

A Toolkit to Support Elderly with Communication Difficulties During Societal Crisis

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Communication difficulties in the elderly can be caused by hearing impairments, acquired cognitive challenges, and physical conditions affecting speech production. These difficulties impact their ability to participate in important conversations in society, both privately and with professionals in societal settings such as healthcare or crisis preparedness.

The purpose of this study was to test a toolkit designed to enable comprehension and expression for elderly individuals with communication difficulties in meetings with professionals untrained in alternative communication.

The toolkit consisted of:

- (1) Supported Communication in Adults with Aphasia (SCA),
- (2) The Talking Mats framework using picture symbols to visualize preferences and
- (3) A cognitively adapted Likert scale using picture symbols.

A speech and language pathologist used the toolkit in discussions on crisis preparedness with 16 elderly individuals with aphasia.

The results showed that the toolkit was a successful method to involve participants with varying communication abilities. It enabled them to share important insights on their experience of the COVID crisis, their weaknesses and strengths, and how they should act if a new crisis occurs.

In conclusion, the toolkit is useful in conversations with elderly individuals with communication difficulties, and the topics can be changed without affecting its usability.