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Meaningful participation in academic life: Support centers for students with disabilities in Higher Education

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Introduction: Despite equal rights and accessibility legislation, the rate of students with disabilities (SWD) in Higher Education (HE) is low compared to the general population. In response to this challenge, the Israel National Insurance Institute established support centers for the inclusion of SWD in HE. This paper presents a research evaluating the contribution of support centers.

Objectives:

1. To identify services and accommodations that facilitates the participation of SWD in HE.
2. To assess the satisfaction level of SWD from the services and accommodations provided by the support services in HE.

Method: The sample included 393 SWD from 10 HE institutions. Participants completed an online questionnaire regarding level of satisfaction from their achievements in various academic experiences, and questions related to the degree of use and usefulness of services and accommodations they received from the support centers.

Results: SWD were more satisfied with individual - academic assistance than in other areas, such as social inclusion, time management, and setting personal goals. SWD were satisfied from most accommodations they received related to academic requirements (i.e. papers, exams). In additions, they considered mediation of support services' staff in communicating with faculty members to be very helpful.

Conclusion: Services and accommodations designed to support academic participation are crucial for the success of SWD. However, findings demonstrate that services that support social and emotional needs and transition to work are often neglected. Service providers can benefit from SWD's perception in improving accommodations and designing services that ensure equal opportunity for SWD's participation in HE.