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Research Landscape of Islamic Feminism and Its Relevance to the SDGs: A Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis of Key Issues and Theoretical Debates

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to (1) examine the growth and publication trends of Islamic feminism research between 2019 and 2025, (2) identify the principal thematic clusters through keyword co-occurrence analysis, and (3) explore the relationship between emerging research themes and the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Islamic feminism has developed from a theological discourse advocating gender justice into a multidisciplinary field engaging with social, legal, political, and cultural issues. Nevertheless, the intellectual landscape of this scholarship remains fragmented, and limited studies have systematically examined its thematic evolution and relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **Theoretical framework:** Grounded in feminist hermeneutics, intersectionality theory, and the SDGs framework. **Literature review:** Previous studies have primarily emphasized conceptual, historical, or qualitative discussions, while comprehensive bibliometric mapping of the field remains scarce. **Method:** This research employs a quantitative bibliometric approach using VOSviewer to analyze 434 Scopus-indexed publications retrieved through search terms related to Islamic feminism, Muslim feminism, and gender in Islam. **Results:** The findings demonstrate a consistent increase in scholarly output, reaching its highest level in 2023, reflecting expanding international academic attention. Keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals three dominant thematic clusters comprising theological reinterpretation and Qur'anic hermeneutics, socio-legal activism and gender justice, and decolonial and intersectional perspectives. Emerging topics, including migration, mental health, digital activism, and decoloniality, indicate a shift from foundational theological debates toward broader contemporary social challenges closely aligned with the SDGs agenda. The geographical distribution highlights substantial contributions from both Global South countries, particularly Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey, and Western academic institutions, demonstrating increasing international collaboration. **Implications:** These findings imply that Islamic feminism has become an important intellectual framework for advancing inclusive development, social justice, and gender equality. **Novelty:** The study's novelty lies in integrating bibliometric keyword co-occurrence analysis with the SDGs framework, providing a comprehensive evidence-based mapping of theoretical debates, research trajectories, and future directions within contemporary Islamic feminism scholarship.

Keywords: islamic feminism, bibliometric analysis, keyword co-occurrence, sustainable development goals (sdgs), gender justice.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic feminism has gained considerable traction in recent decades, reflecting a global shift in feminist discourse. This movement explores the intersection of Islamic teachings and feminist principles, seeking to address gender equality and the rights of women within the framework of Islam. While feminist movements have traditionally been understood in secular terms, Islamic feminism offers a unique lens that blends religious interpretations with the quest for gender justice. The issues central to Islamic feminism gender equality, social justice, access to education, and women's empowerment are deeply consonant with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). As global interest in this field expands, the intellectual structure surrounding Islamic feminism has evolved, incorporating diverse perspectives from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in ways that increasingly intersect with the SDGs agenda. However, despite the growing body of literature, the intricate relationships between key themes within Islamic feminism have not been fully mapped, leaving significant gaps in the understanding of its theoretical underpinnings, practical implications, and contribution to the achievement of the SDGs [1], [2].

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in publications addressing Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism. A wealth of studies has emerged from countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey, contributing to the growing discourse. However, these studies often focus on localized issues, with limited international collaboration. Additionally, while Islamic feminism has garnered substantial attention in the global academic community, the structure and connection between various topics such as women's rights in Islam, gender equality, and the role of women in religious contexts remain underexplored. Critically, how these themes relate to the broader global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment has not been sufficiently addressed. This gap highlights the need for a more cohesive approach that connects these elements within a comprehensive bibliometric framework and situates them within the SDGs discourse [3], [4].

Despite the increasing scholarly attention, there is a lack of comprehensive bibliometric analyses that link key elements of Islamic feminism with the global sustainability agenda. The relationship between various themes such as women's rights, gender equality, and religious roles in Islam has yet to be systematically examined in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The existing literature offers fragmented insights, focusing on legal and social aspects while overlooking the global and interdisciplinary dimensions of Islamic feminism and its potential contribution to the SDGs. This gap in research points to a critical question: How can keyword co-occurrence analysis identify the key issues and research trends in Islamic feminism from 2019 to 2025? What theoretical debates emerge from the existing literature, and how can they shape the future of research in this field particularly in relation to the SDGs? Therefore, the purpose of this study is to (1) identify the trends and evolution of major topics in Islamic feminism research, (2) analyze the co-occurrence of keywords to determine relationships between key topics including their alignment with the SDGs, and (3) map the existing theoretical debates in the literature to provide a clearer understanding of the central issues within Islamic feminism and their contribution to the achievement of the SDGs [5], [6].

