

# The Correlation of the Female Physical Ideal on Self Esteem in Women with Physical Disability and Mobility Impairment in Lampang Province

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## Abstract

This study was mixed method with survey and in-depth interview and aimed to study the correlation between the effects of the female physical appearance ideal and self esteem in women with physical disability and mobility impairment in Lampang province. The sample size consisted of 374 women with physical disabilities and mobility impairments that had selected by simple random sampling. For the data collection, the researcher divided it into two parts- quantitative and qualitative method. The first part, questionnaires were used to collect the personal information, the level of self esteem and the level of the effects of the physical ideal towards females with disabilities and analysed by using the SPSS program to obtain the frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Chi Square test, t-test and F-test or one-way ANOVA. For qualitative or in-depth interview, the researcher interviewed three women with physical disabilities. Verbatim data from key informants were analysed by analytic induction method.

The results revealed that overall the sample group had a medium-high self esteem level, which inversely related to the effects of the physical appearance ideal at a medium-low level. This means the women with disabilities and mobility impairment who had a low level of the effects of the physical appearance ideal tended to have higher self esteem, and vice versa. Regarding correlations between personal characteristics and self esteem as well as between personal characteristics and female physical appearance ideal, only age correlated with both the level of self esteem as well as the level of impact the female physical appearance ideal. Occupational level (employed or not employed) affected only the level of self esteem. The study also indicated that the most negative

impact of the female physical appearance ideal in women with disabilities and mobility impairment were a loss of confidence in being a mother and/or a good housewife.

Keywords: Woman, Feminist, Disability, Physical ideal, Image, Self esteem

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# ความสัมพันธ์ของภาพลักษณ์สตรีในอุดมคติและการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองของสตรีพิการทางกายและการเคลื่อนไหว ในจังหวัดลำปาง

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## บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยแบบผสมผสานโดยการสำรวจและการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาหาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างผลกระทบของทัศนคติด้านภาพลักษณ์สตรีในอุดมคติและระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองของสตรีพิการทางกายและการเคลื่อนไหวในจังหวัดลำปาง โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาค้างนี้ ได้แก่ สตรีพิการทางกายและการเคลื่อนไหว จำนวน 374 คน เลือกโดยการสุ่มอย่างง่าย เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลแบ่งเป็น 2 ส่วน ได้แก่ วิธีการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณ และวิธีการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ โดยในส่วนของการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณ หรือเชิงสำรวจนั้น ใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล วัดระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง และ วัดระดับการได้รับผลกระทบของทัศนคติด้านภาพลักษณ์ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้โปรแกรมสำเร็จรูปทางสถิติ SPSS โดยการ การแจกแจงความถี่ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ไคสแควร์ ทดสอบค่าที ทดสอบค่าเอฟ หรือการวิเคราะห์ค่าความแปรปรวนทางเดียว สำหรับข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ หรือการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกนั้น ผู้วิจัยทำการสัมภาษณ์สตรีพิการ 3 ท่าน เพื่อประเมินความคิดเห็นในเชิงลึก วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้ การวิเคราะห์ ติความเชิงอุปนัยข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองโดยรวม อยู่ในระดับปานกลางค่อนข้างสูง ซึ่งสัมพันธ์ผกผันกับระดับการได้รับผลกระทบของทัศนคติด้านภาพลักษณ์ทางกาย ที่มีระดับผลกระทบโดยรวมปานกลางค่อนข้างต่ำ แสดงให้เห็นว่าสตรีพิการที่ได้รับผลกระทบของทัศนคติด้านภาพลักษณ์ทางกายต่ำ จะเป็นผู้เห็นคุณค่าในตนเองสูง และสตรีที่ได้รับผลกระทบฯ สูงจะเป็นผู้เห็นคุณค่าในตนเองต่ำ ในส่วนของความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลักษณะส่วนบุคคลต่อระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองและระหว่างลักษณะส่วนบุคคลต่อระดับผลกระทบที่สตรีพิการได้รับจากภาพลักษณ์สตรีในอุดมคติ พบว่า ความแตกต่างของอายุส่งผลกระทบต่อทั้งระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเองและระดับผลกระทบที่สตรีพิการได้รับจากภาพลักษณ์สตรีในอุดมคติ ส่วนลักษณะการประกอบอาชีพ(ประกอบอาชีพและไม่ได้ประกอบอาชีพ) ส่งผลกระทบต่อเพียงระดับการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง นอกจากนี้ ผลจากการวิเคราะห์ยังชี้ให้เห็นว่า ทัศนคติด้าน

