Elderly and Internet: An Exploratory Research

(Persons over 65 years)

By

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ABSTRACT

Title: Elderly and Internet: An Exploratory Research
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The purpose of this study was to explore how elderly people in Gävle cope with their life by using the Internet and what are their perceived benefits and barriers of the use of Internet. Qualitative methods were used with face-to-face interviews and email correspondence to gather the data. Six elderly people participated in this study. Coping theory was used to analyse the results. The results were divided into three parts. They were describing the use of Internet, benefits and barriers of using the Internet and reasons behind using the Internet and coping. Benefits include connectedness, gratification, usefulness, and active learning experience. Barriers include limitation, distrust and frustration. This paper used the coping theory to try to describe how these persons adjust the way of thinking and the way of behaving and how they use these strategies to cope with the daily life. It was found that Internet for elderly people is becoming more important nowadays and also it is significant to know how they think about the Internet.

Key words: Elderly people, Internet, qualitative method, face-to-face interviews, email correspondence and coping theory
PREAMBLE

First, I would like to thank all the fantastic and wonderful elderly people who made this project possible for me, interviewing them on voluntary basis. Without them, there would have been no background material for my project “Elderly and Internet: An Exploratory Research at all, and I was so excited to meet and talk with them, they gave me all the information needed to complete my project.

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I also need to thank my dear friend Barbro Sollbe for all her help and great patience, bringing me around to all for my interviews. She even helped me with the translation from Swedish to English. I had a great time, got a lot of information and acknowledge through you and because of you.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Sweden, there is a large population of citizens over 65 years and Sweden is among countries, which has a large population over the age of 80 years (Bogdan, 2010).

Have you ever thought about how your life will be when you are getting old? What you will be doing? What your interests will be? What you can do not to be falling out of the community's social life? Not at least, what kind of data technological support and equipment you will be able to take advantage of to get an even better and more valuable life. This should be of the greatest concern to all young people, allowing them to plan their old age in good time getting a nice and happy future.

There are many positive possibilities with computer technology. New products are been introduced to the market. Some of them can be useful for better life quality, some of them are essential for daily life. For example, it can be at school, at work to pay the bills, reading the news or keeping in contact with family and friends and playing games (Findahl, 2011). Therefore, it is interesting to see how the elderly population using and coping with.

Maybe it is about time to put the elderly and their computer skills at the agenda, because being an elderly does not mean you cannot contribute to the society. It is very easy to forget; that it is the elderly who sits on all the knowledge that has built the society, as we know it today. However, the development within IT is going so fast that the elderly might need some extra attention adapted to their own level, especially the newcomers. This might help giving them host of opportunities to still contribute to the society and even acquire an active and happy future (Findahl, 2011).

1.1 Aims, issues and possible hypotheses

Everybody wants to live a life as nice and happy as possible. Everybody wants to stay
updated on what is happening. Everybody wants to keep in contact with their family and friends, even being an important part of the society around them no matter how old you are. The Internet can be a significant part of this life especially to older people having reduced mobility. For example, they can pay the bills in the comfort of their homes, also have access to the newspaper online, more so have the possibility to have social contacts online such as with family and friends.

The aim of this study is to explore how elderly (1) how elderly people cope with their life by using of Internet and what are their perceived benefits and barriers of the use of Internet. This study aims to see (2) how elderly people cope with the barriers that exist when using the Internet and to explore if the Internet (3) has the role coping with everyday tasks and needs.

The interest of this subject of social work are relating to the facts that the number of elderly people are increasing, becoming an important part of the population. This subject is highly emphasized at the International Social Work Programme at the University of Gävle. “In many countries, the oldest old are now the fastest growing part of the total population” (World Health Organization, Global Health and Aging, 2011, p8). This report estimates a global increase of 351 percent between 2010 and 2050 in the population over 85 years old (Global Health and Aging, 2011, p8). Elderly people are a concern for social work as they often lose income when becoming pensioners and often have more health related problems.

**Main question:**
- How do elderly people describe their use of the Internet? What possibilities and benefits Internet can give elderly people in their everyday life?
- How do elderly people use Internet to cope with their life?

**1.2 Essay disposition**
An introduction of this study is presented in the previous part of this thesis, which includes aim, questions and issues. Next, previous research will be presented to make explanation with knowledge and different concepts in this essay. The essay uses the Coping Theory, which is described in detail in chapter three. The methodology is described in chapter four. Chapter five will present all the results from the interviews and the analysis as well. The analysis is based upon previous research and the Coping Theory. The final chapter will discuss and criticize my own work and my advice for further research.

1.3 Explanation of key terms
In order to make every reader understand, I would like to provide some further explanations:

**The Internet**
The Internet is a good platform to provide opportunities for human beings to get in touch with each other. According to the Oxford Dictionaries (2012), a global computer network provides a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols.

