

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING: CHARTING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE AND EMERGING RESEARCH FRONTIERS

Fadhilah Mohd Ishak@Zainudin<sup>1\*</sup>  
Firdaus Abdul Rahman<sup>2</sup>,  
Hafizah Mat Nawi<sup>3</sup>,  
Khadijah Abdul Rahman<sup>4</sup>,  
Nur Shaliza Sapiai<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kelantan, 18500 Machang, Kelantan, (E-mail: [fadhi513@uitm.edu.my](mailto:fadhi513@uitm.edu.my))

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, 08400 Merbok, Kedah Malaysia, (Email: [firdaus396@uitm.edu.my](mailto:firdaus396@uitm.edu.my))

<sup>3</sup> National Defence University of Malaysia, Faculty of Defence Studies and Management, Perdana Camp, 57000 Sg Besi, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Email: [hafizah.matnawi@upnm.edu.my](mailto:hafizah.matnawi@upnm.edu.my))

<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Kelantan, Kampus Machang 18500 Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia, (Email: [khadijah10@uitm.edu.my](mailto:khadijah10@uitm.edu.my))

<sup>5</sup> Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Kelantan, Kampus Machang 18500 Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia, (Email: [nurshaliza@uitm.edu.my](mailto:nurshaliza@uitm.edu.my))

\*Corresponding author: [firdaus396@uitm.edu.my](mailto:firdaus396@uitm.edu.my)

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**Abstract:** *Women's empowerment in household decision making has emerged as a significant topical issue and debate among scholars. Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015, one of the goals is to achieve gender equality and women empowerment. The importance of this goals which has become a national agenda has necessitated this to study to identify the relevant factors that are associated with women empowerment as well as to narrow the gender inequality gap. This study presents a bibliometric analysis of published research on women's empowerment in household decision making, drawing on publications retrieved from the Scopus databases covering the period from 1986 to 2026. The database was filtered to include peer reviewed journals and 606 documents were extracted. The published papers have been analysed using bibliometric parameters and systematically examines the volume and growth of scholarly output, identifies the most leading authors, journals, and countries. While for the citation analysis, the study employs Harzing's Publish or Perish Program to integrate the data. Based on the data, it shows that studies examining women empowerment and household*

*decision making are becoming prominent with the rising trend of annual publications as well as citations. It is found that most of the research of women empowerment was carried out in United States, India, Bangladesh and United Kingdom. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by providing a structured overview of the current state of knowledge, identifying research gaps, and offering directions for future research in this increasingly policy relevant field.*

**Keywords:** *women empowerment, household, decision making*

## Introduction

The connection of women's empowerment and household decision making has attracted scholar attention in recent years. Various studies have linked the household decision making autonomy to decisions on health care, large household purchases, and control over household money (Hossain et.al, 2025; Naseef et al., 2025). Empirically, empowering women can be accelerated through intrahousehold decision making with evidence signifying that improvement in women's bargaining power requires large improvements in their access to financial resources (Calvi et al., 2022; Kochar et al., 2022).

Furthermore, women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept encompassing social, economic, and political aspects and plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development, with digital financial literacy increasingly recognized as a key mediator of women's financial decision-making capacity (Mishra et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2024). The relevance of this analysis is further emphasized by the accelerating growth of literature following the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which explicitly emphasize gender equality and women's empowerment as central pillars of the global development agenda (SDGs) (Cardona Carolina et al., 2024).

Thus, a bibliometric analysis offers a powerful methodological lens to map the intellectual structure, temporal evolution, and thematic trajectory of this research domain. By systematically examining publication trends, citation networks, keyword co-occurrences, and collaborative patterns, bibliometric studies provide an insight of how knowledge in a given field has been produced, disseminated, and interconnected over time (Donthu et al., 2021).

Using the Scopus database, a total of 606 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1986 and 2026 were identified and analysed. The VOSviewer software was employed to conduct keyword co-occurrence analysis. To further assess scholarly influence, Harzing's Publish or Perish software was used to perform citation analysis, highlighting key contributions of scholarly impact. Hence, this study aims to offer a structured overview of the current state of knowledge, highlight gaps in the existing literature and suggest directions for future research.

## Objective of Study

The Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyse current trends in women's empowerment in household decision making