ภาพลักษณ์สตรีในอุดมคติที่ส่งผลต่อสตรีพิการมากที่สุด คือทัศนคติของความเป็นแม่ และความเป็นคู่ชีวิตที่สมบูรณ์ให้แก่เพศชาย

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## Introduction

Recently, awareness has been raised worldwide about the importance of human rights and equality of persons with disabilities (PWDs). This is a group that is disadvantaged and excluded because of the limitations of their bodies. Under the supervision of the United Nations, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been established. In 2006 Thailand ratified the Convention and then established the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2007 and the Education for Persons with Disabilities Act 2008. In order to encourage benefits for PWDs and protect them from social discrimination. Previous studies found that in practice PWDs did not receive comprehensive care and had low quality of life, especially those living in rural areas. Common problems are low access to various services, inequality and a stigmatizing of the disability that reduce the human value in society. Studies has also revealed that women with disabilities are a vulnerable group who see themselves as less valuable due to a combination of factors related to being disabled and women.(Sundthontada & Lakthong 2008; Sherer, 2012)

The disability conditions are the main obstacle that influences the lifestyle of PWDs. The factors that affect the quality of life and make PWDs life more challenging are the attitude of PWDs toward themselves or the perceived self, i.e. self esteem. Findings on self esteem of PWDs showed a correlation between the level of self esteem and the quality of life. Persons with disabilities who had a high level of self esteem tended to have a better quality of life compared to those with lower self esteem. Mostly, this could be seen among women with physical disabilities and mobility impairment (Abraido-Lanza, Guier, & Colon, 1998; Nosek, Hughes, Swedlund, Taylor, & Swank, 2003) Factors like family, environment, social norms, economy, personal characteristics, political and religious beliefs affected the perception of self and self esteem and defined the role of the individual in society (Cornwell & Schmitt, 1990; Hancock et al., 1994; Barnwell & Kavanagh, 1997; Omolayo, 2009; Duvdevany, 2010; Mathis & Roessler, 2010).

Study of Markus and Kitayama (1991) showed that different cultures influenced perception, emotion, and motivation of the individuals differently.

This was also found by Schmitt and Allik (2005) who examined the global self esteem in 53 countries and found that the level of self esteem significantly differed across countries with different cultures and social norms. Niaz and Hassan (2006) found that, the patriarchal culture in Southeast Asia countries affected people's mental health, self confidence and self esteem more than other cultures.

In general, two popular tools to measure self esteem are Coopersmith Self-Esteem and Rosenberg's Self Esteem Inventory. (Coopersmith, 1967, 1981; Resenborg, 1965; Demo, 1985; Heatherton, Wyland & Lopez, 2003; Griffiths et al., 1999; Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Noguchi & Watanabe, 2012). However, the Coopersmith form asks multiple questions on the same topic, creating a sample of answers for that topic. Arguably, this may more accurately reflect a specific participant's true opinion on a given topic compared to using singular questions on each topic, as is the case with Rosenberg's self esteem scale. Additionally, Coopersmith "dissects" self esteem into 4 constructs (significance, competence, power and virtue) as opposed to Rosenberg who uses only two (self worth and self efficiency). Results

from the Coopersmith questionnaire may therefore give a more detailed explanation of a participant's self esteem.

Some studies reflected that Thailand has been administrated by a patriarchy culture (Chahongram et al., 2013) which refers to a culture where the senior male is the leader of the family. Women, on the other hand, must stay at home, take care of the family and be "good" daughters, wives and mothers. Having a normal physical appearance and a beautiful body are also crucial characteristics of a quality woman. The patriarchal aspect of Thai society that oppresses women's thoughts and influences their self satisfaction negatively can be seen regularly in the media. Whether in movies, TV series or magazine's advertising presents the image of an ideal woman with a flawless physical appearance. Such idealistic ideas affect the mental health, confidence and self esteem of normal women (Saussy, 1991; Dutton, 1994; Niaz & Hassan, 2006; Sultana, 2012; Aphiwatanagul, 2003; Reunyen, 2009; Chaiyasang, 2011).

Whereas "normal" women are negatively affected by the existing female physical ideal it seems pertinent to ask

how women that are even further away from the norm, i.e. women with physical disabilities, are affected. However, little to no research has been carried out in this area.

