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The e-Health literacy in rural areas in Saudi Arabia

Wadi Alonazi

King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Background: The e-Health literacy refers to the ability to access, utilize and employ health information from available electronic sources. The aim of the availability of such resources is to build-up cognitive domains in one hand and may contribute in maintaining health and well-being throughout the individual life process on the other hand. Improving such availability may overcome some health-related barrier resources especially in rural areas where running effective health promotion programs is basically very limited. The main objective of this study was to measure the level of e-Health literacy among students attending high schools in a northern rural area of Saudi Arabia (SA).

Methods: Participants are high school students in an isolated geographically area of "Arar" in the upper of SA. Initially, a focus group was conducted among boys and girls. Another group included computer teachers in Arar. The aim of the first stage was to gain insights from the students and their teachers regarding health concerns and views of contemporary paradigms. Based on the first stage outcomes, a survey was conducted among 330 students to acquire their various practices for diverse health activities and behaviors, level of e-health literacy, level of interest in available health information and teachers' supervision of the internet applications in classes. Transcribed data were analyzed employing grounded theory. For the survey, major demographic characteristics, descriptive and inferential analysis were used. Factor analysis was performed to identify the essential variables associated with the level of e-Health literacy.

Results: Girls were less confident about their ability to find effective and accurate health information online than their boy counterparts. Survey results indicated that for predicting e-health literacy, interest in learning about health issues plays a significant role. Expectedly, those (boys and girls) who use the internet for browsing only were likely to have a lower level of e-health literacy than those who use it for other purposes. New e-health factors were associated with literacy.

Conclusions: Psychological, infectious disease and current health issues were common topics identified among both genders but female were concerned with cosmetic subjects. Arabic health research engine may increase the e-health literacy. To improve students' e-health literacy, it is imperative to address new generation hunches.

waalonazi@ksu.edu.sa

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