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# Health Information Literacy Among Women in Maintaining Family Health: A Study of A Coastal Village

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Health information literacy is a condition in which individuals and communities recognize the importance of health information for maintaining health. Women play a key role in maintaining and ensuring the health of their families.
**Purpose:** The study examines the health information literacy of women in the coastal village, Air Napal District, in maintaining the health of themselves and their families.
**Methods:** This study used a qualitative approach, with women in the Air Napal subdistrict as informants.
**Findings:** Women in coastal villages have recognized the importance of maintaining health. They often use health services to seek information and utilize electronic information sources. This information is shared with colleagues and applied within the family.
**Originality/Value:** This study highlights women's role as key agents in health information-seeking and sharing within coastal communities, offering insight into how informal validation practices (consulting health experts) shape family health behavior, providing a basis for designing community-based health literacy interventions in similar coastal settings.

**Keywords:** Health information literacy; Information seeking behavior; Coastal communities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health literacy is an important part of people's welfare, but it still faces serious challenges due to misinformation and the flood of digital information that is not always valid, and limited access to health information. Low health literacy increases vulnerability to misleading information, especially during public health crises. At the national level, Indonesia faces a real gap between urban and rural areas. Rural communities may have lower levels of health literacy (Mubarokah, 2019; Zahnd et al., 2010). Rural communities typically have limited access to health information and health services. Rural communities are less likely than urban

communities to receive certain preventive health services (Casey et al., 2010; Mubarokah, 2019). Limited health facilities, low information literacy, and uneven digital penetration result in unequal access to credible health information. Thus, the gap in health literacy between rural and urban areas not only reflects differences in access to information but also reveals structural inequalities with direct implications for the quality of public health. Social media is the main channel for disseminating information, often reinforcing misinformation due to the lack of strict verification mechanisms. This causes rural communities to rely on traditional knowledge or word-of-mouth information, which may not align with modern medical standards. In the framework of national development, health literacy is an important indicator not only for individual welfare, but also for the quality of human development and the success of the public health agenda. To maintain health and well-being for all, one of its main goals is to eliminate health disparities, achieve health equity, and promote health literacy (Nurdiansyah et al., 2022).

Bengkulu, a predominantly rural province located on the western coast of Sumatra Island in Indonesia, faces similar challenges in the health information landscape. Limited health infrastructure, low levels of information literacy, and persistent digital divides exacerbate inequalities in access to and use of health information. In this context, rural women play a central role as primary managers of family health, often navigating complex health information environments with limited resources and information that is not always accurate or reliable. These conditions pose significant risks to household health decision-making and underscore the importance of examining how health information literacy is developed, practiced, and influences family health outcomes.

Maintaining health is a much better option than waiting until you get sick (Rosini & Nurningsih, 2018). Health is now something that is important for a person to have, especially during a pandemic (Samosir et al., 2021). It can be concluded that maintaining health is a foundation for carrying out daily activities. Given the pandemic, maintaining health is increasingly important, as individuals with good physical and mental health tend to be more resistant to stress and disease. Therefore, health maintenance should be seen as a long-term investment that benefits not only the individual but also the sustainability of society as a whole. Everyone needs to maintain their health to avoid disease. So, someone needs to have health literacy to maintain their health. Someone needs information about health to add insight. In the past, we saw how people often get health literacy, such as through counseling from health institutions, health departments, and others.

Currently, health information is not only obtained from counseling but can be obtained from various sources of information, especially health information such as in the pandemic season yesterday where everyone must be able to maintain a healthy balance so that health literacy is important for the community. Literacy is seen as the degree to which individuals have the abilities to obtain, process, and understand basic health information (Treatment, 2014). It can be concluded that one needs not only to have access to information, but also the skills to interpret and use it appropriately in everyday decision-making. Good health literacy allows individuals to understand medical instructions, recognize disease symptoms, and consistently implement healthy living behaviors. Many sources of health information can now be accessed by the public using electronic devices. But the problem is how people choose relevant information from various information provided on the internet. This is as conveyed by Jacobs that the need for information is increasing so that it requires health information that can be accessed on the web (Jacobs et al., 2017). The future of health care services is increasingly associated with the rapid development of information and

communication technologies (ICT) (Bujnowska-Fedak et al., 2019). However, not all information on the internet is correct, so it is necessary to have good literacy skills in analyzing information. One of the main problems of modern medicine is that patients often make self-diagnoses using information they find online, which can lead to incorrect decision-making and negative impacts on their health (Soto-vega et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening ICT based health literacy must be a strategic priority, not only to improve the quality of individual decision making, but also to support a safer, more effective, and sustainable health system. Good health literacy allows individuals to sort out valid information from unreliable sources, thus supporting informed decision-making regarding prevention, diagnosis, and treatment

