



Global Health Diplomacy: A Bibliometric Analysis of the Most Cited Publications

Küresel Sağlık Diplomasisi: En Çok Atıf Alan Yayınların Bibliyometrik Analizi

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ÖZET

Amaç: Bu çalışma, küresel sağlık diplomasisi literatürünün bibliyometrik analizini yaparak, alanın gelişim süreçlerini, araştırma eğilimlerini, akademik iş birliklerini ve anahtar temalarını sistematik bir şekilde ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Yöntem: Analiz için VOSviewer programı kullanılmıştır. Bibliyometrik analizde, yayınların yıllara, yazarlara, ülkelere, kurumlara, en çok atıf alan yayınlara ve iş birliği ağlarına göre dağılımı incelenmiştir.

Bulgular: Yayınların büyük ölçüde yüksek gelirli ülkelerden geldiği ve literatür üretiminin coğrafi olarak merkezileştiği gözlemlenmiştir. Mevcut literatür genellikle Dünya Sağlık Örgütü'nün rolü, sağlık güvenliği tehditleri ve yumuşak gücün kullanımı gibi konulara odaklanmaktadır; ancak, yerel bağlamlarda diplomasi süreçlerinin uygulanması, güç asimetrisi ve etik tartışmalar nispeten daha az ele alınmaktadır.

Sonuç: Küresel sağlık diplomasisi ile ilgili yayın sayısındaki artış, bu alanın bilimsel bir disipline dönüştüğünü ve politika oluşturma süreçlerinde daha görünür hale geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Küresel sağlık krizleri sadece halk sağlığını değil, dış politika süreçlerini de yeniden şekillendirmektedir. Yayınların büyük ölçüde yüksek gelirli ülkelerden gelmesi literatür üretiminin coğrafi olarak merkezileştiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durum, küresel sağlık sorunlarına evrensel çözümlerin gerekli olduğu bir alanda akademik temsilin dengesiz olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel sağlık diplomasisi, COVID-19, aşı, pandemi

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to systematically reveal the development processes, research trends, academic collaborations, and key themes of the field by conducting a bibliometric analysis of the global health diplomacy literature.

Method: The VOSviewer programme was used for the analysis. The bibliometric analysis examined the distribution of publications by year, author, country, institution, most cited publications, and collaboration networks.

Results: It was observed that publications largely originated from high-income countries and that literature production was geographically centralised. The existing literature generally focuses on topics such as the role of the World Health Organisation, health security threats, and the use of soft power; however, the application of diplomatic processes in local contexts, power asymmetries, and ethical debates are relatively less addressed.

Conclusion: The increase in the number of publications on global health diplomacy demonstrates that this field has become a scientific discipline and has become more visible in policy-making processes. Global health crises are reshaping not only public health but also foreign policy processes. The fact that publications originate largely from high-income countries reveals that literature production is geographically centralised. This situation raises questions about academic representation in a field where universal solutions to global health problems are necessary.

Key words: Global health diplomacy, COVID_19, vaccination, pandemics

Açıklama/Disclosure: Yazarların hiçbirisi, bu makalede bahsedilen herhangi bir ürün, aygıt veya ilaç ile ilgili maddi çıkar ilişkisine sahip değildir. Araştırma, herhangi bir dış organizasyon tarafından desteklenmedi. Yazarlar çalışmanın birincil verilerine tam erişim izni vermek ve derginin talep ettiği takdirde verileri incelemesine izin vermeyi kabul etmektedirler.

Atıf yapmak için/ Cite this article as: Köprülü G, Ak M. Global Health Diplomacy: A Bibliometric Analysis of the Most Cited Publications. Mev Med Sci. 2025; 5(3): 110-117



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought global health diplomacy, which has remained in the background in the international relations literature, to the forefront and led to numerous studies on the subject. When the existing literature is analysed, it is important to look at when and to what extent states have been involved in bilateral or multiple negotiations for health reasons. Although health diplomacy seems to have been historically sidelined in the field of international relations, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided numerous examples of states putting health at the centre of foreign policy, from the European Union's regional vaccination initiative to India's shipment of hydroxychloroquine to the United States in April 2020. Therefore, it is time to give much more importance to health diplomacy in international relations academia and practice (1). This is because it is the responsibility of states to control chaotic situations such as pandemics that closely concern the whole world and to alleviate harsh conditions, which necessitates inter-state cooperation. These collaborations create a dilemma for the majorities in terms of states pursuing their own interests first. This is because states prefer to prioritise their own interests over serving global health. This is the nature of relations between nations. States should both cooperate and share information with international organisations and aim to protect the physical, mental and economic well-being of their citizens in line with the aims of the World Health Organisation's international health charter (2). Health diplomacy is used by states not only to protect the health and welfare of their own citizens, but also as soft power in international politics.

