Intergenerational Influences on the Understanding and Use of Technology in Later Life
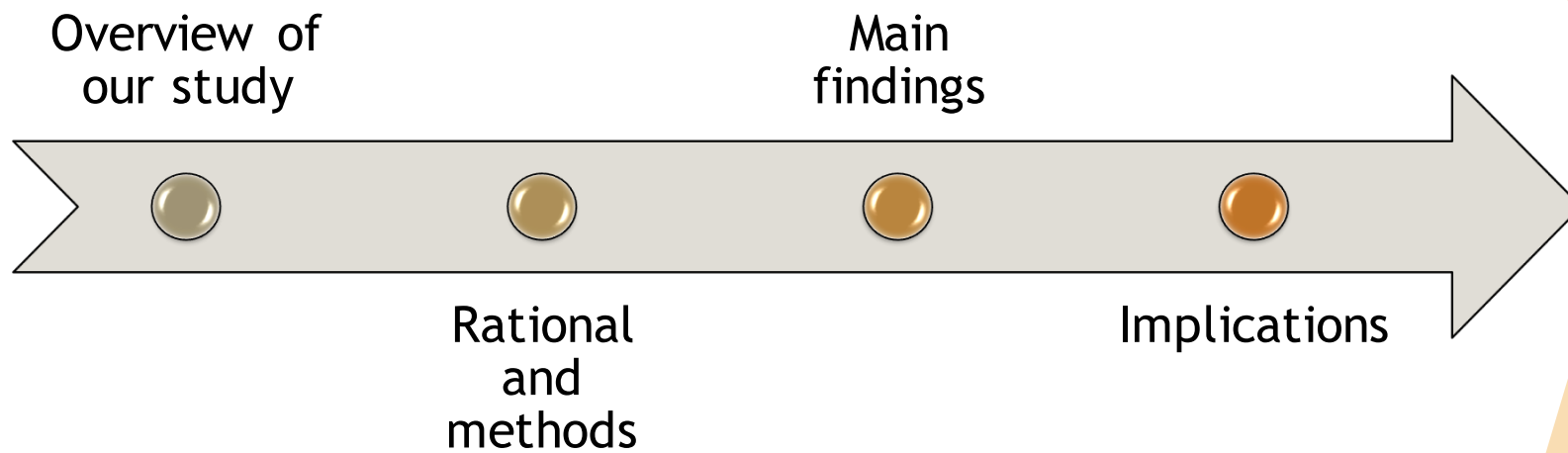
Research Days 2016:

Making Research Matter: Celebrating Evidence Implementation in Northern BC

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Background

- 4 Site Study
  - UK
    - Milton Keynes (Hannah Marston)
    - Rural Wales (Charles Musselwhite)
  - Canada
    - McBride, British Columbia (Shannon Freeman)
    - Regina, Saskatchewan (Rebecca Genoe and Cory Kulczycki)

Canadian Study Sites

McBride

Regina

UK Study Sites

Milton Keynes

Rural Wales

Background

- Across the globe we live in an **ageing society**

- Many individuals reside in **rural and remote communities**

- Global increases in life expectancy and an aging world population are **transforming multigenerational family systems**

- With geographically dispersed families, **intercommunication technologies become important to maintain family bonds**

Rationale

- Technology use is a part of daily life for many older adults
  - Often embraced at a slower pace and in different ways
- There is little understanding and knowledge of technology use and related privacy issues and sharing of information by older adults
- **Being able to understand how older adults perceive and use (or do not use) technology is crucial to address the needs of our ageing society**
  - Presents opportunities

Sample

- **Subjects: N=37**
  - Aged 67-89 years
  - Over 2/3 female
  - All volunteered to participate in the study

- **Canada:**
  - Rural: McBride, British Columbia (N=10)
  - Urban: Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada (N=6)

- **UK**
  - Rural: Southwest Wales, UK (N=10)
  - Urban: Milton Keynes, UK (N=11)

Methods

▶ Survey and focus groups

Survey Domains:

