

The most productive journals that published on the field of bibliotherapy are shown in Table 6 from the Scopus database. However, only three journals were identified to have contributed to bibliotherapy publications in South Africa, which include Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, South African Journal of Education and Archives of Disease in Childhood. Based on the data provided, the Journal of Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment generated two publications on bibliotherapy in South Africa. In addition, the South African Journal of Education, and the Archives of Disease in Childhood each released one publication, which resulted in a total of four publications. This means that one paper was published in two independent journals, to make a total of four. Table 6 gives an overview of the most-published journals.

**Table 6: Journals published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the Scopus database (N=3)**

NO	SUBJECT AREAS	TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS
1	Medicine	2
2	Neuroscience	1
3	Social Science	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>NB:</b>	The article ' <i>Excoriation (skin-picking) disorder: a systematic review of treatment options</i> ' was published in both medicine and neuroscience.	

### 7.4 Top publishing affiliations on bibliotherapy in South Africa

The affiliations listed in Table 7 have all contributed to the publication of bibliotherapy publications in South Africa from WoS database. In view of this, the University of North-West contributed the most publications (four), followed by the University of Cape Town (two). Alternatively, the remaining affiliations rated equally, with one publication each.

These affiliations included Durban University of Technology, Stellenbosch University, University of the Witwatersrand, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and University of Pretoria. Given the aforementioned statement, the analysis revealed a total of seven affiliations pertaining to the field of bibliotherapy. This section focused on the affiliations rather than the publications.

**Table 7: Ranking of institutions published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from the WoS database (N=7)**

RANK	INSTITUTIONS/ ORGANISATIONS	NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS
1	Northwest University	4
2	University of Cape Town	2
3	Durban University of Technology	1
4	Stellenbosch University	1
5	University of the Witwatersrand	1
6	University of KwaZulu-Natal	1
7	University of Pretoria	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	

Table 8 highlights the top South African institutions in accordance with the quantity of bibliotherapy publications from Scopus database. This included Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, and North-West University, which all contributed two publications each. However, it should be noted that two publications by Stein, DJ listed both University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch as affiliations

**Table 8: Ranking of institutions published on bibliotherapy in South Africa from Scopus database (N=3)**

RANK	INSTITUTIONS/ ORGANISATIONS	NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS
1	Stellenbosch University	2
2	University of Cape Town	2
3	North West University	2
NB	Two publications by author Stein, DJ were affiliated in both the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch	

This study presented summary of the data obtained from the WoS and Scopus databases. The retrieved data confirmed a scarcity of publication productivity on the concept of bibliotherapy, specifically within the South African setting. It is important to recognise that a considerable number of researchers lack expertise with the notion of bibliotherapy, giving rise to certain issues.

## 8 Discussions

This section discusses the findings of this study

### 8.1 Most-published authors on bibliotherapy literature

The majority of authors made significant contributions in a variety of research disciplines, both domestically and globally. Nevertheless, bibliotherapy is not as prevalent or widely recognised than disciplines. The data presented in Table 1, obtained from the WoS database, indicates a total number of 10 authors who have contributed to the body of literature on bibliotherapy in South Africa. This implies that the discipline lacks popularity, possibly due to a lack of acquaintance among South African researchers including knowledge creators. On the other hand, this finding may also serve as evidence supporting the hypothesis put forth in the study, which suggested an absence of productivity concerning publications. The limited attention given to bibliotherapy suggests that literature has not been recognised it as an option for healing purposes. It is imperative to acknowledge that disciplines develop and undergo transformations over time. In this regard, one may regard bibliotherapy as a developing discipline within the South African context even though it has been practised since time immemorial.

The Scopus database predominantly consists of scholarly publications such as scientific research articles and conference papers. However, the extracted data indicated that a total of six authors were identified from Scopus. The authors included Carmen, J., Hay, JF., Lochner, C., Stein, DJ., Ross, A., and Cooper, PJ. The study also revealed that the aforementioned authors participated in collaboration, irrespective of collaborative efforts. In addition, data showed that there was a remarkably modest degree of visibility, evidenced by the minimal presence on the Scopus database. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the identified authors were regarded as the main contributors of bibliotherapy literature in South Africa, since they have also been identified in the WoS database.

### 8.2 Subject areas published on bibliotherapy literature

The findings of the study, obtained from the WoS database, revealed a total of six publications pertaining bibliotherapy literature. The publications originated across multiple subject areas, including psychology education, clinical neurology, education research, literature, psychiatry, and religion. The study suggested that bibliotherapy publication productivity is rather scarce and lacks comprehension due to a limited number of subject areas that encompass the discipline, based on the WoS database. Nevertheless, it is evident that the subject area of 'psychology education' retains a prominent position in bibliotherapy literature, exceeding other subject areas in terms of publication outputs. The study suggested that bibliotherapy is widely recognised as a specialised and focused topic within the broader domain therapy and of mental health services. As a result, there is a lack of comprehension among librarians, practitioners, and researchers regarding the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration between books and health, specifically in the domain of LIS.

The study, which was carried out using the Scopus database, collected and examined a total of three publications related to the discipline of bibliotherapy. This included the subject area of medicine, which became the most dominant, accounting for two publications, while neuroscience and social science each accounted for one publication. Furthermore,

this study confirmed the absence of visibility in the subject field of LIS. Furthermore, the study suggested that, while bibliotherapy has numerous advantages, its effectiveness might not attract the same level of consensus as publication productivity. This could hinder the growth of researchers in their attempts towards further publications.

