An Analysis of Social Marginalization Experienced by Physically Disabled Students at Higher Education Institutions of Lahore

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Abstract

This study was conducted to peruse and analyze the experiences of physically handicapped students studying at different Higher Education Institutions in Lahore regarding social marginalization and exclusion. Physically handicapped students are an integral part of the population and their experiences and problems need to be studied. The researchers then conducted the requisite in-depth study into the matter concerned. A detailed interview constituted of open-ended questions was employed to garner the required information from a sample of 30 respondents studying at numerous Higher Education Institutions in Lahore. Their responses were subjected to scrupulous thematic analysis and the ensuing results aligned with the opinions of the researchers. The disabled students of these institutions are indeed marginalized and are at risk of being socially excluded. There is a need for resolving and alleviating their problems and the urgency of this need can't be underemphasized.

Keywords: Disabled, Social Exclusion Theory, Higher Education, Stigma theory, Social Marginalization, Exclusion.

1. Introduction

A Physically disabled or impaired individual refers to a person who is suffering from an affliction or problem that inhibits them from being physically capable and active. Most physically impaired people are faced with a deficiency in agility, mobility, and overall stamina. This, in turn, impacts the affected person's life and restrains him from living a fulfilling and regular life. The odds of a physically impaired person becoming irrevocably disabled and limited are quite elevated. There are certain reasons for this disability and they range from genetic, accidental, or trauma-based foundations (Halfon et al., 2012).

A Physically disabled individual's ability to dispense rudimentary and simple tasks is egregiously impacted. The performing of these simple, daily tasks might become grievously affected as the condition progresses which causes the prospect to perform various tasks even harder. For instance, even dressing one's self becomes improbable after suffering a physical injury.

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Physically handicapped people can face elevated levels of difficulty in accessing the amenities in their surroundings, using everyday items, or managing their own domestic, educational, and other pertinent tasks effectively. There is, however, much discrepancy and variation in the manner regarding how disability affects one person to another (Posti, 2014). benchmarks (Haspolat & Yalçın, 2023). Students experience much stress through a variety of behavioural reactions as they have to deal with the demands of education. It is critical for educators, psychologists and organizations to acknowledge such behavioural subtleties of students in order to increase academic performance and overall wellbeing The complex relationship that exists between stress and academic achievement has wide-ranging effects on students' cognitive, emotional and physical health (Cassidy, 2022). Academic stress is ubiquitous among students, which greatly emphasizes its importance and calls for a very careful analysis of its possible effects on academic performance (Chemutai & Catherine, 2021). Beyond the obvious difficulties of homework and exams, there are additional complications brought about by the complex effects of stress on cognitive processes and mental health (Elias, et al, 2011). It becomes critical for teachers, administrators as well as mental health experts to identify and manage the various ways in which stress manifests itself when students struggle with these pressures in higher education.

The increasing awareness of some mental health issues among students in educational institutions around the globe greatly highlights the need to examine the connection between academic stress and academic performance. Understanding the very complex relationships between stress and academic success is crucial as academic pressures rise in the face of competitive educational environments and changing social expectations. The goal of this study, as referred to above, was to add actual data to the body of knowledge already available about academic stress and its core impacts. Through a thorough investigation of the causes and characteristics of academic stress, this study carefully tried to shed light on the particular pressures that some students encounter in various learning environments. Additionally, by examining how academic stress affects many different aspects of academic performance, such as academic achievement, cognitive functioning and socio-emotional wellbeing, the study seeks to provide evidence for evidence-based interventions and support systems for students negotiating the challenging landscape of higher education.

1.1. Causes of Physical Disability:

There are various causes that can culminate in physical disability in people. These can be expounded as follows:

1.1.1. Congenital Causes:

The term congenital is used to describe those disabilities that are brought about due to hereditary reasons. These issues usually originate at birth and affect the fetus while it gestates in the womb. Any trauma inflicted upon the fetus while in this condition may also result in physical disability or complications in the muscle cells of the unborn child.

1.1.2. Acquired Injury:

Acquired injury is another cause that can culminate in physical disabling of an individual. These injuries are usually caused by serious accidents, trauma to the brain, infections, diseases, etc. Stroke has also been ascribed as being a chief cause of physical disabling in this context.