This study presents the first bibliometric analysis that comprehensively maps the landscape of Islamic feminism research, identifying the key issues and theoretical debates while offering crucial insights into the development and gaps within this field. The structure of the article is as follows: Section 2 reviews the current literature on Islamic feminism; Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including data collection and analysis techniques; Section 4 presents the results of the bibliometric analysis, while Section 5 discusses the findings and their implications for future research in Islamic feminism [7], [8].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intellectual terrain of Islamic feminism is vast and multifaceted, emerging at the crossroads of religious faith and gender justice. Unlike monolithic understandings of feminism often centered in the West, Islamic feminism operates within a specific religious paradigm, seeking to reclaim the egalitarian ethics of Islam from patriarchal interpretations. This section reviews the existing body of knowledge, categorizing the literature into three critical phases that mirror the evolution of the field: the theological-hermeneutical foundation, the socio-legal turn, and the emerging decolonial perspectives [9].

The Theological and Hermeneutical Foundations

The genesis of Islamic feminism as a formal academic discipline is deeply rooted in the project of revisiting sacred texts (tafsir). The early and most influential body of literature focuses on "gender-sensitive hermeneutics." Scholars such as Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, and Fatema Mernissi pioneered this approach, arguing that the Qur'an explicitly advocates for the equality of all human beings, and that patriarchal practices are historically contingent accretions rather than divine mandates [10].

Wadud's concept of the "tawhidic paradigm" posits that placing men above women violates the oneness of God (Tawhid), as it attributes divine authority to human males. Similarly, Mernissi's historical sociology dissected the Hadith tradition, revealing how political misogyny in early Islamic history distorted religious teachings. This foundational literature established the "separate but equal" critique and provided the theological legitimacy required for Muslim women to demand rights without abandoning their faith [11], [12].

The Socio-Legal Turn: Family Law and State Politics

Moving beyond theology, a significant portion of the literature has shifted towards the practical application of these theories, particularly within the realm of Islamic Family Law (Al-Ahwal Al-Shakhsyiah). Research in this domain examines how feminist interpretations interact with state codes regarding marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance.

Scholars like Ziba Mir-Hosseini have been pivotal in bridging the gap between theology and law. The literature highlights a tension between "codified fiqh" (which is often patriarchal and resistant to change) and the lived realities of Muslim women. Studies from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Morocco often focus on the role of women's organizations (e.g., Musawah and Sisters in Islam) in lobbying for legal reform. This strand of research emphasizes that legal justice cannot be achieved solely through secular arguments in Muslim-majority societies; rather, it requires "an internal critique" that speaks the language of Islamic jurisprudence to be politically viable [13], [14].

The Debate on Agency: Secular vs. Religious Feminism

A enduring debate in the literature concerns the relationship between Islamic feminism and secular feminist movements. Early Western feminist literature often viewed religious observance, particularly the wearing of the hijab, as a sign of false consciousness or oppression. However, the "piety movement" literature, notably the work of Saba Mahmood, revolutionized this understanding.

Mahmood's analysis of women's mosque movements in Egypt challenged the liberal feminist assumption that "agency" is synonymous with "resistance" to traditional norms. Instead, she argued that agency can also be found in the voluntary submission to religious authority and the cultivation of pious selves. This theoretical rupture has led to a rich body of literature debating whether Islamic feminism is a contradiction in terms or a pragmatic strategy. Some scholars argue that "Islamic feminism" is a necessary bridge, while others caution that it risks apologizing for patriarchal structures by refusing to break completely with religious dogma [15], [16].

The Decolonial and Intersectional Shift

Most recently, the literature has expanded to include decolonial and intersectional frameworks. This emerging body of work critiques the hegemony of Western feminist epistemology, which often universalizes the experiences of white, middle-class women. Decolonial Islamic feminists argue that the struggle for gender justice in the Muslim world cannot be disentangled from the histories of colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism.

