

# Online self-help via a controlled discussion forum

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## Introduction

Recent studies on hearing rehabilitation with supervised group discussions show similar long-term benefits as conventional professional counselling (Abrams et al., 2002; Hickson et al., 2007). Studies in adjacent fields (tinnitus, anxiety and panic disorders) have shown promising results when using the Internet as a way of supervising and treating patients (Andersson, 2009; Carlbring et al., 2001). Inspired by those results, we created a controlled online discussion forum for self-help where 30 experienced hearing-aid users communicated for five weeks. The aim of the study was to investigate the impact on psychosocial health and the exchange of information between hearing-impaired adults on an online discussion forum.

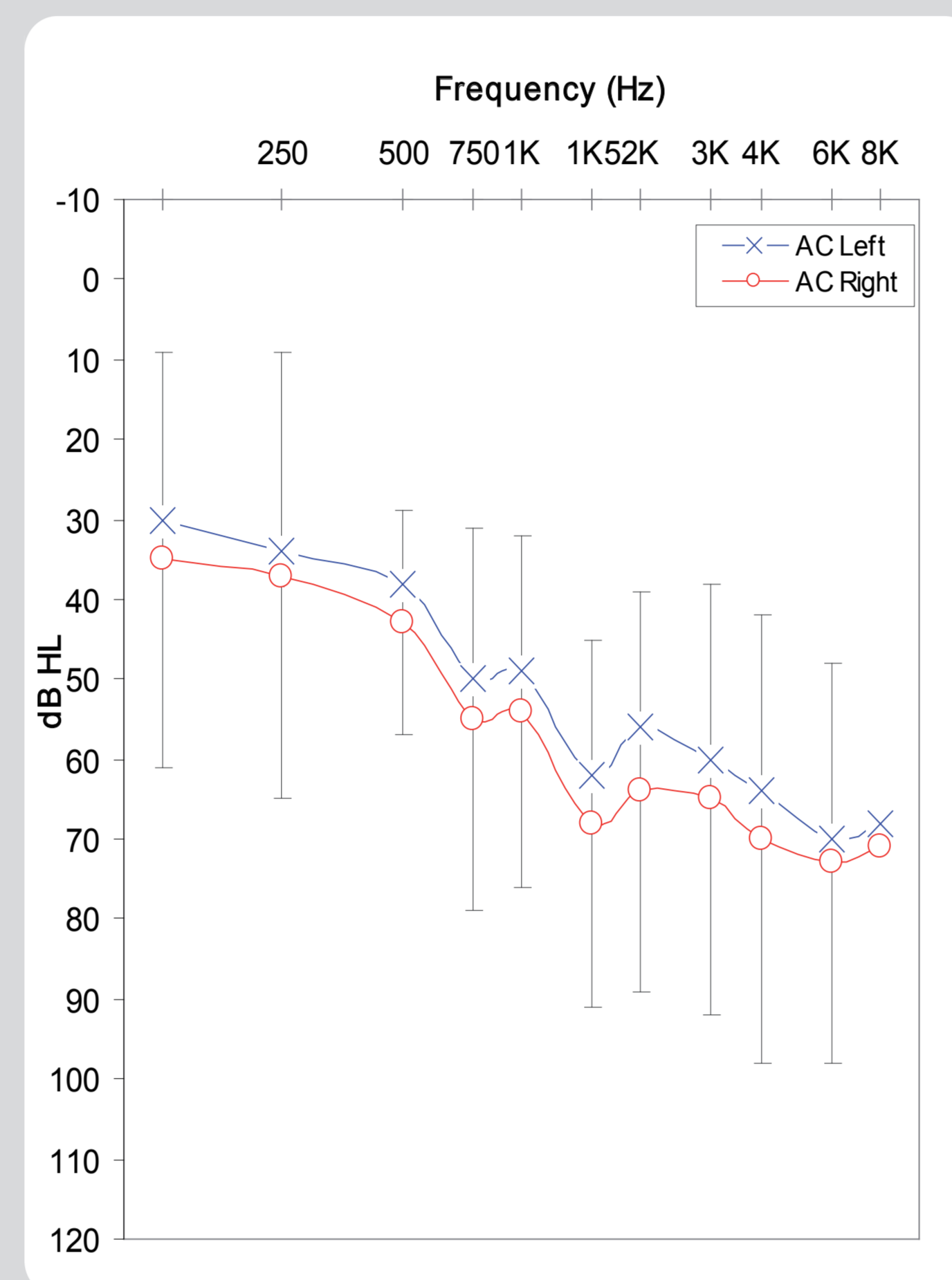
## Method

### RECRUITMENT

Advertisements were published in national Swedish daily newspapers in order to reach possible study participants. The inclusion criteria were; hearing impairment with subjective, significant communication difficulties (defined as HHIE < 20), used hearing-aids for at least one year, were over 18 years old, had Swedish as mother tongue and had access to a computer and the Internet.

