



Original Research Article

## Self Concept of Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Jammu & Kashmir

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### ABSTRACT

The present research assessed the possible effect caused due to traumatic experiences on the self concept of children. The sample for the study comprised of a group of 100 children (50 militancy affected and 50 non-militancy affected) selected for detailed study from a residential institution of Jammu in J&K state of India. The children were between 6-12 years of age at the time of study. The non militancy affected children were taken as reference group and were matched with the core group (militancy affected) on the basis of age, intelligence quotient, duration of stay in the institution and gender. It was a correlation field study in which data was collected using multi-method approach. Standardized tool used for the study included Self Concept Check list (SLC). In addition to it, self devised tools i.e. interview guides, observations and secondary data from institutional and school records were also used. The results revealed that contrary to the expectation militancy affected group of children were found to have awareness about their present self as compared to non militancy affected children. They revealed realistic knowledge of their self. They were aware of their positive and negative personality traits. They were, however, unable to express their deeper emotional state and were found to be unconsciously harboring feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. The present study is expected to provide practical need based suggestions for bringing about positive changes in self concept of children in similar situations.

**Key Words:** armed conflict, self, real, stress in children, militancy affected children.

### INTRODUCTION

At the core of our individuality, the very essence of our personality lies in our perception of 'self' and our perception of 'others'. The predictions are forged by our past experiences and determine our behavior towards others. The 'self' is that on which each person lays his individuality as a human being. It is somewhat an end product of our interaction with others. Self develops through interaction of heredity and environment. As self structure develops, it

becomes the integrating core of personality- the reference point around which the individual's experiences and coping patterns are organized. As new situations arise, they are perceived, thought about and acted upon in relation to the self.

One's self-concept (also called self-construction, self-identity, or self-perspective) is a collection of beliefs about oneself (Leflot et al 2010) that includes elements such as academic performance (Bong, 1999), gender roles and sexuality

(Hoffman et al 2005) and racial identity (Aries, 1998). Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "Who am I?" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erikson%27s\\_stages\\_of\\_psychosocial\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erikson%27s_stages_of_psychosocial_development), retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> april,2014).

Self in the Indian psycho-philosophical system is made parallel with 'Jiva' and 'Atman' (as cited in Suar,2001). The Jiva or the individual self is the object of consciousness, the experiences, the doer, the knower and the enjoyer. The Atman or Brahman is absolute and is beyond the grasp of senses and intellect but is known only by higher intuition (Sinha, 1996).

Self concept is the cognitive or thinking aspect of self (related to one's self image). During the past few decades, there has been a great emphasis on the study of self-concept by personality theorists, mental hygienists and clinical psychologists for understanding and predicting the many facets of human behavior. According to Franken (1994), "there is a great deal of research which shows that the self concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behavior. It is the self concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behavior".

There are four major aspects of self, undertaken for the study:

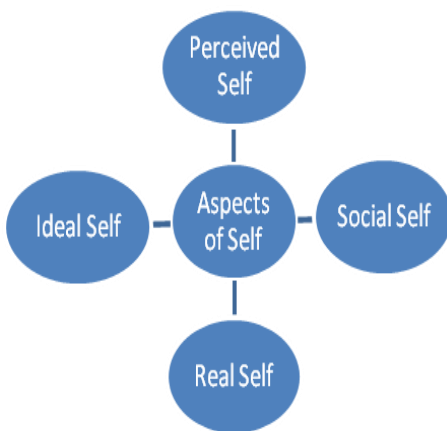


Fig. 1 Aspects of self:

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-concept>, retrieved on 14.6.14

**Perceived self:** which relates to what the person thinks he is. Perceived self creates and defines a person's world. It is one's own mind and understanding of world one decides what is positive and negative. Perceived self is determined through interaction with one's environment (<http://www.alduncan.net/self.html>).

**Social self:** means a person's sense of worth in social interaction with parents, peers, teachers and others in the society. It includes the views others have of the individual. Social self develops from the child's interaction with his caretaker i.e. mother and other family members. Child's interpretation of his mother's behavior and treatment of others towards him affects his social self concept.

**Real self:** means what we are really like. It is an understanding of who am I? it is knowledge we have about ourselves, of the variety of social roles which we play every day. Sometimes we feel that we have several different selves. Thus, a young mother who teaches in school may play the role of wife, parent and teacher each with its different role expectation and demands. The one who knows his real self will be able to integrate such varied role into a coherent "master role" (Bizman and Yinon, 2004).