Unlike today's world, in the past, a state had to take care of itself and struggle with its own internal problems. Today, it is not possible to talk about this with the effect of globalisation (3). Especially in the field of health, when there are effects that transcend the borders of states, it is not enough for states to take care of themselves. At this point, the importance of diplomacy emerges. As a concept, diplomacy is defined as the art and practice of negotiation (4). The concept of 'global health diplomacy' is defined as negotiations between states for health. Diplomats trying to protect the interests of their states in bilateral agreements and multiple alliances have to conduct negotiations meticulously in situations where domestic and foreign policy issues become intricate, epidemics occur and security threats arise. The World Health Organisation is the leading institution in global health diplomacy. In recent years, in addition to the WHO, more actors in the field of health have started to have a voice in the international arena (5). Global health diplomacy is a new field that addresses the dual goals of improving global health and enhancing international relations, particularly in conflict zones and resource-poor settings (6). As the concept of health diplomacy encompasses

the most effective international health interventions, it is essential to recognise the political, social, economic and cultural differences between states in a more inclusive manner. The international environment, which in a sense necessitates a state of interdependence that transcends spatial, temporal and cognitive boundaries caused by globalisation, has brought climate change, migration, instability and pandemics (7). The COVID-19 pandemic has been a slap in the face to the world that avoids these unstable collaborations and has taken global health diplomacy to a different dimension and has become an important element of geopolitics. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in a speech on 18 August 2020 said: "No one is safe until everyone is safe." (8).

Global health diplomacy first began in 1851 when European states came together at the first International Health Conference to co-operate in the fight against epidemics such as cholera, plague and yellow fever. The countries participating in the conference tried to combat diseases with national quarantine policies. In the 20th century, conferences were held for international cooperation to combat epidemics and international health organisations were established. In 1948, the World Health Organisation was established and in 1951, WHO published the International Health Regulations, a regulation for the prevention of infectious diseases that should be quarantined (9).

In the environment of ideological, political and military competition between the USA and the USSR created by the Cold War period, relations continued with diplomatic, economic and psychological struggles instead of direct armed conflicts. During the Cold War, health diplomacy was used as a diplomatic tool between ideological tensions beyond addressing global health problems. In particular, diplomatic relations between the US and the Soviet Union were strengthened through vaccination programmes and public health campaigns. During the outbreak of smallpox, the US and the USSR used health diplomacy as a soft power tool and demonstrated how they could unite towards a common goal despite their ideological opposition (10).

COVID-19, the largest global health crisis since the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918, has disrupted cooperation between states. Although states tried to take a common stance against the pandemic under the leadership of WHO, the diplomatic crisis between the United States and China suspended the agreements to which WHO, UN Security Council, G7 and G20 member states were parties. In this process, WHO's limited mandate delayed taking measures against the pandemic and caused the pandemic to turn into a global crisis. For COVID-19 diagnosis, treatment and vaccination, countries entered into a race prioritising their own citizens. In particular, high-income countries initiated 'vaccine nationalism' and spent large amounts of money

Table 1. Top 16 organizations by publication, citation and impact levels

University	Number of Publication	Number of Citation	Impact Level
University of toronto	21	293	13,95
Central university of punjab	14	186	13,29
University of the west indies	14	242	17,29
University of oxford	14	294	21,00
Saveetha university	13	136	10,46
University of ottawa	8	78	9,75
Datta meghe institute of medical sciences	7	37	5,29
Lund university	7	79	11,29
London school of economics and political science	6	97	16,17
Witwatersrand university	6	32	5,33
Harvard medical school	6	69	11,50
Himachal pradesh university	5	43	8,60
Nanyang technological university	5	52	10,40
The london school of hygiene & tropical medicine	5	185	37,00
University of oslo	5	99	19,80
Sao paulo university	5	42	8,40

to guarantee access to vaccines for their own people (11). This situation has led to inequalities in access to vaccines worldwide.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bibliometric analysis was used in the study. VOSviewer programme was used for the analysis. In the bibliometric analysis, the distribution of publications by years, authors, countries, institutions, most cited publications and collaboration networks were examined. Structural patterns in the literature were evaluated by visualising keyword matches, author collaborations and co-publication relationships at country level.

