

Health Literacy in Childhood and Adolescence (HLCA) as a Target for Health Promotion and Primary Prevention - The German HLCA consortium

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Recent research into definitions and concepts of health literacy has widened the meaning from individual functional skills in medical word recognition, text comprehension, and numeracy to other skills required to access, appraise and use health information. Current integrative health literacy concepts put a stronger focus on underlying competences and motivation and therefore encompass social and life skills. In addition, the widened understanding of health literacy has also been recognized for its quality to shift the focus from individual-level skills to social, economic, or environmental forces that have impact on health at population- and system-levels. The recent conceptual developments make health literacy a promising target for health promoting and primary prevention because they a) allow for integrating behavioural and contextual factors, b) can be linked to related approaches from e.g. social epidemiology or socialisation research, and c) serve for the development of measurement tools to assess dimensions other than those that are usually used to inform on health literacy levels in populations.

So far children and adolescents have poorly been included into health literacy research. Health literacy theoretical models also implicitly target rather adults than younger age groups. Only little information is available for children and adolescents and gaps encompass e.g. definitions, concepts and models refined for different age groups, the formulation of needs of and demands on health literacy for children and adolescents, or for adults who impact on child health. This contrasts with the importance given to children and adolescents for health promotion and primary prevention.

Here, we present the German "Health Literacy in Childhood and Adolescence - HLCA" consortium that was launched to meet the needs as outlined above. The consortium aims to research into health literacy in childhood and adolescence by developing, adjusting, implementing, and evaluating theoretical, conceptual, and methodological health literacy approaches linked to children and adolescents. The consortium aims to target not only children and adolescents, but also adults and systems with impact on child development. We will focus on mental health, ehealth literacy and media education with a strong focus on socially disadvantaged children. We target electronic media as a source of communication with high importance for child and youth health development twofold: with a cluster randomized trial on the effectiveness of a brief parent oriented intervention to reduce screen media use in children and with ethnographic studies on health associated internet usage of youth migrants.

The HLCA consortium consists of three work blocks: Basic research (WB1); applied research on mental health literacy (WB2) and media/e-Health literacy (WB3). There are two regional clusters: WB2 will be implemented in North Rhine-Westphalia, WB3 in Baden-Württemberg. A Steering Committee will act as supervisory body and will be responsible for assuring and monitoring of the consortium's progress and for the implementation of a quality assuring process. The HLCA-Consortium will be funded by the German Ministry for Research & Education within the framework "Consortia in Primary Prevention and Health Promotion"

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