

REFLECTIONS OF HEALTH LITERACY ON WOMEN HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Today is knowledge age, people are expected to interpret their disease, determine symptoms and make decisions on their health. These decisions are determined by health literacy level. Health literacy is one of the factors affecting women's health directly. A woman's health literacy is an important element in her ability to engage in health promotion and prevention activities both for herself and her children. Health literacy level provides to women be able to notice health problems, contacts a health care at the right time, treatment and follows-up to fit the situation. Women's health literacy level can effect to women at any lifecycle. These effects can be seen some conditions like taking care for prenatal period at pregnancy, duration of time to follow up at disease, screening rate for prevention of cervical cancer. Consequently, raising women health literacy level will cause to increase about taking responsibility and effect of family and community health in a positive way. Therefore, especially early childhood and also adult education should include health literacy education to improve awareness of health literacy in society.

Key words: health literacy, education, women, behaviours, awareness

INTRODUCTION

Today is knowledge age, people are expected to interpret their disease, determine symptoms and make decisions on their health. Decisions of the health care services users effect to efficiency and quality of health care. These decisions are determined by health literacy level (Balçık, Taşkaya, & Şahin, 2014). Health literacy is commonly defined that is degree to which people have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions (Manganello, 2008).

Health literacy is important issue in community health due to the effects on many people. Also, today there are very causes for important of health literacy such as rising chronic disease, negatively health results, health care costs and demand of health knowledge. Especially, women is affected due to the fact that most of them is lack of literacy skills on worldwide (Yılmazel and Çetinkaya, 2016). Determining and increasing the level of women's health literacy enables them to reach the right time, right place when they have health problems. For this reason, "health literacy" is an important issue that needs to be addressed in terms of women's health. Aim of this review is to emphasize the impact of health literacy on women's health and the issue of improving and improving the level of health literacy in women.

HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy is commonly defined as 'the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions' (Manganello, 2008).

People who has high health literacy level can apply health care services on the time, understand their health conditions and implement suggestions well due to rightly understand to doctor (Taş and Akış, 2016). However, health literacy isn' t only using of services, but also it is connected with development of health, positive health behaviours and early diagnoses of disease (Table 1) . If, health literacy level is inadequate level, it causes poorer health status, lack of knowledge about medical care and medical conditions, decreased comprehension of medical information, lack of understanding and use of preventive services, poorer self-reported health, poorer compliance rates, increased hospitalizations, and increased health care costs (Andrus, & Roth, 2002).

Table 1. Subdimensions of health literacy as defined by the conceptual model

Health literacy	Access or obtain information relevant to health	Understand information relevant to health	Appraise, judge or evaluate information relevant to health	Apply or use information relevant to health
Health care	1) Ability to access information on medical or clinical issues	2) Ability to understand medical information and derive meaning	3) Ability to interpret and evaluate medical information	4) Ability to make informed decisions on medical issues
Disease prevention	5) Ability to access information on risk factors	6) Ability to understand information on risk factors and derive meaning	7) Ability to interpret and evaluate information on risk factors	8) Ability to judge the relevance of the information on risk factors
Health promotion	9) Ability to update oneself on health issues	10) Ability to understand health-related information and derive meaning	11) Ability to interpret and evaluate information on health-related issues	12) Ability to form a reflected opinion on health issues

Source: World Health Organization (WHO). 2016. Health literacy. The solid facts. *World*.

Health literacy includes 12 subdimensions related to competencies of accessing, understanding, appraising and applying health-related information within health care, disease prevention and health promotion settings. The model can serve as a basis for interventions to enhance health literacy and capture the dimensions of health literacy within health care, disease prevention and health promotion settings (WHO, 2016) (Figure 1).

