

Inadequate Self-Efficacy in Health: A Conceptual Analysis

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Theme: Care processes and practices

Contribution to the field: This study can provide theoretical groundwork for developing more precise and individualized interventions aimed at promoting self-care and treatment adherence. Furthermore, it strengthens professionals' structured clinical reasoning, allowing for an approach that is more sensitive to the limitations perceived by patients regarding their ability to manage their own health. This conceptual analysis also broadens the field of scientific research in nursing, fostering studies that explore strategies for developing self-efficacy and, consequently, the autonomy of individuals in care settings.

Abstract

Introduction: Self-efficacy is a psychological construct developed by Bandura that is widely used in the health sciences; it refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and perform the actions necessary to cope with future situations. In contrast, although inadequate self-efficacy is often described as a limited individual perception, it remains relatively undefined in the literature. **Objective:** To conduct a conceptual analysis of the term 'inadequate health self-efficacy, focusing on its applicability in the nursing context. **Materials and Methods:** This is a conceptual analysis based on the eight steps proposed by Walker and Avant, complemented by an integrative literature review, following the guidelines of the PRISMA checklist. The search was conducted during June 2025 in the SciELO, PubMed, and EBSCO databases, using the keyword 'inadequate health self-efficacy,' with no language restrictions and a time frame limited to the last five years. Eligibility criteria included original articles, theoretical or methodological studies, and reviews that directly or indirectly addressed the concept of inadequate health self-efficacy, available in full. **Results:** Inadequate health self-efficacy is an individual's limited belief in their ability to take the necessary actions to achieve therapeutic goals and maintain self-care behaviors, resulting in emotional, functional, and clinical impairments. Furthermore, precedents (chronic condition, lack of knowledge, and lack of social support) and consequents (poor treatment adherence, clinical deterioration, and psychoemotional distress) were identified. **Conclusion:** This conceptual evolution will contribute significantly to evidence-based nursing practices informed by clinical judgment, which will strengthen approaches aimed at promoting patient self-care and autonomy.

Keywords (Source: DeCS)

Self-efficacy; concept formation; methodology; healthcare; evidence-based clinical practice.

Resumen

Introducción: la autoeficacia es un constructo psicológico desarrollado por Bandura, ampliamente utilizado en las ciencias de la salud, y representa la creencia del individuo en su capacidad para organizar y ejecutar las acciones necesarias para afrontar situaciones futuras. En contraste, la autoeficacia inadecuada, aunque difundida como una percepción limitada del individuo, permanece escasamente definida en la literatura. **Objetivo:** realizar un análisis conceptual del término “autoeficacia inadecuada en salud”, centrándose en su aplicabilidad en el contexto de la enfermería. **Materiales y método:** se trata de un análisis conceptual, basado en los ocho pasos propuestos por Walker y Avant, complementado por una revisión integradora de la literatura, conforme a las recomendaciones de la lista de verificación PRISMA. La búsqueda se realizó en junio de 2025, en las bases de datos SciELO, PubMed y EBSCO, utilizando la palabra clave “inadequate health self-efficacy”, sin restricción de idioma y con un marco temporal de los últimos cinco años. Los criterios de elegibilidad incluyeron artículos originales, estudios teóricos o metodológicos y revisiones que abordaran directa o indirectamente el concepto de autoeficacia inadecuada para la salud, disponibles en su texto completo. **Resultados:** la autoeficacia inadecuada en salud corresponde a la creencia limitada del individuo en su capacidad para realizar las acciones necesarias para alcanzar objetivos terapéuticos y mantener conductas de autocuidado, lo que resulta en deterioros emocionales, funcionales y clínicos. Además, se identificaron antecedentes (enfermedad crónica, falta de conocimiento y apoyo social) y consecuentes (baja adherencia al tratamiento, empeoramiento clínico y sufrimiento psicoemocional). **Conclusión:** esta evolución conceptual contribuirá significativamente a las prácticas de enfermería basadas en evidencia y sustentadas en el discernimiento clínico, lo que fortalecerá enfoques orientados a promover el autocuidado y la autonomía del paciente.

Palabras clave (Fuente DeCS)

Autoeficacia; formación de concepto; metodología; atención a la salud; práctica clínica basada en la evidencia.

