

Digital Technologies to support social wellbeing of community dwelling older adults in receipt of social care and their carers

Summary of findings from interviews and focus groups
with older adults

BRIEFING SUMMARY



Executive Summary

This report is the second of three briefing summaries from a research project (DiTSoW) exploring digital technologies in adult social care to support social wellbeing for older community dwelling adults. The research sits within the National Priorities Programme of Adult Social Care and Social Work, a partnership of nine Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs) from across England, funded by the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) and led by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex ARC (ARC KSS).

The DiTSoW study aimed to explore digital technologies in the context of Adult Social Care, where there has been accelerated adoption and innovation particularly during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. In England, the pandemic led to a series of lockdowns (2020–2022) when services, and individuals, had to adapt. Organisations responded with a range of solutions to ensure people have the support they need without the availability of face-to-face contact (reported in Briefing One). Government and local authorities are committed to further digital innovation and implementation is seen as vital to ensure a sustainable future for social care.

This briefing focuses on findings from twenty-one qualitative interviews and three focus groups with older adults (50 years and over). In total 38 older adults were asked questions about if and how they were using digital technologies in their daily life and how this was (or wasn't) supporting social wellbeing. We explored what these older adults liked and did not like about digital technologies and the barriers and facilitators of digital technologies use.

Older adults were recruited through community organisations who work with older adults to offer support with social wellbeing and social care needs, or with digital inclusion. In this report, we offer perspectives of people including those living with disabilities; people who identify as LGBT+ and people from different ethnicities. We include views from technology users, as well as those who choose not to engage with technology. However, despite best efforts, it was harder to recruit those not engaged. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

From this data we identified seven key themes:

- How digital technologies are supporting social wellbeing
- The potential and limitations of online options
- 'Helpful' technologies vs 'unhelpful' technologies
- Identification of risk: issues of privacy and security
- Factors enabling digital inclusion
- Challenges of digital technology use
- The experience and impact of exclusion

This research found that it is principally privately brought digital technologies (e.g. mobile phones, tablets and virtual assistants such as Alexa) that older adults are using to support their social wellbeing, rather than technologies commissioned and recommended through Adult Social Care.



Our findings suggest there is potential for digital technologies to be better integrated into social care to support the social wellbeing of older adults, through increased social connections, meaningful occupation and via improved independence, choice and control in daily life. However, the findings also highlight considerations that would benefit from further exploration, to address issues of equity in meeting these ambitions.

These considerations include:

- Older adults have agency in choosing which technologies they decide to engage with (or not);
- Greater understanding of the limitations of virtual options and how these compare to face-face options when considering social wellbeing;
- A recommendation for more co-production of digital technologies with older adults to ensure that they meet the varied

needs of older adults, taking into account the nuanced way in which digital technologies are used by different groups;

- Addressing issues around risks to security and privacy is paramount to support increased uptake and safer use of digital technologies;
- Better personalisation in the way training and support with digital technologies is offered to support increased digital inclusion.;
- Digital engagement is becoming increasingly nuanced; this is no longer a binary picture of inclusion and exclusion according to who has the means to access digital technologies and Wi-Fi;
- Digital exclusion has the potential to exacerbate inequalities, unless better consideration and resource is given to ensuring that there are non-digital pathways that offer equal access to services.

Background Information

Digital Technologies are seen as vital to a sustainable future of social care, and governments and regional authorities are harnessing the power of digital technology to address the needs of their citizens with greater efficiency, speed and relevance.

This has been acknowledged in the recent Social Care White Paper (People at the Heart of Care) alongside investment commitments of £150m to target key areas such as: care technology; the development of digital care records; investment in infrastructure and cybersecurity and improving digital skills and confidence across the social care workforce. COVID-19 necessitated an accelerated adoption of digital technologies within health and social care and increased

innovation and interest in this domain. The pandemic also impacted how citizens were using digital technologies, but we are now in a period of reflection as to what worked well and for whom. Initial scoping, in our study, suggests that a primary emphasis for digital technologies leans towards health (e.g. monitoring blood pressure) and to monitor activities at home through sensors. These technologies may increase efficiency and financial benefits, but could exacerbate rather than reduce goals of social wellbeing through reduced in-person contact. Technologies aimed towards alleviating issues related to social wellbeing, particularly for older people living independently in the community, have received less research attention. When considering issues of loneliness and social isolation with associated impacts on individuals, and on health and social care services, this is a timely research project.

