



# RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 2024-09-01

## Use of communication technology, such as phone calls and text messages, supports well-being of older adults living alone

**Research article:** Acceptance of communication technology, emotional support and subjective well-being for Chinese older adults living alone during COVID-19: A moderated mediation model. *Published in PLoS ONE in September 2023. Click [here](#) to view the published article online.*

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### KEY FINDINGS

1. For older adults living alone, more acceptance and competency with communication technology **is related to** better emotional support, and better well-being.
2. For older adults living with others, acceptance and competency with communication technology **is not related to** their emotional support or well-being.

### IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

1. Communication technology could help older adults living alone be socially connected.
2. Social connection through communication technology could support the emotional health of older adults living alone.
3. Prioritising communication technology education for older adults living alone could help with their well-being, especially if they are unable to leave their house either due to a similar pandemic or for health reasons.
4. Future research could explore effective ways to support older adults in using communication technology, such as education or improving their access to communication technology devices and peripherals.
5. Community care organisations and policymakers will find the findings crucial in supporting efforts to address resistance and inertia amongst older adults living alone, both beyond the pandemic period and in their daily lives.
6. The findings will also be useful in designing interventions to encourage older adults to use communication technology.

## BACKGROUND

Countries implemented lockdowns with stringent social distancing measures, such as restrictions on household visitors, in response to COVID-19. Such measures could be an issue for older adults living alone, who were already more likely to report depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and emotional distress prior to COVID-19. Lockdown measures could lead to these older adults experiencing greater isolation and being socially isolated for prolonged periods can lead to chronic loneliness and depression.

Social connection is an effective and recommended way to mitigate the effects of social isolation. However, lockdown measures made it difficult to maintain social engagements with others outside one's household. Thus, communication technology such as phone or video calls and text messages became essential tools to maintain social engagements. However, much of the existing research in this topic has focused on older adults without examining the moderating effect of living arrangements.

## FOCUS OF PROJECT

The aim of this study was to examine the association between acceptance and competency with communication technology and their roles in providing emotional support and well-being among older adults living alone, compared to those living with others. The findings contributed to understanding of the association between communication technology and well-being. It also identified older adults living alone as a priority for communication technology education.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participants were Chinese community-dwelling older adults. They were recruited between September to November 2020 with the help of four Senior Activity Centres in Singapore's North, East, and Central areas. Participants had to be at least 65 years old, spoke either English, Mandarin, Teochew or Hokkien, and consented to be in the study. This study had 293 participants aged 74 years on average.

## STUDY DESIGN

It was a cross-sectional study involving older adults who expressed interest in participating. These participants completed surveys with the help of trained surveyors. The study did not include a control group.

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