Thus, the present study set out to deal with this issue. More specifically, our objectives were to investigate some research statements among women with physical disabilities: (1) How much is level of the existing female physical appearance ideal and self esteem? (2) How different is between female physical ideal and self esteem?, (3) How different is between personal characteristics and self esteem ?, (4) How different is between personal characteristics and level of female physical appearance ideal?.

## **Method**

### **Study design and participants**

This study used mixed methods: survey and depth interviews. The research was carried out between January and June 2014. Three hundred and seventy-four respondents were involved as research participants for the questionnaires part. They were selected by a simple random sampling method from 1,617 women with physical disabilities and mobility impairments in Lampang province. The

sample size was calculated with the Taro Yamane method using a 95 percent confidence level.

## **Instruments**

The questionnaires were divided into 3 parts: (1) personal data (questions on age, educational level, marital status, career and cause of disabilities); (2) self esteem level measurement, using Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Adult form; and (3) questions regarding the impact of physical appearance ideal in women with disabilities.

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Adult form is comprised of 25 statements that the participant confirms to be either true or false. The questionnaire can be scored by attributing the values 1 and 0 to response the positive items, and 0 and 1 to the negative item. The total score can be interpreted summarily in the four score ranges; 0-24, 25-49, 50-74 and 75-100 to have an overall of self esteem level from low, medium low, medium high and high. We tested with the 30 women with disabilities in the area and the reliability coefficient was .88

The Impact of physical appearance ideal questionnaire was developed by the researcher. It contained 9 items presented

in Likert's scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It can be scored by attributing the values 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 to response the positive items, and 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to the negative items. The total score can be interpreted in the four score ranges; 9-17, 18-26, 27-35 and 36-45 which mean the women with disabilities and mobility impairment affected by physical appearance ideal in high, medium high, medium low and low level. We tested the question with the 30 women with disabilities and mobility impairment in the area and the reliability coefficient was .85

For the in-depth interview the researcher then selected 3 participants (using the Purposive Sampling method) from the sample group. The inclusion criteria for participant selection were as follows. Willing to partake in the study, having different background, age, educational level, occupation and life style, and having different cause of disabilities both congenital and acquired. The participants were interviewed about their attitudes toward life, the way they perceive themselves and how they believed the female physical appearance ideal affected them.

## Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data, for example percentage, standard deviation, etc. Differences and correlation in personal characteristic variables and self esteem and impact of physical appearance ideal scores were analyzed using the Chi-Square test, t-test and F-test or analysis of variance (ANOVA). Total self esteem scores, impact of physical appearance ideal scores were compared between groups by F-test and verbatim data of interview part were analyzed by analytic induction.

## Results

### Questionnaires

#### *General information of participants*

: A total of 374 women participants with physical disabilities and mobility impairments in Lampang area were invited to participate in this study. Of these, 3 were selected to participate in the depth interview based on their different age, background, cause of disabilities and life style.

Seventy-three percent of the participants were aged 51-60. Age between 40-50, 29-39 and 18-28 were found to make out 13.1 %, 10.4% and 3.2%,



respectively. In terms of marital status, 59.9% reported to be married, 26.7% were single, 8% widowed and 5.3% divorced or separated. The Educational levels among the participants were 73.3% primary education, 13.9% no educational system, 5.1% junior high school, 2.7% high Vocational school, 2.7% under graduates, 1.6% senior high school and 0.8% informal

educational system level. In terms of occupation, 39.2% of the participants were agriculturist, 31.5% was self employed, 10.4% unemployed and 5.1% were employees in the state enterprise business. Fifty-seven percent of the participants had acquired disabilities and 43.0% had congenital disabilities. (Table 1)

**Table 1** Personal characteristics of Participants (N= 374)

Personal characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
18-28	12	3.2
29-39	39	10.4
40-50	49	13.1
51-60	274	73.3
Marital status		
Single	100	26.7
Married	224	59.9
Divorced/Separated	20	5.3
Widow	30	8.0
Educational level		
No educational system	52	13.9
Primary school	274	73.3
Junior high school	19	5.1
Senior high school	6	1.6
High vocational school	10	2.7
Undergraduate	10	2.7
Others (informal educational system)	3	0.8
Occupational		
Self employed	118	31.5
Agriculture	147	39.2
Company employee	52	13.9
State enterprise business employee	19	5.1
Unemployed	38	10.4
Cause of disabilities		
Congenital	161	43.0
Acquired	213	57.0

*Self esteem:* As self esteem level in the participants, a medium high to high level of self esteem was found in 72 percent of the participants, whereas 28 percent had a medium low to low level of self esteem. However, most of the participants responded that they felt lacking of self confidence and self satisfaction. (Table 2).