Definition of Terms

Social Wellbeing is quite a nebulous term; more of a subjective feeling. Despite no universal definition in the academic literature, common facets include: social participation; inclusion; meaningful occupation; and the absence of social isolation and loneliness. For this study we have consulted lived experience groups¹ and co-designed the following definition:



‘Social wellbeing is the ability to live a meaningful life with a sense of belonging and purpose, to feel connected to family, friends and society and not be passed by. The boundaries of this are a personal choice. Social wellbeing sits alongside and is achieved in conjunction with all other types of wellbeing: physical, mental, financial and emotional.’

Digital Technologies are being kept purposely broad during this exploratory stage of the research and is inclusive of commissioned technologies (such as telecare/ remote monitoring, care management, and assistive technology including memory or visual aids or smart doorbells) as well as ‘consumer technology’ such as smart technology/IOT (Internet of things) including mobile phones or voice-controlled devices and apps available on the general market (e.g. WhatsApp).

¹ Public Involvement is central to the National Priorities Programme within which this study is one of four. The Programme has a Strategic Lived Experience Group who were consulted on the meaning of social wellbeing. DiTSOW also has a separate lived experience advisory group working with the research team for the Digital Technologies project. They were also consulted on the meaning of social wellbeing and then co-designed this definition.



Key Findings



How digital technologies are supporting social wellbeing

The older adults we interviewed identified a wide range of ways that digital technologies were supporting their social wellbeing, although digital technologies were not being adopted by all and, for some, they were a source of stress and illbeing. A fundamental use and benefit of adopting digital technologies was to support people connecting to families, friends and, more widely, to local and virtual communities. Participants frequently referenced the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, or email, to keep in touch with their immediate social networks. This was of particular benefit to the older adults without local families, or where, through poor health, there was not the option of accessible local in-person networks.

There were various special interest groups that participants accessed online such as politics, photography, tai chi and creative writing. These opportunities allowed individuals to be entertained at home, tailoring groups and activities to personal hobbies and interests. Digital technologies were being adopted to support disabilities. For example, Rachel who is blind, uses voice recognition software, talking devices and virtual platforms to access peer support. Importantly, participants gave personal examples as to how digital technologies opened opportunities for increased connections to minority groups of different ethnicities and LGBT+ communities.

My husband uses WhatsApp constantly, because he can tune into the communities that nourish him. He's ethnic Chinese, born in Malaysia, and WhatsApp allows him to talk on video with people in Malaysia, in his Chinese dialect.

(Andrew)



Several participants, like Caroline (see quote below), were using digital technologies to address feelings of social isolation and loneliness. They could find out what is available in their local communities and were using different platforms to make new friendships. However, the predominance of publicity about activities in the local community being online has implications for those who are digitally excluded, as considered in the final theme.

When you're a certain age it is harder to form those groups of friendships because people are settled into their own routines, with a partner, they've maybe got children and grandchildren nearby, they don't go out necessarily as much, that kind of stuff. So yeah, you know certainly Meetup [a local online platform] has been a great help.

(Caroline)



Participants voiced (often with pride) that the internet was a source of continuous learning from their own homes. Digital technologies supported access to knowledge about anything that interested them, and they found this helped them make better informed decisions across all areas of life. This flexible access to information and services, such as shopping, banking and healthcare, was in turn supporting independence and control over daily lives. As well as becoming a fundamental part of managing life, it is possible that an outcome of this digital technology use is a reduced need for both formal and informal care.

