

Development of a health literacy measurement tool for primary school children in Germany

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Background

Lower levels of health literacy (HL) have been found to be associated with poorer health outcomes. Thus, in the last years HL has been increasingly acknowledged as an approach towards health promotion. While there is a large body of studies on adults' HL, only few studies investigate HL of children. To tackle this research gap, we aim to develop a tool to assess HL of 9- to 10-year-old children attending 4th grade in Germany primary schools.

Methods

We performed a systematic literature review on HL measurements in children and adolescents to identify tools applicable or adaptable for our target population. Then, we conducted interviews with children to deepen our understanding of how they perceive their health and factors contributing to it, and consulted HL and childhood experts. Cognitive interviews are currently being conducted before the final instrument will be validated with $n = 1000$ participants in a field test.

Results

Our review identified $N = 15$ generic HL assessment tools, of which $n = 5$ have been used with children aged 9 to 10. None of the instruments met our requirements of being built on a broad definition of health literacy and combining performance-based with self-report assessment. Hence, we developed an instrument assessing HL-related skills, attitudes and knowledge, while taking into account social and cultural backgrounds. For the assessment of skills, an adapted short form of the HLS-EU questionnaire has been developed. We further apply case vignettes/scenarios to assess children's behaviour and practice in everyday health-related situations.

Conclusions

To date, little is known about HL in children, despite its importance for different health outcomes. Thus, the development of a HL measurement tool, specifically tailored for children aged 9 to 10, constitutes a major contribution to informing effective and sustainable interventions promoting HL and health in children.