

Self-Concept of Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Children in Mizoram

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school students in Mizoram on various domains: physical, social, and educational dimensions. The sample consisted of 100 middle school children (50 institutionalized children and 50 non-institutionalized (family-reared) children). Data were collected from five middle schools that both groups attended using the self-concept scale developed by Saraswat (1984), which was revalidated through a pilot study. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the institutionalized children, while simple random sampling was employed for the selection of non-institutionalized children. The collected data was analyzed by employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including percentage, mean, standard deviation, and t-tests, to identify differences between the two groups. The study revealed no significant difference in the physical self-concept between the two groups; however, a significant difference was observed in the social and educational self-concepts of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children.

Keywords: *Self-concept, Institutionalized children, non-institutionalized children*

Self-concept is one of the most important aspects of human identity and psychological wellbeing. It can be described as a person's perception and belief about his identity, values, beliefs, and character. According to Baumeister (1999), "Self-concept is the individual's belief about himself or herself including the person's attributes and who and what the self is" (Baumeister, 1999, as cited in Kumar & Singh, 2017). It is said to be a structured and organized construction that molds an individual's feelings about themselves, others and also their relationships in a social setting (Showers et. al. 2015)

One of the characteristics of self-concept is that it is not an inborn state; it is acquired by an individual over time through their interaction with the social environment. From birth onwards, an infant starts developing a sense of self; this process becomes more pronounced during puberty and adolescence (van der Aar et al., 2018). Early adolescence typically encompassing ages 11–15, represents a transformative period in a child's life and is a critical aspect of overall psychological growth. During this stage, as children enter the adolescence stage, they experience significant developmental changes in the physical, emotional, social,

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and cognitive aspects of their lives. These changes are likely to be accompanied by a number of difficulties and problems influencing their self-concept, which often leads to an abstract conception of who they are. Changes during adolescence influence not only children's social behavior but also their way of perceiving themselves, that is, their self-concept (Ganzaley et al. 1997, as cited in Ahad, Ara, & Shah, 2016)). Children who develop a strong sense of self-worth and a well-developed structure during this stage had all the need to develop a positive identity. Thus, this developmental stage becomes critical in laying the foundation for the development of a positive self-concept.

For the development of a positive self-concept, the environment in which children are brought up has played a significant role. Among all the environments children encounter, family environments are traditionally considered the optimal environment, offering emotional security, support, and nurturing essential for healthy growth. Children who are surrounded by a nurturing and encouraging environment develop a positive self-image, an optimistic view of themselves, and feelings of competence. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2006) states that, "if parents praise and love a child, if playmates respect and give attention to the individuals, he forms a picture of himself as a desirable person and hence develops a positive self-concept. However, if parents and peers reject and criticize the individual and are indifferent, this leads to a derogatory self-picture resulting in inferiority feelings." (UNICEF, 2006, as cited in Ahad, Ara, & Shah, 2016)

Although family environments are the ideal environment to be brought up in, unfortunately, a significant number of children end up in institutional care due to many reasons, such as abandonment, neglect, abuse, death of parents, or legal issues. A total of 1.8 lakh children are residing in child care institutions in India (Jena Committee Report, 2017). These children, who are placed in childcare institutions are referred to as institutionalized children. Brown (2009) has defined institutional care as "a group living arrangement for more than ten children without parents or surrogate parents', in which care is provided by a much smaller number of paid adult caregivers". Furthermore, Brown (2009) highlights that, "residential care implies an organized, routine, and impersonal structure to the living arrangements for children and a professional relationship, rather than a parental relationship between the adults and children." (Brown, 2009, as cited in Padmaja et al., 2014)

Children who are placed in the institutional care are regarded as socially disadvantaged due to lack of family relationships, love, and other basic necessities. It is a general belief that institutionalized children will have low self-concept due to absence of a nurturing environment that led to difficulties in forming healthy self-concept and which adversely affect their overall psychological well-being compared to non-institutionalized and family reared children.

Many studies have been conducted to compare the self-concept of institutionalized children with that of non-institutionalized children. Results from these studies have generally shown that the self-concept of the institutionalized children is lower when compared to the non-institutionalized children.

Unnikrishnan and Neelakandan (2019) concluded that a good parent-child relationship provides for a positive general self-concept and personality development among adolescents. Compared to orphan students, normal students had higher self-concept (Solanke, 2015). Hadush (2015) reported that non-institutionalized children scored higher on the self-esteem scale than institutionalized orphan children. Talukda (2015) asserts that non-institutionalized

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children had higher cognitive competence than institutionalized children in the Greater Guwahati area. According to Arun et al. (2015), there was a highly significant positive correlation between self-concept and family environment among adolescents. Asbah and Razal (2013) found a strong relationship between parents' communication about their culture and the self-contact of Malay adolescents. Saraswati et al. (2008), in their study, reported, "Institutionalized children had unsatisfactory adjustment, indicating more problems in social, emotional, and educational areas compared to non-institutionalized children." One of the most emphasized factors in this regard is the parent-child relationship. Gibson and Jefferson (2006) investigated the parenting, peer, mentor, and community influences on adolescent self-concept regarding perceived parental involvement and growth-nurturing relationships on their study in the GERA UP and found the influence of family peers, mentors and involvement in community groups on adolescent self-concept.

