

## Coping Strategies Used by Persons with Spinal Cord Injury: A Rehabilitation Hospital Based Qualitative Study

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**Abstract :** Sustaining a spinal cord injury (SCI) causes severe disruption of all aspects of a person's life, resulting in the difficult process of coping with the distressing effects of paralysis affecting their ability to lead a meaningful life. These persons are hospitalized in the acute stage of injury and subsequently for rehabilitation and the treatment of complications. The purpose of this study was to explore coping strategies used by persons with SCI during their rehabilitation period. A qualitative study was conducted among persons with SCI, undergoing rehabilitation at the Rheumatology and Rehabilitation Hospitals, Ragama and Digana Sri Lanka. Twelve participants were selected purposively to represent both males and females, with cervical, thoracic or lumbar levels of injuries due to traumatic and non-traumatic causes as well as from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Informed consent was taken from the participants. In-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide to collect data. Probes were used to get more information and to encourage participants. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative content analysis was conducted. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya. Five themes were identified in the content analysis: social support, religious beliefs, determination, acceptance and making comparisons. Participants indicated that the support from their family members had been an essential factor in coping, after sustaining an SCI and they expressed the importance of emotional support from family members during their rehabilitation. Many participants had a strong belief towards the God, who had a personal interest in their lives, played an important role in their ability to cope with the injury. They believed that what happens to them in this life results from their actions in previous lives. They expressed that determination was essential as a factor that helps them cope with their injury. They indicated their focus on the positive aspects of the life and accepted the disability. They made comparisons to other persons who were worse off than them to help lift them out of unpleasant experience. Even some of the most severely injured and disabled participants presented evidence of using this coping strategy. Identification of coping strategies used by persons with SCI will help nurses and other health-care professionals in reinforcing the most effective coping strategies among persons with SCI. The findings recommend that engagement coping positively influences psychosocial adaptation.

**Keywords :** content analysis, coping strategies, rehabilitation, spinal cord injury

**Conference Title :** ICNEP 2018 : International Conference on Nursing Education and Practice

**Conference Location :** Bangkok, Thailand

**Conference Dates :** February 08-09, 2018