2. To evaluate annual changes in subject trends, co-occurrence analysis, and scientific publications.

### Related Work

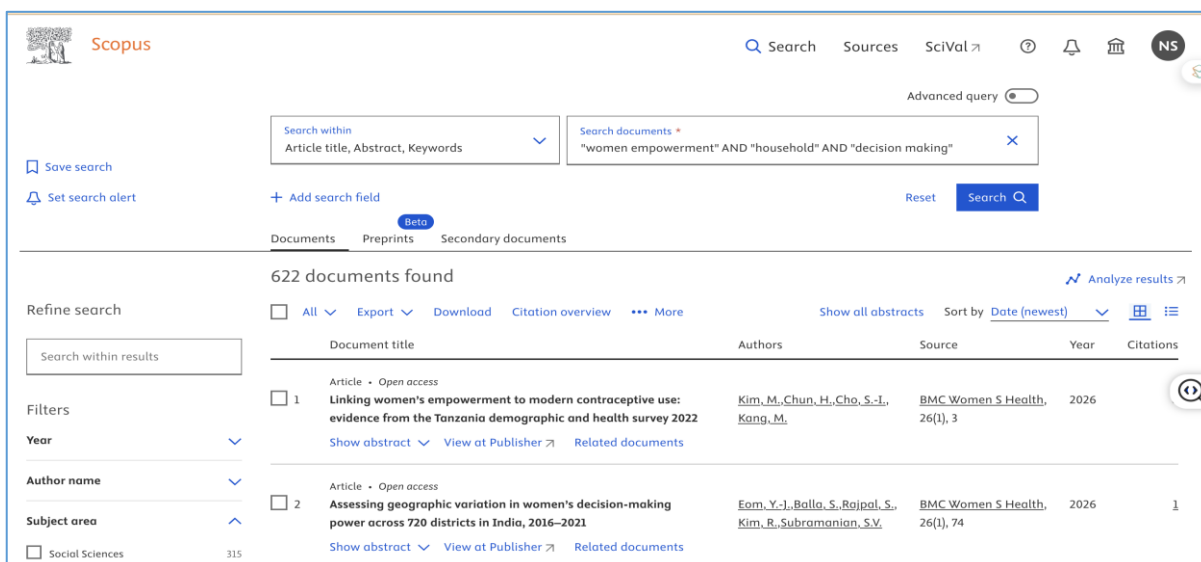
Women's empowerment in household decision making is a crucial factor influencing several aspects of development such as healthcare, economic stability and social equity. Empowerment in household decision making associated with improvement in health and economic stability. Research in Pakistan examine that a minimal empowerment significantly reduces health expenditures and the likelihood of appalling health costs, with a unit increase in empowerment lowers the decreasing deprivation due to health costs by 80% (Ishfaq & Ali, 2026).

While in Bangladesh, women's involvement in healthcare decisions, significant purchases, and mobility is positively associated with deliveries supervised by skilled birth attendants, underscoring the importance of decision-making authority in enhancing maternal health outcomes (Alam et al., 2025). In India, improved transport infrastructure indirectly enhanced women's empowerment by increasing employment opportunities, indicating how structural interventions can develop decision making power (Bhattacharjee & Dubey, 2024).

Cultural and social norms significantly influence women's decision making roles. In rural Bangladesh, while women often participate in financial decisions, men normally retain the last decision, which reflecting rooted patriarchal norms (Kirkwood et al., 2023). This is supported by research that was done in Uganda which shows that joint decision making often as male dominance since men regularly have the final conviction despite women's involvement (Acosta et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need for transformative programs that encounter traditional gender roles and foster equitable decision making (Lecoutere & Chu, 2024; Sanya et al., 2025).

In Burkina Faso, interventions that combined economic strengthening with family coaching made women more involved in decisions about the health of their children, but they didn't have much of an effect on other household economic decisions (Karimli et al., 2021). In Ghana, women's involvement in agricultural decision making significantly enhanced food security but the inequalities in resource access are still endured (Asitik & Abu, 2020; Essilfie et al., 2021). Thus, future research should focus on comprehensive approach that integrate economic, educational and social strategies to promote equitable decision making and sustainable development.

## METHODOLOGY



**Figure 1: Scopus database searching keywords**

The current study adopted a bibliometric research design to investigate the development, intellectual structure and evolving research trends in women empowerment and household decision making domain. The reason for being with the bibliometric analysis is that it serves as a systematic and quantitative approach to assess scientific output (i.e. publications), citation impact, collaborative trends, and thematic development in a body of literature. The main data source was the Scopus database due to the deservedness of this tool for exploration based on a rich coverage of international peer reviewed publications, and its viability in bibliometric mapping. A data search was performed on 9 April 2026 using the keywords of “women empowerment” AND “household” AND “decision making”, limited to be found in article title/abstract/keyword. This initial search yielded 622 documents.

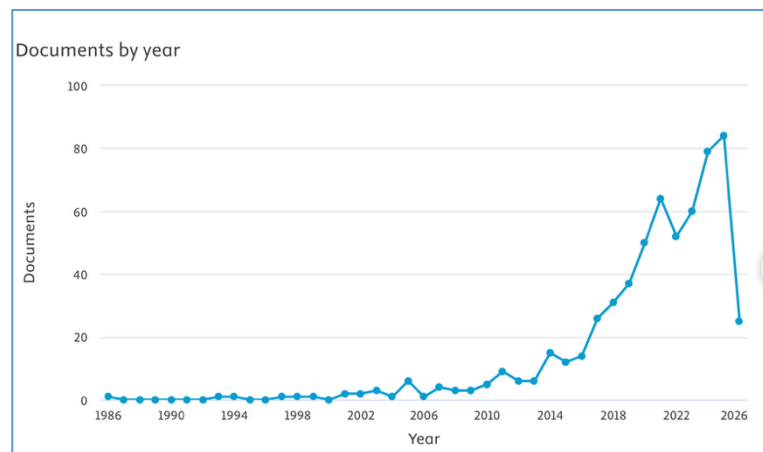
In doing so, a screening and refinement process was performed within Scopus to obtain both relevance and consistency of the dataset. The dataset included document types flagged as non-core, such as notes and data papers. Furthermore, the publication stage was also verified in order to only include final indexed publications; “article in press” records were excluded from consideration. This filtering process led to a final dataset of 606 documents, from which all further analyses were derived. The chosen publication records constitute the key indexed evidence-based literature associated with this agenda and form an adequate sample to drive performance analysis and knowledge mapping.

