Social Isolation and Loneliness in People Living with Chronic Kidney Disease and Kidney Failure: A Mixed Method Systematic Review

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What do we know so far?

- People living with CKD and kidney failure experience many burdens that impact all areas of their lives[1]
- Social isolation has been well documented in people with chronic and complex condition[2, 3] and linked to high levels of anxiety and depression and low levels of quality of life[4]
- Social isolation is all too common in older adults with chronic health conditions as the lack of physical mobility may restrict their ability to be mobile and interact socially with others[,2, 5] however, people of all ages living with chronic conditions have identified health impacts from social isolation[6, 7]
- Social isolation can be defined as the lack of social connection including friends, family or people within the community[2, 5]

Are you surrounded by people but still feel lonely?



- Having a lack of social connection due to isolation may lead to significant vulnerability in health, as some people struggle with their health concerns alone[8, 9]
- Interestingly, some people can be surrounded by others but still experience feelings of loneliness[5, 10]
- However, people who are experiencing isolation do not necessarily feel lonely and vice versa

Aim and Research Question

To conduct a mixed method systematic review to answer the following questions:

1. What is known about social isolation and loneliness of people affected by CKD and kidney failure?
2. What is the impact of social isolation and loneliness on people living with CKD and kidney failure?

Methods

- Following the PRISMA guidelines[11] a convergent design was selected whereby both qualitative and qualitative studies were analysed separately before converging together The review followed the registered prior protocol PROSPERO

TABLE 1 | Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Selection criteria	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Language	English	Non-English
Dates	Publication from November 2005 to August 2025	Publications before 2004
Study types	Quantitative research, qualitative research, mixed methods and systematic reviews	Conference abstracts, reports, case studies, news articles, editorials
Topics	CKD, kidney failure, loneliness, lonely, isolation, social isolation	Kidney cancer, AKI

Abbreviations: AKI, acute kidney injury; CKD, chronic kidney disease.

TABLE 2 | Search strategy (CINAHL).

