

EXPLORING COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT ISSUES AMONG PHYSICALLY DISABLED STUDENTS

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Abstract: Transition from high school to college involves significant social and psychological change in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal and social demands. The aim of the present research was to study the college adjustment issues of physically disabled students as compared to normal students in terms of these new changes experienced. Participants included 30 physically handicapped students and 30 normal students. The data was collected by visiting various colleges in Delhi using the College Adjustment Scale by W D. Anton and J R. Reed (1991). The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups of students on the dimensions of academic problems ($t=4.39$ $p<0.01$); anxiety ($t=6.9$ $p<0.01$); interpersonal problems ($t=1.92$ $p<0.01$); depression ($t=6.97$ $p<0.01$); career problems ($t=4.37$ $p<0.01$); suicidal ideation ($t=6.15$ $p<0.01$); substance abuse ($t=2.33$ $p<0.01$); self-esteem problems ($t=7.01$ $p<0.01$) and family problems ($t=9.2$ $p<0.01$).

Key Words: Transition, Adjustment, physically disabled, values and beliefs.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Adjustment refers to balance or harmony between the demands made on the organism by the environment and organisms functioning to deal with such demands. It is the outcome of efforts to deal with our environmental, biological, physical and social demands. When resources are limited and one fails to utilize the resources to maintain the balance it leads to maladjustment. Pursuing a college education requires adjustment on the part of all students, though the type and degree of adjustment experienced by each student will vary depending on background, experience, and prior schooling. Adjustment to college will also vary depending on the size, mission (e.g., research intensive versus teaching intensive), affiliation (e.g., religiously affiliated institutions), and control (e.g., public versus private) of the institution in question. Arthur Chickering and Nancy Schlossberg (1995) point out that students who are leaving high school, attending college full-time, and living on campus tend to experience the most dramatic adjustment.

2. ADJUSTMENT IN COLLEGE:

Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (1991) assert that adjusting to college entails the complementary processes of desocialization and socialization. Desocialization is the changing or discarding of selected values, beliefs, and traits one brings to college in response to the college experience. Socialization is the process of being exposed to and taking on some of the new values, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives to which one is exposed at college. It is also the process of learning and internalizing the character, culture, and behavioral norms of the institution one is attending. Pascarella and Terenzini describe the transition from high school as a "culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal and social demands". This culture shock is especially acute for those students who do not have siblings or parents who attended college.

Specific types of collegiate adjustment involve changes in roles, relationships, academic demands, and social demands. In addition, some subpopulations of students will face specific adjustment issues depending on the institution in question.

Roles: Taking on the new role of college student often brings new challenges and forces adjustment in existing roles, such as those of son/daughter, friend, partner, spouse, and parent. This is especially the case for part-time adult students with full-time jobs and families. Adjustment also involves disengaging from old roles that no longer exist for the student in the collegiate environment, such as athlete (for those not participating in college athletics), or social leader (a role often lost for students moving from small high schools to large colleges).

Relationships: New college students need to adjust to changes in their relationships. Students make new friends and develop new peer groups in college. In fact, students who remain preoccupied with friends from home tend not to adjust well to college. Students often need to renegotiate existing relationships, especially with their parents and family. However, while remaining preoccupied with friends from home detracts from adjustment, students who maintain compatible relationships with their families are more likely to experience success in college. College is often a place where one is more likely to meet people who are different from oneself in terms of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status.

Establishing relationships may be a struggle for students who do not fit the institution's norms, such as students of color (at predominantly white institutions), international students, students with disabilities, adult students, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. For these students this situation often results in initial feelings of marginalization and isolation. In college (depending on the particular type of institution), there also are often different types of relationships with faculty than students may have experienced in previous educational settings. On the one hand, students are expected to be independent learners, yet there also exists the possibility of developing intellectual, collaborative, and social relationships with faculty.