Resumo

Introdução: A autoeficácia é um constructo psicológico desenvolvido por Bandura, amplamente utilizado nas ciências da saúde, e representa a crença do indivíduo em sua capacidade de organizar e executar ações necessárias para lidar com situações futuras. Em contrapartida, a autoeficácia inadequada, apesar de difundida como uma percepção individual limitada, permanece pouco definida na literatura. **Objetivo:** realizar uma análise conceitual do termo “autoeficácia inadequada em saúde”, com foco na sua aplicabilidade no contexto da enfermagem. **Materiais e método:** Trata-se de uma análise conceitual baseada nas oito etapas propostas por Walker e Avant, complementada por uma revisão integrativa da literatura, seguindo as recomendações do checklist PRISMA. A busca foi realizada em junho de 2025, nas bases SciELO, PubMed e EBSCO, utilizando a palavra-chave “*inadequate health self-efficacy*”, sem restrição de idioma e com recorte temporal para os últimos cinco anos. Os critérios de elegibilidade incluíram artigos originais, estudos teóricos ou metodológicos e revisões que abordassem direta ou indiretamente o conceito de autoeficácia inadequada em saúde, disponíveis na íntegra. **Resultados:** A autoeficácia inadequada em saúde é a crença limitada do indivíduo em sua capacidade de realizar ações necessárias para alcançar metas terapêuticas e manter comportamentos de autocuidado, resultando em prejuízos emocionais, funcionais e clínicos. Ademais, foram identificados antecedentes (condição crônica, falta de conhecimento e suporte social) e consequentes (baixa adesão ao tratamento, piora clínica e sofrimento psicoemocional). **Conclusão:** Essa evolução conceitual contribuirá significativamente para práticas de enfermagem baseadas em evidências e subsidiadas pelo discernimento clínico, o que fortalecerá abordagens voltadas à promoção do autocuidado e da autonomia do paciente.

Palavras-chave (Fonte DeCS)

Autoeficácia; formação de conceito; metodologia; atenção à saúde; prática clínica baseada em evidências.

Introduction

Self-efficacy is a psychological construct developed by Bandura that is widely used in the health sciences; it represents an individual's belief in their ability to organize and perform actions necessary to cope with future situations (1). In the field of nursing, self-efficacy is an essential element for promoting self-care, treatment adherence, coping with chronic diseases, and the development of safe and effective professional practices. However, when this perception of capacity seems limited or distorted, resulting in inadequate self-efficacy, significantly harmful effects on individual and public health may occur (2).

Recent studies have shown that low levels of self-efficacy are associated with worse clinical outcomes, low treatment adherence, increased anxiety, and depressive symptoms, as well as a negative impact on patients' well-being and quality of life (3). From a professional perspective, particularly among nurses, inadequate self-efficacy can compromise clinical decision-making, generate uncertainty, and delay essential interventions, directly affecting the quality of the care provided (4).

Furthermore, the classical literature on self-efficacy has primarily focused on understanding it from a predominantly positive perspective, emphasizing its role in promoting healthy behaviors and better clinical outcomes. Its incorporation into theoretical models, such as the Health Belief Model, and its application in interventions, such as those developed by Kate Lorig, reinforce this perspective (5, 6). In contrast, inadequate self-efficacy remains underexplored conceptually and operationally, often being treated merely as the absence or low level of the construct. Therefore, the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term 'inadequate self-efficacy' in the nursing literature highlights the need for theoretical and practical delineation of this phenomenon. As proposed by Walker and Avant, concept analysis is a rigorous methodological strategy that aims to clarify meanings and identify essential attributes, precedents, consequents, and empirical referents associated with a concept, thereby facilitating its applicability in clinical, educational, and research contexts (7).

Therefore, conceptual analysis contributes to the refinement of the disciplinary language of nursing by subsidizing scientific research and the development of theories aligned with clinical practice. Consequently, it contributes to the development of professional identity, the advancement of scientific knowledge, and evidence-based practice (8).

In this sense, conducting a conceptual analysis of inadequate self-efficacy in healthcare, within the context of nursing, is necessary to broaden the understanding of the effects of reduced self-efficacy on patients and healthcare professionals. A study of this nature, supported by current theoretical and empirical evidence, enables

the development of more effective interventions grounded in solid conceptual foundations.