1.1.3. Prenatal Reasons:

These reasons are linked with problems that can spawn while the child is in the perinatal period. This is the period preceding and subsequent to childbirth. Perinatal reasons are grounded in biology and can be brought about because of profound injury, lack of oxygen, premature delivery, or an infection in the birth canal that ultimately affects the newborn.

According to the International Classification of Functional Disability, or ICF, physical disability is a problem that encapsulates a prominent deficiency or weakness. It is the failure of some organs or functions in the body that in turn keeps an individual from completing normal and simple physical tasks and functions. This conspicuously affects their effective functioning in various aspects of life. A person who is physically disabled faces many problems in his or her life. These problems include social marginalization, challenges in social interaction, and hindrances in performing effectively in some or all facets of life (Chatzitheochari & Butler-Rees, 2023). This infers that physically disabled people experience a lower level of independence or social emancipation and are usually dependent on others. This can entail profound stress and frustration on the part of the affected person. It also causes a level of prejudice to manifest between the abled and disabled persons.

The rate of Social Exclusion and marginalization is very steep in people with disabilities. There are many interpretations of Social Exclusion. It is most effectively described as a process that causes people, as individuals or groups to be excluded explicitly or partially from engaging in all facets of social life on the basis of their social identities, race, culture, language, and gender, and based on economic, social, and physical shortcomings. Social Exclusion or Marginalization in this study alludes to the systematic restriction to access social relationships in social, political, or cultural aspects of disabled students within all aspects and facets of social life (Strauss & Pollack, 2003). This extends to include Institutes of Higher Education as well.

There are certain reasons that stimulate Social Marginalization amongst people. These factors can be elucidated as follows:

- Mental Models include opinions and values that might often remain unarticulated or taken for granted

- Differences or Otherness and the Mental models associated with them can also bring about sentiments of social marginalization or exclusion.

- The understanding that a person has regarding what an Ideal is and the ensuing people that deviate from this perception are subjected to social exclusion.

- Perceptions regarding valued and devalued roles can also result in Social Marginalization.

These paths of cognizance and cogitation are deeply embedded in the social exclusion of people over the course of history. These perceptions are rooted in features such as gender, identity, ethnicity, or other latent characteristics of people (Das, 2009). For instance, people who are judged purely on the terms of their disability and juxtaposing it against the idea of a "Normal worker" can culminate in discriminatory behavior (Harma et al., 2013). These mental models have brought about exclusion, but also alienation, persecution, and discrimination in numerous ways (Gayapersad et al., 2023).

Understandings of valued or devalued roles are also a factor that drives social marginalization. Those who attain valued roles will receive favorable treatment but those who don't will be treated

unfavorably and poorly. People who have assumed devalued roles will often be the disabled ones. These devalued roles will also be filled by those with adversely perceived body features or those with abnormal behaviors e.g. disfigured, or obese. They will be subjected to social marginalization, exclusion, and alienation from the rest of society as they are perceived as uncanny and strange.

Each of these observations and thought processes can entail a number of emancipating actions. For instance, physically or mentally disabled people are often separated and excommunicated because of social stigma, discrimination, and lower hopes of what they can do and attain in life (Granjon et al., 2023).

The reasons for exclusion are driven by a number of factors. These factors catalyze marginalization at the levels of society, community, individual, and relational-based. The Socio-ecological model (Dahlberg & Krug, 2006) is a great method for explaining the various drivers and the settings where exclusion/marginalization occurs. For instance, the effect of mental models on societal levels of marginalization via portrayal in media, concepts of the ideal body image, and litigation and policy-making can lead to social marginalization.

At the level of the community, Social Marginalization is caused by the opinions of comprehending and cognizance about disabled individuals, bullying, education, access to transportation, employment opportunities, etc. (Kovačević & Radovanovic, 2023).

Social and personal relationships can also cause social marginalization or exclusion. Several disabled persons require support from family or others to engage in the community, specifically when it concerns some of the socio-economic and structural obstacles in the path of social inclusion. This support can be affected adversely by insufficient resources, and the concerns of the families over bullying or discrimination (Anaby et al., 2013).

On the individual level, causes of social exclusion or marginalization pertain to a person's health and well-being, efficiency, opportunities, support systems, and internal confidence. These factors can hamper chances for social participation.