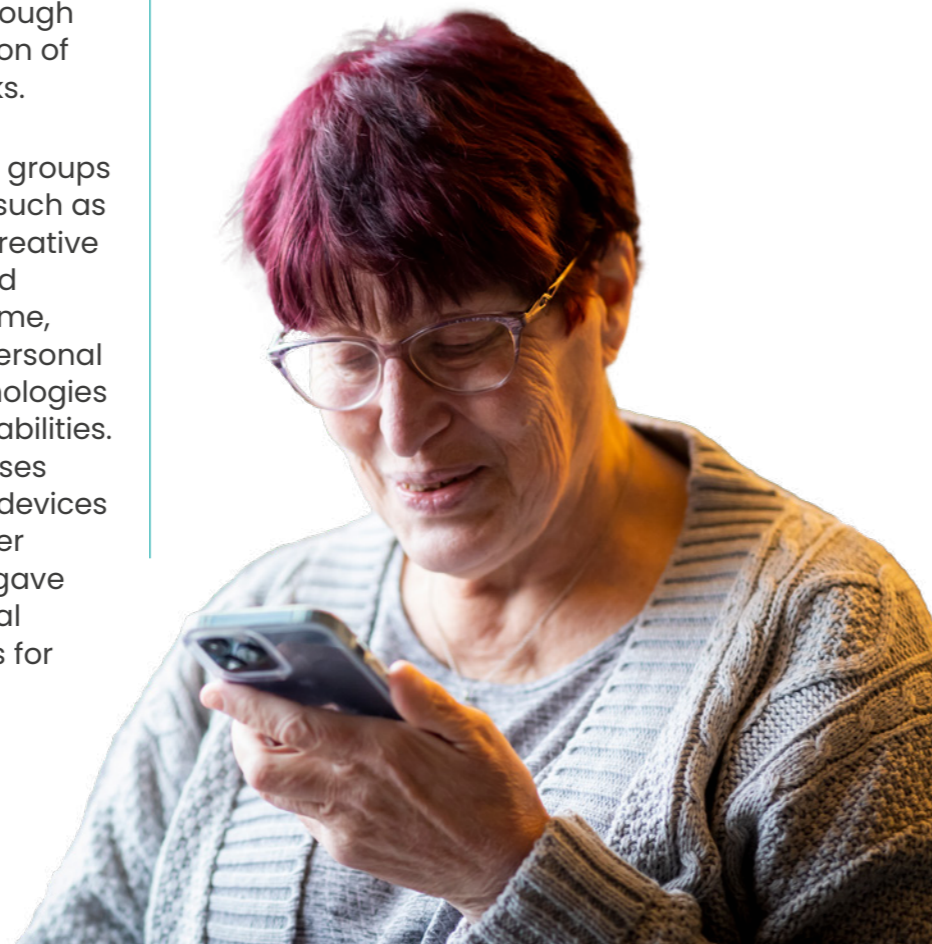
...we use online shopping. We use online banking – now, that is key to our existence. Without, our lives would be total hell...we would struggle to manage on our own.

(Ada)



Maureen is in her 80s and lives on her own. She is widowed and has no children. Maureen has complex physical health conditions and is unable to walk. She has carers visit every day and enjoys going out to a club once a week; this is her only scheduled outing aside from regular hospital visits. Despite this, Maureen rates her social wellbeing as high and attributes much of this to the connections and entertainment she accesses through digital technologies. She uses her tablet and phone to play games, to keep up to date with the news, to manage her life (shopping, bills, appointments etc) and to keep social contact with people through video calls, social media and text messages. In lockdown with more clubs running online, Maureen's social world expanded for a while.

Andrew is 74 and retired. He identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community, living with his husband who is ethnic Chinese, born in Malaysia. The COVID-19 pandemic combined with a recent retirement, left Andrew feeling very lonely. He became disillusioned with video conferencing as a means of contact, although it fed his intellectual needs, it did not nourish his "heart and soul". Despite this, Andrew is a great advocate for the use of smart technologies to improve his quality of life. He wants to invest in a suite of technology to allow him to do everything with ease, including switching the washing machine on, seeing who is at the door or turning the electric blanket on half an hour before going to bed. Although he acknowledges the cost of this is prohibitive to most pensioners.





The potential and limitations of online options

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the recent pandemic, many of the research participants reported a recent increased use and uptake of digital technologies, and older adult participants referenced that phones, tablets and the internet 'kept me going' through COVID-19. As noted in the previous section, virtual groups can open opportunities otherwise unavailable to reduce loneliness and isolation particularly for those who like Maureen (see page 7) may struggle to leave her house.

However, when exploring virtual alternatives with the participants, they viewed this with an element of caution and as a secondary preference compared with face-to-face communication in most situations for the following reasons:

- Concerns were raised about what was missed online – particularly if the group was related to social care, or health, assessments, such as doctors' appointments or exercise classes;
- Participants (sometimes) felt video calls and meetings offered a relatively shallow and disconnected interaction, compared to meeting in person where human contact and warmth can be better given and received. For some participants this increased feelings of loneliness. Although in contrast, a couple of participants had, over time, developed strong friendships from online meetings, and one participant noted that those less outgoing found online groups could be an easier place to 'hangout' than in-person meetings.

Technology is good for information, but it's always nice to have human contact, and human interaction. I don't like talking to something like this (Zoom) because there's no warmth in it. Technology doesn't make people sociable. They make people very distant.

(Focus group 1, female)



- With more social groups and essential services going online, participants were worried that this gave less reason for individuals to leave their homes which in turn could be detrimental to both physical health and social wellbeing. This was exacerbated, some older adults stated, by a nervousness of going out that is a legacy of COVID-19. During COVID-19 many older adults got out of the habit of going out and, participants explained, have lost the confidence to do so.

If the choice was it's now going to be online or it's going to stop, then it would have to be online obviously. But as much as possible I think if we can still do certain things together physically, I think it's good for your mental health to be honest. Just the fact that you have to get dressed, get the train, go to the place – it motivates you. Especially during lockdown – how many of us got dressed from here up, you know pyjama bottoms on your legs, you know you could see them.