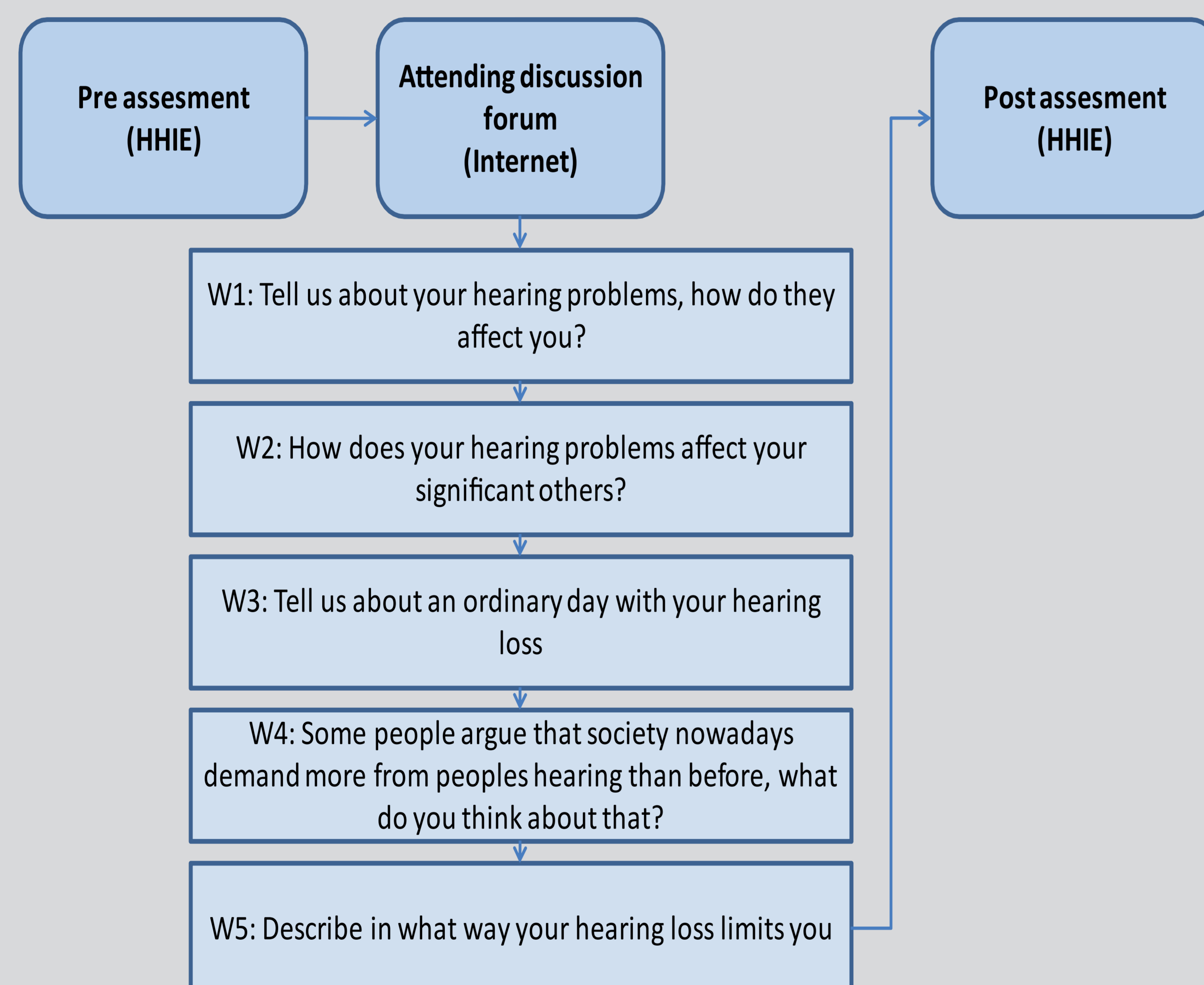
### PARTICIPANTS

N = 30, 16 men and 14 women  
Mean age: 61,2 years (range 24-76, SD 14.2 years)  
The average audiogram of the participants corresponded to a moderate, typical sloping presbycusis hearing loss.



### INTERVENTION

The participants were referred to a discussion forum built on the open source platform *phpbbb.com*. Each week the test leader posted a new topic to discuss. The test leader did not have any personal contact with the participants, but the online discussions were closely monitored.



