

The Concept of Self-Care

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INDIA BEING, the seventh largest and the second most populous country in the world, has manifold problems to resolve, of which health is only one in order to attain the national goal of self-sufficiency. As nurses and citizens of India, what part do we, each of us, have to play to achieve that goal and to meet our primary goal of nursing i.e., to assist a patient to attain and maintain a state of physical, physiological, psychological and social equilibrium.

It is my assumption that knowledge of the concept of self-care in health and its implications in nursing would help nursing personnel to assist the patient attain his equilibrium. Answers to some of the questions may be helpful to guide us on the right track. What is the notion of self and self-concept? What is Orem's concept of self-care? What are some of the existing problems in India in the practice of self-care concept? What is its application to nursing in India? Since we are all "selves", the most basic discussion we must have, is that of the meaning of self and of self-concept.

The notion of self only applies to human beings. It is used in philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and nursing.

A two-fold aspect of self—the self as knower or subject and the self as the thing known or object—was developed in philosophy. Great philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas have emphasized the concept of self as 'subject', 'self' or 'ego', 'soul or self'. Thus the self is inferred as the principle of knowledge both of itself and of the sense world. Descartes introduced the word *self* as it is used now. He saw the self as a spiritual substance aware of his thinking. Locke dis-

agreed with this idea and explained that the self is the person as he sees himself and as seen from outside. Kant pointed out self as known and knower which has the power of institution, i.e., of receiving impressions and power of pure thought. Royce distinguished between phenomenal self, a group of ideas, and the metaphysical self, a group of aims and ideals to be contrasted with the rest of the world. Each human self is the absolute, but men retain their individuality and distinction from one another in so far as their life plans are mutually contrasting and include recognition of other life plans as different. (5)

The concept of self and the concept of ego were used interchangeably by some and in a differentiated way by others. Combining the two viewpoints, self (ego) "is a developmental formation in the psychological make up of the individual, consisting of inter-related attitudes that the individual has acquired in relation to his own body and its parts, to his capacities, and to objects, persons, family, groups, social values, goals and institutions, which define and regulate his relatedness to them in concrete situations and activities". (13)

From a research viewpoint, the concept of self is a constellation of attitudes linked with identifiable reference groups and sets, providing tools for integrating behavioural (individual) and socio-cultural levels of analysis. Groups then, and populations have properties which display important features which are identical with socio-cultural prescriptions.

The judgment value of self is different in different situations. The self values such as the ways, the time, the relative frequency with which he becomes ego-involved differ from person to person. A change or disturbance of self-attitudes is psychologically uncomfortable and even painful. Resistance to change increases in proportion

to the degree of commitment person has in a particular matter. A person is less likely to change his attitude readily if he is highly involved in it. Therefore, attempts to change the behaviour of a person are rather difficult. This aspect of self concept is an important factor to keep in mind while nursing a patient, for he is a unique individual who has specific characteristics and relative values of self in his particular group.

Orem's concept is that self-care is the behavioural manifestation or performances of an individual to maintain his own health and that of the dependent members in his social group. (11)

Age, state of health or sickness, cultural and educational background, role of an individual in his family and society, the environmental situation's in which he lives, all play a great part in taking each step of his decisions and actions relative to self-care.

"Self-care activities are learned, positive and practical which involves a decision, a choice depending on the nature of the demand. Some kinds of self-care are universally required while others are required only in the event of illness, injury, or disease." (11)

All the activities to meet the basic human needs at all times and ages from birth to death as air, water and food, acts of elimination, balance of activity and rest, solitude and social interaction, prevention of hazards to life and being normal in one's own social group, are termed as one kind of self-care—'universal self-care'. When any change in human structure, in physical functioning, in behaviour and habits of an individual occurs which interferes with human integrated functioning, the individual has to depend on others totally or partly to sustain his life or well-being. The person then moves from the position of self-care agent to that of patient or recipient of care. Similarly, when a child gets sick and demands care which exceeds parents capacities as child care agents the parents also experience a change in their position and

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