1. Technology use
2. Internet ownership and use
3. Social networking

4. Digital device ownership
5. Purchasing patterns
6. Self and life-logging

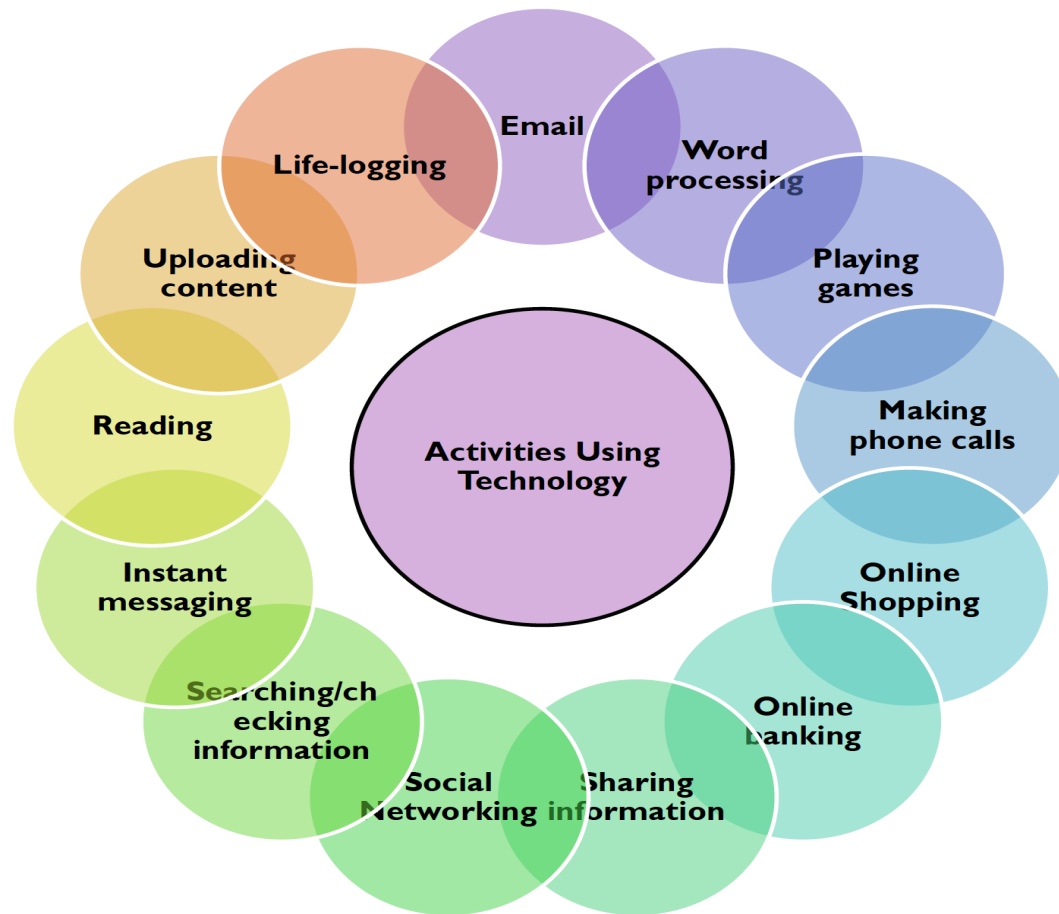7. Information sharing and privacy issues
8. Demographics

Overview of Technology Use

	Total Population (N=37)	Rural (n = 20)	Urban (n = 17)	Canada (n = 16)	UK (n = 21)
Have used a computer	**97.3** (36)	95 (19)	100 (17)	93.8 (15)	100 (21)
Own a computer	**89.2** (33)	89.2 (33)	88.2 (15)	93.8 (15)	85.7 (18)
Have the internet	**94.3** (33)	89.5 (17)	100 (16)	92.9 (13)	95.2 (20)
Use social media sites	**35.1** (13)	20 (4)	52.9 (9)	50 (8)	23.8 (5)
Own a digital device	**100** (36)	100 (19)	100 (17)	100 (15)	100 (21)

Overview of Technology Use

- Nearly all used a computer (97.3%).
- All participants reported using some kind of digital device, typically a mobile/cell phone
- Over 94% of participants identified having Internet at their home
- Over 82% of participants identified having used digital devices to share information
- Participants used social networking sites, although many were unaware of it

Reasons for Using Technology:

Reasons Adults in Later Life use Technology

▶ Technology acts as a facilitator of intergenerational family relationships

▶ **Main reason: to communicate with family**
  ▶ Especially adult children and grandchildren
  ▶ Technology as a **digital 'gathering place'**
  ▶ Technology especially important when family members were living in disperse geographic locations

Technology as a Facilitator of Intergenerational Family Relationships

"…Skype is brilliant. I've got a daughter in Spain, I've got a granddaughter in Spain, I've got a son in the West Indies and a daughter in London, and Skype is one of the most brilliant things that's happened because you can see, you can talk." [participant 6, interview 2, gender not specified, Milton Keynes]

"I go on Facebook and I go on Skype with my daughter in Australia and I do research things. Last night I was talking to my grandson, who's seven." [participant 2, interview 1, female, Milton Keynes]

