

I.H. ALAKÄRPPÄ. *Technology and the elderly in the urban areas of northern Finland. Geron-technology 2010;9(2):185; doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.214.00* **Purpose** The relationship between technology and the aged is often approached solely from the perspectives of welfare and healthcare. The relationship between the elderly and their object environment can be examined in a broader context than merely from the viewpoint of assistance and healthcare offered to them. The role of technical devices is to support quality of life so that a user feels capable of utilizing one's opportunities in a confident and motivated manner¹. Functional independence must be supported, and culturally defined roles preserved, in order to promote the willingness to use tools continuously. In this article, the term object environment refers to man-made objects that are owned by someone and located and used in a particular area. It also refers to objects that an individual uses or carries along. The term area refers here to an individual's living surroundings and the objects therein. **Method** This study examined the context-related, personal implications affecting the use of technology. This was accomplished by stating the following questions: (i) what kinds of meanings do the elderly place on the objects around them, (ii) how do the elderly deal with technology, and (iii) how does a product's environment of use affect the implications associated with technology? The study included interviews of 140 elderly persons living in northern Finland. The research data was gathered through personal interviews that were mainly carried out in the participants' homes. The mean age of the subjects was 69.7 years. Women constituted 61% (n=86) and men 39% (n=54) of the research subjects. **Results & Discussion** Men mostly considered hobby-related equipment as their favorite objects. The significance of recreational equipment is emphasized because it enables one to break away from the everyday routine and engage in purposeful activities. Women, on the other hand, valued decorative objects. The third largest group covered technical devices such as mobile phones, tools, and stereo equipment. Based on the answers, one may conclude that the elderly have a positive stand toward technology, and approximately half of them are willing to use new technology in the near future in order to manage longer by themselves at home. It can be concluded that a person is not willing to publicly use awkward objects, objects that can be closely related to the user's person, or objects which are against the norms of the community, if they cause feelings of shame or inferiority in the eyes of others. The attitudes and the fear of incompetence also affect the use of technology in the home environment. However, people are not ashamed to use objects at home, and negative conceptions about old age are not as present at home as they are in the public sphere. People also admit their need for help more willingly in the home environment than in the public environment. Both public and private environments are necessary for an individual functioning in everyday life. These two environments constitute a great challenge in the design of new technology and acceptance of the devices.

References

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