

Health information seeking and information encountering of female undergraduates: a pilot study at University of Moratuwa

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Abstract

Health literacy can be explained as one's ability to obtain process and understand health information and services to enable sound health decision making. A healthy population is an asset to any country and directly related to the economic growth and development. Health literacy is fundamentally important to maintain a population's health. A national survey on emerging issues among adolescents, recognized health literacy as a life skill since adolescence has recently gained recognition as a critical phase of life. On the other hand, health literacy as a life skill will have a greater impact on adult health. Undergraduates just passed adolescence will be future leaders of the society and female undergraduates will be future mothers in the community. This study was conducted as a part of a research on prevention and control of breast cancer and explored the health information seeking and information encountering behaviour of female undergraduates of the University of Moratuwa. Adopting the survey method, a semi- structured questionnaire was developed as the research instrument and consisted of 4 parts namely socio demographic data, knowledge on breast cancer, knowledge on screening of breast cancer and information seeking behaviour. Questionnaires were randomly distributed among 245 female undergraduates of three faculties of the University of Moratuwa who were willing to participate in the survey. Of 245 respondents, 95 undergraduates belonged to the Faculty of Architecture; 71 undergraduates belonged to the Faculty of Engineering and 79 undergraduates belonged to the Faculty of Information Technology. Though health literacy is not a novel concept majority of the respondents were not aware about it. Only a few participants were able to explain the concept of health literacy. Majority of the respondents understood that health education was vital

to university undergraduates and expressed the desire that such information be available the university library. However, only 19 students have used university library to find health-related information. Most of the female undergraduates preferred to maintain a personal collocation on health related aspects. Participants also believed that University library did not have information on health aspects and the available collection was out-dated. Of 245 respondents, 191 undergraduates believed that the Internet provided latest information on health aspects. Social media such as Facebook has been rated as the best option to educate users on health literacy. However, 98 students frequently got information from Medical Officers. On the other hand, health information seeking through television programmes was also common. In addition, most of the participants obtained health related information through magazines and newspapers dedicated for women. Majority of the female undergraduates who participated were not concerned about their health at the younger age since there were many other burning issues besetting undergraduates. In conclusion, female undergraduates accepted the fact that health education was vital in the university setup as undergraduates were future leaders. Regular awareness programmes to educate undergraduate about health aspects is recommended along with developing library collection related to health literacy.

Keywords: *Health Literacy, Information Seeking Behaviour, Information Encountering, Academic Libraries*