**Ideal self:** is one's perception of who he would like to be (Hawkins et al. 1998). Besides a sense of personal identity, our self concept includes our aspirations for accomplishment and growth. Our image of the persons we would like to be and think we should be is called our self ideal. Our self – ideal is closely related to the identification we make with various role models- parents, teachers, friends, prominent personalities and other persons we admire. Depending upon whether our aspirations are difficult or easy to achieve in relation to our abilities and environmental opportunities, we are said to have high or low level of aspiration. It is important that

our level of aspiration be realistic. If it is too high, we will suffer inevitable failure and self devaluation no matter how hard we try and how well we perform. If it is too low, we will waste our personal resources and opportunities for growth and fulfillment (Coleman, 1979).

Terrorism has come to define 21<sup>st</sup> century. It poses a multidimensional threat to all. In India, armed conflict in J&K state, one of the northern states, began in the year 1989. It has had grave consequences for the population particularly children. Out of 38% child population in J&K state, 5-6% is either parentally deprived or destitute or neglected and displaced, ones who do not get their basic needs fulfilled (Hanjoora,2002 ; Hanjoora,2007). The accurate number of parentally deprived children and widows is not available but still a reliable estimate reveals their number between 16,000-20,000 (Madhosh, 1997). As a result of death of their parents, the conditions of parentally deprived children have become worse and are deteriorating day by day.

Militancy has affected all aspects of children's development. Such effects accumulate and interact with each other. Quota, Punamaki and Sarraj(2008) suggested that life threats, violence and losses form a risk for increased distress among children. They are unable to relax and enjoy their life as they used to do prior to militancy. A child who has experienced such traumatic situations will have negative self evaluation and indulges in self accusation, self-alienation, and experiences problems with self-identity and has low self-esteem (Carlson and Ruzek,2002).

The present work is based on the premise that the adequacy of the development of self concept is to a large extent the result of early parent-child relationship; the learning process through which a child passes continuously. As has been found by previous research studies,

when child is deprived of natural parents and family especially due to traumatic incident, his or her self concept is likely to be affected. The present research was undertaken with the view to assess the effect caused due to traumatic experiences on the concept related to the self among children, affected by armed conflict in J&K state. The main research hypothesis devised was that due to militancy related experiences, the target group was expected to have unrealistic concept about their own selves.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The sample for the study was drawn from a residential institution (SOS Children villages) located in Jammu district of J&K state. The sample size was 100. The entire sample for the study was divided into two sub groups. The group comprised of parentally deprived children in the age group of 6-12 years. This group was divided into two subgroups.

Militancy affected (MA) group (50): This was the core group which included children who witnessed and were affected by the armed conflict (violence). Each of them had lost at least one member (mother/father) of their natural family during the incidence of militancy and as a result they were left homeless, parentally deprived with no one to take care of them.

Non militancy affected group (NMA): The children in this subgroup were those who had lost their parents due to illness, domestic violence, and poverty. Some of them were runaway children. They were matched with core group (MA) on some variables viz. institutionalization, age, gender, intelligence quotient, duration of stay in the institution and parental deprivation. This group was taken as the reference group. Sample size of this group was 50.

Tools used for the study included self concept checklist developed by Pratibha

Deo (1998) and Self devised interview schedule were used to study the self concept of children. The quality of research work was evaluated against the validity framework of Mouton (1996).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of the sample children

In order to present a brief account of the personal characteristics of the sample children, the information related to their life before and during institutionalization was gathered from the respondents and the institutional authorities. Militancy affected group comprised those children who had seen incidents of violence and armed conflict in various parts of J&K and were residing in the present residential institution after losing one or both of their parents. Non- Militancy affected group mainly comprised parentally deprived children admitted to institution.

Table 1: Present age of Militancy affected (MA) and Non-Militancy affected (NMA).

Age Group(years)	MA (n=50)		NMA (n=50)		Total (n=100)
	N	%	N	%	
Younger group (6-9yrs)	22	44	18	36	40
Older group (9-12yrs)	28	56	32	64	60

The age group selected for the study was 6-12 yrs. This range was divided into two groups i.e. 6-9yrs and 9-12 yrs. The mean age of sample children (MA and NMA) was 9.24yrs.

