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**A KEYWORD CO-OCCURRENCE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH  
ON SPIRITUALITY FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE  
BETWEEN 2018 TO 2022: EMERGING RESEARCH TRENDS**

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**Abstract:**

The article provides a detailed overview of the extant literature on spirituality from Islamic perspectives as well as it reveals the trends and suggests future research directions for scholars who wish to contribute to this rapidly growing field. A bibliometric analysis was conducted using data obtained from the Scopus database by searching articles, book chapters, and manuscripts containing the term “spirituality” AND “Islamic perspectives” OR “views” OR “concept” on their titles, abstracts, and/or keywords. Publish or Perish, and VOSviewer software were then used to obtain publication trends, citation index per year, highly cited articles, and keyword co-occurrence network. There is a fluctuating trend of publication on spirituality from an Islamic perspective such that a decrease occurred in 2021 compared to the years prior. Although 2018 has the highest total citations (n=351) and average citations per article (5.40), 2021 has the highest number of cited publications (n=116) which suggest a notable presence of influential works in the year 2021. Some of the themes with the highest keyword co-occurrence are well-being (27 items), clinical studies (26 items), Islamic thoughts and civilization (13 items), and medical ethics (5 items). There are abundant articles published within the year 2018 to 2022 regarding spirituality from an Islamic perspective and the bibliometric analysis found emerging trends specifically on themes of well-being, clinical studies, and Islamic thoughts and civilization which future researchers can focus on.



## Introduction

The concept of spirituality has always been a part of Islam which can be traced back to the Quran and especially the spiritual life (*hayat al-ruhiyyah*) of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) (Mohd Amin et al., 2018). Studies on the Quranic interpretation of spirituality can be traced back to 1987 in which Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1991) highlighted earlier studies by Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali. Since then, the number of literatures continues to increase with thousands of yearly publications. However, studies on spirituality using bibliometric review are scanty to some extent non-existence. Furthermore, there is also an increase in trend by the West towards the importance of spirituality as it is linked with various positive outcomes towards physical health (Goyal et al., 2019; Badanta-Romero et al., 2018; Nadarajah et al., 2013) and mental health (Braam & Koenig, 2019; Stanley et al., 2011). As such, the exploration of the role of spirituality has expanded to other fields that typically do not highlight spirituality such as engineering (Spies & Schrode, 2021) and computer science (Solijonovna, 2020; Rashid, 2019). In addition to this, even within the field of theology, there are differences between the Islamic interpretation of spirituality which consists of oneness of God (*tawhīd*), moderation (*waṣatiyyah*), asceticism (*zuhd*), gratitude (*shukr*), God-consciousness (*ihsān*), patience (*sabr*), and self-mortification (*mujahadah*) (Mohd Amin et al., 2018) as compared to the Western perspectives with numerous interpretations and the development of non-material elements of the sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning, and purpose being one of the interpretations (Holmes, 2007).

This study aims to achieve three main objectives. First, it provides a complete survey of the existing literature on spirituality from an Islamic perspective by examining citation counts, h-index, and other bibliometric indicators. Second, it explores the emerging research topics and trends within spirituality from Islamic perspectives during the specified time frame by analyzing keywords, co-occurrence of terms, and topic clusters to identify evolving areas of interest and research themes. This will provide insights into the key research domains where spirituality is being applied. This analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how spirituality is integrated into various academic disciplines.

The results from the bibliometric analysis will provide a quantitative insight regarding the number of publications devoted to the study of spirituality from Islamic perspectives in recent years. More importantly, the research identifies some of the most influential studies in this area. The paper discusses trends and highlights the challenges related to the interpretation of spirituality. Further, limitations, interpretation, implications, as well as the recommendations were made based on the emerging findings of the present research.