All of these factors, when amalgamated, can have a detrimental impact on the results and social outcomes for physically disabled persons as they augment practices of marginalization.

It is a fact that several countries seriously consider the problems of their disabled population and take appropriate action in a facilitating manner. However, it is equally true that our country doesn't extend such emphatic and empathic steps toward ensuring a proper and regulated social experience for the physically disabled. This issue is especially prevalent in Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan, like universities and colleges. There are problems with physical accessibility, curriculum, and administration for physically disabled students at these institutes (Pirzada, 2023). However, the issue of Social Marginalization is perhaps the most prevalent and prominent one of them all.

Regarding the context of Punjab, there wasn't any considerable focus or effort extended towards special and inclusive education up till the elections of 2018. The main focus of the policy in the province was merely relegated to increasing the rate of enrollment and enhancing the quality of education through the fulfillment of certain milestones. The blueprint that was the main means for moving the attainment of targets in the education sector in Punjab till the 2018 elections was absent of any milestones pertaining to the needs of physically impaired students. The Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2014 afforded a legal foundation for education for all children

and embodied the aspect of dealing with the requirements of marginalized children. However, the manner in which the aspect of educational fulfillment was to be met for physically handicapped students wasn't explicitly elucidated and was instead predicated upon intended subsidiary regulations. The FCDO-funded Punjab Inclusive Education Program was the only monumental or notable endeavor for dealing with the requirements of children with disabilities. After the formation of SpED, the number of institutions under its auspices increased from 51 to 294 and addressed the needs of 32,000 students in contrast to the previous 4000. This enhanced scale and handling of facilities under SpED has stimulated the need to produce a system to make certain that the needs of physically disabled students regarding education are completely fulfilled (Gul, 2020).

Higher Education Institutions like Universities are a melting pot of various ethnicities, cultures, social identities, etc. It is a place where diversity takes the lead and people from varied backgrounds mingle and engage in meaningful social endeavors (Patton, 2023). While there is marginalization predicated upon cultural and social identification-based indicators, the same can't be extrapolated verbatim for disabled persons. Theirs is a population that is derived from identification and is trivialized and marginalized significantly. A disabled person in university experiences much in the way of trepidation and stress because of this callous, impartial, and apathetic treatment. It is a matter that is ubiquitous and is incumbent amongst all major Higher Education Institutes in the country. There is an exigent need to address the root causes of this Social Marginalization and mitigate the problems of Physically handicapped students effectively. The physically disabled form a large and palpable part of the population of students currently studying in Higher Education institutes in Pakistan. They are just as much deserving of social care and prestige as any able-bodied student. The level of abuse and social exclusion that these students are subjected to is apparent and vividly legible. Concrete and effective steps need to be executed to address this discrepancy and mitigate their problems of social marginalization and exclusion. This will entail salubrious and advantageous ramifications for the educational system as well as for the general well-being of the entire physically disabled student population.

2. Research Questions

The purpose of this research's interrogative was to glean whether the physically disabled students encountered any discrepancies or issues during the pursuit of their higher education at their concerned higher education institutes. There are perceptions that need to be corroborated regarding the impediments faced by them on an administrative, teaching-based, and extracurricular basis at higher education institutions stemming from their disabilities. The students of this category have always been vulnerable and susceptible to a myriad of problems and ostracizing. These problems need to be illuminated and brought to light so that they can be dealt with and ultimately expunged through comprehensive and consistent studying. Do these issues make them vulnerable? Does the prevalence and constant exposure to the probable, marginalization that they face entail stress and anxiety? And do these issues exacerbate the odds of these students becoming disconcerted with higher education? These are the questions that this research aimed to ask of the respondents involved in the study. This research aimed to inquire about certain aspects related to the problems faced by the Physically handicapped students at Higher Education Institutions of Lahore. The first set of questions was related to the prevalence and perception of Social Marginalization amongst physically impaired students and how they perceived their social experiences in these institutions. The research also aimed to understand whether they received any support from their respective institutions and if they were effective as well. Another point of inquiry was about the barriers and challenges experienced by the respondents that perpetuated the

issue of social marginalization. The treatment of the faculty, staff, Peers, and contemporaries towards the respondents and how they interact with these physically impaired students were also a focus of the study. The Rationale of the Study

