

# **INCLUSION AND BODY IMAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE COLLEGES OF JUIZ DE FORA, MG.**

Emerson Rodrigues Duarte; Fabiane Frota da Rocha Morgado; Maria Elisa Caputo Ferreira.

Body and Diversity Study Group

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the contemporary world, the inclusion of a student with a disability represents a challenge from childhood education to higher education, both in private and public institutions. In Brazil, the official statistics, studies and research elucidate the status of these students in the process of inclusion in basic education levels subsidized by the Education for All (1990) and the Salamanca (1994) declarations.

Nevertheless, little is documented on the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, which shows a lack of reflection, studies and statistics, making it difficult to formulate public policies which comprise actions favoring an inclusive education in higher education as well. Furthermore, there are few studies which approach, together with the theme of inclusion, aspects of body image for these people. These factors make it difficult for health care professionals to take preventive and therapeutic measures regarding the students with disabilities in the institutions of higher education in particular.

Body image is an important construct related to body identity. It is understood as the mental representation of this identity (Tavares, 2003). This study is justified by the need to know this construct more deeply as it relates to people with disabilities. At the same time, it is important to know how the process of inclusion of these people in higher education is going. With these two pieces of knowledge associated, it would be possible to establish processes and methodologies in educational policies which consider human diversity, respecting the singularity of each individual in his/her educational routine and promoting preventive and therapeutic measures for the healthy development of his/her body image.

Therefore, our aim is to carry out a survey of the students who declare themselves as having disabilities and who are in the process of inclusion in private and public colleges in Juiz de Fora as well as to explore aspects of body image of these people.

## **Methodology**

### ***Ethical Criteria***

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee on Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). Authorization from the colleges studied was requested and the subjects received the Free and Clarified Consent Term. All interviews were recorded and later completely transcribed for further analysis. The recordings are stored in the Body Studies Laboratory of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and will be destroyed five years after the data collection.

### **Subjects**

In the private colleges, the subjects were the course coordinators who had students who declared themselves as being disabled and who were enrolled and attended classes regularly.

In the public college, the subjects were the coordinators of the 45 courses offered.

After this survey, the students who declared themselves as disabled and who were enrolled and attended classes regularly, in the course of physical education, were interviewed.

### **Institutions**

Eleven institutions of higher education were surveyed, 10 of which were private colleges and one was a public one (UFJF).

### **Tools**

A semi-structured interview sequence was sent to the course coordinators with the objective of collecting quantitative data on the process of inclusion in higher education. Another semi-structured interview sequence was

sent to the self-declared disabled students with the objective of identifying traces of their body image.

#### Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed with the help of the Microsoft Excel for Windows XP software. The qualitative data were analyzed through the methodology of Content Analysis (Bardin, 2008).

#### Results

From the data collected, it was possible to notice that there are, today, 45 students with disabilities enrolled and attending classes in courses of both private and public institutions of higher education. The private institutions, composed of 10 colleges, correspond to 82.2% (37 students) of this total, and the public one, represented by UFJF, 17.8% (8 students).

Most of the students with disabilities are in the humanities (71.1%), followed by 17.8% in the health care field and 11.1% are in the exact sciences. In the humanities, the most popular courses were: Pedagogy, Law, Communication, Business, Psychology, Accounting, History and Tourism. In the health care field, the most popular courses are Physiotherapy, Physical Education, Medicine and Biology. In the exact sciences, there are students enrolled in the courses of Architecture, Computer Sciences, Graphic Design, Mathematics and Internet Systems.

When analyzing the disabled students of the private institutions according to gender, we noticed that 67.6% of them were male and 32.4% were female. At UFJF, the results are inverted: there are 62.5% female and 37.5% male. In total, there are more male students (62.2%), while 37.8% of the students are female.

When the types of disability were analyzed, the conclusion is that the visual disability is the most common one both in the public and private institutions, corresponding to 40% of the total number of students with disabilities enrolled. Physical disabilities correspond to 33.3% and students with hearing disabilities correspond to 26.7%.

After the first phase of the study was concluded, two students who declared themselves as having disabilities were found to be enrolled in the

course of Physical Education in the same private institution. They are male and were 22 and 28 years old, respectively. Both had been in car accidents when they were 19 and 22 years old and, as a consequence, one of them had the lower limbs amputated and the other had a spinal cord injury.

Concerning body image, we have identified in these two students' accounts, positive relationships with their own bodies which made the disability seem to be overcome, as they say:

Student 1: When I had the accident, I stopped doing things. I came to Juiz de Fora to get the prosthesis; I started the physiotherapy. A lot of difficult exercises. Then I started to work out to help with the rehabilitation. I had always enjoyed sports, soccer. So I started working out, physiotherapy, rehabilitation and since they were working, that was cool.

Student 2: I was taken aback. I thought I'd never make it when my limbs were cut off. I thought about what my life was going to be like then. I did not imagine all of this was gonna happen... I lost my leg, got idle, but I am alive now, doing everything I like. There are disadvantages, but there are lots of advantages as well.

It seems that physical activity is, as Schilder (1999) said, an important facilitator of the healthy relationships that these participants showed to have with their bodies. Countless testimonies relate the practice of physical activities to some positive aspect of their body image, as in student 2's testimony:

I cannot spend a day without playing. Even being disabled, things have happened very fast for me. I grabbed this opportunity I had with sports and realized many dreams. I think these dreams are not just mine, but they belong to everyone who was beside me, who went through everything with me, everything I overcame, and who, through sport, are able to make other dreams come true.

Performing studies which aim to broaden the information on inclusion and body image of people with disabilities in the Brazilian educational system, as well as understanding the process and its difficulties, struggles and overcoming problems to get to higher education has been important to help the

professionals who are involved, not only in the educational process and in the rehabilitation of these people, but also physical education, physiotherapy, Medicine and Psychology, among others.

## Final Considerations

This study aimed to investigate how the process of inclusion of people with disabilities in institutions of higher education in Juiz de Fora is coming along, and which are the most striking characteristics of body image for these people. The inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education institutions was verified. Currently, there are 45 students with disabilities enrolled and attending classes at these private and public institutions. At the same time, positive aspects of these people's body image were traced. Physical activity emerged in the interviews as an important promoter of healthy relationships of these people with their bodies. Therefore, we suggest that professors in higher education institutions in Brazil, especially the physical education professionals, take this issue into consideration and use the movement as an important tool for a healthy development of the body image of their students with disabilities.

## References

Bardin, Laurence. Análise de conteúdo. Lisboa: Ed. 70, 2008.

Brasil. (1994) Declaração de Salamanca e linha de ação sobre necessidades educativas especiais. Brasília: UNESCO.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1990) Declaração Mundial sobre Educação para Todos: plano de ação para satisfazer as necessidades básicas de aprendizagem. Brasília: UNESCO.

Schilder, P. (1999) Imagem do corpo: as energias construtivas da psique. 3ª. Ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Tavares, Maria da Consolação G. Cunha F. (2003) Imagem corporal: conceito e desenvolvimento. Barueri-SP: Manole.