

Prevalence of Limited Health Literacy in the Philippines: First Nationwide Survey

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INTRODUCTION: Health literacy (HL) is the ability to access, understand, appraise, and apply health information across the three domains of the health continuum: healthcare, disease prevention, and health promotion. It is needed for people to effectively manage their health. Information on population HL level is useful for crafting appropriate and targeted interventions to improve HL.

OBJECTIVE: The aim of this study was to describe the HL level of Filipinos at the national and subnational levels.

METHODS: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in 2018–2019 with 2,303 randomly selected Filipinos 15 to 70 years of age, using an adapted Asia version of the HLS-EU-Q47. Prevalence estimates for limited HL and the corresponding 95% CI were computed at the national and subnational levels.

RESULTS: The nationwide prevalence of limited HL was 51.5% (95% CI: 49.5%–53.6%), while subnational prevalence estimates ranged from 48.2% to 65.4%. The prevalence varied across HL dimensions, with difficulty in access to information having the highest level. Similarly, prevalence across domains was variable; healthcare-related HL had the highest prevalence of limited HL. The HL levels for different dimensions and domains also varied across subnational groups.

CONCLUSION: The majority of Filipinos had limited HL, and prevalence estimates varied across HL dimensions, HL domains, subnational groupings, and socio-demographic characteristics. The results highlight the need for targeted interventions focusing on subgroups with limited HL and on dimensions and domains where Filipinos have limited HL.