

BEING A YOUNG WOMAN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES: LIFE EXPERIENCES AND THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore how the discourses on women with physical disability and family responses towards the family member with disabilities, which influence the self and subjectivity of women with disabilities (WWDs), and how does it impact their sexual and reproductive health practices. Qualitative research design was used for this study. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Fifteen young women with physical disabilities were recruited through the international non-government organization. For key informant interview, three mothers and three community members were recruited in the study. To analyze the data, theoretical concepts of discourse, bio-power, and sexuality, concepts developed by Michel Foucault and concepts from Critical Interpretive Medical Anthropology has been used.

The findings showed that most of the discourse came from the medical knowledge which was related to the body impairment and capacity of a person. The discourse had an influence on the notion of the self and subjectivities of young women with physical disabilities as in seeing themselves as unattractive, asexual, abnormal, in addition, they lacked confident in engaging sexual relationship which made them feel incapable in personal relationship. The family attitudes and support towards the WWDs also had an influence on the notion of self and subjectivity of WWDs. Individuals also felt the negative attitudes regarding disabilities as a result of bad karma or sins from a previous life. Feeling of shame from being disabled lead WWDs to have negative notion of self and subjectivity which leads these young women to be unaware of their reproductive organ and sexuality, lack of knowledge of harmful SRH practices and problems, and lack of understanding of their vulnerability to sexual harassment and sexual violence.

There is a need of an advocacy of SRH with clear information for not only WWDs but also for other community members. Existing laws and policies for the person with disabilities need to be advocated to enhance fully understanding of women with disabilities and their sexuality in an attempt to reduce the stigmatization, negative attitudes and beliefs against these women, and to provide the effective inclusive development environment for the women with disabilities.

KEY WORDS: DISCOURSE/ WOMEN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES/
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