

Internet Use, Social Networks, Loneliness and Quality of Life among Adults Aged 50 and Older: Mediating and Moderating Effects

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Abstract : Background: The increase in longevity of people on one hand, and on the other hand the fact that the social networks in later life become increasingly narrower, highlight the importance of Internet use to enhance quality of life (QoL). However, whether Internet use increases or decreases social networks, loneliness and quality of life is not clear-cut. Purposes: To explore the direct and/or indirect effects of Internet use on QoL, and to examine whether ethnicity and time the elderly spent with family moderate the mediation effect of Internet use on quality of life throughout loneliness. Methods: This descriptive-correlational study was carried out in 2016 by structured interviews with a convenience sample of 502 respondents aged 50 and older, living in northern Israel. Bootstrapping with resampling strategies was used for testing mediation a model. Results: Use of the Internet was found to be positively associated with QoL. However, this relationship was mediated by loneliness, and moderated by the time the elderly spent with family members. In addition, respondents' ethnicity significantly moderated the mediation effect between Internet use and loneliness. Conclusions: Internet use can enhance QoL of older adults directly or indirectly by reducing loneliness. However, these effects are conditional on other variables. The indirect effect moderated by ethnicity, and the direct effect moderated by the time the elderly spend with their families. Researchers and practitioners should be aware of these interactions which can impact loneliness and quality of life of older persons differently.

Keywords : internet use, loneliness, quality of life, social contacts

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