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# STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA: END-LINE REPORT

March 2024

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## **STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA: END-LINE REPORT**

**Note:** This study was conducted between May 2023- December 2023 and the report is ready to be published in March 2024. This study is a key component of the NCPEDP-Bajaj Finserv Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities.

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# FOREWORD

Education is one of the core pillars around which NCPEDP advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities. It is a fundamental right of the citizens of India, and the concerned authorities need to ensure that all legal rights provided to students are effectively implemented.

This study, titled 'Status of Higher Education of Students with Disabilities in India,' was undertaken to understand the current enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education in the four states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra) and one UT (Delhi). Previous studies have highlighted the dismal percentage of enrolment of students with disabilities in the education system. Despite the legal frameworks such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and the National Education Policy 2020 in place, students with disabilities are underrepresented in higher education, and the education system has not adequately addressed their needs for reasonable accommodation.

This work is a key component of the NCPEDP-Bajaj Finserv Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities, and as the title suggests, the study has been supported by Bajaj Finserv. I sincerely appreciate the contributions and support offered by Bajaj Finserv. The report highlights the challenges faced by students with disabilities in accessing their right to education. I hope the key findings of this report will be given careful consideration, and the recommendations made will be implemented to improve the existing condition of education for students with disabilities in India.

**Arman Ali**

**Executive Director**

**National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all the students with disabilities who generously consented to participate in this study spanning across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam, and Delhi. Without their invaluable participation, this research would not have been possible.

This study is a collaborative effort of NCPEDP and Bajaj Finserv. It is supported by Bajaj Finserv as part of their social impact program, and we extend our sincere thanks to them for identifying the need for this study and supporting the same.

We would like to acknowledge Sense International and the faculty members of Delhi University for their contributions. Special thanks to George Abraham of Score Foundation, New Delhi, and Mrs. Radhika M. Alkazi, Founding Member of ASTHA, New Delhi, for providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by students with disabilities in higher education.

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Thanks are due to Mrs. Ketaki Bardalai, Governing Body Member of Shishu Sarothi, and the dedicated team members of Shishu Sarothi, Guwahati, for their assistance in connecting with students with disabilities in Assam.



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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

**PWD** Persons with Disabilities

**RCI** Rehabilitation Council of India

**RTE** Right to Education

**ITI** Indian Technical Institute

**UNCRPD** United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**ECCE** Early Childhood Care and Education

**SEDGs** Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups

**UGC** University Grant Commission

**AICTE** All India Council of Technical Education

**B.Ed** Bachelor of Education

**UT** Union Territory

**RPWD Act** Right to Persons with Disabilities Act

**CUET** Central University Entrance Test

**OMR** Optical Mark Recognition

**UPSC** Union Public Service Commission

**JEE** Joint Entrance Exam

**NEET** National Eligibility Cum Entrance Examination

**PH** Physically Handicapped

**TISS** Tata Institute of Social Sciences

**TCS** Tata Consultancy Services

**SWAYAM** Study Webs of Active- Learning for Young Aspiring Minds

**DoEPwD** Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities

**NHFDC** National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation

**CSR** Corporate Social Responsibility

**ADIP** Assistance to Disabled Persons for purchase

**STEM** Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Students with disabilities in India and globally have been historically deprived of their basic human rights of education. The Indian education system underwent a major policy-level shift in 2020 with the implementation of National Education Policy 2020. The policy emphasized rethinking and revamping various aspects of the education system with a focus on the inclusive education of unprivileged groups of students including students with disabilities. The policy speaks of endorsing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. While focusing on inclusive education at higher education, the policy in chapter 14, acknowledges “the dynamics and also many of the reasons for exclusion of Socio Economic Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) from the education system are common across school and higher education sectors.” The policy thus, enunciates that the approach to equity and inclusion must be common across school and higher education. NCPEDP extensively advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities. Given the shifts in the education system, it became important to understand the status of inclusive education for students with disabilities at the higher education level. In this endeavour, the organisation conducted a research study in four states and one UT of India. This study has been supported by Bajaj Finserv and is a key component of the NCPEDP-Bajaj Finserv Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities.

Chapter 1 of the report presents the background of the study, objectives and aims of this research study. The chapter highlights the data collection process and the challenges encountered during the data collection. The study adopted a mixed-method approach of data collection comprising both quantitative (using survey method) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews). 250 students across disabilities from four states (Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra) and UT (Delhi) currently enrolled in different courses in higher education through regular mode participated in the study.

Chapter 2 of the report highlights the profile of the students with disabilities in the higher education system. It brings forth the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education based on their disability as well as gender and highlights the under-representation of various disability groups in the higher education system. The chapter also focuses on the economic status of the families of SwDs as well as the status of enrollment of these students in different managements of Higher Education.

Chapter 3 describes the various challenges that students with disabilities have faced during the admission process and entrance examination. These issues and challenges are largely related to access.

Chapter 4 of the report talks about the range of barriers that students with disabilities face in getting enrolled in their respective courses. The lack of accessible and affordable hostel facilities in the host city acts as one of the major challenges for students with disabilities. Inaccessible roads, and lack of accessible and affordable public transport en route to the college have been some of the challenges faced by students. Also, safety and security is yet another issue faced by the day scholars en route educational institutions. ***Around 20% of day scholars with disabilities have experienced sexual harassment in public transportation***



**regularly irrespective of gender.** The chapter further talks about the issues of physical accessibility within higher education institutions. The report highlights that in most of the higher education institutions (especially in the state of Bihar, Assam and Uttar Pradesh) the understanding of physical accessibility and barrier-free environment remained confined to the presence of rail and ramps and separate toilets for students with disabilities.

Chapter 5 of the report highlights the barriers faced by students with disabilities in teaching-learning processes in the higher education system. Some of the issues and challenges faced by students with disabilities are similar to the issues faced by them during the school education system but become more profound and complex in the higher education system. The chapter also focuses on some of the specific support and reasonable accommodations students with disabilities require in STEM courses but largely remain absent from the system. The role of Equal Opportunity Cells or Enabling Units in higher education institutions has also been the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 6 of this report presents some of the economic barriers that students with disabilities face in their effective participation in the higher education system. Many students with disabilities require constant medical intervention in the form of medicines, therapies and even blood transfusions for which families endure huge out-of-pocket expenditures. Consequently, the medical needs of the students obscure their educational needs.

The last chapter of this report gives some important recommendations and suggestions towards making the higher education system more inclusive for students with disabilities. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- Effective enforcement of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 in all states.
- Establishing synergy between various government stakeholders (Ministries) and ensuring convergence to plan as well as execute modes and modalities to provide a single window for all schemes and services for students with disabilities.
- Building and strengthening of partnerships between state, private, civil society, DPOs and community.
- The schools must be made one of the key stakeholders to prepare the students with disabilities to cope with the wider and complex environment of the higher education system.
- Equal Opportunity Cell must be opened and made functional in all universities as well as colleges to cater to the needs of students with disabilities.
- Capacity building of all the stakeholders including the faculty members is a must.
- Enhancing the budgetary allocation of the Department of Higher Education and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Development, compilation and strengthening of all relevant data on education of the students with disabilities in aggregated or disaggregated forms.

# **CHAPTER-1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

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Persons with disabilities are perhaps the most vulnerable groups that have been deprived of their basic human rights including the right to education. Globally, there are an estimated 1.3 billion persons with disabilities and the global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3%.<sup>1</sup>

About 90% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school and their enrolment falls from one level of education to another.<sup>2</sup> At the higher education level, students, scholars and researchers with disabilities remain under-represented and they are among the most marginalized, vulnerable, and excluded groups on campus.<sup>3</sup> They struggle with accessibility to learning facilities and face various forms of stigma and discrimination, as well as barriers to exercising their rights.<sup>4</sup> The situation of students with disabilities in India has been no better than its counterpart States elsewhere. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) shows the persisting dismal condition, exclusion and discrimination that students with disabilities have been facing to access education. As per the AISHE data (from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022), the enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education hovers between 0.19-0.22 % of the total students enrolled in the higher education system.<sup>5</sup> The dismal condition of the enrolment of students with disabilities persists despite policy-level interventions for their inclusion in the higher education system in India.

## Policy-level intervention for the education of students with disabilities in India

Education of students with disabilities in India has been the focus of the government since independence. The constitution of India does not allow any form of discrimination based on disability. Article 15 (2) of the *Indian Constitution*, has specifically mentioned that no citizen including persons with disabilities can be denied access to public places. Article 45 of the constitution through the 86 amendments, extends the right to free and compulsory education to all children including children with disabilities up to the age of fourteen years.

At the policy level, some of the early milestones towards the education of children and students with disabilities include the National Policy on Education 1986,<sup>6</sup> RCI 1992 (later amended in 2000),<sup>7</sup> the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights

1 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html>

2 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html>

3 <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/disability-and-higher-education-inclusivity-increasingly-technologically-inclined>

4 Ibid

5 The raw number is collected from the AISHE report and collated for the academic year 2017-18 to 2021-2022. The percentage is calculated by total number of PwD enrolled in higher education to total number of students enrolled in higher education system.

6 *National Policy on Education 1986* has a detailed plan for the inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream of school education and provisions to open special schools, train teachers and provide adequate funds to empower them but the reach of all the provisions does not go beyond the school education (National Policy, 1998).

7 Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 as amended in 2000, empowers Rehabilitation Council of India to act as a regulatory and supervisory body to formalize services, provided to persons with disability. RCI controls entire ecosystem available to provide services for person with disability. Its function involves recognizing programmes offered

and Full Participation) Act, 1995”,<sup>8</sup> the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities of 2006, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act 2012<sup>9</sup>. However, the focus of these policies has been on affirmative action for students with disabilities at the level of school education. *Programme on Action Report for National Policy on Education 1986* was the first initiative for the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education and it envisaged for setting up of centers for vocational training of the handicapped in institutions like District Vocational Training Centers, ITIs and Polytechnics.<sup>10</sup>

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2006, like other policies primarily focused on the education of students with disabilities at the school level and provides access to students with disabilities in universities, technical institutions and other institutions of higher learning to pursue higher and professional courses (NPPD, 2006). It, however, does not elaborate on it.

In 2009 the fundamental Right to Education for children from the ages of 6 to 14, took the shape of the Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE Act). After much advocacy, the RTE Act 2009, made specific mention of children with disabilities in disadvantaged groups and other areas through an Amendment in 2012. However, the RTE Act does not cater to the needs of children with disabilities at the secondary level of education.

<sup>11</sup>Additionally, the centrally sponsored scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (launched in 2001-02) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (launched in 2009) at the secondary level, provided for inclusive education of children with disabilities. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan focused on the identification of children with disabilities, functional and formal assessment, appropriate educational placement, preparation of an Individualized Education Plan for each CWSN, provision of free aids and appliances, transport and/or escort support, teacher training, appointment of resource teachers, therapeutical support and barrier-free access.

