Self-concept of adults with cerebral palsy

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Abstract
Purpose. To describe the self-concept of adults with cerebral palsy (CP).
Method. Cross-sectional design included the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, version 2 (TSCS:2), Functional Independence Measure (FIM™), Beck Depression Index II (BDI-II), Craig Hospital Inventory of Environmental Factors (CHIEF), Diener’s Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Gross Motor Functional Classification System (GMFCS) levels and demographic questions.

Results. One hundred and two people with CP (52 females, mean age = 26) participated. Thirty-eight participants had unreliable answers as indicated by validity scales and were excluded from the analysis. Ten participants had high self-concept; 41 had average self-concept and 13 had low total self-concept. Self-concept had a fair and inverse association with the BDI-II (Pearson’s r = -0.3, p < 0.01) and a moderate and direct association with the SWLS (Pearson’s r = 0.4, p < 0.001). Self-concept was not associated with GMFCS level or FIM score. Family and Personal sub-domain scores were lowest sub-domain scores for people with low self-concept (p < 0.01).

Conclusion. The majority of the participants in this sample had a healthy self-concept; and self-concept was not associated with severity of CP, but with lack of depression and life satisfaction. Results suggest the need for family centred care into adulthood.

Keywords: Self-concept, adult, cerebral palsy

Introduction

Self-concept is a person’s overall view of oneself and sense of worth, value and adequacy [1]. A goal of parents and of professionals who work with children with cerebral palsy (CP) is a healthy self-concept in adulthood. Drs. Werner and Smith’s seminal work on long-term outcomes in vulnerable children and adolescents identified social competence and high self-esteem as characteristics associated with resiliency [2] and the ‘promotion of self-esteem and self-efficacy...the key ingredient in any effective intervention process’ [3, p. 205]. However, there is little known about the self-concept of children or adults with CP. An assumption made by many clinicians is that people with CP have a low self-concept, especially with increasing levels of severity [4], when, in actuality, this may not be true. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of literature that documents the positive impact of rehabilitation interventions on the self-esteem of children and adults with CP [5-7]. Knowledge of the patterns of self-concept within the general population of people with CP and factors associated with healthy self-concept will assist in (1) the design of clinical trials that include self-concept as an outcome and (2) identifying subgroups at risk for low self-concept as adults.

A synthesis of research on the self-concept of children with CP concluded that for the most part, children and adolescents with CP have a healthy self-concept, although some subgroups may be at risk for low self-concept [4]. Adolescent females have been identified as having lower total self-concept scores, physical self-concept scores and social self-concept scores than that of their peers [8]. Younger children...