**Title**: Use of technology to enhance social connections, community participation and mental health for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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**Introduction**: Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have significantly lower rates of community living and participation in areas of employment, education, recreation, and social activities than both peers without IDD and those with other disabilities (Newman et al., 2011; White & Forrester-Jones 2020; Windsor et al., 2021). However, research examining technology use in young adults with IDD supports gains in daily living skills, social connection, and leisure activities through texting, video calls, and apps on a phone, tablet, and computer (Arun & Jain, 2022; Jenaro et al, 2018; Kim et al. 2021, Lancioni et al., 2020), and additionally has shown the potential for the management of mental health and well-being (Sheehan & Hassiotis, 2017). With the proliferation of technologies available at large (Johnson et al., 2023), more research is needed to understand how technology is used in daily life and how it is experienced by young adults with IDD and their families.

**Method**: Semi-structured virtual or in-person interviews were conducted with 15 dyads of young adults with IDD, most (67%) who had co-occurring autism, and one care partner (a parent or family member) as part of prototyping an eLearning tool developed to support increasing community participation skills. Participants were asked about current technology use and barriers to use and to provide comments on their experience using the eLearning tool. Study team members analyzed transcribed interviews to identify current technology use in daily life and preferences, engagement with new technology, and other emergent themes.

**Results**: Participants described using app-based technology in daily life to support their executive functioning to enable participation in daily living and community activities. Many participants reported keeping a schedule through using calendar reminders, alarms, and the notes app to make lists. Others used GPS and transit maps to navigate the community independently or with others and consulted weather apps when making plans in the community. Participants and care partners reported how technology also served an important role in fostering social connections with family and friends through messaging/texting apps, FaceTime, Zoom, and Life360. In some cases, technology was the preferred mode for participants to connect with others. Some participants noted using social media to connect with others, for example, using TikTok, Instagram, Discord and YouTube for making friends online, posting content, and talking to people with similar interests. Others had more passive connections to the broader community through these apps.

Many participants were confident in their skills in using technology for community and social purposes. Some also used technology to support their mental health. For example, they used mindfulness and emotion recognition apps. Care partners noted that given their skills in using virtual platforms and apps, this type of technology has the potential to be particularly useful for those who may have difficulties identifying and vocalizing emotions if they included familiar interactive features such as clicking and scrolling. However, some noted that additional assistance and training may be necessary for their young adult to use this technology to support their mental health needs.

**Discussion:** Findings from the current study suggest that adults with IDD use a variety of widely available free apps in multiple ways to support gains in daily activities, community participation, and social connection. These social technology skills for young adults with IDD, whether alone or with support, hold promise for future applications related to mental health and self-regulation. More research and technology development is needed on how to best leverage these skills to provide more equitable access for young adults with IDD to take an active role in managing their own mental health needs.

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