

TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND MORALITY RESEARCH: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS (2015-2025) WITH AN EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

TENDÊNCIAS EM PESQUISA EM ÉTICA RELIGIOSA E MORAL: UMA ANÁLISE BIBLIOMÉTRICA (2015-2025) COM UMA ABORDAGEM EDUCACIONAL

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Abstract. Ethics are considered essential elements in developing a healthy society. The relationship between religion and morality is increasingly relevant in contemporary ethical discussions. However, despite the growing body of literature, a comprehensive analysis of emerging themes and trends in religion and morality research is either lacking or inadequate. Therefore, this study focuses on a ten-year bibliometric analysis of 1827 research articles on religious ethics and morality using “religion” and “morality” as keywords. An internet-based search was performed to locate recent and relevant articles published between 2015 and 2025 from the Web of Science database. The dataset reveals research quality and productivity during the period, particularly influence and collaboration patterns. The analysis includes contributions from 5231 authors. A total of 566 of these documents are single-authored. On average, each document features 3.1 co-authors, suggesting collaborative efforts among researchers. In particular, 20.10% of these documents are internationally co-authored, which reveals a degree of global collaboration. The outcomes show a projected growth in publication frequencies through 2025. The analysis revealed a growing recognition of the need for inclusivity and multidisciplinary approaches to ethics and morality research. The study also indicates a rise in the frequency of articles addressing psychological factors and moral obligations. Additionally, this study reveals an increased focus on healthcare ethics, gender dynamics, and social values. This study could be a valuable resource for educators and researchers aiming to develop a comprehensive framework for integrating religious ethics into moral development.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, English as a second language, technical challenges, web-based learning

Resumo. A ética é considerada um elemento essencial no desenvolvimento de uma sociedade saudável. A relação entre religião e moralidade é cada vez mais relevante nas discussões éticas contemporâneas. No entanto, apesar do crescente corpo de literatura, uma análise abrangente de temas e tendências emergentes na pesquisa sobre religião e moralidade é insuficiente ou inadequada. Portanto, este estudo se concentra em uma análise bibliométrica de dez anos de 1827 artigos de pesquisa sobre ética religiosa e moralidade usando “religião” e “moralidade” como palavras-chave. Uma busca na Internet foi realizada para localizar artigos recentes e relevantes publicados entre 2015 e 2025 no banco de dados Web of Science. O conjunto de dados revela a qualidade e a produtividade da pesquisa durante o período, particularmente os padrões de influência e colaboração. A análise inclui contribuições de 5231 autores. Um total de 566 desses documentos são de autoria única. Em média, cada documento apresenta 3,1 coautores, sugerindo esforços colaborativos entre pesquisadores. Em particular, 20,10% desses documentos são de coautoria internacional, o que revela um grau de colaboração global. Os resultados mostram um crescimento projetado nas frequências de publicação até 2025. A análise revelou um reconhecimento crescente da necessidade de inclusão e abordagens multidisciplinares para a pesquisa de ética e moralidade. O estudo também indica um aumento na frequência de artigos abordando fatores psicológicos e obrigações morais.

Além disso, este estudo revela um foco maior na ética da saúde, dinâmica de gênero e valores sociais. Este estudo pode ser um recurso valioso para educadores e pesquisadores que buscam desenvolver uma estrutura abrangente para integrar a ética religiosa ao desenvolvimento moral.

Palavras-chave: Análise bibliométrica, inglês como segunda língua, desafios técnicos, aprendizagem baseada na web

1. INTRODUCTION

The connection between religion and morality has long been a focal point of scholarly inquiry. The attention paid to this area reflects researchers' quest to understand ethical frameworks within spiritual contexts. As society struggles with complex moral dilemmas, the role of religious beliefs in shaping ethical behavior becomes increasingly significant. Recent studies highlight this relationship and emphasize how religious ethics inform personal and societal moral standards (Afrilsah, 2024; Guna & Yuwantiningrum, 2024; Nikitina, 2024). For instance, research has shown that religious affiliation often correlates with distinct moral attitudes and behaviors, which impact issues ranging from social justice to bioethics (Afrilsah, 2024; Davis, 2003; Wong, 2004).

