



Health Information among students: A survey study

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Abstract: Health information is very crucial to develop certain healthy lifestyles. Access to the right health information will help individuals develop the right health behavior (Chen, Li, Liang, & Tsai, 2018). Students are gradually moving towards the internet seeking for health information. Most young adults use social networking sites to get their health information (Kim & Syn, 2016). However, there are still other sources where students prefer to get their health information. A Study among US College students report that students prefer health centre medical staff, health educators, faculty or coursework, and parents as believable sources (Vader, Walters, Roudsari, & Nguyen, 2011). This study aims at investigating the sources of health information received by students. This study answers to the question, what are the sources students seek to learn about health? A survey study was employed to determine the sources of health information. A sample of 52 students from all the faculties was taken randomly. Forty four percent reported that they received their health information from parents, family and friends and 36% received from the internet and 17% received either from health care professionals or other sources. Out of those that received health information from the internet, 52% reported that they received their health information from youtube and 35% received from whatsapp.

Keywords: Health information, Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Health information as defined by Wyatt and Sullivan (2005) is “the data and knowledge that intelligent systems (human and artificial) use to support their decisions.” With the onset of the internet it has become much easier for the medical community to help patient by storing health information in the web (Wyatt & Sullivan, 2005, p. 1). The Internet has unlimited access to health information for the consumer health education and has a high chance of improving individual health (Escoffery et al., 2005). In most part of the world access to health information is very limited. The lack of health information acts as a barrier to receiving a high knowledge care (Steinbach, 2009; Kwiatkowska, 2016). It was very difficult to access health information in the past as how it is today (Chen et al., 2018). Thus one of the United Nations (n.d.) sustainable target goals is to “increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet in least developed countries by 2020.” With information boom, students are likely to use the accessibility and affordability of the internet for easy access towards health information. Students are gradually moving towards the internet seeking for health information. Most young adults use social networking sites to get their health information (Kim & Syn, 2016). However, there are still other sources where students prefer to get their health information. A Study among US College students report that students prefer health centre medical staff, health educators, faculty or coursework, and parents as believable sources (Vader, Walters, Roudsari, & Nguyen, 2011).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Escoffery and his colleagues (2005) found in their study that “72.9% of their respondents reported getting health information from the Internet for themselves. Of those who retrieved health information, 7.7% reported retrieving information a lot, 49.3% reported retrieving information some, and 43.0% reported retrieving information a little. The most common method used to find health-related Web sites was using a search engine (72.9%)” (p. 184).

A study conducted in Ghanaian universities shows that 67.7% of the students used the internet for seeking health information and 72.4 % of them used the information in modifying their lifestyle (Asibey, Agyemang, & Dankwah, 2017).

Another study in Saudi Arabia shows that “92.7% of the students usually searched the internet for health information and 84.8% perceived internet health information as a help towards improving their health status” (Alghamdi, Alqarni, Bakarman, Moniem Mukhtar, & Bakarman, 2019, p. 1).

In Oman, a study conducted by Sultan, Joshua, and Misra (2017) found that 89% of the college students choose internet and family as the most popular sources and more than 80% students preferred doctors and other health professionals as primary sources of health information.

A survey conducted by Mukherjee and Bawden (2012) shows that the internet (85%) was the first choice to search for health information, followed by books (17%) and asking friends or family (16%).

A question we may all ask, why do the general public look for health information? “Lambert and Loisselle suggest that the three main areas behind health information seeking are the following: coping with illness; involvement in medicinal decisions; and preventative health” (Mukherjee & Bawden, 2012, p. 242).

A study conducted between 1996 and 2006 which focus on three things:

“the information needs of doctors, information seeking by doctors, and information sources used by the doctors. In most of the studies, text sources were the most commonly used. This was followed by colleagues, electronic resources, the Internet, and personal library. With regard to human sources of information, physicians would often find it simpler to refer to a colleague for information regarding a particular case. In another study conducted by Andrews and Pearce, it was found that print and interpersonal resources were more likely to be used for gaining knowledge regarding a case rather than online resources” (Dasgupta, Yadav, & Dasgupta, 2017, p. 4).

In India, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI, has established a dedicated Health Management Information System (HMIS) portal for all Public Health related information (Pandey, Roy, Bhawsar, & Mishra, 2010).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a survey research study. A quantitative cross sectional design was used to determine the health information students received. A common population was selected which are the students of a university. Students from different faculties are represented in this study.

Methods for data collection

A self-reported health information questionnaire was used to collect the data from students. The questionnaire has 5 items which measures the sources of health information, sources of health information from the internet, and whether or not the students practice the health information received from their sources. A demographic profile has also been added to the questionnaire to determine certain demographics with the health practices.

Sample size

A randomized sampling was employed and 52 students participated from a university.

Data Analysis

The data was analyze using Microsoft excel and google forms responses summary.

Objectives of the study:

1. To investigate the sources of health information received by students.
2. To determine the relationship between practice and the health information received.

