



Online singing groups for people with dementia and their carers (IDISIDE study) – Summary of findings

In 2021, researchers from the University of Nottingham conducted a study about online singing groups for people with dementia and their carers. Due to the ongoing pandemic, face-to-face singing groups were unable to take place. This was a challenging time for people with dementia and their carers, who had to cope with a loss of routine and a sudden stop to many of their activities and forms of support, as well as the risk posed by the coronavirus itself. Online activities, such as singing groups, offered an alternative, but we did not know whether these would be accessible or helpful for people with dementia, and there was no existing research in this area. We wanted to see whether it was possible to run successful online singing groups, what the challenges were, and whether the people who attended found them enjoyable and useful. From January to August 2021, we invited people with dementia and their carers to take part in the study and attend 10 online singing sessions. This document is a summary of what we found.

Who took part in the study?

We advertised the study by emailing contacts at organisations which support people with dementia and asking them to spread the word. We also publicised the study on Facebook and Twitter, and used the recruitment tool “Join Dementia Research”. In total, 16 people with dementia and their carers took part in the study.



What happened during the online singing sessions?

The online sessions were run by SongTime CIC (pictured above). The sessions were held using the video calling software Zoom, and participants were sent the Zoom link to join the sessions a couple of days in advance. The sessions would start with a chat section; the leader would greet each pair in turn and talk to them about the topic of the day (for example, “What’s your favourite colour?”). There would then follow a physical and vocal warm up. After this, the participants would sing songs from a song book which was displayed using screen share. Group members took turns to choose songs. Everyone remained muted during singing, except the group leaders.

What data was collected during the study?

We asked people with dementia and their carers to complete questionnaires before they started attending the singing group, and after they had been attending for 10 weeks. As this was a small study without a control (comparison) group, we did this mainly to see whether online data collection would work for this kind of study, and to give us an idea about what questionnaires to use if we conduct a larger study in the future. We also interviewed the pairs after they had attended 10 sessions.

Topics of questionnaires

Both

- Quality of life
- Mood

People with dementia

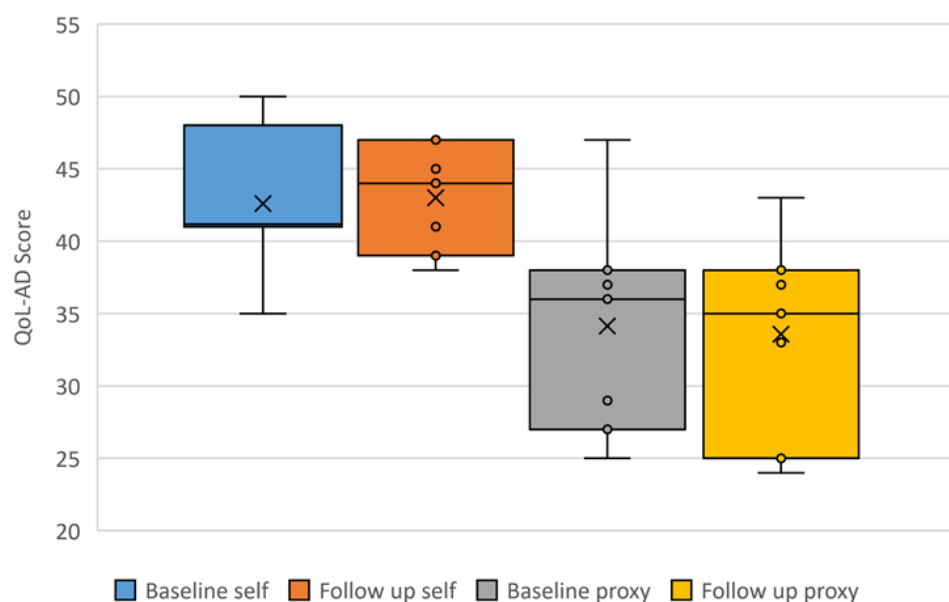
- Musical engagement

Carers

- Experiences & consequences of caring
- Caring relationship
- Cognitive decline of person with dementia
- Activities of daily living for person with dementia
- Proxy assessment of quality of life for person with dementia.

What did the data show?

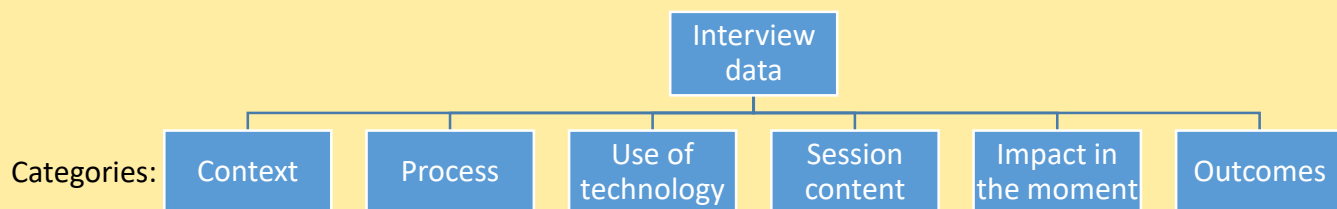
Attendance at the singing group was high, with an average of 79% across the course of 10 sessions. More than half of the pairs continued to attend after they had finished taking part in the study. People with dementia were aged between 72 and 92 years, and most had a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease (37.5%) or vascular dementia (18.8%). Carers were aged between 47 and 76 years, and most were the child (50%) or spouse/partner (35.7%) of the person with dementia. Looking at the data from the questionnaires, we did not see much change in either direction over the course of the study in either people with dementia or their carers.



This chart shows an interesting finding from a questionnaire called "Quality of life in Alzheimer's Disease": people with dementia rated their own quality of life higher than carers rated it on their behalf. The blue and orange boxes show the self ratings, while the grey and yellow boxes show the carer ratings.

What did the participants think about the singing groups?

We transcribed the interviews and then analysed them by looking for themes in the data. We looked for points of agreement and disagreement in what the participants said. In the end we grouped the information into six overall categories, which each contain several themes. Some key findings are described below.



People generally coped well with using Zoom, and most technological problems were resolved easily. However, group members found it hard to interact with each other online. This was noted as a big difference from face to face sessions.

"I'm not brilliantly technical, but I'm technical enough to Zoom, I knew that we could carry on doing that."

People who had previous experience of face to face sessions tended to see the online group as "better than nothing" while they waited for in-person groups to restart. However, people who were new to singing saw some advantages; for instance, less confident singers felt more comfortable singing while muted.

"Well, it's better than nothing, but seeing people in real life and meeting up. Having a hug. Having a chat. That's the important part."

"Because it's on mute, it's brilliant cos you can sing away and nobody gives a monkey's that I'm never in tune."

In the moment impacts of the sessions included enjoyment, providing a meaningful activity, having the chance to interact with others, and using the brain. Longer term impacts included improved relationships, providing routine and something to look forward to, increasing use of music in daily life, and improved wellbeing.

"And while I'm in the singing group, I've found that it's bringing my happy, happy moods out to the forefront more than they were before."

"We like singing. We're not very good, but we enjoyed it"

"It can be a mood changer if there's a little bit of angst between us [...] an hour on the session, and it's dissipated. It's gone, you know it can be holding hands with singing together. Smiling."

And finally...

We would like to say a really big "Thank you!" to everyone who took part in the study, and to Angela and Paul who led the singing group sessions. This is an abridged version of the results from the study; if you would like to read the full report, please email preside.research@nottingham.ac.uk

IDISIDE
Implementing Digital
Singing in Dementia