Health literacy as how individuals acquire, process and understand the basic health information and services necessary to make informed health decisions (Smith & Keselman, 2015). Health literacy can enable people to acquire the necessary health information from valid and reliable sources and cooperate with health care providers and the community to improve their health status (Chen et al., 2018; Tavananezhad et al., 2022). MLA defines health information literacy is a set of abilities needed to recognize health information needs, identify possible sources, and use them to retrieve relevant information. In the world, the female population is the largest (MLA, 2016). This also happens in Indonesia, where the female population is more than men. The phenomenon that often occurs is that women are usually more concerned about matters related to health because they usually take care of the family and often remind family members of both activities in maintaining health and preparing healthy foods for themselves and their families.

During the pandemic season, a year when mothers play a vital role in maintaining the health of their families, namely by providing health equipment and foods that support health and behaviors in maintaining health. A recent survey conducted by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in the period 7-14 September 2020 showed differences in compliance between women and men. The survey involving 90,967 respondents showed that women were more obedient to follow health protocols than men. Based on these data, we can see that women are more obedient and care about health. Although it cannot be generalized that men do not care for their health, In most families, women are responsible for food selection, cooking, home management, including hygiene, etc. (Ashraf et al., 2022). Women have more health literacy in maintaining health. This applies not only in urban areas, where women in villages also have behavior patterns in maintaining health for themselves and their families. Rural women are critical in achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social change necessary for sustainable development (PBB) (Ekoko, 2020). Health literacy is essential because it can help guard against possible delays in treatment for health problems.

In Bengkulu Province, when the pandemic came in 2020, all people tried to maintain their health; this also influenced their behavior to maintain their health and their families' health. The people of Seaside Village in the Air Napal District. also feel the same way; they also try to maintain their health for their families, especially young mothers, where maintaining children's health is their priority. This also affects the pandemic season, during which they must maintain their health and family to avoid outbreaks. Women in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District. also take precautions to avoid diseases and maintain health. Most people in these villages work in the agricultural sector, namely the palm oil and coffee agriculture sectors. Currently, since the pandemic, people have also started growing durian crops. With these conditions, it is necessary to maintain health amid conditions that often occur.

Some of the studies conducted on health information literacy are found that women's inadequate ability to access, read, understand, assess, and use health information was an obstacle to obtaining relevant health information. Improving these women's health information literacy skills will likely improve their health outcomes (Kassim & Ndumbaro, 2022). In this study, it was also found that the need for efforts to sensitize women to use mobile phones to access health information must be strengthened. This should be done in conjunction with empowering women with essential skills to utilize these tools to access such information successfully. The following research was conducted by Covolo with the title Exploring the Online Health Information-Seeking Behavior in a Sample of Italian Women: Researchers found that health literacy is necessary in the general population, especially in exploring the Web and, at the same time, reorganizing health training to improve health literacy in health professionals, also enriching their communication skills (Covolo et al., 2022).

As individuals increasingly rely on online sources for health information, they become more vulnerable to the adverse consequences of misinformation, particularly when health literacy levels are low. Adequate health literacy is therefore essential for enabling individuals to critically access, evaluate, and manage health information. Moreover, healthcare professionals must equip themselves with appropriate frameworks to respond effectively to patients' information needs, foster trust, and mitigate the risks associated with health misinformation.

Although previous studies have extensively examined health literacy and health information behavior, limited attention has been given to rural women, whose experiences may differ substantially from those of urban women due to disparities in healthcare access, information infrastructure, and digital resources. Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on women living in a coastal village in Air Napal District, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. Specifically, this study aims to examine the health information literacy of mothers in maintaining family health by exploring how they acquire, evaluate, and utilize health information from various sources.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the meanings, experiences, and characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative research is a strategy *of Inquiry* that emphasizes the search for meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols, and descriptions of a phenomenon; focused and multimedia methods, natural and holistic; prioritizing quality, using several ways, and presenting (Yusuf, 2014). The research was conducted in Seaside Village, located in Air Napal District, North Bengkulu Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. Seaside Village is characterized by a type A (humid tropical) climate, with humidity levels ranging from 70% to 87%. The subjects of this study were mothers residing in Seaside Village. Informants were selected based on specific criteria, namely mothers who actively utilized health facilities, had previously accessed health-related information, including health services and other health resources, and had young children. Based on these criteria, five informants were included in the study. The data were collected in 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that made the examination of mothers' roles in maintaining family health particularly significant.

