

Abstract

Paraplegia resulting from spinal cord injury is an abrupt life change from independent living to living in dependency with a disability. Paraplegics must learn a variety of new behaviors to manage their life. The aim of this study was to develop a substantive theory that describes the perception and basic social process of Thai persons in managing everyday life after being paraplegic. Nineteen Thai persons with paraplegia who lived in rural areas in the northern part of Thailand were recruited by purposive sampling method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, and letters from some participants.

Finding indicated that Thai persons with paraplegia perceived life alteration after becoming paraplegic and tried to manage their problems using their own capacity and supporting resources under the existing condition and context. From constant comparative analysis "making the best of paraplegia" was derived as the core category. A four-component construct model consisting of perceived self and life alteration, learning self-care, learning the system of care and support, and learning to live in society, was used to represent the theory and causal relationships in the model. The concepts of self and life alteration in the theoretical model included : 1) perceived the self as "being ill" 2) perceived the self as "being disabled" 3) perceived the self as "being a disabled person".

The process of "making the best of paraplegia" is a moving cycle originating from the center of self and gradually expanding with every cycle of movement. The

movement of a Tornado characterizes the occurrence. Thus, the model of "making the best of paraplegia" is always expanding gradually in an outward direction. Although within process the movements are repeated, the meanings of each repetition are never the same.

To increase the possibility for persons with paraplegia to live independently, nurses should aim to enhance their self-care, self-esteem, and self-empowerment. With respect to policies, the government and authorized persons should provide an infrastructure and other proper support to enable them to live independently in society, and they should be encouraged to form groups to lobby government institutions, in order to develop their live and well-being. For research, the right of the disabled and their self-capability to speak for themselves should be studied.