## Research Questions

The research questions that the current study aims to answer are:

1. What is the volume of publications for research on spirituality from Islamic perspectives from 2018 to 2022?

2. What are the emerging trends for topics regarding spirituality from Islamic perspectives between 2018 to 2022?

### Literature Review

Spirituality generally describes the feeling of connectedness with a higher power or consciousness and the search for answers to questions about the meaning of life, of illness and other sufferings, of death, and the purpose of life itself (Alimohammadi et al., 2020). The understanding of spirituality in Islam is unlike the secular understanding as it is usually separated with the understanding of gods or God is not available or connected with the life of humans (La Cour & Götke, 2012). This is a polar opposite with Islam which is rooted in the Quran and the Sunnah. Spirituality must always be connected with God. *Taqwa* or God-consciousness is an essential element in Islamic spirituality and the aim of the Islamic belief system and is rooted firmly in the Islamic creed of absolute monotheism—the Oneness of Allah: there is no God but Allah (Ahmad & Khan, 2016).

Spirituality is not perceivable by human senses, but its effects has always been observed throughout human generations in which men feel satisfied and happy in their lives. Spirituality or spirits or souls are metaphysical, and this led Muslims scholars to discuss the ways to attain happiness by the word of *tazkiyatunnafs* because it is not beneficial to understand such a thing that is beyond human comprehension (Ahmad & Hassan, 2015).

Literally, *tazkiyatunnafs* is defined as to cleanse and to grow. Technically, it is about cleansing the soul or self from diseases and deadness by numerous means such as *ṣalāh* (prayers), *zakāh* (almsgiving), *ṣawm* (fasting), *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), *zikr* (remembrance of God), *fikr* (contemplation), *tilāwah al-Quran* (reading the Quran) and others (Sa'id Hawwa, 2005). All the commands of Allah S.W.T. are the means to cleanse human's soul because it is the sole purpose of human creation i.e., to worship God. Only by worshiping God, the soul will be at ease. In a profound sense, Islamic spirituality is nothing other than the realization of *tawḥīd*. Its study is nothing other than tracing the impact in depth of *tawḥīd* upon the life, actions, art, and thought of that segment of the human race which makes up the Muslim ummah (Nasr, 1991).

The foundation of Islamic Spirituality is much connected with the concept of moderation or mean (*tawazzun*) in relation to the balanced state of the human soul (Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin et al., 2018). A man's soul will achieve the balanced and mean state by controlling three faculties of the soul; the intellect (*'aql*), heart (*qalb*), and desire (*nafs*). Another quality that is emphasized in the spiritual education of Islam is gratitude (*shukr*). Gratitude means a feeling of joyfulness that mingled with a sense of submission and humility towards God for granting His bounties. Patience (*ṣabr*) is also vital as it is a mental and bodily power to restrain and endure vices that emerge from the imbalanced state of the soul. Patience is needed in every stage of the man's life; he is always concerned with the conflicting motive of the lower soul and motive of religion. This quality can also be achieved through training and habituation (Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin et al., 2018). The discussion on the concept of man and the principles which constitute as core manifestations of Islamic spirituality are crucial however, the other elements of human are not fully highlighted i.e., the body. Men cannot be completed when the very basic necessity of humans is neglected.

According to Zeki Saritoprak (2017), spirituality is an effort to free oneself from worldly attachments and imperfections and reach the level of spirit. He based his definition from Islamic mystical approach to the spirit in which the body is important, but it is the spirit that constitutes the essence of human beings. The term “spirituality” has a larger connotation and is more inclusive. It does not limit itself to a specific group of people but is the concern of everyone as opposed to the term “mysticism” or “Sufism”. Theologically, everything has a spiritual dimension. In other words, everything has two dimensions. One is *mulk*, the corporal dimension. The other is *malakut*, the spiritual dimension. Everything that exists in the corporal dimension, from a fly to an elephant, from an atom to a mountain to a planet, also exists in this spiritual dimension. Besides, all the five pillars of Islam and six pillars are understood fully through the experience of the development of Islamic spirituality. In other words, Islamic spirituality strengthens human beings to reach the level of spirit to have not only knowledge-based faith in these principles of Islam, but also experience-based faith. Faith is to be made experiential. This perception somehow in contrast to the earlier Muslim scholars as experience-based faith may be harmful if it against the *sharī'ah*. Personal experience-based faith may be an excellent tool to increase Muslims faith, however not every experience is good to anyone since men have diverse levels of knowledge and phases of lives as well as different tests in this life.

