



## Letter to the Editor

# The Role of Digital Communication Technologies in Middle-Aged Health and Relationships

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Received 10 Apr 2021

**Citation:** Hashempour-Sadeghian M, Abbasi Shavazi MT. The role of digital communication technologies in middle-aged health and relationships. *Elderly Health Journal*. 2021; 7(2): 54-55.

Humans are social beings who can live in a social space by communicating and interacting. Social relationships, by creating interactions between people in a society, put them in a network of relatives and non-relatives in various ways, in order to meet their needs and shape their social life.

Social network is an important dimension of social life (1). The concept of network emphasizes the fact that each person has a series of communication nodes with other people, each of whom in turn is tied to a small, medium or large number of others (2).

Traditionally, in generations past, people usually had small, tight social networks -in rural areas or urban villages -where a few important family members, close friends, neighbors, community groups (churches and the like) constituted the safety net and support system for individuals (3). However, over the past two decades, the structure of social networks has changed considerably (4).

Today, people deal with a wide range of relationships in a wide array of situations. They are part of very important circles (e.g. their family, their friends and their coworkers). In short, people live in fluid and changing networks that go well beyond groups (3). These networks consists of a new phase of relationships, in which person to person relationships take shape not on a village and neighborhood scale, but on a global scale.

One of the most important subsets of the social network is the "Core Discussion Network" (CDN). CDN is defined as a composed of people with whom an individual tends to discuss important matters, from whom s/he receives support, and with whom s/he has frequent contact (4). Therefore, CDN is at the center of a person's interactions and has important effects on his life.

CDN is the most important part of social network. An extensive literature has pointed out to the effects of close and supportive social network on mental, physical, mental and spiritual health (9, 10).

Assessing and describing CDN is important in all age groups. Examining the middle-aged CDN can help scholars to find out which groups of friends, relatives, and acquaintances one is in constant interaction with and close to. In other words, it will be cleared what the strong and intimate social ties of middle-aged people are like. One of the reasons for the importance of studying this age group is that they are on the verge of entering a stage of their life (old age) that will be accompanied by severe physical, psychological and social decline. In particular, the richer the social network of people, the easier it is for them to deal with old age and the more successful aging they will experience.

Iran is a society in transition to old age. So, it is better to do studies to know more about the specific conditions of the elderly before reaching the stage of aging. An important category of these studies should be performed on middle-aged people. Unfortunately, it can be argued that middle-aged people are more neglected in research than other age groups. Therefore, to help the elderly, we must first think about recognizing and solving middle-aged problems. Undoubtedly, one of the most influential factors on the type and amount of interactions in the middle-aged CDN, is new media, including the Internet.

The social shift from small groups to wider personal networks, mentioned earlier, has progressed with greater vigor through the widespread use of the internet and mobile phones. Web 2 interactive environment provides countless opportunities to expand the new relationships that a person can have.

Evidence from some research suggests that new media often complement other forms of communication, and are more likely to be used in connection with those with which non-internet communications are also established (5, 6).

On the contrary, there is also limited evidences that new media limits the social network of users and may

even turn into a complete substitute for face-to-face relationships (7, 8).

In any case, it is accepted that the internet affects CDN and its effect on middle-aged CDN in Iran is very important. It seems that this issue must be part of the plans to move the successful aging and for this purpose, it is suggested that various studies be done with quantitative and qualitative methods in this regard in order to create more knowledge about this issue in Iran.

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