Publish or Perish and VOSviewer were combined for complementary bibliometric mapping. Citation based performance indicators (e.g. total publications, total citations, citations per year, citations per paper, citations per author, h-index and g-index as well as related impact measures) were evaluated using Publish or Perish. First, these indicators following the analysis were used to assess general published influence about research field maturity. In parallel, VOSviewer was used for science mapping and network visualization. In particular, it was

applied to build and analyse author co-authorship networks, country collaboration networks, and keyword co-occurrence maps. These visualization techniques facilitated the detection of key authors, leading countries and group collaboration clusters, as well as dominant research themes.

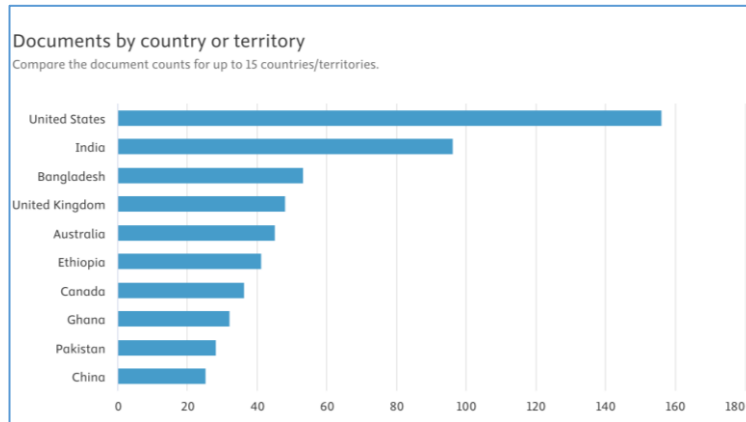
The combination of Scopus, Publish or Perish and VOSviewer allowed to offer a robust methodological underpinning in terms of both the performance dimension and conceptual/social structure of the literature. This hybrid bibliometric strategy enabled this study to incorporate not only publication and citation trends, but also the exploration of collaboration and thematic condensation characterizing women empowerment and household decision making research.

## Result and Discussion



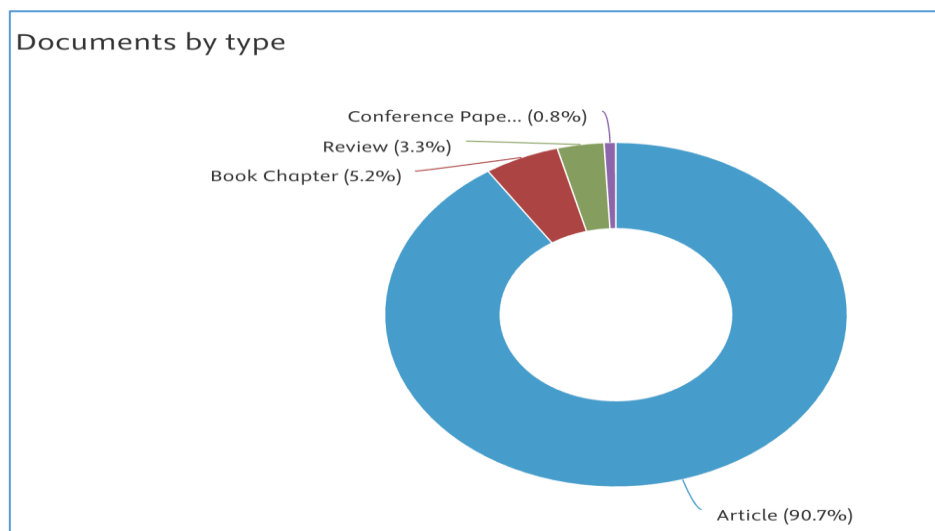
**Figure 2: Documents by Year**

The annual publication trend of the Scopus database shows that research on women empowerment and household decision making has been very limited from 1986 to early 2000s, with only few documents published in a year. There had been a slow uptick from the late 2000s, but there really was a steeper upturn in the mid-2010s onward. Publication output distinctly increased after 2017, suggesting an expanding scholarly and policy interest in the topic. In recent years, this upward trend continued with 37 documents in 2019; 50 – in 2020; 64 in 2021; 52 in 2022; and for the next few years there were: 60 in 2023, 79 records in-years of publications to-date on Iranian studies are equivalent to those provided by a network of research-companies fighting for institutions budgets needs every year. The lower count for 2026 (25 documents) is likely due to that its data on research activity are still incomplete; there is unlikely a real drop in scholarship activity. Thus, the figure shows a robust long term upward trend and indicates that this field has transformed from a rather niche subject matter into an active area of interdisciplinary research with high growth potential.



