

Can technology enhance the social participation of older adults with dementia living in the community?

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Introduction: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of social isolation among community-dwelling people with dementia has rapidly increased worldwide. As social isolation can negatively affect health and well-being, psychosocial interventions that target social participation are increasingly gaining importance. To date, however, little attention has been paid to the potential of technology.

Methods: A systematic review aimed to explore the effects of technological interventions in promoting social participation among older adults with and without dementia. The scientific databases Medline (PubMed), CINAHL, PsycINFO, the Cochrane Library, and Web of Science were systematically searched.

Findings: A total of 36 studies was included in a narrative synthesis. Included studies ranged widely in methodological quality, study design, type of technology, and outcomes measured. The majority of included studies evaluated social networking technology or training programs for Information Communication Technology (ICT). Only three studies focused on people living with dementia. While quantitative findings showed limited effects on loneliness, social isolation, and social support, qualitative findings identified several benefits related to social participation (e.g. improved companionship).

Conclusion: Overall, technological interventions have shown the potential to alleviate social isolation and loneliness, and to enhance social support among older adults. However, a major finding of the review was the inconsistent use of terms and concepts related to social participation, leading to limited comparability of research findings.

Keywords: Dementia, technology, social participation