This perspective is increasingly relevant in the context of Islamophobia and the "War on Terror," where the "liberation of Muslim women" has frequently been co-opted as a justification for military intervention. Consequently, recent scholarship focuses on how Muslim women navigate the "double bind" of resisting internal community patriarchy while simultaneously resisting external stereotypes and racism. This intersectional approach aligns Islamic feminism with other Global South movements, broadening the scope from a purely theological issue to a matter of global social justice and human rights. In this light, Islamic feminism serves as a significant intellectual force for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), by providing religiously grounded arguments for justice, equality, and inclusion in Muslim-majority societies [17-25].

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric analysis approach to map the intellectual structure and evolution of Islamic feminism research. Bibliometrics utilizes statistical methods to analyze books, articles, and other publications, allowing researchers to identify patterns, impactful authors, and emerging trends within a specific domain. This method is particularly effective for visualizing the complex relationships between theological concepts and socio-political issues that characterize Islamic feminism.

Data Source

The data for this study was harvested from the Scopus database. Scopus was selected over other databases (such as Web of Science or Google Scholar) due to its extensive coverage of journals in the social sciences and humanities, as well as its rigorous quality standards for indexing. It provides the comprehensive metadata including citations, abstracts, and author affiliations necessary for network analysis.

Search Strategy and Data Collection

The data collection was conducted to capture literature published between 2019 and 2025. This timeframe was chosen to analyze the most recent theoretical developments and the impact of global events (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical shifts in Muslim-majority countries) on the discourse.

A broad search query was designed to be inclusive of various terminologies used to describe the intersection of Islam and gender. The search string utilized Boolean operators as follows:

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(TITLE-ABS-KEY("islamic feminism" OR "muslim feminism" OR "gender islam" OR "women in islam") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("feminism"))
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This query ensures that the dataset includes articles that explicitly discuss "feminism" in the context of Islam, Muslim women, or gender issues, while excluding general studies on Islam that do not engage with feminist theory.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the data, a filtration process was applied based on the following criteria:

Document Type: The search was limited to Journal Articles, Book Chapters, and Reviews. Editorials, conference abstracts, and notes were excluded as they often lack deep theoretical analysis.

Language: Only documents written in English were included to ensure linguistic consistency for the keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Relevance: The final dataset was manually screened to remove duplicates or articles that were off-topic (e.g., medical studies on "Muslim women" that did not discuss gender dynamics or feminism).

The final dataset comprised 434 documents, which served as the basis for the bibliometric analysis.

Data Analysis and Visualization

The bibliographic data was exported in CSV format and analyzed using VOSviewer software (version 1.6.19). VOSviewer was employed to construct and visualize bibliometric networks based on co-citation and co-occurrence data. Two specific types of analysis were performed:

Co-occurrence Analysis: To identify the intellectual structure of the field. A threshold was set for keyword frequency to filter out insignificant terms, resulting in clusters of thematically related keywords.

Co-authorship Analysis: To map the geographic distribution of research production (Country Scientific Production) and identify leading nations in the field.

The analysis generated three types of visual maps:

Network Visualization: To display the clustering of research themes.

Overlay Visualization: To trace the temporal evolution of topics from 2019 to 2025.

Density Visualization: To identify "hotspots" (saturated research areas) and "cold spots" (under-researched gaps) within the literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis of 434 documents indexed in Scopus provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual trajectory of Islamic feminism from 2019 to 2025. The data reveals that Islamic feminism is no longer a peripheral sub-field but has evolved into a dynamic, globally distributed domain of inquiry. The following sections detail the quantitative growth of the field, the shifting geographic centers of knowledge production, and the thematic evolution from foundational theological debates to contemporary intersectional applications.

