



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Experience of Loneliness Among Older Persons With Long-Term Care Living in Nursing Homes: A Descriptive Qualitative Study in China

Yue Ying | Pornchai Jullamate | Watchara Tabootwong

Faculty of Nursing, Burapha University, Chonburi, Thailand

Correspondence: Watchara Tabootwong (watchara.t2525@gmail.com)**Received:** 23 July 2025 | **Revised:** 13 October 2025 | **Accepted:** 16 October 2025**Funding:** The authors received no specific funding for this work.**Keywords:** loneliness | long-term care | nursing home | older persons | qualitative research

ABSTRACT

As China's aging population continues to grow, increasing numbers of older persons are residing in nursing homes (NHs) and receiving long-term care (LTC). Loneliness is one of the most prominent feelings among older persons with LTC living in NHs. However, their experiences of loneliness are often poorly known in Chinese NHs, especially in the counties. Therefore, this qualitative study explores the experiences of loneliness among older persons in NHs. The selection of 14 participants was based on purposive sampling, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with audio recordings. The content analysis method was employed to analyse the entire data. Four key themes emerged: being alone with experiences of loss and dilemma; health conditions contributing to loneliness; institutional loneliness; and dealing with loneliness. The findings of this study highlight the importance of focusing on understanding the individual needs and inner thoughts of older persons to help them deal with loneliness, addressing the relationship between nursing care rights and older persons, and creating a home-like environment for them.

1 | Introduction

The older population in China is increasing dramatically: it is estimated to rise from 19.8% in 2023 to more than 30% in 2035, marking the transition to a super-aging society (China State Information Center 2023). The National Health Commission of China (2022) pointed out that the health status of older persons in China is not ideal; the number of semi-disabled and disabled older persons is gradually increasing, and up to 78% of older persons suffer from at least one chronic disease. Declining health status and increasing physical limitations among older persons often result in irreversible changes and substantial social losses, placing them at a heightened risk of loneliness (Hammond and Pullen Jr 2020; Yang et al. 2018).

Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a significant public health concern in this population (The Lancet 2023). The current study reveals a substantial prevalence of loneliness estimated at 26% worldwide, with 32% for Asia (Susanty et al. 2025). However, the prevalence of loneliness among older persons in China is 36.6% in 2024, which suggests that loneliness among Chinese older persons requires more attention (Wang et al. 2024). Meanwhile, one study underscores the high rates of moderate loneliness (61%) and severe loneliness (35%) among older persons in NHs (Gardiner et al. 2020). NHs are a key part of China's long-term care system. In its Fourteenth Five-Year Plan, the government prioritised eldercare reform, positioning institutional care as a supplement to weakening family support. Factors such as the one-child policy, urbanisation, smaller households and rising labour mobility have further strained traditional kinship care (Feng et al. 2020).