

S. SUM, M.R. MATHEWS, M. POURGHASEM. *Study of the associations between Internet use, loneliness and well-being among older adults. Gerontechnology 2010;9(2):253;*

doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.226.00 **Purpose** Social engagement and participation of older adults in society are seen as indicators of successful ageing<sup>1</sup>. Creating new relationships is often one of the challenges that older adults may encounter. With the changing nature of society over recent years, many older people are at risk of social isolation; having limited contact with others<sup>2</sup>. The Internet opens new options for communication and may change the extent to which people are involved in community. Use of the Internet as a new communication technology may lead to changes in older adults' social relationships and well-being. Although it is increasingly obvious that the Internet is changing the way humans live, the details of this change are not yet clear. A major debate in current literature involves the capacity of the Internet to enhance social relationships and well-being in old age. In this regard, the present study attempts to investigate the relationships between Internet use and seniors' loneliness and well-being.

**Method** An online survey was conducted at the University of Sydney. Subjects were recruited online. Two-hundred and twenty-two seniors responded to the survey. The measures used included a wide range of instruments related to Internet use, loneliness and well-being. Respondents used the Internet for various purposes, including seeking information, entertainment, commerce, communication and finding new people. **Results & Discussion** The main findings of the study were that the relationships between Internet use, loneliness and well-being are complex constructs, and the Internet has different effects on loneliness and well-being resulting from different uses of this technology. The results support Wellman's conceptualisation that the Internet has a supplementary effect on other communication modes such as face-to-face communication, which helps to enhance social life<sup>3</sup>. Those with a higher amount of Internet use were more likely to have a lower degree of social loneliness. Yet, excessive time spent on the Internet causes decline in the Internet user's involvement with family and friends, and increases in their loneliness. The results show that not all Internet activity is social: using the Internet for entertainment was a negative predictor for well-being. This research indicates that the Internet can be an effective aid to increase older people's social relationships and well-being, although the effect is complex.

#### References

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**Keywords:** Internet, elderly, loneliness, well-being

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