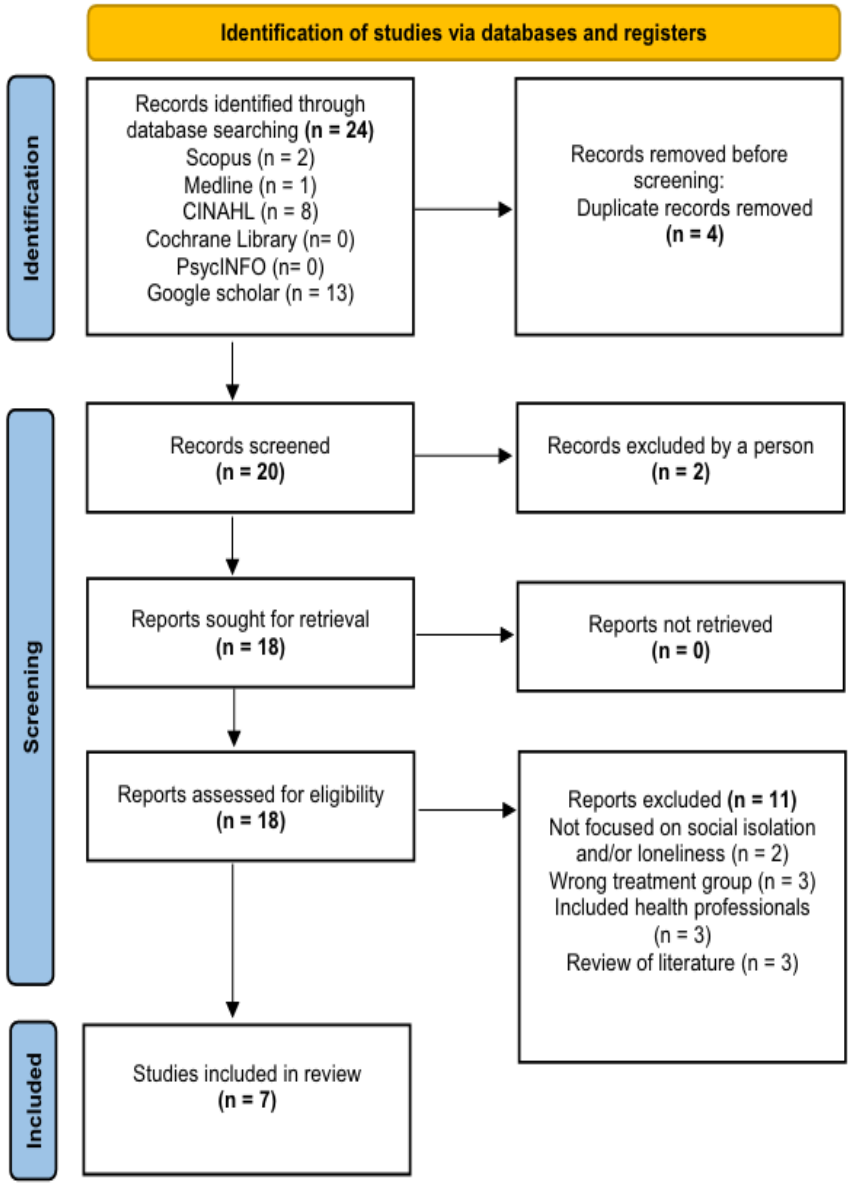
1.	"Loneliness" OR "lonely" OR "alone"	12,269
2.	"Social isolation" OR "social alone"	17,137
3.	"End-stage kidney disease" OR "ESKD" OR "end stage renal disease" OR "ESRD" OR "end-stage kidney failure" OR "ESKF" OR "kidney failure" OR "chronic kidney disease" OR "CKD" OR "renal replacement therapies" OR "RRT" OR "peritoneal dialysis" OR "haemodialysis" OR "haemodialysis" OR "HD" OR "dialysis" OR "renal" NOT "predialysis" NOT "transplant"	45,076
4.	1 AND 2 AND 3 AND 3 AND 4	8
5.	Limiters-English	8
6.	Limiters-Date of Publication 2005, to August 2025	8
7.	5 AND 6 AND 7 AND Journal article OR Review	8

Study Selection

- The study selection process was conducted in the Covidence systematic review software

Critical Appraisal

- The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)[12] was used to critically appraise the studies
- Two of the studies were assessed using the quantitative methodology criteria of the MMAT tool[12] .The other five qualitative studies were assessed with the qualitative methodological quality criteria



