

R. CAROLINA PAULO, T. MARQUINE RAYMUNDO, C.M. SOARES BERNARDES, M. PANTONI SANTANA, C. SILVA SANTANA. *The use of communication technologies by the elderly in a digital inclusion project in the city of Ribeirão Preto, Brazil.* *Gerontechnology* 2012;11(2):157; doi:10.4017/gt.2012.11.02.474.00

Purpose With increased life expectancy, the elderly feel the need to adapt to new technologies and the demands of modern society. The technology may involve the use of simple appliances (TV, camera, remote controls), information and communication technologies (mobile phones, tablets, computers) as well as other more complex machines (ATMs). These information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly important. These ICTs can help older people to reduce their isolation and solitude, making it easier to stay in contact with their family and friends and they may help extend their social network¹. The Report of the World Economic Forum released in January 2010 noted that mobile phones are the best new technologies² to promote social inclusion. Because of the diversity of mobile phones on the market and the many functions and models, the elderly report having difficulties. This study aimed to describe the difficulties the older users experienced using mobile phones during the observed classes given at the Digital Inclusion Project of the elderly (PIDI), developed in the city of Ribeirão Preto, Brazil.

Method The sample consisted of 42 active older people from Ribeirão Preto, aged 60 to 85 years and of both genders, with different educational levels and preserved functional capacity. This is a descriptive, transversal, observational, intervention and qualitative study, carried out between February and December 2011. The procedures for data collection included assessments using an initial and final structured questionnaire. A descriptive, qualitative analysis was used for data analysis. **Results & Discussion** Project characterization: The project (PIDI) started 18 months ago with weekly sessions. The project offered extra classes where the participants could express doubts or pose questions, with individualized and direct attention. The project aimed to familiarize the elderly with the use of everyday electronic equipment (mobile phones, cameras, computers, remote controls, digital devices for self health care). Mobile phone use is inhibited by the factor: complexity, multiple functions, and the diversity of models causes difficulties in knowledge transfer between the old devices and newly purchased ones. Other difficulties are the size of numbers and letters on alphanumeric keys. The elderly also report difficulties regarding the necessity of making quick decisions to perform a task. The influence of this project on the daily life of the elderly was analyzed through a final questionnaire, which evaluated the effectiveness of the project. A total of 61.1% reported being able to use the mobile phone with more frequency and 33.3% reported that the project facilitated the use of the device, but it did not increase the frequency of usage. Regarding the impact of mobile phone use on daily life, the elderly reported that as they practiced and manipulated the mobile phone, it became easier with each day. Everyday life became easier, through access to a phone. This was true also outside their homes because they were always reachable by family members and friends, with no need to stay at home to wait for a call. Their increased sense of competence and self-esteem, encouraged them to start using other devices such as computer or an ATM. In conclusion, the ICTs have great importance for the elderly, solving everyday problems with security, better access to services, and the possibility to contact family members regardless of where they are. Training in the use of these devices will be important for digital inclusion in the globalized world. In addition to these actions, the development of equipment that is more accessible to this population is needed.

References

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