There was a major paradigm shift in disability sector worldwide with the enforcement of the International Convention UNCRPD 2008, which focused on the right-based approach towards Persons with Disabilities. The UNCRPD acknowledges that children and persons with disabilities have equal rights within a society and conceives them as individuals with a

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by institutions of higher education, preparing professionals/service providers for PWD, development of resource material for education of disabled students, promote inclusion of disabled in all policies and facilitating training of disabled by providing necessary support. RCI takes necessary steps to facilitate education and inclusion of disabled in main stream of society. RCI has done commendable service in development of human resource to provide service for persons with disability along with development of resources and study materials in accessible formats. RCI also provides financial assistance to different stake holders for promotion of disability issues.

<sup>8</sup> Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. Under article 26 (a) obligate appropriate government to ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of eighteen years. Article 27 (d) contains provisions about imparting education through open schools or open universities. Under Articles 30, 30(b) and 30(f) appropriate governments were directed to prepare comprehensive plan for education by removing architectural barriers from schools, colleges or other institutions, imparting vocational and professional training and suitable modification in the examination system to eliminate purely mathematical questions for the benefit of blind students and students with low vision. (PWD Act, 1995). The act does not have much to say about the transactional aspect of higher education and only focuses on removing the architectural barriers along with examination reform for blind students

<sup>9</sup> GOI, 2012, Right to Education Act, Chapter-2.

<sup>10</sup> GOI, 1986, Programme on Action Report for National Policy on Education 1986, p. 40).

<sup>11</sup> Alkazi, R. and Bhutani, R. 2022. White Paper on Rights of Children with Disabilities to Inclusive Education, Pg:5, ASTHA: New Delhi.

disabling medical condition. It talks of designing every institution of society in a manner that ensures their equal participation in all aspects of life.<sup>12</sup> UNCRPD under Article 24 obliges the State to provide inclusive education to persons with disabilities at all levels of education.<sup>13</sup> Under the same article, the law enunciates free compulsory primary education as well as secondary education, reasonable accommodation, effective individualized support and many more provisions for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education.<sup>14</sup>

India was one of the first signatories of the UNCRPD which obliges the state to relook and revisit its legislations, and policies towards the rehabilitation and habilitation of persons with disabilities. In this pursuit, India, consequently implemented a right-based legislation “Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act” in 2016, eight years after ratifying the convention. Chapter 3 of the law provides for free and quality inclusive education for persons with disabilities. For the first time “inclusive education” has been defined in the Indian context.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 envisages in Chapter III, Section 16 and 17 the right of children with disabilities to quality inclusive education. Section- 16 of the law provides for reasonable accommodation and individual support to ensure their full participation and inclusion. The law under the same article obligates the State to make institutions accessible and transact teaching-learning processes using appropriate language and mode and means of communication and transport facilities. RPWD Act under Section 17 provides for capacity building of various stakeholders, providing books and assistive devices to students with benchmark disabilities. Additionally, the law in Chapter VI and Section 32 provides reservations and upper age relaxation of five years for admission in higher education. Further, the law emphasizes under section on making the physical infrastructure of public places including educational institutions accessible for persons with disabilities.

Meanwhile, in 2015, the international community moved away from the Millennium Development Goals and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals with a 2030 deadline. SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In 2020 amid the COVID-19 lockdown India got a New Education Policy for which implementation plans are already being made in different states. This policy accords the “highest priority to the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system and endorses completely the provisions in education of the RPWD Act 2016.<sup>15</sup> While focusing on inclusive education at higher education, the policy in chapter 14, acknowledges “ The dynamics and also many of the reasons for exclusion of SEDGs from the education system are common across school and higher education sectors.”<sup>16</sup> The

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12 Ibid.

13 United Nations, 2006, Education, Article-21(1), United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocols. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

14 Ibid.

15 Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec. 6.10, Pg no. 26, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

16 Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec. 14.1 Pg no. 42 National Education

policy thus, enunciates that the approach to equity and inclusion must be common across school and higher education.<sup>17</sup> It also talks of continuity across the stages of education to ensure sustainable reform. Thus, the policy initiatives required to meet the goals of equity and inclusion in higher education must be read in conjunction with those for school education.<sup>18</sup>

## Steps taken by UGC and AICTE towards inclusion

During the ninth five year plan, the University Grant Commission started two schemes i.e. Teacher Preparation in Special Education (TEPSE) and Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (Differently-abled Persons) (HEPSN).<sup>19</sup> Teacher Preparation in Special Education (TEPSE) scheme was launched to introduce B.Ed. and M.Ed degree courses with specialisation in one of the disability areas.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) Scheme focused on establishing enabling units and providing special equipment to persons with disabilities.

AICTE has issued directions to institutions to follow and implement guidelines issued by the Government of India to build barrier-free environments in institutions. It has collaborated with various organizations to develop manuals like the Design Manual for a Barrier-Free Environment in Universities/ Colleges for All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) on the different areas of intervention for persons with disabilities.<sup>21</sup>

AICTE provides SAKSHAM scholarship for students with disabilities to pursue higher education and organizes awareness programs to sensitize the stakeholders to build an inclusive atmosphere in institutions. The council has included the components of architectural design as an elective course named Barrier-Free Architecture (AICTE, Model 2019, p.131) that addresses the issues of disability and accessibility. Providing a barrier-free built environment for disabled and elderly persons has been made essential requirement for the approval of institutions.<sup>22</sup>

Against all these developments towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education, it becomes imperative to understand the existing ground realities.

## Aims and objectives of the study

This research is taken against the background of the white paper on India's National Education Policy and disability inclusive education titled "National Education Policy: Opportunities and Challenges". The whitepaper highlighted some key challenges that students with disabilities

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Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Chauhan, Prithviraj. (2022). Higher Education Policies in India for Persons with Disabilities: Building an Inclusive Ecosystem in Higher Education Institutions. 18. 23-31.

20 Ibid

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

face in their access to education. The study aims to highlight as well as provide evidence for the acknowledged fact that students with disabilities face many structural and systemic challenges which act as barriers for them to access their educational rights across all levels of education.

It is important to critically examine the scope of inclusive education in the light of the new policy as well as the laws of the land and lay out the barriers that have been faced by students with disabilities so that these challenges can be addressed in new plans and schemes. The study, therefore, aims to understand the range of barriers, issues and challenges the students with disability encounter in accessing the right to higher education.

Keeping into consideration the RPWD Act and National Education Policy 2020, the study aims to understand the socio-economic status of the students with disabilities and the site of the school education from which they are transiting. The study also aims to understand the following aspects:

- the streams/ subjects students with disabilities have been aspiring for and the courses are being offered to them.
- Issues and challenges related to access to higher education system in terms of admission procedure and entrance examinations.
- Presence of support systems in the institution for their effective participation in terms of physical, technological and digital infrastructure.
- Exploring these questions will help in reducing gaps in existing literature and help in knowledge building about the status of education of persons with disabilities in higher education. It will also help in reducing the methodological gaps and the findings of the study will provide an opportunity for further research. It will also act as a platform for the advocacy work to be taken by civil society organizations for the proper inclusion of students with disabilities in the higher education system.

## Methods of data collection

To meet the objective of the study, a mixed-method approach comprising quantitative and qualitative methods has been followed. The source of data has been both primary and secondary. Survey method has been used to collect quantitative data while for qualitative data semi-structured interviews were carried out with different stakeholders.

The study has been carried out in four states -Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra and one UT (Delhi). The selection of the states has been done keeping in consideration the geographical representation as well as the enrollment of students with disabilities in these states in the higher education system of India.<sup>23</sup> Two states Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh

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<sup>23</sup> According to the latest AISHE Report, (2020-21), there are total of 960 students with disabilities enrolled in higher education in the state of Assam. In the state of Bihar, there are 5646 students with disabilities enrolled in higher education. Uttar Pradesh has 15003 students while Maharashtra has 6163 students with disabilities enrolled in higher

were selected also because these are the states where the NCPEDP-Bajaj Finserv Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities is supporting students with disabilities to continue their education by providing scholarship support.

A total of 250 cross-disabled students from different educational institutions participated in the online survey carried out during April- September 2023. The students have been selected following the random sampling method from the list of data for the states of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Assam.<sup>24</sup> “Snowball” method of sampling has been adopted in the states of Bihar and Delhi. While selecting the sample size due cognizance has been given to the representation of various disability groups. The sample has a representation of both girls and boys with disabilities. Students have been selected from higher education institutes/colleges and universities across all management- government, deemed to be private. The students are currently enrolled in graduation, post-graduation, MPhil and PhD courses.

Sr. No.	States	No. of students
1	Bihar	75
2	Uttar Pradesh	35
3	Assam	33
4	Delhi	37
5	Maharashtra	70

For the data collection, an online survey form in English and Hindi was designed. The questions were both open-ended and close-ended, focusing on issues and challenges that students with disabilities encounter in higher education. It contained background questions including the type of disability, gender, and socio-economic background of the family, site of education at the school level, their present course etc. The questions related to entrance examinations, admission processes, access to the college and institutes, accessibility both in terms of physical as well as technological, teaching-learning methods, equal opportunity cells, and scholarship have been incorporated.

A pilot with ten students with disabilities was conducted to validate and finalize the survey

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education. Delhi has 4426 students with disabilities enrolled in higher education. For details refer to Table- 15 of AISHE Report (2020-21).

<https://aishe.gov.in/aishe/viewDocument.action;jsessionid=D2F57AAE4B1C3FD54ACAE35D184EA3FF.ng?documentId=352>

<sup>24</sup> NCPEDP runs a scholarship program in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The program is funded by the Bajaj Finserv. As such, NCPEDP has list of students with disabilities that are currently availing scholarship under this program. This list has been used to reach out to students with disabilities in these two methods. In Assam, Sishu Sarothi also run scholarship program. NCPEDP reached out to Sishu Sarothi for the same and collected the data through their help.



form. The final survey form was then disseminated to the students with disabilities via email and WhatsApp group. Telephonic conversations were held and the responses were recorded in the forms for the students who did not have access to technology.

The data collected through the survey method was then cleaned and processed. Each variable was coded, and the data was analyzed using SPSS software.

### **Methods of qualitative data**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with at least five students from each of these states and UT. A total of 30 students who have been part of the survey have been interviewed telephonically or through online platforms like Zoom, or Google Meet. Additionally, interactions with the special educators, heads of the organizations in disability sectors, and faculty members were also conducted to understand the nuances of the issues. They acted as key informants for the study.

## **Challenges faced during data collection**

During the data collection process, various challenges came up for which alternative steps were taken.

- Many students with disabilities in Bihar and Delhi chose not to be part of the study to conceal their identity as a person with disabilities. Similarly, some students from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra also did not give their consent to be part of the study due to various reasons including stigma related to disabilities. Consequently, the previously decided sample size of 100 students per state and UT was reduced to a minimum of 30 samples per state and UT.
- Interactions with the students having intellectual disabilities and deaf-blindness have been one of the challenges during the data collection. Assistance from either of the parents or family members was taken to interact with these students.