Table 2: Duration of stay of Militancy affected (MA) and Non-Militancy affected (NMA) group in the institution.

DURATION (YEARS)	MA(n=50)		NMA (n=50)		TOTAL (n=100)
	N	%	N	%	
Less than 2years	11	22	8	16	19
2-5years	13	26	17	34	30
5-10years	26	52	25	50	51

Mean (MA)=4.52; Mean (NMA)=4.70

The duration of stay of the selected children ranged from less than 2 years to 10 years. Majority of children in both the

groups were residing in the institution since 5-10years.

### Background Information of Sample Children (Prior To Institutionalization)

Parental deprivation: since the development of self-concept is the result of interaction with others and reflection of others appraisal, especially that of parents about oneself, they are the earliest and most important sources. It is vital to know about the parental background of the children involved in the study. Staying away from one's parents at an early age of life certainly affects child's view of himself or his evaluation of himself.

Table 3: Status of parental deprivation among militancy affected (MA) and non militancy affected (NMA) children

CATEGORY	MA (n=50)		NMA (n=50)		TOTAL (n=100)
	N	%	N	%	
Complete parental deprivation	40	80	23	46	63
Partial deprivation					
Mother absent	02	4	09	18	11
Father absent	07	14	04	8	11
Information not available	01	02	14	28	15

Table 4: Information about siblings residing together in SOS Home (MA and NMA groups)

Biological siblings residing in same institution	MA (n=50)		NMA (n=50)		Total (n=100)
	N	%	N	%	
Sister and brother	16	32	12	24	28
Sister/sisters	10	20	18	36	28
Brother/brothers	14	28	09	18	23
single	10	20	11	22	21

Calculated  $\chi^2=3.96$ , insignificant difference

In the present study, all the selected children were parentally deprived, some were facing 'complete deprivation' (both the parents not alive) and some were bearing 'partial deprivation'. The data shown in table 1 reveals that, overall, most (63%) of the children were completely parentally deprived. Majority among them were MA children. With reference to partial deprivation, 14% MA children were not having their fathers alive, while 18% of

NMA children had fathers only. There were few children whose parental information was not available in the institutional records.

The data related to siblings residing together in SOS family homes, revealed that 21 percent of children were single i.e. those who were not having any biological brother or sister residing with them. Most of the children in MA group had their brother as well as sister with them in the family home. In case of NMA children, many (36%) of them were staying together with their sisters in family home. Such an arrangement has helped mothers (mothers refer to those women who look after children in SOS home) to make children feel comfortable and secure immediately after their placement in home, by making them understand that they had with them someone whom they already knew and could interact in their own language. While, in case of single children, mothers had to give more attention and time to make them feel wanted.

Concluding comments about personal characteristics of sample children: Analysis of the personal characteristics of sample children revealed that all the children were parentally deprived. Majority of children in both the groups were Hindus, 32% of MA children were Muslims belonging to Kashmir, Doda, Kishtwar, Baderwah. Mother tongue was used as a medium of communication prior to their institutionalization and for few months after it. Later on everyone in SOS home spoke Hindi. The academic level of both the group of children was similar before their placement in the institution. The mean age of sample children was 9.24 years, mean IQ score was observed to be 22.29 and mean duration of stay in the institution was 4.61 years.

*Assessment of self-concept of children self*

Concept is the cognitive part of the self. It is knowledge one has about oneself.

The self concept of sample children was assessed using self-concept check list, developed by Deo (1998). This consisted of 212 adjectives which cover almost all the important aspects of personality. These were divided into positive and negative words. The words were also divided into different dimensions – intellectual, emotional, character, social, aesthetic characteristics. The overall mean and standard deviation for MA and NMA groups are presented in table 2.

Table 5: Self-concept of sample children\*

Respondents	Mean (x̄)	S.D.(σ)	Calculated t
MA	27.10	19.80	- 0.25
NMA	28.12	14.38	

Based on SCL score, p<0.05 = 1.65, difference insignificant

The result of t-test on the SCL scores revealed that there is no significant difference between MA and NMA children in this respect.

*Aspects of self*

The three aspects of self (perceived, real and ideal) were also assessed using SCL. Mean and standard deviations were calculated for each of these aspects of self concept (based on SCL scores) studied.

