

HEALTH RESEARCH ABSTRACT SUBMISSIONS

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Name *	Ryoko Furukawa
Email *	ryoko-furukawa@uiowa.edu
Educational Level *	PhD Candidate
If Selected Other	
College *	College of Nursing
Department *	College of Nursing
Title of Research *	Maintaining Family Connectedness Using Video-Mediated Communication: An Exploratory Study
Other Authors *	Juan Pablo Hourcade, PhD (UI Department of Computer Science); Martha Driessnack, PhD, PNP-BC (UI College of Nursing)

Introduction & Purpose *

Families remain one of our most important sources of support, especially during stressful times, such as the birth of a new child or sending a child away to college. As today's families become increasingly mobile, it is often difficult to maintain a sense of family connectedness across large distances. With advances in computer-human interaction systems, including video-mediated communication (VMC), new opportunities are emerging for families trying to maintain their communication and connections. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of individuals who use VMC to communicate with distant family members.

Experimental Design *

Individuals were recruited using an internet listserve at a Midwest university. Inclusion criteria required experience using VMC with distant family members. The resultant convenience sample included 341 individuals. Each completed a web-based survey containing focused and open-ended questions about their experience with and reflections about VMC.

Results *

73% of the participants had at least one year of experience using VMC to communicate with distant family members. 60% reported using VMC at least once/week, although it was not their sole method of maintaining contact. The most common reasons cited for using VMC were its visual cues and visual-audio communication features, followed by low cost, substitution of face-to-face communication or visitation, and feeling of closeness and involvement. The most commonly cited challenges using VMC were technical issues and video quality. The participants considered family communication as important for feeling close and involved with family members and staying in touch, followed by sharing experiences, and getting support from family.

Conclusions *

Communication with distant family members is regarded as an important aspect in supporting family connectedness or cohesiveness. By substituting physical co-presence, VMC helps people feel connected with family through visual-audio perceptions despite quality and technical issues. This study provides evidence of people's acceptance of VMC as a useful tool to provide virtual co-presence.

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