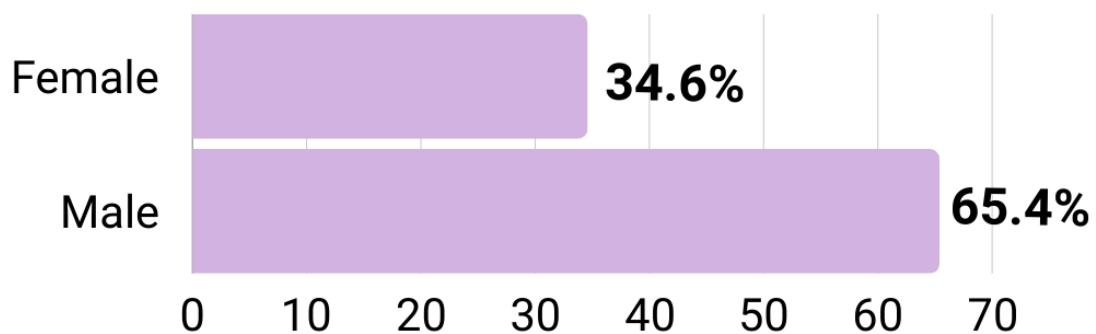
**CHAPTER-2**

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
STATUS OF STUDENTS  
WITH DISABILITIES IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
SYSTEM**

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## Gender-wise profile of the students with disabilities in the higher education system

The survey reveals that in the higher education system in the states and UT under study, 65.4% of students are boys/males with disabilities while 34.6% of them are girls/female students with disabilities. The low percentage of girls/women with disabilities can be attributed to the double disadvantage and discrimination faced by them due to the intersectionality of gender and disability.



**FIG. 1. GENDER-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

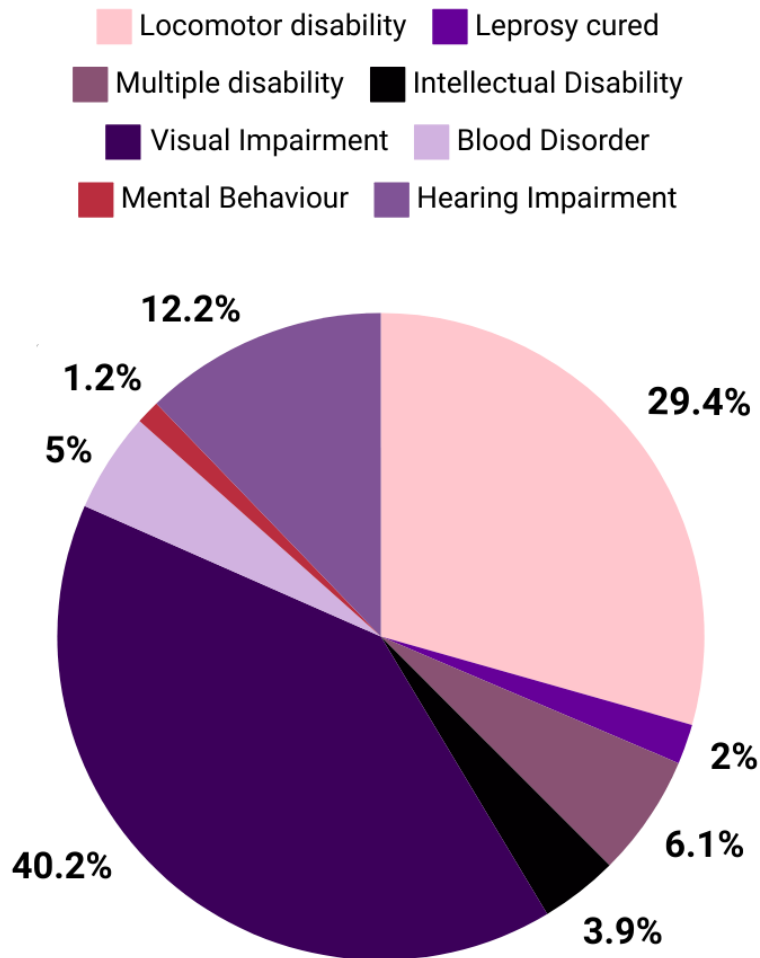
## Disability-wise profile of students with disabilities enrolled in the higher education system

The survey reveals the high prevalence of students with visual impairment and locomotor disabilities at the higher education level. 38.2% of students with visual impairment<sup>25</sup> followed by students with locomotor disability (29.4%).<sup>26</sup> Students with hearing impairment constitute about 12.2 % of the total students with disabilities enrolled in the higher education system followed by 6.1% of students with multiple disabilities, students with blood disorder (5%). Merely 3.9% of students with disabilities have identified themselves as students with intellectual disabilities. 2% of students with disabilities are leprosy cured student.<sup>27</sup> Also, these are the students with disabilities that are independent or require minimal support in carrying out their daily life activities.

<sup>25</sup> Within the category of visual impairment, students with blindness and low vision are included.

<sup>26</sup> Within the category of locomotor disability, students with muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, and dwarfism are also included.

<sup>27</sup> Students with deaf blindness are also included under the category of multiple disabilities.



**FIG. 2. DISABILITY-WISE PROFILE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

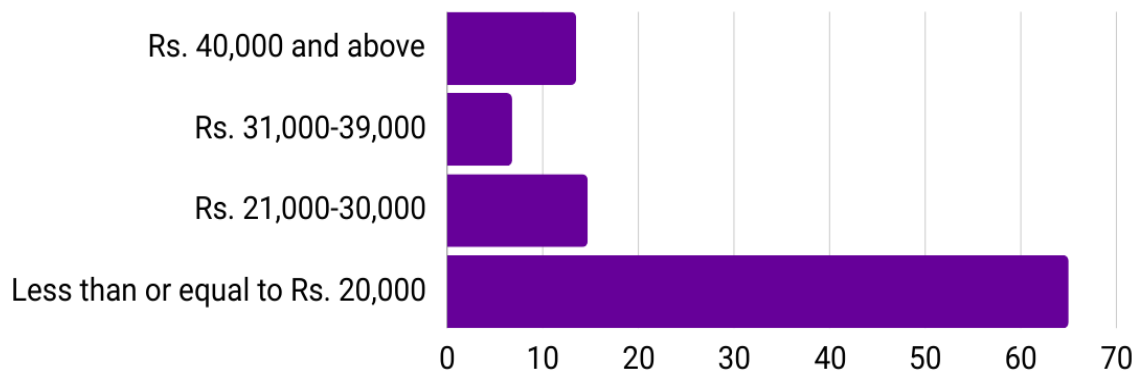
The percentage of students who have identified themselves as students with intellectual disabilities and mental behaviour has been low in the higher education system. Their low visibility in the higher education system can be attributed to the stigma attached to disabilities. According to the key informants, people and families with disabilities tend to conceal the disability if it is not profound and remains inevitable. Fear of denial of admission based on disabilities and other forms of discrimination prompts them to conceal their disability. Additionally, many students with intellectual disabilities/ learning disabilities (with severe conditions) have issues related to the span of attention, some others are slow learners, while others can have problems remaining organized, lack critical thinking and so forth. As such, they may likely find it difficult to cope with the core academic subjects and opt for vocational courses

Additionally, the low visibility of students with blood disorders is likely due to a lack of awareness among the students and families about the inclusion and recognition of their conditions under the disability law of India.

## Economic status of the families of students with disabilities

More than half of the students with disabilities (65%) have been from families having income of 20000 or less. The families of these students have been engaged in the unorganized sectors and daily wage earners. They are engaged in activities like construction workers, street vendors, house helpers, housekeeping staffs in malls, labourers in small factories, farmers and so forth.

Around 15% of the students with disabilities have been from families having income ranging between 21000- 30000 per month followed by 13.5% from families having income ranging between 40,000 and above. 6.8% of students with disabilities have been from families having income between 31000-39,000. They belong to white color jobs and businesses.



**FIG. 3. MONTHLY INCOME OF THE FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**CHAPTER-3**

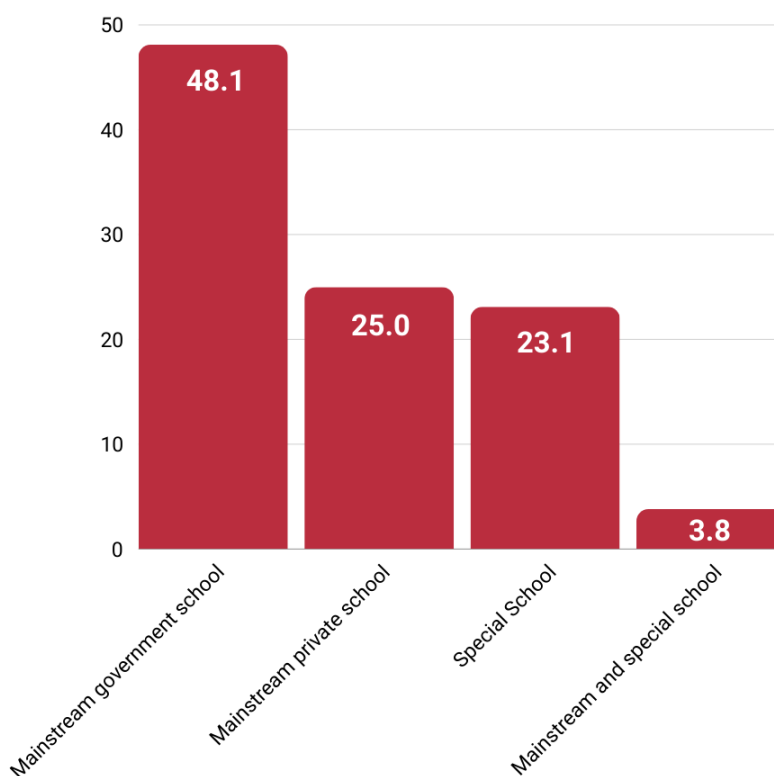
**ACCESS TO HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS FOR  
STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES**

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Knowledge about the previous educational context of the students is essential to develop a holistic understanding of the status of students in higher education. It is important to understand the previous site of education from which the student has transited, the availability of a support system to make career choices and the processes to undertake to have access to the higher education system. Existing literature shows the students' previous site of education, past experiences, prior knowledge and skills have an indirect impact on the academic achievement and the retention of the student in educational spaces. Students with disabilities are no exception to this general rule.

## Transition of students with disabilities from different sites of school education to higher education

The survey reveals that the students with disabilities who enter the higher education system are from diverse educational sites of education. However, close to half of the students who enter the higher education system (48.1%) have studied in mainstream government schools or private schools. Very few students transition from special schools to the higher education system. The survey reveals that **23.1% of students with disabilities from special schools transit to higher education**. These are the students with visual impairment, deaf-blind and students with intellectual disabilities.



**FIG. 4. SITE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL**

## Career counselling and making educational choices

Like any other student, students with disabilities require career counselling while making choices about higher education institutes and their educational aspirations. Additionally, students with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and students who had limited interaction with the external environment need psycho-socio counselling while transitioning from school to college. The survey shows, that **only one out of ten students with disabilities have received career counselling from their school or the last attended educational institutions.** Also, the schools do not prepare students with disabilities to interact with the complex environment of the higher education level. Thus, the onus of the educational decision falls on the students with disabilities and their families.

Due to the lack of support systems, it is likely that most of the students with disabilities end up choosing and opting for institutions and courses much against their educational aspirations and dreams.

## Online application and examination process for access to higher education institutions

Indian higher education system has witnessed drastic changes in admission processes. Entrance examination for various colleges, universities and courses has replaced the merit criteria. The entire process of examination and various stages of admission has been made online. All these changes have direct and direct impact on the access of students with disabilities to the higher education system. This research study shows the mixed response from the students with disabilities on these changes with some advocating for the online mode of admission process while others opposing it. The following section will reflect the experience of the students during the entire process of admission.

