Abstract

Self-concept, the totality of beliefs, attitudes and evaluations an individual hold about themselves, is a critical determinant of the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents with disabilities, yet it remains under-researched in rural regions such as northern Namibia. This study assessed the level of self-concept among adolescents with special needs attending special and mainstream secondary schools in the Oshana and Omusati regions of northern Namibia. The study was guided by Rogers' Self-Concept Theory and adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 192 adolescents with special needs, selected through census sampling, using the Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire (SCQ), while qualitative data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected participants. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using SPSS Version 23 to generate means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Findings discovered that adolescents with special needs generally reported a positive self-concept. The highest-rated indicators were the ability to like oneself even when others do not ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 2.07$), feeling valued by those who know them well ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 2.27$), gladness at being who they are ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 2.27$), decisiveness ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 2.02$) and perceived attractiveness ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 2.02$). Qualitative findings converged with these results, with participants describing themselves as confident, self-disciplined, determined and proud of their achievements despite the challenges associated with their disabilities. However, a subset of items relating to self-doubt, feeling unlucky, appearance dissatisfaction and vulnerability to criticism received comparatively lower ratings and several interview participants described experiences of social comparison and misunderstanding that undermined their confidence. The study concludes that self-concept among adolescents with special needs in northern Namibia is generally positive but uneven, shaped strongly by self-acceptance, resilience and supportive relationships, while also marked by insecurity linked to disability-related stigma and exclusion. Schools, families and policymakers are encouraged to strengthen counselling services, disability-awareness programming, peer mentorship and inclusive teaching practices to consolidate and extend these positive self-perceptions.