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in academic interest surrounding themes of morality as they pertain to religion, as evidenced by a substantial rise in published research articles (Nikitina, 2024; Nwafor, Ugwu, Okoye, Obi-Nwosu, & Ofonedu, 2024). This trend reflects the evolving themes of ethical discourse and highlights the increasing relevance of religious perspectives in addressing contemporary moral challenges. Studies have indicated that religious ethics become integral to discussions on moral frameworks (Heim, 2000; McCarthy & Smith, 2019). The integration of this theme suggests a shift towards a more holistic understanding of how religious beliefs interact with various aspects of the human experience. The growing body of work underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into religious ethics and morality research trends (Baker et al., 2020; Smith & Jones, 2021).

The current research aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis to identify prominent themes and trends in religion and morality research from 2015 to 2025. This analysis highlights scholarly engagement with religion and morality subjects by identifying publication patterns and thematic frequencies. By mapping out the frequency and significance of various topics over the past decade, this bibliometric analysis will offer valuable propositions for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. As moral complexities emerge, understanding the contribution of religious ethics to morality remains essential in ethical decision-making across diverse contexts. This focus reflects societal changes and an urgent need for inclusive discourse within religious ethics. Thus, the current research could be valuable in revealing how research around religious ethics and morality has evolved. Additionally, understanding trends in the research context can provide insights into emerging issues and shifts in research focus to help determine future research directions. Specifically, the analysis aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To identify the most prominent terms in religion and morality research and their frequency over the decade (2015-2025).
2. To ascertain the recurring topics and trends in religion and morality research over the specified period.

Research into religious ethics and morality has gained increasing attention in academic discourse. Early works investigated how ethical considerations are influenced by religious, cultural, psychological, and social factors and debated the connection between religious beliefs and ethical frameworks, emphasizing the foundational role of religion in shaping moral values (Baker & Smith, 1998; Davis, 2003; Heim, 2000; Wong, 2004). This foundational perspective has evolved as contemporary research highlights the complexity of this relationship. As a result, the field has expanded to incorporate diverse methodologies and interdisciplinary

approaches. Research expansion in this domain allows for an understanding of how religious ethics manifest in various contexts. This phenomenon reflects a broader societal interest in how faith influences moral decision-making.

Moreover, studies have identified key themes that dominate the literature on religion and morality. For instance, Baker et al. (2020) found that topics such as gender dynamics and human experiences are increasingly prevalent, suggesting a shift towards inclusivity in ethical discussions. This trend is corroborated by findings from Smith and Jones (2021), who noted that psychological insights into religious ethics have become essential for addressing contemporary moral dilemmas. These findings emphasize a growing recognition of the ethical discourse within religious contexts. Such recognition points to the relevance of religious ethics in addressing pressing societal issues.

Moreover, previous studies have shown that religious ethics and morality are characterized by trends that reflect broader societal changes from different perspectives (Afrilsah, 2024; Nikitina, 2024). For instance, Heim (2000) examined the philosophical implications of faith as a moral principle. The study showed that religious and secular frameworks represent a significant source of guidance in ethical and moral reasoning. Similarly, Wong and Davis (2002) reviewed the literature on religion's role in shaping ethical behavior. According to the review, cultural and societal contexts influence religious ethics. Nevertheless, Davis (2003) emphasized that historical and cultural underpinnings of moral principles are derived from religious ideologies.

The discourse has further been enriched by integrating psychological and sociological factors into religious ethics. McCarthy and Jones (2001) investigated how clerics utilize religious ethics to address moral dilemmas. The study offered insights into the practical application of religious principles in community leadership. Likewise, Smith and Wong (2010) found that religious doctrines significantly impact psychological and ethical reasoning. Additionally, McCarthy and Smith (2014) explored the psychological dynamics of moral decision-making in religious contexts. The findings revealed that religious ethics significantly influence cognitive and emotional processes. Johnson and Smith (2020) examined youth perspectives on religion's influence on ethical behavior. The study indicated a generational shift toward more inclusive moral frameworks.

Furthermore, Wong and Baker (2019) investigated religious ethics and morality in corporate social responsibility. The study emphasized the ethical considerations faith-based perspectives have brought to modern marketplaces. Martin and Davis (2019) proposed combining philosophical, psychological, and theological perspectives to analyze morality's complexities in diverse cultural contexts. Similarly, Heim and Wong (2000) argued for an integrative framework that examines religion's role in shaping ethical philosophies. These studies suggest ongoing debate in religion and morality from diverse disciplines to foster a comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs influence moral reasoning. The studies highlight the growing relationship between religion, morality, and secular principles. Thus, as societal challenges become more complex, integrating theological insights will be crucial for developing ethical frameworks that resonate with diverse populations.