IV. RESULTS

A sample of 52 students from all the departments of a university was taken randomly. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were male and 42 % were female. One hundred percent of the respondents reported as single in their marital status. Sixty percent of the respondents were between the age 15-20 years. Four department are represented and 44% of respondents are from Business and commerce.

Table 1.1

Gender	Number	Percenatge
Male	30	58%
Female	22	42%
Marital Staus		
Single	52	100%
Age		
15-20	31	60%
21-25	19	36%
26-30	2	4%
Departments		
Arts & Social Sciences	13	25%
Business & Commerce	23	44%
Music (Performing Arts)	10	19%
Sciences	6	12%

Forty-four percent reported that they received their health information from parents, family and friends and 36% received from the internet and 17% received either from health care professionals or other sources. Refer to table 1.2 for reference. Out of those that received health information from the internet, 52% reported that they received their health information from YouTube and 35% received from WhatsApp. Refer to figure 1.3 for reference.

Figure 1.1

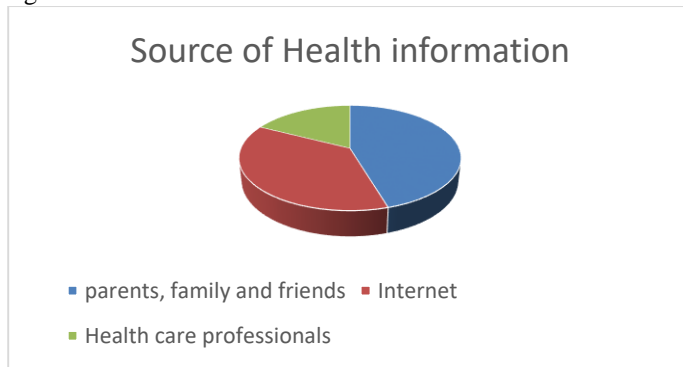
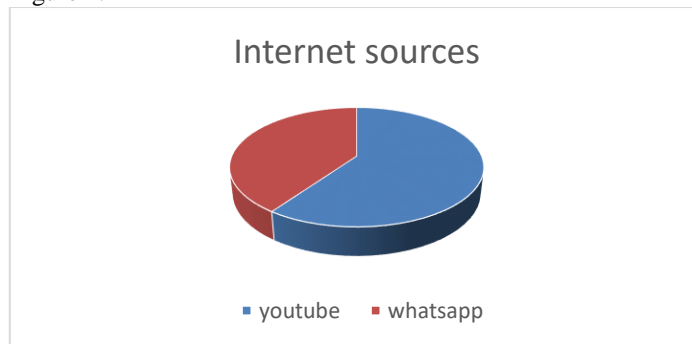


Figure 1.2



For the item that states if they practice what they read on the internet, 58% of the respondents reported that they may have practice, 29% reported that they have practice, and 13% reported that they have not practice.

For the item that states if they practice what they learn from their parents, friends or family, 70% of the respondents reported that they do practice, 29% reported that they may have practice, and 1% reported that they do not practice.

For the item that states if they practice what they learn from health care professionals, 75% of the respondents reported that they do practice, 19% reported that they may have practice, and 6% reported that they do not practice.

V. DISCUSSION

Principal findings

This survey study reports that students seek health information mostly from parents, family and friends and followed closely from sources on the internet, only 17% that is about 10 respondents seek health information from health care professionals or other sources. This tells us that students have more trust and reliability on the people they are close with. It could also be assumed that other students do not have access to reliable internet health source thus they do not seek the information from the internet. The health information from the internet also come from social media sources like YouTube and WhatsApp, followed with Instagram and Facebook. None of the respondents mention any reliable health website or sources for their health information.

Sources of health information

Both male and female mostly seek health information from YouTube. An equal number of 13 each reported that they seek their health information from YouTube. Seven female respondents and 11 male respondents reported that they received their information from WhatsApp respectively. Instagram and Facebook are the least preferred social media sources to seek health information with a combined number of 9 respondents from both gender.

Health information Practice

The study reports that 39 respondents practice the information given to them by health care professionals followed closely by 36 respondents who practice the health information received from parents, family or friends as compared to internet with only 15 respondents who reported that they practice what they learn or received from the internet. This tells us that although majority of the health information comes from parents, family or friends, students highly regard the advice of health care professionals as the number one source to practice health.

Relationship between health information and social ties

Indian society are usually “collectivistic and promotes social cohesion and interdependence” (Chadda & Deb, 2013). Given this argument, it is highly possible that students who are dependent on their parents would also seek health information from them. Close ties like family members, and friends also may play a role to provide health information as suggested in this study. Maybe with more easy access to health care professionals either online or in person, students would mostly like to receive health information from them, although this can debatable or can be studied further.

VI. CONCLUSION

From this study, we can come to an understanding that a high percentage of college students received health information passed down from either parents, friends or family, and the internet as a source for health information follows very closely with a margin of just 8%. Although internet has spread over the years in India than it was before, university students still prefer health information from parents, friends or family which majority also practice. This could be because of the close ties in Indian families which I would recommend to look for in further studies.

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