Academic demands: For most college students, the transition to the college classroom requires an adjustment of academic habits and expectations. They often must study harder, improve their study habits, and take school more seriously. Classes are larger, instructors have differing teaching styles, the pace is faster, and written work is more frequent, reading assignments are lengthier, standards are higher, and the competition is more acute. Students need to learn to set and balance priorities, and for commuter and adult students this includes balancing work, home, and school.

Social demands: The social environment of college requires adjustment on the part of new college students. Students must learn to balance the many social choices they have with their academic responsibilities. Developing new relationships represents an important element of social adjustment. Other social issues that require adjustment include negotiating dating in an era of sexually transmitted diseases, homesickness, shifts in daily routines, and the lack of externally imposed structure on their lives.

Student subpopulations: There are specific adjustment issues for students of color; women students; gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; students with disabilities; and adult students - and especially for students who are members of more than one of these groups. For example, at predominantly white institutions, students of color (especially those from homogenous living environments) will face attitudes, belief systems, and power structures that often work against people of color. In classes, students of color may be asked to speak for their entire ethnic group on matters of race. Especially acute social adjustment issues for students of color include dealing with depression and stress, managing cross-cultural relationships, and adjusting to the campus racial/cultural climate. Some classroom environments will be experienced by women students as "chilly"; that is, women students may be addressed inappropriately and treated as less competent than male students.

College is the time when many gay, lesbian, and bisexual students choose to come out publicly for the first time. Students with disabilities, depending on the type and severity of their disability, will tend to face a host of adjustment issues, including perhaps being independent for the first time and finding and establishing support services. Finally, older students may face issues of low confidence, low self-esteem, identity adjustment, and role stress to a more severe degree than traditional-age students. Lack of a sense of trust and hope, a feeling of inferiority may result in isolation and an inability to take part in society. The disabled individuals may have poor social skills, and many unresolved psychological crises. The lack of these involvements for the individuals with a disability may cause depression and grief. Lack of support, resources, and body image issues may lead one to feel lower on confidence, and one may not be able to adapt in the college environment, where one is in entirely new environment and where groups are formed, not being accepted in a group may make one's condition worse. This research aimed at understanding the adjustment issues faced by physically disabled students in college campus. This understanding might help in developing appropriate interventions and resources for the students.

3. MATERIALS/TOOL USED:

The College Adjustment Scale by Anton & Reed (1991). It is an inventory for use by professionals who provide counselling services to college students. The CAS was developed to provide a rapid method of screening college counselling clients for common developmental and psychological problems (Grayson, 1989). Based on analyses of presenting problems in college counselling centers, the CAS scales provide measures of psychological distress,

relationship conflict, low self-esteem, and academic and career choice difficulties. The nine CAS scales include anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, self-esteem, interpersonal problems, family problems, academic problems and career problems. The internal consistency coefficient for CAS scales ranged from 0.83 to 0.92. Convergent and discriminant validity has been established with a correlation coefficient of .40 or larger, regardless of direction, was chosen as representing a substantial relationship between the variables.

4. METHOD:

The aim of the present study was to explore the college adjustment issues of physically disabled and to compare it with the normal. For this purpose:

Participants used: Data was collected in a group. The data collected included responses from 30 (Males -15, Females 15) disabled college going students and 30 (Males – 15, Females -15) normal college going students from various colleges of Delhi.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table no 1: Showing the mean, standard deviations (SD) and t value of the normal and physically disabled children on the 9 dimensions of College Adjustment Scale.

Dimensions	Disabled		Normal		t - value	p value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Academic Problem	24	5.37	18.84	3.75	4.39	p<0.01
Anxiety	23.77	5.23	16.29	3.02	6.90	p<0.01
Interpersonal Problems	26.23	4.53	15.68	1.92	11.94	p<0.01
Depression	22.58	4.91	15.19	3.27	6.97	p<0.01
Career Problems	25.87	6.83	19.45	4.51	4.37	p<0.01
Suicide	20.77	4.98	14.74	2.24	6.15	p<0.01
Substance Abuse	16.68	4.97	14.26	2.98	2.33	p<0.01
Self-Esteem	25.94	4.25	18.61	3.97	7.01	p<0.01
Family Problems	22.68	4.89	14.16	1.61	9.20	p<0.01

As seen through table no.1 the t-values obtained for all the nine dimensions are significant which indicates that the degree of adjustmental problems as experienced by physically disabled students in campus are more as compared with the normal students. The result for each dimension has been discussed below.