The objective of this study is to conduct a detailed analysis of the concept of inadequate health self-efficacy in the nursing context.

Materials and Methods

This is a conceptual analysis based on the model proposed by Walker and Avant. This method comprises eight steps: Selection of the concept; objectives of the conceptual analysis; identification of the concept's possible uses; determination of the defining attributes; identification of the model case; identification of an additional (contrary) case; identification of precedents and consequents; and definition of empirical criteria.

After selecting the concept, defining the objective of the analysis, and identifying the concept's uses in the literature, an integrative review was used as a method to guide the search for defining attributes, precedents, and consequents. This process enabled the development of model cases. The integrative review, in turn, is a systematized and standardized method that allows for the synthesis of literature stemming from different methodologies, aiming to understand a phenomenon of interest based on research questions.

Concept Selection

This step stemmed from the need to clarify the concept of inadequate self-efficacy in healthcare based on nursing practices, with the aim of elucidating its meaning.

Analysis Objectives

This is an essential step, as it guides the research. The objective of this study is to clarify the concept so that it can be used in academic research and adequately understood by professionals.

Identification of Potential Applications of the Concept

In the step of identifying the concept's applications, it is recommended to consider all its possible uses, to avoid limiting the search exclusively to the medical literature. It is worth noting that ignoring the existence of different contexts can introduce bias in the understanding of the concept, limiting its analysis and reducing its usefulness for future research. Thus, it is essential to explore the widest possible range of uses for the term, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate approach.

Therefore, to identify the various uses of the concept ‘inadequate health self-efficacy,’ journal articles and gray literature were consulted. Databases were searched during June 2025, including SciELO and PubMed; textbooks and dictionaries were obtained by searching the collections of the Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) library. The keywords used were “*autoeficácia inadequada em saúde*” (“inadequate health self-efficacy”, in English). The search was limited to the last five years, but there was no language restriction to expand the scope of the search for studies.

Determination of the Defining Attributes

The attributes are core characteristics that distinguish a concept and ensure its correct understanding, thereby avoiding ambiguity. Furthermore, they represent the essential elements that must be present for a concept to be correctly recognized and applied. Therefore, they include terms and expressions commonly found in the literature, which help to define and apply the concept accurately.

Identification of a Model Case

The identification of a model case consists of presenting a real-life situation or one constructed based on the literature and specialists’ opinions, which clearly illustrates the application of the concept.

Identification of an Additional Case

Cases reported to demonstrate concepts that were not applied correctly. Therefore, they are most useful for determining whether the concept under study was inapplicable or applied incorrectly.

Identification of Precedents and Consequents

The precedent events are conditions that precede the manifestation of a concept, influencing its emergence, but that are not part of its defining attributes. The consequent events represent the effects or impacts resulting from the concept’s emergence.

Definition of Empirical Referents

Empirical referents are categories or classes of observable phenomena that, when present, indicate the occurrence of the concept. In this case, the empirical referents would be the observable manifestations resulting from inadequate self-efficacy in health.

