

## Abstract

Original reason for carrying out this research is to open up a new knowledge space in enhancing and developing quality of life of persons with disabilities by exploring a role of disability identity which influences an empowerment of persons with disabilities as it is a crucial beginning point in the development process. The research argues and criticizes ways of doing dominated by a medical model of disability which aiming for medical rehabilitation to regain capabilities of the person and that they can do daily activities all by themselves and a categorization of disability according to a classification of impairment.

Population of the study were those who involved directly with Independent Living Centers in Nakornprathom, Nonthaburi and Chonburi provinces; 19 persons with disabilities and 9 persons from their families, and key persons in disability policy field; 4 persons with disabilities from organisations of disabled people and 5 experts from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Concepts and theories from critical theory, postmodernism and cognitive anthropology are brought to construct a working framework. These concept all are about knowledge, perception and worldview which powerfully determines human's ability. The research process itself was intended to serve as a tool in the independent living of persons with abilities movement. Then a qualitative approach was chosen in a research design using two methods; dialogic approach and testimonio. Tools for data collection were deep listening dialogue, semi-structured interview, participant observation and literature review.

The significant findings are disability identity give impacts to self development and empowerment of persons with disabilities. The creation of positive disability identity (i.e. I am disabled and can do valuable activities. Having disability brought good opportunity and make me happy as I am at present) is a turning point in life of the persons which brings about empowerment from inside and then leads to creative behaviour in many areas of living. This can be seen at groups of people with

extensive disabilities who have formed up Independent Living self-help group. The Independent Living process provides a social space for positive disability identity and group disability identity development. The group disability identity serves to sustain personal positive disability identity and connects people to advocacy activities.

A deep-sense interpretation of teachings from Buddhism about mind and wisdom can take people away from negative discourse on karma and disabilities in mainstream society. However, the concept of karma helps family members to accept the reality which happened and be with present. They let go focusing on cure or hope to get rid of disabilities. They support persons with disabilities according to their need to have normal and satisfied life.

The research argument proposed that sustainable development in living life of persons with disabilities is about providing the person to have thought, worldview, and interpretation about their own disabilities in positive prospect. Then this can give deep impact to ways of living.

The finding in the research confirms and supports new critical idea that is to create positive worldview, perception towards their own disability can lead to higher level of potential in thinking, doing and living independently. Then the enhancement and development of persons with disabilities in this new era shall not limit to only medical treatment (physically treatment focused) and charity. The emphasis will be on the creation of knowledge and positive perception of disability by support a setting up of strong self-help groups or communities which persons with disabilities be leaders and manage their own organisations. Persons with disabilities live inclusively in the society having rights and dignity under a country's constitution and international convention on human rights and disability rights.