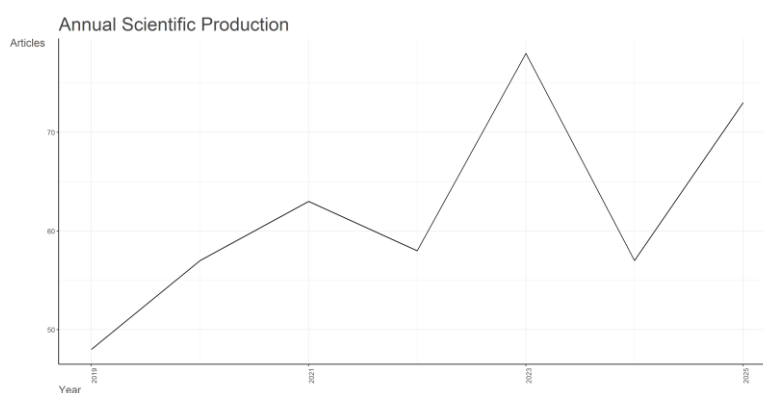


Figure 1. Annual Scientific Production

The Annual Scientific Production graph provides a clear visual representation of the trends in the number of articles published on Islamic feminism between 2019 and 2025. The data shows an upward trajectory in scientific production, with a significant increase from 2020 to 2021. The number of articles fluctuates during this period, with the most noticeable peak occurring in 2023. This suggests a surge in interest or research activity within the field during that year. However, the graph also reveals a decline in 2024, suggesting a temporary dip in publication activity. Despite this, the overall trend remains positive, indicating a growing interest in Islamic feminism and Muslim women's issues in scholarly circles. This pattern could reflect external factors such as global political movements, socio-economic crises, or significant academic events that influenced the flow of publications. The slight decline in 2024 might also be attributed to methodological shifts or resource allocation within the research community. The continuous rise from 2021 to 2025, however, suggests a sustained interest and a strong upward trend in the field, signaling the establishment of Islamic feminism as a critical area of study in academic discourse [26-30].

Country Scientific Production

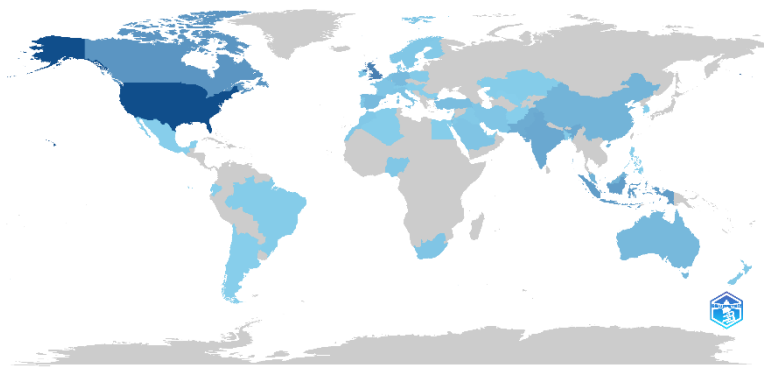


Figure 2. Country Scientific Production

The Country Scientific Production map offers a visual representation of global research output on Islamic feminism across different countries. The map is color-coded, with countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and parts of Western Europe shown in the darkest shades of blue, indicating the highest levels of research activity. These countries are leading in terms of scientific publications and scholarly attention toward Islamic feminism, suggesting a well-established academic infrastructure for feminist studies that intersects with Islamic contexts.

Countries in Asia, particularly Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia, also show moderate to high research output, reflected by medium to dark blue tones. These regions are increasingly contributing to the scholarly discourse on Islamic feminism, with research often addressing local socio-political issues, gender equality, and religious reforms in Muslim-majority countries. However, some Middle Eastern countries, particularly those with more conservative approaches to gender equality, show lower research output, as indicated by lighter shades of blue and gray areas.

Latin America and some parts of Africa show a sparse but growing interest in Islamic feminism, with countries like Brazil and South Africa marked in lighter blue, indicating emerging interest in the intersection of feminism with Islamic teachings, possibly driven by diaspora communities and increasing global collaboration.

In summary, the Country Scientific Production map reveals that the United States and Western Europe dominate the scholarly output on Islamic feminism, while Asia and Latin America are developing their contributions. The map also highlights the disparities in research production across different regions, suggesting areas where further academic engagement is needed, particularly in regions with lower publication rates. This global distribution reflects both

the opportunities and challenges in making Islamic feminism a truly global academic movement [31-34].