(Mary)





'Helpful' technologies vs 'unhelpful' technologies



Research participants were almost exclusively using privately brought digital technologies such as mobile phones (although not necessarily smart phones), laptops, computers or tablets, and all except a very small number of participants had access to the internet. Many older adults were using social media platforms and a variety of apps to support leisure activities, such as keeping up with the news and weather or playing games, as well as more functional apps to support banking, shopping, and directions when going out. A couple of participants felt they had no interest or intention in using digital technologies; a far larger proportion of participants felt the digital technologies were becoming integral to daily living – even if they did not like all aspects of technology.

Oh this phone I've been using for about 5 years would you believe, it's about time it was changed actually. But you know why I'm reluctant to change it is because it's got that round button at the bottom. And I like that to press for Home.

(Rachel)



Throughout the interviews, several factors helped dictate whether a digital technology was incorporated into lifestyles or was unhelpful. Factors in technologies being seen as helpful included:

- Familiarity – participants liked digital technologies better when they knew what they were doing and what to expect. This was particularly the case as people were starting to use technology and for people, like Rachel, who is sight impaired;

- Technology had to be user friendly and reliable. If something was tried and not liked, it could prevent people persevering with or trying other digital technologies. There was a tendency amongst the participants to assume it was them who had done something wrong rather than the technology mis-performing and this could also prevent people continuing to use devices and platforms.

Equally, there were a range of factors that the participants said they found unhelpful:

- Some older adult participants were very 'tech savvy' and embraced all new developments. For other participants technology devices and platforms are too often not designed with older adults in mind. A key issue raised by participants was around too many functions that prevented people being able to get to grips with the technology, or learn how to operate it fully;

This thing is not designed by someone who is sympathetic to older people, it's designed by a pimply-faced geek who thinks everyone is just as quick off the mark as they are. And I get extremely annoyed.

(Colin)



- Technologies not interacting with other technologies was another problem for many, and there was a desire for more seamless integration and universality of digital technologies. Examples of some common problems included phones marketed for older adults not being advanced enough to do internet

banking, and Apple products not being compatible with Google products;

- Whilst search engines were heralded by some as helpful, it was also felt that there can be too much information to navigate online – one older adult described this as a 'doorway to madness' especially in relation to looking up health concerns;
- Technologies, particularly social media platforms, were also frequently referenced by participants as being time wasting and a 'trap for oversharing'. As individuals and as a society, participants also felt we are becoming too dependent on technology;

I feel as I'm getting older my time is very precious and I should not be sitting here for half an hour or 45 minutes just looking at a screen when I could be doing something productive as you said, yeah.

(Sandra)



Lastly, for technologies to be viewed as beneficial, people have to perceive a value in them before even trying. Some participants, like Betty, felt that more could be done by companies to support people to understand what technologies can do and how this may be useful. Devices that were given by the family who thought it would be good, rather than the older adult themselves, were often in their boxes in the cupboard.

One of the phone companies sent a group of their employees and it was one to one – we sat at a table one to one and they helped us with various things on the computer. And that was really helpful. It made me realise that I would be capable for finding the computer useful.

(Betty)



Nora is terrified of technology and chooses not to engage with it at all. She feels useless and anxious being around it. She did have one mobile phone and had managed to learn the basics like messaging but was completely floored when she got a more advanced version. There was too much to try to understand and she feels that she is too far behind the technology curve to catch up. She also has a distrust and fear of all the information that is collected and shared online. For Nora, the only technology she wants is her pendant alarm which keeps her feeling safe in her own home.

Grace is a recent widow who experiences loneliness and depression which is exacerbated by a move to a new area. Grace also has a life limiting illness that affects her mobility. She has successfully used 'trusted' technology (such as her laptop), and social media to access local communities and engage with hobbies, but she has a love-hate relationship with online interactions. Grace does not believe that remote interaction can replace face to face contact and is concerned that technology is reducing interactions, services and health care provision. Grace is also concerned that older people are being left behind due to the pace of technology and a lack of access to key resources.

Perceptions of risk: issues of privacy and security



I never answer emails, unless I know who they're from. I never – I'm very cautious, very... because there's that many scams, isn't there, around? I mean, there's a lot of – an awful lot of scams.

(Joyce)



Older adults frequently mentioned issues about the risks related to using digital technologies which centred around concerns of privacy and security. Fears of being scammed was a major concern across all participants; some participants had personal experience of being scammed, others were just conscious that online scams were both prevalent and sophisticated. Participants were opting out of digital options for banking as they did not feel that they could protect themselves adequately. Several of the older adults interviewed were getting family networks to purchase goods online for them, as this made them feel less vulnerable.