Additionally, the rise of empirical research methodologies has facilitated a more systematic examination of trends within the field. Although qualitative methods dominate the field, quantitative analyses have emerged as valuable tools in religion and morality research over time (McCarthy & Smith, 2019). The increasing emphasis on empirical methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches signifies the growth of this field toward addressing contemporary moral challenges. Thus, scholars must remain attuned to emerging themes and methods that can further enrich our understanding of religion's role in shaping ethical behavior. The current study focuses on a bibliometric analysis to identify prominent themes and trends in religion and morality research from 2015 to 2025.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Search Procedure and Inclusion Criteria

A bibliometric analysis of 1,287 research articles focusing on religious ethics and morality was conducted using “religion” and “morality” as keywords. An internet-based search was performed to locate recent and relevant articles published between 2015 and 2025. Only empirical and review articles published in English within the mentioned period were considered for analysis. The articles were collected from the Scopus database. This is because relevant, reliable, and up-to-date information could be sourced from the mentioned database. The literature search was inclusive within the data pool consisting of empirical and review papers from various academic research journals. The following figure depicts information on the article selection process.

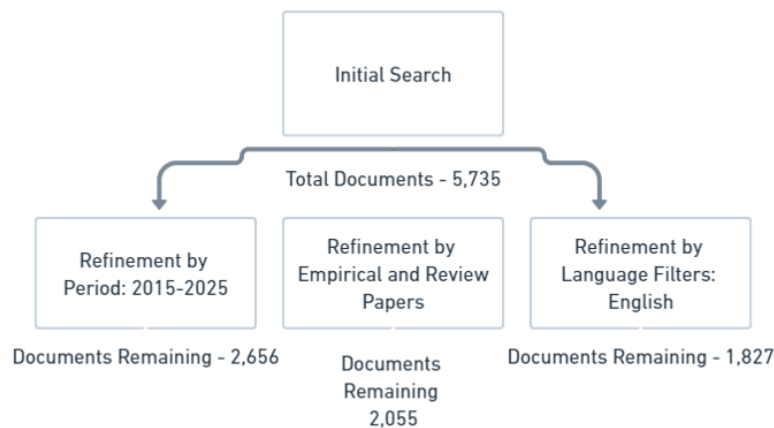


Figure 1. Search Procedure

As presented in Figure 1, the search process commenced with an initial search that yielded 57,35 articles. A subsequent refinement specifying the period from 2015 to 2025 resulted in 2,656 articles. Further narrowing down the results to include only empirical and review papers led to 2,055 articles. Finally, excluding articles published in languages other than English resulted in 1,827 articles. Therefore, 1,827 articles published in English were considered for analysis. This organized approach guarantees that only relevant articles on religion and morality published in English within the specified period were sourced and considered for inclusion in the bibliometric analysis.

Table 1. Main information of the data

| SN | Description | Results |
|----|----------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Timespan | 2015-2025 |
| 2 | Articles | 1671 |
| 3 | Review | 156 |
| 4 | Documents | 1827 |
| 5 | Annual Growth Rate (%) | -38.81 |
| 6 | Authors | 5231 |
| 7 | Single-authored documents | 566 |
| 8 | Co-authors per documents | 3.1 |
| 9 | International co-authorships (%) | 20.10 |
| 10 | Average citations per document | 9.959 |

occurrences of 943 by 2025. This trend underscores the increasing importance of religious frameworks in shaping ethical discussions and moral considerations within scholarly discourse. Additionally, terms such as female, male, and human indicate a growing focus on gender and human experiences, reflecting an inclusive approach to understanding the contribution of religion to morality. The data also highlights significant interest in psychological aspects, with terms such as psychology and morality showing substantial prominence. This outcome suggests that researchers are increasingly integrating psychological insights into their analyses of religious ethics. Overall, the findings show a dynamic context in which religious themes are being re-examined through contemporary lenses. Table 2 presents a bibliometric analysis of the frequency terms used over the decade (2014-2024).

