



# Group Work on the Digital Divide in Rural Elderly People Takes the X Community of Ruijin City as an Example

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**Abstract.** The development of the Internet has brought us great convenience, but the elderly have become the vulnerable groups in the digital age, and it is difficult for them to quickly integrate into the changing society. The results of the survey of the elderly in X village, Ruijin city show that the elderly in the village have difficulties in mobile phone operation, distinguishment of the true and false of network information, and understanding of mobile phone function. Therefore, it is particularly important to bridge the digital divide among the elderly through group work. In the process of intervention, six group activities were designed under the guidance of social learning theory and advantage perspective theory. The research results show that under the guidance of social learning theory and advantage perspective theory, through mutual observation and learning between group members, we achieved some results in bridging the digital gap among the elderly.

**Keywords:** Rural Elderly · Digital Divide · Group Work · Social Learning Theory · Advantage Perspective Theory

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The process of modernization has brought about the rapid development of science and technology, and the Internet is becoming more and more widely used by people. The development of the Internet promotes social progress, but causes different social consequences for different social groups. For the younger generation, they have more novel experiences and convenience. For the older generation, a digital divide is the main problem they have to face, which divides them apart from the young people. Although the number of Internet users over the age of 60 increases, the proportion of elderly Internet users is still low compared with young people. According to the Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, as of June 2020, China had 940 million Internet users, the Internet penetration rate reaching 67%, while those over 60 accounted for only 10.3%.

As a country with a high degree of aging, China has a large number of elderly people, which resulted in some social problems. Especially during the epidemic period, many elderly people lack of Internet knowledge to obtain effective epidemic prevention information, faced with the inconvenience of travel and life.

## **1.2 Purpose and Meaning of Research**

### **1.2.1 Theoretical Level**

The research on the digital divide of rural elderly groups is not only based on the digital access and use differences between urban and rural areas, but also fully considers the information integration gap between the elderly groups and youth groups, making contributions to the enrichment of social work in the digital divide of rural elderly people.

### **1.2.2 Practical Level**

Under the dual background of China's aging and the continuous development of the Internet, the scale of rural elderly groups is huge. They are unable to adapt to the new lifestyle of the Internet era. Intervening in the digital divide of the rural elderly by group work can help the rural elderly to better integrate into the information society, improve the quality of life of the elderly group in their later years, and promote active aging. At the same time, it provides reference and experience for social work in the face of other objects with digital divide phenomenon.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Research Status and Influencing Factors of the Digital Divide in the Elderly**

Zhou Yuqiong believes that the influence of subjective factors on the use of WeChat in the elderly is greater than the objective factors. As the age grows, the objective factors encountered by the elderly are bound to increase, but as long as they have a positive perception of new media subjectively, they can still cross the digital divide [1]. Huang Chenxi believes that the lack of use of information infrastructure, the low level of digital literacy and the structural tension of social transformation are the important reasons for the digital divide among the elderly [2]. Liu Shuang believes that driven by the maximization of interests, Internet commercial institutions selectively ignore the elderly group and construct discourse barriers in network culture hinder the integration of the elderly into the information society [3]. Based on the data of the 2016 Chinese elderly social tracking survey, Wang Bin analyzed the factors affecting the Internet use for the elderly in China from three perspectives of new human capital, family endowment and macro opportunities. He believes that the resource differences caused by the combination of multidimensional factors ultimately lead to the dilemma of digital integration of the elderly [4].

### **2.2 Research on Solving the Digital Divide Solution in the Elderly**

In terms of the countermeasures to bridge the digital divide among the elderly, Zhou Xiaohong put forward the concept of cultural feedback, that is, the new inheritance mode of the younger generation to pass on culture and its meaning to the living older generation, which is conducive to the older generation to better adapt to the rapidly changing modern society [5]. Liu Ruhao and Qiu Qian believe that due to their geographical location,

psychological and emotional proximity, peer groups such as friends, colleagues and neighbors can be used as a reference for imitation, form normative pressure in social circles, provide social support, and better help the elderly to bridge the digital divide [6].

### **2.3 The Social Work Intervention Research on the Digital Divide**

Social work has little research on the digital divide. Guided by the theory of social support and energy enhancement, Li Tong designed group activities to improve the learning confidence of the elderly, establish their social support, and impart knowledge as well as operation exercises in the group, achieving certain results in bridging the digital gap between the elderly [7]. In the research on social work intervention in rural women's ability to use new media, under the guidance of social learning theory and energy enhancement theory, Li Xinming conducted six targeted group activities on mobile phone use, so as to improve the use of smart phones for rural women [8].

## **3 Theoretical Principle**

### **3.1 Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory mainly discusses the influence of individual cognition, behavior, environment and the interaction between them on human behavior. Bandura believes that behavior is learned during the observation and evaluation of others' behavior. When a member is praised for some behavior, the other members will expect to receive the same praise in the future [9]. In the group, not only social workers affect the behavior of team members, but also group members influence each other. Under the guidance of team members, they learn certain operational skills from social workers and consolidate the learning results through interactive observation among team members.

### **3.2 Advantage Perspective Theory**

The advantage perspective focuses on the internal strength and superior resources of individuals, and weakens the problem awareness of the service object. In the group process, social workers should be aware that the elderly have many advantages in addition to the digital divide, such as learning potential. Therefore it is necessary to explore the learning potential of the elderly and the mutual assistance resources of the elderly group to help them better integrate into the digital age.

## **4 Research Methods**

### **4.1 Semi-structured Interview Method**

Because the concept of digital divide topic is more difficult to understand for the rural elderly, and it is inconvenient to conduct self-contained questionnaires, so the semi-structured interview method is adopted.

