

Life experiences of people who stutter, and the perceived impact of stuttering on quality of life:
personal accounts of South African individuals

The purpose of the study was to investigate the life experiences of a group of South African adults who stutter and the impact of stuttering on their quality of life. Participants were 16 adults with a mean age of 28.9 and ranging from 20 to 59 years. Methods involved individual interviews designed to explore the life domains of education; social life; employment; speech therapy; family and marital life; and identity, beliefs and emotional issues. Main findings of the study indicated that the majority of participants perceived their stuttering to have impacted on their academic performance at school, and relationships with teachers and classmates. Although their stuttering was not perceived to adversely influence their ability to establish friendships, people generally reacted negatively to their stuttering. Many felt that their stuttering did not have an adverse effect on their choice of occupation, ability to obtain work, and relationships with managers and co-workers, although it was perceived to influence their work performance and hamper their chances for promotion. Although the majority viewed their speech therapy experiences as being negative; more than half the sample believed that speech therapy had, nevertheless exerted a positive effect on their quality of life. Overall, stuttering did not appear to have influenced participants' family and marital life. Most participants felt that stuttering had affected their self-esteem and self-image, and had evoked strong emotions within them. Findings are taken to suggest the need to incorporate subjective feelings about stuttering into the clinical practice of speech-language therapy; to provide information and coping strategies for teachers and employers; and for further research.