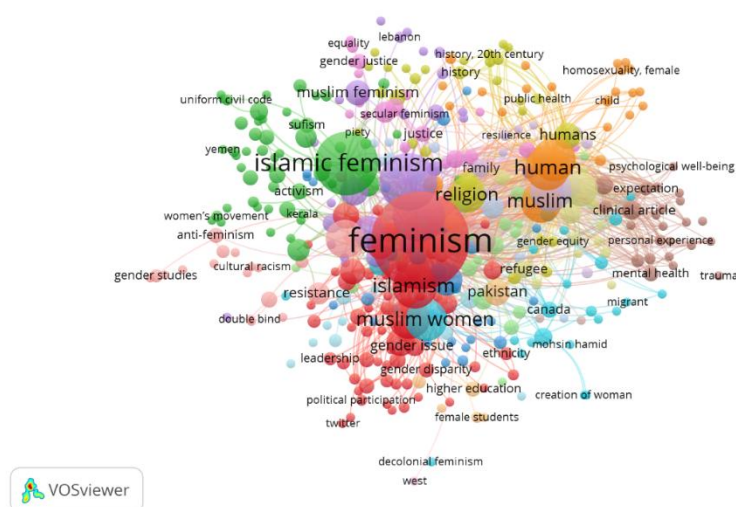


Figure 3. Network Visualization

The keyword co-occurrence network visualization generated through VOSviewer reveals the intricate relationships between various key themes in Islamic feminism research. From the visualization, it is evident that Islamic feminism and feminism are the dominant nodes, linking several related topics such as gender equity, muslim women, gender justice, and equality. This indicates that the central discourse in Islamic feminism research revolves around gender equality, both from theological and social perspectives. Specifically, larger clusters like muslim feminism and islamic feminism are interconnected with topics such as resilience, human rights, and political participation, suggesting that Islamic feminism extends beyond religious text interpretation to include social-political issues and broader human rights concerns.

Furthermore, the connection between secular feminism and Islamic feminism reflects ongoing theoretical debates about whether feminist principles can be integrated within Islamic contexts or if a unique approach is needed. Keywords like decolonial feminism and gender studies also highlight a movement to situate Islamic feminism within larger theoretical frameworks, such as decolonization and inclusive gender studies, and its role in a global context. Additionally, terms like Islamism and muslim women interact with social themes like cultural racism, gender disparity, and social justice, illustrating that gender equality in Islam is often obstructed by deeply rooted patriarchal cultural norms. Overall, this visualization emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary approach that combines legal, social, and political aspects in Islamic feminism research, while also encouraging the integration of secular feminist theory with religious-based approaches to address gender equality challenges in Muslim contexts [35], [36].

Increased Focus on Global Contexts: Themes such as migrants, refugees, and resilience indicate a growing focus on the socio-political challenges Muslim women face in international contexts, particularly related to displacement, migration, and the intersection of Islam with modern global issues.

Shift from Theoretical to Practical Application: As the years progress, Islamic feminism research increasingly aligns with real-world challenges faced by Muslim women, as seen in the rising prevalence of keywords like public health, gender equity, mental health, and poverty.

In conclusion, the 2019-2025 overlay visualization reveals a dynamic shift in the field of Islamic feminism, from a theological and legal discourse to an increasingly global, interdisciplinary, and socially engaged research agenda. The evolution reflects broader societal changes, with scholars incorporating global crises, social justice movements, and political activism into Islamic feminism studies. This trajectory underscores the need for future research to continue expanding into these new domains while deepening the intersection between Islamic feminist thought and global feminist practices [37], [38].