## **4.2 The Participation Observation Method**

The participation observation method refers to the unstructural observation made by the researcher during the daily social life of the participating subjects. The researchers should investigate the current situation of the digital divide among the elderly in X Village. As social workers as local people can participate in the production and life of the village, the investigation process is smoother and the information obtained is more authentic.

## **5 The Practical Process of the Digital Divide for the Elderly in X Village**

### **5.1 Performance of the Digital Divide Among Rural Elderly People**

Elderly people make up the majority of the village. Most young people go to big cities to study, work or do business. They are influenced by developed cities, have access to advanced information technology and receive higher education. In order to deeply understand the current situation of the digital divide of the elderly in X village, the interview of 15 elderly people in the village showed that the elderly in the village use gap and knowledge gap are apparent. Therefore, the focus of research is on bridging the use and knowledge gap.

### **5.2 Group Work is Involved in the Practical Process of the Digital Divide in the Rural Elderly**

#### **5.2.1 The First Group Activity—Meet Together**

In the first group activity, team members had a process of adapting to the group, and social workers mainly played the role of leaders and encouragement to mobilize the enthusiasm of team members. Since members were familiar with each other, the establishment of the group relationship was relatively smooth. In the progress of self-introduction, social workers have added personal advantages introduction, which is conducive to the team members to explore their own advantages and other team members' advantages. When the group contract was made, some shy old people were afraid to give their opinions. Social workers should create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere through warm-up activities in the early stage, eliminate members' doubts, and guide and encourage team members to actively express their views.

#### **5.2.2 The Second Group Activity—Change the Old Cognition**

In this group activity, from the novelty and discomfort of the group at the beginning to gradually adapting to the study of the group, the mutual assistance function of the peer group gradually emerged, and the relationship between the team members was further deepened. Besides, their attitude towards the Internet have been changed, and had a comprehensive understanding of the Internet. Social workers gradually change from a leader to a supporter and observer.

### **5.2.3 The Third Group Activity—Learn the New Operation**

In this group activity, most of the team members learned the basic operation of the mobile phone, but they were not familiar with it and often forgot how to operate it. It is required that the team members went back home to practice more. But this time the social workers did not grasp the time, in order to explain the basic operation clearly, we spent a lot of time to explain it, which was not expected in advance.

### **5.2.4 The Fourth Group Activity—New Lifestyle**

In the free practice session, team members expressed freely, learnt actively and interacted more frequently, which fully reflected the subjectivity of team members in the activities and the change of the role and identity of social workers. After the group activities in this section, the team members can use the electronic payment, and the relationship between the team members has also entered a stable period.

### **5.2.5 The Fifth Group Activity—Rumor to Identify**

By sharing the exposed rumors and summarizing the rumor characteristics, it is conducive to cultivating the team members' thinking ability and observation ability, which is better than the single explanation of social workers. The interaction and communication between peer groups can make the elderly accept more easily than the single explanation of social workers, and what the elderly learnt and experienced in the communication is also more profound. After this group activity, the team members deepened their understanding of rumors and enhanced their awareness of network security. Team members had high enthusiasm and strong participation in group activities.

### **5.2.6 The Sixth Group Activity—Better Luck Tomorrow**

In this activity, the team members realized their growth, overcame their fear of new things, and enhanced their ability to use the Internet. At the same time, the group activities also promoted the interpersonal communication of the team members and enhanced their confidence in facing challenges. In the group process, the participation of the team members is getting higher and higher, and the group relationship is constantly strengthened. The team members expressed their feelings of not giving up, and the social workers dealt with the parting mood well by guiding the team members to give wish cards to each other. In addition, social workers have set up mutual aid groups for the elderly to keep members with each other, and also help deal with the parting emotions of team members, reflecting the concept of "self-help" in social work.

## **5.3 Group Work Assessment**

In terms of evaluation, the method of combining process evaluation with result evaluation and multiple subject evaluation is adopted. The evaluation results show that under the guidance of social learning theory and advantage perspective theory, through mutual observation and learning between group members, consolidate the effect of reinforcement learning, tap the potential of service objects and environmental resources, and achieve a certain effect in bridging the digital gap among the elderly.

## **6 Conclusion and Shortcomings**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

#### **6.1.1 Advantages of Group Work Involved in the Digital Divide Among the Elderly**

First, the digital divide is a group dilemma, and people have similar problems, so the intervention of group work can maximize cost savings. The intervention of group work provides a learning platform and mutual assistance platform for the elderly. The elderly with common needs support and encourage each other in the group to improve the learning effect.

Secondly, the group work has a perfect theoretical guidance system, professional service methods, and professionally trained social workers. As a social group, the group makes the members have a sense of belonging and identity. The growth and progress of the group are also sustainable, and the service objects' learning demands for the Internet are also sustainable.

#### **6.1.2 Advantages of Social Learning Theory and Advantage Perspective Theory in Group Work**

Social learning theory is used in group work to make group members learn from each other. In the learning process, group members' interaction increases and group cohesion is also strengthened. Social workers can guide team members to learn or consolidate their learning achievements by observing and imitating how others' operation.

Social workers act as guides, listeners, and supporters, helping older people to realize their strengths and resources in the environment. Social workers actively promote the formation of mutual aid group for the elderly, pay attention to the leadership of group leaders, and enable the group to continue to play the mutual aid function after the group activities.

### **6.2 Shortcomings**

The survey was conducted from January 10 to 14, 2021. The survey objects are the residents of the researchers' village. Due to the understanding of each other, the survey process is more cooperative and the data obtained is more real. However, due to the short survey time and the small number of selected samples, it could not accurately reflect the overall situation.

Because the researchers independently completed the design of the service object for the first time and intervened in the group work practice, we were not skilled in the application of the theory. Therefore, there are still many places to be improved, and we need to constantly improve myself in the future theoretical and practical study.

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