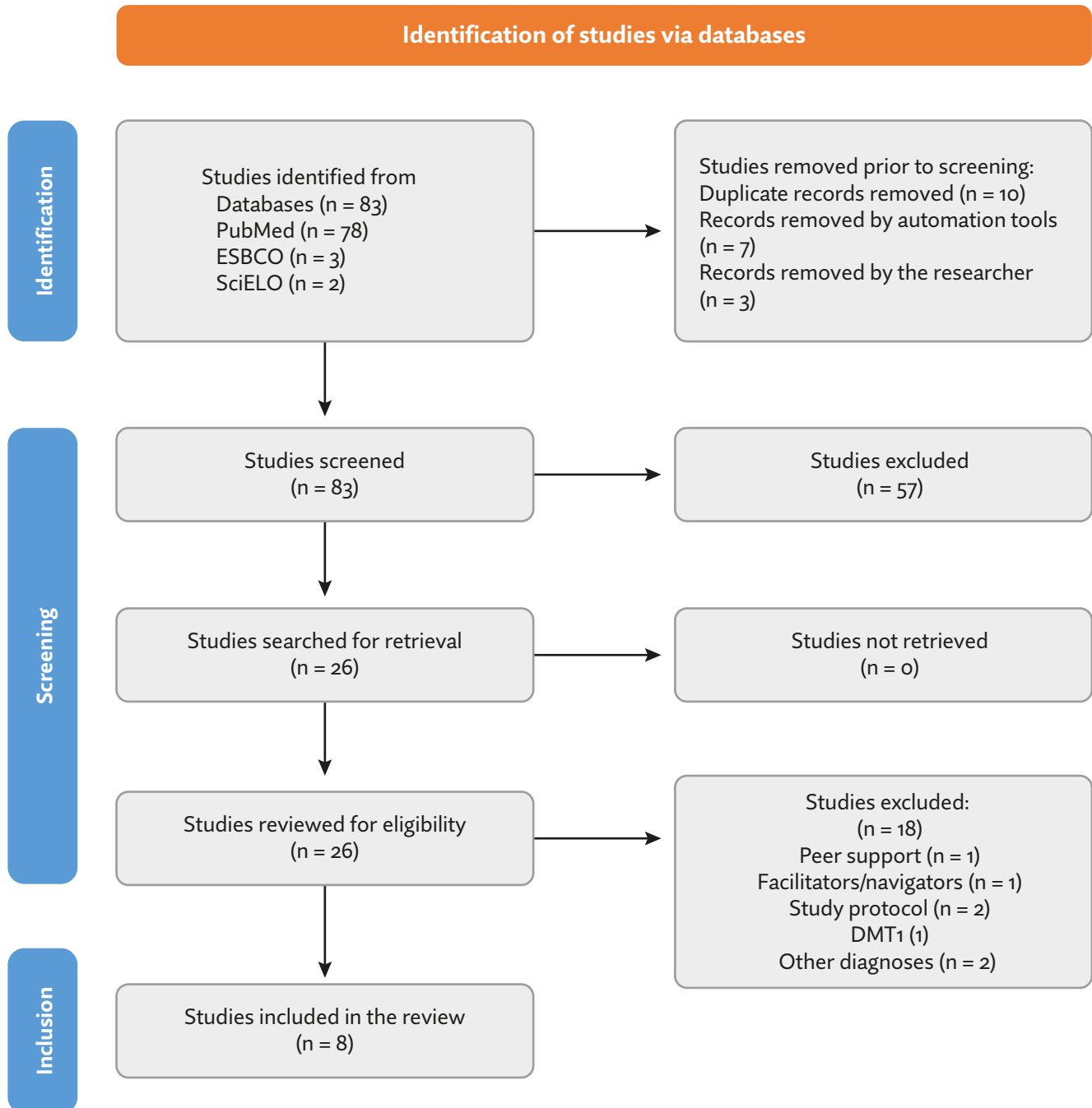
Ethical Aspects

Data were retrieved through a literature review. Thus, the study did not include direct participation by human subjects and, therefore, did not require review by a research ethics committee. Consequently, it complied with all ethical and legal requirements.

Results

The initial literature search identified 83 articles (78 in PubMed, three in EBSCO, and two in SciELO). No duplicate studies were found. The articles were then screened based on titles and abstracts, a step in which 57 articles were excluded. The remaining 26 studies were analyzed in full text, of which 18 were excluded as they did not specifically address inadequate health self-efficacy. At the end of the selection process, the sample for this review consisted of a total of eight studies, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Study Identification and Inclusion Process – PRISMA Flowchart, 2020



Source: prepared by the authors.

Therefore, based on the studies reviewed, it is clear that “inadequate health self-efficacy” is a concept found at various healthcare levels. To encompass the contexts in which this concept is present, all definitions were included in the analysis, and the main definitions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Presentation of the Definitions of the Concept Found in the Literature. São Luís, 2025