A few participants were very knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe online, but generally these participants had previously held jobs that required this knowledge or had family members working with technology to support them. Without this resource, daytime television was the primary source of information, but participants felt there was more news on scams than safety. It was acknowledged by participants that there is a 'dark side'

of the internet, that can prey on the more vulnerable and concerns around how to keep those with increased risk safe online.

Even participants who felt they were benefiting from technology were finding digital technologies intrusive because the mobile nature of devices means that people are never without them and there is a growing expectation of immediate response, regardless of what else is going on. Embedded in issues of intrusiveness were issues of privacy, and participants expressed grave concerns about surveillance in their homes. This was not only about devices installed to monitor people in their homes, but about adverts popping up based on searches and regarding big companies/governments harvesting data without consent.



I got so paranoid I'd take my phone apart at night, I'd take the sim card out, I'd take the charger out, I'd put one bit there, one bit there... not that I was hiding anything, but the thought of like someone might be watching me when I was asleep.

(Adrienne)



Complexities of how to regulate this were mentioned by several of the older adults. They identified concerns about how data was 'scooped up and used' as well as how much the government and big corporations could and should be trusted to regulate the internet. There was a sense from older adults that 'this is the price we pay for convenience' and worries that the more we use technology the more we just accept the associated risks part of it.

And I have mixed feelings about it, really, because in one way it's a godsend, because it does give you the opportunity to reach out to people and have a bit of communication. But, on the other hand, this constant scrolling and the immediacy of it, which my generation aren't used to, is stressful. So it's a kind of love/hate relationship that I have with it, really, I would say. But it has been a godsend, I must admit.

(Grace)



For increased use of technology, and the safety of those using it, this research, and conversations with older adult digital champions, highlighted that getting these risks of security addressed is paramount.





Factors enabling digital inclusion

Interview participants identified various factors that are supporting them, and other older adults, to adopt technology, as well as barriers to this. These are the considerations of the next two sections.

[Having computers at work] didn't make me – what can I say? I can't set up a computer, I just work systems as they put in a system at work... I think it just makes you less worried about it, probably. But I think probably now I would be more hesitant than I was then.

(Focus Group 1, Female)



- This research highlights a range of resources (such as financial means, social networks and previous

employment) that can give advantages to successful adoption of technology in later life. Having sufficient funds to buy equipment and connect to the internet was an essential, but many older adults cannot afford this. Participants who had used some form of computer or computerised system prior to retirement attributed this as something that had either sparked an interest/curiosity or demystified the fear of technology. Equally, some participants had been influenced by seeing friends managing and getting benefits with different types of technology.

- Older adult participants also spoke about how invaluable (often essential) it was to have someone they could rely on to give technical assistance to get started, to help overcome worries or 'hiccups', and to give trusted advice. For many, this support was a family member such as an adult child, grandchild or spouse. Less is known about those who do not have this kind of support, however with an increasing number of older adults not living in tight geographical networks with families, some participants were also accessing support from local charities and voluntary organisations.

And you know I'm comfortable with it [technology]. But if I got stuck, I would ring up [name of local voluntary organisation] – they seem to have an expert on whatever problems you've got. You might have to wait a little while, but somebody would come round, but they also do, on a Wednesday morning digital help at the library.

(Melvin)



- When receiving support, participants valued training being face-to-face and pitched at their level. Older adults told us that too often family members helping, whilst well intentioned, went too quickly and instead of slowly showing how to do things took over and just did things for them.

Well yeah instead of sitting there and showing you, they start da-da-da-da... that's that there. 'I'll do it for you Nana'. But they never have time for that, to sit there and watch to make sure you are doing it right.

(Focus Group 2, Female)

