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Not All Helping Professionals Are Better Connected: Digital Access in Later Life

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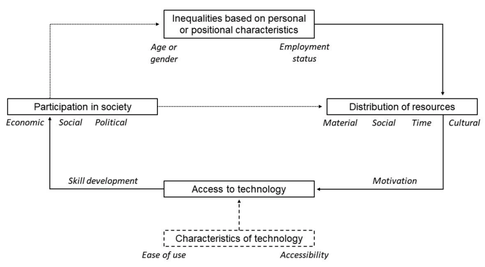
Background and Conceptual Framing

Helping Professions

- Intensive workplace technology exposure
- Fewer barriers to reliable home internet
- Seamless digital transitions into later life

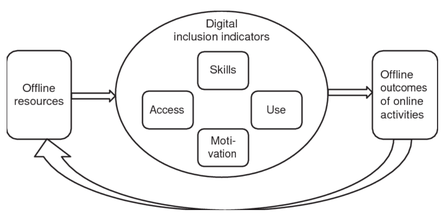
Resources & Appropriation Theory (van Dijk, 2020)

- Examines how personal and positional resources lead to different types of digital access and usage levels
- Expectation: Professionals leverage work-based resources for home access



Third-Level Divide (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015)

- The ability to convert digital skills into social and health outcomes
- Expectation: Helping status creates resilient "digital safety nets"



Structural Transitions across Life Course (Pearlin et al., 2005)

- Views digital access as a trajectory influenced by structural transitions (like aging or retirement)
- Expectation: Occupational legacy fades against aging-related barriers

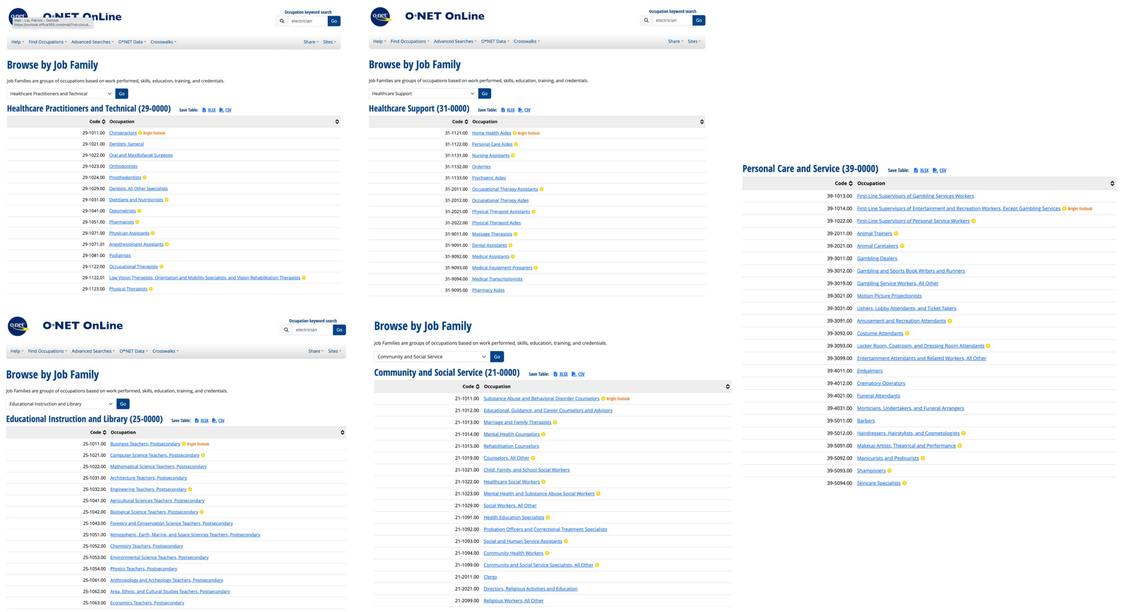
Mental Health & Privacy

- Digital Mental Health is Context-Dependent
- Privacy Requirement: Therapy requires a secure, private home environment
- Public Barrier: Libraries or schools (outside access) are unsuitable for clinical disclosures
- Crisis Readiness: 24/7 connectivity is vital for digital suicide prevention or monitoring

Measure

Defining Helping Professions

- O*NET (Occupational Information Network)
- Healthcare & Medical Support
- Education
- Community & Social Services
- Protective Service & Personal Care



Context of Access to the Internet

- Home-Only: Exclusive access at residence. Provides maximum privacy for mental health
- Hybrid: Access at home AND outside (e.g., library/school). Highest digital capital
- Outside-Only: Access ONLY at public venues. High risk for digital exclusion

Data Source & Study Population

- CPS Primary Data: A monthly household survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).
- Internet Use Supplement: Specifically utilizes the biennial supplement sponsored by the NTIA (National Telecommunications and Information Administration).
- Pooling Strategy: Pooled multi-year data (2023- 2025) to ensure statistical stability for the 50+ age transition.

