

Corona-specific health literacy: a longitudinal study in the German-speaking part of Switzerland

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Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by an infodemic, i.e. a flood of conflicting information through numerous channels and mis-/disinformation. To cope with these challenges and to make sound health-decisions, people need skills that enable them to access, understand, appraise, and use health-related information, i.e. adequate health literacy (HL). Thus, the present study investigates how people in the German-speaking part of Switzerland handle with Corona-specific information, what their difficulties are and what potential improvement measures could be.

Methods:

Three representative samples of 1'000 individuals each were interviewed online in early summer, autumn and winter 2020 using a modified version of the HLS-EU-Q16 questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive methods and an index for Corona-specific HL was built.

Results:

In early summer, 55% of the German-speaking Swiss population reported adequate Corona-specific HL, with a tendency to increase with the duration of the pandemic (autumn: 62%; winter: 63%). Nonetheless, a great proportion reported difficulties, especially with assessing the trustworthiness of information from the media. With the progress of the pandemic, participants felt less informed and the proportion of (very) poorly informed increased from 8% in early summer to 16% in winter 2020.

Conclusions:

Participants often found it difficult to assess the trustworthiness of information on COVID-19 and to derive consequences for their own behavior. Hence, it is important that all relevant stakeholders such as health organizations, authorities and media support the population with tools to facilitate the use of health information and to empower them to take responsibility for their own health as well as for their community.

Key messages:

- People need adequate HL to handle the amount and complexity of COVID-19-related information.
- Relevant stakeholders need to take over responsibility to empower the population and to enhance their HL.