Table 2. Themes Frequency Over Time

| Year | Religion | Female | Human | Male | Adult | Humans | Articles | Middle-Aged | Psychology | Age |
|------|----------|--------|-------|------|-------|--------|----------|-------------|------------|-----|
| 2015 | 71 | 69 | 59 | 64 | 51 | 53 | 19 | 28 | 28 | 13 |
| 2016 | 153 | 131 | 124 | 117 | 94 | 99 | 40 | 54 | 54 | 28 |
| 2017 | 219 | 191 | 178 | 181 | 136 | 136 | 58 | 88 | 79 | 44 |
| 2018 | 297 | 263 | 239 | 252 | 192 | 179 | 99 | 127 | 108 | 67 |
| 2019 | 389 | 348 | 313 | 329 | 276 | 234 | 148 | 167 | 142 | 102 |
| 2020 | 505 | 444 | 399 | 413 | 358 | 300 | 207 | 203 | 175 | 129 |
| 2021 | 621 | 517 | 489 | 483 | 414 | 363 | 274 | 217 | 182 | 152 |
| 2022 | 743 | 595 | 578 | 544 | 484 | 429 | 347 | 230 | 196 | 175 |
| 2023 | 847 | 658 | 659 | 586 | 533 | 479 | 407 | 241 | 202 | 184 |
| 2024 | 942 | 738 | 729 | 658 | 597 | 526 | 457 | 277 | 226 | 213 |
| 2025 | 943 | 738 | 729 | 658 | 597 | 526 | 457 | 277 | 226 | 213 |

As shown in Table 2, the data illustrates a significant upward trend in research articles related to various themes in religion and morality from 2015 to 2025. The most notable increase is observed in the overall number of articles published, rising from 71 in 2015 to a projected 943 in 2025. This growth reflects a growing academic interest in religious ethics and morality, indicating that these topics are becoming increasingly relevant in contemporary scholarly discourse. Furthermore, specific categories such as “Religion”, “Female”, and “Human” show consistent increases each year, suggesting that researchers are not only expanding the breadth of their inquiry but also focusing on diverse perspectives within the field.

In addition to the overall rise in publication numbers, the data also highlights shifts in thematic focus over the years. For instance, the category “Religion” exhibits a substantial increase from 71 articles in 2015 to 943 by 2025, while other categories such as “Adult” and “Psychology” show growth at different levels. The consistent rise across these themes indicates a broadening of the scope within religious ethics and morality research, encompassing various demographic and psychological dimensions. This trend may reflect societal changes and an increasing recognition of the importance of understanding moral frameworks from religion, particularly as they relate to contemporary issues such as gender and human behavior.

The second objective of this analysis sought to ascertain the recurring topics and trends in religion and morality research over the decade. Table 3 reveals significant trends that underscore the evolving discourse within religious ethics and morality. The term “Religion” stands out with the highest frequency of 943 occurrences by 2025, indicating its centrality in current research. This prominence suggests a growing recognition of the interplay between religious beliefs and moral frameworks, particularly in contemporary societal issues. Additionally, terms such as “Ethics” (96), “Morality” (188), and “Psychology” (226) reflect a multidimensional approach to understanding how religious contexts shape ethical considerations and moral behaviors. The increased use of these terms signals an expanding interest in integrating psychological insights with ethical discussions, highlighting the importance of understanding moral obligations from religious and psychological perspectives.

Table 3. Topic trends in religious ethics and morality

| Term | Frequency | Year (Q1) | Year (Median) | Year (Q3) |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| Moral obligations | 7 | 2015 | 2015 | 2019 |
| Adaptive behavior | 6 | 2015 | 2015 | 2016 |
| Social psychology | 35 | 2016 | 2016 | 2018 |
| Social values | 21 | 2015 | 2016 | 2018 |
| Religion and medicine | 52 | 2015 | 2017 | 2018 |
| Attitude to death | 46 | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 |
| Ethics | 96 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 |
| Middle-aged | 277 | 2017 | 2019 | 2021 |
| Psychology | 226 | 2017 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Morality | 188 | 2017 | 2019 | 2022 |
| Religion | 943 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
| Female | 738 | 2017 | 2020 | 2022 |
| Human | 729 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
| Article | 457 | 2019 | 2021 | 2022 |
| Child | 117 | 2019 | 2021 | 2023 |
| Vaccination | 33 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Motivation | 32 | 2018 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Personality | 10 | 2021 | 2024 | 2024 |
| Love | 8 | 2022 | 2024 | 2024 |
| Psychological Resilience | 8 | 2022 | 2024 | 2024 |

Furthermore, the dataset indicates that themes such as “Female” (738) and “Human” (729) are also gaining traction within the literature, suggesting a more inclusive approach to studying religious ethics and morality. This significant frequency points to an emerging focus on gender and human experiences concerning moral decision-making processes. The rise of topics such as “Vaccination” (33) and “Attitude to death” (46) in recent years reflects how contemporary issues are being examined from the viewpoint of religious ethics, particularly in light of global health crises and existential concerns. Generally, these trends illustrate a dynamic landscape in religious ethics and morality research, characterized by an increasing integration of diverse perspectives and contemporary relevance.