### **8.3 Most-published journals on bibliotherapy literature**

The study focused on the output of the discipline of bibliotherapy, incorporating both national and international journals. This means, if the study primarily examined the production of national journals while disregarding international journals, the outcomes might have yielded a limited number of findings. In this regard, a total of five journals have been identified, encompassing both national and international journals. These journals included School Psychology International, South African Journal of Education, current writing text and reception in South Africa, HTS Teologiese Studies – theological studies, and CNS Spectrums. Of these journals, it was found that the School Psychology International Journal had the highest number of publications (two). The study demonstrated that the findings derived from the WoS database implied that the visibility of bibliotherapy literature is limited and unsatisfactory. In this context, the study showed that the discipline of bibliotherapy is more dominant in the journals of psychology. Based on the data obtained, the study suggested that there is limited and insufficient visibility of bibliotherapy publication productivity in South Africa, particularly in the indicator of publishing journals.

A limited number of three journals were found from the Scopus database that made contributions to the discipline of bibliotherapy literature in the context of South Africa. These are Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, the South African Journal of Education, and the Archives of Disease in Childhood. These journals are deemed suitable for publishing research on bibliotherapy literature and for acquiring knowledge on this specific subject area, as evidenced by the findings in the Scopus database. Given the aforementioned statement, the results are considered unsatisfactory, suggesting that national and international publications do not recognise bibliotherapy as a distinct discipline. On the other hand, one may argue that the journals should not be held accountable as far a publication visibility and productivity of a discipline is concerned. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that authors should possess the main accountability for publication productivity since they are considered the most significant contributors. Therefore, the results of this study suggested that the publication productivity of bibliotherapy in South Africa, as evidenced in the Scopus database might be linked to a lack of knowledge pertaining to the discipline.

### **8.4 Top publishing affiliations on bibliotherapy in South Africa**

The research highlighted a total of seven affiliations that have contributed to a discipline of bibliotherapy literature in South Africa. The affiliations included University of North West, University of Cape Town, Durban University of Technology, Stellenbosch University, University of the Witwatersrand, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and University of Pretoria. Additionally, the study discovered that the University of North West produced the highest number of six publications in the discipline of bibliotherapy among all the affiliations examined in both databases. Having stated that, a cumulative count of 17 publications was recorded. Some of the publications are associated with more than two affiliations.

Based on the findings of the study, it could be inferred that a discipline consisting of significant popularity and visibility should be associated with a substantial number of affiliations. The level of productivity can be considered rather low in terms of productivity. In addition, it should be noted that South Africa has 26 universities, and only seven contributed to bibliotherapy literature. No affiliation was associated with other institutions such as hospitals and research institutes. This raises a question whether academic affiliations should be considered as the only reliable affiliations of publication productivity. It was expected for health and therapeutic affiliations to be the forefront of advocating bibliotherapy as compared to academic affiliations. Having considered the aforementioned, the analysis confirmed the limited level of publishing productivity pertaining to bibliotherapy literature, as evidenced by both databases. The study was guided by the problem statement on lack of publication productivity on the concept 'bibliotherapy' in South Africa.

## **9 Conclusion and recommendations**

This study revealed a dearth of bibliotherapy publication productivity in the South African setting. This assertion is supported by the limited number of publications originating from South Africa, which amounted to fewer than 20, indicating a relatively small contribution to the total amount of literature on the concept. Based on the findings, it could be inferred that bibliotherapy is a discipline that lacks proper recognition in South Africa. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that bibliotherapy has a greater presence in the field of psychology than in the field of LIS. Although no publications specifically related to this topic were identified within the field of LIS, the study suggested that books were still not recognised as a valid therapeutic intervention. This can be attributed to the outcomes of the study, which also highlight a need for multidisciplinary

cooperation in the field of bibliotherapy as a discipline. This is a potential avenue for fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between the fields of psychology, linguistics, criminology, and information science.

In general, this study presents three distinct categories of implications for theory and practice, including scholarly benefits, social benefits, and target audiences. Scholarly benefits encompass the generation of knowledge, as well as the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration across various fields. This collaboration is facilitated through research activities and the development of enriched curricula. Social benefits pertain to the potential adoption of books as a therapeutic tool used by the general public and reading clubs. This implies that books could be used for therapeutic purposes, potentially enhancing well-being and promoting personal growth. Lastly, the identified target audiences for these implications included citizens, scholars, public libraries, correctional service facilities, children, and hospitals. These groups are likely to be directly impacted by the findings of this study and could benefit from the insights and recommendations provided.

The study recommends the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration among academic disciplines, such as information science, linguistics, criminology, and psychology, to enhance research publications and development of this niche area of bibliotherapy. For instance, language barriers and reading illiteracy can potentially hinder the effective application of bibliotherapy. Therefore, a deep understanding of languages and proficient reading skills are essential prerequisites before integrating bibliotherapy as a medical adjunct. This proficiency is crucial for the comprehension of written materials and the realisation of therapeutic benefits through bibliotherapy. Within the field of psychology, bibliotherapy primarily involves reading as a therapeutic tool. A further qualitative study on why bibliotherapy is not practised in South Africa is recommended. Such a study can target hospitals. Future quantitative studies can also target other databases such as Google Scholar for a wider coverage.

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