

TeCoMo Developing Theories, Concepts and Models for Health Literacy in Childhood and Adolescence

Results of the systematic literature review

The systematic literature review (see ZPI Brief 05/2015, first work package) was applied to depict the current understanding of health literacy in the target group children and adolescence (<18). Especially when emphasizing to what extent existing conceptualizations deal with unique needs and characteristics of children and adolescence, this approach was very helpful.

Method: Six bibliographic databases were systematically searched with relevant search terms in English and German. An analysis of definitions and models was undertaken to compare and synthesize the various dimensions retrieved from the literature along the multiple meta-categories identified. After the search identified N=1492 publications, duplicates were removed, and abstracts screened by applying the eligibility criteria. 32 articles were selected for a four step content analysis.

Results: The systematic review of the literature identified twelve definitions and 21 models that have been specifically developed for children and young people. In the literature, health literacy in children and young people is described as comprising variable sets of key dimensions, each appearing as a cluster of related abilities, skills, commitments, and knowledge that enable a person to approach health information competently and effectively and to derive at health-promoting decisions and actions.

- Health literacy turns out to be very divers, contextual and depends on the complexity of tasks considered. Therefore broad concepts are difficult to operationalize and measure.
- HL is prominently defined as a combination of personal skills and “assets” with relevance for the individual, the community and society.
- HL also varies, according to their focus (skills- vs. topic/task-focused) and perspective (individual vs. societal) taken. Also various antecedents and several consequences/effects were recognized.
- Moreover, health literacy is conceptualized as an action competence, with a strong focus on personal attributes, while recognizing its interrelatedness with social and contextual determinants.
- Life phase specificities are mainly considered from a cognitive developmental perspective, leaving children and adolescent’s specific needs, vulnerabilities, and social structures poorly incorporated within most concepts and therefor need to be problematized.
- While a critical number of definitions and concepts were identified for the adolescent population or secondary school students, similar findings are lacking for children under the age of ten or within a primary school context. There is also a lack of clarity regarding the differentiation to HL in adults

Further proceedings should consider the importance of the developmental stages of children, especially because younger children are more dependent on their parents which can have an effect on their health literacy. How should an understanding of health literacy in children and adolescents look like, which components and target-group specific aspects would need to be considered?

If interested, the following link will provide you with more information:

http://www.hlca-consortium.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IUHPE-2016_Poster_TeCoMo.pdf

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