



Self-concept in Persons with Disability

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Abstract: Self-concept is a major psychological construct. Though self-concept is the perception that a person holds about himself/herself, family as well as society play vital role in developing the self-concept of an individual. A disabled person is the one who is considered as disabled because of the difference in appearance or behaviour. Basically disability is a tag assigned to the persons having some kind of impairment. Therefore, the development of self-concept among disabled students is not normal like other students. Poor self-concept is markedly observed among disabled students. However, if they get support from their family and society, their self-concept are likely to be enhanced. Similarly, inclusive education plays a major role in building the self-concept of disabled students. This review paper highlights the prevalence of different types of disability in students, the significance of family care and inclusive education in enhancing the self-concept of disabled students.

Key Words: Self-Concept, Disability, Inclusive Education

Self-concept is a major psychological factor that operating within an individual which determines his/her behaviour. Psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow played major roles in popularizing the concept of Self-Concept. The formation of self-concept works as a major factor for the development of individual's personality (Roger, 1959). With a proper self- concept, an individual grows gradually in various dimensions like mental, social, physical, intellectual and emotional. The growth of an individual's personality is the result of the person's interaction with the total environment. This environment comprises family environment, school environment, neighbourhood environment, playground environment and social environment at large. All such environments put larger impact on the person's development. Meanwhile, during the process of interaction, a person not only forms a concept about his/her surrounding and others, but develops an image or concept of his/her own self. He/she gradually forms an image of his own physical health, structure of his/her body, appearance of face, physical attributes, strengths, weaknesses, vitality and other attributes like his/her interests, attitude, abilities, potentials, intelligence, creativity etc.

The term Self-Concept is defined by psychologists in various ways. William James (1890) defined 'Self or Empirical Me' as the sum total of all that a man can call his- his body, traits and abilities; his material possessions; his family, friends and enemies; his vocations and avocations and much else. He further stated that 'self' is made of four constituents:

- i. **Material Self:** The material self consists of the material possessions of oneself.
- ii. **Social Self:** The social self implies how a person is regarded by his fellows.
- iii. **Spiritual Self:** The spiritual self contains one's psychological faculties and dispositions.
- iv. **Pure Ego:** Pure ego of an individual consists of his/her sense of personal identity.

Carl Rogers (1959) was of the opinion that "Self-Concept is a portion of the total perceptual field which gradually becomes differentiated as the self." Every person has his own way to perceive things around him/her. With the passing time, an individual's perception becomes stronger and stable. Gradually, he/she learns to differentiate himself from the rest of the world, he develops his perception towards himself and that makes up his Self-Concept. At the same time, he also learns to recognise familiar faces, objects, persons, voices and events.

According to the view of Combs and Snygg, "Self-Concept is the person's perception or view of himself." It means Self-Concept is the sum total of all the things that is related to 'I' or 'Me'. It refers to all the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and values that a person attaches to him. That's why Self-Concept can be regarded as a view or perception one holds about himself. In other words, Self-Concept can be decoded as a person's evaluations about his physical abilities, appearance, intellectual capacities, social skills, psychological self-image, self-confidence, self-respect and self-adequacy. Thus, Self-Concept basically deals with a person's perceptions. This Self-Concept again can have impacts on the social interaction, level of aspiration, psychological health, school achievement etc. It can also have an indirect effect on his popularity and approval by other people in his surroundings.

Self-Concept is alternatively known as Self-Construction, Self-Identity, Self-Perspective or Self-Structure. Self-Concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself (Leflot et. al., 2010; Flook et. al., 2005). It answers to the question. "Who am I?" (Myers & David, 2009). It is made up of one's self-schemas and interacts with self-esteem, social-self, and self-knowledge to form the 'self'. It includes the past, present and future selves (Utulua-Abumere, 2013).

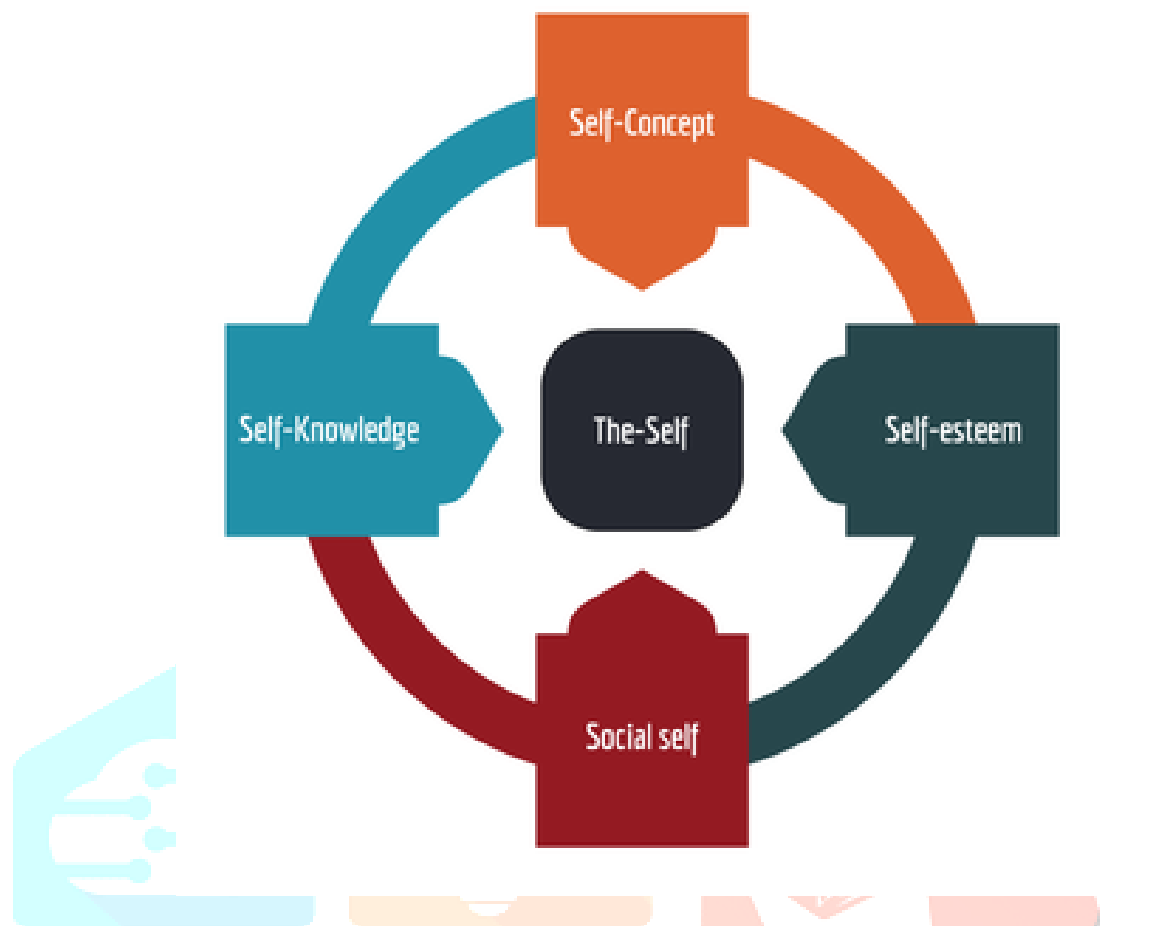


Fig. 1: Components of Self-Concept

Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-concept#/media/File:The_constituent_on_one's_self.png

One's self-perception is defined by one's self-esteem, self-concept, self-knowledge, and social self. Disability is not the only identity of a person. It is a part of a person's life. A person with disability can view himself/herself much more than just being disabled. On a contrary, they are prone to discrimination, stigma and stereotypes by the society and thus face a lot of difficulties while trying to meet society's set standards (Voigt, 2009). It results into their negative self-concept (Shpigelmen and HaGani, 2019).