6. RESULT:

Family problems scale focused on difficulties experienced in relationships with family members. For this dimension the obtained t value 9.20 is significant (p<0.01). On this dimension the physically disabled group has higher mean value (mean = 22.68, s.d = 4.89) and the normal group has lower mean value (mean = 14.16, s.d = 1.61). This indicates that physically disabled group experiences more difficulties in relationship with family as compared to normal group. Physically disabled individuals may be less valued by their family members, they may be considered inferior and their opinion may least matter for their family members, they may have limited expression of feelings within the family. The environment may be more controlled and less conducive for them to function, thus frustration related to the family members would even affect one's performance in academics at college, and their interaction with people at college. Thus for them coming from a family background where one is having difficulty in relationships, probably fights and arguments with other members, it would be difficult to adapt to a totally new environment and a new way of functioning.

Self-esteem is the way one evaluates oneself. Self-esteem dimension focused on negative self-evaluation and dissatisfaction with personal achievement. For this dimension the obtained t value 7.01 is significant (p<0.01). On this

dimension the physically disabled group has higher mean value (mean = 25.94, s.d = 4.25) and the normal group has lower mean value (mean = 18.16, s.d = 3.97). Physically disabled group; due to lack of support from the environment, body image and identity issues may make one self, feel inferior to others and evaluate one as worthless. They may consider their disability as a barrier to their achievement and face problems especially when one is not getting support from family. These all issues may make them less confident as compared to others. Thus they being low on self-esteem and self-confidence may not be able to present oneself so well in a new environment and face adjustmental problems.

Academics in college becomes difficult when the study of a subjects gets more elaborated, moreover the change of situation from school to college, where one is no longer pampered and everything depends on self only, the struggle is entirely of the individual. Academic problem dimension measured the extent of problems related to academic performance in college. For this dimension the obtained t value 4.39 is significant ($p < 0.01$). On this dimension the physically disabled group has higher mean value (mean= 24, s.d = 5.37) and the normal group has lower mean value (mean = 18.84, s.d = 3.75). This indicates that physically disabled group faces more number of academic problems in college as compared to the normal group, this may be due to lack of support and help from others around as very few people genuinely are friends with them, in case of blind person finding books, reader and a writer for them would be difficult, writing and doing things at same pace with others would be difficult and affect the academics, putting in extra efforts and still not getting worth, would make them feel less competent and less motivated to do well.

The anxiety subscale taps the level of anxiety faced by the college students, on this subscale the obtained t value 4.39 is significant ($p < 0.01$) for the disabled students mean is higher ($M=24$ S.D= 5.37) and for normal students mean is lower ($M= 18.84$ S.D= 3.75) this indicates that anxiety related to college in physically disabled is more as compared to the normal. The reason may that they students are not accepted by the normal students, they are made fun of, they are considered inferior. Every student who enters college has to face a lot of problems in terms of academic demands, social demands, roles, relationships and many more but students with disability faces more problems and challenges. The transition period from school to college is very difficult for them, with so many obstacles they make friends, adjust to all the demands in school and now suddenly they enter college and they have to start a fresh hence all this leads to anxiety, they remain anxious all the time, Hence with so much of burden of not being able to do things at others pace, the anxiety level is quite high for these individuals as compared to the normal students.