**Number of elderly people**
Sweden has a population of 9 million people. 1.5 million of this population is over 65 years old (Bogdan, 2010). This is a large population and it has to be addressed and understood. This research will try to focus how this part of population use the Internet and how the Internet can benefit them with the daily life tasks. Assuming that the Internet is a good tool supporting the elderly population in daily tasks and the Internet can be helpful in keeping contact with family and friends, more so in the maintaining contact with the society.

**Coping**
According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is the way we deal with problems
through adjusting the way we think and the way we behave to be able to manage the problems we face in our lives.

This thesis will focus on three key words *internet*, *elderly* and *coping* trying to find out if there is can be any benefits to both the elderly people and the society in general.

2. **PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Several authors (Kakkarainen 2012, Lewin, 2001, Jokisuu et al., 2007) argue that the Internet around elderly people issues is getting more important, because the ratio of elderly people of the world’s population is increasing. The attention of scientists is shifting towards these kinds of issues. But at the same time they have different opinions about elderly people using the Internet. The many different views of scientists around the world are important to better understand the issues about elderly people, to be able to improve their life quality.

A prime example in Finland, which has the faster growing numbers of elderly people in Europe and also has successfully developed electronic services such as e-commerce and e-government. It also has very large mobile phone and broadband usage (Jokisuu et al., 2007). This research is made in central Finland. It is about how Information and communication technologies (ICTs) used as tools provide service and support for inclusion and quality of life. In this research, there were 714 participants. The ages of response were from 55 to 99. The results show that elderly people need to use technology in order to make sure they are included by the Information of the Society. A large proportion of this group owns computer and has been using it for at least 5 years. And most of them are connected to the Internet. 80 percent believe that they can learn to use the new technology and 73 percent express their willingness to learn more about the computer use. Example of some common Internet use: writing emails, banking services, information seeking, checking opening hours and schedule and information about health. Some of less common of using the Internet are watching photos or videos, listen to music, play the computer games and shop online. However,
they are those in this elderly group are not interested in learning to use the computer (Jokisuu et al., 2007). About 86 percent of elderly people have their own computer and 75 percent of them have Internet connection. Most of 80 percent of the respondents believed that they had abilities to learn to use new technology and 73 percent would like to know more how to use a computer. Purposes for using computer are for word-processing, email, online banking service and information seeking in general. Other information that they looked for on the Internet was about health, current affairs and local events, hobbies and services for elderly people. Also the computer is used to watch photos or videos or listened to music and play computer games. It is also used for booking and buying the tickets online and using library services. a large percentage of the computer-using respondents want to learn more about computers. Gender did not have a significant effect on computer use (Jokisuu et al., 2007). All these data got collected to see how the respondents from computer using and non-computer using differ. It is easier to compare data from a quantitative study.

Regarding the statistics about there is a large elderly population that are using the computer and the Internet. According to Kirkwood (2001), the computer and the Internet can transformed the life of the elderly people. It can provide contacts, information and professional service. It can help to create new forms of health care and support for those elderly people living at home. Kirkwood (2001) suggests that it could be an obvious installing just like electricity, water or gas, although it involves vagaries in beliefs and attitudes of elderly people.

In a research done in Sweden (Lewin, 2001), all the respondents are over 70 years old. Interviews were carried out by 12 elderly people from 70 to 83 year old. At the same time a Web based/e-mailed questionnaire was finishes by some Swedish elderly people. They are the members of SeniorNet in Sweden that an organization set up to encourage elderly people to acquire computing skills (Lewin, 2001). “The research found that, although not a cure-all, learning to use a computer may help to compensate for some of the losses which commonly accompany older age and which contribute to social
exclusion- such as loss of people, loss of physical abilities, loss of role, loss of opportunities, loss of identity and social status, loss of individuality and loss of income. Using computer may also allow older people to continue to contribute to the pool of social capital as they age” (Lewin, 2001). Older people who use welfare services are considered major potential beneficiaries of electronic services and therefore national European strategies have prioritized the need to promote older people’s access to the internet and the need to better understand their specific need (Sourbati, 2009). The internet is seen as a socially significant medium capable of providing developed countries with a means to deliver services related to education, health, social security and welfare (Selwyn et al., 2005; Sourbati, 2009). Older people normally use the Internet to keep in contact with their family and friends, to research health-related issues, and to read up on hobbies, such as travel, genealogy, and word processing (Buse, 2009; Wagner et al., 2010). Many studies show that those over the age of 60 are less likely to go online just for fun or for no particular reason (Buse, 2009). At the same time, there are some researches about those elderly people who do not use the Internet. It showed that many elderly people stayed away from computers and online access because they perceived no benefits or motivation, were intimidated by computer jargon, had security and safety concerns, lacked sufficient information and support although it was expensive, had physical limitations, stereotypical thinking, little or no experience, had unsuitable user interfaces or missing network connections (Cresci et al., 2010; Harwood, 2007; Richardson et al., 2005; Wagner et al., 2010). The previous research shows that most elderly people use the Internet and are interested to develop that use. There is a minority of elderly people that do not use the Internet or computers for different reasons. This research will try to describe some of benefits and barriers that the elderly people express during using the Internet and how they cope with barriers.