The present study endeavors to assess and compare the self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children in Mizoram. In Mizoram, due to various social factors, many children end up in child care institutions. While some are staying there as they are orphan, some also stay there because their parents have divorced and have started a new family and neither of them sought the custody of their children. In such scenario, the self-concept of institutionalized children may be adversely affected when compared to the non-institutionalized children. Hence, this study explores the self-concept of children focusing on three domains such as physical, social and educational self-concept. In the present study physical self-concept refers to how children see their bodies and look. How an adolescent perceives themselves is crucial because it affects their overall sense of self-worth, identity formation, and mental wellness. Social self-concept refers to the way of perceiving himself or herself in connection with social interactions and relationships. Children in the early adolescence are in the stage of building social identities and self-concepts. A positive social self-concept enables adolescent to understand their roles in social groups, like friendship, family, and society at large, which is crucial in their efforts to form a stable self-concept. Educational self-concept refers to the way a person perceives himself or herself in respect to schooling or learning environments. An adolescent with good educational self-concept develops the belief that he or she has necessary academic abilities to pursue their studies successfully, thus increases their motivation to academic success. This belief consequently improves their efforts and determination, a willingness to take risks, all of which leads to success academic.

Focus of the Study

Objectives

- To find out the self-concept levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children
- To compare the self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children in Mizoram with regard to their physical, social and educational self-concept.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significant difference in the physical, social and educational self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children in Mizoram.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the descriptive survey method. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for data analysis.

Population and sample of the study

The population of the present study consists of all Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized middle school children from Aizawl and Champhai districts Mizoram. The sample of the study consisted of 100 middle school children. Out of which 50 are institutionalized and 50 are non-institutionalized children. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the 50 institutionalized children, while simple random sampling was applied to choose the 50 non-institutionalized children.

Tools used for data collection

For the present study, a self-concept questionnaire developed by Saraswat (1984) and revalidated by the investigator was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire consists of 42 items. Each item is provided with three alternatives: always, sometimes, and never, and scoring was done as follows: always-3, sometimes-2, and for never -1. High scores indicated a high level of self-concept, and low scores indicated a low level of self-concept.

Procedure for data collection

The investigator personally visited the selected schools and obtained permission from the headmasters to conduct the study. An introduction to the self-concept test was provided to the students, outlining its purpose and relevance. The investigator then explained the procedure for administering the test to ensure clarity for the participants. Furthermore, confidentiality was assured regarding the information provided. Finally, the self-concept test was administered to the students.

Statistical techniques used for data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, i.e. mean, standard deviation, percentage and t-tests, to determine significant differences between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children.

RESULTS

Table 1: Levels of Self-concept of institutionalized and Non- institutionalized Children categorized by percentage.

Dimensions	Category	Self-Concept Scores	No. of Institutionalized Children	No. of Non-Institutionalized Children	Total	Overall Percentage
Physical Self-Concept	Low	1-42	2	0	2	2
	Average	43-84	15	12	27	27
	High	85-126	33	38	71	71
	Total		50	50	100	100
Social Self-Concept	Low	1-42	1	0	1	1
	Average	43-84	19	13	32	32
	High	85-126	30	37	67	67
	Total		50	50	100	100
Educational Self-Concept	Low	1-42	0	0	0	0
	Average	43-84	21	9	30	30
	High	85-126	29	41	70	70
	Total		50	50	100	100

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The data presented in Table 1 shows that, of a sample of 100 middle school children, 71% have a good physical self-concept, 27% have an average physical self-concept, and 2% have a low physical self-concept. Further analysis reveals that non-institutionalized children have a greater percentage of high physical self-concept, with 38% falling into this category. In contrast, 15% of institutionalized children have an average physical self-concept, whereas 12% of non-institutionalized children fall into this category. 2% of institutionalized children have a low physical self-concept, whereas none of the non-institutionalized children were found in the low category of physical self-concept.

With regard to social self-concept the above table also revealed that in the social self-concept among 100 middle school students, 67% have a high social self-concept, 32% have an average social self-concept, and 1% have a low social self-concept. It was also found that 37% of non-institutionalized children and 30% of institutionalized children are in the high category of social self-concept. Furthermore, 13% of non-institutionalized children are found to have an average social self-concept, whereas 19% of institutionalized children are found in the same category. Only 1% of institutionalized children and 0% of non-institutionalized children have a low social self-concept.

It can also be seen from the analysis that 70% of middle school children have high educational self-concept, while 30% are classified as having an average self-concept. Notably, no children are found in the low educational self-concept category. The data further reveals that 41% of non-institutionalized children fall into the high educational self-concept category, while 29% of institutionalized children are in the same category. The data also reveals that 21% of institutionalized children and 9% of non-institutionalized children are found to have an average educational self-concept.