The online method of application process has received mixed response from the students with disabilities. **68% of students have shared the inconvenience they encountered during the online mode of filling out entrance examination forms and the admission process.** Some of the persistent challenges for these students have been a lack of access to computers/laptops and devices for the process, inaccessible format of application forms and lack of physical support while filling out the forms. Due to lack of physical assistance many students with disabilities have experienced constant confusion and ambiguities throughout the application and admission process. Students have also shared their concerns about the inaccessible format of advertisements and announcements about the admission process.

The RPWD Act 2016, under Section 42 makes it mandatory to provide all contents available in audio, print and electronic media in an accessible format; access to electronic media by providing audio description, sign language interpretation and close captioning; electronic goods and equipment which are meant for everyday use are available in universal design. Although the administration and the system have tried to make the process accessible in



central universities, it seems that the system had a narrow conception of accessibility. By and large, the accessibility norms related to access to information have largely remained absent during entrance examinations and admission processes.

## Physical accessibility during the entrance examination

For conducting entrance examinations, the guidelines issued by the University Grant Commission,<sup>28</sup> All India Council for Technical Education, Medical Council of India and all other concerned bodies have provided for individualized support and accommodation as per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 as well as National Education Policy. These bodies in the guidelines to conduct examinations have provided facilities like scribes, readers, and lab assistance for students with benchmark disabilities. Provisions like extra time to complete the examination, 20%-50% of objective questions, and use of computers as per the individualized support.<sup>29</sup>

Colleges and universities across four states as well as in Delhi have followed some components of the guidelines issued by the examination bodies. All the students who required extra time to complete their examinations were allocated the same. The National Test Agency (responsible for conducting all entrance examinations across the country) under its guidelines tries to keep in consideration the access for students with disabilities. While the NTA tries to allocate the examination centre as per the choice of the applicants with disabilities, yet students with disabilities face a range of issues and barriers related to access and accessibility. The limited number of examination centres both for national level as well as state level entrance examinations act as barriers for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have shared physical stress, financial burden, and stress due to other barriers associated with travelling to other cities to appear for examination. Students have shared about encountering barriers like amenities in the city including accessible transportation and examination centre, arranging for a scribe, safety in the new city and many more during the examination.

The survey also highlights the issue of inaccessible physical infrastructure in examination centres across states. The entrance of the examination centres was highly inaccessible, especially for wheelchair users in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Broken ramps and small gates at the entrance of the building acted as barriers to their free movement. One of the students with a locomotor disability while sharing his experience with the examination centre said the following:

*I remember I was going to take my law entrance examination. I have a customized scooter that I ride on my own. It helps me to move from one place to another in my entire city.*

28. [https://nta.ac.in/Download/Notice/Guidelines\\_29\\_08\\_2018.pdf](https://nta.ac.in/Download/Notice/Guidelines_29_08_2018.pdf)

29. [https://www.aicte-india.org/sites/default/files/Circular-AICTE%20Guidelines%20for%20inclusive%20education%20for%20all%20including%20persons%20with%20disabilities\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.aicte-india.org/sites/default/files/Circular-AICTE%20Guidelines%20for%20inclusive%20education%20for%20all%20including%20persons%20with%20disabilities_compressed.pdf)

*My journey to the examination center was fairly fine. I reached my examination centre in Patna about half an hour before the commencement of the examination. However, the situation became bad when I reached the center. It was very difficult for me to get inside the examination hall. The ramp was broken, and the stairs were also in deplorable condition. There was no wheelchair in the center. I could not walk as I had polio in my legs and my legs were badly deformed. I was perplexed a bit but I had to take my entrance examination. I waited for a few moments, then I got down from my scooty. I lay down on the ground and I started walking on my hands. I somehow climbed on stairs leading to the corridor of the ground floor where my examination hall was situated. It took me around 45 minutes to reach the hall. I have been dealing with this issue ever since I started studying. This has become a norm for me now. I wish the authorities had given cognizance to my needs and my disability and made the environment much more conducive to our needs.*

**-Manoj Kumar, Law Student, Patna.**

## Reasonable accommodation and individualized support during entrance examinations

In the past few years, there has been a change in the mode and pattern of entrance examinations. The traditional paper-pen examination has been replaced by the Computer Based Test (CBT). However, individual support in the form of customized chairs and desks, and brightness in room are some of the basic support that many students with disabilities may require at the time of entrance examination. Quite a few students appeared in traditional paper-pen- based examinations. In the traditional paper-pen-based examination, students with low vision may require large font question papers, and brightness in the examination halls.

Most of the national-level, entrance examinations are now computer-based. The computer-based test (CBT) system has received a mixed response from students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who have access to, and knowledge of technology felt CBT more accessible than the traditional method or even OMR pattern.

*I have low vision and I also have a squint problem. I use very high power of specs. My vision is decreasing gradually, and I have undergone various corrective eye surgeries but to no avail. When I took up my graduation entrance examination it was OMR OMR-based examination. I had to take the help of a scribe as I found it difficult to fill the OMR sheet. With my present vision, I could write without help but I need help in filling OMR sheet as required to fill small circles which I cannot do. After completing my graduation, I skipped three academic years as I started preparing for UPSC. I joined Delhi University in 2022 for my master's course. By that time, the examination was CBT (Computer Based Test), and I was glad to see the change as for the first time I felt self-reliant and independent. I can work*

*very independently on a computer. It was a good replacement as I didn't have to struggle to arrange a scribe for me to take the examination. I am not sure how helpful computer-based examinations are for my fellow friends with disabilities, but for me the experience was good. However, I believe that the system can be made more accessible if there is scope for further improvement.*

***-Prahlaad Kumar (name changed), Delhi University.***

However, a large number of students with disabilities including students with visual impairment and mobility issues in their hands have shared the range of accessibility issues faced during the CBT. Students with visual impairment above 80% did not have good experience with CBT and found it problematic. 60% of students with visual impairment who have taken CBT said that it was difficult for them to comprehend even the upper-case letters. These students also found it difficult to read subscripts and superscripts. Around 75% of the students with visual impairment who have taken CBT faced difficulty in accessing the calculator, images and icons embedded in the CBT interface. According to them, inappropriate font sizes used by the CBTs acted as a barrier for them as they are used to their preferred font-size reading.

*During my JEE Mains and advanced examination which was computer-based, I requested my invigilator to arrange and adjust the monitor of the computer at a lesser distance as I was unable to see clearly due to low vision. However, the invigilator turned a blind ear to my request. Also, when the invigilators were giving us instructions before the examination, I was unable to understand him as he was speaking too fast. -*

***-Shared by a student with low vision***

Students with mobility difficulty in their hands faced barriers in accessing anything that required movement of the mouse. Some other accommodations and individualized support required by students with mobility issues or vision impairment are in the form of accessible computer systems with pre-installed appropriate software, modified keyboards etc. However, these accessibility components remained largely absent during entrance examinations.

UGC mandates that accommodation in the form of extra time for students with disabilities to complete the examination has to be provided. Apart from this, students with vision impairment or students with low vision were to be exempted from attempting the diagram-based or geometry-based questions. All the students who have appeared in the national level examinations shared that the principle of accommodation has been followed in the question paper and they were required to attend questions based on comprehension or any other reasoning questions in all central examinations.

## The issue of scribe during the entrance examination

One of the persisting challenges that students with disabilities have been constantly facing has been related to scribes for their examination. 80% of students with disabilities who require a scribe to take their examination have been facing this issue. The examination centres do not provide the facility of scribes, often due to the lack of awareness and knowledge among the invigilators about such provisioning. The entire onus falls on the students and their families. Also, often the individuals serving as scribes are underqualified and inefficient for the level of examination they are assisting with.

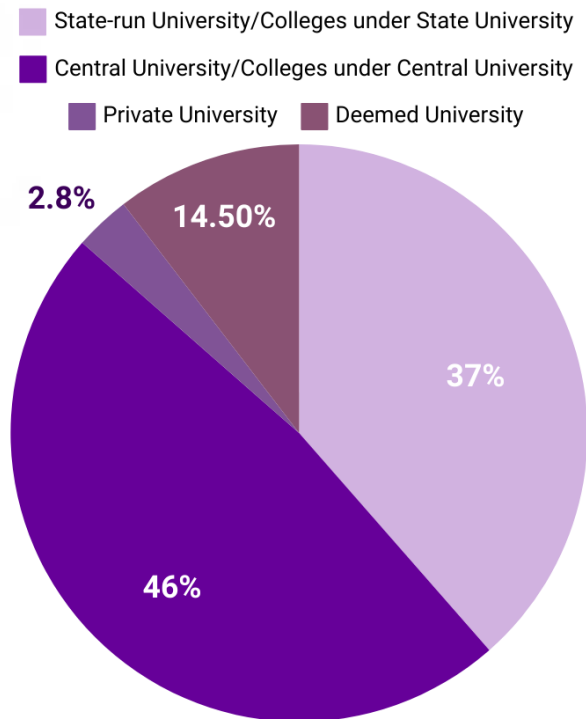
*I had to face a lot of challenges during the entrance examination of JEE. The invigilators and the concerned authorities in my examination centre are unaware of the norms related to scribes and so they did not provide me with the scribe facilities. After much arguments, they said that they knew some scribe and it was only after one hour they were able to me with one scribe. And I had to struggle a lot on that day. The scribe was not well trained and up to the mark. The scribe messed up everything with questions and it was very irritating for me.*

**-Shared by a Student**

## Access to college and higher education institutions

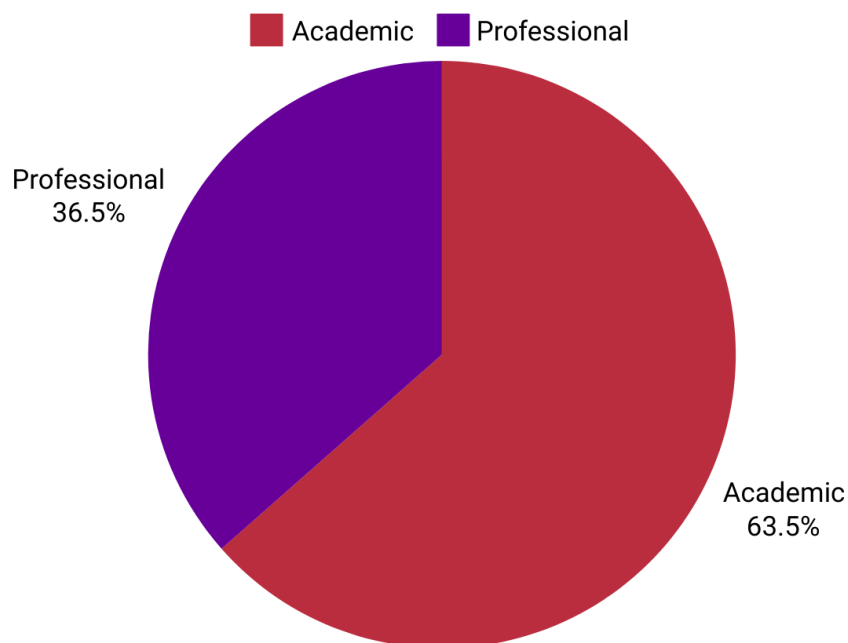
Qualifying for entrance examinations is one of the initial processes to have access to desired educational institutes and courses. The in-depth interview with students highlights the struggle students have to undergo in accessing college and the courses of their choice. Discrimination and attitudinal barriers of the management and faculty towards students with disabilities act as barriers for their access to the higher education system. Students especially in professional courses have experienced denial of admission due to preconceived notions that students with disabilities are fit for humanities subjects and vocational courses like bakery, painting, and arts. Despite the enforcement of the RPWD Act 2016, denial of admission continues to be a persisting challenge for students with disabilities and leading to vacant seats for students with disabilities in higher education institutions across all management.

