

## **Mapping of computer and internet usage in elderly**

A survey of computer and internet usage in people who are 65 and older was made in the Agder region in Norway. We wanted to map elderly's computer and internet usage. Specifically, what they needed to obtain a machine, and the support for the acquisition, installation and use of a computer and Internet. Among other factors analysed were motivation for such use, the need for training and in which areas it was desired more training. In addition, we wanted to document the reasons why ICT is not used, and what were the reasons to get started.

The study had the following research questions: To what extent are elderly people users of computer and Internet? What motivates the use/non-use of Internet? In what areas is there a need for training?

## **Methods**

### **Design**

In this sub-study a quantitative design was chosen, with design of a questionnaire where the purpose was to map the extent of elderly people's use of computers and the Internet together with the reasons that motivated and prevented the use of ICT.

### **Selection of sample and data collection**

A questionnaire was distributed to a randomized and stratified sample (in relation to gender and age) of people over 65 years in the municipality of Lillesand. The municipality has approximately 10 000 inhabitants of whom 15% are over 65 years old. A total of 500 individuals received the questionnaire by ordinary mail.

### **Ethical considerations**

The responses were anonymous. The project has been notified and approved by the Privacy Ombudsman for Research (NSD).

## Results

### Description of the sample

178 people responded to the questionnaire, of which 60% were men. About 45% were aged 65 to 69 years, while only 22 individuals were 80 years or older. Among the respondents, there was a relatively high percentage that had higher education and good economical status. Over 80% lived with someone else. Only 15% were still employed.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptions of the participants (N = 178)**

Socio-demographic variables		N (%)
Sex	Male	103 (59.9%)
	Female	69 (40.1%)
Age	64 – 69	77 (45.3%)
	70 – 79	54 (39.9%)
	80 and older	22 (12.4%)
Education	Low	83 (47.2%)
	High	93 (52.8%)
Economic situation	Low income	52 (29.8%)
	Medium income	65 (38.0%)
	High income	55 (32.2%)
Housing situation	Living alone	29 (17.2%)
	Living with someone	140 (82.8%)
Still working	Yes	26 (14.7%)
	No	151 (85.3%)

### Access to and use of computer

160 people (91%) had access to a computer, 99% of them at home. 15 people (9%) had no access. 65% of those who had access to computer had the computer for more than ten years. 14% got the machine for less

than five years ago (and 21% for 6-10 years ago). 80% report frequent computer use, that is, either weekly or daily. 17% did not use a computer.

### **Help for the acquisition and use of computer**

Almost 40% of those who have acquired a computer have got help from family members, 25% reported that they managed by to do the tasks by themselves, while about 15% paid for help. When problems occurred with the use of the computer it usually was either family and friends (44%) or support services (45%) who were contacted.

It was only fifteen people (9%) who did not have a computer at home and, of them, slightly less than half were not interested in acquiring a computer in future. Nobody reported that poor economical status was a reason for not buying a computer. 5 people says they needed help in connection with acquisition.

### **Use of the Internet**

Those who reported that they used computer were asked how they assessed their competence relative to others of same age. Most of them believed that they were as good as others (60%), while 27% thought they were better and 13% said they were inferior.

### **Motivation**

The interviewees were asked about the main motivation of starting using the Internet. The three main reasons given were that introduction to Internet was related to work or education, to order goods and trips, and because they needed to get access public services.

Furthermore, they were asked about what they thought was the main motivation to continue to use the Internet today. For 65% percent the main reason for using the internet was to follow along with what was happening in society, 15% use the Internet because they believed it was necessary while about 10% provided social contact as an important motivator.

## **Training**

The majority of respondents reported that they had learned to use the internet through attending courses (50%). In addition, many had been trained through guidance from family, friends or colleagues (37%). 13% stated that they had learned it by trying on their own.

## **The Internet's impact on social life and mental health**

When asked if the Internet affected social life, the majority answered that the Internet affected social life in a positive way (53%), while almost as many said it had no effect at all (44%). Four people (3%) stated that the Internet affected social life in a negative way.

They were also asked about using the internet effect on their mental health. Most of them stated that it did not affect mental health (72%), while 27% believed that the Internet affected mental health in a positive way. 2 people believed that the Internet affected mental health in a negative way.

## **Experience in use of the Internet**

A majority of those who used the Internet regularly had extensive experience with using online banking, email, sending attachments, reading online newspapers, find phone numbers and addresses and finding factual information. It was more variation in experience when it came to creating email account, transferring pictures, booking tickets, writing, editing and organizing files.

Most had little experience in installing programs, buying and selling goods over the internet, using social networking sites such as Facebook and Skype, genealogy, in using games and entertainment applications and watching movies or listening to music via the internet.

## **Obstacles**

The respondents mentioned various obstacles to become better at using the internet. 15% were not interested to learn at all, while slightly over 20% believed that they needed to learn more. Another reason being pointed out by some of them was that they had others doing it for them. About 10% stated that the reason was that there was a lack of offered training courses.

### **Need for further training**

When asked to what extent they needed to strengthen their skills in the use of internet, approximately one half answered that they needed it to some extent. Approximately 27% believe that they did not need training or had only some needs, while 16% believed that they greatly needed to strengthen their skills.

Regarding requests for training, it was especially genealogy and organizing and editing files that were mentioned. In addition, there were some who wanted to learn how to use social media and entertainment applications.

### **Non-users of the internet**

There are 17% who said they did not use computers. Half of these had access to computer at home, but did not use it anyway. Often other family members used the computer. Non-users were asked what was the reason for not using the computer, and they provided very different reasons.

Among the thirty people who did not use the Internet, about one third stated that they wanted to learn it.

### **Requests for training**

Both those who used the internet today and those who did not, were asked if they would like to attend courses. 46% responded that they would consider it. Slightly less than 20% did not know.

### **Participation in society**

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that using the Internet was necessary to participate in society. More than 80% agreed that it was necessary.