

# Something instead of someone

## Older persons ambivalent feelings for freedom and surveillance in relation to Wireless Sensor Networks (WSN)

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WSN detect and respond to the activities and/or characteristics of the older person and is an ideal technology to monitor health relevant parameters such as movement, social activity, breathing, body temperature and ECG. It can also be used as Body Area Network (BAN), placed on the human body to monitor vital signs and provide information to relatives, healthcare staff or to the user him/herself.

### Aim

To identify and describe old persons' feelings for freedom and surveillance in relation to WSN.

### Method

A qualitative, descriptive and inductive study design was used based on five focus group interviews with older persons (65+) who was living in senior housing. A totally of 45 persons was included in the study.

### Analysis

Qualitative content analysis by using domains was conducted in systematic steps ending up in three categories.

### Results:

#### Independence vs. Security

Demonstrate the ambivalence between the participants' enthusiasms for feeling free and independent, but at the same times their request for security even if being watched over. They also claimed that new technology could be seen as frightening and difficult to accept at first, but in the long run it could be accepted once they got used to it. If they had to choose between greater security by use of WSN entailing greater control of their person and being more independent, the majority of the participants stated that feelings of security was most important.

*"Being secure is more important than giving up some of your privacy"*

#### Privacy vs. Intrusion

Expressed ambivalence between being private on one hand and on the other hand intrusion. If they had to choose between different kinds of surveillance they would still prefer surveillance of their health status in front of their actions but still, cameras was never stated as an option. At the same time they stated that surveillance of health status through the rapid technology innovation reduced risks but could lead to another kind of suffering, not necessarily to the better from their own perspective.

*"Of course technology can make things a lot easier ... but it can also take you back to another sort of suffering instead. That might not be better?"*

#### In the best interest of me vs. In the best interest of others

There seemed to be ambivalence between using WSN for one's own needs and using a surveillance system to satisfy others. Satisfying other's needs by being linked to surveillance systems, a feeling of fear were revealed since WSN might imply being analyzed as statistics, not as a person with individual needs. The participants stated that their experience of being aged and dependent already had implicated a reduction of not being able to maintain their identity in the same way as before. The ambivalence was again exposed regarding the technological possibilities were endless in satisfying other's control of their existence rather than satisfy one self.

*"I mean that the staff and those living at the home do not have the contact that they used to have before ... so ... you become a stranger ... you become nothing ... and, I mean, how can they care about you when they do not know who you are"*

### Conclusion:

Feelings towards WSN, from the older person's perspective, may be more complex than it first appears to be since they perceive a moral ambivalence regarding WSN. Older people require supplementary time and clearer information when learning and adapting to new technology. They seem motivated to compromise their privacy if it will certainly lead to greater safety, but desire technology that will permit maintenance of control, identity, and personality.