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## Review Article

# Exploring health knowledge: An extensive review of information seeking behaviors, health literacy, and the relevance of libraries and community resources

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## ABSTRACT

The complicated interactions between health literacy, health information-seeking behaviors, and the vital roles that libraries and community resources play are all explored in detail in this comprehensive examination. Underscoring the importance of well-informed decision-making and enhanced health outcomes, the research delves into many models, such as the "Health Belief Model" and the "Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills Model". Factors impacting health information seeking, such as psychological variables and socioeconomic status, highlight the challenges in meeting the requirements of a varied community.

The multifaceted character of health literacy is investigated, including aspects such as the quality of educational resources and the influence on patient outcomes. Libraries, which have evolved into vital health information centers, serve critical roles in disseminating trustworthy information. Collaboration between libraries and community services has been shown to dramatically advance health literacy levels.

The analysis finds links between health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the functions of libraries and community resources. Budget limits coexist with the potential opportunities for leveraging technology and collaborative approaches for enhanced health information services. Practical implications emphasize recommendations for policymakers, librarians, and community organizations to improve health literacy programs.

The findings emphasize the constant adaptation required to satisfy the changing needs of the healthcare sector. Future studies should focus on evaluating the influence of innovative library programs, community initiatives, and emerging technology on health literacy outcomes. This study serves as a basic resource for policy and strategy development to promote health literacy on a larger scale.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background and context

Access to reliable and intelligible health information is essential for promoting informed decision-making and improving health outcomes.<sup>1,2</sup> However, the many methods by which people seek and perceive health information

provide difficulties for both researchers and practitioners.<sup>3,4</sup> Recognizing this complication, the present analysis intends to investigate health information-seeking behavior, with a particular emphasis on the roles of libraries and community resources in improving health literacy.

### 1.2. Objectives of the review

The principal aims of this systematic review are to attain a thorough synthesis of the existing literature regarding

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the behavior of seeking health information, clarify the aspects of health literacy, and evaluate the vital roles that libraries and community resources play in supporting these endeavors. The following specific objectives serve as the foundation for this review:

1. *Synthesize current knowledge:* Conduct a comprehensive assessment and synthesis of current research on the behavior of people seeking health information.
2. *Elucidate health literacy elements:* Provide a deep examination and elucidation of the different elements comprising health literacy.
3. *Evaluate and analyze the contributions of libraries and community resources:* Evaluate and analyse the key contributions played by libraries and community resources in promoting both health information-seeking behavior and health literacy.
4. *Align with overarching goals:* Align the review with the overarching objective of improving health literacy research on a larger scale.
5. *Provide insights to help design effective strategies:* Provide information to support the development of tactics that successfully encourage health literacy across a variety of demographic groups.

### 1.3. Conceptual framework

The study is guided by a conceptual framework that encompasses key elements of health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the importance of libraries and community resources.<sup>3</sup> This framework acts as a lens of theoretical inquiry through which we evaluate current literature, connecting different perspectives to develop an integrated understanding of the dynamic interactions in the health information ecosystem.



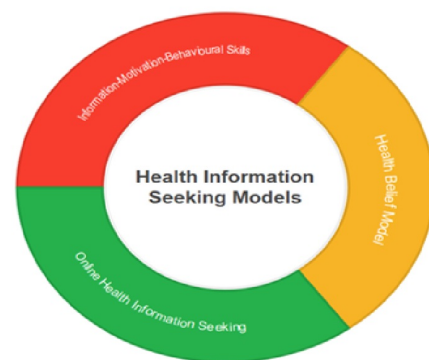
**Figure 1:** Understanding the concept of health knowledge

The outline (Figure 1) provides a breakdown of the main topics and subtopics related to health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the significance of libraries and community resources.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Models of health information seeking

Health information-seeking behavior is a complicated process impacted by a variety of circumstances, requiring a nuanced knowledge for successful healthcare procedures. Two important models that are integrated with online health information seeking in Figure 2 are the “Health Belief Model” and the “Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills Model.” These models reveal valuable insights into the psychological and environmental processes that influence an individual’s interactions with health information. This literature review summarizes recent studies that make use of these models, shedding light on the diverse nature of health information-seeking behavior.



