



Falls and Social Isolation in Older Adults

Date prepared: June 17, 2025

Summary

Falls are a major cause of injury among adults aged 65+, potentially leading to social isolation. This scoping review included 39 studies examining falls, social isolation, and related outcomes like loneliness, fear of falling, and mental health. Most studies were cross-sectional and community-based. Results highlight inconsistent outcome measures and a need for more research, given the aging population and health impacts of both falls and social isolation.

What does this mean?

Further research is needed in this area because falls and social isolation affect the health of older adults especially as the population continues to age. The studies used several tools to measure social isolation after a fall, and only a few explored risk factors or mental health outcomes, highlighting the need for more consistent methods and further research in this area.

Citation: Thomas SM, Parker A, Fortune J, Mitchell G, Hezam A, Jiang Y, de Groh M, Anderson K, Gauthier-Beaupré A, Barker J, Watt J, Straus SE, Tricco AC. (2022). Global evidence on falls and subsequent social isolation in older adults: a scoping review. *BMJ open*, 12(9), e062124.

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What is the current situation?

- Over 30% of older adults in Canada are at risk of social isolation.
- Social isolation in older adults is linked to negative health outcomes such as cognitive decline, depression, and dementia.
- Falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury death worldwide.
- Falls can result in serious consequences, including physical injuries (e.g., fractures), cognitive decline, depression, anxiety, fear of falling, and increased social isolation.

What questions did we aim to answer in our research?

- Given the harmful effects of both falls and social isolation, this review explored the association between falls and social isolation in older adults, and whether the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on this relationship.

How did we approach these questions?

- A scoping review was conducted, searching studies up until 2021 to summarize the link between falls and social isolation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What answers did we find from our research?

- Fear of falling can lead to reduced activity and withdrawal from social life, which contributes to social isolation.
- There is a link between falls and poorer mental health, including depression and anxiety, which are also tied to social isolation.
- The review found no studies about falls and social isolation during COVID-19, which highlights a gap in the research.

How confident are we in these findings?

- There were no studies that looked at falls and social isolation in the COVID-19 pandemic, or among older adults from diverse cultural or language backgrounds who are at a greater risk.
- There are clear knowledge gaps and confidence in our findings is limited.