3. Coupling to theory

The coping theory was chosen because it could help to understand how elderly people cope with their life by using of Internet. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984),
coping is the way we deal with problems through adjusting the way we think and the way we behave to be able to manage the problems we face in our lives. This theory can be used to help the whole research to get more understanding for elderly people. Their cognitive and behavioural efforts can be influenced by their ordinary life with the Internet. In order to fulfil the aim of this study the coping theory will be used to explore how elderly people understand the Internet and what are the benefits of the use of Internet by elderly people. The coping theory has been in psychology for over 60 years. Coping is the meaning that we use to combat or prevent stress. The changing of cognitive and behavioural efforts is constant and is the lifetime process. Folkman & Lazarus (1991) explains that the way we cope is changing all the time depending on different assessments we make with our environments and our relationships to others that is also constantly changing. Coping can be described both as something you do and/or an internal process you do within yourself. That is done to be able to manage, control, accept and reduce the environmental and internal stress and the struggle between them (Lazarus & Launier 1978). Coping is compensation of behaviours that are used for the purpose of managing tensions in times of problems (Hobfoll 1988). Coping is described as complex and multi-layered (Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Pargament 1997). Coping is the meeting point between the individual and situation it depends very much on the different situations and the individual thus it involves different selections of choices making it multi-layered and multildimensional (Pargament, 1997).

**Coping strategies**

Coping strategies can be described as methods people use to decrease stressful events when they are incanting difficult situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). These methods can include both psychological and behavioural strategies. Two different strategies are often recognised. One of the strategies is problem-solving strategy. The other one is emotion-focused strategy. Problem-solving strategy is the attempts to minimise stressful situations. The emotion-focused coping strategy is attempts to succeed the emotional effects of a stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Most of people
use both types of these coping strategies when struggling with difficult situations. They are two main coping strategies that categorised as active or passive. Depending on the way a person is facing the stress situation whether they are coping actively that is to say doing something to change the situation or choosing to avoid the situation and being passive. Active coping strategies can be perceived as more effective strategies however a passive strategy is a choice and therefore an active process. Coping often involves difficult choices and therefore it depends on the situations (Folkman & Lazarus 1980).

**Coping resources and burdens of coping**

Coping resources are the strength that individuals bring with them when coping with the situations. For example the economic background, physical health, levels of psychological and social competence or spirituality. Also past experience with a problem is an effective coping recourse (Pargament, 1997).

Burdens of coping can be a physical, psychological, social or spiritual hinder. It can be also financial difficulties. Other burdens of coping can be the feeling of failing often, a disfunctional family background, or obscure believes about oneself or others. The resources and burdens of coping are the effects of our general believes, relationships, values and personalities. And they have an effect on the choices we make and how we cope with difficulties (Pargament 1997).

**Coping and the use of Internet by elderly people**

It is important to understand and analyse what elderly people express as barriers to be able to facilitate them with better technology if necessary or better information. The easier research in this paper shows that the majority of elderly people use the Internet however there is a minority that do not use it. Learning more about how the majority copes with the Internet can give an indication of what can be done to improve accessibility to all elderly people.

**4. Methodology**
This chapter will introduce the methods used to reach the aim of the study. It is necessary to explore what elderly people thinks about the Internet, if they have any experience and if they know the benefits, they can get by using the Internet. It has been used in previous research with both quantitative and qualitative methods. A qualitative approach has been chosen in this study, and it will combine both face-to-face interviews and email correspondence. Email correspondence is the very best and easiest way for interviewees to participate, because they save time and energy (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The preliminary, the research design, the mode of procedure, the tools of analysis, essay credibility and the ethical standpoint will be described in the rest of the chapter.

4.1 Preliminary understanding
The reason why I chose this subject about elderly people and the internet is that the number of elderly is increasing rapidly and that it is very important to help them to stay self-reliant, to help them maintaining their social network and to help them getting the best quality of life possible. Not at least, this has an important economic aspect as well, both to the elderly as to the society in general.

The fact is, by helping and teaching old people how to deal with a computer and the Internet they can keep in touch with their family and friends. They can shop groceries getting them delivered at the door. They can stay in touch with their doctor, even seeing each other at the screen. They can even read the news and play games to get the time pass by sitting all alone - just to mention a few things.

Knowing that all of us want the very best life quality possible getting old, this has to become an important part of social work. I think we have to give this subject a lot more attention, especially by scientists having social work as their special field.