5. DISCUSSION

This bibliometric analysis of religious ethics and morality research trends revealed noteworthy themes and topics. The data indicates a marked increase in the frequency of articles published on themes such as “religion”, “female”, and “human”. This trend underscores a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives into discussions about morality, particularly those related to gender and human experiences. As Baker et al. (2020) highlighted, including female perspectives in religious ethics enriches moral discourse and reflects broader societal changes toward inclusivity. This shift is essential for addressing

contemporary ethical dilemmas that require understanding how various identities intersect with religious beliefs.

Moreover, the current analysis shows that psychological factors are increasingly recognized as influential in moral decision-making within religious contexts. The term “Psychology” appears with a frequency of 226. This outcome indicates that researchers are keen to explore how psychological insights can inform ethical behavior influenced by religious beliefs (Table 3). Psychological dimensions provide critical contexts for understanding how individuals employ moral choices within their faith frameworks (McCarthy & Smith, 2014). Integrating psychology into religious ethics could broaden the inquiry and help to develop more effective interventions for individuals facing moral dilemmas.

The analysis also reveals that specific moral themes, such as “moral obligations” and “social values”, have gained prominence over the years (Table 3). This trend reflects an increasing scholarly focus on how religious teachings inform individuals' perceptions of their moral responsibilities towards others. This focus is crucial for understanding how cultures interpret moral obligations through their respective religious lenses (Wong, 2004). The emphasis on social values further highlights how individual ethics relates to societal norms. This outcome suggests that researchers are increasingly aware of the broader implications of religious ethics in shaping community standards.

Additionally, this study indicates that contemporary issues such as healthcare ethics are being examined through the lens of religious beliefs. The terms “religion” and “medicine” appeared with a frequency of 52. This result suggests that scholars actively explore how faith influences ethical decision-making in medical contexts (Table 3). This outcome aligns with previous research indicating that individuals often turn to their religious beliefs when faced with health-related moral dilemmas (Smith & Wong, 2010). By integrating discussions on religion and medicine, researchers can better understand how faith informs patient care decisions and health policies. This understanding could ultimately contribute to more holistic approaches in healthcare settings. The foregoing discussions show that the trends identified in this analysis reflect how religious ethics and morality research are characterized by increasing inclusivity, interdisciplinary approaches, and relevance to contemporary issues.

6. CONCLUSION

This study focused on a bibliometric analysis of religious ethics and morality research over the past decade. The analysis indicates a substantial increase in publications related to themes such as “religion”, “gender”, and “humanity”. These findings demonstrate a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity and diverse perspectives in ethical discussions. In addition, the study indicates a rise in the frequency of articles addressing psychological factors and moral obligations. This outcome suggests a shift towards interdisciplinary approaches integrating insights from religion, psychology, and theological perspectives. Moreover, the findings show a projected growth in publication frequencies through 2025, indicating that scholars will continue to engage with pressing ethical issues shaped by religious beliefs. Additionally, this study demonstrates an increased focus on healthcare ethics, gender dynamics, and social values.

The significance of this research lies in its comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 1827 documents concerning religious ethics and morality, which elucidates critical trends and themes within the field. This study could be a valuable resource for educators and researchers aiming to develop a comprehensive framework for integrating religious ethics into moral development. Ultimately, these contributions underscore the necessity for ongoing exploration and innovation in religion and morality to meet the evolving research trends. This information could help researchers quickly grasp the dominant themes and potential areas for further investigation in the research context.

The current analysis underscores the significance of interdisciplinary approaches and continued research into religion and morality. Future research directions should focus on several key areas to further enrich the discourse and address contemporary challenges. Firstly, there is a pressing need for empirical studies that examine the impact of religious beliefs on ethical decision-making across cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western societies where traditional frameworks may differ significantly. Additionally, researchers should explore the connection between psychology and religion, particularly how religion influences moral reasoning and ethical behavior among younger generations. This interdisciplinary approach might combine insights from psychology and theology to develop comprehensive moral decision-making models that account for individual and communal factors. Additionally, as global issues such as climate change and social justice gain prominence, future studies should investigate how religious ethics can inform practical responses to these challenges.

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