

Health & Mental Health Literacy in Child Welfare: Implications for Reducing Child Neglect and Health Concerns in Immigrant Families

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Health Literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

(Ratzan and Parker, 2000)

Mental Health Literacy is knowledge and beliefs about mental health disorders, which aids recognition, management or prevention.

(Jorm, 2012)

Parents with low health literacy have difficulty:

Navigating the healthcare system



Reading prescription bottles

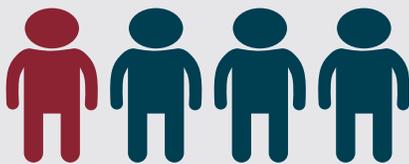
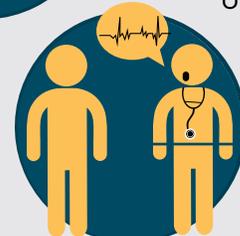
Filling out medical forms



Following written or verbal instructions



Understanding information about health risks



1 out of **4** children in the U.S. is an immigrant or has immigrant parents



A growing number of immigrants entering the child welfare system

45% of people with limited English proficiency report **low health literacy** compared to only **13.8%** of English speakers

Parents with low health literacy → ADVERSE CHILD HEALTH OUTCOMES



Greater disability & chronic illness



Unhealthy lifestyle / practices



Higher risk of injury



Incorrect prescriptions

Interviews with health and child welfare providers report:

“When we talk to him (the father), we have to consider both health and human services together. Not just the health provider’s orders. If you go to social services, you will lack knowledge of medical treatment for the girl, if you just go to the mental health treatment provider, you lack the social services support, lack home visits, lack education, and lack knowledge on how to care for the daughter. It is important to be open and allow outside people to come when considering treatment for the daughter. The parents, they are not open, they just keep the child inside the house. That is why I try to educate him (father) to be open, for his daughter.”

— A social worker, Vietnamese, shared a story of a Vietnamese client that kept a daughter inside of their home for five years due to a mental health disorder

“When I think about kids’ health, the first thing I think about is “who’s caring for them and what’s their capacity to actually do that caring?” So, often I find that parents who are depressed have less capacity to care for their children who may also be experiencing depression or anxiety, and so their ability to be attuned to their child’s needs, to even take in information that I’m trying to share with them about their child’s needs, and then to act on that, those are several hurdles that they have to overcome in order to be able to do that. And so I think parents’ health literacy has a huge impact.”

— As described by a behavioral health provider who worked with immigrant and refugee children

Asking one simple question might help in determining health literacy:

How confident are you filling out medical forms by yourself?

- Extremely
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- A little bit
- Not at all



Resources:

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