Besides, the term is also defined as an oriented philosophy action in which all activities are done for the sake of Allah and happiness of the soul. According to several definitions, spirituality is all philosophical oriented good deeds intended to make effort to possess transcendent value for the sake of Allah. It suggests that, essentially, every human action must have a good goal and transcendent value (Warsah & Imron, 2019). It is possible to conclude that the spiritual refers to intangible, not physical, and cannot be seen with the naked eye. Even according to Muslim scholars like al-Ghazali, the dimensions that shape one's spirituality are *al-qalb* (heart), *al-ruh* (spirit), *al-nafs* (soul), and *al- 'aql* (mind) (Azlisham Abdul Aziz et al., 2021). There are numerous studies of Islamic spirituality focusing on the meaning, concepts, dimensions, scopes, constructs, spirituality in mental health care, multidimensional measure of Islamic spirituality, its effectiveness to self-care, to care providers. However, there is a dearth of research which focuses on the bibliometrics review of spirituality from Islamic perspectives. As such, there is a need to address the gaps in the literature in addition to better understanding spirituality from the contemporary Islamic perspectives.

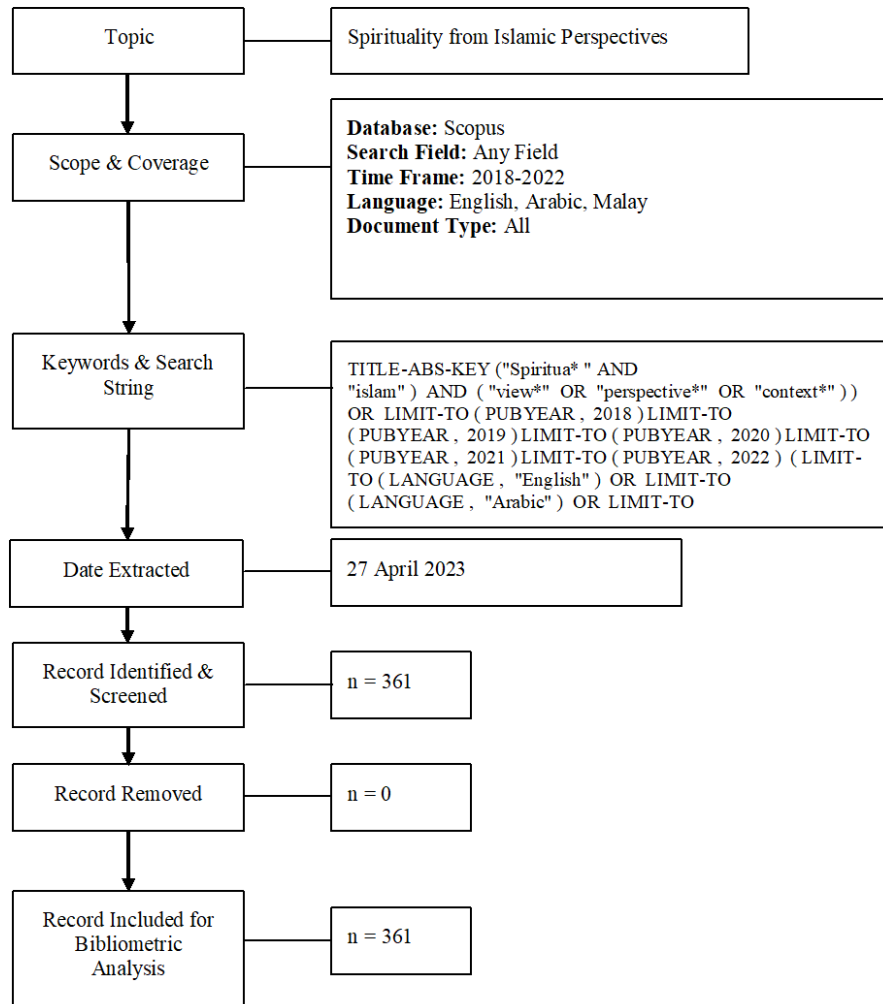
### **Methodology**

This is a quantitative study that uses bibliometric approach which is the application of quantitative techniques for exploring and analyzing large volumes of bibliometric data such as units of publication and citation (Donthu et al., 2021). The quantitative technique that was used in the current study is bibliometric analysis such that data gathered from a specific scientific database is reviewed. Scopus was used for this bibliometric analysis due to its comprehensive coverage in the areas of scientific, technological, medical, and social sciences literature. It also has tools for tracking and analyzing research output (Salisbury, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

For this study, an electronic search was undertaken using the Scopus database. The database advanced search features were utilized to identify any articles, book chapters, and manuscripts containing the term “spirituality” AND “Islamic perspectives” OR “views” OR “concept” on their titles, abstracts, and/or keywords. The date was limited between 2018-2022 and

restrictions on documents in English, Malay and Arabic were imposed. The last search was run on 27th April 2023 which produced a total of 361 documents. Figure 1 shows the flow diagram of the search strategy based on Zakaria et al. (2020).



**Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the Search Strategy**

Source: Zakaria et al. (2020)

### **Data Analysis**

The data was downloaded in the Research Information System (RIS) and comma-separated values file (CSV) format and analyzed with Publish or Perish, and VOSviewer. The author, source of the document, country, type, year, subject, and title of publishing are all gathered from the downloaded data and analyzed. Moreover, the co-occurrence of keywords used by authors were analyzed in which item clusters were identified. All the data were then tabulated and discussed within the context of bibliometric approach.

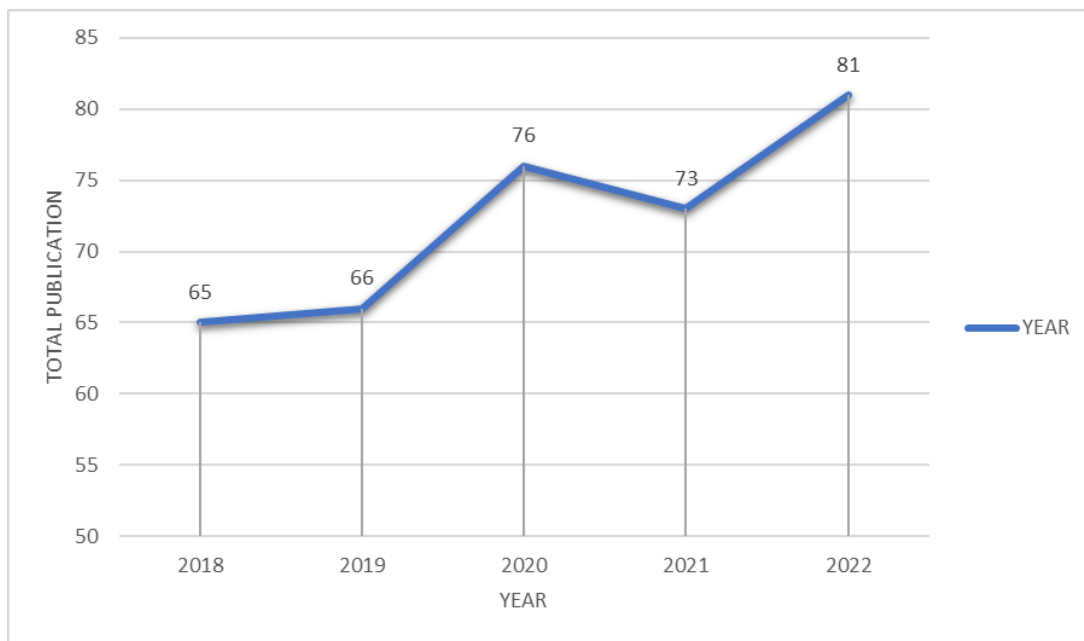
### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Volume of Publication from 2018 to 2022**