**Figure 2: Documents by Country**

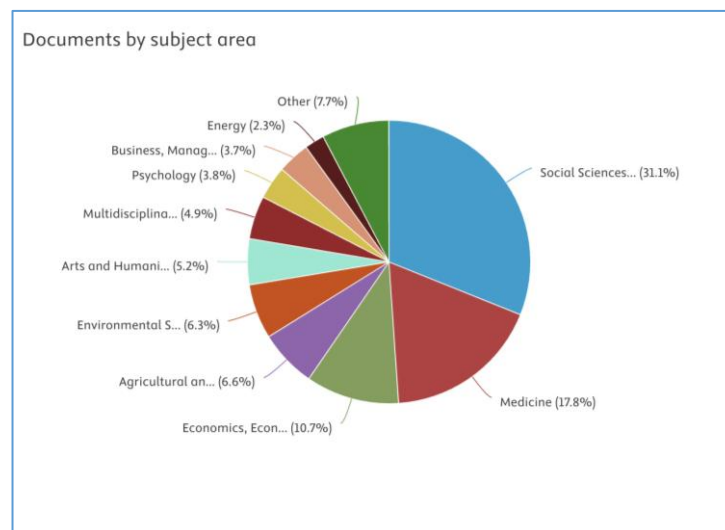
The geographical publications of research on women empowerment and household decision making (based on analysis of 606 documents in Scopus), led the USA with 156 documents, which exceeded all other countries. India is second with 96 publications, showing a vigorous and growing South Asian contribution. At the third position is Bangladesh (53), followed by United Kingdom (48) and Australia (45), indicating that both developed and developing-country context have significance in this area. Other countries making significant contributions to the literature include Ethiopia (41), Canada (36), Ghana (32), Pakistan (28) and China. The individuals are spread across the globe, indicating that this topic has intrigue abroad as well though it's a hot topic in countries where gender issues, development goals and household welfare are more central to the socio-political agenda. The most important thing about the figure though is the relevance of the field and knowledge production mainly led by a handful of countries.



**Figure 3: Source Type**

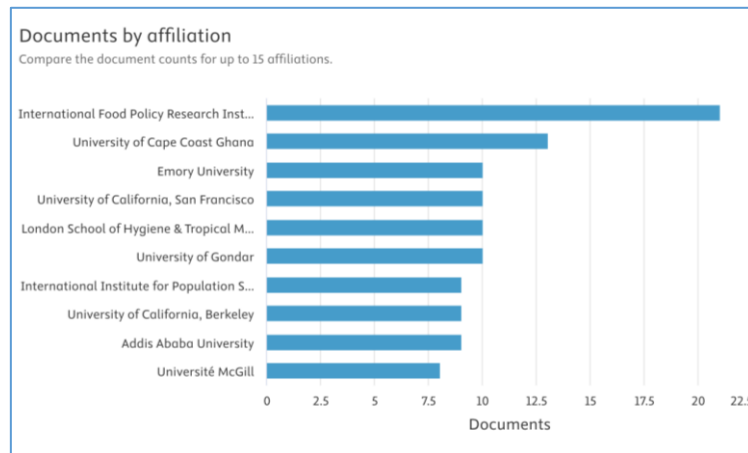
As indicated in the Scopus document-type distribution appended in Table xx, the research on women empowerment and household decision making is overwhelmingly represented by

journal articles-549 out of 606 documents (90.7%). Whereas the relative small number suggests most knowledge produced in the field is named with and communicated through full-length peer-reviewed articles or that empirical investigation is primarily focused on formal scholarly dissemination. Book chapters account for 32 documents (5.2%) and reveal a small but still meaningful contribution from edited volumes (often providing conceptual or thematic discussions). Three (3.3%) of the articles are review papers, suggesting there is evidence synthesis out there but less prevalent than original research. Only the conference papers are very limited, which accounts for only 5 (0.8%), indicates that the field is less dependent upon their publication outlets through conferences. Evidently, the figure indicates a mature and article-focused research landscape where peer-reviewed journal publications are the main avenue for elaborating ideas, supporting data and policy relevant conversation.