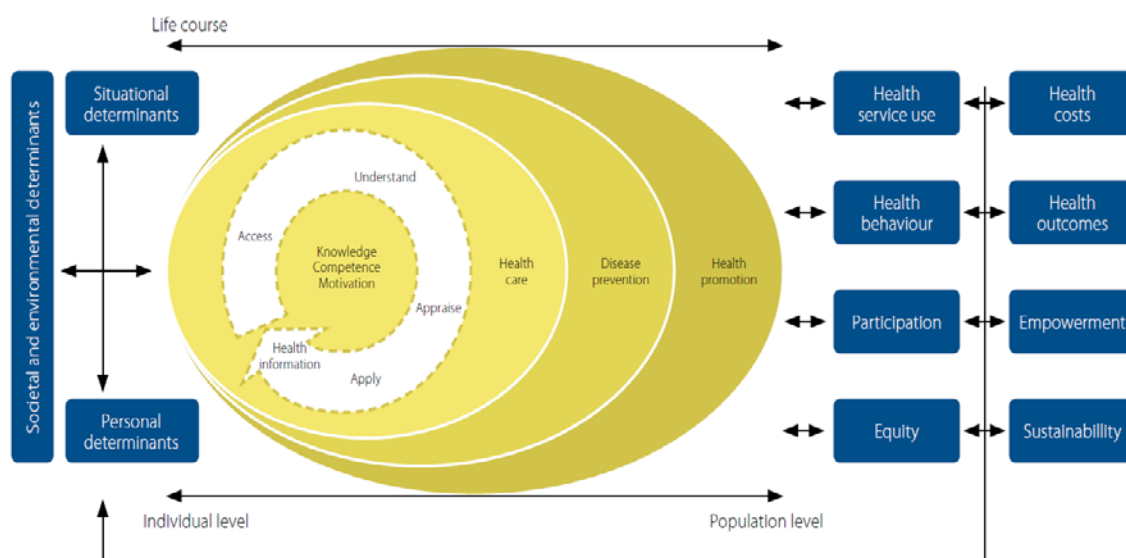


Figure 1. Conceptual model of health literacy of the European Health Literacy Survey

Source: World Health Organization (WHO). 2016. Health literacy. The solid facts. *World*.

Health literacy level is affected individual features such as demographic, cultural and psychological factors, the illness-related experiences and the factors are related to the health care system (Sorensen et al., 2012). These individual features can adversely affect level of health literacy at some conditions. When people have low level of health literacy, it can lead to failure of controlling disease, increasing in the occurrence of complications, reduction in quality of life, dissatisfied with the service, reduction of participate in screening programs. Moreover, low level of health literacy can decrease using of preventive health services, so this can cause to increase health problems and treatment of problems (Egbert and Nanna, 2009).

EFFECT OF HEALTH LITERACY ON WOMEN HEALTH

Health literacy is one of the factors affecting women's health directly. A woman's health literacy is an important element in her ability to engage in health promotion and prevention activities both for herself and her children. An inadequate understanding of health care information will lead to less informed decisions for women, so this condition cause to decrease satisfaction of health care outcomes for herself and her family (Shieh, & Halstead, 2009). Health literacy level provides to women be able to notice health problems, contacts a health care at the

right time, treatment and follows-up to fit the situation. Women's health literacy levels lead to notice of health problems at an early stage by contacting with health organizations (Gönenç, 2015).

Women's health literacy level can effect to women at any lifecycle. When, literature was searched about effect of health literacy on women health, it was found that studies were especially interested with effect of health literacy on pregnancy and cervical cancer.

Maternal health literacy is a skill to diagnose the dangerous symptoms of the pregnancy period, the method of a healthy life and the suitable nutrition in pregnancy period. Literacy or educational levels help them to understand when to start antenatal clinics, attend nutritional classes for health education, health talks and immunization programmes organized for them by the midwives and nurses. Also, literacy levels of the pregnant women helps them to understand danger signs in pregnancy, take adequate care of themselves and adhere to the advice given to them by the midwives and nurses during the antenatal clinics, which help them to experience healthy and safe pregnancy (Mojoyinola, 2011).

Health literacy also prepares women to manage decisions during pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnant women with low health literacy have less pregnancy-related knowledge and poorer health behaviors. They also have less knowledge about prenatal screening tests for birth defects and the effects of smoking on the fetus. Cho et. al. (2007) stated that patients with low health literacy are more likely to demonstrate inadequate understanding of prenatal screening tests. Also, the one factor that was associated with an impaired understanding was a patient's level of education. So, we can see effect of education level is important individual factors for health literacy level. There are significant relationship between women's health literacy and taking care for prenatal period, also to be healthy pregnant (Arnold et al., 2001). One study showed that there is an association between mother's functional health literacy and the likelihood of initiating and sustaining breastfeeding of her infant. These results call for more awareness in the health care community of the needs many patients have for simpler health education materials (Kaufmann et al., 2001).

