

# A Scoping Review of Mutual-Aid Groups for Substance Use in Asia

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## Background and rationale

- The mutual-aid approach was originally developed and implemented in Western contexts.
- Lack of systematic exploration in East, South, and Southeast Asia.
- Cultural traditions and social practices can influence behavior, in turn influencing treatment response, engagement, and retention.



## Research aims

1. Describe empirical studies in current literature.
2. Explore how groups were culturally tailored.
3. Identify key findings captured in these populations.



## Methodology

### Search strategy

- Conducted in Cinahl, EMBASE, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science until 9 November 2021.

### Key terms

- 1) East, South, and Southeast Asia, 2) Substance use, and 3) Mutual-aid groups for people who use substances.

### Inclusion criteria

- Original studies of any study design published in peer-reviewed journals. No language-, gender-, or age-based limits.



### Screening and data extraction

- Process followed the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses extension for scoping review (<https://osf.io/jrzg5>).
- Screened independently by two reviewers (WJT and CH) on Covidence.
- A data extraction tool was developed using Excel spreadsheet.



## Key findings

- A total of 2,719 articles were screened, 103 full-texts were assessed with 45 included in the review.

### Description of included studies

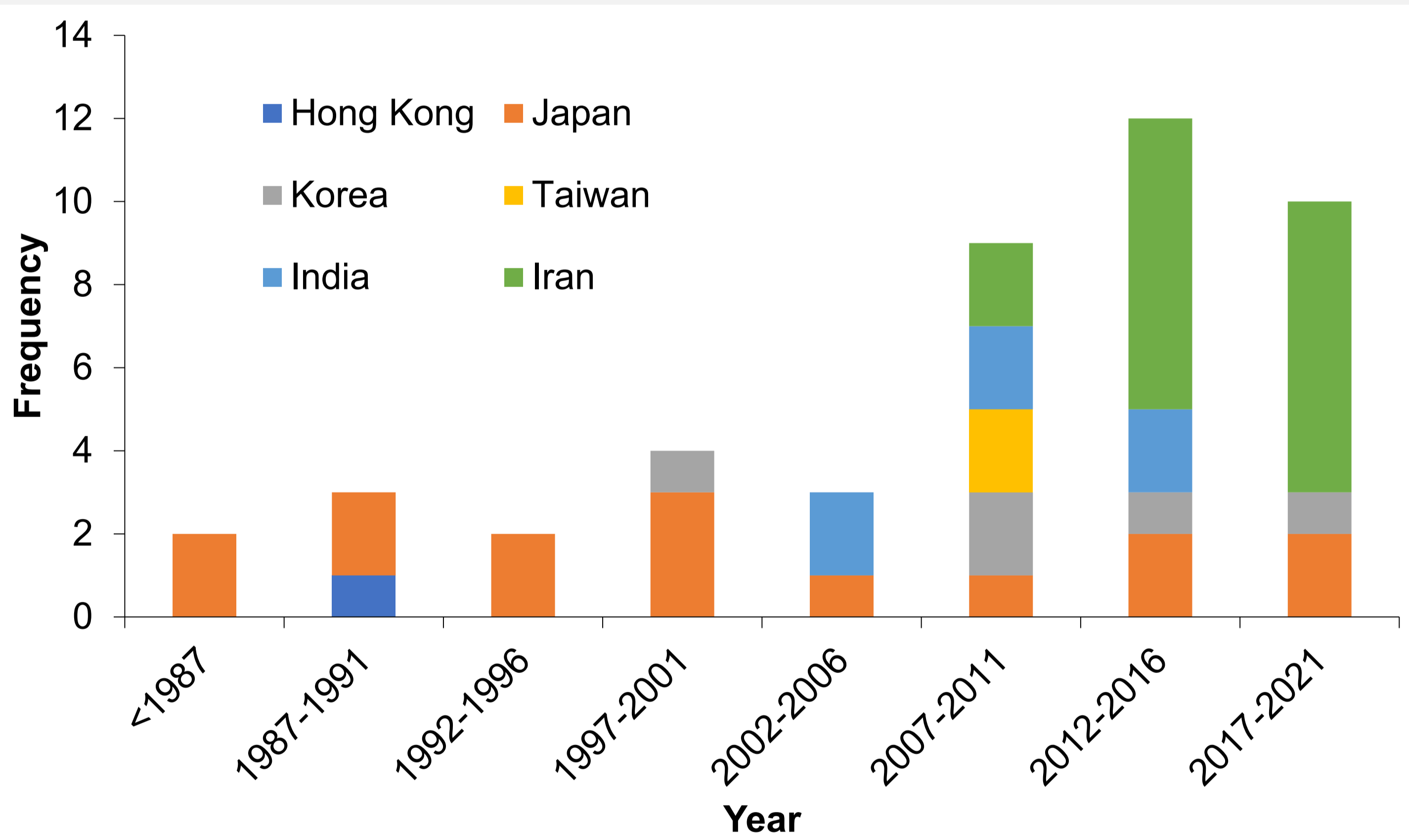


Figure 1. Number of publications in five-year blocks by country/region.

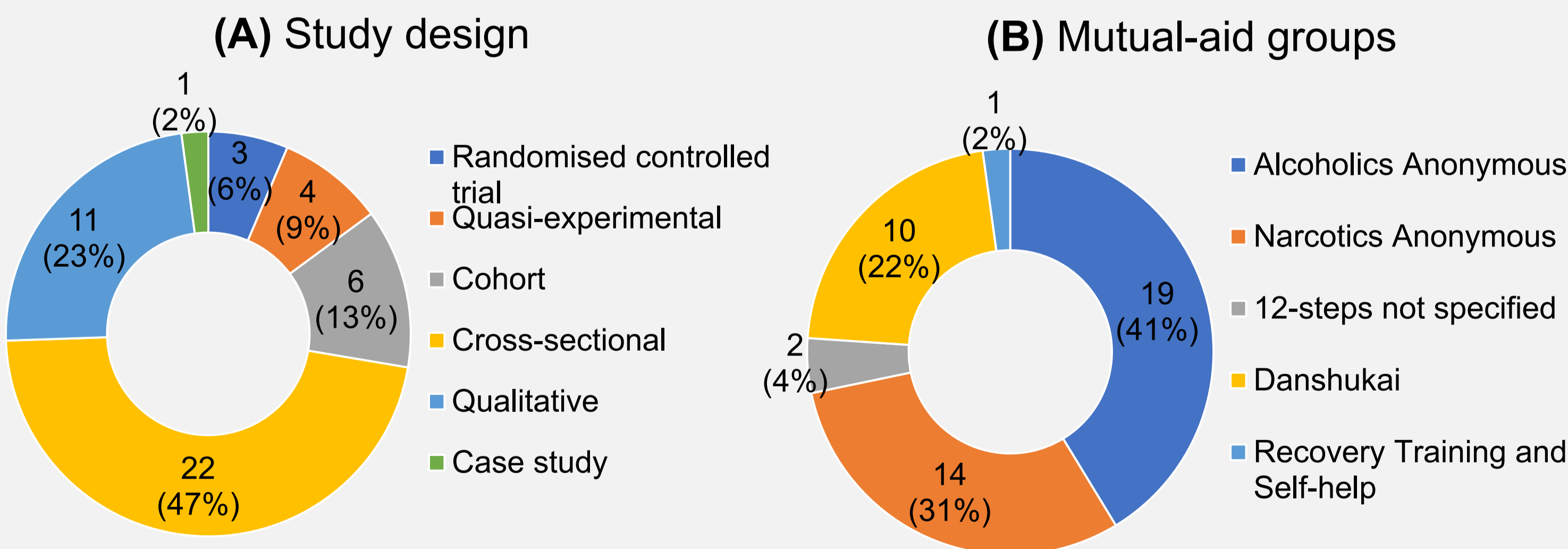


Figure 2. Distribution of reviewed studies.

