

INDIA

School Education of Children with Special Needs in India With a Perspective on the Initiatives for Children with Autism

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The earliest reference of “autism” in Indian literature was reported in 1959, but the knowledge about autism was limited. The awareness gradually grew in India in the 80's, though the number of professionals was few. By the late nineties a few organizations specifically for autism were established in different parts of the country, as well as a few schools and parent associations. Gradually development of related aspects viz. diagnosis, treatment and educational options, parental involvement, vocational options, human resource development, legislation etc. also took place. Consequently the number of reported cases of autism increased dramatically in the 1990s and early 2000s. This can be attributed to either increase in the actual prevalence or improved diagnostic tools. The reported incidence of autism varies considerably among countries and is complicated by varying criteria for diagnosing autism, different standards for reporting public health problems, and other variations. The earlier available screening and diagnostic instruments for evaluation, assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) were generally intended for the Western population. The Indian Disability Assessment and Evaluation Scale (IDEAS) developed by the Rehabilitation Committee of the Indian Psychiatric Society is one of the tools now being used for diagnosis of autism in India.

WHO puts the global prevalence of autism at 1 in 500. Boys are four times more likely to have autism than girls. From one in 10,000 children ten years ago in India, the prevalence is 3-4 per 1,000 live births now. The incidence rate is approximately 1 in 90,666 or 11,914 people in India. According to estimates, over 2 million people are living with autism in India. Every year, the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped, Secunderabad, registers approximately 100-125 new cases, which is much higher than compared to five years ago.

It is only in recent years that the problems related to ASD have gained acceptance. Yet, this condition in children is not new. Parents and teachers know that these children struggle to cope with the demands of their homes, school, and society. What is new is that finally the problems are being acknowledged. Today, ASD is accepted as a condition, one that professionals can distinguish from other childhood disorders. India has set for itself the goal of Education for All. Therefore, educational interests of children with ASD cannot be overlooked. The various organisations, both Government and civil society are working on development of new pedagogical strategies and related support, through which it would be possible to educate these children and turn them into productive citizens.

SCHOOL EDUCATION OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN INDIA

Currently, the number of schools providing education to children with autism is severely limited as compared to the need. However, the range of services is extremely varied and diverse ranging from autism specific services to mainstream schools. Starting with the first school in 1994, there are now around 15 autism-specific schools in India. These special schools have a student enrollment ranging from 15 to 70. The majority of children with autism who attend school do so at the nearest special needs facility accessible. This could be a school for children with intellectual delay, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, or of mixed disability. Some attend special needs classroom in a mainstream school. The efforts to increase early diagnosis coupled with the rise in number of qualified special teachers, professionals and setting up of more special / appropriately equipped regular schools is paving the way for early educational and behavioural interventions, enabling the child to make significant gains – steps which are particularly required in rural parts of the country. An appropriate educational program would be one which incorporates both the general needs of children with autism with the particular needs of the child in question.

INITIATIVES OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION OF DISABLED CHILDREN

1. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

The key objective of SSA is Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), three important aspects of which are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy. The goal of UEE, has further been strengthened by the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 making free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. This Amendment has given a new thrust to the education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN), including autism, as without their inclusion, the objective of UEE cannot be achieved.

2. Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS)

The Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was launched in 1974 by the then Department of Social Welfare and was later transferred to the Department of Education in 1982-83. The scheme was revised in 1992 and provided educational opportunities for disabled children in common schools to facilitate their integration and ultimate retention in the general school system. This has now been replaced by IEDSS, launched in April 2009. It provides assistance for the inclusive education of disabled children of Classes IX – XII having blindness, low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotor disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, autism and cerebral palsy. Funds are provided for activities such as identification and assessment, assistive devices, allowance for transport, escorts, readers, uniforms, books and stationary, stipend for girls, etc. Besides, there is provision for engagement of special teachers, creation of barrier free environment, teachers' training,

orientation of communities, parents, educational administrators, etc.

3. Making Schools Barrier Free

All States have been directed to ensure that all primary and secondary schools are made disabled friendly, in a prescribed time bound manner, taking into account the needs of different categories of disabled children. Each district will also have a model inclusive school.

