Abstract

Social integration is widely recognised as a critical determinant of the psychosocial well-being of adolescents with disabilities, yet empirical evidence on how its relational core, social support, relates to self-concept among adolescents with special needs in rural sub-Saharan Africa, and Namibia specifically, remains scarce. This article reports on the third objective of a larger convergent parallel mixed-methods study, which sought to examine the relationship between social support and self-concept among adolescents with special needs in special and mainstream secondary schools in northern Namibia. Anchored in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Rogers' Self-Concept Theory (1959), the study used a census sample of 192 adolescents with special needs who completed the Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, complemented by semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected adolescents. Quantitative data were analysed using Pearson product-moment correlation in SPSS Version 29, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that adolescents with special needs in northern Namibia experienced an overall high level of social support (composite mean = 4.94 on a seven-point scale) and a moderate-to-high level of self-concept (composite mean = 4.29 on an eight-point scale). A statistically significant, moderate positive correlation was found between social support and self-concept ($r = .497$, $p < .001$, $N = 192$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Qualitative accounts corroborated this pattern: adolescents who described strong support from family, friends and significant others also described themselves as confident, resilient and self-accepting. The article concludes that social support is a meaningful, though not sole, contributor to positive self-concept among adolescents with special needs, and recommends that schools, families and policymakers strengthen structured peer-support, mentorship and counselling programmes to enhance both outcomes.