Table 6: mean and standard deviation of aspects of self concept (MA and NMA groups)

Aspects of self	MA (n = 50)	NMA (n = 50)	Total (n = 100)	t-value
Perceived self				
x̄	25.42	22.65	24.05	0.61
σ	19.31	44.25	16.97	
Real self				
x̄	14.82	19.12	17.05	0.67
σ	31.79	31.73	31.81	
Ideal self				
x̄	23.62	30.08	26.81	2.01*
σ	17.94	13.93	16.33	

\*Difference significant, p<0.05

The responses to the perceived self and ideal self were analyzed from sample children's perspective, while the responses to the real self on the check list were analyzed from the perspective of significant

others for both the groups. As shown in the table 3 , the mean scores obtained by the MA children are more on perceived self as compared to NMA children (although the difference is insignificant statistically). It could, however, be interpreted that MA group have higher perceived self-concept than NMA children. The S.D. value is quite high in NMA group for perceived self indicating a wide range of variation in scoring between extremely high and extremely low scores.

On the other two aspects viz. real and ideal self, MA children have lesser mean scores than their counterparts. The values present in table reveal that unlike the core group (MA children) the mean scores obtained by the reference group on the aspect of real self were closer to their mean score on perceived self. MA children were found to be more satisfied with their present self than NMA children, as children of latter group reported more changes and additions in their personality and behavior patterns showing lesser satisfaction with their perceived self image. No doubt MA children too desired some changes in their perceived self. It may thus appear that children of MA group were more aware of their strength and limitations. They were more realistic in their approach towards their wishes as compared to other group. The SD of total sample is high in terms of real self than the other two aspects of self. The values of ‘t’ calculated for all the three aspects of self were insignificant in case of perceived self, thus indicating statistically significant differences in the mean scores for both group of children.

*Discrepancies between the aspects of self*

According to SCL manual, larger discrepancies between any two aspects of self spell out a maladjusted personality, showing little insight into oneself and having no self confidence. The degree of disparity between the real self and ideal self

is regarded as a measure of self confidence sometimes called self acceptance or self rejection. The discrepancy between perceived and real selves is an index of self insight. There is close and linear relationship in between discrepancy scores and indices of maladjustment. In the present study, self concept checklist (SCL) was used to obtain the discrepancy between the aspects of self. These discrepancies gave the score for self acceptance and self insight/knowledge.

Table 7: Discrepancy scores between aspects of self (MA and NMA group)

Aspects of self	Discrepancy Score	
	MA	NMA
Ideal – Perceived	-1.8	7.43
Ideal - Real	8.8	10.96
Perceived - Real	10.6	3.53

The discrepancies calculated in between Ideal – Perceived, Ideal – Real and Perceived – Real are depicted in table 4. The scores revealed that on the Ideal – Perceived discrepancy, which, gives the self acceptance score, core group children were found to be having lower score(-1.8) as compared to children of reference group (7.34). Self acceptance score is also obtained from the discrepancy between ideal – real self and here again MA children exhibited lower scores, indicating higher self acceptance in comparison with other (reference) group. On the discrepancy between the perceived – real aspects of self however, MA children were observed as having greater difference as against their counterparts. This discrepancy gives the score for self insight. It was found that MA children were unable to express about their emotional status openly. They had problems at unconscious level and were trying to suppress their negative feelings.

**CONCLUSION**

After the analysis and interpretation of the data, it can be concluded that MA group children had higher perceived self-

concept as compared to reference group. Significant difference was found between the mean scores of ideal self for both the groups. MA children were found to be more satisfied with their present self than the other group. The children of core group reported their desire for some changes in their personality traits but they did not reveal very high ideals unlike other group. Their wish for ideal image was rational. They related themselves on such adjectives which revealed their desire for improvement in themselves. This is supposed to be a sign of healthy development according to many researchers. On the whole, it can be thus concluded that core group children were aware of their selves and had accepted their personality traits and abilities the way they were. They revealed the awareness and acceptance of their negative behavior. The desire for the modification in the limitations in their personality and behavior pattern depict that they were satisfied with their present self and had positive attitude towards their development. The discrepancies calculated between the aspects of self revealed smaller disparity between the ideal self - perceived self and ideal self-real self of children of MA group. The greater discrepancy between perceived - real self showed difference in MA children's opinion about their self and opinion of significant others.

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