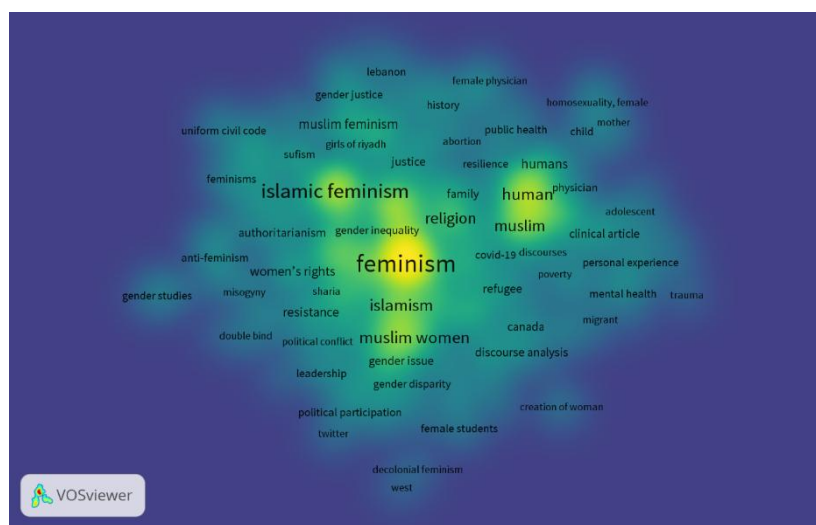


Figure 5. Density Visualization

The density visualization further enriches our understanding of the thematic distribution and the frequency of keyword co-occurrence in Islamic feminism research. In this heatmap-style map, the intensity of the colors represents the frequency of co-occurring keywords, with green and yellow indicating areas of higher frequency, while blue and purple suggest lower occurrences.

The central nodes, Islamic feminism and feminism, remain prominent, with the densest clustering of keywords around them, reflecting their foundational importance in the research field. The terms muslim feminism, muslim women, gender equality, and gender justice also appear prominently in the central area of the visualization, highlighting their critical role in shaping the discourse within Islamic feminist studies.

The map reveals that, in recent years, Islamic feminism research has increasingly integrated discussions on women's rights, gender inequality, and social justice. The color transition towards yellow around these keywords reflects their growing prominence and the expanding scope of the field beyond theological interpretations to include practical issues like public health, COVID-19 discourses, and mental health areas that have gained importance in the wake of the pandemic. This suggests an increasing intersection between feminist concerns and global health issues, especially regarding Muslim women's well-being.

The emergence of keywords like discourse analysis, political participation, and leadership also shows the growing recognition of political and social activism in the context of Islamic feminism. These terms, located slightly further from the core in the green and yellow regions,

signal the broadening of the field to encompass not only theological or legal issues but also societal engagement and political movements that address women's roles in Muslim-majority countries.

Additionally, the appearance of decolonial feminism, resistance, and gender disparity at the periphery further highlights the ongoing debates within Islamic feminism regarding the reconciliation of feminist thought with traditional interpretations of Islam. The west and gender studies are also emerging as relevant keywords, indicating the increasing engagement of Islamic feminism with global feminist discourses and the influence of Western feminist theory on Muslim scholars.

This density visualization suggests that Islamic feminism is undergoing a significant transformation, with a shift from its theological and legal foundations to an inclusive, interdisciplinary field that integrates politics, social issues, health, and global feminist perspectives. The growing focus on issues like mental health, refugees, migrants, and global health illustrates the expansion of Islamic feminism into broader social and political domains, making it an increasingly relevant field for understanding gender justice in the modern world. Overall, the density visualization provides valuable insight into how Islamic feminism research has diversified and evolved, highlighting both the central themes that have long been foundational to the field and the emerging areas that reflect the contemporary challenges and interdisciplinary nature of feminist scholarship within the Islamic context [39], [40].

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully identified the major trends and evolution of key topics in Islamic feminism research, analyzed keyword co-occurrence to establish relationships between key topics, and mapped the theoretical debates that shape the understanding of key issues in this field. As the first comprehensive bibliometric analysis of Islamic feminism, this research has provided valuable insights into the development and gaps within the literature. It highlights the dominance of topics such as Islam and feminism, gender equality, the debate between secular and Islamic feminism, and social justice issues, while revealing the limited focus on global and interdisciplinary perspectives particularly the connection with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings demonstrate that Islamic feminism research is closely aligned with the SDGs agenda: themes of gender justice and women's empowerment correspond directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality); discussions on poverty, health, and migration relate to SDG 1, SDG 3, and SDG 10; while advocacy for inclusive legal systems resonates with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The findings underscore the urgent need to bridge the gap by incorporating insights from other fields, such as gender studies, politics, and globalization, and by making the contribution of Islamic feminist thought to the SDGs more explicit and visible. As the field continues to evolve, it is crucial for future research to expand beyond local and legal dimensions to include global and interwoven social contexts that better reflect the complexities of feminist movements in Islamic settings, while consciously positioning this scholarship as a contribution to the global pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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