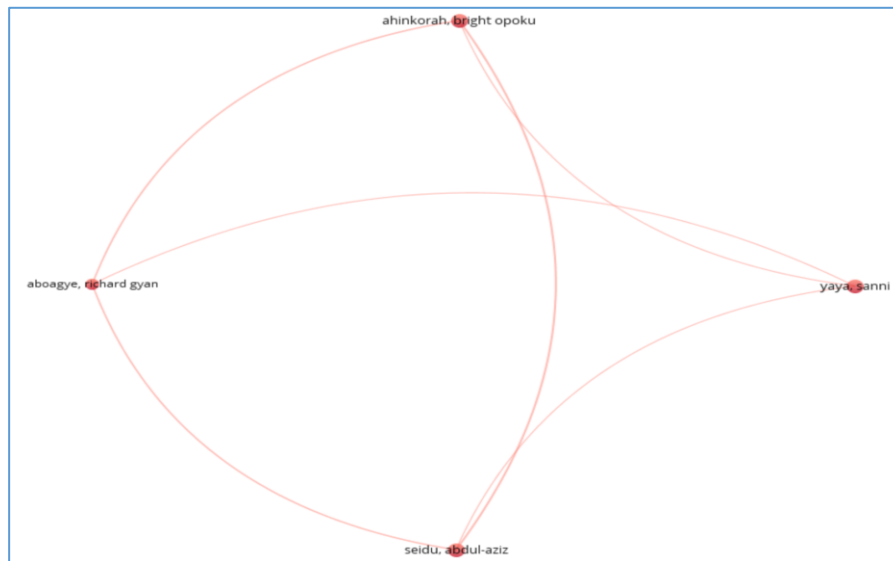
**Figure 4: Documents by Subject Area**

The subject-area distribution given is from Scopus, which indicates that research on women empowerment and household decision making displays a strong interdisciplinary nature; however the majority of records are anchored in Social Sciences (303 records, accounting for 31.1% of records). Medicine comes second with 174 documents (17.8%), meaning that the topic is also widely dealt concerning health and reproductive perspectives. Economics, Econometrics and Finance account for 104 documents (10.7%), with attention to the dimensions of household welfare, labor and allocation of resources. Other notable contributions are made by Agricultural and Biological Sciences (64; 6.6%), Environmental Science (61; 6.3%) and Arts and Humanities (51; 5.2%). Slightly lower but still impactful proportions are in Multidisciplinary studies (48; 4.9%), Psychology (37; 3.8%), and Business, Management and Accounting (36; 3.7%). In summary, the figure has shown that this literature covers social, health, economic and development-oriented domains and thus highlighted the broad multidimensional constituents of the field.