The survey reveals that a good percentage of students with disabilities are currently enrolled in government universities/colleges and institutes. 37% of students are currently enrolled in state-run universities and their affiliated colleges while their inclusion in terms of enrolment is more prevalent in central universities and their affiliated colleges (46%). The data also reveals that the inclusion of students with disabilities is also visible in private universities and institutes.



**FIG. 5. ENROLMENT OF THE STUDENTS BASED ON DIFFERENT MANagements OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The survey also shows the inclusion of students with disabilities in professional courses. **36.5% of students with disabilities are currently enrolled in professional courses like Masters in Business Administration, B. Tech in Computer Science, MBBS, Optometry, Data Science and Applications.**



**FIG. 6. COURSES OPTED BY STUDENTS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

***Girls with disabilities have also been participating in professional courses, especially in STEM subjects. However, only 2% out of total girls with disabilities who are currently enrolled in higher education have opted for professional courses including STEM courses.*** Popular professional courses among girls have been Bachelor of Education, Diploma in Education, Music and other humanities courses. Students with disabilities opting for professional courses have revealed that the attitude of the concerned higher education institution towards students with disabilities as well as the students' attitude towards themselves play a key role in selecting such courses. They have also shared that the motivation and support given by the family acted as a catalyst to pursue a career in science.

**CHAPTER-4**

**PHYSICAL BARRIERS  
FOR STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS**

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## The migratory trend among students with disabilities

Like any other student, with disabilities too migrate to other cities in their endeavor to pursue higher education. A total of 60% of students with disabilities have migrated to cities both inter-state and intra-state. This trend is seen across all states. In central universities and institutes of excellence like the University of Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia University (Delhi), Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), Indian Institute of Technology (Mumbai), and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai), have students with disabilities from across states. **However, very few girls with disabilities (10% of girls with disabilities) are likely to migrate for their higher studies as compared to their boys with disabilities (72% of boys with disabilities).**

The in-depth interviews also revealed that a lot of students with disabilities who have migrated to cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Pune were previously unaware of their educational rights and the range of facilities they are entitled to. The interaction and the exposure they received in educational spaces in these cities have created awareness in them about their rights and sustain themselves in the higher educational space.

## Access to hostels and physical accessibility in hostels

Government-owned hostel facilities (for example, Blind Students Hostel, Seva Kutir in New Delhi, Minto Blind Hostel in Patna University) for blind students and students with low vision are available in many cities to provide affordable residential facilities to them. Some of the universities and colleges have made provisions like reservations of seats in hostels and concession or complete waiver of hostel fees for students with disabilities for their inclusion in the education system. During the in-depth interview, some of the hostelers with disabilities

shared the importance of having access to hostel facilities. Access to college/university hostels not only reduces their cost of living and out-of-pocket expenditure but also prevents them from getting exposed to the physical and mental stress of travelling to their higher education institutions.





## **HOSTEL FACILITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN SOME SLELECT UNIVERSITIES**

Seats are reserved for students with physical disability at hostels in Jawahar Lal Nehru University, Delhi. This applies only to those PH students who are not in receipt of fellowships/ scholarships and whose parents/ guardians' income is under Rs. 75,000/- per annum.

3% reservation in hostels are given to students in hostels at the University of Delhi. Additionally, they get an exemption from hostel fees and a waiver of 50% in other hostel facilities like dining facilities.

Seats are reserved for students with disabilities in hostels at Banaras Hindu University.

Despite these provisions, the availability of accessible, barrier-free, and affordable hostels in the host city continues to be a persisting barrier for student with disabilities. This can be attributed to lack of sufficient accessible and barrier free hostel facilities within their premises higher education institutions, tough eligibility criteria based on merit and long waiting list. The survey shows that 65% of students with disabilities continue to stay in private hostels and paying guest accommodation. These private spaces lack essential facilities and hygiene and are obligated to follow the physical accessibility norms under the RPWD Act .

The issue of accessible physical infrastructure plagues the hostellers within the premises of higher education institutions. Hostels, especially with old physical infrastructure and structures across universities fail to comply with accessibility standards. These include the old hostels of Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University where the understanding of accessibility remains confined to ramps and rails. Also, many times rooms are allocated without any sensitivity and consideration towards the needs of wheelchair users, students with visual impairment and students with mobility issues. During the in-depth interview, students with low vision and blindness residing in the blind hostel of Patna University have shared their ordeal related to the poor and unhygienic condition of the hostel. Lack of access to basic facilities like clean drinking water, clean toilets and washrooms, proper ventilations, right attitude of cleaning staffs and lack of sensitivity among administrative officials towards the needs of students with disabilities along with bureaucratic hurdles have been acting as barriers for their retention and sustenance in the system.

Despite these persisting challenges many universities and institutes have given cognizance to the provisions of accessible physical infrastructure mentioned in the RPWD Act and brought about reforms that are discernable. Newly built hostels across all central universities

as well as institutions of excellence are adhering to the accessibility norms. The newly built hostels are equipped with facilities like ramp and rail at the entrance, elevator facilities, tactile path, signage at regular intervals, barrier free open spaces, and large dining spaces for the movement of wheelchairs. Sharing her experience, one of the students of Delhi University currently staying in Rajeev Gandhi Hostel for Girls said:

*I share the room with another girl and she is a person without disability. Unlike the private hostel where I stayed earlier, my present university hostel is not only spacious but equipped with all modern amenities. We have a lift in our hostel so it is not at all difficult for me to reach my room on the second floor. The floors in our hostel do not have barriers or obstacles in the corridor, so it is very safe to move and walk in the corridor. Our mess is also good and bigger.*

**- Monica Pandey, M.A. (Final) Sociology, Delhi University**

Similar experience has been shared by a student currently enrolled in Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The institute has all-inclusive hostels catering to the needs of not only students with disabilities but also for the LGBTQ community.

*Our hostels are disabled-friendly and all-inclusive, especially our hostel number 4 in the old campus. We have elevators in hostels which makes it easier for the students with and without disabilities to move across all floors. The dining hall space is all well accessible. Ramps are present across the campus including hostels for barrier-free access for the students that are wheelchair users. Toilets and bathrooms are also accessible for students with disabilities. There are signages across the hostel premises to cater to the needs of students with hearing and speech impairments. Additionally, the hostel warden/in charge is sensitive towards the needs of students with disability. They ensure that students who are wheelchair-bound or have mobility issues or students with visual impairment are allotted rooms on the ground floor of the hostel. Life is comfortable in hostels in TISS irrespective of the hostel you are staying in.*

**- Shweta Agrawal (name changed), MA, TISS, Mumbai.**

## The issue of access for day scholars and private hostellers

Usually, the policy-makers associate the issue of access and accessibility inside the educational spaces and give no cognizance to the access and accessibility issue for students with disabilities en route to the school or college. Unlike schools, the number of higher education institutions is much fewer and hugely scattered. Distance and safe routes to the higher education space, the presence of transport facilities are some of the determining factors for the students with disabilities in their access and retention to higher education.

The study reveals that 30% of students with disabilities have chosen their current higher education institution due to easy access and connectivity to their institution. The RPWD Act 2016 acknowledges the importance of accessible transport facilities for persons with disabilities and therefore, envisages that the states provide accessibility and access to transportation for persons with disabilities.<sup>30</sup> The accessible, barrier-free, safe route between residences and institutes helps in the effective participation of students with disabilities. Students have shared varying experiences en route to their college and university.

### Inaccessible travel routes

The RPWD Act under Section 42 focuses on making roads accessible. However, the survey brings forth that inaccessible roads and streets en route to higher education institutes as a major concern for day scholars with disabilities across all states and UT. The situation is more critical in two-tier cities like Patna, Lucknow, Pune and Guwahati. **70% of day scholars with disabilities from these cities have shared their concerns about inaccessible roads en-route to their higher education spaces.** Students with hearing impairment, as well as visual impairment, have shared their concerns about the lack of foot-over and subway near their higher education institutes and the challenges they encounter in reaching there. Students have also shared about the lack of signage at regular intervals on the roads and streets, raising access issues for them.

Additionally, the ongoing infrastructure-related development work like the construction of metro rails, elevated roads and bridges in many of these cities have been acting as a new barrier for students with disabilities. Traffic diversions, debris, broken roads and streets, pipelines, and cable wires have become security and safety concerns for many students with disabilities in these cities. One of the wheelchair users gave an account of his challenges and safety concerns while commuting to his faculty at Patna University

*I use a tricycle to commute between college and my home. Earlier it used to take one hour for me to reach my department but now it takes more than two hours for me to reach my*

30 GOI, 2016, Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, Chapter-VIII, Section 40-41.

Section- 40. **Accessibility.**—The Central Government shall, in consultation with the Chief Commissioner, formulate rules for persons with disabilities laying down the standards of accessibility for the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including appropriate technologies and systems, and other facilities and services provided to the public in urban and rural areas.

Section 41. **Access to transport.**—(1) The appropriate Government shall take suitable measures to provide,—

(a) facilities for persons with disabilities at bus stops, railway stations and airports conforming to the accessibility standards relating to parking spaces, toilets, ticketing counters and ticketing machines;  
 (b) access to all modes of transport that conform the design standards, including retrofitting old modes of transport, wherever technically feasible and safe for persons with disabilities, economically viable and without entailing major structural changes in design;  
 (c) accessible roads to address mobility necessary for persons with disabilities.  
 (2) The appropriate Government shall develop schemes programmes to promote the personal mobility of persons with disabilities at affordable cost to provide for,—  
 (a) incentives and concessions;  
 (b) retrofitting of vehicles; and  
 (c) personal mobility assistance.

department. I have two routes to reach my university. However, due to metro construction work and overbridge, the roads have become very difficult and unsafe. Diversion of traffic at various locations, has been causing inconvenience for me forcing me to take long routes (often taking too narrow lanes). Roads are broken and have become too bumpy. It has become very difficult for me to ride my tricycle in this situation. I always have this fear of my tricycle losing control and meeting unforeseen accidents.

