

# Relationship between digital literacy and risk behaviors relevant to HIV among teenagers

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Dear Editor,

Digital media play indisputable role in increasing knowledge, awareness, attitude, behavior change, and lifestyles of people in digital era [1, 2]. Media are defined as people, equipment, and situations, through which a message is presented. Digital medium is an electronic medium that is used to store, convey, and receive digital data, as a form of electronic medium. It is obvious that the users number of websites, such as YouTube, Facebook, Yahoo, and Google increase day by day. Moreover, the number of users of a medium like Facebook, with a billion people, indicate an extremely notable tendency of a new generation of society towards digital media [3, 4]. New media can have reciprocal role in health promotion of the society. Therefore, complete identification of digital media, health strength, and threatening points can have an important role in planning and policy-making of the society [5]. However, digital media, along with access-free sources and data available for people of every age and gender, can trigger several risks and dangers, which have been studied in various studies. One of the most important dangers of using Internet-based media is visiting and using porno websites, chatrooms, and pornographies, which are easily available [6]. During a research conducted in this regard, 79 million people have visited spam pornographic websites monthly, and according to a report of the "Center of the Safe Media for Families", mostly done by teenagers between the ages of 12 to 17 [7]. Therefore, with a free access to the Internet data, people, especially teenagers, face a great risk. Thus, it is considered as the main public health crisis

in countries like the U.S. because of its' importance and destructive effects [6].

Because of lack of understanding and proper analysis, digital media can pose a potential threat for committing risky behaviors, such as unsafe sex, leading to the spread of diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) [8]. Studies showed that some percentage of venereal diseases, such as HIV, are due to unsafe sexual relationships derived from initial sexual relations via cyber space. This should be taken seriously considering emotional state and lack of experience and knowledge of teens in this regard [8].

Knowing about cyber space and its' positive potential effects is vital in this new era. Therefore, proper awareness, analysis, and decision-making should be considered as a strong barrier against risky behaviors, which requires health literacy, especially electronic health literacy [9]. Health literacy is regarded as one of the indicators of disease prevention as well as disease management. Inadequate health literacy can cause growing burden of the diseases, increasing hospitalization and cost of treatment. Electronic health literacy is defined as the ability to search, find, comprehend, and evaluate health data from electronic sources [10, 11]. Identifying reliable sources and risky channels can be influential in helping the society, policy makers, and families reduce vulnerability of different groups of the society including teens [12]. Studies indicate that majority of population is not able to distinguish the difference between correct and false data due to inadequate health literacy of the society. Various

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studies confirm a relationship between the adequate literacy and health consequences among teenagers [13]. Therefore, cyber space should be one of the concerns of parents regarding Internet use of their children, because their direct and indirect sexual arousal would trigger harmful mental and physical consequences. In order to improve health promotion behaviors and prevent risk behaviors, which may lead teenagers to dangerous diseases, e.g., HIV, it is essential to empower them in terms of risky behaviors. Educational interventions at schools as well as Internet channels, informing children/adolescents of potential threats of virtual world and improving individual skills, can immune them to harmful information in cyber space to some degrees [14]. Furthermore, effective relationship between children and parents, teaching youngsters of the principles of cyber space, indirect surveillance on their web surfing, and social programs can be the preventive approaches in schools and families [15]. Therefore, parents' performance and dynamics of families include provision of the emotional and economic security, guidance and setting proper limitations, surveillance and control, preparation of basic needs, and security as well as inspiration and stability of growing. Moreover, effective interaction of schools and parents can positively affect the development of objectives setting, thus, the accessibility of people to correct data relevant to health, especially sexual health, which can inform society of the issue. In this regard, it is recommended for the policy makers and planners to empower parents and teachers on cyber space and provide appropriate effective approaches to prevent potentially fatal risks of Internet.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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