4. Capacity Building of Special Teachers

- a) Course curricula has been developed and standardized by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) for
 - i) Diploma in Special Education (Autistic Spectrum Disorders), introduced in July 2003, and is operational in 11 institutions registered with RCI, producing 20-25 teachers every year per institute
 - ii) B.Ed. Special Education (Autistic Spectrum Disorders) will become operational from the session beginning in July 2010 at 4 institutions across the country
- b) Some other organisations imparting diploma in special education (ASD) include Spastics Society of Karnataka, Bangalore; School of Hope, Delhi; Action For Autism, Delhi; Jai Vakeel, Mumbai and Pradeep, Kolkata
- c) State Nodal Agency Centre (SNAC) and State Nodal Agency Partners (SNAP) of the National Trust have conducted trainings on
 - i. Inclusive Education for Private School Teachers to handle the special needs of students with National Trust disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In the Govt. Schools, this is being done under the SSA Program. 38 programs were conducted during 2008-09.
 - ii. Special School Teachers Training - National Trust has specially focused on Early Intervention and Autism. This program was conducted in 15 States during 2008-09. For Early Intervention, the National Trust has a partnership with Voice & Vision (A unit of Hilton / Perkins, U.S.A.), Mumbai for training one Special Teacher in the Aspiration Programme.

5. The National Award to Teachers, conferred to teachers from across the country by the President of India, has a dedicated category for disabled teachers/special teachers doing yeoman's service for the education of disabled children

SUPPORT FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN

1. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made several **changes in the examination bye laws** in February 2009 to facilitate the disabled children, including those with autism, giving the Board (public) examinations of Class X and XII
 - a) Use an amanuensis and be allowed an additional time ranging from 30 – 60 minutes depending on the duration of the paper.

b) Option of studying one compulsory language as against two within the overall spirit of the Three Language Formula prescribed by the Board.

2. **A government sponsored health insurance plan “Nirmaya”** for people with autism, mental disorders and multiple disabilities was launched in 2008 to provide affordable Health Insurance to persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation & Multiple Disabilities. This has been a breakthrough, since earlier Health Insurance products did not include people with developmental disabilities.
3. **Gyan Prabha - a Scholarship Scheme for People with Developmental Disabilities**, enables them to pursue any employment oriented vocational training, professional course or higher studies (post schooling) from any recognized institution, leading to an economic activity.
4. **The amendment of the Income Tax Act, 1961** by Finance Act, 2007, tax benefits have become available to families of children with autism. A 75% concession in railway tickets for the child and an escort is also available if it is noted in the disability certificate that the child will need an escort every time he or she travels.
5. It has become easier for persons with disabilities like autism and cerebral palsy to open and operate bank accounts, by the **directive of the Reserve Bank of India** asking banks to accept guardianship certificates issued by local level committees set up under the National Trust Act or those issued by the district court under the Mental Health Act.
6. **National awards for empowerment of persons with disabilities** are conferred by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, in various categories which includes autism also

LEGAL SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

1. **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009** makes free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right, for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years.

2. Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992,

The Rehabilitation Council of India was set up under this 1992 Act of Parliament. This Council regulates and monitors the training of rehabilitation professionals and personnel, and promotes research in rehabilitation and special education. Its functions include determining minimum standards of education, making recommendations to the Ministry regarding recognition of qualifications granted by Universities, etc., in India for rehabilitation professionals, making recommendations to the Ministry regarding recognition of qualification by institutions outside India and inspection in examinations

3. Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995

The Act provides for education, rehabilitation, employment, non-discrimination and social security for persons with disabilities. The amendment of the Act currently underway includes among others, inclusion of autism as a disability and various enforceable provisions for ensuring education for the disabled children.

4. National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and

Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999.

The Act facilitates, among others, the realization of equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disabilities and provision for appointment of legal guardian of a person with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation & Multiple Disabilities.

5. National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is the nodal Ministry to coordinate all matters relating to implementation of the Policy. The Department of School Education & Literacy is also one of the implementing partners of the policy. The salient features of the policy include educational rehabilitation which includes vocational training for the disabled.

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<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Q1. India is a big country with only 20 schools for Autism. How do students with Autism get to these schools?

A1. NGO's run these schools and they are only in urban areas.

Other students access, mainstream schools, home based education and bridge courses under different program of inclusive education.

The government is focused on providing more provision into the future through home based education, residential schools, special schools and regular schools.

There is provision to allowances for hostel, transport, helpers, assistive devices, etc in the government programs.

Q2. Explain home-based education.

A2. Home based education is when a teacher from the village or nearby villages come to the home to support such students who cannot travel to schools.

Q3. Is special teacher training focused on specific categories of disabilities.

A3. Yes currently largely it is. However the Rehabilitation Council of India is developing curriculum for multiple disabilities courses, Now in pre-service teacher training there is a course on disability so all newly trained teachers have some understanding of imparting education to the special children. This is how the requirement of special education teachers in India will be fulfilled.

Q4. Indian incentive programs who is eligible for these.

A4. All students who have a diagnosed disability including Autism are eligible.

Q5. How does diagnosis happen in India?

A5. The ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has a website with the criteria published on it.

The office chief commission for persons with disabilities deals with the special requirements and grievances of and on behalf of persons with disabilities.