

Elderly and impact of the modern technologies for their life

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Summary

During the last decades the population's age-distribution has drastically changed in Europe. The aging of the European population, with parallel increasing of the low birthrate, is a social phenomenon of great prominence today. Nowadays computer and modern technologies have increasingly important role in our society. The new generation of older people are better educated than the current one. More and more older people will seek meaning independent of any denomination. The future generation is digital decisive and using the digital highway for several applications. But it is necessary to look regionally and see the differences between European countries and opportunities for European citizens.

Key words: elderly people, eHealth, digital literacy, loneliness, health serv.

Lead-in

Two important trends will promote the economic development for the next decades. The first important trend is ageing of general population. Europeans live longer, hence the costs of health and social care will rise substantially to about 9% of EU GDP in 2050. Modern technologies can be our most powerful ally to maintain cost efficient and high quality health and social care, as it empowers people of every age to better manage their health and quality of life, in any place. The second important trend in these days is technological development which provides the elderly with products meaning new opportunities to face aging in a positive way.

People are working longer in comparison with previous 20 years and they are contributed as active citizens of Europe in the later years of their lives. The obtaining of digital literacy is one of the most important elements of supporting active ageing, opening up a new learning opportunities for elders, either in formal or in informal settings.

Improving the quality of life of elderly requires taking into account their work environment, their community and social relations, elderly home environment and their personal well-being. They have different types of learning needs, related to improving knowledge or their ability to accomplish practical tasks (Ala-Mutka, Malanowski, Punie & Cabrera, 2008). Older people are a heterogeneous segment of the population and in order to develop flexible and relevant learning opportunities, it is necessary to take into account both the content and the conditions of learning in their specific contexts.

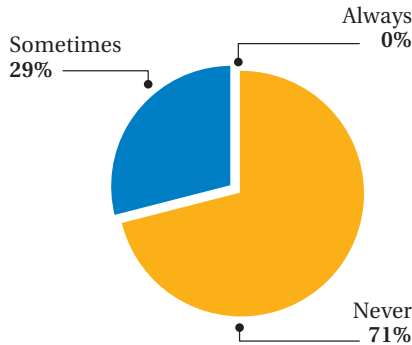
To use the modern technology may have three high impact factors:

1. Reduce loneliness and isolation

Technology enables older people to renew or develop social contacts and to become actively involved in their community. It can prevent social isolation and loneliness in older people because of the changes that occur in life such as: retirement, health damage, etc. and may help those who are socially isolated to escape their situation. Elderly and disabled persons face particular difficulties in benefiting fully from new electronic content and services. As ever more daily tasks are carried out online, everyone needs enhanced digital skills to participate fully in society using modern technologies establishing and maintaining social contacts. Since exclusion from access to technology increases with age, the pattern of access and use is changing year after year. For many of those who have access at home or using access to a public environment (such as libraries), emails or social networking sites are the way of staying in touch with friends and family members.

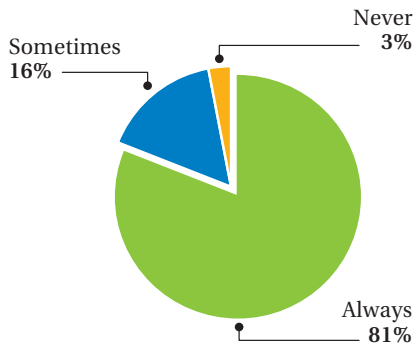
We use ESCALE ESTE II (Pinel, Rubio y Rubio, 2009) to asses and compare if using modern technologies help people to feel less alone. Our survey consisted from 360 respondents from several parts of Slovak republic. The biggest group of our respondents (71%) answered in the questionnaire that never feel alone. It is caused that most of the respondents were located in the cities. 29% of respondents declared feeling sometimes alone. Noone of the respondents chose the answer never.

Do you feel alone?



We consider that people feel less alone cause they have more opportunities to stay in touch with their families or friends using phone call. In these days most of our respondents (81%) use cell phone for their everyday communication, sometimes 16% of our respondents and 12 respondents, which is 3% declared never used cell phone.

Do you use a cell?



2. Help ageing citizens' lives

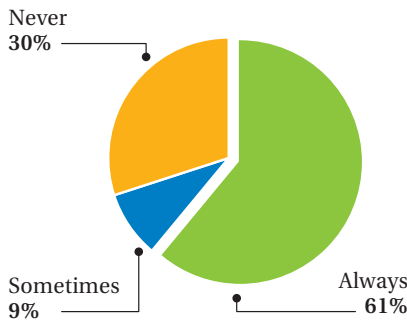
For the most elderly population is common use of the modern technologies just using Internet for receiving or sending mails and finding basic information. Modern technologies could help managing social contacts and improve social network and communication in a positive way. The use of internet and e-mail can give the elderly the opportunity to maintain contact with issues beyond their home and have regular contact with family members who live afar. This can be enhanced by the use of Skype or similar means providing

visual communication. The use of online conversation spaces (chat rooms), which are under supervision, can help older people and disabled who are stranded at home contact with others who have similar interests, which helps alleviate the isolation.

