

# RAPID REVIEW (PART ONE): SOCIAL ISOLATION IN LATER LIFE

## Rapid Review: Social Isolation in Later Life

### Part I: Results of the Peer-Reviewed Literature

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## INTRODUCTION

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Social isolation is an experience that can be detrimental to the health and well-being of older people. Research across many disciplines has uncovered risk factors and harmful outcomes of social isolation both in general and for older people. Social isolation however, has been approached and defined in a range of ways. In an effort to summarize the broad range of literature that has been published on social isolation among older adults in the last 20+ years a rapid review of peer-reviewed literature was conducted. The results of this rapid review will be used to summarize the state of the literature and establish a working definition and baseline for the project.

## SEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

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An accelerated search strategy (rapid review) was selected to identify peer-reviewed literature on social isolation among older adults. Rapid reviews are considered a valid means of summarizing the state of a body of literature in a timely fashion (3 weeks – 6 months), whereas traditional systematic reviews are often highly time (6-12 months) and resource-intensive (Gannan, Ciliska, & Thomas, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Rapid reviews aim to capture relevant literature and information in a shortened time frame making the method an efficient way of synthesizing information; especially when reporting to government policymakers and health professionals.<sup>2</sup>

The six-stage framework refined by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien<sup>3</sup> was used to complete this rapid review. The stages included: (1) identification of the research question, (2) identification of relevant studies, (3) selection of relevant studies for the review, (4) charting information and data from the selected literature, (5) summarizing and reporting the results of the review, (6) stakeholder consultation.

A rapid review was conducted in August 2016 through McMaster University's institutional library system. The search was used to identify relevant peer reviewed articles in six distinct databases: AgeLine, MEDLINE, Social Science Abstracts, EMBASE, PsycINFO, and CINAHL. The following search strategy was used: [(late\* life or old\* person\* or old\* people\* or elder\* or old\* adult\* or seniors or retiree\* or pensioner\*) AND ((“social \* or perce\* or experienc\* or feel\* or felt) AND (marginali\* or isolat\*))], searching titles only. Specific searches for each database varied slightly due to differences in database indexing (i.e. how articles are categorized and archived using key words). For example, CINAHL uses subject headers to index publications. As such, a modified search strategy was used whereby the subject header Aging was selected in addition to the string of search terms relating to aging (i.e. [(late\* life or old\* person\* or old\* people\* or elder\* or old\* adult\* or senior\* or retiree\* or pensioner\*)]). The search strategy was replicated across the six databases.

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<sup>1</sup> National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. *Methods: Synthesis 1. Rapid reviews: Methods and implications. [fact sheet]*. Hamilton, ON: National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. Retrieved from [http://www.nccmt.ca/pubs/Methods\\_Synthesis1.pdf](http://www.nccmt.ca/pubs/Methods_Synthesis1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Ganann, R., Ciliska, D., & Thomas, H. (2010). Expediting systematic reviews: methods and implications of rapid reviews. *Implementation Science*, 5 (56). <http://www.implementationscience.com/content/5/1/56>

<sup>3</sup> Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. (2010). Scoping studies: advancing methodology. *Implementation Science*, 5 (69). <http://www.implementationscience.com/content/5/1/69>

## FINDINGS

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A total of 373 citations on social isolation among older people were identified using our search strategy. The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) the article must be published in a peer reviewed academic journal; 2) the article must be available in English; 3) the article must focus on social isolation (e.g. citations that simply mention social isolation were not included; 4) the article must focus on older people; 5) the article must have been published since 1995. The decision was made to limit the search to the past 20 years as it is within this time frame that the bulk of the research on social isolation in later life has been published. The inclusion criteria were applied to all 373 citations through the screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts; citations that did not meet these criteria were removed from the pool (see details of the search).

A preliminary review of retrieved titles resulted in the identification of 163 duplicate citations which were immediately removed from the pool bringing the new total to 210 unique citations. Based on a review of the unique citation titles 35 were removed as they did not meet the citation type (i.e., peer-reviewed journal article). A more in-depth review of abstracts and summaries resulted in the removal of an additional 86 citations because they did not meet the citation focus (i.e., social isolation and older people). In these cases, papers typically mentioned social isolation and/or older people, but focused primarily on a different issue, such as falls. This process resulted in a final set of 89 citations that focused directly on social isolation among older people (see Table 1). The paper reviewed articles deemed most relevant for the project are included in the reference list at the end of the document (see Results).

## DETAILS OF THE SEARCH

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We began with a pool of 373 citations

Criteria 1: Published in a peer reviewed academic journal (35 removed)

- 9 – conference proceedings
- 8 – book reviews
- 8 – letters to the editor
- 7 – doctoral theses
- 1 – book chapter
- 1 – book
- 1 – non-peer reviewed citations

Criteria 2: Available in English (0 removed)

- 0 – citations removed

Criteria 3: Focused on social isolation (46 removed)

- 22 – biological and cell-related studies
- 14 – animal studies
- 6 – study focused on older people but not social isolation
- 4 – study focused on social exclusion / marginalization

Criteria 4: Focused on older people (40 removed)

- 20 – social isolation and health among adults
- 7 – social isolation among individuals with mental illness
- 3 – social isolation post-disaster or trauma
- 3 – social isolation among workers
- 2 – delayed discovery of bodies
- 2 – social isolation (no discussion of age)
- 1 – social isolation in caregivers (all ages)
- 1 – social isolation in vulnerable populations
- 1 – social isolation in women (all ages)

Criteria 5: Published since 1995 (0 removed)

- 0 – citations removed

<b>TABLE 1. RAPID REVIEW RESULTS</b>	
<b>373</b>	<b>Citations retrieved from search strategy</b>
163	Duplicate citations removed
35	Non-relevant citations removed based on publication type
46	Non-relevant citations removed based on non social isolation focus
40	Non-relevant citations removed based on non older adult focus
<b>89</b>	<b>Total citations reviewed and summarized</b>

## RESULTS (APA FORMAT)

Ajrouch, K. J. (2008). Social isolation and loneliness among Arab American elders: Cultural, social, and personal factors. *Research in Human Development, 5*(1), 44-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15427600701853798>

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