**Table 2** Frequency and percentage of participants classified by self esteem level (N= 374)

Self esteem level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (score less than 24)	47	12.5
Medium low (score 25-49)	57	15.5
Medium high (score 50-74)	186	49.6
High (score more than 75)	84	22.4

*Physical appearance ideal:* In terms of level of the female physical appearance ideal, it shows that in 28.5% of the participants the impact was low, in 64.7% it was medium-low, in 5.4% it was medium-high and in 1.6% it was High. (Table 3) When we analyzed the questionnaires question item by item, it was found that the sample group felt less attractive and less adequate as mothers and wives, compared to non-disabled women. (Table 4.)

**Table 3** Frequency and percentage of participants classified by the effect of female physical appearance ideal level (N= 374)

Effect of female physical appearance ideal	Frequency	Percentage
Low (score higher than 36)	107	28.5
Medium low (score 27-35)	241	64.7
Medium high (score 18-26)	20	5.4
High (score lower than 17)	6	1.6

**Table 4** Percentage, mean and standard deviation of female physical appearance ideal classified by item of questionnaire (N= 374)

Question	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Mean	SD
1) Having the image like the actress on television program and movie is my goal.	26.2%	62%	11.8%	2.8	.82
2) I always compare myself to the model in the magazine.	61.7%	28.1%	10.2%	2.2	1.06
3) In my society disabled female is as attractive as normal female.	50.9%	20.8%	28.3%	2.3	.88
4) Nowadays it doesn't matter if you are disabled or not.	42.2%	37.2%	20.6%	2.2	.93
5) I believe that I could be a good wife and mother.	42.5%	32.1%	25.4%	2.2	.98
6) I am not different than other.					
7) My society believes that disabled man have more potential than disabled woman.	47.5%	29.2%	23.3%	2.1	.76
8) I am not confidence to be in the crowd.	16.5%	62.3%	21.2%	3.1	.72
9) I believe that the appearance is not as important as what is inside. (thought, moral)	32.6%	44.4%	23%	2.9	.77
	30.7%	33.4%	35.8%	3.1	1.0

*Correlation/ difference:* Self esteem relationships were found between self were significantly ( $p<.01$ ) related to the esteem and marital status, educational level of female physical appearance ideal level nor cause of disability (Table 6) (Table5) as well as age and occupation. No

**Table 5** The difference between self esteem and female physical appearance ideal (N=374)

Mean square		F-test	p-value
Between Groups	6.75	6.92	.00*
Within Groups	.97		

\*p<.01

**Table 6** The difference between self esteem and personal characteristics (N= 374)

Personal Characteristics	F-test	p-value
Age	5.37	.03*
Marital status	1.89	.59
Educational level	2.16	.17
Occupation	1.02	.01*
Cause of disability	.062	.56

\*p<.05

Age was the only descriptive factor that was significantly (p<.05) related to the impact that the female physical appearance ideal .had on the women. Marital status, educational level, occupation and cause of disability, on the other hand, were not (table 7).

**Table 7** The difference between physical appearance ideal and personal characteristics (N=374)

Personal Characteristics	F-test	p-value
Age	3.10	.02*
Marital status	.59	.61
Education level	3.73	.72
Occupation	1.06	.37
Cause of disability	1.05	.30

\*p<.05

### In-depth interview

For the in-depth interview, three women with different backgrounds and lifestyles were interviewed. All names used are fabricated.

Ms. Supin (single woman, age 37) have, since the age of 2, poliomyelitis which has caused leg length discrepancy. Now she is working for the government in the Lampang municipality and is living with her grandparents and nephew.

Ms.Sukjai (married, age 40) was in a motorbike accident when she was 15 and had her right leg amputated above the knee. She is living with her husband (who is also in a wheelchair) and their 3 kids. Now she is working with her husband in a mechanical repair shop. She is also a member of a “Don’t drink and drive” project and the president of the provincial sport association for persons with disabilities in Lampang.

Ms. Wipa (single, age 28) has a congenital condition that left her legs to not fully develop, forcing her to use a wheelchair. She is living with her parents and is now starting her first job, for the government in the municipality office.