Descriptive Analysis (N = 14,507)

Variable	Frequency	Weighted %
Race		
White	12,045	83.03
Black	1,305	9.00
Native American	118	0.81
Asian	789	5.44
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	51	0.35
Multiracial / Other	199	1.37
Education		
Below high school	300	2.07
HS with/without diploma	4,068	28.04
Some college	3,982	27.45
Bachelor's degree or above	6,1157	42..44
Helping Profession	3,504	24.15
Access		
Home Only	1,765	12.17
Access: Hybrid	11,956	82.42
Access: Outside Only	786	5.42

Multinomial Logistic Regression

access_type	RRR	Robust std. err.	z	P>|z|	[95% conf.	interval]
Home_only						
helping_profession						
helping_profession	.8777213	.1109668	-1.03	0.302	.6850821	1.124529
age	1.018214	.0071009	2.59	0.010	1.004391	1.032227
race6						
Black	1.04081	.161029	0.26	0.796	.7685596	1.4095
AI/AN	1.125839	.6066921	0.22	0.826	.3915445	3.237217
Asian	1.414061	.3268346	1.50	0.134	.8989354	2.224375
NH/PI	.8416407	.7791916	-0.19	0.852	.1371146	5.166183
Multiracial/Other	1.992081	1.121132	1.22	0.221	.6610818	6.002866
sex						
female	1.102738	.1099695	0.98	0.327	.9069577	1.34078
education						
below High school	9.674668	9.080289	2.42	0.016	1.537197	60.88954
High school with or without diploma	6.174756	5.650727	1.99	0.047	1.027204	37.11787
Some college, or with associate's degree	5.810311	5.334329	1.92	0.055	.9610109	35.12937
Bachelor's degree or above	4.877011	4.476617	1.73	0.084	.8069273	29.47631
_cons	.1181287	.1195893	-2.11	0.035	.0162416	.8591749

Home___outside						
helping_profession						
helping_profession	.9269652	.0981136	-0.72	0.474	.7533017	1.140664
age	.9909732	.0060894	-1.48	0.140	.9791098	1.00298
race6						
Black	.7797702	.1041039	-1.86	0.062	.6002419	1.012994
AI/AN	1.005154	.4700191	0.01	0.991	.4019786	2.513403
Asian	1.110787	.2302528	0.51	0.612	.7399235	1.667534
NH/PI	.5591921	.5513595	-0.59	0.556	.0809622	3.862245
Multiracial/Other	1.964561	1.017832	1.30	0.192	.7116408	5.42338
sex						
female	1.101269	.094657	1.12	0.262	.9305301	1.303336
education						
below High school	1.473237	1.002501	0.57	0.569	.388196	5.591061
High school with or without diploma	2.568331	1.664444	1.46	0.146	.7211367	9.147119
Some college, or with associate's degree	5.437327	3.540748	2.60	0.009	1.517361	19.48417
Bachelor's degree or above	8.543694	5.562165	3.30	0.001	2.385017	30.60553
_cons	5.347983	4.025019	2.23	0.026	1.223363	23.37893
Outside_only	(base outcome)					

Note: **_cons** estimates baseline relative risk for each outcome.

Helping Profession status is NOT a significant predictor of improved access contexts compared to public-only access.

Discussion & Implication

<u>Why did Helping Profession status fail to predict better access?</u>

Structural Supremacy: Education and Income (structural) may override occupational identity (contextual)

Digital Legacy Loss: Workplace skills do not guarantee home infrastructure.

Education remains key: Bachelor's degree or above significantly associated with Hybrid access (RRR = 8.54, p < .01)

<u>US vs. HK:</u>

ACP Termination (US): The Affordable Connectivity Program ended in May 2024 due to funding depletion

Shift in Subsidies (HK): Programs like WebOrganic (Broadband Concessions) have largely phased out direct ISP bill subsidies → District Digital Support Station

SDoH Advocacy: Reclassify home broadband as a Social Determinant of Health