



## **The Role of Health Literacy Promotion in Decreasing Vaginal Infection: A Message to Health Policy Makers**

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Vaginal infection is one of the prevalent problems among the women especially at the age of pregnancy. It can cause death and other complications such as cervical cancer, abortion, premature birth, and infertility. Different infectious organisms can affect the female reproductive system, and almost 95 % of vaginal infections are caused by *Candida albicans*, *Gardnerella vaginalis*, and *Trichomonas vaginalis* microorganisms. Vaginal infections do not usually have any symptom; however, symptoms such as vaginal discharge, irritation, itching, and smelly vaginal discharge can indicate vaginal infection (1).

In the health evaluation visit from Sibo Soran city in Sistan & Baluchestan province in East of Iran, qualitative interviews with health staff and the native women revealed that the prevalence of vaginal infections is increasing in this region; the interviewees mentioned the causes of this prevalence as inobservance of healthy behaviors and hygiene, urinary habits, sexual behaviors, eating habits, lack of diagnostic equipment's, limited access to healthy water, and the low level of health literacy in this city. Nowadays, health literacy is considered as a fundamental indicator affecting the results and the costs of healthcare services, and it is also a requisite for healthcare systems. Health literacy is widely considered as a health determinant and a prioritized issue in public health policies. Low health literacy is related to low health, extensive inequality, and higher costs of health system. Health literacy enables the individuals to play a more active role in changing their surrounding environment to affect health level (2).



Although health literacy is considered as an important issue related to all people, it is especially more important for some populations such as women; because in addition to prevention of diseases, education of women can be effective in promotion of the child and family health. Therefore, women are considered as the primary population to be focused for promotion of health literacy (3).

Improvement of women's health leads to their increased ability to make informed decisions, decrease health-threatening risks, higher prevention, promote security and quality of life, and increase quality of healthcare. People with low health literacy report poor levels of health (4).

On the other hand, Sistan & Baluchestan is one of the cross-border and deprived areas with a tropical climate (5); fungal infections such as vaginal infections are usually more prevalent in tropical areas (1).

With regard to the above statements, promotion of health literacy prioritizing the issue of vaginal infection is considered as a necessity in this region. It is necessary for health sector policy makers to adopt appropriate policies regarding the special nature of the disease.

One of these policies can be mentioned as adopting solutions to improve educational programs by the group media to promote health literacy, developing educational programs proportional to the native culture of every region, starting educational measures in elementary programs, and periodical evaluation of key indicators (6).

Educations acquired in childhood can prevent many inappropriate health habits and diseases in adulthood. It is necessary to start education and develop awareness of prevention of high risk behaviors in the most critical and important periods of life i.e. childhood and adolescence. Health policy makers should observe these measures in their modification plans (7).

Finally, it can be stated that providing simple practical educations proportional to the native culture of every region and promotion of self-care strategies can effectively promote health literacy among the women living in that region. In this

regards, midwives and health staff can play a key role in this area. Also, using the new technologies such as playing video clips in health centers, providing delivery facilities, and using virtual space and social media can provide new opportunities to access the most updated health information.

### Keywords

Health literacy, Vaginal infection, Health policy making.

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