Those three participants had quite good self esteem level. The results showed what they had in common in the term of self esteem that for the participants, self esteem often depended on their independent living; self confidence of their own potential, not comparing with other, working efficiency and participating in social event. They also coped with some negative physical appearance ideal on self esteem especially “motherhood perspective”

#### *Independent living*

“During my study in 1990s, every time I had school break I travelled to Bangkok alone. Took all jobs they offered me. And when school break finished I came back to the hometown to study. I tried to do everything I could to be able to continue my school. When I finished the junior vocational school, I continued studying until I finished the senior vocational school even if my parents didn’t agree with that due to the money issue but I told them to not worry about this I will

work and earn money for that by myself.”

(Supin)

*Don't compare with other to overcome social stigma*

“I understand that every people have different prospective towards life. So I don't compare myself with someone else. It's like working, if you don't work you won't earn money to buy food and no one else will bring food to you. So you should not care whatever people think so much. When I was very young, my friends at school mocked me for being a disabled but I never let it bother me. I only focused on study, that's why I always in the top rank of the class and made my grandparents proud.”

(Supin)

In terms of the effect of female physical appearance ideal, not having “normal body” did not affect to their self satisfaction regards to the beautifulness through their own positive understanding and acceptance.

“From my own opinion I actually don't care so much about my physical appearance. I like to see beautiful people but I never compared myself to them”

(Sukjai)

*Working efficiency*

“ Regarding to the work efficiency, I think disabled - and non disabled person are the same. The work place often focuses on the work efficiency. So I don't get any problem from it since I can work like other.”

(Wipa)

“Disabled - and non disabled person are not different if you don't look at the appearance. We all can do pretty much the same thing.”

(Supin)

*Social integration, recreation and contribution*

“ I started joining the sport club many years ago. At first I tried to play basketball myself and it made me stronger and felt good so I invited the friends to join it

with me. After a while we decided to establish our own sport club. We also sent our membership from the club to join nation sport competitions for person with disabilities for many years until now...

...Past a few years, my husband and I also join the “Don’t drink and drive” project. Every year we have meeting to educate student in the school about the consequences of driving after drank.”....

(Sukjai)

“Besides taking care of the nephew I also play badminton too. When I was in Bangkok I went out to play badminton everyday with my friends, it’s really fun.”

(Supin)

“To be honest, I want to have a boyfriend, want to get married, have my own family and kids even though I know it’s impossible, because I never get flirt from anyone or anything close. I do have guy friends but we are just a friend. I know that no one wants to have serious relationship with disabled woman like me. If they have to pick between normal and disabled woman, they will pick normal girl. If I were a guy, I would pick normal girl too. Choosing the disabled woman could cause many problems. Since we can’t perform the wife duties perfectly and if we want to have kid, I’m not sure if our kid will be disabled like us too.”

(Wipa)

### *Challenges in motherhood perspective*

Instead they believed that having “normal body” is a symbol of being a great mother or wife together with lacking of knowledge about disabilities and their capabilities. These effected to their self satisfaction in such an aspect.

“I got pregnant after I married for a few months. During those times I was so worry about being mother. How I could take care of them since it’s hard to take care of house and myself already. My husband is also on the



wheelchairs so what could we do if something happened. I worried about everything back then. Luckily, my mother in law decided to move in to stay with us and helped me take care of the baby during my adjusting time.

(Sukjai)

## Discussion

The present study investigated the difference between the female physical appearance ideal and self esteem in women with physical disabilities and mobility impairment in the Lampang area. Statistical analysis of gathered data revealed that overall participants had medium-high self esteem level, which inversely related to the effects of the physical ideal at a medium-low level. This means the women with disabilities and mobility impairment who had a low level of the effects of the physical appearance ideal tended to have higher self esteem, and vice versa. Similar results have been found by other researchers such as Chinchang (2010), Watcharagul (2007) Kantha (2002) and Krungkasem (2003), who studied the impact of female physical appearance ideal on women in Thailand.

Participants that felt highly affected by the existing female physical appearance ideal are likely to have a negative body image and low confidence in their abilities to be a good mother and/or a wife. This in combination with a lack of knowledge/education about motherhood with disabilities probably resulted in a low level of self esteem. Fisher and Cleveland (1968) stated that the self-assessment in the individual is like a mirror that reflects the personality. When a person lacks self confidence, that person is likely to feel worthless which leads to low levels of self esteem and a perceived negative self image.

When personal characteristics were included in the analysis it was found that only age influenced the level of self esteem as well as the level of impact the female physical appearance ideal had on the women. Younger women had lower self esteem and were more affected by the physical appearance ideal.