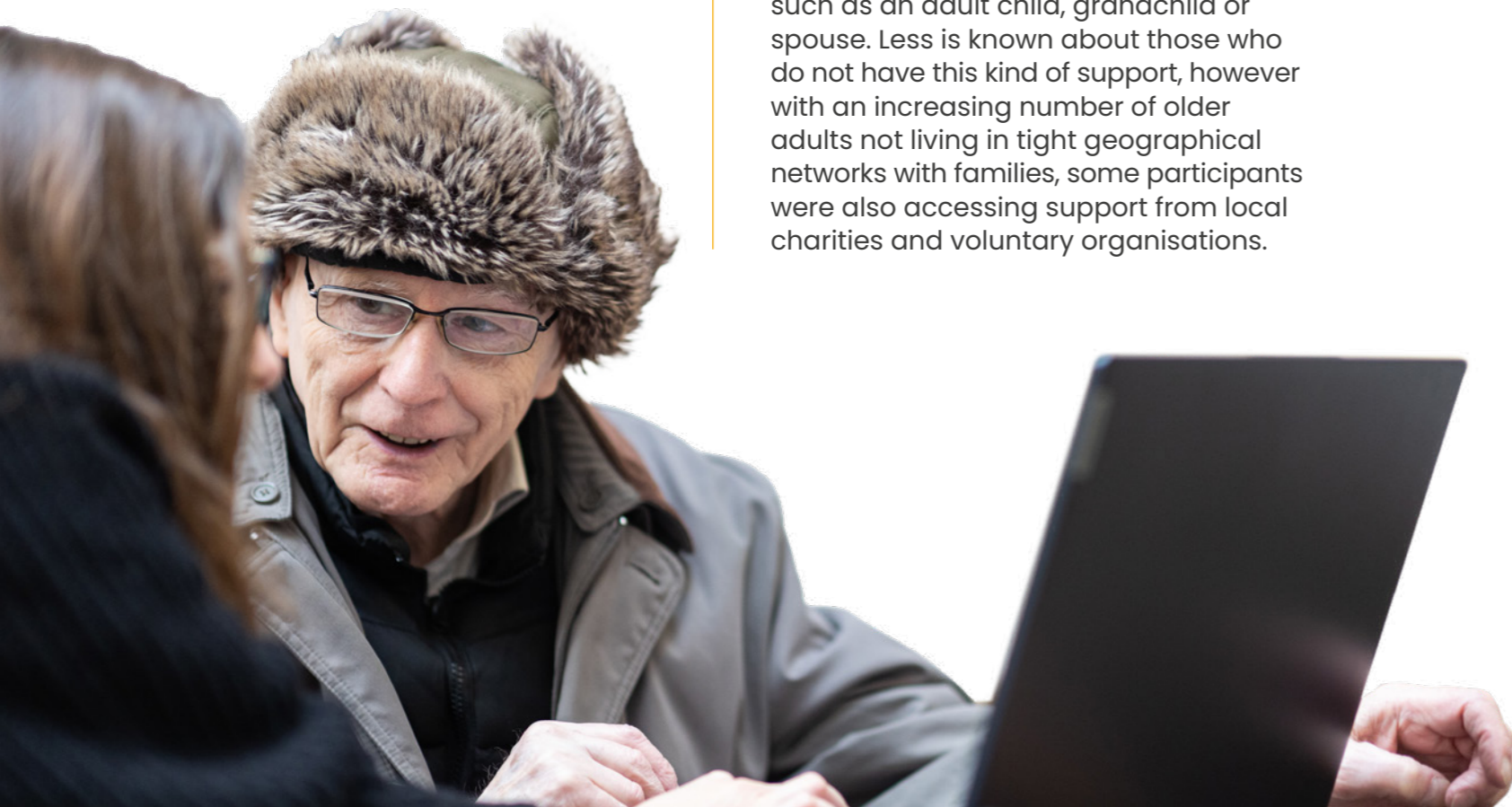
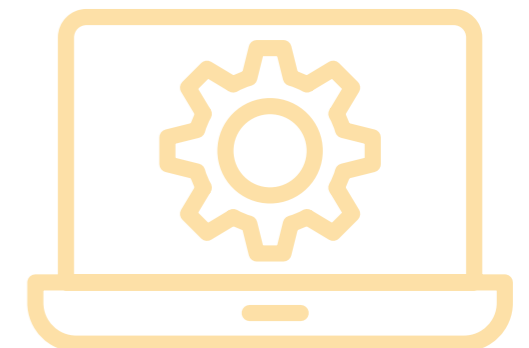


- Added to this, often support did not start at a basic enough level, and those helping made assumptions about what participants could do and what jargon they understood. Older adult participants liked to keep simple and repeat basic things until working with technologies had become familiar.

Participants recognised that confidence built gradually, and as they became more confident, they would often increase what and how they used digital technologies.

...once you've done something several times, it sort of registers, but sometimes it can take longer for it to register. Once it registers better, I remember... And like some already had computer knowledge and everything before. So that made a difference, and they seemed to get things quicker, ...and I'm thinking I didn't get it, you'll have to explain it step by step. I normally have to write things down and go through that step... several times before it will just connect and then I can do it. Again, it's just people's confidence, I think. I just haven't got confidence in a computer... not the computer itself, in me working a computer!

(Elsie)





Challenges of digital technology use

It puts me off using everything – I'm scared, I am actually scared. I am scared of pressing the wrong button... So, I don't do it. It's best for me not to.