Data were gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation. The validity of the data was evaluated using triangulation, a method that enhances the validity and reliability of research findings. By employing triangulation, researchers avoid dependence on

a single source or method. Instead, they integrate multiple sources, techniques, and perspectives to achieve a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. Data analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Functional Health Literacy

When a person knows how to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services scientifically to make the right health decisions, then that person has been said to have functional health literacy. This is the initial stage in the community understanding various information and health services to maintain their health. This study found that mothers in seaside villages already understand the importance of maintaining health and utilizing health services. This can be seen where mothers in seaside villages maintain health, especially their children's and babies' health, by regularly visiting health service centers such as Integrated Service Posts (*Posyandu*), Community Health Centers (*Puskesmas*), midwives and doctors to maintain family health, especially children's pandemic season or sick season. Mothers also actively participate in counselling training at *Posyandu* and *Puskesmas*, where in *Posyandu*, it is very intense to carry out counselling activities so that mothers get health information through this training.

> *"I often use health services such as hospitals and midwives. For example, if a sick child goes to the midwife because it hurts, we are dizzy, or the disease is not as severe as teething, I like to search on Google before going to the doctor so that the characteristics go to the doctor."* (informant)

Based on the informant's opinion, it can be concluded that women in Air Napal look for information. This makes it easier for them to detect early health problems before going to the health center.

> *"I often attend training sessions at Posyandu and Puskesmas, sometimes about haemoglobin (HB) and healthy food for infants and children.*" (Informant).

The interviews revealed that mothers in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District. have developed the habit of seeking and using health information from various sources. One informant stated that she often uses health services such as hospitals and midwives. However, before visiting a doctor, she usually searches for information on Google to identify symptoms or characteristics of the illness. This reflects an effort to detect early health problems before deciding to go to the health center.

Another informant explained that she frequently attends training sessions at *Posyandu* and *Puskesmas*, sometimes focusing on topics such as haemoglobin (HB) checks and healthy food for infants and children. This active participation in health education activities demonstrates their awareness of the importance of maintaining family health, informed by the knowledge provided by health professionals.

Overall, these findings highlight that mothers in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District have developed functional health literacy. They can search for, understand, and apply health information, whether through digital platforms or formal health services, to make appropriate decisions to safeguard their families' well-being.

**Communicative Health Literacy**

Communicative health literacy is the process by which an individual sets out to convey a message to another individual through words and image gestures so that the message sent will be received and understood. Communicative health literacy is when a person can exchange messages or information with others against the information that has been obtained. Informant said that,

> *"I usually also often exchange information with other mothers, for example about which medicine works well for their child and which one works well for mine. Sometimes I try the medicine that another mother recommends, and it usually works. So, we can share ideas and experiences."* (Informant).
>
> *"When we gather at the office with colleagues, we remind each other of specific illnesses and the medicines for them. That's basically what we do at the office."* (Informant).

The interviews indicate that mothers in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District habitually exchange health information across various social contexts. One informant shared that she often discusses with other mothers about which medicines are effective for their children and which ones work well for hers. At times, she even tries medicines recommended by other mothers, and they usually prove effective. This reflects the practice of sharing experiences and health knowledge informally among mothers.

In addition, health-related interactions also occur in the workplace. Another informant explained that when gathering with colleagues at the office, they remind each other about certain illnesses and the appropriate medicines. This activity shows that health communication is not limited to the family sphere but also extends into professional settings.

Overall, these findings highlight that mothers in Seaside Village have developed communicative health literacy. They are not only recipients of health information but also active participants in sharing and exchanging it with others. This practice strengthens their ability to make informed health decisions and contributes to the resilience of both families and communities.

**Critical Literacy**

Critical health literacy is where a person reaches the stage where a person can critically evaluate the health information obtained. Critical health literacy is a higher-order process that can be developed through education to assess health-relevant information critically. Based on research data, village mothers validate the information data carried out by ensuring the information they get. Informant said that

> *"I have also used some applications, but I usually go directly to Google, specifically to the Halo Doc website. For example, when I recently experienced a health problem related to women, I read about it on the internet and then confirmed it with the midwife. In this way, we can verify the accuracy of the information."* (Informant).
>
> *"Usually, we often exchange ideas with other mothers, for example, appropriate and inappropriate drugs. I have also asked my midwife or doctor why this drug is suitable while other drugs are not suitable for the same disease. So I asked the doctor for sure, and the doctor said this drug dose could not be appropriate for my child, but for other children, the dose was appropriate. So I didn't make up my mind."* (Informant)

The interviews reveal that mothers in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District actively seek and verify health information from multiple sources. One informant explained that although she has used health applications, she usually prefers to search directly on Google, particularly the Halo Doc website. When she experienced a women's health problem, she first read about it online and then confirmed the information with a midwife. This shows a pattern of early detection and verification of health information before making decisions.