### Cultural adaptation/tailoring of mutual-aid groups

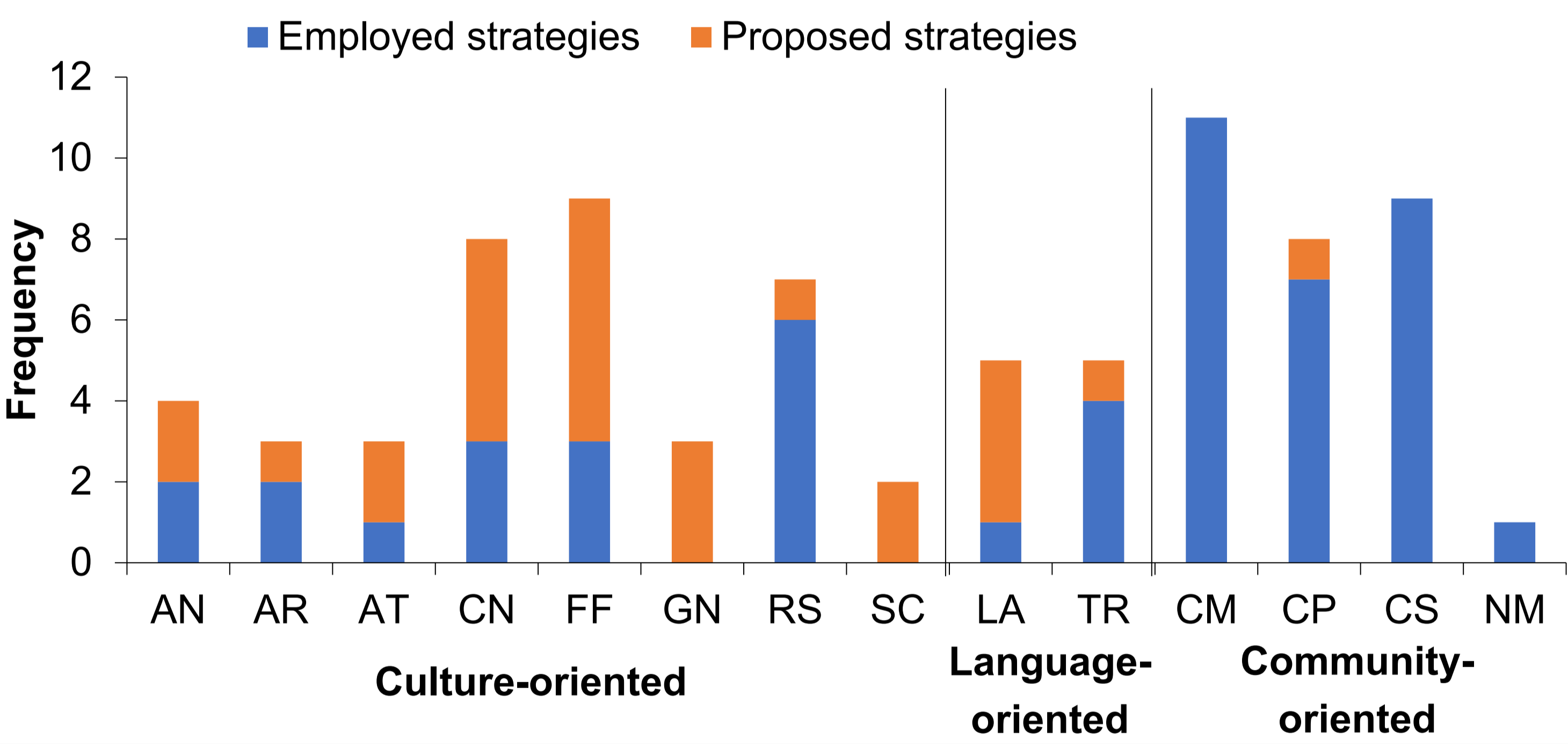


Figure 3. Strategies employed or proposed as important when culturally adapting or tailoring the program.

AN = Anonymity  
AR = Accountability and responsibility  
AT = Culturally appropriate activities  
CN = Cultural norms  
SC = Scheduling and convenience  
FF = Involve family and friends  
GN = Gender norms and roles  
RS = Religion/spirituality  
LA = Culturally-informed linguistics  
TR = Translation  
CM = Community members  
CP = Community partnerships  
CS = Community spaces  
NM = Networks and media

- None of the studies provided a definition of cultural adaptation, nor reported the process of culturally adapting or tailoring the program.



## Limitations and future research

- Findings in this review are limited because of:
  - Study design (most were cross-sectional or qualitative).
  - Concern of publication bias (may inflate perceived effectiveness).
- Future research is needed to elucidate:
  - Cultural adaptations that are most and least effective.
  - Potential differences between locally developed, culturally adapted, and non-adapted program.



## Conclusions

- Adaptations often target surface-level structures (observable social and behavioral characteristics of the target population).
- Delineation of the adaptation process is needed.
- The varying extent of adaptation speaks to the inherently contextual nature and complexity of cultural tailoring.

## Acknowledgements

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