

# Social isolation and loneliness among older Asian immigrants through the lens of Sense of Coherence: A systematic review

Maneze, D.<sup>1\*</sup>, Smith, B.W.<sup>1</sup>, Chan, A.<sup>1</sup>, Aldahmashi, H.<sup>1</sup>, Ramjan, L.M.<sup>1,2</sup>, Montayre, J.<sup>1,3</sup>, Alex, J.<sup>1,4</sup>, & Salamonson, Y.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Wollongong, Australia; <sup>2</sup> Western Sydney University, Australia; <sup>3</sup> Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong; <sup>4</sup> Western Sydney Local Health District, Australia

\*Corresponding author: [dmaneze@uow.edu.au](mailto:dmaneze@uow.edu.au)

## Introduction

Social isolation and loneliness (SILO) are becoming significant global health issues for older immigrants.

SILO contributes to poorer health, reduced cognitive function, higher risk of dementia (Guarnara et al., 2023) and premature death in older people (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2021).

Sense of Coherence (Antonovsky, 1986) with its three elements (comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) provides a valuable lens in examining these multifaceted issues.



## Methods

**Search Strategy:** Keywords related to four concepts: (1) older people, (2) social isolation and loneliness, (3) Sense of Coherence, and (4) community-dwelling.

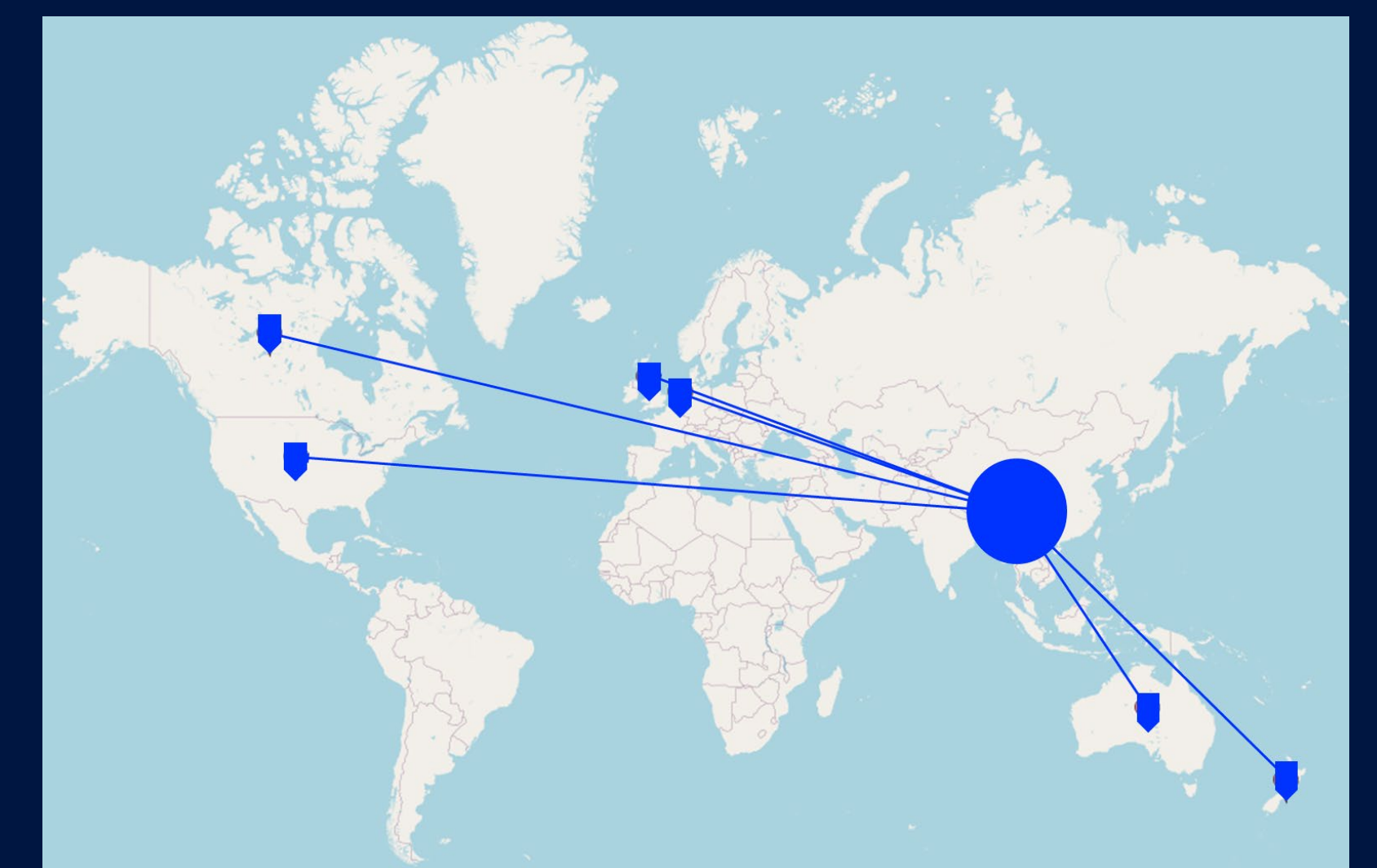
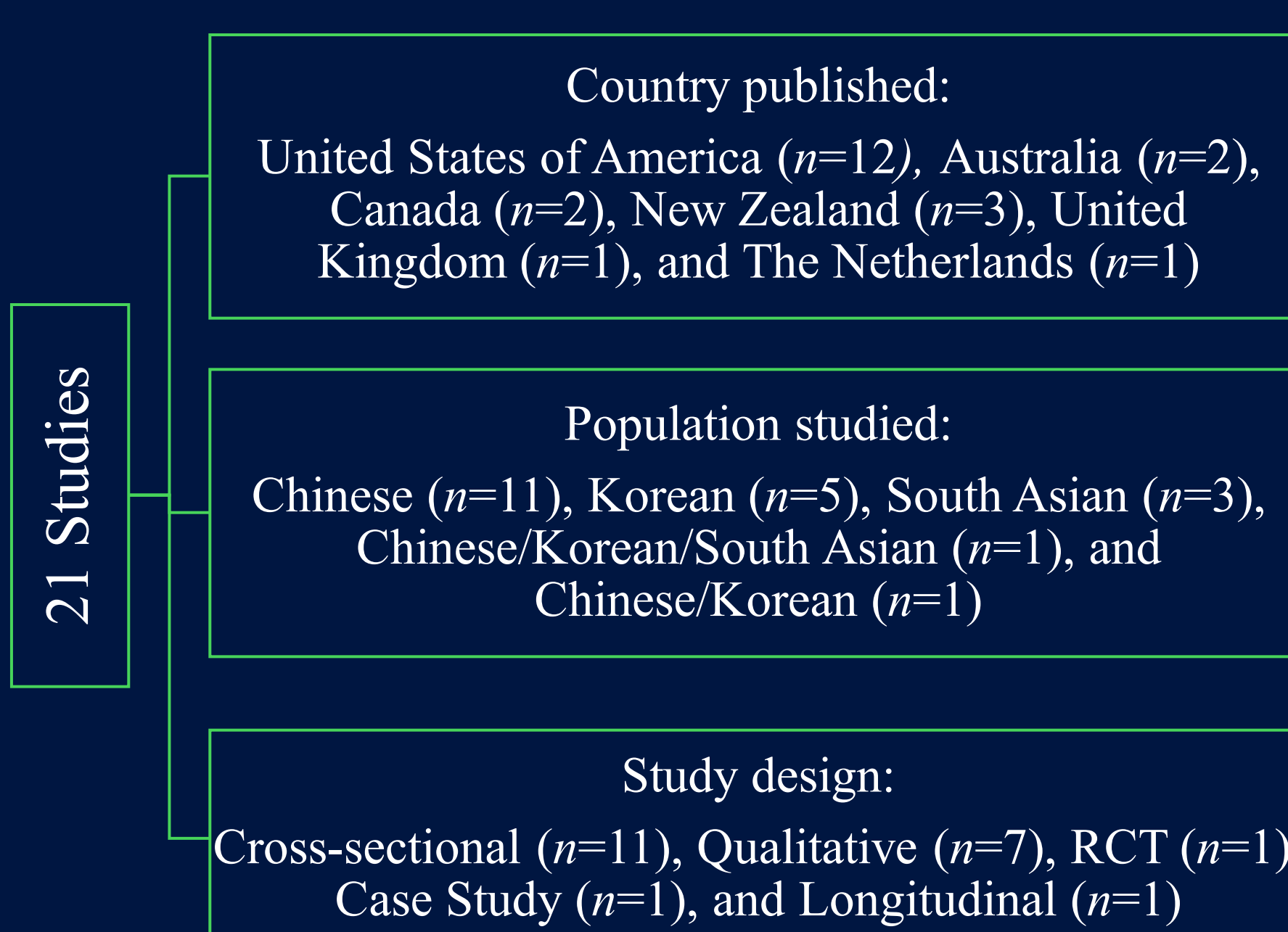
**Databases:** AgeLine, CINAHL, MEDLINE, ProQuest, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Primary research from 2014 to 2024 on Asian immigrants aged 65+ living independently in a Western country experiencing SILO. Participants with confounding health and lifestyle factors were excluded.