Another informant highlighted the importance of exchanging ideas with other mothers regarding appropriate and inappropriate medicines. She also asked her midwife or doctor why certain drugs were suitable for one child but not for another. The doctor clarified that dosage differences were the determining factor, meaning that a medicine effective for one child might not be appropriate for another. The informant emphasized that she did not make decisions independently without professional confirmation.

**Health Resources**

The source of health information is a means of finding health information that can be used to maintain the health of oneself and one's family. There is much health information today obtained through counselling, health services and various sources of information that the community can use. Sources of information can be found through various sources, namely from people, observations, documents, pictures and others. In this study, the community's source of health information is the health service center.

> *"I often use health services such as hospitals, midwives, and posyandu and attend health training."* (Informant).

The interview highlights that mothers in Seaside Village in Air District Napal actively utilize formal health services and participate in health education activities. One informant explained that she often uses hospitals, midwives, and posyandu as part of her family's health care routine. In addition, she regularly attends health training sessions.

Google is one of the Search engines most often used informants because a lot of Health information is presented on Google.

> *"I often search for information on Google, such as the characteristics of a child's pain. I also opened my app, Halo Doc. In addition, I look for health information through websites and Facebook. I also searched for herbal medicine information on Google."* (Informant).

The majority of people in Seaside Village in the Air Napal District use Google in the current era of technological development. Besides Google Seaside, village mothers also use social media, such as Facebook, to read health information. One account mother often use is Halodoc, which provides health information. People also often rely on experts in treating diseases or obtaining health information. Although there are now many uses for doctors' medicines, traditional medicines are also the choice of the Napal water community, especially those known for generations in the surrounding community.

## DISCUSSION

Health literacy is a condition where people maintain health by seeking information related to their health. Health literacy includes cognitive and social skills that enable individuals to understand and use health information effectively (Yasaman et al., 2026). Health literacy concerns people's capacity to meet the complex health demands of modern times (Sørensen et al., 2015). Element of health literacy are knowledge of health, healthcare

and health systems; processing and using information in various formats in relation to health and healthcare; and ability to maintain health through self-management and working in partnerships with health providers (Liu et al., 2020). Every community will try to maintain its health to avoid various diseases and have a long life or, in other words, a long life. Health information is essential for patients, which helps in decision-making about the best treatment and accessible and reliable health services (Madge et al., 2023). Health literacy is an individual's ability to acquire and translate knowledge and information to maintain and improve health in ways appropriate to the individual's context and system. Health literacy is lifelong learning that should start in early childhood (Bröder et al., 2017)

In the s Seaside Village community, women especially families have tried to maintain their health, especially for their children and husbands, where they are enough to maintain health, especially for children's health. This is because, in the opinion of mothers, children will be different from adults, especially toddlers, who cannot convey when sick. After all, they cannot speak., so mothers in this village try to maintain their children's health starting from their babies. Women in this village are trying to find information related to health. Health literacy will help overcome health disparities and make decisions in maintaining the health of oneself, family and community (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2023). Kushalnagar et al stated that health literacy will help make the right health related decisions and help people make healthy choices (Kushalnagar et al., 2018). The practice of health literacy enhances individuals' capacity to safeguard their own health, as well as that of their families and communities. At the same time, it represents a form of lifelong learning that ideally begins in early childhood.

Functional health literacy is defined as an individual's capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services scientifically to make appropriate health decisions. At this stage, it is the initial phase in which society understands various health information and services so that they can be used to maintain their health. In maintaining health, the people of seaside villages look for sources of information in health service centers such as *posyandu*, *puskesmas*, and doctors. *Puskesmas* and *Posyandu* are basic health services. Primary health care has an important function to help maintain the quality of health of individuals, families and society in general as a basic living necessity (Ngii, 2021). They must even consider asking shamans or people who understand their local language. Women are also more likely to consult more resources, including friends, family, and alternative health professionals (Dluhos-Sebesto et al., 2021). Mothers also use traditional medicines for early prevention of disease. Many traditional medicines used by the community come from plants. WHO said that most people in the world still use herbs in traditional medicine to relieve diseases (Tahir et al., 2023). Usually, its use is carried out by improvisation according to local needs and wisdom. Traditional medicines are the ingredients or the concoction of ingredients derived from plants, animals, minerals, galenic preparations or mixtures of these ingredients that have been used from generation to generation for treatment in accordance with the prevailing norms in society (Anggraini, 2021).