A total of 361 publications were identified on the database using the advanced search feature of the Scopus database. The number of publications started at 65 in 2018, showing an initial level of interest. This interest grew slightly to 66 publications in 2019 and a notable rise can be



seen in 2020 with a total of 76 publications indicating a heightened focus on the subject. However, there was a slight decline in 2021, where the number of publications decreased to 73. This dip might be attributed to various factors such as shifts in research priorities or external circumstances. One possible circumstance is the Covid-19 pandemic in which most researchers were focusing on the treatment options and preventative measures (Li et al., 2021). It is important to note that even with the decreased number of publications compared to 2020, the total publications were still higher compared to 2018 and 2019. This could be due to the continuous interest in the psychological impact of the pandemic (Arden & Chilcot, 2020) and how spirituality can be a possible coping strategy (Arslan & Yildirim, 2021). Nonetheless, the trend rebounded significantly in 2022, reaching 81 publications. This substantial increase suggests a renewed and strengthened interest in exploring spirituality from Islamic perspectives. Overall, the graph demonstrates a general upward trajectory, showcasing the growing significance of spirituality from Islamic perspective during the specified period. The fluctuations across the years that can be seen in Figure 2 reflect a dynamic interplay of academic exploration and contextual influences that have shaped the research landscape in this domain.



**Figure 2: Total Publications by Year**

Table 1 provides a detailed outlook of the publication trend with information regarding number of cited publications, total citations, and average citations per publication among others. The h-index, a measure of both productivity and impact, was calculated to be 10. This signifies that there were 10 publications in the dataset that each had at least 10 citations, revealing the presence of a core group of influential works. The g-index, a complementary metric that accounts for the distribution of citations across all publications, yielded a value of 16. This value is then squared to determine the impacts of both the mostly cited article and the less cited articles. Overall, the metrics from 2018 reflect a scholarly landscape where a notable fraction of publications received citations, with an average citation rate of 5.40. The h-index and g-index further highlight the presence of influential works, offering insights into the interplay between productivity and impact within the research domain during that year. This can be further explored based on the top 20 highly cited articles as shown in Table 2. The data suggests

that the most cited publications are work that are theoretical in nature (Tanhan & Strack, 2020; Sahin, 2018; Tanhan, 2019) while there is a growing interest on the role of spirituality with regards to individual health and well-being (Saeed et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2021; Weathers, 2018).

**Table 1: Total Publications and Citations by Year**

Year	TP	NCP	TC	C/P	h	g
2018	65	70.20	351	5.40	10	16
2019	66	78.50	314	4.76	9	15
2020	76	98.33	295	4.10	8	15
2021	73	116.0	232	3.46	9	12
2022	81	53.50	107	1.30	5	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>					

Notes: TP=total number of publications; NCP=number of cited publications; TC=total citations; C/P=average citations per publication; C/CP=average citations per cited publication; h=h-index; and g=g-index