Lahore is the most populous and prominent city of Punjab. It is a hub of education and commerce and is widely perceived as the greatest city in the Country. there are numerous Higher Education Institutions dedicated to the task of disseminating loftier tenets of education amongst the populace established across the city. All of these Institutes have a section of the population that comprises physically handicapped students. These students are at risk of being socially marginalized and excluded from all proceedings pertaining to higher education. The reasonings for said ostracism needed to be probed and that is the main impetus that drove this study. It is imperative that the problems of these students are mitigated and resolved on an expeditious and consummate basis. That is because the right to attain higher education should be made readily available to all groups regardless of color, caste, creed, gender, disability, etc. These students are deserving of this right as well and the latter shouldn't be obstructed due to social exclusion. This study is unique in that it provides insight into the numerous problems being faced by physically handicapped students studying at the higher education institutes of Lahore. The results will also be applicable to other cities and populations seeing as the milieu of Lahore is compatible with other regions and strata of Pakistan.

3. Ethical Integrity

The researchers endeavored to ensure that the study in question remained sound from an ethical standpoint. The researchers emphasized the aspect of respect for humanity in relation to the respondents and attempted to treat them with reverence and forbearance. The respondents were duly informed about the aspects of non-maleficence and confidentiality associated with the study in which they were partaking. The consent of all respondents was solicited and secured prior to the initiation of the feedback collection. The study also resonated on the human and empathic scale since the results are intended to benefit the respondents and their pertinent population in general.

4. Objectives of the Study

Following were the research objectives;

- To assess the problems of Social Marginalization being faced by physically impaired students at the Higher Education Institutes of Lahore
- To ascertain whether the students experience any difficulties in accessing the facilities of the higher education institutions
- To delineate if students experienced feelings of stress or anxiety stemming from any potential marginalization that they experience

5. Theoretical Framework

There are several theories that corroborate the occurrence of Social Marginalization as a social phenomenon. The research derived from the following theories:

- **Social Exclusion Theory**: This theory elucidates how people or groups are methodically barred from, or hampered, from total access to numerous rights, social chances, and resources that are ordinarily and readily available to other members and groups in the

society. The theory of Social Exclusion has been supported by scholars like Amartya Sen and Hilary Silver as well (KILIÇ, 2023; Šušterič, 2024). This theory is relevant to the study in question as it corroborates the phenomenon of Social Marginalization towards Physically impaired students. The study has already deduced that the respondents of the study are at risk of being socially marginalized and excluded and that is why this theory is emphatically pertinent in this context.

- **Stigma Theory**: The Stigma Theory postulated by Erving Goffman is predicated upon the concept of stigma and how it affords a view into how physical disabilities can entail societal stigma and successive ostracism (Goffman, 2009). Physical handicap in our society is linked to stigma as well. The physically handicapped are ridiculed and treated with a level of apathy that can be traced back to them being perceived on the basis of their disability in a disparaging and stigmatic manner. This, therefore, relates to the study in question.

Disability Studies

- **Social Model of Disability**: The Social Model of Disability differentiates between disability, social exclusion, and impairment, physical constraint. It infers that disability is the result of barriers in society and not only because of physical limitations. This has been propounded and upheld by authors like Mike Oliver (Sajjad). This model holds promise concerning the study of physically impaired students of the study and provides an insight into the probable causes for exclusion that they face due to their physical shortcomings.

Educational Inequality

- **Cultural Capital Theory**: Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital can be employed to expound the manner by which students from varying classes, including disabled ones, have disproportionate access to opportunities and resources pertaining to education (Bourdieu, 2011). Granted, the study in question has extrapolated the respondents to be facing obstructed access to educational avenues which makes this theory highly relevant as well.

- **Intersectionality**: Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality can assist in probing into how numerous types of ostracism or marginalization founded on concepts such as gender, race, disability, etc. can coincide and affect the experiences of physically disabled students (Crenshaw, 2021). Disability is indeed a component that exudes susceptibility to social exclusion and has been corroborated by Crenshaw's theory thereby making it a propitious addition to the repertoire of theories being employed.