During pregnancy, most women consider that medications they take may harm their fetus. The label of medications used in pregnancy can also influence the perception of teratogenic risk and shape their decision about need to medication during pregnancy. One study found that low-health literacy women has higher risk perception for medications and more negative beliefs about medication. This study stated that health literacy was significantly associated with maternal health behaviors regarding medication non-adherence (Lupattelli, Picinardi, Einarson, & Nordeng, 2014). However, high level of health literacy can sometimes effect negatively people. One study was made with first-time mothers over 35 years found that mothers had information based dilemma due to high level of health literacy. Most of them stated that they were made anxious by knowing such detail and found it difficult to focus on even positive odds. This important phenomena of over-consumption of health information, combined with poor comprehension, gives rise to a tendency towards even greater anxiety and over-pathologizing by mothers (Carolan, 2007).

The effect of health literacy level can be seen later life period for women. Health literacy are important for patients with cancer, as key information regarding treatment complications and clinical trials is often imparted using written educational material. One study explained that there are relationship between health literacy and health behaviors related to cervical cancer prevention in an effort to address concerns about low rates of screening and follow-up in vulnerable populations. Low literacy was thought as a barrier to prevention of disease and efforts screening cervical cancer screening efforts (Bennet, Switzer, Aguirre, Evans, & Barg, 2001). Lindau, Basu and Leitsch (2006) stated that low literacy are significantly more likely to fail to present for follow-up among women with abnormal Pap smear. The study showed that high school education level is a significant predictor of duration of time to follow up. Low literacy may have a significant effect on cervical cancer screening efforts. Also, low literacy level associated with increased levels of distress among women at high risk for developing cervical cancer due to that distress serves as a barrier to treatment, culturally informed, effective interventions are needed (Sharp, Zurawski, Roland, Toole, & Hines, 2002). In another study that assessed the health literacy of women, it was found that women with low health literacy are less likely to have had a mammography. In this study, approximately 50% of the women had low health literacy levels who were described as functionally inadequate (Guerra, Krumholz, & Shea, 2004). As similarly, Turkey's general health literacy in women was significantly lower. Mammography (28.7%) and pap smear scanning (18%) was very low. Women with over age 65 make osteoporosis screening with rate 32.5% (Tanrıöver, Yıldırım, Ready, Çakır, & Akalın, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Consequently, raising women health literacy level will cause to increase about taking responsibility and effect of family and community health in a positive way. It will affect to early realize deterioration of their health status, so be able to apply for a health care professional. In addition, higher level of women's health literacy provide to accurate identification of health problems, correctly understand health-related applications and documents, so they will enable to treat (Gönenç, 2015). This study shows that the level of health literacy directly effect women

health. For this reason, it is thought to be important of development women's health literacy level for promoting women health.

The development of health literacy in the community can not be achieved only through the efforts of individuals or the health sector, which requires a multi-sectoral approach. The development of health literacy can be achieved through the joint efforts of various parties such as the education sector, non-governmental organizations, the academic environment, the media and the communication sector and the business community. However, it should be kept in mind that the main determinant of health literacy is the general level of education (Bilir, 2014). Also, it is suggested that approaches are recommended by World Health Organization (WHO) (2016) to improve awareness of health literacy in society must be used. These approaches are;

- Health literacy education should be given at early childhood period.
- The concept of improving health education should be developed during school education.
- Cope with methods must be developed for potential obstacles during adult education.
- Multidirectional programmes must be made according to the features and capabilities of individuals.
- Participants training methods should be used. Training should not be construed as "expression and listening". Participants also actively involved in the educational process.
- In terms of both health and sense of well-being respect both of teaching methods developments, new method and concept should be monitored and applied.

Brief biography of each author

Ayse Deliktas is a research assistant. She has doctorate programme at department of Obstetric and Gynaecological Nursing. She is interested with nursing education and research methods especially in women health. Oznur Korukcu is assistant professor at department of Obstetric and Gynaecological Nursing. She is interested with psychological health of women. Kamile Kukulu is professor at department of Obstetric and Gynaecological Nursing. Also, she is interested with psychosomatic obstetric and other lifecycle of women such as menopause.

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