

Level of health literacy and factors associated with it among school teachers in the Colombo Education Zone

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Health literacy refers to people's competencies to access, understand, judge, and apply health information in healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion.

Objective

To describe the level of health literacy and the factors associated with it among school teachers in the Colombo Education Zone.

Methods

A cross-sectional study among 502 teachers representing Colombo Education Zone measured health literacy using the self-administered version of HLS-EU translated to Sinhalese and adapted to local setting. Information on factors was through a self-administered questionnaire. The HLS-EU requires the respondent to assess own competencies to access, understand, judge and apply health information in the domains of disease prevention, healthcare and health promotion. Based on a score study participants were divided into four levels of health literacy as 'inadequate', 'problematic', 'sufficient' and 'excellent' as well as two levels as 'limited' and 'adequate'. Association of the factors with 'limited' health literacy was determined by crosstabulating and assessing their associations using chi square test. A p value of 0.05 determined the significance.

Results

The response rate was 96.5%. Mean age was 43years (SD= \pm 9.75), 81.7% (n= 410) were females and 66.1% (n=332) were graduates. Only 3.6% (n=18) were teaching health while 18.3% (n=92) were teaching science.

'Limited' health literacy was found in 32.5% (95%CI 28.4%-36.6%) while 67.5% (95%CI 63.4%-71.6%), 61.2% (95% CI 56.9% - 65.5%) and 6.4% (95%CI 4.3%-8.5%) showed 'adequate', 'sufficient' and 'excellent' levels, respectively. 'Problematic' and 'inadequate' health literacy were 31.5% (95%CI 27.4%-35.6%) and 1%(95%CI 0.1%-1.9%).

The modifiable factors associated with 'limited' health literacy were not being a member of health club/welfare group (p=0.002), having not done any special course on health (p=0.009), not getting an opportunity to participate/being exposed to a health awareness program (p=0.007), visit to a medical practitioner/ preventive health staff (p=0.049), not accessing print media to obtain general information (p=0.007), not accessing print media to obtain health information (p=0.009) and poor health knowledge (p=0.036). Non-modifiable factors were age being \leq 45 years (p=0.025) and service as a teacher being \leq 10 years (p=0.012).

Conclusions: The high proportions of 'limited' health literacy among school teachers in the Colombo Education Zone needs the attention of education and health authorities.

The interventions should consider the study findings on modifiable factors.

Key words: 'health literacy', 'factors', 'teachers'