Table 2: Comparison of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children in their Physical, Social and Educational self-concept.

Dimensions	Status of the Students	No of Respondents	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Mean	Mean Difference	t-Value	Significant at 0.05 level
Physical Self-Concept	Institutionalized	50	2.1922	.41336	.05846	-.04580	-.557	Not-Significant
	Non-Institutionalized	50	2.2380	.40908	.05785	-.04580	-.557	
Social Self-Concept	Institutionalized	50	2.0024	.30306	.04286	-.35520	-6.102	Significant
	Non-Institutionalized	50	2.3576	.27850	.03939	-.35520	-6.102	
Educational Self-Concept	Institutionalized	50	2.1766	.43954	.06216	-.22340	-2.870	Significant
	Non-Institutionalized	50	2.4000	.33119	.04684	-.22340	-2.870	

From the above Table 2, it can be seen that:

The mean score of non-institutionalized children on 'Physical self-concept' was higher than the mean score of institutionalized children. However, the t-value of $-.557$ is lower than the critical t-value of 1.98 at the 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no significant difference between institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children with regard to their physical self-concept. Hence, the hypothesis, 'There will be a significant difference in the physical-self -concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children' was rejected.

The mean score of non-institutionalized children on 'social self-concept' was higher than the mean score of institutionalized children. The t-value of 6.102 is more than the critical t-value of 1.98 at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, this means that there is a significant difference between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children with regard to their social self-concept. and the hypothesis, 'There will be a significant difference in the social self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children' was accepted.

The mean score of non-institutionalized children on 'educational self-concept' was higher than the mean score of institutionalized children. The t-value of 2.780 is more than the critical t-value of 1.98 at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, this means that there is a significant difference between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children with regard to their educational self-concept, and the hypothesis, 'There will be a significant difference in the educational self-concept of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children' was accepted.

Major Findings of the Study:

Findings of the self-concept levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children. In the three dimensions of self-concept, i.e., physical, social, and educational, non-institutionalized middle school children showed higher levels of self-concept, with 38% in the high self-concept category for physical self-concept, 37% for social self-concept, and 41% for educational self-concept. In contrast, institutionalized middle school children showed lower percentages, with only 33% in the high category for physical self-concept, 30% for social self-concept, and 29% for educational self-concept. Institutionalized children are found more in the average levels of self-concept, with 15% in physical self-concept, 19% in social self-concept, and 21% in educational self-concept, whereas 12% of non-institutionalized children fall in the average category of physical self-concept, 13% in social self-concept, and 9% in educational self-concept. 2% of institutionalized children fall in the low category of physical self-concept; no children were found in the low category in other dimensions such as social and educational self-concept.

No significant difference was found between institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children with regard to physical self-concept.

Significant differences were found between institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children with regard to social and educational self-concept, where non-institutionalized children are found to have a higher social and educational self-concept than institutionalized children.

DISCUSSION

Although the findings revealed that 38% of non-institutionalized children fall into the high self-concept category for physical self-concept compared to 33% of institutionalized children. However, it is noteworthy that the difference is not statistically significant. This finding was, however, not consistent with the findings of Goswami (2015), who conducted a comparative study of self-concept and academic achievement of institutionalized orphan children and family-reared children, and found a significant difference in the physical self-concept of these children coming from different environmental settings.

In contrast to the findings for physical self-concept, significant differences were found in the social self-concept between the two groups. Non-institutionalized children show a higher percentage (37%) in the high self-concept category for social interactions compared to only 30% of their institutionalized counterparts. On the other hand, against the findings of the present study, Padmaja et al. (2014) in their study of psychosocial problems and well-being in institutionalized and non-institutionalized children found no difference. Findings of the present study highlights the impact of environment on social development; non-institutionalized children typically have more opportunities for peer interactions, socialization, and community engagement, which are vital for developing positive social self-perceptions. Meanwhile, institutionalized children may face restrictions in social opportunities, leading to lower social self-concepts.

The findings also revealed educational self-concept, where 41% of non-institutionalized children have high self-concept levels compared to just 29% of institutionalized children. This significant difference suggests that the educational environment plays a crucial role in shaping a child's self-perception regarding their academic abilities. In support of these findings, Soni (2015), in her study of self-concept among children living with families and children living in institutions, also revealed that children living with families have a greater level of self-concept in all the aspects of self-concept than children living in institutions.

The reason for such differences could be that non-institutionalized children may benefit from more supportive educational experiences, individualized attention, and encouragement, whereas the institutionalized children may not provide the same level of support or resources, resulting in decreased educational self-concept.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that non-institutionalized children who are brought up in a family environment have a better level of self-concept than those children who are institutionalized in home care. Findings of the study clearly indicates that environment has a significant role in shaping self-concept among middle school children. However, institutionalization sometimes remains the only option available to families due to various factors. Therefore, there is a need to assess the support and facilities provided in institutional care for improving socialization and educational opportunities within the institutional settings so that there is an enhancement of self-concept that eventually contributes to healthier psychological development.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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