**Figure 2:** Models of health information seeking

1. *Information-motivation-behavioral skills model:* Using the Longo Model, Nader et al. studied the impact of individual characteristics on the health information-seeking behavior of infertile couples undergoing assisted reproductive technologies.<sup>5</sup> Their findings highlight the value of customized interventions and add to the expanding body of research using the “Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills Model” in specific healthcare contexts. Jing et al. extended the Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills Model’s applicability to older persons in long-term care institutions, concentrating on nutrition-related information acquisition behaviors.<sup>6</sup> This research advances the understanding of how this model can be tailored to other demographic groups, showing the possibility for personalized health promotion programs.
2. *Health belief model:* Using a model based on protection motivation theory, A Alhemimah investigated the effects of COVID-19 on travelers’ intentions to travel and their search for travel health information.<sup>7</sup> This study emphasizes the Health Belief Model’s flexibility to modern health concerns,

proving its relevance in analysing information-seeking behavior in the context of a worldwide pandemic. Zhao et al. explored the use of the "Health Belief Model" and "Social Support Theory" to investigate people with chronic diseases' internet searches for health information.<sup>8</sup> The study contributes to the refining of the Health Belief Model by providing useful insights into the interaction of individual beliefs and societal influences in determining health information-seeking behavior.

3. *Online health information seeking*: Online health information seeking (OHIS) has grown in popularity, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has its own set of influencing variables and behavioral models.<sup>9</sup> The quality, trustworthiness, and usability of the information, as well as instrumental variables such as the growth of information and communication technology, are determinants of online health information seeking.<sup>10</sup> Information overload from searching several sources for information might cause information anxiety and, ultimately, information avoidance.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, by considering individual characteristics, prior experiences, and outside factors, these models offer a solid framework for developing tailored healthcare interventions. The results underscore the necessity of tailoring strategies to reduce inequalities in health information accessibility and promote informed decision-making.

### 2.2. Factors influencing health information seeking

The behavior of individuals seeking health information is influenced by an array of factors, such as cultural influences, socioeconomic status, and personal characteristics. Elucidate health literacy aspects gives a thorough appraisal of the many components of health literacy. Comprehending these factors is crucial in personalising interventions to address the heterogeneous requirements of distinct demographics.

Psychosocial determinants, which include cognitive elements, personality characteristics, demographics, and environmental aspects, are factors that impact the behavior of seeking health information.<sup>12,13</sup> Furthermore, socioeconomic characteristics influence how people seek out health information and how much they trust the providers of such information.<sup>14</sup> According to Chang and Huang, several important variables affect people's behavior when searching out health information, including self-efficacy, availability, credibility, health literacy, emotional reaction, and subjective standards.<sup>15</sup> Online health information's quality, reliability, and usefulness are the main elements influencing people's decision to look for it; instrumental factors have a greater influence than psychological ones.<sup>10</sup> It has been discovered that

utilising the Internet for health(care)-related reasons is significantly influenced by personal, health-related, and cognitive aspects.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3. Dimensions of health literacy

Designing strategies that effectively meet the different information demands of individuals requires an understanding of the multidimensional nature of health literacy. According to Paakkari and Okan, there are several dimensions of health literacy, such as functional, interactive, and critical literacy.<sup>17</sup>

Health literacy is a complex concept with numerous dimensions that are essential to a thorough comprehension. The aspects of health literacy that must be taken into account for a literature review are 1) Quality and readability of educational resources.<sup>18,19</sup> 2) The effect of health literacy on outcomes as reported by patients.<sup>20</sup> 3) Associations between socioeconomic determinants of health and health literacy.<sup>21</sup> 4) The impact of health literacy on patient expectations and satisfaction before and after surgery.<sup>22</sup> 5) The importance of health literacy in decision-making, symptom management, and treatment adherence. 6) The connection between health literacy and general health outcomes, such as the development of the body, mind, and emotions. 7) The significance of digital health literacy and further disparities in children's and teenagers' health status.