Results: Studies

Asti et al. 2006[13] Turkey

Diao et al. 2023[14] China

Jeong et al. 2025[15] South Korea

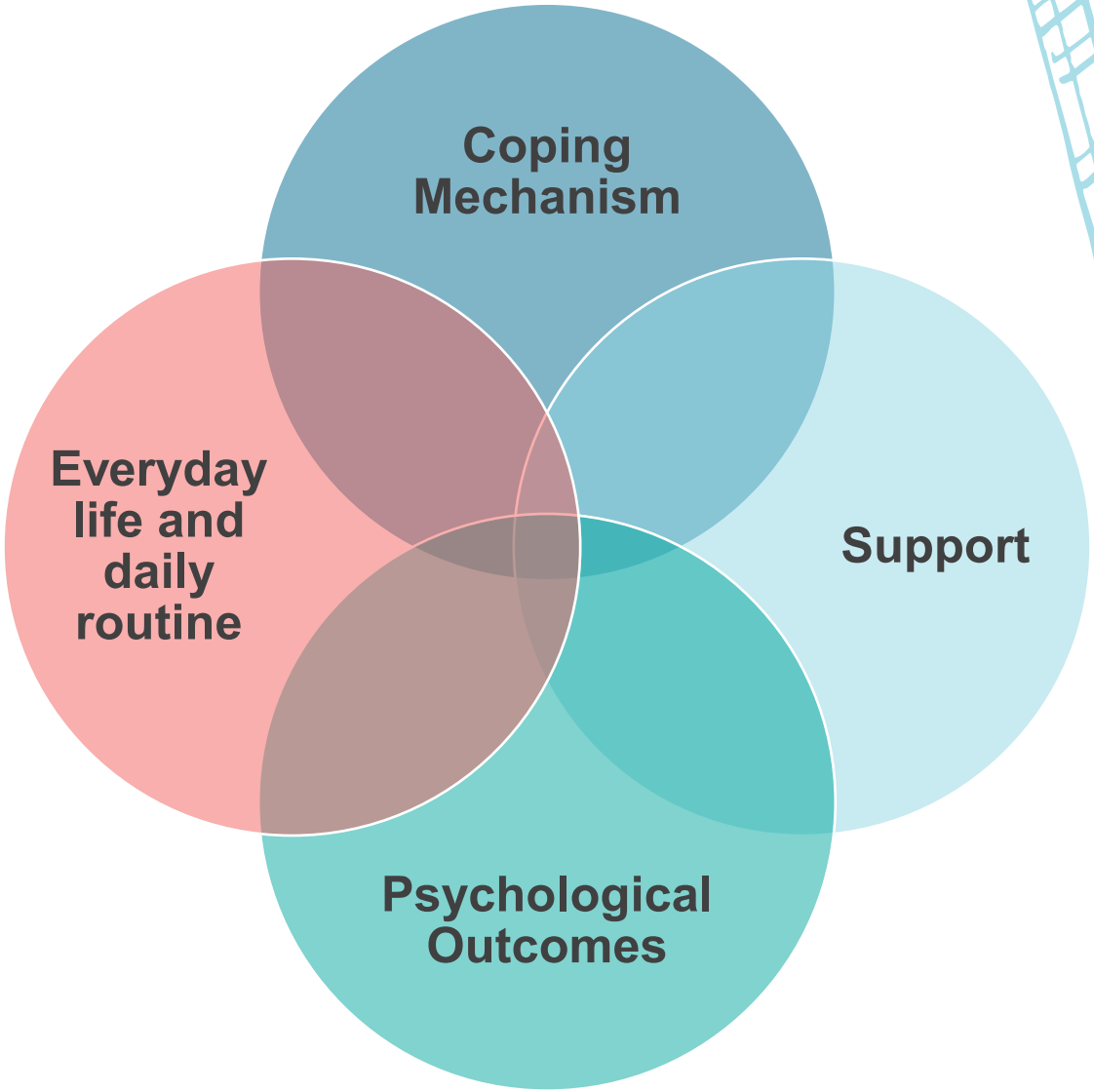
Malo et al. 2022[16] Canada

Saedi et al. 2019[17] Iran

Sluiter et al. 2024[18] Australia

Zou et al. 2024[19] China

Results: Main Themes



Results

Coping Mechanism	Positive coping mechanism using technology	Negative coping mechanism Acceptance and part of being sick
Support	Invaluable support from family and friends in different was	Lack of support from health services in accessing services
Psychological Outcomes	Anxiety, depression, altered moods	Physical changes that caused unpleasant feelings and made social connection difficult
Everyday life and Daily Routine	Appreciation for life and family Normalise their life, activities and ongoing learning	‘HD is just like a job’ Conditioned and attached to their daily routine

Conclusion

- The restrictions associated with living with CKD and kidney failure often restricts their social activities and promotes isolation for some
- For young people living with kidney failure, there is a social strain on friendships and connections, as they face challenges around disclosing their illness, arising concerns about the potential impact on Conversely, attending the HD center for KRT was an opportunity for some to socially connect with renal staff and other people living with CKD and kidney
- The importance of connecting people with others who are living with the disease can provide comfort in knowing they are not alone.
- Support services and early interventions need to be considered to better manage social isolation and loneliness for people living with this chronic health condition.

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