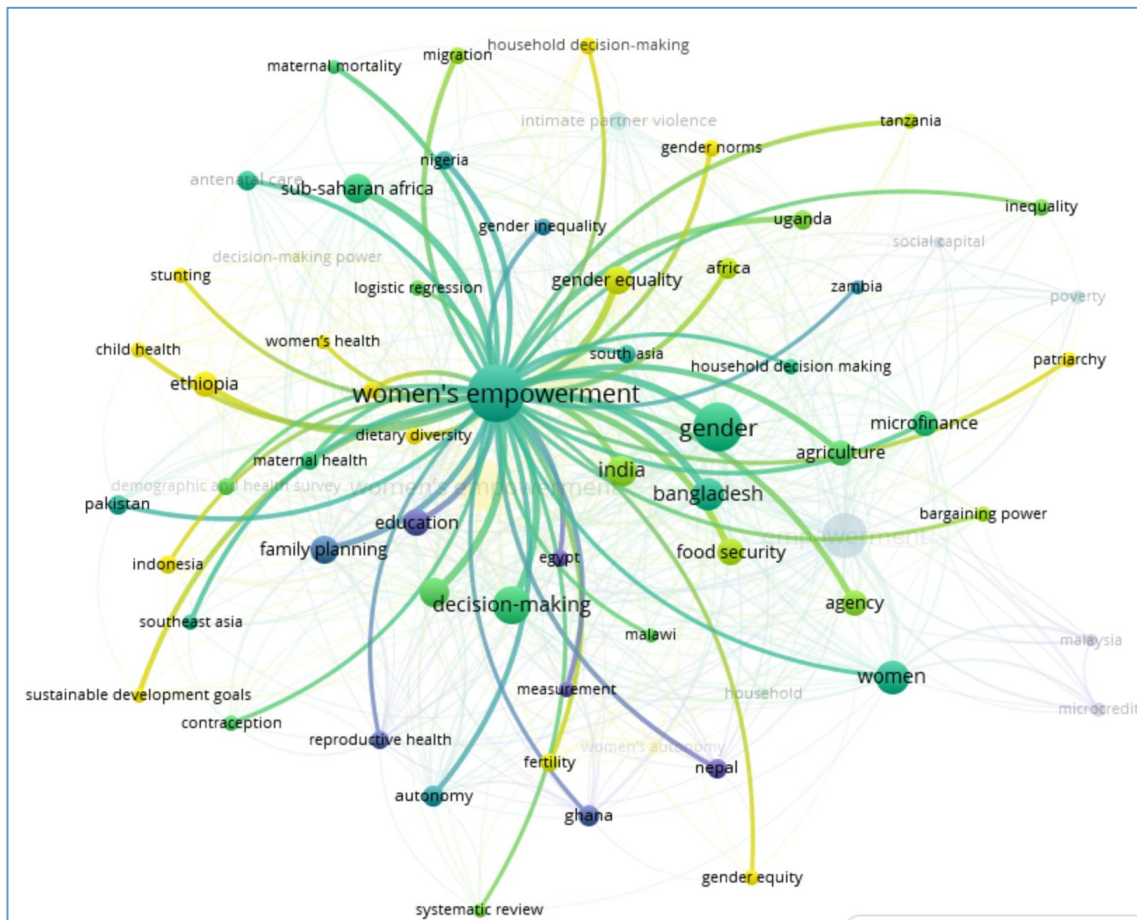
**Figure 5: Documents by Affiliation**

The Scopus affiliation analysis reveals that research relating to women empowerment and household decision making is generated by a variety of institutions, although there are a few leading contributors. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) leads with 21 documents, demonstrating its influential position guiding research in this direction, representing work of a more development- and policy-oriented type. Followed with 13 documents from University of Cape Coast, Ghana emanates the increasing contribution of literature from African institutions. Other institutions with a comparable output include Emory University (n = 11), University of California, San Francisco (n = 10), London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (n = 10) and University of Gondar (n = 10). Other prominent players, such as the International Institute for Population Sciences, also only underscore the wide institutional base in which the field has developed. Above all, this figure implies that knowledge production is not limited to one academic center but is an international and interdisciplinary system of public health, development, and social science institutions producing research.



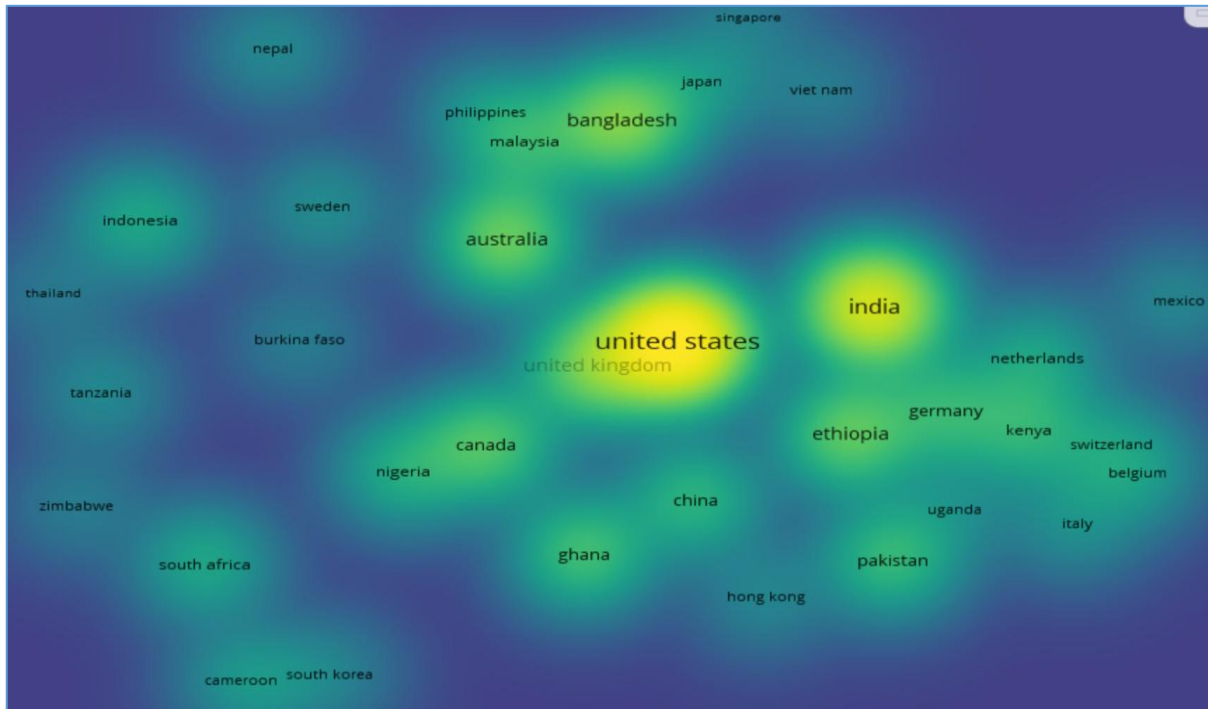
**Figure 6: Network Visualization of Authors**

The co-authorship author network in VOSviewer shows that collaboration between the most productive authors in this research area is still comparatively limited and takes place within a narrow core. There is only one visible connected cluster of authors, that includes those by Ahinkorah and Bright Opoku; Seidu Abdul-Aziz; Aboagye Richard Gyan and Yaya Sanni who are directly or repetitively co-authored. In this group, Ahinkorah and Seidu exhibit the highest total link strength (12 each), followed by Aboagye (10), implicating these authors as the most important connectors within the identified structural collaboration pattern. Yaya, who has the highest citation count (236) among the connected authors but a weaker total link strength (6), suggesting an outsize scholarly impact beyond the immediate network. On the flip side, there are some authors with high citation counts (e.g., Peterman, Amber (943) and Gipson, Jessica D. (593)) that appear disconnected from the mapped core indicating highly impactful yet independent contributions rather than collaborative efforts among those in this graph. In sum, the figure shows a fragmented authorship landscape of moderate collaboration with few networked research partnerships.



**Figure 7: Overlay visualization of Keywords Map**

The Scopus keyword network graphic depicts women's empowerment as the major concept (i.e., most discussed and central) in the field, serving as the primary hub connecting various thematic realms. Words closely associated with the terms gender, decision-making, gender equality, women and household decision making highlight that the literature is predominantly organized around women's agency, power relations in households and wider framed gendered social dynamics. The map also shows strong connections to applied development topics such as food security, agriculture, microfinance, family planning, reproductive health, maternal health and child health; confirming the multidimensionality of the subject. Geographical terms like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa indicate that much of the research is also located in developing-country contexts. Additional nodes such as patriarchy, gender, norms, inequality, agency and bargaining power all stress the role of the social and structural in how empowerment is achieved. In summary, the figure shows that this research area is necessarily interdisciplinary, concerned with policy and very interconnected across health, development and household welfare aspects.



**Figure 8: Density Visualization of Country**

The VOSviewer country co-authorship analysis reveals a highly international research network organized into several collaboration clusters. The United States appears as the principal hub, with the highest number of documents (156), citations (6,475), and total link strength (108), confirming its leading role in both productivity and international connectivity. The United Kingdom (48 documents, 2,047 citations, Total Link Strength (TLS) = 70) and Australia (45 documents, 795 citations, TLS = 62) also occupy central positions, reflecting strong collaborative influence. India (96 documents) and Bangladesh (53 documents, 1,067 citations, TLS = 41) contribute substantially to publication output and regional linkages. Other active countries, including Canada, Germany, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, China, and Pakistan, form interconnected nodes that strengthen the global structure of the network. The colored clusters indicate distinct but overlapping regional and thematic partnerships. Overall, the map demonstrates that the field is supported by broad cross-country collaboration, with a few dominant nations serving as key bridges in knowledge production and dissemination.

### Citation Analysis

Citation metrics	
Publication years:	1986-2026
Citation years:	40 (1986-2026)
Papers:	606
Citations:	13403
Cites/year:	335.08
Cites/paper:	22.12
Cites/author:	5109.82
Papers/author:	243.87
Authors/paper:	3.58
h-index:	53
g-index:	91
hI,norm:	32
hI,annual:	0.80
hA-index:	16
Papers with ACC $\geq$ 1,2,5,10,20:	420,329,144,34,6

**Figure 9: Citation Metric**

The citation analysis of the researcher published through Publish or Perish (Harzing) indicates that their publication record demonstrates consistent productivity and significant scholarly impact across a 40 year period (1986-2026). Of these, 606 papers produced a total of 13,403 citations with an average of 335.08 citations per year and 22.12 citation days per paper pointing both to high volume of output and citation visibility. The average of 3.58 authors per article also indicates a collaborative research profile. An h-index of 53 indicates that at least 53 publications have earned at least 53 citations each and a g-index of 91 emphasizes the accumulated significant influence on cited works. On the other hand, 420 papers obtained at least 1 citation; 329 papers received at least two citations, 144 papers reached 5 citations; 34 papers were over 10 citations and 6 papers were over 20 citations. The metrics represent a globally visible and substantial research portfolio spanning across Academia that reflects a level of maturity.

**Table 1: Top 20 Cited Articles in Women Empowerment in Household Decision Making**

No	Authors	Title	Year	Source	Cited	CitesPer Year	Google Scholar (GS) Cites	Google Scholar (GS) Cites Per Year
1	S. Alkire, R. Meinzen-Dick, A. Peterman, A. Quisumbing, G. Seymour, A. Vaz	The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index	2013	World Development	725	55.77	1835	141.15
2	U.D. Upadhyay, J.D. Gipson, M. Withers, S. Lewis, E.J. Ciaraldi, A. Fraser, M.J. Huchko, N. Prata	Women's empowerment and fertility: A review of the literature	2014	Social Science and Medicine	326	27.17	614	51.17
3	P.H. Brown, A. Park	Education and poverty in rural China	2002	Economics of Education Review	270	11.25	746	35.52
4	S. Mahmud, N.M. Shah, S. Becker	Measurement of Women's Empowerment in Rural Bangladesh	2012	World Development	267	19.07	636	45.43
5	M. Do, N. Kurimoto	Women's empowerment and choice of contraceptive methods in selected African countries	2012	International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health	195	13.93	416	29.71