The depression scale taps the level of depression faced by the college students, on this subscale the obtained t value 6.97 is significant ($p < 0.01$). for the disabled students mean is higher ($M=22.5$, $SD=4.9$) and for the normal students mean is lower ($M=15.9$, $SD=3.27$) which indicates that the level of depression faced by the disabled is more as compared to the other group lack of identity, lack of a sense of trust and hope, a feeling of inferiority may result in isolation and an inability to take part in society. The disabled individual may have poor social skills, and many unresolved psychological crises. The lack of these involvements for the individuals with a disability may cause depression and grief.

The suicide scale taps the extent of recent ideation reflecting suicide, including thoughts of suicide, hopelessness and resignation. On this subscale the obtained t value 6.15 is significant ($p < 0.01$). for disabled students mean is higher ($M=20.77$ S.D= 4.98) and for normal students mean is lower ($M= 14.74$ S.D= 2.24) which indicates that disabled students show a high rate in suicidal attempts and thoughts due to their rejection and not being able to achieve what they want such as their goals and also the competition they face with the others around. Moreover the lack of support, body image issues and lack of resources may lead to frustration, and entering into depression and grief one may experience more suicidal tendencies and thoughts.

The substance abuse scale taps the extent of disruption, in interpersonal, social, academic and vocational functioning as a result of substance use and abuse. On this subscale the obtained t value 2.33 is significant ($p < 0.01$). for disabled students the mean is higher ($M=16.68$ S.D= 4.97) and for normal students mean is lower ($M= 14.26$ S.D= 2.98). which indicates that physically disabled students are more likely to engage in such behavior as compared to normal. The college years are the days when students enter into a new world, from a protected world in school where teachers were guiding them at every moment, with more rules and regulations, sudden change in the environment, the increase level of responsibility and especially for the students with disability as a lot more responsibility is imposed on them hence to feel free from all the responsibilities or to forget all the demands and the challenges they face they might start using drugs which effects their interpersonal, social and most importantly their academic functioning. Another factor might be due to peer influence as these students are not easily accepted by the rest of the students to get into the group they might start consuming alcohol.

Interpersonal Problem scale taps the extent of problems relating to others in the campus. The obtained t value 11.94 is significant ($p < 0.0$). for the disabled group mean is higher on this scale ($M=26.23$, $SD=4.58$) and mean is lower for normal group ($M=15.68$, $SD=1.92$). which indicates that physically disabled individuals face more interpersonal problems as compared to the normal. This could be a result of non-acceptance by others in the campus and because of being seen differently and not treated equally. Problems in family, low self-esteem, high anxiety, demands and challenges also affect the interpersonal problems of the disabled individuals.

Career Problems taps the level of problems faced in making choices for one's career. For this dimension the obtained t value 4.37 is significant. On this dimension the physically disabled group has a higher mean value ($M=25.87$, $SD=6.83$) than the normal group ($M=19.45$, $SD=4.51$) which indicates that they face greater problems in making their career choice. This may be because of their physical limitations that they cannot opt for choices they might want to pursue. They might have pressure from parents and family about what they should take up as their career. Since their parents have seen the real outside world and being fully aware of their limitations as a result of their disability, do not want their children to face any troubles and lead a secure life without going through any struggles and that is why not explore newer alternatives and instead just go by what has been decided and considered most appropriate and conducive for them. This makes them feel very restricted and forced at times regarding their career decisions.

7. FINDINGS:

With the above result it has been found that college adjustment is difficult for the physically disabled students in comparison to the normal students.

Physically disabled students feel more negative emotions for example anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, career problem and interpersonal problem.

They also face adjustment problem because of lack of support and resources.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The sample size is small in the study so the larger sample size can give better idea and depth study.

The range of sample can also be increased, in the present study only Delhi NCR population has been covered so the sample can be selected from outside Delhi.

Along with quantitative tools some qualitative tools i.e., interview can also be used.

9. CONCLUSIONS:

Thus from the above analysis it can be said that college adjustment is difficult for the physically disabled group as compared to the normal students. They experience anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, carrier problems, interpersonal problems more as compared to the normal. More of challenges with less of support and resources from the environment make it difficult for them to cope and thus face adjustmental problems.

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