

Educational Services Provided to Students with Disabilities in a Tibetan Refugee Residential Rehabilitation Center in India: A Case Study

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Background

- There are barriers to services for students with disabilities in India, including negative cultural attitudes and lack of trained personnel.
- Many religions in India explain disability as caused by karma, which can affect the way people with disabilities access services.
- Karuna Home is a residential rehabilitation center for students with cognitive or physical disabilities whose parents are Tibetan refugees. Most people on campus are Buddhist.
- Karuna Home provides a range of care and rehabilitation such as daily living assistance, physical therapy, special education, self-care, speech therapy, religion, and health care.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to describe the educational program for students with disabilities at Karuna Home, including the people, processes, attitudes toward disabilities, and educational outcomes.

Research Question

What are the education policies and procedures, and staff attitudes toward disability in a residential rehabilitation center in India for students with disabilities who are children of Tibetan refugees?



“Lotus symbolizes our special children like the opening of the each petal from the lotus. Same way they are being lifted up from the darkness ... Hope that they will lead life with best of ability and blossom like the lotus. This is lotus's meaning” (Chodren, special educator).



Participants and Setting

- Interview informants were six teachers, one physiotherapist, one administrator, and one teaching assistant.
- Observants were 12 female and 18 male students aged 5-32 years with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities. Four were Indian, one Nepali, and 25 Tibetan.
- Interviews were conducted in various Karuna Home rooms and classrooms. Students were observed in classrooms, the dining hall, the physiotherapy room, and community settings.

Methods and Data Analysis

- Audio recorded interviews of teachers, administrators, and service providers
 - Multiple observations in all classrooms and campus settings
 - Reviews of documents regarding student demographics and the school's mission.
 - Data from interviews, observations, and school documents were triangulated to describe cultural and educational aspects.
- Researcher and faculty mentor analyzed data using thematic analysis to answer study question and subquestions.

Results

- Karuna Home provides for the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families congruent with the religious and ethical standards of Tibetans in exile.
- Most Tibetans in India are unable to access services for children with disabilities.
- Adult attitudes and perceptions about disability were laced with Tibetan Buddhist compassion and love. Informants also indicated that disability is caused by poor parent choices (e.g., prenatal care) and that karma plays a large part.
- The linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the students affect the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.
- Most instructors lacked training in creating learning and behavioral objectives, and objectives were difficult to measure.
- Accurately assessing student learning and behavior is a great need.
- The success of the physiotherapy program may result from professional competence, 1:1 student-staff ratio, and belief that physiotherapy is something the students can “actually do.”

Conclusions & Implications

- Karuna Home should
- adopt evidence-based curricula and instruction to address student needs
 - implement systematic assessment of academic and behavioral functioning
 - prepare teachers to create data-based learning objectives, to monitor progress during instruction and therapy, and to use data to improve instructional practice.