

Co-Producing Mental Health Knowledge with Older Adults: A Bibliometric and Thematic Mapping of Participatory Research

Fatma Hastaoglu

Elderly Care Programme, Vocational School of Health Services, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkiye

Abstract

Participatory approaches can reposition older adults from passive research participants to active contributors whose lived experiences inform mental health research, services, and policy. This study aimed to map the growth, conceptual structure, emerging themes, and international collaboration patterns of participatory mental health research involving older adults. The Web of Science Core Collection was searched for English-language articles published between 2000 and 2026 using terms related to older adults, mental health, participatory research, co-design, co-production, patient and public involvement, and experts by experience. The final dataset comprised 331 articles. Publication trends were examined descriptively, while keyword co-occurrence, temporal development, and country collaboration networks were visualized using VOSviewer. The earliest article was published in 2004, but research activity increased markedly after 2020 and reached its highest level in 2025 with 56 publications. Mental health, older adults, co-design, participatory research, loneliness, dementia, and participatory action research were central concepts. The literature also connected participation with technology, digital health, social participation, qualitative research, community, long-term care, and health disparities. Recent research showed growing attention to co-design, participatory design, loneliness, distress, physical activity, and health inequalities. International collaboration was concentrated around the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada. Participatory mental health research with older adults is expanding rapidly; however, geographical concentration and the limited visibility of socially excluded populations indicate continuing inclusion gaps. Future research should involve diverse older adults as experts by experience throughout priority setting, study design, interpretation, and dissemination.

Keywords

Older adults, mental health, participatory research, co-design, bibliometric analysis.