The community also needs traditional medicine, mainly to maintain and improve health, body stamina, and fitness (Prasanti, 2018). In addition, people in seaside villages use Internet sources to find health information. The role of the Internet as a health information source has increased, corresponding to a growing interest in online health services. Many health websites are devoted to health and fitness, where consumers can access health information directly (Mulauzi, 2016). It can be seen from the sites they visit. People use Google to search for information. However, not just looking for information on Google, seaside village mothers also do not immediately use or take information for granted, and

they often validate to trusted people such as health workers. Mother also utilizes various social media platforms as well as the *Halodoc* application to seek health related information. This practice reflects the growing trend of individuals relying on digital ecosystems for medical knowledge, combining informal sources such as social media communities with formal, app-based health services. The platform helps people, including those in remote areas, get medical access faster. Features that make it easier for users to consult health directly without meeting (Sabina, 2024).

The use of various online media platforms is very helpful for the public in finding information. However, if you get the wrong information, it can make people even more worried so that finding the right information is needed. Information media on social media is also very much so that information literacy skills are needed in reading the information. The public must be able to identify and analyze whether the information is true and not misleading. This is as revealed by previous research that users must know whether the account is official or not, whether the person is an expert in their field, or not in order to avoid misleading (Rosini & Nurningsih, 2018).

Critical Health Literacy is the stage at which a person can critically evaluate the health information they obtain. Critical health literacy is a higher-level process developed through education to assess health related details critically. Based on research data, village mothers validate the information they receive by ensuring its accuracy. Usually, mothers in the Seaside Village ask health experts, such as midwives, for the health information they seek. This is done by mothers to obtain accurate information and to ensure they do not misinterpret the diseases they are experiencing or the information they find on Google about the health issues they face. Improving health information literacy is imperative for increasing people's control over their health and enhancing their health decision making processes (Kassim & Ndumbaro, 2022). Improving health information literacy is essential for empowering individuals to take control of their health and make informed decisions. Higher health literacy supports informed decision-making, disease prevention and improved quality of life (Gök, M.S., et al., 2002; Oğlak et al., 2026). The more women are able to identify trustworthy information, the easier it becomes for them to make health related decisions

Communicative health literacy is a process in which an individual seeks to convey a message to another person through verbal and/or visual cues, ensuring the message is received and understood. Communicative health literacy occurs when one can exchange messages or information with others based on information already obtained. In this context, it refers to exchanging information or messages about health that they acquire from various sources. The mothers shared health information with fellow local village mothers, ranging from health information, countermeasures, and tips on maintaining health to appropriate medicines. Usually, health communication revolves around the health of the baby. In addition, information about health is also communicated to families where mothers maintain health. Mothers provide preventive measures to families from the various information they get to maintain health.

Mothers living in coastal areas have demonstrated increasing awareness of maintaining their own and their families' health. This awareness is reflected in their active behavior in seeking, understanding, and utilizing health information as part of preventive and promotive efforts. They not only prioritize maintaining their own health but also prioritize their families' health, viewing health information as a vital asset in their daily lives. These mothers use a variety of information sources, ranging from health service centers such as *Posyandu* and *Puskesmas* to online sources. Mothers living in coastal areas have shown an

increasing awareness of the importance of maintaining their own health and that of their families. This awareness is evident in their proactive efforts to seek, understand, and utilize health information as part of their preventive and promotional health practices. These mothers not only prioritize their own well-being but also place significant importance on their families' health, viewing health information as a crucial resource in their daily lives.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mothers in Seaside Village, Air Napal District, play a pivotal role in maintaining health literacy for themselves and their families. They perceive health information as an essential resource for preventing health problems and enhancing their ability to make informed decisions regarding family well-being, particularly in caring for young children who are unable to communicate their health conditions effectively. The findings further reveal that formal healthcare facilities, particularly *posyandu* and *puskesmas* remain the primary sources of health information and assistance. At the same time, mothers increasingly rely on internet-based information to complement advice obtained from healthcare professionals before seeking formal medical care. This reliance highlights the importance of critically evaluating the credibility of online health information to minimize the risk of misinformation and inappropriate health decisions. Overall, the mothers in Seaside Village exhibited functional and communicative health literacy by actively seeking, understanding, and applying health information from both formal healthcare services and digital sources. These capabilities strengthened their capacity to protect and promote the health of their families and contributed to community health resilience.

**AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

**Fransiska Timoria Samosir:** Writing oiginal draft preparation, Ideas, formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims. **Richard Togaranta Ginting:** formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aim

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

We state that there are no known conflicts of interest linked with this publication, and that there has been no significant financial assistance for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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