- **Arvind Kumar (name changed), LLM, Patna University.**

### Inaccessible transport facilities

The RPWD Act under Section 41 also emphasizes on access to and making all modes of transport accessible for persons with disabilities.<sup>31</sup> The study reveals that **68% of students have shared presence of an inadequate accessible public transport system as a major challenge while commuting to college and institutions.** Constant transition from one mode of transport to other leads to physical and mental fatigue especially for students with mobility issues and wheelchair users. For students with autism, overcrowded public transport systems act as a physiological barrier. The lack of accessible transport facilities also amounts to huge out-of-pocket expenditures for the students. This eventually has implications for students with disabilities on their attendance and effective participation. Sharing her experience, one of the students currently enrolled in Lucknow University said,

*I am a girl with physical impairment and I use crutches to walk. Unlike other students, my walking pace is too slow and I take almost double the time to reach my college than my peers who do not have any mobility issues. While going to college I have to use a private auto on a sharing basis to the nearest bus stop. In Lucknow, there is a bus pass for persons with disabilities which makes the travel free for me in the bus. However, there is no direct bus to my college from my house. Not all buses are low-floor buses and buses are too crowded. Sometimes I have to keep standing during the entire journey. I have to change bus twice and then again take an auto to reach my college. Every day I end up paying Rs.50 as an auto fare. By the time I reach my college, I am completely exhausted both physically and mentally. Therefore, I avoid going to college every day as it costs me physically, mentally and financially.*

-**Mahi Kumari (name changed), B.A, Mahila Vidyalaya Degree College, Lucknow**

The study shows great variation in the experience of students with disabilities pertaining to accessibility and access to public transport in metro cities and mega cities. Some of

31 Access to transport.—(1) The appropriate Government shall take suitable measures to provide,—

(a) facilities for persons with disabilities at bus stops, railway stations and airports conforming to the accessibility standards relating to parking spaces, toilets, ticketing counters and ticketing machines;

(b) access to all modes of transport that conform the design standards, including retrofitting old modes of transport, wherever technically feasible and safe for persons with disabilities, economically viable and without entailing major structural changes in design

the students with disabilities have moved from one city to another due to personal and educational reasons. Sharing, his experience of studying in Bangalore and Delhi, one of the students shared his differing experiences about the transportation facilities in the two cities.

*Earlier I used to live in Bangalore, where the roads are overcrowded and public transport facilities are highly inaccessible and I wasn't able to move around in the city in my automated wheelchair independently. As such I had to use my father's car while plying to college. I was not regular to college as travelling to my college was very exhaustive for me. My father got transferred to Delhi and for the last five years, I have been living in Delhi. Delhi has one of the best transport facilities which is disabled friendly, especially the Delhi Metro. The DMRC has provided all necessary accessible components within its premises as well as in the metro rail coach. Announcement about the next station and the direction of opening of the gates, display showing the time of arrival of the next metro, tactical path, signage and marks on the floor to show the direction of platforms, availability of escort services and wheelchairs, escalator as well as elevators facilities in all stations are some of the physical accessibility provided by the DMRC. The services are so disabled-friendly that I do not face problems reaching my college. My driver drops me to the nearest metro station. Once I reach the metro station, they escort me to take me to the platform and board the metro station. Even if the escort is not available, I can use my automated wheelchair very conveniently anywhere inside the metro premises. I use lifts to change the platforms. The escort waits for me at the destination station and helps me to leave the metro premises. Also, I use my automated wheelchair very conveniently on the roads of North Campus. I feel very independent inside the campus and I am regular to the college.*

**-Shaurya Kumar (name changed), MA, University of Delhi.**

Apart from the issues related to accessible public transport facilities in different cities, students have also shared some of the social problems like sexual harassment faced en-route while commuting between residence and college/university. **The survey reflects that 20% of students with disabilities have experienced sexual harassment in buses and local trains while commuting to their higher education institutions on regular basis irrespective of the gender of students with disabilities.** For girls with disabilities, colleges and universities are some of the limited spaces and avenues wherein they socialize and interact with the outside world. The limited options available for girls with disabilities, make them compromise with the ordeal due to a lack of sensitivity, and existing societal norms coupled with poverty.

*Every day, I use local trains as well as buses to ply between home and college. I am a girl with visual impairment, but I can very well distinguish between good and bad touch. When I travel to my college, I often experience inappropriate touch in various parts of my body be it my back, or my breasts. It's not that only men touch me but also women. This become*

*unbearable for me and I encounter this almost every day. I cannot launch a complaint as I don't know the perpetrator. I cannot react as people will gaze at me and blame me for the situation. I am from a conservative family. I don't have the guts to share my problem with anyone, not even with my family as I fear I will be stopped from going to college.*

***-Priyanka Manjrekar (name changed), B.Ed., University of Bombay.***

## The issue of physical accessibility within the premises of higher education institutions

The RPWD Act 2016 under Section 45 (1), talks in length about making the built environment accessible for students with disabilities following the principle of universal design and reasonable accommodation. It also obliges the states to make the existing infrastructure and premises accessible within a time-bound manner with a period not exceeding five years.<sup>32</sup> However, the survey and the interviews with the students with disabilities reflect non-compliance of the norms related to accessible physical infrastructures within the premises of higher education institutes.

The study reflects that the system continues to follow the narrow conception of physical accessibility in its narrow sense and remains confined to the presence of rails and ramps in addition to functional toilets for the disabled in the educational spaces. **The survey highlights that 88% of the respondents in the survey have shared the presence of ramps, rails and functional toilets in their educational institutions.** Knowledge and awareness among the various stakeholders about tactile paths, signage, lifts and elevators continue to remain absent in most of the state universities. It also shows a great variation in the presence of accessibility components in the state and central universities. The issue of accessibility in the states of Bihar and Assam needs urgent attention than any other state under study. **All the students from the two states have shared the deplorable condition of physical accessibility within the campus.**

The existing law for persons with disabilities also has provision for parking facilities in public spaces including educational spaces. However, the study reveals that **only 2% of students have replied that they have reserved parking spaces for students using wheelchairs, tricycles or customized vehicles.** 15% of students have said that they have tactile paths in their education premises to cater to accessibility of students with visual impairment.

32 Government of India, 2016, RPWD Act 2016, Article 45. Time limit for making existing infrastructure and premises accessible and action for that purpose.—(1) All existing public buildings shall be made accessible in accordance with the rules formulated by the Central Government within a period not exceeding five years from the date of notification of such rules:

Provided that the Central Government may grant an extension of time to the States on a case-to-case basis for adherence to this provision depending on their state of preparedness and other related parameters.

(2) The appropriate Government and the local authorities shall formulate and publish an action plan based on prioritization, for providing accessibility in all their buildings and spaces providing essential services such as all primary health centers, civil hospitals, schools, railway stations and bus stops.

For students with physical disabilities barrier-free and accessible classrooms, laboratories, libraries and other spaces within the premises of the institution are crucial for their effective participation and inclusion in the higher education system. Students with disabilities having mobility issues have shared during the in-depth interview about the lack of physical accessibility in these spaces. The wheelchair users and students with physical disabilities have shared their concerns related to inaccessible classrooms and laboratories. Due to lack of awareness, insensitive attitude of authorities towards their needs as well as lack of physical assistance most of the student using wheelchairs encounter challenges in reaching their classrooms and laboratories. The situation aggravates when these spaces are not situated on the ground floor of the building. Additionally, the classrooms, reading rooms and laboratories are not spacious for barrier-free movement of the wheelchair. Students with physical disabilities enrolled in the STEM courses have shared their concerns about inaccessible equipment, furniture and retrofits including shelves and washbasin in the laboratories.

However, these challenges do not persist in all higher education spaces and many students with disabilities, have good experiences at their present universities or institutes. Sharing his experience in St. Xavier's College of Mumbai, the student shared the initiatives taken for the students with disabilities to make the college accessible for them.

*Our college follows accessibility norms and the entire physical environment of our college is disabled-friendly. The campus has elevators/lifts, accessible and functional toilets, as well as disabled friendly drinking water facility. Classrooms are also well-ventilated and have adequate sunlight. The college authority takes into cognizance that the classrooms for the courses that have students with disabilities are located on the ground floor for students with disabilities. Additionally, our canteen also provides special services for students and persons with disabilities. Unlike other students, we do not need to stand in queues to place our orders. There is a system of bar codes which we need to scan for ordering food from the canteen. Once the food is ready, it is served on the table for the person with disability. For the toilets escort services by the male peon (for boys with disabilities) or female peon (for girls with disabilities) of the college are provided to every student with a disability. Not only this, the college also gives cognizance to the safety and security of the students with disabilities. The college staff drop students with disabilities to the nearest railway station or metro station in the absence of an escort facility.*

**- Akash Malhotra, (name changed) , B.Com, St.Xaviers College, Mumbai.**

**CHAPTER-5**

**TEACHING-LEARNING  
PROCESS AND SKILL  
DEVELOPMENT  
AMONG STUDENTS  
WITH DISABILITIES IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS**

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While some of the barriers remain common across all levels of education, new challenges may emerge as the students move from one level of education to another. Unlike in school, the higher education system is more challenging for students with disabilities in terms of the content of courses, assignments, practical etc. The system has this pre-conceived notion that students with disabilities entering higher education are skilled to endure the prevalent teaching-learning practices in the higher education system. However, teaching-learning methods and pedagogy based on the principles of universal design, individualized support, and reasonable accommodation as well as mode of communication as per the needs of students with disabilities are instrumental for the retention and effective participation of students irrespective of the level of education. The RPWD Act as well as the National Education Policy acknowledge the importance of these components and principles of inclusive education.

## **Reasonable accommodation and individualized support during teaching learning process**

Many students with disabilities require individualized support and reasonable accommodation within the real classroom setup for their effective participation and inclusion. For example, students with cerebral palsy, may require a chair and desk that can support them in their sitting posture. A person with low vision may require sitting in the front row. During the teaching learning process, students with blindness may require audio- record the lecture for future reference. A person with a blood disorder may require more time to complete their task due to fatigue caused by falling hemoglobin levels in the blood. A student with hard to hearing and speech may require the lecture to be delivered at a slow pace to easily comprehend the lip movements. Similarly, students with complete loss of hearing may require a sign language interpreter to understand the lectures. Some groups of students may require accessible reading material in advance to effectively understand the concepts.

The study also reveals that the students with disabilities enrolled in professional courses, especially in STEM across universities often face accessibility issues during practical classes. The students have shared that lack of understanding among the laboratory instructors about the specific needs of students with disabilities often creates barriers to their effective participation in the laboratory. Apart from this, students have found difficulties receiving help from instructors which consequently leads to loss of interest in many topics and contents.

80% of the students with disabilities across universities have shared about lack of awareness as well as of sensitivity among faculty members and the education system about various individualized support and the reasonable accommodation required for students with disabilities. Students of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences have shared their relief as their faculty members try to deliver lectures at a pace that enables them to comprehend the lip movement. Around 25% of students have shared that they get relaxation in completing their writing tasks. Students in higher education institutions in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune have shared that apart from relaxation in completing writing tasks, they are allowed to submit the

assignments in soft-copy versions or any other format that is accessible for them to use.

Students with disabilities in central universities have also shared that to avail individualized support and reasonable accommodations in the real classroom setting as well as teaching-learning processes prior information to the concerned authorities is required. Students with disabilities have also shared that the availability of such arrangements largely depends upon the whims of the authorities as well as pressure exerted by the Enabling Units. Students with specific learning disabilities and students with blood disorders have shared the difficulty of getting individualized support and reasonable accommodation as their disability is invisible. For example, one of the students with thalassemia major shared that he was denied recorded lectures for the days he was absent due to his condition deteriorating. However, because he has been able to attend classes normally and his disability is not physically apparent, the teaching faculty denied the requested accommodation even upon submission of necessary medical reports.