4.2 Research Design
The research design in this thesis is qualitative in nature. An empirical study was conducted with interviews and email correspondence as the data collection method.
Qualitative methods were chosen in order to collect the rich data and personal descriptions. In order to avoid being subjective, it is important to read and find more literature and to see how others think about the same subjects. This will contribute a lot to this area. Regarding the research issue from different perspectives will bring depth to the inquiry and prevent bias.

4.3 Mode of procedure

1. The choice of literature

About the choice of literature, it was used by different previous researches and different collection databases. EBSCO host Discovery and PsycINFO were found in the Högskolan I Gävle website. There are so much information, many journals and books. The words used while searching were: elderly people, internet, online education, the use of technology by elderly people, the use of computer by elderly people and the use of internet by elderly people. Many books and references were found in LIBRIS. To be able to search for more relevant documents and materials, Google was used very often in this study and it helped to save much time. All the ways of doing this is to make sure it is possible to reach the purpose of the study when the research was finished.

2. Selection of informants

In the research, interviews were used to collect the data and information in order to get wide variety of data. Interview participants were contacted with the help of a personal contact. All of the interview participants were found and introduced by my friend. I got all email address from my friend and I sent my appointments with them. After that I got answer from them, my friend took me to go their homes in order to make face-to-face interviews. These individuals were chosen in this investigation in order to pay more attention to elderly people and try to find the best way to improve their quality of life.

3. Description of the investigation

Six participants were all from Gävle, and to get balance in my survey. Three female and
three male interviewees were chosen in the interview. They all had been working in different companies before their retirement at 65 years, now joining a club called *Gruppensionärer*, in English *The group of the Retired*. The all interviews were made by face-to-face interviews and email correspondence. Every interview participants joined in the interviews with different appointments. It took around thirty minutes to have an interview.

Two methods were used in my research: Face-to-face interviews and email correspondence.

*Face-to-face interviews*

Conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with four interviewees, and before visiting the face-to-face interviewees in their private homes, I did send an email, asking if they wanted to participate and booking an appointment. In order to get different opinions from the interviewees in my survey, I did choose two females and two males who are living in different places in Gävle. Assuming that male and female could have different opinions and different environments could have effects.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews can bring some interesting facts into the conversation. It is even important to ask the questions several times to see if the interviewees has understood them correctly, making the internal validity as high as possible (Bryman, 2002).

Before the interview started, all participates were provided with the opportunity to express their opinions. Permissions were asked to record the interview on an audio recorder and they were also given the opportunity to listen to the conversation later on if needed.

All interviews were divided into three parts. First, face-to-face interview was audio-recorded. Second, all the tapes were listened in order to get a transcription. Thirdly, the similarities and the differences were found between the interviewees in order to see if
finding any patterns in their answers. All the information collected was eventually presented in my results.

**Email correspondence**

Two of the interviews I did by email-correspondence, as the very best way to collect strong, full and complete data is to use both face-to-face interviews and email-correspondence. The benefit of e-mail correspondence is that the interviewees are free to write whatever they want at the time that suits themselves. If they have any questions, it is easy to send me an email getting everything clarified – a fast and flexible system giving me confident and sufficient answers. It is even very important to have a deadline otherwise; it can take too long time getting the answers.

Email correspondence is a part of computer-assisted interviewing. Both interview and interviewee should be relatively skilled at written communication, the mediated interaction introduced a possibly unfruitful reflective distance without cues from bodies and spoken language, and it can be difficult to generate rich and detailed descriptions (Elmholt, 2006 in Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The most important thing is to get the best data with the suitable way. This is the way to communicate with written style. It is easier for the interviewee to give a correct answer with e-mail correspondence because it gives him or her more time to answer comparing with face-to-face interviews. All information you get from the email correspondence was written without names and identity and it is a good way to keep the anonymity of the interviewee. At the same time, the emails can be deleted in the mailbox and it is able to protect the interviewees’ confidentiality and anonymity (McCoyd & Schwaber Kerson, 2006).

**4.4 Tools of analysis**

In order to analyse the results, similarities and differences were identified in the interviewees’ answers. For example, usefulness of using Internet or frustration of using Internet was then used to enable identification of themes that later could be analysed by the theory. In qualitative work, it is common to take some steps to make analysis about
the data. A first step the interviewees talk spontaneously about their experiences and how they feel in relationship to the questions. A second step is when the interviewees reflect on what they already said and perhaps find new meanings without the interpretation of the interviewers. The third step is when the interviewer reflects over what the interviewee has said and presented to them. The fourth step is the analyse of the recorded interview and is done by the interviewer alone. The fifth step is a re-interview. The sixth step is when the interviewees were affected by the interview and has responded in the different way after the interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This research uses four of six steps.

4.5 Essay credibility

Validity

“Validity refers in ordinary language to the truth, the correctness, and the strength of a statement. A valid inference is correctly derived from its premises. A valid argument is sound, well-grounded, justifiable, strong and convincing. Validity has in the social sciences pertained to whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p246). In the processing of the study, the researchers make sure everything has been made to be clear to the interviewees. It took much time to repeat and ask them to be able to let them understand all the questions in order to ensure the validity. Validity is as quality of craftsmanship to become pivotal and essential (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In the face-to-face interviews, it is easy and free for interviewees to say what they want to and at the time they could have some body language to express themselves more lively. It is more convincing and thick statement. In the email correspondence, it gives interviewees more opportunities to write what they want to say, there is no word limitations for this. It gives the interviewee a free space to enjoy and tell what his or her opinions are and how he or she thinks. There is nothing you need to be worried and nervous about. It is very private way to ensure the validity of the statement.

Reliability
“Reliability pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings; it is often treated in relation to the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other researchers” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p245) All interviews questions have been considerable and concerned. The objectivity of knowledge and the nature of interview research in reliability are very important. “Objectivity as freedom from bias according to reliable knowledge, checked and controlled, undistorted by personal bias and prejudice” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p242). During the interview, some interviewees speak Swedish to have a conversation. It is adventurous and challenging to make it. It is mainly important to make sure the translation between Swedish and English is correct. Sometimes it took some time to do this, but it is very meaningful and worthy to do it. This is the best way to retain high reliability. About the interview reliability, it is very important to relate to the leading questions and find the best interviewing technique to make the answers better (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

**Generalizability**

In the research, six interviews were made with two different methods. It is possible to have naturalistic generalization and analytical generalization in order to make some general conclusions. Naturalistic generalization focuses on personal experience and analytical generalization includes a judgment to be reasonable (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). It can be relevant to the previous research and make the results stronger.

**4.6 Ethical standpoint**

Ethical standpoint plays a very important role in the whole research area. “Ethical issues go through the entire process of an interview investigation, and potential ethical concerns should be taken into consideration from the very start of an investigation to the final report” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In all the interviews all the interviewees were informed to every participant in order to get their consent. They are voluntary to do this. They have all rights to refuse to answer and choose what they would like to answer. We should inform them about this before we start the questioning. “Informed consent entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the
investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risk and benefits from participation in the research project.” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p70). Confidentiality will also make sure completely during the interview. Especially it is important to make sure the anonymity of names of interviewees, profession and other personal information. In this research, no names or address are mentioned, only age with the consent of the interviewees is mentioned. The results of this research will be shown to the interviewees. Striving to make the interviews meaningful and thereby respecting their time and efforts. “Confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p72). At the same time, the all data collected will only be used in this research study and it will not be used to any commercial ways and some other purposes.

5. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND EMPIRICISM ANALYSIS

This chapter contains a presentation of the results and the analysis of this study, connected to both theory and previous research. There are three parts of my results:

1. Describing the use of Internet
2. Benefits and barriers of using the Internet
3. Reasons behind using the internet and coping

All three parts of the results based on the main question, sub question, to previous research, and analysed by the coping theory, show what interviewees describe the use of Internet.

Describing the use of Internet

When it comes to the describing the Internet, most interviewees tell that they are looking upon it primarily as a practical tool. They can use it to pay their bills and to keep in contact with their family and friends. They can keep themselves updated on the latest news worldwide. They can play games write emails to make the time pass.
On the other hand, if they have had better knowledge about the usage, they could probably have taken even more advantage of it, and not least been less afraid of making mistakes or destroying the machinery. Some of the interviewees even tell that they have put a lot of effort into it and that it has been a long process coping with the use of Internet. They wish they could learn more about the use, discovering new things, getting even more benefits out of it.

The public care system is using the Internet more frequently in Sweden and it seems to becoming a predisposition. Therefore the knowledge of the use of Internet is important.

The topic can be summarized in three main points:

- The Internet is a useful tool that can make life easier for the individual.
- The Internet can never replace the human touch and personal attention.
- The Internet requires training and being able to take advantage of all the benefits.

One understanding of using the Internet is that it can be used as a tool for elderly people. An Interview participant states:

"Internet is like a practical tool in my life. Often I have so many notes from Internet to write down and I only have a short time." (Interviewee C).

In connection to coping theory, the Internet could be used to maintain elderly people’s social life (Greer & Watson, 1987). The Internet is been used by the interviewee as problem-solving.

Even though Internet could be a useful tool for elderly, some of the interview subjects mention that it is difficult to learn new technology. For instance, an interview explains:

"Internet is just a tool to me. I do not like any new technology. It makes me nervous and I get very frustrated if it does not work one day" (Interviewee A).