### 2.4. The role of libraries and community resources

Public libraries are evolving into essential centers for the dissemination of health information, offering a wealth of resources and services. In conjunction with community-based initiatives such as outreach programs and health seminars, these institutions contribute significantly to promoting health literacy levels.<sup>23</sup> Halder and Jana underlined the opportunity to contribute to a knowledge-based society, and it gives insights into the multidimensional nature of libraries and the changing landscape of the LIS profession.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 3:** Role of library and community resources

The multifaceted role that libraries and community resources play in influencing health literacy and information-seeking behavior is shown in Figure 3. Their varied contributions to the advancement of general health knowledge are examined in the following analysis.

#### 2.4.1. *Role of librarian in health information access*

Librarians regularly participate in providing information literacy training to healthcare professionals, guaranteeing that evidence-based information sources are utilized as efficiently as possible throughout medical operations and patient care management systems.<sup>25</sup> They collaborate with healthcare practitioners to promote digital and health literacy by offering targeted instruction and information.<sup>26</sup>

Librarians are involved in both helping to improve healthcare procedures and supporting the behavior of seeking out health information. In his seminal research, Halder examined the current situation of the “Library and Information Science (LIS)” field.<sup>27</sup> His work highlights the multifaceted roles that LIS specialists perform and provides insightful information about how dynamic the field is in the contemporary setting.

Librarians contribute to new roles in health literacy, patient education, and consumer health by using their unique abilities, to address the broad skill set necessary in the healthcare sector.<sup>28</sup> Librarians additionally support healthcare providers and people who are depressed by giving relevant, accurate, and up-to-date information. This effort intends to raise depressed people’s knowledge and comprehension, as well as improve healthcare service.<sup>29</sup> Librarians in health sciences libraries are actively developing positions to teach and cooperate on health informatics and health data. This includes making data assets and software tools easier to access, manage, and utilize for health professions students, professors, and staff.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.4.2. *Advancing health equity through libraries*

In-depth insights into the function of libraries in promoting health equity are offered by Wilson et al., which advances our knowledge of such functions. Their evaluation of the literature adds to our understanding of how to address health disparities and ensure that everyone has fair access to healthcare resources.<sup>31</sup>

#### 2.4.3. *Specialized library initiatives*

The study conducted by Lin et al. centers on the function of libraries in augmenting eHealth literacy within the elderly population, providing insight into the possible benefits of libraries in advancing health literacy within this population.<sup>32</sup> Franzen and Sharkey give a case study on the impact of embedded librarianship on the information skills of undergraduate nursing students, illustrating the impact of library services on promoting information literacy among

students.<sup>33</sup>

Rivera presents a case study on the deployment of a mobile application for library resources in an academic setting, providing insightful information on how technology may be leveraged to enhance library services and resources.<sup>34</sup> Edwards and Gilroy evaluate quality outcomes in library and knowledge services, highlighting the need to ensure library and knowledge service quality in the healthcare sector.<sup>35</sup>

#### 2.4.4. *Impact assessment of health library and knowledge services*

A strategic planning and improvement process requires an evaluation of the influence that health libraries and knowledge services have on the healthcare system.

The validity of generic questionnaires is emphasized by Urquhart and Brettle in assessing the contribution of health libraries and knowledge services, both separately and together.<sup>36</sup> Their validation research of a general impact survey provides a strong instrument for evaluating the efficacy of these services, adding to the evidence base in health information and libraries.

Service gaps in the advocacy and marketing of library services are identified by Siemensma, Clayworth and Pitman.<sup>37</sup> The information gathered from their study forms the basis for strategic planning goals and enhances management’s understanding of the library’s influence. This emphasizes the need for strategic planning and advocacy in optimising the contribution of health libraries to the entire healthcare environment.