The data used in this study were obtained from the Web of Science (WoS) database. Academic publications were searched using the keywords 'diplomacy' and 'Covid'. In the study, the keywords 'diplomac*' and 'covid*' were searched on 14.07.2025 and a total of 461 studies were reached as a result of the search. The search was limited to include only title, abstract and keywords, and articles in Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) and Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI- EXPANDED) indexes were included.

RESULTS

In this section, a bibliometric analysis was conducted for 461 studies obtained as a result of the search with the keywords "diplomac*" and "covid*" in Web of Science.

Leading Organizations by Publication, Citation and Impact Levels

Researchers in the field benefit from institutional spending assessments based on the institutions with the highest publication volumes in the literature. Once this analysis is complete, the frequency of publications in this region

and the data on relevant outbreaks, such as diplomacy and COVID-19, can be more systematically evaluated. While the number of publications produced by authors on a given topic is a significant indicator, the inclusion of the publications' level of acceptance and contributions in the academic literature provides a more comprehensive measure than quantitative production. Table 1 shows the top three publication numbers: the University of Toronto, the University of the Punjab, and the University of the West Indies.

Figure 1 also shows all additional institutions publishing in the relevant subject area on a map, while Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the number of publications, citation levels, and impact rates of these institutions. This table is an important resource for researchers conducting literature reviews or academic research on the subject, providing comprehensive citation data and impact analyses, along with the institutions' overall publication performance.

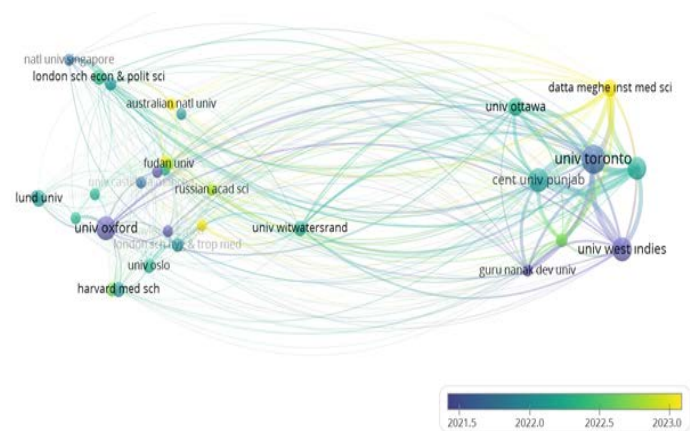


Figure 1. Leading organizations by publication, citation and impact levels.

Journal	Number of publication	Number of citation	Impact levels
Hauge journal of diplomacy	21	144	6,86
Place branding and public diplomacy	18	269	14,94
Health promotion perspectives	9	130	14,44
International affairs	7	156	22,29
Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhunarodnye otnosheniya	6	9	1,50
Frontiers in public health	5	51	10,20
Asian survey	5	15	3,00
Journal of asian and african studies	4	42	10,50
Humanities & social sciences communications	4	30	7,50
International politics	4	39	9,75
Revista brasileira de politica internacional	4	8	2,00
Social sciences (basel)	4	29	7,25
East asia	4	29	7,25
Global policy	4	6	1,50

Words	Frequency	Words	Frequency
Covid-19	243	Digital diplomacy	23
China	66	Global health	22
Diplomacy	46	India	19
Public diplomacy	41	Global health diplomacy	18
Vaccine diplomacy	41	Foreign policy	16
Soft power	37	Africa	14
Health diplomacy	28	Russia	12
Vaccines	25	Science diplomacy	12

Examining journals published within the field allows us to determine which journals are most frequently preferred by researchers and their impact. The journal, which hosts the most publications using the keywords "Diplomacy" and "Covid," has a special storage feature for contributing to the relevant information repository. This study not only guides academics in literature searches but also facilitates them in

Table 2 lists articles published in journals that cover the topics of "diplomacy" and "COVID" together, along with the recorded citations for these publications. The impact of these publications was also analyzed. Rankings are primarily based on articles published on related topics, with no impact factor observed.