Authorship	Definition
Aliakbari F, 2022 (9)	Inadequate self-efficacy is therefore understood as a <i>limited perception of one's own ability to act</i> for the betterment of health, <i>influenced by low health literacy</i> .
Ma Y, 2022 (10)	<i>The lack of confidence or perceived capacity</i> to take the necessary steps to maintain one's own health.
Gouveia-Bezerra KM, 2023 (11)	Low self-efficacy is considered a <i>limited belief in one's own capacity to perform necessary self-care behaviors</i> for the effective management of chronic conditions, resulting in poor treatment adherence and an increased risk of clinical complications.
Wang L, 2024 (12)	Limited perception of one's own capacity to perform self-care activities.
Tavakoly Sany SB, 2024 (13)	Inadequate self-efficacy in health can be considered a <i>low propensity or inclination to adopt or engage in healthy behavior</i> .
Casco-Gallardo KI, 2024 (14)	Inadequate self-efficacy in health would be a <i>low level of confidence in one's own capacity to manage one's health</i> .
Gheisari F, 2024 (15)	<i>The professional's limited belief in their capacity to competently perform clinical tasks</i> , especially in complex situations such as transitions.
Giordano F, 2025 (16)	Low self-efficacy seems to be related to a <i>low belief in one's own capacity to resist social pressure</i> and maintain healthy habits, especially in the face of the influence of social media.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Defining Attributes

As proposed by Walker and Avant, attributes are essential characteristics related to concepts that help distinguish them from other phenomena. Thus, based on an analysis of the findings presented, the defining attributes of the concept of inadequate self-efficacy can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Presentation of the Defining Attributes and Their Descriptions. São Luís, 2025

Attributes identified	Description
Perceived incapacity to face challenges	Individuals with low self-efficacy have a reduced belief in their own capacity to deal with health-related adversities, which manifests as a reluctance to take action, which can lead to lower adherence to self-care and treatment.
Passive behavior in the face of changes	Shows limited initiative in adopting healthy habits, which hinders lifestyle changes.
Compromise in self-care and treatment adherence	Low self-efficacy is associated with difficulty managing the health condition, negatively affecting treatment outcomes.
Impact on professional performance	Healthcare professionals with low self-efficacy tend to delay clinical interventions, thereby compromising the quality of care provided.
Relationship with mental health and subjective well-being	There is a higher incidence of anxiety and depression symptoms, as well as a lower sense of emotional well-being.
Influence of beliefs on treatments	Negative perceptions of treatments, including complementary therapies, constitute a hallmark of low self-efficacy, manifesting as beliefs regarding low effectiveness and unfavorable attitudes toward these interventions.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Other Cases

Model Clinical Case

This case presents the defining attributes of the concept and an accurate representation of what constitutes inadequate self-efficacy.

Patient A, a 60-year-old woman, who was recently diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Despite the guidance she received from the healthcare team, *she doesn't believe she is capable of following the recommended diet or engaging in physical activity. When struggling to maintain adequate blood sugar levels, she easily lost hope and discontinued treatment for weeks. In addition, she did not seek help and avoided follow-ups in the outpatient clinic. As the days went by, she developed symptoms of anxiety and felt constantly frustrated. When asked about possible lifestyle changes, she replied with frustration that "It's worthless trying, I can never keep doing things for a long time."*

Related Case

In this case, there are similarities to the concept, but it does not present all the essential attributes. Thus, it may represent a related concept, such as insecurity or low motivation.

Patient B, a 40-year-old woman with diabetes, *she seems insecure* regarding starting physical activities. She has questions regarding the ideal type of exercise, but she searches for information and attends her appointments regularly. *Despite her initial hesitation, she continues to take her medication* and is willing to try following the new diet, despite not being fully confident.

Contrary Case

In this case, it is possible to observe the complete absence of the concept, that is, a person with high self-efficacy.

Patient C, a 35-year-old woman diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus, strictly adheres to her treatment plan. She trusts her capacity to recognize the signs and symptoms of dysglycemia, uses her preventive medication correctly, and adjusts her routine. In addition, she participates in an online support group and reports *feeling confident in managing her condition*.

Definition of the Concept

After analyzing the identified concepts, defining the attributes, and constructing the model and contrary cases related to the applicability of the concept of inadequate self-efficacy, a definition for the construct was formulated. In addition, it was noted that the term “low self-efficacy” is recurrent in the literature as a manifestation related to the concept under study.

Therefore, the conceptual definition hereby established states that low self-efficacy refers to an individual's limited belief in their own ability to take the necessary actions to achieve health-related goals, overcome adversity, or adopt beneficial behaviors, resulting in compromised self-care, poor treatment adherence, and emotional and functional impairments.