6. Methodology

Keeping in perspective the nature of the study and the data involved, an interview comprising open-ended questions was employed for gathering qualitative and untainted primary data from the physically disabled students of the Higher Education Institutions of Lahore. A total of 30 students were selected from the 700 disabled students that were studying in the different institutes of Higher Education in Lahore including the University of Punjab, Lahore, University of Education, University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, and the Government College University, Lahore. The method of sampling employed was simple random sampling as the population concerned evinced an eminent, homogenous attribute that necessitated no further classification. The purpose of the research was to stimulate the respondents and to gauge the different problems and hindrances that they experienced regarding Social Exclusion and marginalization as students at the higher education institutes of Lahore. The responses were recorded and subjected to a

detailed thematic analysis. The responses were recorded and then transcribed into written form. It was then subjected to a scrupulous reading to underscore the significant sections of the text. These sections were assigned codes and then compared with other responses to create overreaching and matching themes. These themes were then elucidated to reflect the results that were garnered.

Results and Discussion

The responses of the Respondents were meticulously recorded and subjected to Thematic Analysis. The common themes and results derived from this process are elucidated as follows for your perusal:

Theme 1: Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness:

The first theme that was derived from the detailed scrutiny of physically disabled students' feedback was the experiencing of intense feelings of loneliness and isolation. All students were questioned extensively regarding this matter and they reported experiencing feelings of being not welcome. They were of the opinion that they often experienced feelings of isolation and being different from others. These marginalized students were excluded socially and experienced indifference from their able-bodied student contemporaries. These marginalized students opined that they felt as if they didn't fit in with the mainstream or normal students which in turn led to intense feelings of isolation. This feeling of loneliness and isolation was further cemented by the absence of a proper or effective social network. The physically disabled students reported having limited or smaller social circles where the capacity to interact with other students was not prolific or promising. These sentiments were ubiquitous and present amongst all respondents of the study.

Theme 2: Experiences of Discrimination and Prejudiced Behavior:

This theme relates to the experiences of disabled students regarding discriminative behavior and attitudes of their peers, teachers, and others in Higher Education institutions. Most of the physically disabled students reported having been subjected to discrimination and palpable exclusion predicated upon their condition and disability. Most of the students studying in universities are insensitive to the plight of disabled students and aren't reticent to express their opinions. Derogatory monikers, name-calling, and denigrating behavior were experienced by almost all respondents of the study. Stereotyping of all disabled was a dominant practice within these higher education institutes. However, it was reported that this behavior didn't extend to the faculty or administration members of the universities. They remained respectful and mindful of the disabled students in this regard and didn't utter any such disparaging terms or opinions.

Theme 3: Access to Resources:

The students/respondents reported extensively on this theme as well. They felt that they were especially excluded from several resources and study materials intentionally or inadvertently. They reported not having sufficient material for their assistance in class, library, or other such facilities. The condition was distinctively grievous for blind students who reported about not the non-availability of critical books in braille within the respective Libraries of the institutes in which they studied. Per them, this profoundly impacted their access to critical data and knowledge adversely. The majority of students also reported not having access to proper writing or reading material that kept their special requirements in perspective.

Theme 4: Access to University Facilities:

This formed another integral component of Social Inclusion in Universities and how

inaccessibility to it caused physically disabled students to feel excluded and marginalized. These facilities include access to buildings, canteens, auditoriums, and other such facilities. The physically disabled students form an integral and tangible part of the population and their access to these facilities must be unhindered and absolute. However, while the majority of the respondents reported ample provisions for their facilitation, some weren't so positive. There were some institutions that hadn't implemented proper ramps, wheelchairs, or transportation means for physically handicapped students. Students of the Islamia University of Lahore reported being extremely facilitated with all amenities including wheelchairs, ramps at key buildings, special transportation services, etc. The other institutes have yet to take such concrete and workable steps to ensure expedient and effective facilitation of their physically handicapped population.

Theme 5: Stress and Anxiety:

This theme relates to whether the physically impaired students experienced feelings of anxiety and stress at their institutes. The results were quite grim and alarming as the majority of respondents reported having experienced such sentiments frequently. They were of the view that due to the increasingly isolative and exclusionary attitudes that they experience, the manifestation of anxiety and stress is inexorable. This is true and congruent with studies that infer social marginalization as being a chief driver for enhanced anxiety and stress in affected subjects. These feelings get further exacerbated when these disabled students can't access any social groups or other such social resources. They may even end up feeling stigmatized in soliciting assistance from others.