According to the fact that most of the elderly people use internet (61%) encourage them to find more possibilities for new applications and ways of communication for example skype or messengers.

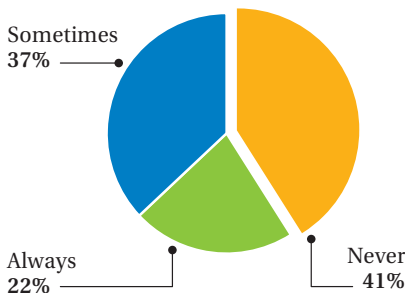
Our respondents declared us that using messengers or skype help

Do you use internet?



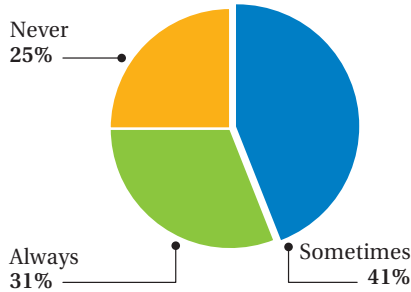
them to stay in touch with family members (22% respondents use these application always and 37% sometimes.) This fact can be also caused by the problem that the most of young people work and live abroad and their parents and grandparents want to be part of their live worldwide by sharing photoes, sending messages or video calling.

Do you stay in touch with your family or friends via internet?



When we get back to the question if our respondents feel alone we want to know if they are able to or if they are looking for new friends via internet. The majority group of our respondents (44%) said doing it sometimes. Closly the same group size declared response Always (31%) and Never (25%).

Is it easy to make friends for you via internet?

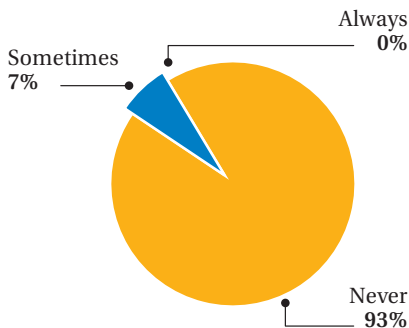


3. Support elderly people independency and revolutionize health services

The using of modern technologies create facilities for older group of people to make them more independent in living in their homes (e.g. using modern technologies to provide health care services and remote). Modern technologies can contribute by providing European citizens with better and cheaper services for health and ageing well. The introduction of modern technologies and telemedicine alone is estimated to improve efficiency of health care by 20%. Moreover, modern technologies empowers users of every age to better manage their health. As the global telecare and telehealth market is forecast to grow from 7.6 to 17.6 billion Euros already by 2017, therefore European economy can benefit from such growing market. We can achieve a triple win: a better quality of life for European citizens, innovation and growth for a competitive EU industry and more sustainable healthcare systems for society.

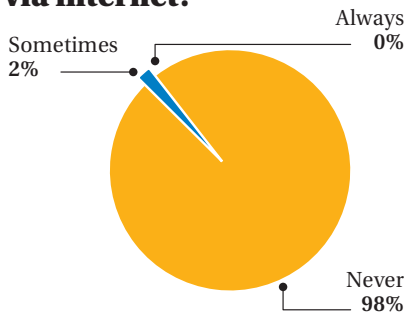
In consideration of the fact that modern technologies can promote quality of live not only elderly people we wanted to know if also elderly people are familiar with using eHealth application. Only 7% of our respondents declared using eHealth application sometimes and 93% respondents never. This fact can be caused by developing of new eHealth applications and the fact that only few private hospitals use eHealth for their patients in Slovakia.

Do you use eHealth application?



From previous time, face to face contact with the doctor is still vital and elderly people do not want to change this fact. Personal appointment with their doctor is essential, that why 98% of our respondents answered Never for this question.

Do you consult your health condition with your doctor via internet?



Conclusion

Regarding the elderly, they are in general dynamic, capable and vital members of our society. They transmit knowledge, skills and experience to the next generations. As individuals and as a whole they contribute to the economy, the community and in the transmission of the cultural heritage. As family members the elderly are responsible for encouraging the cohesion and solidarity in our society.

It is important not to put the focus only on the chronological age, but to recognize and raise the ability to participate at all ages, as well as to recog-

nize the fact that, even if the elderly face restrictions due to health, this does not necessarily preclude their participation. Older people from nowadays this part of the population, who did not grow up with modern technologies, as it was not a routine part of their educational, work and/or personal lives. This can give answers to the fact that familiarity with using modern technologies is low in comparison to younger populations, who have grown up with modern technologies as part of their daily lives. According to the Eurostat just over half of older adults (65-74 years old) have never used a computer, although these figures vary widely across European countries. In addition to the computer, the Internet usage among older people is an important indicator of modern technologies use. On average, more than one third of all people aged 65-74 years in Europe have used the Internet in the last three months (Eurostat, 2014).

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