

Coping with life crisis situations and adapting to them is a topic of great human interest and importance. Sustaining a spinal cord injury with the consequent lifelong paralysis may be considered to be one of the most serious life events due to its devastating and wide-ranging impact on people's lives.

Spinal cord injury is a traumatic injury, which typically occurs suddenly and without any warning. Its consequences present an enormous physical, social and psychological trauma which the individual has to confront and come to terms with. The changes caused are life-long and affect every aspect of a person's life. Paralysis leads to wheelchair dependence for mobility. In addition, the individual with a spinal cord impairment may become dependent on others for help and assistance in order to be able to carry out most of the tasks of daily living. All the losses and changes caused by the injury have profound effects on both the spinal cord injured person's social roles and those of their loved ones.

The individual's and his/her family's psychosocial adaptation to spinal cord injury, which is the main theme of this work, involves an intricate adjustment process. Stage coping theory, which dominates the current scientific literature concerning coping with life crisis situations, is not sufficient for a comprehensive explanation of the range of individual interacting variables that impact on the process. Furthermore, it does not take into account the unique influence of the individual's physical and social environment. Therefore, in trying to outline the complex nature of the adjustment process, we fostered the holistic approach as a means of describing the person's and his/her family's reactions, and also the adjustment process, to spinal cord impairment.