## Accessible teaching learning resources and assistive devices

The RPWD Act under Section 42 emphasizes providing all information in an accessible format. It also has provisioning of audio description, sign language interpretation and close captioning. The law also provides for electronic goods and equipment in universal design. For many students with disabilities, accessible learning resources along with assistive devices and technology during the teaching-learning process are instrumental for their effective participation and inclusion in the higher education system. Students with hearing impairment, students with visual impairment and some categories of students with locomotor disabilities require assistive technology and devices to cater to their educational needs. These include accessible computers with screen magnifiers, screen reading software like JAWS, Dragon Professional, PocketBook readers, modified keyboards and so forth. Android phones or smartphones too are assistive devices for many students. Additionally, students with disabilities may require cognitive aids like electrical or software-backed assistive devices that help people with attention, comprehension, and reading disabilities. Some traditional assistive devices for communication and teaching-learning processes for visually impaired students include objects and maps with tactile surfaces, braille and braille stationaries, and audio recorders.

The study reveals lack of awareness among students about assistive devices and technologies that are available to cater to their educational needs. **80% of students with disabilities who are unaware of the latest assistive devices and technology are students enrolled in the states of Bihar and Assam and have studied in mainstream schools.** Experts from Bihar have shared that students with visual impairment in Bihar are unaware of and do not have access to assistive devices with appropriate software and hardware. Students with visual impairment in Bihar use traditional assistive devices like braille and braille stationaries as well as audio

recorders. Students have shared that the lack of sensitivity among the university authorities to provide them with braille and braille stationery and even audio recorders have been acting as a barrier to their educational endeavors.

***Around 34% of students have shared that they have been provided with computer and laptop facilities by their universities and institutions. These are the students enrolled in institutions in Delhi and Maharashtra. However, only 10% of students have been able to get the laptops and computers as per their individualized needs and accommodations.*** The students have shared that the laptops being provided to them do not meet their requirements. It does not have pre-installed software like JAWs (paid software application), customized keyboard and so forth.

## Online and e-resources of learning materials

With the advancement of technology and the growing shift towards the online mode of teaching learning practices, higher education institutions have developed and strengthened their e-resources of learning material. The Central Government also provides free e-learning resource platforms like SYAWAM and the National Digital Library. Additionally, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with Daisy Forum of India launched Sugamya Pustakaly, an online library system that contains books in an accessible format for the blind, people with low vision or to persons with any other print disability.

Despite these services, the study highlights the concerns of students with disabilities related to online and e-resources of learning material. First and foremost, there is a lack of awareness among the students enrolled in state universities and affiliated colleges about e-resource services provided by their concerned universities. ***69% of students at the state level universities and private universities are unaware of e-resources services offered by their concerned universities and institutions.*** Only two out of ten students with disabilities are aware of the available e-learning resource platforms like SYAWAM and National Digital Library services provided by the Central Government.

The survey also highlights that some of the universities lag behind other universities in adopting technology and developing accessible e-content for their students. For example, Patna University in Bihar has e-learning resource which students can use to have an access to lectures in audio-visual forms and e-journals on official website of the university. However, the students have shared their concerns about inaccessible websites, frequent technical glitches, redundant resources and inaccessible e-resources. Inaccessible formats of learning resources have emerged as a common concern for all students across universities. Most of the e-resources and reading materials are in PDF formats which are inaccessible for students with visual impairment. In order to read these materials students with visual impairment have to use other free software applications. Students have also shared that relying on other free software also acts as a barrier as there is a high probability of the software not supporting

PDF files. Students with disabilities have shared the reluctance to purchase and procure paid software applications due to their expensive market price.

## Support during the examination

The RPWD Act 2016, talks of reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities during the examinations. Complying with the RPWD Act, UGC Notification F.No. 6-2/2013 (SCT) dated 14 January 2019 has made certain provisions for conducting written examinations for persons with benchmark disabilities as per the guidelines issued on 29th August 2018 by DoEPwD of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. As per the notification, certain provisions for written examination that include but do not remain confined to the facility of Scribe/Reader/Lab Assistant who has limitations in writing including speed, the option to mode of examination, Compensatory time (i.e., extra/additional time) use of assistive devices, alternative questions and many more.

The survey reveals that compensatory time has been provided to all students who have limitations in writing. Reasonable accommodation in examination in the form of alternative questions has not been available for many of the students with disabilities who require such alternatives and modifications during the internal as well as annual examinations. However, reasonable accommodation is being provided by some prominent colleges to students with intellectual disabilities in terms of marks scored by them and sitting arrangements during examinations. One of the students with intellectual disabilities is currently enrolled in St. Xavier's, College, Mumbai shared that:

*If I score 3 credits it will be considered 5 credits as said by my teachers, If I write 1 sentence also I will get marks and I will not be considered a failure. They provide me with extra time also. The exams are arranged in the different classrooms for the PwD and take into cognizance that we are comfortable during the examination. The college also provides us with a scribe.*

## Skills required by SwDs to survive in educational institution as well as at Jobs

Students with disabilities require different sets of skills based on the nature and extent of their disability. Unlike the school education system, the higher educational spaces have complex environments. In the survey, students with disabilities have shared an array of social-emotional skills to mitigate their stress and anxiety in social situations prevalent in the higher education institutions. Students have also shared during interview about the importance of interpersonal skills to sustain in higher educational spaces. In the absence of effective formal institutional support, interpersonal relationship with peers and friends act as an alternative and informal support system for students with disabilities in higher education system.

The study also highlights the various skills that students have learnt over the period of time to sustain themselves in the system and to pursue their long term career aspirations. Students with low vision and blindness across universities have shared their growing abilities towards nurturing basic life skills and independent living skills including use of aid and appliances like white cane for their independent movement. Students have shared that in order to endure the complex environment and learning needs at higher education system, they had to gradually develop skills like listening skill to understand the core curriculum and communication skills to use like Braille, slate and stylus, and signature writing.

The survey shows that skills to use assistive technologies and devices efficiently has been the major concern for students with disabilities and an important factor to sustain in the higher education system and future advancement in career. For example, a lot of students with blindness from Bihar are unaware of how to use braille, daisy player, abacus and many more assistive devices. Similarly, a lot of students with disabilities irrespective of their geographies do not have basic computer skills.

The aim of higher education is to prepare individuals to lead an independent (including financially) and dignified life. The higher education system prepares the individual for employability aligned to their skills and desire. The study reveals that only **40% of students with disabilities opine that their present course does align with the market roles and demands.** Students with disabilities enrolled in core academic courses share that the curriculum and syllabus do not train them in skills like management skills, financial skills, communication skills, interpersonal and social skills that are pre-requisite to sustain in job market. *30% of students with disabilities have shared that they need to inculcate digital-related skills to succeed in marketplace.* Apart from digital skills students with disabilities have also shared that they need to learn skills of apps control, program control as well as data control. *Around 59% of students with disabilities have shared that they need to develop English speaking skills as well as other language skills.* Apart from these, quite a few numbers of students have shared the need to leadership skills to excel not only in educational endeavors but also in their lives.

The Right of Persons with Disabilities Act has provided for the participation of students with disabilities in sports and recreational activities in the educational spaces. Under Section-30 of the existing law, provision has been made to encourage persons with disabilities to participate in sports activities. The National Education Policy also emphasizes their right to participate in sports and recreational activities in educational spaces. The study reflects sports and recreational skills is another set of skills that students with disabilities in colleges have and are indicator of inclusion of students with disabilities in the higher education system. Students with disabilities irrespective of their disability and gender have participated in various extra-curricular activities at school level as well as at university level. The survey reveals that apart drawing, painting and singing, students with disabilities have participated in sports and games like chess, cycle race, martial arts and other recreational activities.

## Presence of equal opportunity cells in the higher education system

The UGC also mandated higher education to provide for the enabling units which are guide-lined society, to address the needs of students with disabilities. However, the survey shows that equal opportunity cells are non-existent or dysfunctional in most of the colleges irrespective of the locations. **Only 32% of the students with disabilities responded that they have Enabling Units or Equal Opportunity Cell in their higher education institution.** In state-level universities like Patna University, Gorakhpur University, and Lucknow university, do not have equal opportunity cells, however, all these universities have gender-sensitive cells. All central universities including IIT, Banaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru, Delhi University, Tata Institute of Social Science Mumbai University have equal opportunity cells. These equal opportunity cells also engage in activities like Poetry Recitation competitions, Quiz Competition, workshops and so forth for inclusion of the students with disabilities in mainstream education.

Equal Opportunity cells that are functional in some of the colleges and universities (mainly in Delhi and Mumbai) are instrumental for the effective inclusion and participation of students with disabilities in the higher education system. Functional and sensitive equal opportunity cells have made the lives of some of the students easier. Sharing his experience at St. Xavier's College:

*We have a disability-enabling unit in my college and it works very proactively. As soon as I joined my college, someone from the enabling unit called me up to enquire about my needs. They asked me if I was facing any problems inside the college in terms of accessibility. Whether the room allocated to me in the college hostel is accessible for me and if I can move inside the premises independently. They also asked me if I required any type of support in my studies. They asked me to contact them immediately in case I needed any assistance and support.*

**- Vikas Kumar (Name Changed), St. Xaviers College, Mumbai**

A similar view has been shared by the students enrolled in some of the colleges at Delhi University like Hindu College, St. Stephens College, and Venkatershar College. Students at Delhi University have shared that Equal Opportunity Cell has been supporting them in terms of providing them with readers, and accessible computers where books are stored in accessible formats. The cell also provides basic training including Indian Sign Language, usage of computer technology and software as per their individualised needs. The Equal Opportunity Cell has played a crucial role in pressurizing system to provide reasonable accommodation and support to the authorities.

**CHAPTER-6**

**ECONOMIC BARRIERS  
FOR STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN THE  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
SYSTEM**

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It is well acknowledged that children of parents with higher and intermediate socioeconomic status (SES) are exposed to a learning environment at home that is more favorable since these parents have greater learning resources available to them.<sup>33</sup> Low family SES is often associated with children performing poorly in school, although the mechanisms underlying this link are less obvious.<sup>34</sup> With a solid financial foundation, parents may best support their children's educational potential by giving them access to the latest facilities and technologies.<sup>35</sup> The data reveals that a lot of students with disabilities have been encountering a range of barrier due to a lack of financial resources. Consequently, they have been deprived of various facilities that are instrumental for their access to and retention in the education system. These include not only access to preferred higher education institutions but also access to various assistive devices, aids and appliances, means of communication including braille books, braille stationery items, laptops and computers with customized keyboards and range of other teaching and reading materials as per their individualized needs to participate effectively in the education system.