In Figure 2, it is seen that the 'Hauge Journal of Diplomacy', which ranks first with the number of publications, is one of the journals that first contributed to the literature on the



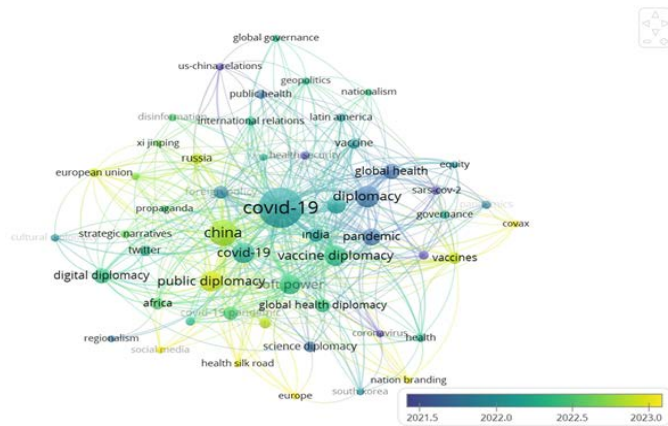


Figure 3. The most common words in studies

subject in 2020. Although the journal 'International Affairs' contributed after 2021, it is seen that it ranks first in terms of impact level.

Keywords most used in studies

Frequently used keywords in the studies are presented in Table 3 according to their frequency of use. Because keywords reflect the core content and themes of academic units, they constitute an important indicator for determining the characteristics of research in the literature. In this context, keyword analysis allows for a more detailed exploration of the framing framework and subthemes related to the topic on which the study focuses.

Figure 3 shows the 461 articles considered most representative, with key concepts visualized in larger font sizes based on their usage patterns. They are also sorted by color scale, from light to dark tones, based on frequency of use. Visible on the map, the most frequently occurring term is "Covid-19," a central concept that appeared 243 times in the literature. Between 2021 and 2022, this term was used most frequently. The second most frequently used keyword

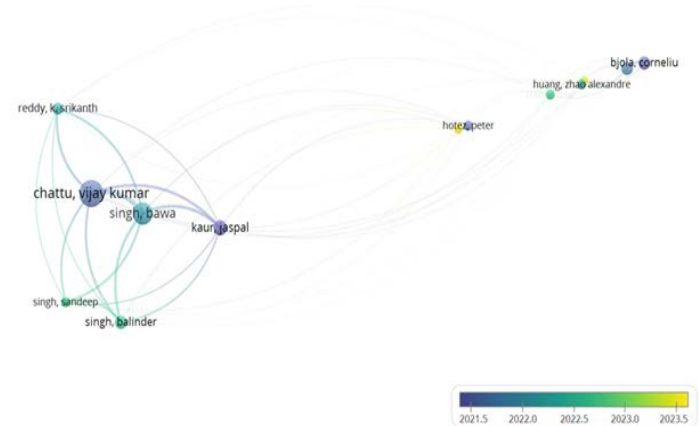


Figure 4. Analysis of active authors

was 'china', which was repeated 66 times, while the third most frequently used keyword was 'diplomacy'.

Analysis of Active Authors

Table 4 lists the authors who have contributed most to the "diplomacy" and "Covid" literature, ranked by publication type, structure, and impact level. The basic application of publication and citation standards indicates that Vijay Kumar Chattu is the author with the most publications in this field, ranking first with 21 publications and 293 citations. Bawa Singh is second with 14 publications and 186 citations. Jaspal Kaur is third with 7 publications and 116 citations. She also leads the impact perspective with an impact level of 16.57. Corneliu Bjola follows with 5 publications, 71 citations, and an impact level of 14.20.

