

Background

Health literacy level is an important metric used to assess societal health status and health outcomes. A broad definition of health literacy is the ability and capacity of people to acquire, understand and interpret health-related information and making decisions upon it. Low health literacy has been linked to outcomes like treatment failure.

Aim

To determine the health literacy level of patients attending primary healthcare centres in Bahrain and whether socio-demographic factors and health status influence health literacy.

Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted at a primary healthcare center in Hamad Town in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the months of June and July 2019. Attending patients (≥ 18 years) and parents accompanying their children were approached and invited to participate in the study (**total approached = 400 patients, response rate = 77%**).

A validated structured questionnaire, the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ), was used in a face-to-face interview. The HLQ consists of nine scales: 'Feel understood and supported by healthcare provider', 'Have sufficient information to manage own health', 'Actively managing health', 'Have social support for health', 'Appraise health information', 'Ability to actively engage with healthcare providers', 'Ability to navigate the healthcare system', 'Ability to find good health information', and 'Ability to understand health information well enough to know what to do'. Sociodemographic data was also collected.

Results

Characteristics of the Participants

The mean age of participants was 35.70 years; SD, 13.77 years. Most of the participants (73.25%) were less than 45 years old and 237 (59.25%) were females. Majority (95.8%) were Bahraini nationals and, 71.8%, were married. Thirty-six percent of the population had a university degree whereas 63.8% had a secondary degree or less. Only 38% of the interviewed people were employed and the remaining were unemployed (either students, retired, housewives or unable to work).

Patients' Health Literacy Scores

Overall, the participants scored highly across all nine scales of the HLQ indicating high levels of health literacy. The highest score was for 'Reading and understanding health information enough to know what to do' (mean 4.17, SD 0.61) and lowest scores for 'Feeling understood and supported by healthcare providers' (mean 2.78, SD 0.58).

The questionnaire is composed of 2 sections. In the first section, the highest score was seen for the scale that measures the 'Social support for health' (mean 3.09, SD 0.48) and the lowest score was for 'Healthcare Provider Support' (mean 2.78, SD 0.58). In the second section, the highest score was for 'Reading and understanding health information' (mean 4.17, SD 0.61) while the lowest score was for 'Navigating the healthcare system' (mean 3.89, SD 0.65).

Despite the high literacy observed, minimal variations among demographic groups cannot be overlooked. Being male, married (regardless of gender) and age of ≥ 45 years were associated with higher scores in most scales. Those with higher education and with chronic conditions reported higher in 'Reading and understanding health information'.



Graph 1: The mean results on a scale (0-4) in which higher score indicates greater ability or more support



Graph 2: The mean results on a scale (0-5) in which higher score indicates greater ability or more support

Conclusion

This study and its findings are an important step towards gaining a better understanding of the health literacy of the population of Bahrain, whose healthcare system has been adopting towards a more patient-centred approach. Therefore, elucidating the health literacy of patients will aid in providing health care tailored to the patients' needs.

References

