

Promoting social activities and participation among seniors

Exploring and evaluating social and Internet-based occupational
therapy interventions

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

Introduction: The use of technology and Internet-based activities (IBAs) is increasing in society. However, seniors with limited experiences with the Internet can experience restricted participation in meaningful activities that are dependent on the Internet. Also, social transitions during aging might lead to reduced social activities and social contacts and increased experiences of loneliness, all of which might have negative health implications. Therefore, there is a need to advance the knowledge of how occupational therapists can support seniors' use of IBAs and create opportunities for social contacts and social activities during aging.

Aim: The overall aim of this thesis is to increase the knowledge of how Internet-based activities influence seniors' participation in society, how seniors experience and are influenced by support from social Internet-based occupational therapy interventions, and how different aspects of these interventions can contribute to healthy ageing.

Methods: In study I, seniors' experiences of IBAs were explored and described through interviews with 10 seniors (66–82 years old) that were analyzed with constant comparative methods. In study II, a multiple case study with five seniors (65–85 years old) was used to explore the design of an Internet-based occupational therapy social intervention program and how it influenced social activities and social contacts among the participants. The qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources were analyzed by pattern matching. In study III, an explorative randomized crossover study with an AB/BA design was conducted with 30 seniors (61–89 years old) who were vulnerable to loneliness and who participated in the intervention program. The quantitative data were analyzed with parametric and non-parametric statistics. In study IV, a qualitative interview study was conducted to collect the experiences of 15 seniors (66–87 years old) from the previous intervention process in study III. The interviews were analyzed with constant comparative methods. All participants in studies I–IV were community-dwelling, retired seniors without home-care services.

Results: Complex interactions of different aspects influence seniors' possibilities and preferences for taking part in IBAs. The performance of IBAs yielded different experiences of participation in society (study I). The initial explorative results indicated that the client-centered and individually adapted intervention program supports participation in social IBAs (SIBAs) and other social contexts (study II). After participation in the intervention program, the experiences of loneliness significantly decreased, and satisfaction with social contacts on the Internet increased (study III). If an individual's requirements are met during the intervention process, experiences of habitual SIBA usage, increased self-reliance, and enriched social contacts and social activities both on and off the Internet might be facilitated (study IV).

Conclusion: This thesis provides knowledge of how social support, experiences of and accessibility to technology, life-changing events, and identified meaningfulness with online activities influence the motivation to participate in social and Internet-based activities. The occupational therapist should address the individual's perspective in the intervention program so as to adapt the intervention and to support experiences of satisfactory participation and enhanced social activities and social contacts for seniors. In addition, healthy aging might be supported by the intervention program due to the reduction in loneliness and increased participation in social activities and society. Further evaluation of the framework and content of the intervention program for seniors with restricted use of IBAs and SIBAs and high levels of loneliness is suggested.

Keywords: Health promotion, social activities, social media, evidence-based practice.

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