**Table 2: Top 20 Highly Cited Articles On Scopus Database**

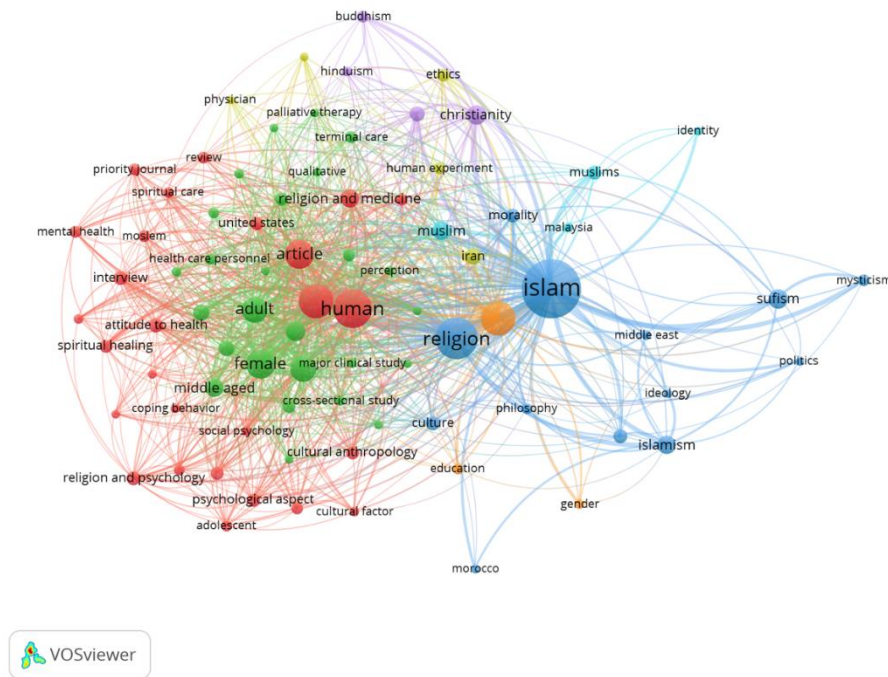
No.	Authors	Title	Cited by
1	Tanhan A., Strack R.W. (2020)	Online photovoice to explore and advocate for Muslim biopsychosocial spiritual wellbeing and issues: Ecological systems theory and ally development	43
2	Sahin A. (2018)	Critical issues in Islamic education studies: Rethinking Islamic and western liberal secular values of education	43
3	Moufahim M., Lichrou M. (2019)	Pilgrimage, consumption and rituals: Spiritual authenticity in a Shia Muslim pilgrimage	40
4	Tanhan A. (2019)	Acceptance and commitment therapy with ecological systems theory: Addressing Muslim mental health issues and wellbeing	28
5	Saeed F., Sardar M.A., Davison S.N., Murad H., Duberstein P.R., Quill T.E. (2019)	Patients' perspectives on dialysis decision-making and end-of-life care	18
6	Paris W., Seidler R.J.H., FitzGerald K., Padela A.I., Cozzi E., Cooper D.K.C. (2018)	Jewish, Christian and Muslim theological perspectives about xenotransplantation	17
7	Kurt Y., Sinkovics N., Sinkovics R.R., Yamin M. (2020)	The role of spirituality in Islamic business networks: The case of internationalizing Turkish SMEs	13
8	Heidari A., Yazdani H.R., Saghafi F., Jalilvand M.R. (2018)	The perspective of religious and spiritual tourism research: a systematic mapping study	13
9	Davis E.B., Granqvist P., Sharp C. (2021)	Theistic Relational Spirituality: Development, Dynamics, Health, and Transformation	12

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|----|---|---|----|
| 10 | Hill J. (2018)  | Wrapping authority: Women Islamic leaders in a Sufi movement in Dakar, Senegal                            | 12 |
| 11 | Weathers E. (2018)  | Spirituality and health: A middle eastern perspective   | 12 |
| 12 | Richardson C., Rammal H.G. (2018)   | Religious belief and international business negotiations: Does faith influence negotiator behaviour?      | 11 |
| 13 | Pahlevan Sharif S., Lehto R.H., Amiri M., Ahadzadeh A.S., Sharif Nia H., Haghdoost A.A., Khoshnavay Fomani F., Goudarzian A.H. (2021) | Spirituality and quality of life in women with breast cancer: The role of hope and educational attainment | 11 |
| 14 | Willis R., Zaidi A., Balouch S., Farina N. (2020)   | Experiences of People with Dementia in Pakistan: Help-Seeking, Understanding, Stigma, and Religion        | 10 |
| 15 | Ahmad Z., Ahad A. (2021)  | COVID-19: A Study of Islamic and Scientific Perspectives  | 10 |
| 16 | Myers P.R., Shoqirat N., Allen D.H., Dardas L.A. (2019)   | Patients with diabetes observing Ramadan: The experience of Muslims in the United States                  | 10 |
| 17 | Tanhan A., Young J.S. (2022)  | Muslims and Mental Health Services: A Concept Map and a Theoretical Framework                             | 10 |
| 18 | Caidi N. (2019)   | Pilgrimage to Hajj: An Information Journey  | 9  |
| 19 | Bubandt N., Rytter M., Suhr C. (2019)   | A second look at invisibility: <i>Al-Ghayb</i> , Islam, ethnography                                       | 9  |
| 20 | Almansour H.A., Chaar B., Saini B. (2018)   | Perspectives and experiences of patients with type 2 diabetes observing the Ramadan fast                  | 8  |

### ***Topic Trend Development Analysis***

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted by determining terms that frequently appear in VOSviewer which then provides currently evolving subjects and future study prospects. Next, utilizing network visualization (Figure 3) and density visualization (Figure 4), VOSviewer displays three different visualizations in bibliometric mapping associated with keywords into separate clusters. The keyword co-occurrence analysis used a full counting technique with a minimum number of occurrence keywords of five, yielding 3368 keywords with 82 items meeting the threshold.





