

Original Research Article

Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Devices Among the Oldest-Old: Loneliness, Anomie, and Autonomy

Anomie means "personal unrest, alienation, and uncertainty that comes from a lack of purpose or ideals"

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: A good person–environment-fit has positive effects on well-being in old age. As digital technologies are an integral part of older adults' environments, we predicted that the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is associated with subjective well-being among the oldest-old. Specifically, we compared different user groups of ICT devices (nonusers, users of nonweb-connected ICT, users of web-connected ICT) and analyzed the relations among ICT use and three domains of subjective well-being (loneliness, anomie, autonomy).

Research Design and Methods: We performed a quantitative data analysis using data from the first representative state-wide survey study in North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany on quality of life and well-being of the oldest-old ($n = 1,698$; age range: 80–103; 9% long-term care). Multiple regression analyses were applied.

Results: The findings revealed that 25.9% of all individuals aged 80 years and older reported using web-connected ICT, in contrast to 38.5% who do not use ICT at all. Individuals who used web-connected ICT reported lower levels of loneliness and anomie, and higher levels of autonomy. These differences remain significant when controlling for indicators of social inclusion and individual characteristics.

Discussion and Implications: This study investigated an underexplored group in terms of ICT use, shedding light on the relationship between ICT use and subjective well-being. The oldest-old generally use ICT in their everyday life but an age-related digital divide still exists. To avoid negative consequences of nonuse digital infrastructures and technology training for older adults need to be established.

Translational Significance: The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is positively related to well-being among the oldest-old even when considering indicators of social inclusion and individual characteristics. Highlighting such positive effects may increase ICT use in advanced age. To realize the benefits of ICT use among the oldest-old technology training and digital infrastructures are necessary.

Keywords: Digitization, Germany, Internet, Subjective well-being, Technology use