Figure 4 shows that the top three authors (Chattu, Singh, and Kaur) are among the first authors to collaborate with each other and contribute to the field. Since research citations indicate not only the quality of the work but also the influence of the authors, it is very important to evaluate the authors according to the number of citations their published work has

Table 4. Analysis of active authors

Author	Number of publication	Number of citation	Impact level
Chattu, Vijay Kumar	21	293	13,95
Singh, Bawa	14	186	13,29
Kaur, Jaspal	7	116	16,57
Singh, Balinder	5	43	8,60
Manor, Ilan	5	53	10,60
Bjola, Corneliu	5	71	14,20
Reddy, K. Srikanth	4	35	8,75
Singh, Sandeep	3	15	5,00
Huang, Zhao Alexandre	3	38	12,67
Vadlamannati, K. Chaitanya	3	12	4,00
Moral, Pablo	3	15	5,00
Tran, Emilie	3	25	8,33
Hotez, Peter	3	20	6,67

Table 5. Publications most frequently included in resources

Publications	Number of Citations
Nye Jr, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. The annals of the American academy of political and social science, 616(1), 94-109	33
Fazal, T. M. (2020). Health diplomacy in pandemical times. International Organization, 74(51), E78-E97.	32
Lee, S.T. (2021). Vaccine diplomacy: nation branding and China's COVID-19 soft power play. Place branding and public diplomacy, 19(1), 64.	29
Kobierecka, A., & Kobierecki, M.M. (2021) Coronavirus diplomacy: Chinese medical assistance and its diplomatic implications. International Politics (The Hague), 58(6), 937.	25
Hotez, P. J. (2014). "Vaccinediplomacy": Historical perspectives and future directions. PLoS neglected tropical diseases, 8(6), e2808	25
Kickbusch, I., Silberschmidt, G., & Buss, P. (2007). Global health diplomacy: The need for new perspectives, strategic approaches and skills in global health. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 85, 230-232	18
Gauttam, P., Singh, B., & kaur, J. (2020). COVID-19 and Chinese global health diplomacy: Geopolitical opportunity for China's hegemony?. Millennial Asia, 11(3), 318-340	17
Manor, I. (2019). The digitalization of public diplomacy (Vol. 15). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan	17
Javed, S., & Chattu, V. K. (2020). Strengthening the COVID-19 pandemic response, global leadership, and international cooperation through global health diplomacy. Health promotion perspectives, 10(4), 300.	16
Chattu, V. K., & Knight, W. A. (2019). Global health diplomacy as a tool of peace. Peace Review, 31(2), 148-157.	15

received. By using the writings of the relevant authors, it will be possible to find literature in this direction and this will also provide a resource for further research.

Publications most frequently included in resources

Table 5 presents the most frequently cited sources in the bibliographies of the studies and shows the top 10 most frequently included studies in the bibliography.

In Table 5, Nye Jr.'s (2008) study ranks first with 33 citations (12). This is followed by Fazal (2020) with 32 citations (1), Lee (2021) with 29 citations(13), and Kobierecka & Kobierecki (2021) with 25 citations (14). The other publications, outside of Nye Jr.'s (2008) study, Hotez (2014) (15), Kickbusch et al. (2007)(5), Gauttam (2020) (16), Manor (2019) (17), Javed and Chattu (2020) (18), Chattu and Knight (2019) (19) are

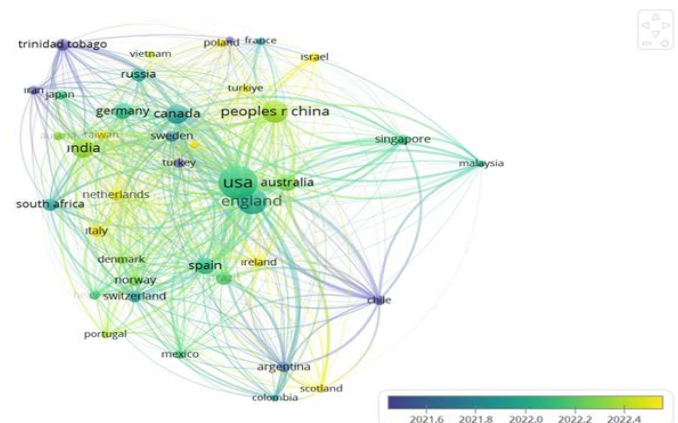
said to be directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic on diplomacy.

