

Methods: People with dementia and informal carers from the UK, Australia, Italy, India, and Poland participated in remote semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked about their experiences of the pandemic and how restrictions have impacted on their lives and care. Transcripts were analysed by researchers in each country using thematic analysis, then combined across sites.

Results: Fifteen people living with dementia and 111 informal carers participated across the five countries. Four themes emerged: (1) Limited access and support; (2) Technology and issues accessing remote support; (3) Emotional impact; and (4) Decline of cognitive and physical health reported by carers. Whilst variations were noted, the pandemic has indirectly affected people with dementia and carers across all five countries. The pandemic removed access to social support services and thus increased carer burden. Remote services were not always provided and were limited in benefit and usability for those with dementia. Carers frequently described noticeably deteriorating cognitive and physical health in people with dementia.

Conclusions: The pandemic has amplified dementia as a global public health problem, and both people affected by the condition and their carers need support to better access vital support services to live well. This is even more important with emerging new waves and new variants of the virus affecting different countries, in our globally connected world.

Talk 2 Abstract

Social health of people with dementia during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic

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Background: Limited access to medical and social services during the coronavirus outbreak has contributed to the exclusion of vulnerable populations, such as people with dementia and older adults. These limitations and the resulting social isolation have highlighted the importance of social relationships and their relationship to the mental health of these people. In the context of dementia, 'social health' (SH) can be defined as the role of social abilities for achieving a dynamic balance between opportunities and limitations. The concept encompasses the capacity and independency of an individual to participate in social activities alongside the influences of the surrounding social network.

Methods: Using a qualitative and quantitative approach, we will present social health and its determinants of people with dementia related to social care service closures and self-isolation during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. We present an analysis of the survey data from the cross-country population-based study and the semi-structured telephone interviews with people with and without dementia from Poland, UK, Australia and Italy aged 65 and over.

Results: Measuring the Social Health Index in relation to experiencing self-isolation and changes in the use of services before and during the pandemic among the people with dementia, allow us to identify the level of SH and its determinants. Also, the qualitative results revealed the indirect consequences of

the pandemic-related restrictions in the access to social care service and social isolation. Reduction of social support was significantly related to deficits in social health and well-being.

Conclusions: Our results highlight the emerging impact of health the current global epidemiological situation upon social health, with a particular focus on those affected by social disadvantage and isolation.

Talk 3 Abstract

The use of technology by people with dementia and informal carers during COVID-19: a cross-country comparison

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Background: Social distancing rules and the closure of services associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have strongly impacted the physical and mental health of people with dementia. Digital technologies can represent an effective means to compensate for the distress associated with social distancing rules and the decreased use of in-person services. More specifically, technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and smart home systems can minimize the negative effects of social distancing and isolation, and the pressure on health and care systems. Indeed, they can provide a continuity of care and social connectedness, while decreasing exposure to risk. However, barriers such as digital literacy and lower income households can impede the access and use of digital technologies. The aim of this international study was to compare the use of technology by people with dementia from different care settings, and their informal carers across four countries (Italy, UK, Australia, and Poland).

Methods: People with dementia and informal carers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Verbatim transcripts were analysed by researchers in each country using inductive thematic analysis.

Results: A total of 141 people with dementia and carers (47 in Italy; 50 in the UK; 18 in Australia; 26 in Poland) were interviewed. The analysis identified three overarching themes: 1) different uses of technology (three subthemes); 2) benefits of technology (three subthemes); 3) limitations of technology (three subthemes). Results show that calls, video calls, and group-chats were effectively used across countries to guarantee the continuity of relationships with professionals, families, and small groups of peers. Telemedicine was used with varying levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, the benefits experienced by carers exceeded those for people with dementia. Similar barriers were reported across countries, and were strictly associated with dementia deficits, low level digital literacy, and the need for carer's supervision.