

# Life situation affects need for digital help more than age

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Credit: Pond5.com

According to research, one's situation in life strongly affects the amount of digital help received from outside the home. Somewhat surprisingly, single-parent families require more external digital help than older people in using and updating the computer and digital television.

Academy Research Fellow Sakari Taipale, who works at the University of Jyväskylä, has studied within the Centre of Excellence in Research on Ageing and Care how [family](#) situation, age and gender affect the help provided and received in the use of computers and digital televisions.

The Time Use Survey of Statistics Finland was used as data.

The digital help provided is especially targeted at homes where [technology](#) is used in a versatile and active way. "In single-parent families, the need for external help is increased by the fact that digital skills are typically accumulated by only one parent. Technology-hungry children need help in introducing devices and exploring the digital world," Taipale says.

In addition to one's own interest in technology and motivation, warm experts play an important role in the adoption of new devices and applications. When the use of a new technology or application cannot be learned from a user manual or the learning requires unreasonable effort, digital help is sought from relatives and friends who are more familiar with technology. Families are key operators from the perspective of providing and receiving digital help.

The project Intergenerational Relations in Broadband Societies led by Taipale studied the ways in which new digital technologies are acquired and used in families consisting of at least three generations. The study reinforces the notion of parents as their children's digital warm experts. As children grow, however, the roles as givers and recipients of help change quickly, but only with regard to the use of new technology. Children and young people are happy to help their parents and other [family members](#) in the digital world even though the role of a warm expert is also seen as burdensome and the expectations placed on them are sometimes excessive.

According to the study, the link between the respondent's age, gender and education and the digital help received is weak. About 8 per cent of the respondents reported that their household had received help and about 9 per cent said that they had helped another household with digital issues free of charge. The chronically ill receive more free digital help

from outside their own household than others. Most of the providers of digital help were young men, but the gender differences disappeared with age.

The role of warm experts proved to be vital for ageing technology users. With the support of family members and friends, they are able to continue using devices and applications either independently or together with loved ones. Physical deterioration and age-related health problems also led to the use of technology on behalf of another in families. The situation is particularly difficult for grandparents who do not have close relatives or friends who could support them in the use of technologies.

A new phenomenon of the digitalised society emerged in the study: older people include more and more digital wizards who are forced to give up the use of information and communication technologies due to deteriorating physical ability or illness. In the future, the role of warm experts will not only be to motivate and encourage [older people](#) to use technology, but also to support them in continued use and the controlled winding down of active technology use.

The interview data collected from families in Finland, Italy and Slovenia in 2014–2015 shows that the differences in the provision of digital help between the countries are significant. Finnish young people only rarely act as warm experts for their grandparents. In Slovenia, in turn, the provision of digital help extending over one generation is common and in some families even systematic, for example weekly. This is partly explained by the tradition of multigenerational households, which also reduces the need for technology-mediated everyday communication in families. In Finland, however, fragmented families and long distances reduce regular meetings. At the same time, the provision of technology-mediated digital help, such as by phone or via Skype, is generally seen as difficult.

"In all of the countries surveyed, the oldest family members used digital technologies significantly less. In addition, parents and especially grandparents consider their skills to be considerably narrower and weaker than [young people](#)," Taipale says.

Provided by Academy of Finland

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