The European Health Literacy Survey

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Health literacy: Improving Health, Health Systems, and Health Policy Around the World
New York Academy of Medicine; September 24, 2012
The European Health Literacy Project

2009-2012
Measuring health literacy in Europe: HLS-EU-Q – in a nutshell

• Measuring health literacy in populations
• A conceptually based tool
• Developed by a multinational group of researchers
• Broad scope of health: Healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion
Measuring health literacy in Europe: HLS-EU-Q – in nutshell

• The tool is content & context specific (Nutbeam, 2008) and measures the fit/relation of personal/individual competences, expectations and experiences versus situational/contextual demands/expectations/complexities (Parker, 2009).

• Three versions: HLS-EU-Q86; HLS-EU-Q47 and HLS-EU-Q16

• Translated to 10 languages, more in progress

• Applied in the HLS-EU survey plus in additional studies, more in progress
HLS-EU definition

Health literacy is linked to literacy and it entails people’s knowledge, motivation and competencies to access, understand, appraise and apply information to form judgment and take decisions in everyday life in terms of healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain and improve quality of life during the life course.

Sørensen et al. 2012
HLS-EU Conceptual model

Sørensen et al. 2012

Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences
"On a scale from very easy to very difficult, how easy would you say it is to .... “very difficult” – “difficult” – “easy” – “very easy”, (don’t know)"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health literacy matrix (examples of items)</th>
<th>Health promotion</th>
<th>Disease prevention</th>
<th>Healthcare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access/obtain</td>
<td>find information on healthy activities such as exercise, healthy food and nutrition?</td>
<td>find information on vaccinations and health screenings, that you should have?</td>
<td>find information about symptoms that concern you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>understand information on food packaging?</td>
<td>understand why you should need health screenings?</td>
<td>understand your doctor’s or pharmacist’s on how to take prescribed medicine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraise</td>
<td>judge how where you live affects your health and well-being?</td>
<td>judge when you should go to a doctor for a health check-up?</td>
<td>judge how information from your doctor applies to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>make decisions to improve your own health?</td>
<td>decide if you should have a flu vaccination?</td>
<td>follow the instructions on medication?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HLS-EU-Q scale

47 items converted to a 50 point scale indicating four levels of health literacy

- **Inadequate level:** 0-25 pts.: **50%** (1/2)
- **Problematic level:** >25 to 33 pts.: **66%** (2/3)
- **Sufficient:** >33 to 42 pts: **80%** (5/6)
- **Excellent:** >42 to 50 pts.: **top 20%** (<5/6)
General health literacy: 47% on average with problematic or inadequate levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Excellent HL</th>
<th>Sufficient HL</th>
<th>Problematic HL</th>
<th>Inadequate HL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE*</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*only NRW
Health literacy and age in the HLS-EU study
In general a strong social gradient in the HLS-EU study.
Health Literacy and Self Perceived Health in the HLS-EU study
The role of health literacy in improving health, health systems, and health policy in Europe

- Health literacy is a challenge in Europe
- It is content and context specific, it varies across countries
- European collaboration is an asset
- National and local solutions are needed
- Policy strategies should be enhanced at all levels