(FG1, Female)



Specific challenges participants cited as impacting digital technology use include:

- Participants felt anxious and overwhelmed by technology and did not want the stress of learning



something new or having technology 'go wrong on them'. One participant, who was confident with technology felt this was because older adults too frequently feel that the computer is in control and not them.

- Passwords and onerous security measures were frequently described by participants as a 'nightmare'. Whilst understood to be necessary to keep safe, these are a big deterrent – especially when you are advised to not use the same password and each individual website now seems to want at least one password.
- Some older adults perceived their age was also a barrier. Several participants reported feeling their memory was not good enough to remember the steps needed to use new equipment, or that arthritis was making it hard to hold phones, swipe screens and press small buttons. A few of those interviewed simply perceived that digital technologies were not for them – they felt of 'a different generation'. Constantly changing technology was also undermining digital technology use for older adult participants. Updates on phones or a new website layout were cited as problematic as familiarity was lost.
- Lastly, a number of participants simply did not want to bother family and friends. This prevented access to help with technologies; there was an element of pride at play when people chose whether or not to reach out for assistance.

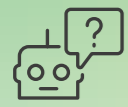
And our children will show us, you know if there's something that we don't quite get, I can always ask one of the children. But of course, they're not always around to ask are they – when you're desperate to know something they're never around are they? And you don't like to appear thick.

(Focus Group 2, Female)



Adrienne is in her early 60s and moved into a local authority assisting living housing scheme, due to complexities of both mental and physical health, shortly before the pandemic. Adrienne struggles with digital technologies. She has an inherent fear and distrust of them which causes excess stress and anxiety. She has been unable to successfully access any digital support groups, and limited support from friends and family has not worked either as they explain things too quickly. Adrienne feels that her wellbeing declined significantly during and following COVID-19 because of her inability to access information, cheaper tariffs and online services, such as food shopping and benefits. She finds it is now expected that everyone can access the internet. The experience of digital exclusion is making Adrienne feel like a second-class citizen as no one seems to care that she is being left behind.

Gill is a retired teacher and lives on her own. She tries to keep busy and socially active as she knows this helps her sense of wellbeing. She has used a computer for many years to send emails and find information on the internet. More recently, she has done online newsletters for a group, used zoom, and visited art galleries virtually. She considers herself a basic technology user and has, and needs, the support of her son, when things go wrong. Through choice, Gill has a very simple mobile phone, just for emergency calls. She does not like the intrusion mobile devices bring to life but has recently found herself excluded from society because of a lack of a smart phone. Specific examples include being able to order food at a restaurant as she could not scan a QR code and the inability to park at a train station as it was solely payment online. Gill is incensed that she is being 'forced' down a route of digitalisation, or 'forced' public life in society.



'Shoved on the scrap heap': The experience and impact of exclusion



The world in general thinks that everyone should be computer literate and – no they're not.

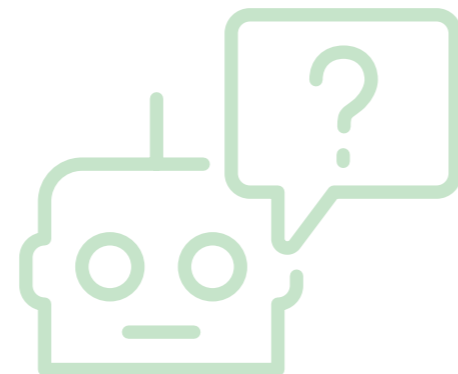
(Elsie)



This research indicates a complete spectrum of levels of engagement with, and access to, digital technologies for older adults, spanning those who are making active choices that technology is not for them to those that are embracing many different forms to enhance their daily life. Additionally, some participants were unable to access digital technologies due to cost and availability of suitable training or absence of family support. Interviews highlighted mixed views on where the balance of technology for good and for bad sits, and personal parameters of balancing this to decide how and what

technology is chosen and adopted. This showcased intricacies of digital engagement, which should no longer be viewed as binary picture of who is included and excluded according to who has the means to afford equipment and access Wi-Fi.

Participants reported views on, and experiences of, a society becoming increasingly layered in the way technologies are woven into nearly all pathways to health and social care services and to access goods and information more generally. Internet connection and prerequisite apps were necessary for activities like shopping, healthcare, banking and parking. Consequently, some participants are struggling to feel like they have parity of access due to a lack of digital technology use. Information about local groups and services is almost solely online; cheaper deals and tariffs are often to be found online; and instructions as to how to use technology is online. When participants tried to find necessary information in a non-digital format, they struggled as most organisations signpost to websites and chatrooms rather than offer phone numbers for people to call for advice and support.