Disability

A disabled person is the one who is considered as disabled in his/her society because of the difference in appearance or behaviour (Ittyerah & Kumar, 2007). The World Health Organization (1980) has proposed three international categorization of disability: Impairment, Disability and Handicap. Impairment refers to as any kind of loss or abnormality in physiological, psychological or anatomical structure or function. Disability refers to as lack or restriction of ability to perform an activity in the same manner a normal child of the same age level does. A handicap is a disadvantage resulting out of disability or impairment which prevents an individual to fulfil the roles of a normal child of his/her age.

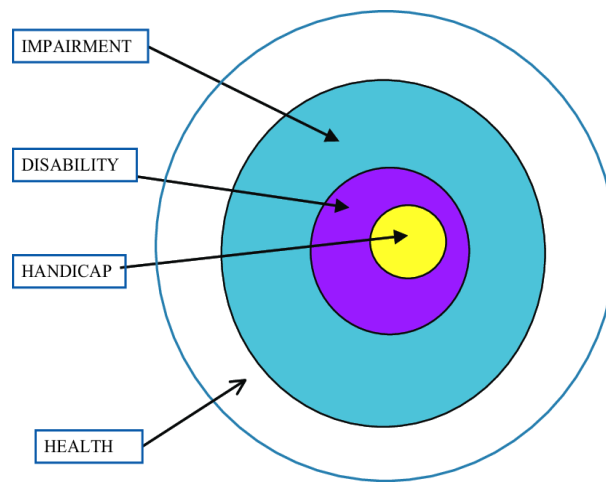


Fig. 2: Venn diagram representing the relationship among Impairment, Disability and Handicap

Reprinted from “An extension of the capability approach: Towards a theory of dis-capability” by N. Bellanca, 2011, European Journal of Disability Research.

Disabilities (especially the acquired ones) and chronic diseases change or lower people’s self-image (Moore et. al., 2000). Children having mild disabilities are found to face adjustment problems related to teachers and peers in school setting (Popovici & Buica-Belciu, 2013). In some cases, the self-concept of disabled students was found to be higher than the normal students (Suganthi & Little Flower, 2015; Leminen, 2002). It is because, they show highly optimistic self-image as a defence mechanism to hide their depressive, gloomy and real self-concept (Popovici & Buica-Belciu, 2013).

Types of Disability

According Viji (2020), the following kinds of disabilities start to develop in child from early childhood days.

1. Visual Impairment
2. Hearing Impairment
3. Loco motor Disability; Cerebral Palsy
4. Mental Retardation & Mental Illness

Self-Concept of Children with Visual Impairment

Visual impairment also known as vision loss refers to the decreased ability to see to some degree which can’t be fixed with usual means like lens or glasses (WHO, 2015). Blindness refers to complete or nearly complete vision loss (Maberley, Hollands, Chuo, Tam, Konkal & Roesch, 2006). The principles of psychology in the dynamics of development of self-concept and self-esteem are equally applicable in case of sighted and blind students (Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004). But children with visual impairment may develop lower self-concept than the other students because of the challenges they face in their everyday life due to the impairment (Alexander, 1996; Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2013; Konarska, 2007).

Self-esteem plays a vital role in a child's developmental process in all aspects (Brooks, 1992; Olsen, Beckler & wiggins, 2008). Visually impaired students not only need inclusion in normal education system, but also in mainstream of society. Visual impaired students can't see things or persons. So, they can't predict the behaviour and perception of other persons towards them. They feel helpless at times. They need attention from their peers, teachers and other members of society. If the inclusion is not done properly, they may feel unwanted in society and develop inferiority complex among other students of their age. This feeling may lead to negative self-esteem. In fact, self-esteem is sometimes referred to as inferiority complex of a person (Alberts, 2020).

The type of school viz. special school, residential school for blinds, inclusive school also influences the perception of a child towards his or her moral, physical, personal and social self-esteem (Bracken, 1995). Therefore, it can be said that development of self-concept of children with visual impairment depends on the type of school he/she has been admitted into. Because, the care and attention a student with visual impairment gets in a special school or in a residential school might differ from that of a inclusive school set up. Bowen (2010), after doing a thorough review of twenty two literatures, stated that the more severe the visual loss is, the lower will be the scores of self-concept and self-esteem. So, it is quite evident that self-concept of visually impaired students is less than the normal children. In the same way Datta (2014) found that negative self-concept is developed in most of the visually impaired students.