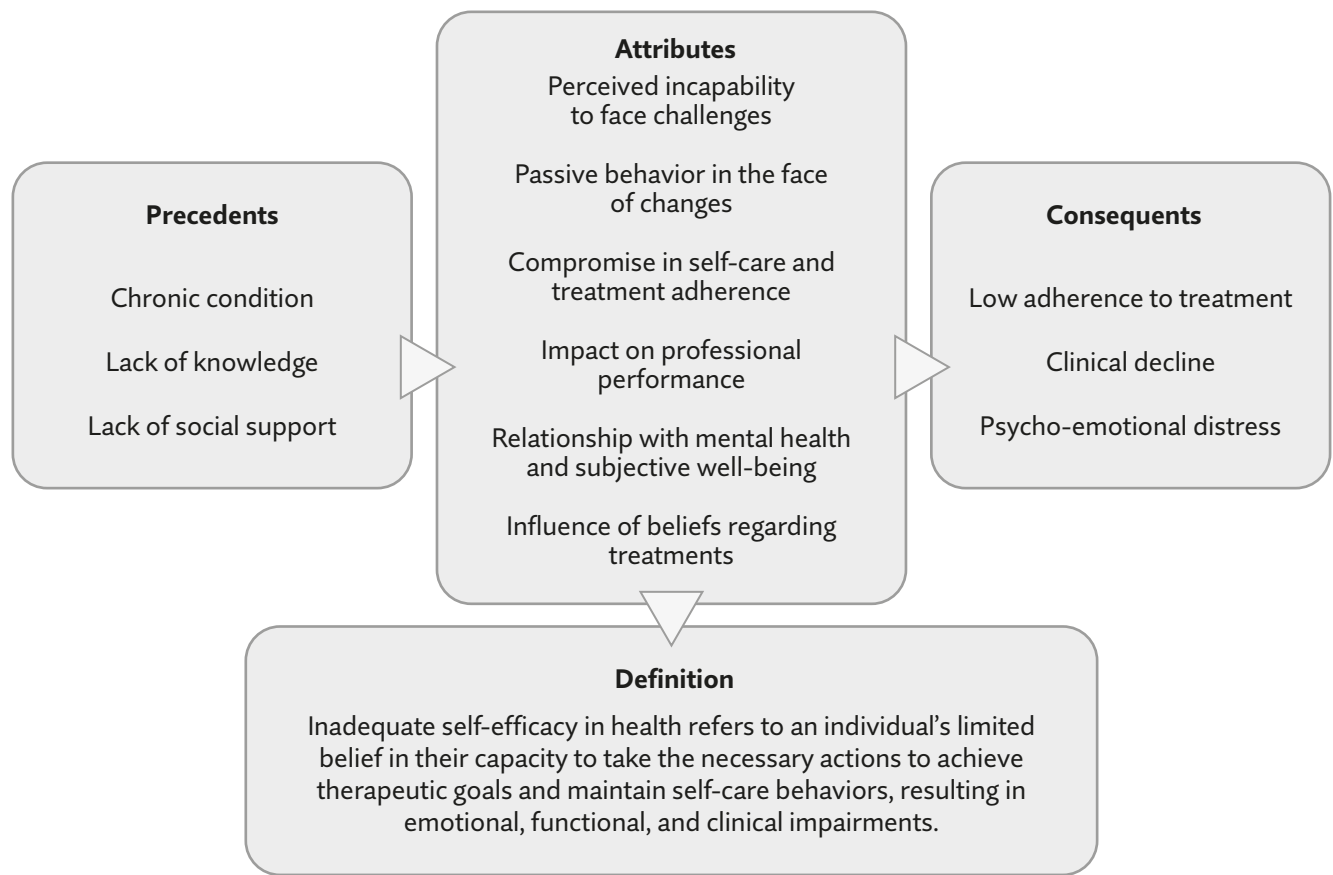
Precedents and Consequents

Based on the conceptual analysis method proposed by Walker and Avant (7), the concept of inadequate self-efficacy was defined. Figure 2 presents the main precedents and consequents identified in this study.

Empirical Referents

Empirical referents are defined as observable phenomena that, when present, demonstrate the occurrence of the concept. Following a review of the literature, it was possible to identify the empirical referents, as shown in Table 3.

