- **Name of the study**: Older adults with an intellectual disability in supported accommodation: Understanding and describing the adoption process of digital communication technology to maintain contact with family members
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- **Type of research:** research
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Abstract

Over the last decades, more persons with an intellectual disability (ID) are getting into old age; many of them can no longer live with their aging caregivers and move to out-of-home residence. This situation may have a negative impact on their sense of loneliness and emotional wellbeing. Digital communication technologies, such as applications for interpersonal communication and online social networks, provide an opportunity to maintain contact between older adults with ID and their families. Previous studies have indicated a significant association between using digital communication technologies and a reduced sense of loneliness among elders from the general population. However, this issue has received scant attention among older adults with ID. In addition, these technologies are not always accessible to aging people with ID.

The preset study addressed this gap by examining the adoption process of accessible digital communication technology to maintain contact between older adults with ID residing in supported accommodation and their families. The sample included sixteen dyads of a resident with ID and a family member and eight staff members from different residential settings. The residents used a tablet for making WhatsApp video calls with their families for about a month. All 40 participants (residents, family members, and staff members) were interviewed before and after the intervention program, and quantitative data was collected regarding the residents' use of technology, including who initiated each video call and the frequency of the calls. A

qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted as well as descriptive statistics of calls output.

The findings indicated that the use of digital communication technology contributed to the relationship between residents, especially those with a high level of functioning, with their families. However, environmental factors, such as the person's ability, training, and support for the resident, family, and staff, should be considered in such interventions. From a theoretical perspective, the study findings contribute to the understanding of two unique factors that were found to be significant for technology adoption among older adults with ID -- the person's ability to ask for assistance (advocacy skills) and free physical access to the technology. It was found that the use of tablets for video calls with the family contributed especially to older adults with a high level of functioning. On the other hand, for older adults with a low level of functioning, the use of technology was complex, meaning that those residents needed intensive support which was not always available in the residential settings. The findings also emphasized the significant role that the family plays in the adoption of new technology for communication with the residents. In cases where many video calls from the residents were not answered by their families, the adoption process was unsuccessful. Hence, the adoption of digital communication technology in residential settings requires a joint effort and preparation of the residents, families, and staff.

In light of the study findings, residential settings that choose to use such technologies should include them in routine leisure activities, while taking into consideration the residents' level of functioning and the availability of the staff to provide ongoing support. It is recommended to implement such programs at a young age of residents. Using these technologies should be part of the routine leisure activities in the residential settings, while it is important to designate an existing or new staff member who will guide and support the residents. Furthermore, free and accommodated access to technological equipment should be provided to the residents. Technology usage skills training should also be provided for both the residents and staff. Beyond that, it is important to include in the residents' training advocacy

skills and social skills required in social media communication. The residential settings should also provide emotional support for the residents to cope with unanswered calls by their families. Finally, residential settings should encourage the residents' families to take an active role in this process.

Keywords

Intellectual and developmental disability, old age, aging, older adult, out-of-home residence, supported accommodation, communication technology, social media

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