No	Authors	Title	Year	Source	Cited	CitesPer Year	Google Scholar (GS) Cites	Google Scholar (GS) Cites Per Year
6	A. Malhotra, M. Mather	Do schooling and work empower women in developing countries? Gender and domestic decisions in Sri Lanka	1997	Sociological Forum	188	6.48	576	19.86
7	N. Holvoet	The impact of microfinance on decision-making agency: Evidence from South India	2005	Development and Change	186	8.86	510	24.29
8	S. Yaya, O.A. Uthman, M. Ekholuenetale, G. Bishwajit	Women empowerment as an enabling factor of contraceptive use in sub-Saharan Africa: A multilevel analysis of cross-sectional surveys of 32 countries	2018	Reproductive Health	185	23.13	313	39.13
9	N. Prata, A. Fraser, M.J. Huchko, J.D. Gipson, M. Withers, S. Lewis, E.J. Ciaraldi, U.D. Upadhyay	Women's empowerment and family planning: A review of the literature	2017	Journal of Biosocial Science	164	18.22	309	34.33
10	K. Mishra, A.G. Sam	Does Women's Land Ownership Promote Their Empowerment? Empirical Evidence from Nepal	2016	World Development	162	16.20	315	31.50

No	Authors	Title	Year	Source	Cited	CitesPer Year	Google Scholar (GS) Cites	Google Scholar (GS) Cites Per Year
11	C. Brody, T. de Hoop, M. Vojtkova, R. Warnock, M. Dunbar, P. Murthy, S.L. Dworkin	Can self-help group programs improve women's empowerment? A systematic review	2017	Journal of Development Effectiveness	150	16.67	303	33.67
12	M. Sell, N. Minot	What factors explain women's empowerment? Decision- making among small-scale farmers in Uganda	2018	Women's Studies International Forum	147	18.38	313	39.13
13	U.D. Upadhyay, D. Karasek	Women's empowerment and ideal family size: An examination of DHS empowerment measures in Sub-Saharan Africa	2012	International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health	147	10.50	323	23.07
14	P. Kantor	Women's empowerment through home-based work: Evidence from India	2003	Development and Change	135	5.87	328	14.26
15	W. Hameed, S.K. Azmat, M. Ali, M.I. Sheikh, G. Abbas, M. Temmerman, B.I. Avan	Women's empowerment and contraceptive use: The role of independent versus couples' decision-making, from a lower middle income country perspective	2014	PLoS ONE	134	11.17	264	22.00

No	Authors	Title	Year	Source	Cited	CitesPer Year	Google Scholar (GS) Cites	Google Scholar (GS) Cites Per Year
16	V.N. Bushamuka, S. de Pee, A. Talukder, L. Kiess, D. Panagides, A. Taher, M. Bloem	Impact of a homestead gardening program on household food security and empowerment of women in Bangladesh	2005	Food and Nutrition Bulletin	133	6.33	284	13.52
17	M. Rahman, M.A. Hoque, S. Makinoda	Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Is Women Empowerment a Reducing Factor? A Study from a National Bangladeshi Sample	2011	Journal of Family Violence	133	8.87	326	21.73
18	H. Cueva Beteta	What is missing in measures of Women's Empowerment?	2006	Journal of Human Development	126	6.30	335	16.75
19	B.C. Mullany, M.J. Hindin, S. Becker	Can women's autonomy impede male involvement in pregnancy health in Katmandu, Nepal?	2005	Social Science and Medicine	124	5.90	266	12.67
20	E.-H. Atake, P. Gnakou Ali	Women's empowerment and fertility preferences in high fertility countries in Sub-Saharan Africa	2019	BMC Women's Health	118	16.86	234	33.43

The table shows that h-indexed literature on keywords “women empowerment” AND “household” AND “decision making” has strong and sustained scholarly impact across both of the databases. The most cited document is The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index with 725 Scopus and 1,835 Google Scholar citations followed by Women’s empowerment and fertility: A review of the literature (326 and 614 citations respectively). Across almost all of the listed papers, Google Scholar citation counts greatly exceed Scopus counts and is in line with evidence that Google Scholar has a larger coverage of source types, generating higher overall citation metrics than for Scopus. The table also shows that review articles and conceptual measurement papers receive particularly high citations, indicating that these foundational and methodological studies are most influential on this discursive field. Overall, the dataset describes a mature and impactful research field, with Scopus suggesting selective indexed impact and Google Scholar patchy academic visibility and dissemination.

## CONCLUSION

This study conducted a bibliometric analysis to explore the scholarly discourse surrounding about women empowerment in household decision making. Globally, women empowerment has become a prominent issue and scholarly debate. One of the pillars of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve gender equality. Therefore, there is an urgent call to enhance women empowerment as well as to narrow the gender gap. Drawing from 606 peer-reviewed publications indexed in the Scopus database from 1986 to 2026, the analysis utilized VOSviewer software to map keyword co-occurrences and Harzing’s Publish or Perish program for citation tracking.

The bibliometric parameters show that research on women empowerment are very limited even though it shows an upward trend along the period of 1986-2026. The citation analysis shows a consistent productivity and significant scholarly impact. This implies the subject has enticed scholars from interdisciplinary field and majority of the research on women empowerment are coming from Social Sciences. The review also highlights the contributions from various geographical locations from developed and developing countries, including Malaysia. The highest number of documents is from United States, followed by United Kingdom and Australia. In conclusion, this bibliometric analysis not only maps the intellectual structure of existing women empowerment research but also offer a valuable foundation for future research direction particularly in the context of social and economic development of Malaysia.

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