Problems can always appear with technology. People might feel nervous and stressful. This stressful experience could require emotion-focus coping strategy. It is important to note that although using the Internet for problem-solving strategy cannot always be sufficient enough for emotion-focus coping strategy.
The results show that the interviewees think that Internet is a helpful tool to be informed of things that are happening around them. All the new information and news come directly and they can choose amongst loads of websites.

**Benefits and barriers of using the Internet**

**Benefits**

The benefits of Internet use can be seen as coping resources. It is explained by the theory that the way we cope with things is connected to our resources and barriers. Connection with other people can be a great resource for coping. Gratification and sense of wellbeing can be enhanced through perusing goals and succeeding them. A coping resource can also be a practical material resource. The Internet is a practical tool for daily life. Active learning can be described as a way of coping and coping resource. It is another dimension in coping with life problems. That is to say that learning to use Internet is a coping resource for people to cope in their life.

**Connectedness**

One benefit of using the Internet is connectedness. An interview participant states:

“I use internet and email to keep in contact with my friends. If some friends write to me, I will write back as soon as possible. It is nice to have contact with each other. If something happens, it is very nice to have somebody sharing it. Now I even have Facebook. That has helped me to find some of my old friends. I have some new friends from the Internet as well. All of them think Internet is a very good way to keep in touch with friends and family. It is very easy and they do not need to hurry because they can do it whenever they have the time or want. Still they are making some phone calls as well to hear their voice. Internet is a perfect thing to have.” (Interviewee B). In connection to coping strategies, it is important to have the relationship between the self
and the environment (Folkman & Lazarus 1980).

**Gratification**

One benefit of using the Internet is gratification. An interview participant states:

“I think Internet is a very good thing. I find many interesting things at the Internet. I am talking with my girlfriend at the Internet as well. I have my own Internet thinking and it is necessary to have. Today I cannot imagine a life without it” (Interviewee B). Internet is becoming a good part of his life. He expresses his satisfaction and his happiness to be able to do what he wants with Internet.

Another participant says that:

“The internet is the window to the whole world. I get all the information and news at the first hand” (Interviewee F).

There is a clear satisfaction with Internet as a useful tool.

“I am still learning how to use the Internet every day and sometimes it can be a major challenge to my life” (Interviewee D).

Internet can provide different goals that one can pursue. In connection to coping theory, it is a challenge for fighting spirit. All different kinds of situations and cases can be challenges for them to meet in their life. They try to influence in the whole process to get more information and knowledge (Greer & Watson 1987).

According to interviewees, the Internet can provide a sense of gratification and the feeling of happiness. It can be a useful tool to enhance their confidence, self-worth, self-esteem.

**Usefulness**

One of benefits of using the Internet is the Internet’s usefulness. It can give a feeling of independence when they can do all the things by themselves. One interviewer participant mentions that:

“I do search in book, dictionaries and at the internet to get information. It is very useful for me writing publishing articles” (Interviewee A).
At the same time another interview participant also states:

“I even do watch TV shows at the Internet. For example, if I watch TV series at the TV, sometimes missing an episode, I can just go to the internet looking at it later” (Interviewee B).

This is a good example of problem-solving strategy.

“The internet is very useful to me because I can log on my Internet bank, pay my bills and check how much money I have” (Interviewee C).

And there is an interview participant also mentioning,

“I always like to find some travel information and read some travel companies’ websites before I am going to travel somewhere. It will not take much time doing this. It is very efficient and useful” (Interviewee D).

According to coping theory, in different time they try to change their cognitive and behavioural perceptions to manage their own demands, it makes much easier for them to live in their life. It can be a rich resource for them to get more experience in their life after trying to manage different kinds of things (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

**Active learning experiences**

One benefit of using the Internet is active learning experiences. Different people have different learning experiences with the Internet. One interview participants says that:

“I used the internet when I was working. After retirement, I learnt all the new things about the Internet from my children and by my own experience. Because my daughter is living in another country, and to keep in contact with her, it is very important for me to know Internet very well. I am learning all the time and I am eager to learn something new in my life” (Interviewee D).

In connection to coping theory, the changing environment plays an important role in the person-environment relationship. It is important to manage between environmental and internal demands and try to cope with them (Folkman & Lazarus 1991, Folkman & Launier 1978). Another interview participant also states the active learning experience:
“When I am using Internet, I am always meet different problems, especially when something is happening suddenly and I have to fix it by myself. I usually ask my husband or some friends if they can help me fixing the problem, but still I think it is very good experience for me. It is even very good for me to have something different to concentrate about not only the everyday tasks. Now when I can do several things at the Internet, I feel great and I want to experience a lot in the future” (Interviewee E). One of the many ways of the learning process is to broaden ones views and participate in various activities and discussions. Still when trying to figure out something about Internet, it is useful to have supporting environment such as friends and family with coping of fast change of the Internet. It can be more helpful and useful for getting better ways to use Internet. According to coping theory, this is the connection to cope between an individual and a situation. It has different possibilities and choices (Pargament 1997). Learning can help and bring more to consider and improve the life for elderly people gradually.