Countries with most publications

The top 10 countries with the most publications and the number of citations and impact levels of these publications are given in Table 6. The USA is the most productive country producing publications using the words 'diplomacy' and 'covid' with 106 publications and 1122 citations. The USA is followed by the UK with 63 publications and China with 48

Table 6. Publications by Countries

Country	Number of publications	Number of citations	Impact levels
USA	106	1122	10,58
England	63	773	12,27
Peoples R China	48	415	8,65
India	37	416	11,24
Canada	35	398	11,37
Australia	27	291	10,78
Spain	25	262	10,48
Germany	23	171	7,43
Brazil	17	179	10,53
Russia	17	49	2,88

**Figure 5.** Collaboration network of countries publishing

publications. Although the USA ranks first according to the number of publications and citations, the UK ranks first with 12.27 according to the impact level.

Figure 5 shows the years in which countries are more productive in 'diplomacy' and 'covid'. After 2022, it is seen that Poland, Vietnam, Israel, Turkey, Taiwan, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland contributed to the literature by publishing on these topics.

DISCUSSION

It has been observed that publications on global health diplomacy have increased significantly, especially after 2010 and during the COVID-19 period. This shows the impact of global crises on academic production. The increase in the number of publications reveals that the field has become a scientific discipline and has become more visible in policy-making processes. A significant portion of the literature comes from high-income countries such as the USA, the United Kingdom and Canada. This shows that global health diplomacy has not yet reached a global level of representation. Limited international partnerships were observed in the analysis of collaboration networks, indicating that research production is geopolitically centralised despite global challenges. The most cited publications are generally centred around themes such as health security, pandemic management, the role of WHO, the use of soft power and the intersection of health and foreign policy.

This study analyses both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the academic literature in the field of global health diplomacy to comprehensively reveal the structural characteristics and development trends of the field. The bibliometric findings show that scientific interest in global health diplomacy has increased significantly, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This confirms that global health crises are reshaping not only public health but also foreign policy processes. It has been observed that publications largely originate from high-income countries and that the production of literature is geographically centralised. This suggests an imbalance in academic representation in a field where universal solutions to global health problems are needed. Existing literature often focuses on issues such as the role of the WHO, health security threats and the use of soft power; however, the application of diplomacy processes in local contexts, power asymmetries and ethical debates are relatively less covered.

Multicentre and inclusive studies in the field of global health diplomacy should be increased. Interdisciplinary approaches (international relations, public health, political science, economics) should be used more widely. Diversification of data sources (e.g. field studies, interviews, policy analyses) will increase academic depth. Global health

diplomacy should be institutionalised to build sustainable models of health cooperation, not only in times of crisis. It is recommended that the WHO and similar actors develop more participatory diplomatic platforms where the voices of different countries can be equally heard.

Although each country seems to be experiencing the same challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the intensity of the problems and the solutions varied from country to country. The different health systems and capacities of each country, differences in access and distribution of vaccines, economic collapse and increase in unemployment rates, the negative effects of closure and social isolation, and of course, most importantly, mental health deterioration as a result of anxiety disorders caused by all these problems resulted in different effects of the pandemic in countries. While countries with strong health systems took measures against the pandemic faster, developing countries were inadequate in accessing the vaccine and conducting the treatment process. While some countries prioritised only their own people, others tried to support low-income countries in the distribution of vaccines. Diplomacy became important at this point. Diplomatic relations were critical in terms of global cooperation, sharing information on vaccine development, and transferring vaccines between countries. WHO tried to reveal the effects of the pandemic in economic, political and psychological aspects with the reports published during and after the pandemic. Likewise, The Lancet Psychiatry, Nature, JAMA Psychiatry, BMJ Mental Health and UNICEF & UNESCO have also published on the negative effects of the pandemic on mental health.

Etik Kurul: This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee for Non- Pharmaceutical and Non-Medical Device Research at Necmettin Erbakan University (Decision date and number: 26 September 2025-2025/5984).

Çıkar Çatışması: Çalışmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması yoktur.

Finansal Çıkar Çatışması: Çalışmada herhangi bir finansal çıkar çatışması yoktur.

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