Figure 2. Definition, attributes, precedents, and consequents. São Luís, 2025



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 3. Presentation of the Empirical Referents. São Luís, 2025

Identified Attributes	Measurable Phenomena	Referents
Perceived incapacity to face challenges	General or Adapted Self-Efficacy Scale for self-care	Gouveia-Bezerra KM, 2023
Passive behavior in the face of changes	Schwarzer's General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire	Tavakoly Sany SB, 2024
Compromise in self-care and treatment adherence; The influence of beliefs on treatments	General Self-Efficacy Scale and MBG Scale (Martin-Bayarre-Grau) for measuring treatment adherence	Casco-Gallardo KI, 2024
Impact on professional performance	Sherer's General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), the Visual Analog Scale (VAS) for transfer self-efficacy, and the Manchester Clinical Supervision Scale (MCSS)	Gheisari F, 2024
Relationship with mental health and subjective well-being	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	Giordano F, 2025

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The concept of inadequate self-efficacy in health has not yet been clearly defined in the scientific literature, which highlights the need for systematic conceptual analyses to clarify the concept and facilitate its practical application. The lack of a consensus definition hinders the accurate identification of its essential attributes, precedents, and consequents, thereby compromising the development of effective interventions and communication among healthcare professionals.

In this scenario, concept analysis stands out as a relevant methodological strategy in the field of health, especially in nursing, as it enables the delineation and organization of conceptual fields that are yet to be well established. Furthermore, it allows for the understanding of complex concepts in light of varying interpretations found in the literature, which is particularly important in contexts where the multiplicity of meanings can compromise the uniformity of clinical practice and influence healthcare decision-making (17).

Among the available theoretical and methodological frameworks, the concept analysis model proposed by Walker and Avant is recognized for its widespread use in nursing, particularly due to its systematic structure and practical applicability. In the literature, this model is known for contributing to the clarification of concepts through the identification of essential attributes, precedents, and consequents, as well as the construction of model, contrary, and liminal cases (7).

Although other conceptual analysis models emphasize more contextual and dynamic approaches, such as Rodgers's, Walker and Avant's model remains relevant due to its objectivity and ease of application in nursing studies (18). These steps facilitate not only conceptual delimitation but also an understanding of the relationships between concepts, thereby supporting the development of theories applicable to professional practice (19).

In the context of the present analysis, the selection of the Walker and Avant model and the rigorous implementation of the methodological steps ensure the replicability of the research and the theoretical consistency of the concept of inadequate self-efficacy in health. This selection should consider factors such as the research objectives, the conceptual maturity of the concept, and the clinical or educational context in which it is applied.

As noted in this review, the concept is applicable in various contexts, such as self-care (10-14), barriers to healthy behaviors (9, 16), and the practice of healthcare professionals (15), demonstrating its relevance across distinct healthcare settings. Given this, further research is needed at the varying levels of healthcare (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to refine the concept and adapt it to the specificities of each context (19).

Thus, concept analysis stands out as an essential methodological tool for clarifying meanings, especially when dealing with concepts that have multiple interpretations or are used in different contexts, such as in healthcare scenarios involving nursing professionals (20).

Consequently, concept analysis constitutes a systematic process aimed not only at elucidating the meanings attributed to inadequate self-efficacy, but also at ensuring that its use is consistent among the subjects who employ it within the same spatiotemporal and situational framework (17).

Therefore, by promoting theoretical consistency and terminological precision, this analysis strengthens clinical practices, the development of educational interventions, and the advancement of scientific knowledge in the field of nursing.

Conclusion

Based on the method proposed by Walker and Avant, it was possible to identify the key aspects for analyzing the concept of inadequate self-efficacy in health within the nursing field. By applying this methodology, it was possible to understand and structure the essential attributes, model cases, precedents and consequents of the concept, as well as its conceptual definition, ensuring reliability in the approach and, thus, providing a basis for more assertive nursing care.

Furthermore, based on this conceptual analysis, it is possible to identify new directions for research aimed at deepening the knowledge regarding inadequate health self-efficacy in varying clinical and social contexts, since the more clearly this concept is defined and structured, the greater its utility as a research variable, enabling more accurate assessments and more effective interventions.

In addition, in the future, more specific definitions may be developed, considering particular attributes for each scenario in which inadequate health self-efficacy impacts treatment adherence, care-related decision-making, and the individual's well-being. This conceptual evolution will contribute significantly to evidence-based nursing practices subsidized by clinical discretion, which will strengthen approaches aimed at promoting self-care and patient autonomy.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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