**Barriers**

During the interview session, barriers were mentioned when using the Internet. Often the frustration was about when the Internet was not useful. Barriers could be translated to burdens of coping in this research. Three barriers will be discussed in this section. They are physical and mental limitation, distrust of the Internet information and frustration of failure.

**Limitation**

One barrier of using the Internet is limitation. One interview participant states:

“It is very hard to sit in front of a computer for a long time and sometimes I feel painful in my body, especially in my shoulders and my neck. I do not like technology and technical stuff because it makes me nervous. I am saying very often, the part of my brain for mathematics and technological things is less developed than the other half that is for culture and feelings. This is why I sometimes feel it is being very limited what I can achieve at the Internet” (Interviewee A).
According to Pargament (1997), an orienting system is a system that they way of viewing and coping with the world depending on the values, general beliefs, relationships and characters. The orienting system guides our behaviours and attitudes towards life situations.

Another interview participant also states:

“I was sitting in the front of the computer to answer some mails and some questions. One day, I felt very uncomfortable. I went to hospital and the doctor said I needed to relax because I had too much stress dealing with the Internet being afraid of doing mistakes” (Interviewee C).

During the interviews, it was seen that they had both physical and mental difficulties.

Distrust

One barrier of using the Internet is distrust. One interview participant states:

“Very often I am very concerned about the security. I do not trust all the information at the Internet and I try to evaluate it by myself. Sometimes I even discuss it with others. I do not like to have any personal information or information about my credit cards at the Internet. I always want to feel safe and secure” (Interviewee A).

Another participant also states:

“There is so much advertising at the internet. Sometimes it comes to my information board and I do not trust all of it. It is very easy for people to become victims trusting everything. I feel a little afraid sometimes and it is important to avoid and go against viruses and worms” (Interviewee E).

Private issues can be important reasons why elderly people try to avoid some activities at the Internet. It might include their personal information and identity theft. The trustworthiness can also be a very important reason. They are much concerned about this. Previous research mentioned about the internet can be threat to elderly peoples’ security (Harwood, 2007; Richardson et al., 2005).

Frustration

One barrier of using the Internet is frustration. One interview participant states: “When
I want to deal with some different tasks, maybe several at the same time, I very often become confused and frustrated in the end. For example, if I have lost something at the Internet wanting to get it back again immediately, I do not know how to find it. This is very frustrating because I feel I cannot do everything I really want to” (Interviewee B). Another interview participant says:

“Technical stuff is very difficult to me because it changes all the time. New software and new layout- and it happen so fast. Very often, I have to learn by finding some new instructions at the computer. I need to spend some time at the Internet everyday. Otherwise it is very easy to get lost. I am getting really frustrated if I cannot handle it by myself” (Interviewee E).

Most interviewees like to spend some time daily at the Internet, but they are frustrated when it comes to the learning process and the use of the computer. It can take a long time for elderly to learn all the skills of using and practicing at the Internet. It might be very hard, especially in the beginning because the changes are coming very fast. According to coping theory, problem-solving skills can be good to help them. To have good problem-solving skills is a good way to overcome more trouble in the life. It can reduce behavioural problems as well (Dubow & Tisak 1989).

**Reasons behind using the Internet and coping**

There are several reasons why elderly people use the Internet. Some of these reasons are discussed above such as having access to the news, communication with friends and relatives, practical use such as paying bills and writing emails. Additional reason is avoiding social exclusion.

**Social exclusion**

“The global phenomenon of population ageing brings with it a myriad of challenges for many older people, including major economic, health and social impacts” (Pierson, 2010). Elderly people are facing different problems. Coping is described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the way we face problems and difficulties in our lives. It is also
the means we use to prevent stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). During interviews, the interviewees show that elderly people want to be socially included by the use of Internet. It is an additional way to find out information that can relate to their lives and to about other things happening in their life. Coping according to Lazarus and Lanzaier (1978) is ongoing process with oneself and the environment. It is the combination between the control acceptant and reducing the environmental and internal stress.

This is what a 77 years old woman said.

“I am very busy all the time. I only get some rest in the evening. I have many things to do and many people to meet with” (Interviewee C).

The data shows that Internet is a useful tool to feel connected and to be a part of society further more it is a practical tool for different life demands. It also shows the resilience of the people interviewed and their exuberance.

