

# The role of social factors in the association between health literacy and health behaviors among older adults

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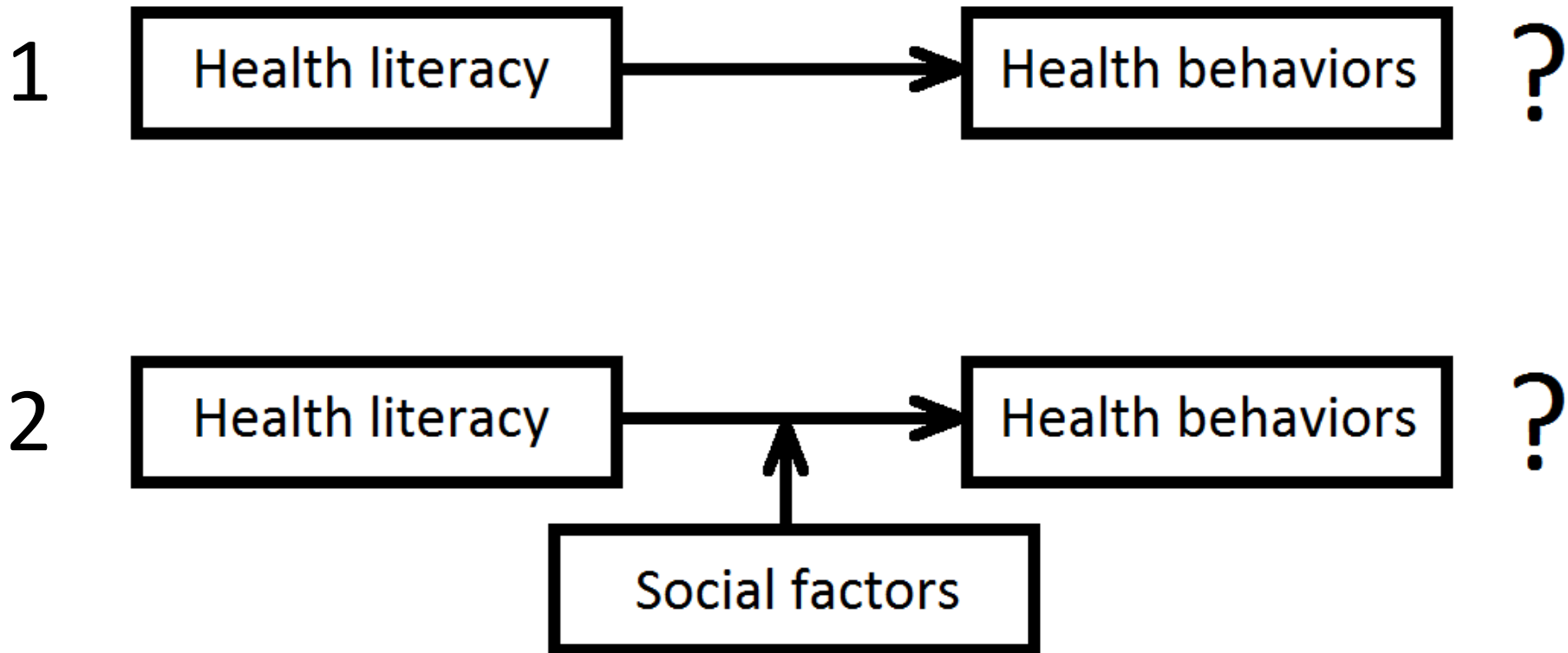
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# Background


- Low health literacy is associated with various negative health outcomes among older adults.
- This may partially be explained by associations between health literacy and general health behaviors.
- Social factors (e.g. loneliness, social support, social contacts) might moderate these associations.



# Objectives



## Methods (1)

- This study:  **LifeLines**
- LifeLines is a Dutch prospective population based cohort study (n=167,729). Data collected in three waves (so far).
- Data of 3,241 participants were used (51.4% male, mean baseline age = 68.9 years).
- Data collection: Health literacy, health behaviors, social factors

## Methods (2)

### Health behaviors

Physical activity

Fruit consumption

Vegetable consumption

Smoking behavior

Breakfast habits

Alcohol use

BMI



### Social factors

Loneliness

Social support

Engaging in social activities

Having many social contacts

Living alone

## Methods (3)

- Health literacy measured by three validated questions (Chew, 2004). Added up to a 3-15 scale, dichotomized to high (13 or higher, 66.6%) vs. low (34%).
- Health behaviors assessed with self-report questions and dichotomized based on international standards.
- Social factors measured with various self-report measures.
- Logistic regression used, adjusted for age and sex. Interaction effects were assessed to study potential moderation.

## Results (1)

- Low health literacy was associated with low physical activity, low fruit and vegetable consumption, poor breakfast habits, and more obesity (OR's>1.31, p-values<.003)
- Health literacy was positively associated with alcohol use (OR=0.81, p=.013).
- No association between health literacy and smoking behavior was found (p=.26).

## Results (2)

- Association between health literacy and smoking was significantly moderated by number of social contacts ( $p < .05$ ).
- Many contacts: Low HL  $\rightarrow$  More smoking (OR=1.38,  $p = .055$ )  
Few contacts: Low HL  $\rightarrow$  Less smoking (OR=0.35,  $p = .068$ )



- 34 other tested moderations were not significant.



## Conclusion & Implications

- Low health literacy is associated with a range of unhealthy behaviors among older adults. This may partially explain the association between low health literacy and poor health outcomes in this group.
- The negative impacts of health literacy on health behaviors are mostly not restricted to lonely people and neither buffered by social participation.



innovative policies for healthy ageing

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