Most of these devices are expensive and the students with disabilities irrespective of their socio-economic status find it difficult to have access to these assistive devices. For example, in India the cost of Electric wheelchair is between Rs 40,000- Rs.2,50,000 depending upon the features. Similarly, the cost of hearing aid cost in India can cost Rs 3,000- Rs.50,000. Speech machines or speech generation devices can cost anything between Rs 10,000- 30,000 in India. Around 65% of students with disabilities in the survey have their family income less than Rs 20,000 per month, and hence cannot have access to these aids and appliances. AIDP, a centrally sponsored scheme, provides aids and appliances to persons with disabilities. However, not all students with disabilities in the study who require aids and appliances are beneficiaries of the scheme due to eligibility criteria. Also, not all aids and appliances and assistive devices are covered under the scheme. Therefore, in absence of financial support as well as any other form of support, access to aid and appliances become challenging for students with disabilities.

In the survey, around 40% of students have shared that they do not have access to computers and laptops due to economic reasons. As such, they often find it difficult to cope with the course content as well as syllabus and consequently have an impact on their educational performance.

Apart from assistive devices, a lot of students with disabilities (like Students with blood disorders, students with gradual loss of vision, and students with cerebral palsy) require constant medical intervention in the forms of therapies, medicines, blood transfusion etc. Due to limited government facilities in the public health care system as well as the limited expertise and services available in the health centers at universities, many students with disabilities have to rely on private hospitals to avail of such medical intervention. Any sort of

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33 Balachandran Vadivel, Sohaib Alam, Iman Nikpoo, Bemnet Ajanli (2023). "The Impact of Low Socioeconomic Background on a Child's Educational Achievements", Education Research International, pg 11, vol. 2023.

34 Ibid

35 Ibid



medical intervention adds to the financial burden on the students with disabilities and their families. Meeting the medical requirements of students with disabilities becomes a priority for the families. As such, families prefer to spend less on catering to the educational needs of the students.

### **MEDICAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH THALASSEMIA**

Students with thalassemia major require constant medical intervention to maintain haemoglobin in their blood. The medical intervention required by persons with thalassemia includes blood transfusion, iron chelation, bone marrow transplantation, folic acid supplementation, and gene therapy. Persons with thalassemia major require blood transfusion as frequently as twice a month. Iron chelation can cost families up to Rs 5,000 per month, while blood transfusion costs upto Rs 10,000 per month depending upon the severity. With the limited government facilities available for thalassemic patients, the treatment costs huge out-of-pocket expenditures for families. Even in the presence of medical facilities from government hospitals, the out-of-pocket expenditure for families includes costs associated with the condition like medicine, nutritional requirements, and travel can cost up to 5,000-8,000 per month.

To address the financial needs of students with disabilities, Ministry of Social Empowerment and Justice introduced two schemes:

- a) Post-matric scholarship for students with disabilities
- b) Scholarship for top-class education for students with disabilities.

Philanthropists and various business establishments (under corporate social responsibility) have also started providing financial assistance to students with disabilities to complete their higher education. Some of the corporates that offer scholarships to students include the Bajaj Finserv Scholarship, Indus Tower Scholarship, NHFDC fund scholarship, AICTE-Saksham Scholarship Scheme and so forth. Some of the organizations like Leprosy Trust of India, provide assistance to access education loans/grants, up to professional courses Facilitates study environments and family situations that promote learning.

The study reveals that only **20% of the students have been availing government-aided scholarships. 45% of the students have been availing scholarship facilities through CSR funding or some other organizational support from civil society organizations while 35%**

**of the students do not get any support for their educational needs.** Some of the reasons associated with the low percentage of beneficiaries for government scholarships as has been shared by the students are as follows: -

- Limited number of scholarships for students with disabilities.
- Lack of awareness among the students about the available scholarships
- Lack of pre-requisite documents and income eligibility criteria required for the scholarship.
- Not all private institutions provide scholarships to students with disabilities.

Students who have been availing scholarships through different agencies have shared the importance of scholarships for them. Although the state-funded scholarship is limited and the amount is too low, yet for many students with disabilities it helps them incur some of the daily expenses of education. Students have shared that the scholarship has been able to sustain them in higher education institutions. The amount received from the scholarship helps them to meet their day-to-day educational expenses. Around 45% of day scholars who have been availing of scholarship use disability allowances and monthly allowances to cover their travel costs as well as other expenses like buying stationeries, and books etc. Some of the visually impaired students have shared that the scholarship amount has helped them buy assistive devices like recorders to record the lectures, braille stationaries (in state of Bihar where braille is still a prominent source of communication for students with blindness) etc.

The students who have been receiving scholarships under the CSR programs have shared that the scholarship amount have not only helped them to pay their tuition and admission fees but also enable them to pay the monthly fees of private hostels, travel cost as well as buy assistive devices for educational purposes. Students with disabilities have shared that the scholarship offered to them inculcates in them a sense of independence and empowerment.

# **CHAPTER-7**

# **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## **Effective enforcement of the RPWD Act 2016 and government Led schemes and policies**

The State must ensure effective enforcement of the Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 in all states. The state rules on the RPWD Act must be enforced to its entirety to ensure access and accessibility to students with disabilities in the higher education system. Social audit of accessibility of all existing infrastructure must be carried out without further delay. It must be ensured that the system adheres to accessibility norms in physical infrastructure, technology, and learning resources as well as during dissemination of information as enunciated in the RPWD Act. The system must ensure that all higher education bodies practice both in letter and spirit the principles of individualized support, reasonable accommodation, argumentative means of communication and universal design to cater to the educational needs of students with disabilities.

## **Establishing synergy between the various government stakeholders**

Access to education for students with disabilities requires multi prong strategies. It requires for convergence between various ministries including Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Education. The State establishing synergy between various government stakeholders and ensure convergence to plan, design and execute mechanisms and subsequently provide a single window for all schemes and services for students with disabilities to reduce bureaucratic barriers faced by students with disabilities.

## **Strengthening of public, private and community partnership**

Focus should be on building and strengthening partnerships between Govt. and private agencies, civil society, DPOs, students with disabilities and parents.. The system must collaborate with these stakeholders for the implementation of schemes and programs at the grassroots level. Corporates can intervene by providing financial assistance in form of scholarships, aids and appliances at subsidized rates, encouraging internship/employment by making the workplace accessible for students with disabilities.

## **Resource building in form of information**

The system must develop, compile and strengthen all relevant data on education of the students with disabilities in aggregated or disaggregated forms. All India Survey on Higher Education must provide disability-wise data for the enrollment rate, drop-out rates, and other educational indicators of students with disabilities in the higher education system.

The educational data must also provide information related to accessible assistive devices, accessible physical infrastructure and other requirements of students with disabilities.

## **Enhancing the budgetary allocation to Higher Education Department**

Enhancing the budgetary allocation of the Department of Higher Education and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for procurement of various activities including the availability of human resources, technological resources, and scholarships to impart quality and inclusive education to students with disabilities.

## **Make schools gateway for access to higher education**

Schools must be made one of the key stakeholders to prepare the students with disabilities to cope up with the wider and complex environment of the higher education system. The curriculum and syllabus across the school education system must be designed in a way that students with disabilities develop interpersonal skills, attitudinal skills, skills to control emotions and other skills right at the early intervention stage.

## **Strengthening of Equal Opportunity Cell and Enabling Units**

Equal Opportunity Cell must be opened and made functional in all universities as well as colleges to cater to the needs of students with disabilities. It must be ensured that currently functional the equal opportunity cell must be equipped with the latest resources in terms of availability of experts, readers and scribes, technology and services being offered to the students with disabilities.

## **Increasing visibility of girls with disabilities in STEM courses**

The system must ensure to increase the enrolment of students with disabilities especially for girls with disabilities in STEM courses. One of the viable steps towards increasing enrolment is by promoting enrollment drive with the help of local bodies (panchayats at the local level), DPOs and civil society organizations. Reservation and exclusive scholarship (both at central and state level) for girls with disabilities may act as catalyst in increasing the enrollment of girls with disabilities.

## **Ensure availability of access and accessibility for students with disabilities**

The system needs to be sensitive towards access related needs of students with disabilities throughout the academic activities. Access and accessibility norms as mentioned in the RPWD Act must be given cognizance and arrangements like physical support in the form of a dedicated helpline or help desk during examination, quality scribe facilities must be provided. All examination-conducting bodies must follow the principle of reasonable accommodation while allocating examination centres, designing and pattern of question papers and individualized support in computers during computer-based examinations and many such accommodations.

Higher education authorities must establish measures to ensure the provision of adequate, accessible hostel facilities for students with disabilities within the institution's premises. Additionally, they should ensure accessible public transport for day scholars and provide accessible information.

The library system and all learning resources must be revamped and designed following the principle of universal design so that no one is left behind in accessing and using learning facilities.

## **Use of technology for the teaching-learning process**

The concerned authorities must ensure effective enforcement of the guidelines issued by the UGC to all higher education institutions to provide customized laptops/computers and other assistive devices and technology for students with disabilities as per their educational needs. Appropriate hardware and software must be pre-installed to make the assistive devices accessible for students with disabilities. Also, the system must take the onus of providing training to the students with disabilities to use technology.

## **Capacity building of various stakeholders**

The concerned bodies both at the central and state must ensure to design, plan and conduct capacity building programs at regular intervals for all the stakeholders including the faculty members, administrative staffs and non-disabled students to cater to the needs of students with disabilities. The content and the pedagogy of capacity-building programs must aim at inculcating compassion, reduce stereotypes and attitudinal barriers for students with disabilities. These programs must be designed in a way to promote knowledge about the rights of students with disabilities including reasonable accommodations and individualized support for their inclusion in the mainstream education system.

## **Scope for further research**

Action Research, need analysis, gap analysis and other type of studies must be taken up to understand the actual status of the inclusive education in higher education institution across States. The future studies must also reflect perspectives and concerns of all stakeholders

including students with and without disabilities, faculty members, government official, DPOs, and employers. Future researches on inclusive education in higher education must also bring in the experiences and voices of students who have suffered acid attack, sexual abuse and new types of disabilities which has largely remained unexplored.

## ABOUT NCPEDP



National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) is a cross-disability, non-profit organization, working as an interface between government, industry, and international agencies, towards the empowerment of persons with disabilities. For the last 27 years, NCPEDP has been working for the rights of persons with disabilities and has established itself as a leading cross-disability organization on this subject. It envisions a society where persons with disabilities live as equal members. It aims to promote the equality of persons with disabilities through its research and advocacy activities, keeping a rights-centred approach and consistently striving to move away from traditionally held views of charity. NCPEDP works on 6 core pillars of the organization, namely, Employment, Education, Access, Policy & Law, Awareness and Youth. NCPEDP has also constituted the **National Disability Network (NDN)** and **National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (NCRPD)**, a cross-disability network which comprises disability sector leaders, organizations of persons with disabilities, and subject matter experts from across the country. Since 1996, NCPEDP has successfully advocated for several policies that have positively impacted the lives of thousands of people with disabilities in India.

## ABOUT BAJAJ FINSERV



**FINSERV**

**Bajaj Finserv** is one of India's leading and most diversified financial services groups. Its CSR initiative is committed to helping the children and youth of India to unlock their true potential. Its social responsibility programmes, focused on the areas of skilling, health, education, protection, and inclusion for people with disability (PwD). So far, it has touched over 2 million lives through 200+ partner-implemented programmes across the country. The company also runs its flagship employability programme-CPBFI, a Certificate Programme in Banking, Finance & Insurance aimed at making graduates from small towns employable in the financial services industry.

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