#### 2.4.5. *Trends in chat reference services*

The development of chat reference services in medical libraries is examined, emphasising historical trends and current significance. Dee investigates historical patterns in chat reference services, providing useful insights into the growth of these services in medical libraries.<sup>38</sup> Clanton, Staggs, and Williams review a chat reference service at the University of South Alabama for distance education students studying biological sciences.<sup>39</sup> The study found that chat reference services were well received by both the target population and other users, indicating the importance of chat reference services in satisfying the information demands of varied user groups. This assessment provides important insights into the efficacy of chat reference services in certain educational environments.

Sze highlights the growing relevance of chat reference services in libraries that offer remote support.<sup>40</sup> The effectiveness of these services is determined by aspects such as personnel and training, emphasising the importance of ongoing development and adaptability to meet the changing expectations of users in the digital era.

#### 2.4.6. *Psychological factors in health information seeking behavior*

Ishtiaq, Butt, and Siddiqi investigate the relationship between anxiety, personality factors, and health information-seeking behavior (HISB) during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>41</sup> Their research indicates a link between personality features, information-seeking anxiety, and HISB, offering light on the psychological aspects that influence health information-seeking in times of crisis.

#### 2.4.7. *Demographic-specific health information needs*

Public libraries are crucial in meeting the needs of many demographic groups, including teenage females, for health-related information, elderly persons, and ethnic communities.<sup>32,42–44</sup> Butler highlights the librarian's role in promoting digital and health literacy, emphasising the joint potential of libraries and health services to improve education and support.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2.4.8. *Impact on patient outcomes and health literacy initiatives*

The assessment of health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, patient engagement, and patient activation highlights librarians' potential effect on patient outcomes and health literacy programs.<sup>45</sup> The "Information Seeking Experiences" scale is used by Paige et al. to quantify intrinsic health information-seeking obstacles among individuals with chronic illness by examining the psychometric features of the instrument.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, research on information-seeking behavior in specific populations, such as disabled students in Nigerian federal universities and chronic patients in Pakistan (Nazir & Soroya, 2021), demonstrates many functions that libraries can perform in fulfilling the distinct information requirements of various user communities.<sup>47</sup>

#### 2.4.9. *Collaborative outreach efforts*

Collaborations between public and academic medical libraries demonstrate the potential for inter-professional partnerships for educating communities about healthy habits and health information-seeking behaviors.<sup>48</sup> Libraries interested in exploring similar outreach collaborations can learn a lot from this strategy.

#### 2.4.10. *Societal impact*

The literature addresses the value of public libraries in promoting the social integration of asylum seekers and refugees and boosting health literacy among farmworker-serving community health workers.<sup>49–51</sup> These studies show how libraries foster diversity and satisfy the needs of individuals with a range of health information needs, which benefits society as a whole.

#### 2.5. *Research gap*

The literature currently in publication provides insightful information on how people seek health information. Further study, however, is desperately needed to determine how innovative library activities and community initiatives affect the rise in health literacy. Individuals who are socioeconomically poor or have limited access to traditional healthcare services are examples of vulnerable groups who need to be given more consideration in these kinds of research.

### 3. **Methodology**

#### 3.1. *Literature search strategy*

The relevant studies on health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, library services, and community health initiatives were found through a comprehensive and methodical literature search. The search was restricted to publications published after 2010, and a meticulously crafted search string was employed to ensure that every item was found and that different search parameters were taken into account.

#### 3.2. *Database selection*

The search comprised the following electronic databases, which were chosen for their relevance and scope:

1. PubMed: A widely utilized biomedical and life sciences database.
2. Scopus: An interdisciplinary database covering a broad spectrum of subjects.
3. PsycINFO: A database specializing in psychology and related disciplines.
4. Google Scholar: A multidisciplinary search engine for scholarly literature.
5. Dimensions: A connected database of scientific information that incorporates funding, papers, citations, patents, and clinical trials.