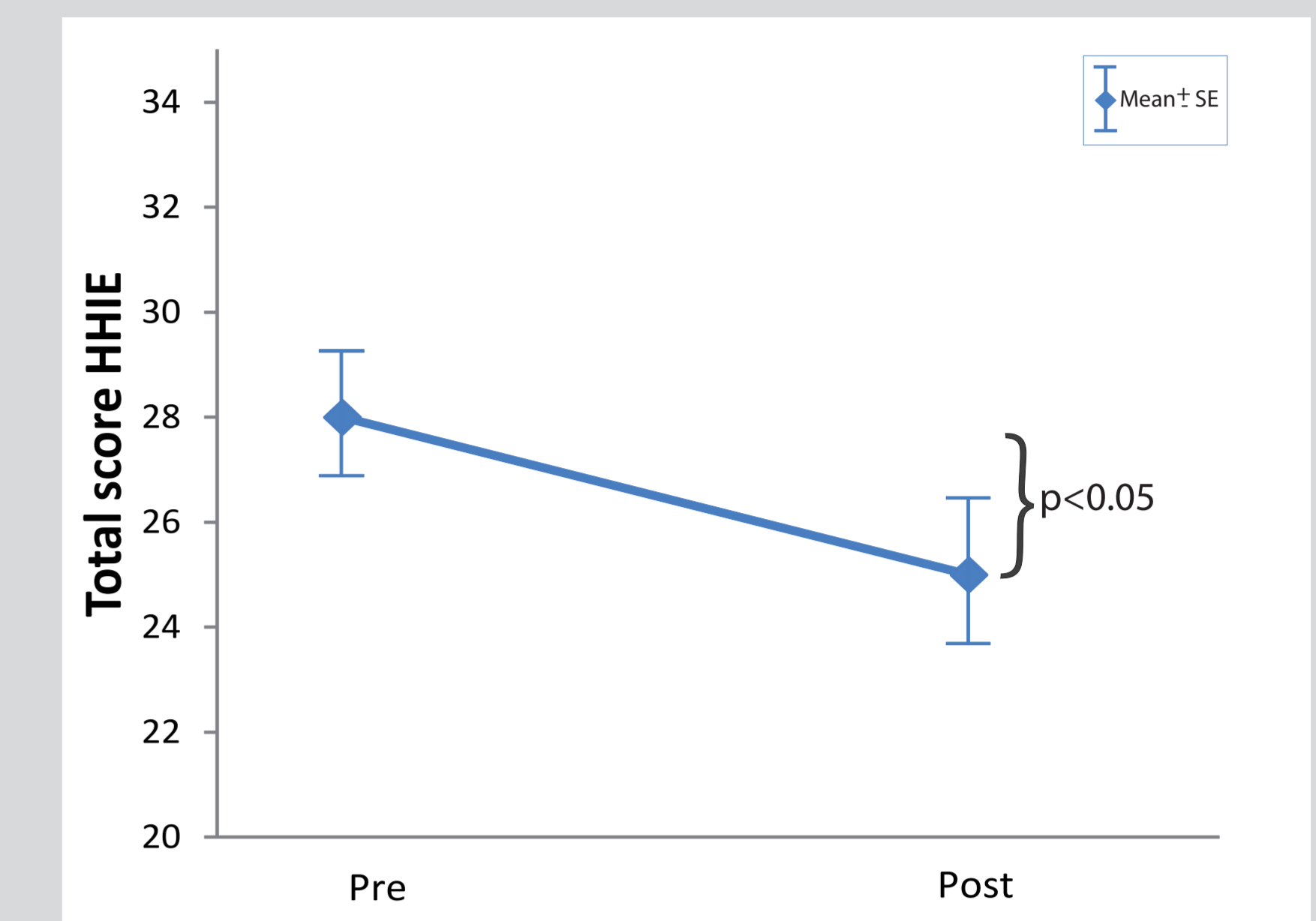
### EVALUATION METHODS

The outcome of the study was results from the standardised questionnaire Hearing Handicap Inventory for the Elderly (HHIE) which the participants filled out pre- and post intervention (Ventry & Weinstein, 1982). A qualitative analysis of the content in the communication between the participants was done after the intervention (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

## Results

### HHIE

Results from the questionnaire HHIE showed that the participants decreased their subjective hearing related problems ( $p < 0.05$ ) after the intervention period was finished by taking part in the online group discussions.



### CONVENTIONAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

The transcribed text from the online discussions was analysed using the following steps according to Hsieh & Shannon (2005) and Graneheim & Lundman (2004):

1. Meaning units were selected
2. An initial analysis was performed
3. The text was condensed
4. An initial coding scheme was established
5. The codes were sorted into categories
6. The categories were sorted in one theme

The outcome of the analysis was a conceptual model of the hearing impaired's communication with peers concerning subjective solutions to managing different daily communication situations.

Theme	Self-awareness makes it possible to give constructive positive feedback			
Category	Emotional reactions		Practical solutions	
Code	Stigma	Family reflections	Relaxing from sounds	Assistive listening devices
Condensed meaning unit	Admitting hearing loss	Support or not from surrounding people	Finding ways for gathering energy	Solutions where hearing aids are not enough
Example of meaning units	LH: When we meet new people I feel ashamed of telling them that I have a hearing loss. GA: I recognize what you are saying about not admitting hearing problems.	BL: Unfortunately people in my surroundings are not understanding [how to respect my hearing loss] EE: You can contact your local hearing-association, they can lend you informative videos that deal with the problems you are talking about.	LF: One thing that works for me is to meditate 20 min at noon, then I have energy for the rest of the day.	EE: ... what is working best for TV is a "hearing pillow". BB: What is a "hearing pillow"? Where can I get one? EE: You can get one from your hearing clinic. You can connect the pillow with your TV and then switch on your hearing aids to telecoil.

## Discussion & Conclusions

- The findings indicate that online interaction with peers in a controlled research context has a positive significant effect on subjective hearing related problems when measured by HHIE.
- Results from a qualitative analysis of the online discussions show that hearing aid users that have high self-awareness of their hearing situation can give constructive feedback to peers in similar situations.
- There are good possibilities of using the Internet in the rehabilitation process of hearing aid users.

## References

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