“Successful ageing, as we understand it, is based upon the concept of adaption, whereby an individual’s progress is measured by the extent to which he or she conforms to the needs of the existing society” (Andrews 1999 in Perison, 2010). Coping is a meeting point of the individual and a situation making it multi-layered and multidimensional (Pargament, 1997). This could suggest that Internet being multi-layered and multidimensional a helpful tool to reduce social exclusion. Successful ageing for elderly people also depends on their adjustment to the environmental change. By using the Internet, they can be more involved in the process.

6. Discussion

With this study, the purpose was to explore how elderly people cope with their life by using of Internet and what are their perceived benefits and barriers of the use of Internet. The qualitative method was used with face-to-face interview and e-mail correspondence. There are six interviewees participating in my whole interviews. All of them are over 65 years old and they are retired. The results collected were analysed by the coping theory and some previous research. The results show that Internet is used as practical tool for problem-solving strategy. The problem-solving strategy has been
used to solve problems in daily life and also has been used to solve technical problems in using of Internet. However the fast changing technology or even basic Internet use can become stressor. Internet use can help cope with practical problems but according to the results the Internet use can become the problem. Therefore focusing on emotional-focus coping strategy is important to try to provide support in how to use the technology and learn to cope with the stress that can be created. Internet is a great resource for information and also a good way to keep friends and family informed or connected. This study shows that the Internet is been used for example, to buy tickets showing the connection between Internet and transport. Perhaps emphasizing the benefits the Internet has to help avoid for example social exclusion. Thereby to help elderly population to avoid social exclusion to some extent, helping them to feel they are a part of the society. The sense of worth and self-esteem are strongly connected to coping strategy (Greer & Watson 1987) succeeding the new technologies enhance these feelings. Also it has been stated by the interviewees that the active Internet learning experience can be a positive destruction from daily hassles. However negative experiences has been found in the results. Physical limitation such as pains in back and neck that could be important to continue researching and find the better ways to avoid it. Distrust can be looked at as a negative behavior but also a very positive and a good thinking. We all have to be careful with the information we give on Internet whether it is about our personal life and banking information. More so previous research has mentioned that Internet can be threat to elderly people’s security (Harwood, 2007 Richardson, et al, 2005). However distrust can become a barrier in using the Internet in a practical and useful way.

Suggestions for study in the future. It could be beneficial to focus on more things in elderly people’s daily life, there are yet many things that could be useful to discover. In this study, it was common that the interviewees spoke about many other things in addition to the interview questions. Although not all information given by the interviewees was used in the research. Still it is interesting to hear.

In this study, qualitative method was used. Face-to-face interviews and e-mail correspondence was a good choice made it easier to get more personal data from the
While doing the interviews it was apparent that there was a lot of information to be gain of elderly people’s lifestyle. The interviewees shared their passion, curiosity, and happiness. Social work can benefit of learning about the strong positive sides of aging. The process of this study showed the researcher that the interviewees although coping with difficulties are also willing to help and assist in many ways. The interviewees showed a very positive and inspiring attitude.

Get back to major international social work, what international social work is. “International social work is defined as international professional action and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members. International action has four dimensions: internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, professional exchange, international practice, and international policy development and advocacy” (Healy, 2008, p10). I am from China and I did my research in Sweden. I used my different viewpoints to discover what special perspectives we have compared to Sweden. It is helpful for me to make a research with an international view and it must be very different to see how it works with different cultures and customs. I always think I am so lucky to study international social work that I can do much research to tell more people about different issues in our life. We are human beings, we are doing something that can make us much better in the future. When we make good things for other people, we are kind to ourselves at the same time. I believe everyone looks forward to having a peaceful and happy life, so what I can do is to try to find the solutions for them. I am sure our planet and our people are the most beautiful in the universe.

In my further research, I want to explore more issues about elderly people. I believe there are many needs for further research to help more people understand this population. It could be so many things happening in the daily life. For example, it can be social relationships among elderly people, the attitude of elderly people and so on. I also would like to make a comparison about elderly people between Sweden and China. It must be interesting to see what the differences and similarities are. To get more opportunities to have conversations with them more, I think it will be meaningful and
valuable to do this in my study. It will make international social work more international.
7. The reference list


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8. Appendix

Appendix 1

Chat of interviewees

<table>
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<th>Profession</th>
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</table>
Appendix 2

Questions

Part 1

Background questions:
Age:
Gender:
Profession

Part 2

Question 1
Describe your daily life and how you feel, do you satisfy with it?

Question 2
Describe how you get in contact with your friends and relatives, do you talk to them on the phone, on the Internet or meet together in the real life? What are their differences and which one do you prefer?

Question 3
How often do you use Internet every week? What do you do with Internet?

Question 4
What do you get from the Internet? Do you think it is a good way to do like this? Can you get some benefits for it and what they are? Which barriers do you think about the Internet?

Question 5
When you do something with the Internet, what do you feel during the time? Do you think Internet is your friend?

Question 6
Which kinds of information you prefer to get from Internet? Can they improve your quality of your life?