Comprehensive coverage was ensured by using the search term consistently throughout PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Dimensions databases. Taking into account the unique specifications and syntax of every database, changes were made as needed.

#### 3.3. *Search terms*

The search phrases were carefully chosen to capture the primary concepts of the study in light of the data-gathering method. The below query was executed to obtain pertinent articles from all the databases: ("health information seeking behavior" OR "health information seeking behaviour" OR "health information seeking" OR "information seeking behavior" OR "information

seeking behavior" OR "information behavior" OR "health education" OR "public health" OR "literature review" OR "health literacy") AND ("library services" OR "libraries" OR "librarian" OR "information services") AND ("community resources" or "community initiatives")

*Explanation:* The use of both "behavior" and "behaviour" variations accommodate potential differences in spelling conventions across literature and databases. The inclusion of synonyms and related terms within each concept, connected by the OR operator, aims to capture a wide spectrum of relevant literature. To provide a targeted and pertinent collection of results, the AND operator is utilized to ensure that the research articles retrieved must contain phrases from each of the connected concepts.

The search query was created with inclusivity in mind, taking into account different terms associated with health literacy, community health programs, library services, and the behavior of people seeking health information. Nevertheless, based on the features of the specific database, a different search query was utilized to obtain information.

### 3.4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Research that met the following criteria was accepted in light of the selection of studies:

1. Published from 2010 till the present.
2. Relevant to library services, community health initiatives, health literacy, and health information-seeking behavior.
3. Research articles, Meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and empirical studies.

### 3.5. Data extraction

Ensuring the inclusion of high-quality research pertinent to the study objectives was the purpose of the systematic extraction process. Important results, participant demographics, study design information, and implications for the research problems under investigation were all extracted throughout the data extraction procedure.

### 3.6. Synthesis of results

A narrative synthesis technique was used to summarize and integrate findings from the selected research publications. Key themes and research trends in health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the relevance of libraries and community resources were identified.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Library services and health information seeking

The use of libraries to get health information is positively correlated with several research outcomes. Rich resources like books, online databases, and community

health initiatives are available in public libraries, making them dependable and convenient places to get health information.<sup>52</sup>

### 4.2. Community-based initiatives and health literacy

Community-based health activities, such as workshops, seminars, and outreach programs, make a substantial contribution to boosting health literacy levels. Collaborations between libraries and community organizations broaden and strengthen the impact of such initiatives.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Integration of findings

The integration of findings reveals the interconnected linkages between health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the responsibilities of libraries and community resources. Libraries have a significant impact on community health literacy by offering a variety of easily accessible health information.

### 5.2. Challenges and opportunities

While the research emphasizes the beneficial influence of library services and community activities, challenges such as inadequate budget and discrepancies in digital access continue to exist. There are opportunities to solve these difficulties and improve the efficacy of health information services by leveraging technology and community collaborations.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study concludes by highlighting the intricate nature of health information-seeking behavior, the importance of health literacy and the crucial roles played by libraries and community resources. By showcasing approaches like the "Health Belief Model" and the "Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills Model," it emphasizes the necessity of individualized interventions. Factors impacting health information seeking, such as psychological determinants and socioeconomic status, highlight the challenge of meeting various demographic demands.

The multifaceted character of health literacy, as well as the critical role of libraries, particularly librarians, in disseminating trustworthy health information, is recognized. Collaboration between libraries and community services helps to advance health literacy considerably.

There are subtle interconnections between health information-seeking behavior, health literacy, and the functions of libraries and community resources. However, the study indicates that challenges coexist with potential opportunities for leveraging technology and collaborative

approaches.

This analysis renders insightful recommendations for policymakers, librarians, and community organizations working to improve health literacy. It focuses on the continual evolution required to satisfy the changing needs of the healthcare sector, urging further research on innovative programs, community activities, and emerging technologies, including virtual reality and mobile applications. Overall, this analysis serves as a basic resource for the development of policy and strategy to promote health literacy on a larger scale.

## 7. Source of Funding

None.

## 8. Conflict of Interest


None.

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