Health literacy – a vaccine for the COVID-19 infodemic?

健康に関する情報リテラシーとコロナに関するインフォデミック

Authors: John William CHENG（チェン、ジョン　ウィリアム）, Masaru NISHIKAWA（西川　賢）
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1　目的

This study quantitatively examines people's level of health literacy and its relations to their media usage and vulnerability to disinformation in the context of COVID-19 in Japan.

From government conspiracies to unproven cures, the proliferation of disinformation in the COVID-19 pandemic has created an 'infodemic' that is as lethal as the virus. One main reason for this phenomenon is that in this pandemic people's exposure to information, both real and fake, from all media has increased substantially because of the prolonged 'staying-at-home.' Studies show that health literacy –one's ability to access, understand, appraise, and apply health information– is positively related to people's health behaviour, however, little is known whether it can help people to navigate the overflow of real and fake information in this infodemic.

2　方法

This study fills this gap using a quantitative approach. It adopts a COVID-19 specific health literacy scale developed by Okan et al. (2020) that is found to be positively related to people's comprehension of COVID-19 health information. Data were collected from an online questionnaire survey conducted in Feb 2021 during when almost half of Japan was in a state of emergency. The dataset comprises 1,448 respondents (20-69 years old) drawn from a nationally representative survey panel.

3　結果

Initial results show that 44% of the samples' overall health literacy levels were inadequate according to Okan et al., (2020)'s criteria. Among the four dimensions, the ability to appraise health information was the most problematic that 59% of the respondents were inadequate. At the same time, 44% and 34% of the samples were exposed to and believed in at least one conspiracy theory about COVID-19, respectively.

4　結論

The initial results reveal an alarming pattern –a low health literacy level and a high tendency to believe in COVID-19 disinformation. Moving forward, we will apply multivariate statistical methods to analyse causal relations between these factors and also the influence of factors such as media usage and trust, government trust, and education to derive further implications on whether health literacy is an effective 'vaccine' against the COVID-19 'infodemic.'

【主要参考文献】

Okan, O., et al., (2020). Coronavirus-related health literacy: A cross-sectional study in adults during the COVID-19 infodemic in Germany. International Journal of Environmental Research and public health, 17(15), 5503.