

# Singing for better aging: the musical project

## Abstract

The MUSICALL project examined the impact of choral singing on the well-being of older adults aged 63 to 91. Using a quasi-experimental pre-post design, self-report questionnaires were administered before and after participation in a community choir. Findings revealed a significant increase in positive emotions (from 50% to 61%) and a reduction in negative emotions (from 45% to 22%). Moreover, 89% of participants highlighted enjoyment and perceived benefits, underscoring the choir's role as a motivating and sustainable activity. Beyond emotional gains, the program fostered social cohesion, strengthened musical memory, and promoted adapted mobility, ensuring inclusion despite physical limitations. Participants emphasized that collective singing provided a therapeutic space for connection, resilience, and community belonging. The results confirm that choral practice not only stimulates cognitive and motor functions but also contributes to emotional health and active aging. The study supports the use of music as a valuable resource for healthy aging and social participation.

**Keywords:** choral music, emotional well-being, active aging, social inclusion.

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## Introduction

Aging is a natural process that involves physical, cognitive, and emotional transformations. These changes, which include decreased mobility, sensory decline, and the loss of social networks, can lead to feelings of loneliness, sadness, or depression. These factors make emotional well-being a central aspect of quality of life in old age.

In this context, cultural and artistic activities have become relevant as intervention strategies, as they not only offer entertainment but also strengthen self-esteem, motivation, and a sense of belonging. Among these, music stands out for its universal nature and its ability to stimulate memory, motor coordination, and emotional expression. Choral singing, in particular, integrates social, cognitive, and physical aspects, creating a space for active and communal participation.

The MUSICALL project stems from this premise, with the goal of evaluating how choral practice influences the well-being of older adults. Through a quasi-experimental pre-post design, the study seeks to determine if group singing can act as a therapeutic resource to promote positive emotions, decrease negative emotional states, and strengthen social cohesion in a group of older adults.

## Theoretical framework

Research on healthy aging has highlighted the importance of activities that integrate physical, cognitive, and emotional components. The World Health Organization (2021) emphasizes that promoting mental health in old age is a growing challenge, as loneliness and depression affect a significant proportion of this population.

Various studies have indicated that active musical practice is an effective tool for addressing these challenges. According to Clift and Hancox,<sup>1</sup> participating in choral activities improves mood, reduces stress, and strengthens emotional resilience. Similarly, Davidson and Faulkner<sup>2</sup> highlight its effect on reducing depressive symptoms, while Creech et al.<sup>3</sup> and Särkämö et al.<sup>4</sup> provide evidence of its impact on social cohesion and the prevention of isolation.

On a cognitive level, music contributes to the maintenance of functions such as memory and attention, promoting neuroplasticity and delaying age-related decline.<sup>5</sup> Musical memory, being relatively

resistant to aging, allows for the recall of significant emotional experiences, reinforcing personal identity.

Furthermore, the social dimension of music is essential: singing in a group not only offers a space for enjoyment but also creates support networks, strengthens solidarity, and provides opportunities to maintain an active role in the community. Thus, choral practice is configured as a comprehensive strategy that combines physical, cognitive, emotional, and social benefits, providing solid evidence on the value of music in the well-being of older adults.

In addition to the individual benefits, choral music promotes inclusion and social participation. In this regard, studies like those by Vernia Carrasco,<sup>6</sup> highlight how group musical experiences facilitate interaction and the creation of interpersonal bonds. The author emphasizes that collective singing is not only a form of artistic expression but also a space for connection and mutual support that strengthens the sense of community and emotional well-being.

## Methodology

The study was developed within the framework of the MUSICALL project, with a quasi-experimental pre-post design without a control group. Participants were older adults aged 63 to 91, who were associated with community centers and cultural organizations.

The intervention consisted of participation in a stable choir, with weekly rehearsals adapted to the needs of the group. The repertoire was varied and chosen based on both musical criteria and accessibility for people with different levels of experience.

For data collection, self-perception questionnaires were used, administered before and after the intervention, focusing on the evaluation of positive and negative emotions, as well as the assessment of enjoyment and perceived usefulness of the activity.

The analysis was carried out by comparing pre-post percentages, highlighting the changes in emotional well-being and social cohesion within the group.

## Results and discussion

The results of the MUSICALL project confirm that active musical practice has a positive and multifaceted impact on the well-being of

older adults. The pre-post analysis revealed significant changes in the emotional state of the participants, supporting the effectiveness of music as a therapeutic tool.

A key finding was the notable increase in positive emotions, which rose from 50% to 61%, while negative emotions were drastically reduced, from 45% to 22%. This change suggests that participation in the choir helped to mitigate common feelings such as sadness, anxiety, and loneliness. These data are consistent with previous studies that have shown that group music can decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety, promoting an environment of resilience.

Beyond emotional well-being, the project strengthened social cohesion. A total of 89% of participants reported enjoying the activity, which indicates a strong sense of belonging and community. Music acted as a medium for non-verbal communication that fostered social connection, an essential factor in combating isolation. Testimonials like “it distracts me” or “it’s wonderful” reflect that participants perceived the choir as a therapeutic space for enjoyment.

Despite the physical limitations of some participants, the program demonstrated high adaptability. The inclusion of physical adjustments and the promotion of adapted mobility allowed for active participation by all. This finding underscores the importance of designing flexible artistic activities to ensure inclusion, regardless of participants’ physical conditions.

Finally, significant cognitive benefits were observed. Musical practice stimulated memory and neuroplasticity, as it activated various brain areas that are more resistant to neuronal aging. The high program adherence (with many participants returning year after year) highlights that music not only improves mental and physical health but also serves as a source of long-term motivation and enjoyment.

## Conclusions of the MUSICALL Project

The MUSICALL project has demonstrated that active musical practice has a significant and positive impact on the health and well-being of older adults. The main conclusions are:

- i. Improved Emotional Well-being: Participation in the choir increased positive emotions and considerably reduced negative emotions, helping to mitigate sadness, loneliness, and anxiety.
- ii. Strengthened Social Cohesion: Music acted as a means to foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging. A total of 89% of participants reported enjoying the activity, which reinforces the value of music in combating isolation.
- iii. Physical and Cognitive Benefits: Despite physical limitations, the program promoted adapted mobility and stimulated neuroplasticity, which contributed to maintaining cognitive functions such as musical memory and coordination.
- iv. Program Sustainability: The high adherence and commitment of participants (many of whom repeat year after year) demonstrate that music is a motivating and sustainable tool for improving the quality of life in old age.
- v. Importance of Adaptation: The project’s success is based on the flexibility to adapt the activity to the physical and emotional needs of participants, ensuring inclusion and enjoyment for everyone.

In summary, the MUSICALL project confirms that music is not just a leisure activity but a powerful therapeutic tool that promotes emotional health, social inclusion, and resilience in the older population.

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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