Unfortunately we failed to show the clear direction of the result regarding self esteem, since this study used Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory Adult form. The answers were only "yes" and "no", which we could not use to analyze

statistically. Nevertheless when we compared the average scores between each age group from younger to older, the scores increased progressively. This was similar to findings of other researchers (Nosek, Hughes, Swedlund, Taylor, & Swank, 2003; Erol & Orth, 2011; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002) who used other questionnaires to test the level of self esteem and found relationships between the age and self esteem. It could be concluded that in the group of older samples, the level of self esteem would normally be higher.

Regarding the impact of the female physical appearance ideal, older women were less affected compared to younger women. This confirmed previous findings by Stunkard and Burt (1967), Tiggemann (2004) and Tiggemann and Lynch (2001) who studied relationships between body image and age.

According to Coopersmith's self esteem theory (1981), there were four components of self esteem: Significance, a feeling of being important to someone; Competence, the ability of doing something well; Power, having some control over being who you are; and

Virtue, the belief that you are a good person. In early adulthood Significance, i.e. being liked by others, is an important component to the self esteem. This may explain why the younger women in the present study were more affected by the female physical appearance ideal, compared to the older women. Being dependent on external confirmation for building self-esteem, the younger women might have been more sensitive about their disabilities and thus more easily influenced by the female physical appearance ideal. In the older women, on the other hand, self esteem might be more dependent on the power and virtue components and the female physical appearance ideal may therefore had less impact.

Results also indicated that occupation affected the level of self esteem. When separated the sample group into 2 groups, employed and unemployed, it was found that the sample group of employed women had a higher level of self esteem compared to the unemployed group. Such findings had also been made by Van Dongen (1996), Mueser et al. (1997), Arns and Linney (1993) Torry, Mueser, McHugo and Drake (2000) who studied self

esteem among groups of disabled or chronically ill who were employed and unemployed. Participants who were employed or were receiving occupational training when the disability occurred experienced a higher level of self esteem. In the in-depth interviews of the present study it was noted that participants spoke with pride about their career and the potential they had to achieve the career goals. This suggested that employment may be an important factor in promoting self-esteem in women with disabilities and mobility impairment. Interestingly, when the data was analyzed to find a possible difference between the impact of female physical appearance ideal and employment/unemployment, no difference was found. Thus being employed or unemployed did not make the women more or less easily influenced by the physical appearance ideal. This contrasted findings by Killen (2012) who found that young employed women were less concerned about their physical appearance compared to unemployed women. However, the women in Killen's study were not disabled.

When the interviews were analyzed, we found that what affected the

participants in terms of female physical appearance ideal was not having a "beautiful" appearance. Instead they expressed a lack of confidence in being good mothers and wives because of their disabilities. This was reiterated in the female physical appearance ideal questionnaires. The participants believed that their disabilities made them less suitable as mothers and wives compared to other women. Such beliefs may also be reinforced externally, e.g. by family, friends and other associates. For instance, a number of previous studies have reported that disabled women need to "prove" themselves in order to be accepted by others as suitable mothers (Shaul, Dowling, & Laden, 1981; Prilleltensky, 2003; Grue & Lærum, 2002; Hanna & Rogovsky, 1991).

## Conclusion

This study found that the sample group of women with disabilities and mobility impairment affected by society's attitudes towards the female physical appearance ideal and the general idea about what constitutes an attractive body. Especially the younger women were concerned about their "attractiveness" perhaps because of a greater dependence on "what other people think". However,

most of the women were concerned about their adequacy as mothers and wives. Physical appearance ideals that are destructive to some groups should be questioned. However, it is unrealistic to believe that such ideals will change in the short term. In the meantime it is important to develop strategies to increase disabled women's self esteem. Furthermore, women with disabilities as well as the general public should be provided with information/education regarding PWDs and motherhood.

### **Suggestions**

From the results of this study a few suggestions can be made to improve the quality of life in women with disabilities.

1. Provide training to educate about disability, especially the role of being a mother and a wife.
2. Promote work skill training and

encourage women with disabilities to participate in the local labor market such as OTOP (one district one product), work that can be done from home, etc.

3. Since women and women with disabilities are different, the questionnaire on self esteem should be adjusted to cover all crucial aspects of women with disabilities such as the feeling toward their disabilities, social inclusion, accessibility, etc.

4. Depth interviews in women with disabilities should be studied in the various age ranges. And to get the comprehensive results from the study, the participant group should consist of women with low self esteem as well as medium and high self-esteem.

5. For the better understanding regarding to female with disabilities, there should be studies in other provinces or various contexts as well.

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