"…stay in contact with the grandchildren very much through email, mostly email and we share pictures. The grand kids will put something on Facebook, a real nice picture or something they are doing or that and then I will save that, put that into my pictures, into my album. And this way I get a lot of pictures so I follow in that way but yes, we are in…" [participant 1, interview 1, female, McBride]
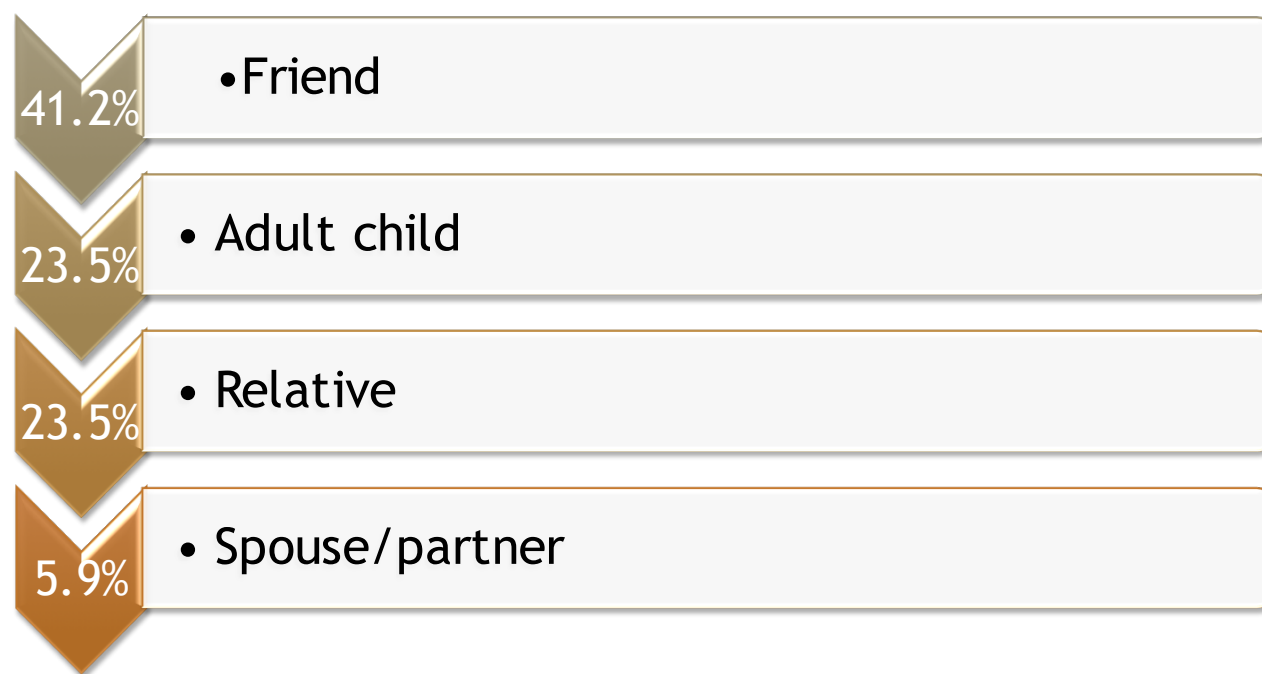
Technology use for Safety Reasons

▶ Over 72% reported owning a mobile device or cell phone

▶ *"…got the cell phone because my kids kept thinking something was going to happen to me…"* [participant 1, interview 1, female, McBride]

▶ *"Oh, well it was the bright idea of my son. I had a mini stroke… ever since, but they're [kids] always frightened… of a recurrence. So my son gave me a cell phone, his old one, which I used right away, or more or less. I think, they decided that I should have one, because I did get a few dizzy spells. So, now I just use it."* [participant 2, interview 2, female, McBride]

Using Technology to Appease Younger Family Members

▶ *"I don't even have an iPhone or iPad so I'm really out of date...I will get more modernized so that my children will be happy"* [participant 2, interview 1, female, Regina].

▶ *"...the kids decided we should have one [computer]"* [participant 4, interview 1, male, McBride]

▶ *"...grandchildren push me and they go, "Oh nana, you're so far behind, you should be up to date and you should be doing this and doing that." So they want me to be up to date with all the latest technology and I'm not."* [participant 3, interview 1, female, Regina].

How Adults in Later Life Learn to use Technology

41.2%
- Friend

23.5%
- Adult child

23.5%
- Relative

5.9%
- Spouse/partner

Shows introduction to social media sites

How Adults in Later Life Learn to use Technology

► *"My son is an IT expert. If I have any problems, 'Can I speak to the IT man please.' He knows it's me. He sorts my problems."* [participant 3, gender not specified, interview 1, Milton Keynes]

► *"I ask my grandchildren. 'Okay, how do I do this?' They say, 'Don't you know?' But they will help me eventually"* [participant 3, interview 1, female, Regina]

► *"Anything I want to know, I have to phone up my sons or my grandchildren because they're a lot more knowledgeable than I am…"* [participant 1, interview 1, gender not specified, Milton Keynes]

Differences in Technology use between Rural and Urban Sites

Location of computer use

- **Rural:** up to 30% more likely to use computers in locations other than own home

Reasons for using technology

- **Rural:** used social networking to connect with children/grandchildren (90%)
- **Urban:** use computer for email (100%)
- **Urban:** use Internet to make phone calls (70.6%) or IM (35.3%)

Frequency of social media site use

- **Rural:** used social media sites more frequently

Conclusion & Implications

► Intergenerational family factors play a critical role in the understanding and use of technology by adults in later life

► Technology is used to communicate with younger family members in disperse geographic locations

  ► Bridges physical distances & strengthens family ties

  ► Used as a safety precaution

► **Technology provides strengths and opportunities** for older adults and highlights the **need for simplified teaching and support methods.** It also seems older adults are **not yet using technologies to their greatest potentials** (e.g., to improve health)

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Questions?