Theme 6: Threat of Social Exclusion:

The respondents were inquired about their opinions at the end of the interview. They were asked whether they felt that these practices could lead to their being socially excluded and irrevocably marginalized. The response of the majority was resoundingly affirmative as the respondents felt that they were already unequivocally excommunicated from all proceedings within their social circles. They felt that they were already suffering from a lack of representation and were voiceless. There were some respondents who remained sanguine but for the most part, the situation was limpidly dire.

7. Conclusion

The study in question revealed that despite the purported steps taken by Higher Education Institutions to ensure inclusivity, persistent challenges yet remain towards explicit implementation. The findings of this study show that while notable barriers remain on the path of ensuring proper participation and facilitation for physically disabled students studying in higher education institutions. First of all, physically impaired student continues to come across, structural, academic, and attitude-based issues that hamper their complete integration into the milieu of the universities in which they are studying. These obstacles originate in aspects of enabling and physical access for which in turn leads to social isolation and an elevated feeling of not belonging. This has been authenticated by many studies that show physically impaired students having lower levels of participation and experiencing specific problems compared to their non-disabled contemporaries which in turn affects their academic and social performance (Green et al., 2023; Rath, 2024).

Also, the social sector of higher education institutions usually fails to sufficiently deal with the requirements and needs of physically disabled students. It is immensely integral that these disabled students are integrated and engaged in extracurricular pursuits like clubs, societies, etc.

to enhance their social and cultural worth. But most of the time, these physically disabled students find this to be a noncordial and repudiating experience. This deficiency of social integration can culminate in increasing the odds of these students dropping out or losing interest in their academics (Iqbal, 2023; Spalding, 2023). The study also showed that these disabled students experience many issues when it comes to accessing and utilizing the university resources and facilities. Many students reported that they encountered hardships while trying to access buildings, availing transportation, and more. This shows and corroborates the fact that disabled students aren't prioritized when it comes to these aspects. Their needs and issues are ignored or trivialized when designing proper policies and approaches in higher education institutions which poses a huge problem. Exacerbation of these issues can potentially lead to these students becoming irrevocably despondent and losing faith in what universities have to offer. This can entail possible profound academic disengagement (Algolaylat et al., 2023; Amoah et al., 2023).

The students of these universities also reported having experienced immense stress and anxiety because of the treatment that they received within the social environment of the universities in which they study. This is one of the reasons why disabled students are unable to properly integrate within the higher education context of the country. This can be perceived as a monumental hindrance to attaining consummate inclusivity in our universities (Hitches et al., 2023; Shaw, 2024). In conclusion, while there have been steps taken toward improving the condition of physically impaired students in higher education institutions, there yet remain certain barriers and obstacles that prevent the effective attainment of the desired outcomes. There is much that needs to be done if these physically impaired students feel like they belong in their respective institutions through perspicacious facilitation and addressing of the underlying issues. Through this path, higher education institutions can make certain that physically impaired students are not only able to pursue their higher education, but also prosper at the task which will inexorably lead to their optimal development socially and academically.

8. Suggestions

As mentioned before, there is an exigent and immediate need for ameliorating the conditions for Physically handicapped students at Higher Education institutions. To do that, certain steps need to be taken. First of all, Higher Education Institutes should ratify their policies regarding Physically handicapped students and rectify any shortcomings or flaws that might hamper their inclusivity in all aspects of their curricular and extracurricular pursuits. These institutions should establish proper support services for these students that include effective mentoring, counseling, etc. Steps need to be initiated to create and foster cooperative, supportive, and nurturing spaces for these students. Punitive measures should be implemented in case of any students who seek to disparage or denigrate the dignity and integrity of these socially at-risk students.

It is also suggested to enhance understanding regarding social marginalization. This will lead to better addressing of social marginalization which can help to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all students. Also, Social Workers can play a highly eminent and beneficial role in the mitigation of said social marginalization by endowing considerable counseling, advocacy, and ameliorative ministrations. That is why these experts must be brought into the fold to deal with the predicaments and complications encountered by the Physically disabled student populations in various varsities.

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