**Figure 3: Network Visualization of Author's keywords Co-Occurrence Analysis**

Figure 3 shows 7 clusters marked with red, green, dark blue, yellow, purple, light blue and orange. The first cluster (red) has 27 items with the most frequent term being “humans” (162 occurrences). The second cluster (green) has 26 items with “female” as the most frequent term (93 occurrences). The third cluster (dark blue) has 13 items with words that often appear, namely "Islam" (377 occurrences). The fourth cluster (yellow) has 5 items with the word that often appears, namely "Iran" (30 occurrences). The fifth cluster (purple) has 4 items with the most frequent term, namely "Christianity" (43 occurrences). The sixth cluster (light blue) has 4 items with the most frequent term, namely "muslim" (37 occurrences). The seventh cluster (orange) has 3 items with the most frequent term, namely “spirituality” (127 occurrences).



	humans (133 occurrences), interview (22 occurrences), mental health (16 occurrences), moslem (15 occurrences), priority journal (15 occurrences), psychological aspect (19 occurrences), religion and medicine (36 occurrences), religion and psychology (24 occurrences), review (15 occurrences), spiritual care (14 occurrences), spiritual healing (18 occurrences), united states (19 occurrences), young adult (18 occurrences).		
2 <sup>nd</sup> Cluster (26 items)	Adult (76 occurrences), aged (25 occurrences), controlled study (19 occurrences), female (93 occurrences), male (74 occurrences), middle aged (40 occurrences), procedures (15 occurrences), psychology (43 occurrences), qualitative research (28 occurrences), quality of life (14 occurrences), questionnaire (19 occurrences), terminal care (16 occurrences).	clergy, clinical article, cross-sectional studies, cross-sectional study, decision making, depression, ethnic group, major clinical study, palliative therapy, perception, qualitative, semi structured interview, surveys and questionnaires, health care personnel.	Clinical studies
3 <sup>rd</sup> Cluster (13 items)	Culture (24 occurrences), Indonesia (21 occurrences), Islam 377, Islamism (40 occurrences), morality (22 occurrences), Morocco (9 occurrences), mysticism (15 occurrences), religion (192 occurrences), sufism (41 occurrences).	ideology, philosophy, politics, middle east.	Islamic thought and civilization
4 <sup>th</sup> Cluster (5 items)	Ethics (19 occurrences), human experiment (16 occurrences), Iran (30 occurrences),	Nursing, physician.	Medical ethics
5 <sup>th</sup> Cluster (4 items)	Buddhism (15 occurrences), Christianity (43 occurrences), Judaism (26 occurrences).	Hinduism.	Religious plurality
6 <sup>th</sup> Cluster	Muslim (37 occurrences), Muslims (23 occurrences).	Identity, Malaysia.	National identity

(4  
items)

7 <sup>th</sup> Cluster (3 items)	spirituality (127 occurrences).	gender, education.	Gender- based education
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### Conclusion

This study performed a bibliometric analysis of 361 articles that were identified from the Scopus database. The findings suggests that there are an increasing trend of publications focusing on spirituality from an Islamic perspective. Even though there is a reduction of publication on two different years specifically 2019 and 2021, the number of publications on 2021 were still higher compared to 2018 and 2019. This suggests that even during a pandemic where most researchers are focusing on treatment and preventative measures, spirituality is still an important variable in numerous academic disciplines. This is reflected in the number of citations on articles that focuses on health care and business as compared to theology which is an academic discipline that typically studies religion and spirituality. The bibliometric analysis in the current study also found topics trend such as mental health, spiritual healing, terminal care, and coping based on the network visualization and density visualization provided by VOSviewer. It is important to note that this study is theoretical in nature based on the data obtained from the Scopus database which is one of its limitations. However, the quantitative insights provide practical implications and empirical justification for future research topics related to spirituality from an Islamic perspective.

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