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Abstract Information

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Access to the Internet and self-rated health among older people: Digital or social divide?

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Abstract:

In this paper we present results from a research project funded by a Spanish Governmental Agency (Institute for Older People, IMSERSO) aiming to analyze the relationship between access to the Information Society and the quality of life of older people. In the present study, we analyze whether the digital divide can generate health inequities among older people beyond structural (social class) determinants of health. To answer this research question we use two national representative samples (users and non-users of Internet). These samples were representative of adult Spanish population of people 55 years and older across sex, use of Internet, and social class. Self-rated health was measured using a 5 point scale from very good to very poor. Several regression models were tested to predict self-rated health. These series of models showed that although there is initially a significant positive relationship between use of Internet and self-rated health, this effect disappears once social class is entered into the equation. Also, the existence of close ties providing social support has a positive relationship with self-rated health beyond the influence of social class. Overall, results suggest that there is no evidence supporting the idea that use of Internet has any positive relationship with health for the older population once social class is taken into account. Results are discussed in the broader context of the social determinants of health among older people, underlying the importance of distinguishing between the structural (e.g. social class) and intermediate (e.g. access to the Information Society) determinants of health. Implications for e-inclusion and ageing research and policy development are also considered.
