Cyberschool for grandparents: An innovative crowdfunded intergenerational educational program. Grandparents' baseline features according to web access

M. Colombo, A. Guaita, E. Rolandi

Purpose There are few studies in which students (from secondary school or universities) act as mentors for seniors to improve their digital competences. These educational interventions generally involved older adults enrolled from the community on a voluntary basis, who already have some initial digital skills and/or a positive attitude toward technology. Leveraging on own previous experience (Rolandi et al., 2020), in the framework of bridging the digital divide, we are running the "Cyber School for Grandparents": a crowd-funded innovative intergenerational educational program aimed to train secondary school students (aged 15-17 years) to become cyber tutors for their grandparents. We aim at showing main baseline grandparents' features, according to web access availability. **Methods** each student was asked to involve at least one grandparent willing to participate in the initiative, so as to constitute a grandfather and grandson dyad. No specific inclusion criteria were set regarding age, ICT proficiency, socioeconomic, health or mobility status of the grandparents. All the instruments selected are suitable for online self-compiling by both young students and older adults; Italian versions or translation were used. The students helped and supervised grandparents to manage possible technical and/or sensory difficulties with the online compiling procedure. We explored frailty [Tilburg Frailty Indicator (TFI)], wellbeing [Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (Italian MHC–SF)], digital literacy [Mobile Device Proficiency Questionnaire (MDPQ) Short Form] and attitudes toward Internet [Attitudes Toward Computer/Internet Questionnaire (ATCQ)]. **Results and Discussion** 63 dyads were recruited; web was available for 15 grandparents (78 %). Grandparents endowed with web availability were [mean (s.d.)]: younger [73,7 (7) vs. 81 (6,1) years old], more schooled [8,5 (3,4) vs. 6,8 (3,7) years], more digitally proficient – as from every MDPQ items and total score [20,1 (6,3) vs. 9,3 (3,3)], and more inclined to Internet – as from ATCQ, either as comfort [17,3 (3,4) vs. 13,7 (3,8)], or interest [19,5 (2,9) vs. 15,6 (4,9)] and efficacy [18,4 (3,4) vs. 14,1 (4,6)]. No differences were found in frailty (TFI) and in well-being (neither total nor single MHC items). Differences among grandparents according to web access pertained mainly socio-cultural aspects, but – unexpectedly - not frailty nor wellbeing. Such features will be useful to tailor our educational program, in a frail population. Compared to previous intergenerational programs on ICT use, the present initiative shows relevant innovative features: the educational lessons will be embedded in the students' school program instead of being offered on a volunteering basis, the students will independently plan and implement the cyber sessions for their grandparents outside the school as extra-curricular activities.

References

Rolandi, E., Vaccaro, R., Abbondanza, S., Casanova, G., Pettinato, L., Colombo, M., & Guaita, A. (2020). Loneliness and Social Engagement in Older Adults Based in Lombardy during the COVID-19 Lockdown: The Long-Term Effects of a Course on Social Networking Sites Use. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(21), 7912. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17217912