**Quality Appraisal:** JBI Critical Appraisal Tools were used to assess the quality of included studies.

**Data Extraction and Synthesis:** Data were extracted, analysed deductively using the Sense of Coherence elements, findings were reported thematically.

## Results



## Comprehensibility

Loss of established social networks and unfamiliarity with new systems and environments can increase isolation (Park et al., 2023).

Language barriers and cultural dissonance lead to family conflicts exacerbating SILO (Wright-St Clair et al., 2020).

Co-morbidities, mobility issues, and dependence on adult children for care hinder social engagement (Lin et al., 2016).



## Manageability

Ethnic enclaves provide a sense of belonging and help mitigate weak family ties (Kim & Silverstein, 2021).

Community-based cultural activities help reduce social isolation and loneliness (Weng, 2019).

Religion offers both emotional and social support (Liou and Shenk, 2016).



## Meaningfulness

Supportive family relationships reduce feelings of loneliness and depression (Kim & Silverstein, 2021).

Intergenerational programs enable older people to build meaningful connections with younger people (Weng, 2019).

Meaning is discovered through spirituality, charitable acts, and volunteering (Park et al., 2019).



## Conclusion

Loss of social networks, unmet expectations of family support, and cultural dissonance following migration contribute to social isolation and loneliness.

Community-based activities tailored to cultural and traditional practices promote social inclusion and help reduce feelings of loneliness.

Greater social interactions, learning new things, and supportive relationships enhance meaningfulness and improve quality of life for older Asian immigrants.

## Recommendations

Screening of older immigrants for social isolation and loneliness is crucial in implementing timely, culturally specific interventions that will improve health outcomes.

More funding is needed to support community organisations in providing services to older immigrants that foster social connections and alleviate loneliness.

Developing resilience and sense of coherence among older people can be empowering and may promote a more sustainable measure to enhancing quality of life.

## References

- Antonovsky, H., and Sagy, S. (1986). The development of sense of coherence and its impact on responses to stress situations. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 126(2), 213-226.
- Guarnara, J., Yuen, E., McPherson, H., et al. (2023). The impact of loneliness and social isolation on cognitive aging: A narrative review. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease Reports*, 7(1), 699-714. <https://doi.org/10.3233/ADR-230011>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 227-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
- Kim, J. H., & Silverstein, M. (2021). Are filial piety and ethnic community engagement associated with psychological wellbeing among older Chinese American immigrants? A cultural resource perspective. *Research on Aging*, 43(2), 63-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027520907332>
- Lin, X., Bryant, C., Boldero, J., & Dow, B. (2016). Psychological well-being of older Chinese immigrants living in Australia: A comparison with older Caucasians. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 28(10), 1671-1679. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610216000922>
- Liou, C. L., & Shenk, D. (2016). A case study of exploring older Chinese immigrants' social support within a Chinese church community in the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 31(3), 293-309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10823-016-9292-2>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). *Social isolation and loneliness in older adults: Opportunities for the health care system*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>
- Park, H. J., Morgan, T., Wiles, J., & Gott, M. (2019). Lonely ageing in a foreign land: Social isolation and loneliness among older Asian migrants in New Zealand. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 27(3), 740-747. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12691>
- Park, J., Jang, Y., Oh, H., & Chi, I. (2023). Loneliness as a mediator in the association between social isolation and psychological distress: A cross-sectional study with older Korean immigrants in the United States. *Research on Aging*, 45(5-6), 438-447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01640275221138807>
- Weng, S. S. (2019). An Asian American community intergenerational response to older adult isolation and loneliness. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 17(3), 257-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2019.1617605>
- Wright-St Clair, V. A., & Nayar, S. (2020). Resettling amidst a mood of loneliness: Later-life Chinese, Indian and Korean immigrants in New Zealand. *Ageing & Society*, 40(11), 2393-2409. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X19000655>



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA