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Habits of the Elderly regarding Access to the New Information and Communication Technologies

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Abstract

Introduction. The Humanities-498 research group from the University of Almeria created the European project entitled: “Improving Digital Skills of European Citizens Seniors and Disabled: a Work Program. DSSD: Digital Skills for Seniors and Disabled” in collaboration with six other countries: Holland, Hungary, Greece, Italy, the Slovak Republic and Romania.

Objectives. The purpose of this article is to describe the basic ICT skills of elderly individuals from different social involvement centres in Almería.

Methodology. A transversal, descriptive study using a sample of 322 elderly individuals in Spain. Their socio-demographic characteristics are described and a questionnaire was used to determine their basic ICTS skills.

Results. 57.4% of the participants were female; the mean age was 72 and 36.6% had some sort of disability. Results were presented in terms of their knowledge of information systems (hardware and networks, software); operating systems; Internet searches and information selection; inter-personal communication and collaborative work in networks: Internet, mobile phones; image treatment; expression / multi-media creation; creation of statistics calculations and graphics, among other topics.

Conclusions. This data may serve as the basis for the design and experimentation of an educational program, based on a green practice model, with the participation of elderly individuals, distinct experts and leaders in social policy.

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1. Introduction

Large increases in the number of elderly individuals are being noted across the globe, due to decreasing birth rates and increasing longevity. Ballesteros, Toril, Mayas, Reales and Waterworth (2014) state that social isolation is a risk factor affecting the health and quality of life of this elderly population, given that this phenomenon relates these individuals with an increased probability of suffering from depression, anxiety, isolation and depressive pathologies. For example, the risk of suffering from Alzheimer's is more than double in individuals who are socially isolated as opposed to those with stable social relationships (Wilson et al., 2007).

Today, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) may be a useful resource for improving the quality of life of the elderly, offering these individuals a more independent lifestyle that promotes active ageing, personal relationships and labour and social participation (Silva & Marquine, 2014). However, in order for these elderly individuals to take advantage of ICTs, training programs are needed, since there is clearly a digital divide existing in this generation (Peral-Peral, Arenas-Gaitán, & Villarejo-Ramos, 2015). The most recent IMSERSO report found that over the last three months, only 15.6% of all individuals between the ages of 65 and 74 had connected to the Internet (Abad-Alcalá, 2014).

The digital divide depends on the access available to telecommunications, economic wealth and social development, and it exists not only in developed and developing countries, but also in those places where a division exists between the urban and the rural, rich and poor, the more and less educated, men and women and youth and the elderly (Tello, 2008). Osorio, Ballesteros, Fay and Pouthas, (2009) believe that recent technological development has ignored the growing elderly population by failing to adapt its materials and resources to suit their needs. Gerontechnology, however, attempts to harmonize this technological development, developing socio-educational products and services that are devoted to them (Bouma, Fozard, Bouwhuis, & Vappu, 2007).

Agudo Prado and Pascual Sevillano (2008) state that currently and over the coming years, individuals lacking basic ICT skills, particularly those required in order to handle information over the Internet and to communicate telematically shall be considered illiterate. Thus it is necessary to create lifelong learning programs for the elderly individuals so that they may acquire the digital literacy and social network participation skills.

Within this framework, in 2013, the Humanities-498 research group from the University of Almeria created the European project entitled: "Improving Digital Skills of European Citizens Seniors and Disabled: a Work Program. DSSD: Digital Skills for Seniors and Disabled" in collaboration with six other countries: Holland, Hungary, Greece, Italy, the Slovak Republic and Romania.

One of the objectives of this project was to determine the current state of habits regarding access to ICTs in individuals over the age of 55 and those with a disability attending day centres and institutions in these countries; as well as the current offering of programs devoted to this issue.

The purpose of this article is to describe the basic ICT skills of elderly individuals from different social involvement centres in Almería.

2. Methodology

A transversal, descriptive study with a sample of 322 elderly individuals over the age of 65 in the province of Almería. 57.40% of the participants were females. The mean age was 72 years (SD= 8.43). 28.10% had no educational studies; 55.60% had primary school studies; 6.30% had professional training; 7.50% had secondary school studies; 2.50% had university studies. 36.60% of the sample population suffered from some sort of disability and 63.40% had no disability.

For this study, a validated questionnaire was used to determine the basic ITC skills that students should have typically dominated upon completion of their primary studies, measured over distinct plots making up ICTs (Instituto Canario de Evaluación y Calidad Educativa, 2004).

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were analysed (means, standard deviations, percentages, frequencies) using the SPSS version 22 statistics program.

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