

Dementia and Technology

Mitigating apathy among rural community dwelling older adults through an eBook club: A mixed method intervention study A. Agboji, S. Freeman. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

Purpose Apathy, defined as diminished motivation and reduced goal-directed behavior (1), is a common concern among older adults, especially those who live in rural settings where opportunities for meaningful social and cognitive engagement are limited (2). Apathy has been associated with poorer mental health and reduced quality of life (3,4), yet few studies have explored accessible, low-cost interventions to mitigate it in this population. This intervention study evaluated the feasibility and preliminary impact of an eBook club on self-reported apathy among older adults in northern British Columbia, Canada. **Method** This mixed-methods study employed a single-group, pre-post convergent mixed-methods design. Participants were provided Kobo eReaders preloaded with weekly reading materials and attended eight weekly in-person group discussions designed to encourage emotional and social engagement. Apathy was assessed using the 3-item Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS-3A) (5) before and after the program. Post-program, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceived changes. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software. Analysis was guided by the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST) (6). **Results and Discussion** Older adults aged 60–86 from three rural communities (N=28) completed the program among whom 89% were female (n= 25). Quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant reduction in apathy scores after the intervention ($Z = -4.01$, $p < 0.001$) with a large effect size ($r = 0.76$). Most participants reported increased interest in reading and social activities. Qualitative findings highlighted three key mechanisms of change: positivity effect, selective social network pruning, and adaptive coping each consistent with SST. The program was well received, and participants expressed willingness to engage with digital tools that supported their ongoing interests. These results suggest that structured, technology-supported reading groups may be a feasible and low-cost non-pharmacological intervention to reduce apathy and promote psychosocial well-being among older adults living in rural communities. The findings support the potential value of integrating such activities into broader aging-in-place strategies and community programming.

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