There was nobody to ask... and I still haven't got anywhere [sorting out a smart meter]. There's no real person that you can ring up!

(Focus group 2, Male)



Adrienne and Gill (outlined on page 17) are two poignant examples. These women vary in their ease and ability to use technologies, but both are feeling excluded from society and marginalised. Adrienne, who had received inadequate support with digital technologies, felt 'shoved on the scrap heap' because increasingly there are no (or complex) alternatives to access the things she needs (like universal credit and online shopping). Gill may have better knowledge and support but feels she is being forced down a route of digital technologies or forced out of society. She reported feeling angry that her agency and choice in these decisions are being taken from her.

It's becoming more and more necessary [to have a smart phone] they're forcing you in a way.

(Gill)



Many participants voiced the opinion that this stealthy advancement of digitalisation is a form of discrimination, and older adults are being marginalised. Participants, such as Grace and Annette, felt that corporates, and professionals could do more to ease this situation, but too frequently 'agencies and organisations are using technology as an excuse not to engage properly.'

And they forget about all the people... and I think this is serious discrimination, because you find a lot of old people do not know about something happening because they do not have access to the computer, or they don't know how to use a computer.

(Annette)



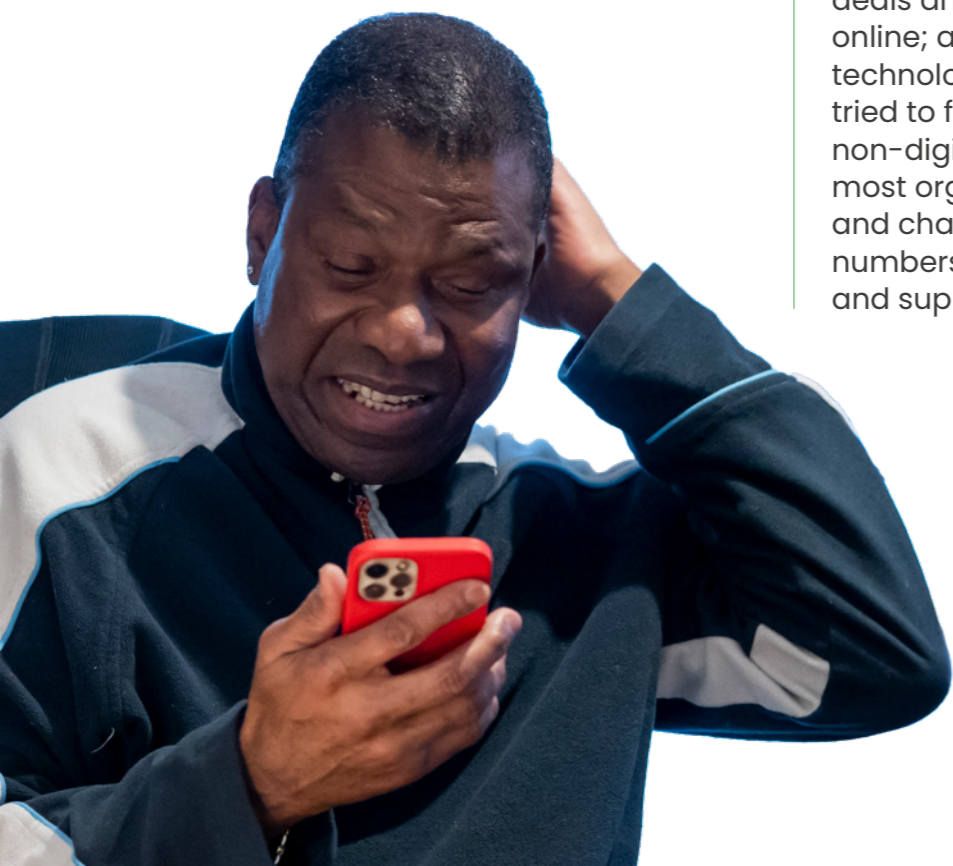
Amongst participants, there was some anxiety around how quickly those who feel they are digitally enabled can fall behind given the pace of technological advancement. Additionally, keeping up to date was not cost free and devices become obsolete too quickly. Digital inclusion is high on many national and local agendas. However, this research highlights the need to ensure that, alongside the support of digital inclusion, attention is given to non-digital alternatives to access information and services. Without this, it is likely that inequalities due to digital exclusion will broaden.

I must admit I am slowly giving up on technology. Because I feel I've still fallen behind. I can't seem to get the answers that I want. And that's the story of my life since it started.

(Focus Group 1, female)



To learn more about this research contact k.almack@herts.ac.uk or a.tingle@herts.ac.uk



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