Self-Concept of Children with Hearing Impairment

Children who don't respond to sounds, have trouble in talking are generally found to be deaf or hearing impaired (Shah, 2020). Though not visible, deafness or hearing impairment is very common impairment among children. About 1.9% of children population have hearing impairment and one out of every 1000 children found to have permanent hearing loss (Shah, 2020). It is a general assumption that the children with hearing loss have less positive self-esteem due to lack of communication ability, physical appearance and social maturity (Warner-Czyz, Loy, Evans, Wetsel & Tobey, 2015). However, a study by Warner et. al. (2015) on self-esteem of hearing loss children wearing cochlear implants (CI) or hearing id (HA) and found positive self-appraised self-concept within them. The researchers revealed that CI and HA devices not only improved their communication skill, but also enhanced their quality of life.

Findings of many research studies revealed that hearing impaired students face difficulties due to a number of reasons like lack of acceptance from peers, difficulty in social-emotional adjustment, low self-esteem etc. (Altshuler, Deming, Vollenveider, Rainer, & Tendler, 1976; Cappelli, Daniels, Durieux-Smith, McGrath, & Neuss, 1995; Davis, Elfenbein, Schum, & Bentler, 1986; Hinderink, Krabbe, & Van Den, 2000; Knutson, Boyd, Reid, Mayne, & Fetrow, 1997; Meadow & Trybus, 1979; Theunissen et al., 2014). On the other hand from findings of a study by Warner et, al.(2015), it can be inferred that if the difficulties and challenges faced by a hearing loss students are addressed properly, their life will be easier and they will show positive self-esteem.

Studies by Cates (1991; Wright (1981); Koelle & Convey (1982) also confirmed that early interventions for children with hearing impairment leads to better self-esteem.

Self-Concept of Children with Loco Motor Disability or Cerebral Palsy

Loco motor disability refers to disability of the bones, muscles or joints leading to substantial restriction of movements of the limbs or any form of cerebral palsy (Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995). Human personality factor is largely affected by defect or injury of the body's limbs. As a consequence of this disorder, a person starts devaluing himself/herself (Narimani & Mousajadeh, 2010). Consequently, the person's self-esteem and self-concept are seen to be less in physically disabled persons.

Harvey and Greenway (1984) undertook an empirical study to know the self-concept of handicapped children and their non-handicapped siblings. The study revealed that the self-concept of handicapped children were lower than their non-handicapped siblings. The handicap group of children also showed lower sense of self-esteem, less integrated view of self and greater anxiety. Another study (Shields, Loy Murdoch, Taylor and Dodd, 2007) stated that children detected with cerebral palsy may be less competent in some aspects of self-concept. But they need not be associated with low self-concept all the time. Parents, teachers, health professionals and care takers need to be aware of this. Otherwise, considering them as children having low self-concept might affect their actual self-concept negatively. Jones (1985) analysed the self-concept of handicapped students and found that they have more negative phenomenal self-concept than the non-handicapped students. They also have higher anxiety level, low self-perceptions of their intellectual ability, school status, popularity, insecurity, inadequacy, guilt, impulsivity and immaturity.

Self-Concept of Children with Mental Retardation or Mental Illness

Mental retardation, currently known as intellectual disability is characterised by below average intelligence or mental ability and lack of skills necessary for day to day living (Byrd, 2020). It is not that they cannot perform any task or learn any new skill. They will do it in a slower rate than others and they may need assistance of others. Intellectual disability ranges from mild to profound. Self-concept in the persons with mental retardation develops very poorly (Popovici & Buica-Belciu, 2013). They stated that self-concept in adolescent students have low self-concept and verbal creativity than the normal students. It is suggested that these children should be sent to special schools for acquiring education. However, Perron (1979) is of different opinion who said that by doing this, the students will be confined to an artificial environment, which will decrease their adaptive standard to outside world.

Overestimated competence and lack of adaptive social skills of the children limit their self-concept to a greater extent (Diederich & Moyse, 1995; Ninot et. al., 2000). Bengt Nirje (1969/1994) mentioned in his seminal paper, "As almost every situation for the mentally retarded has a pedagogical significance and often is related to his slow building-up of self-concept, it is essential that the mentally retarded should be offered

appropriate facilities, which assist his educational processes and development and which make it possible for him to experience himself as becoming adult in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. This is a basic requirement for developing his life as close to the normal as possible. The intention is to provide the students with mental retardation a normal life where they can live and grow in their own way. In that way they can feel confident of their own abilities, feel accepted by others in the society resulting into a developed self-concept. The self-concept of the mentally retarded children is also influenced by the care pattern and environment they get. Deviations from proper care and congenial environment can cause unwillingness to interact and cause poor development of self-concept (Nursalam, Harsaktiningtyas, Kurnia, Fadhillah and Efendi, 2018)

Importance of Inclusive Education for Strengthening Self-Concept of Disabled Children

Children around the world are excluded from mainstream education system due to various reasons. Disability of the students is one of the major causes. Inclusive education is meant for all. It provides equal educational opportunity to all children irrespective of their diversities and disabilities. Literally, 'inclusion' means including diversified entities. So far as education is concerned, 'inclusive education' means placing and educating the students with disabilities in a regular classroom with normal children of the same age group (Chauhan, Mabtry, 2018).

Significant difference has been found between self-concept of disabled and that of normal students (Narimani and Mousazadeh, 2010). In fact, self-concept of disabled students is lower than that of normal students according to a number of studies (Silverman 1983; Chapman, 1988; Nasab, 1993; King et. al. 1993; Narimani and Mousazadeh, 2010). But due to various factors, self-concept among the disabled ones is found to be higher than the normal ones. Those factors include, family support, social support, proper attitudes of family and society (Ferir, 1984; Guyton, 1984; Burk, 1987; Gumble and McHall, 1987; Dason, 1989). Moreover, a survey conducted by Limb (2004), revealed that the self-concept of disabled boys is higher than the self-concept of disabled girls due to the role of family and society. Boys feel more independent than girls because of the attitude of family and society towards them.

From the above stated studies, certain inferences can be drawn for developing self-concept of students with disabilities. As most of the studies (Silverman 1983; Harvey and Greenway, 1984; Chapman, 1988; Alexander, 1996; King et. al. 1993; Nasab, 1993; Konarska, 2007; Narimani and Mousazadeh, 2010; Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2013; Popovici & Buica-Belciu, 2013) are indicating that children having some kind of disability are likely to develop negative self-concept, it is essential for the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream education system. Some of those points have been stated below:

- Disabled students need special care and attention. They might feel excluded if they are not included in mainstream of society. If they don't get access to regular schools with other children, they may feel

segregated from others. They may feel unwanted and isolated from the mainstream of society leading to develop negative self-concept.

- Students' self-esteem is directly related to the way they feel about themselves and others make them feel. At times they feel helpless as they need to depend on others because of their disabilities. They tend to develop an inferiority complex. Therefore, they should be equipped with technical aids adaptations for compensating their defects. For example, visually impaired students should be provided with auditory aids to compensate their disability to do various activities with the normal students. Being able to perform tasks or activities with normal students will definitely improve their self-concept.
- Adjustment is one of the important problems of children with special needs. To develop various dimensions of adjustments, they should be offered training in various co-curricular activities like dancing, singing, drawing, scouts and guide, skit play, dramatization, essay, debate, speech etc. so that if someone is feels himself/herself a disabled in one activity, he/she can excel in some other activities. That will help in improving his/her self-concept.
- In inclusive schools, teachers are well aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the differently abled children. Because, they are trained by various Govt. and non-Govt. organizations to deal with those students effectively. In that way, the disabled students get special attention and concern from their teachers and simultaneously they will feel confident and have higher self-concept.

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