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Navigating Sexual Identity in Rural Contexts: A Case Study of Sexual Minorities in Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the experiences of an individual who identifies himself as homosexual (gay), and navigates their sexual identity within the rural context of Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. It focuses on how the participant negotiates acceptance, self-expression, and social inclusion. A case study design was adopted and data were collected through in-depth interviews that provided rich narratives. Those stories highlight both the challenges and coping strategies employed in a predominantly conservative environment. The findings reveal that family support plays a crucial role in fostering resilience, while societal stigma, discrimination, and religious pressures continue to pose significant barriers. This study contributes to the limited literature on rural queer experiences in South Africa, and it underscores the need for targeted interventions, inclusive policies, and community education that promote acceptance and well-being among sexual minority populations in rural settings.

Keywords: *Sexual identity, Rural communities, social support, Culture, Religion, South Africa.*

Introduction and Background

Sexual identity continues to generate intense debate in African societies, where cultural traditions and religious teachings often frame homosexuality as unacceptable, however, South Africa presents a unique paradox. Since the adoption of the constitution, the country has established one of the most inclusive legal frameworks in the world, prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Legal milestones such as the recognition of same-sex marriage in 2006 have further reinforced these protections. On a legislative level, South Africa (2023) is regarded as a leader in advancing LGBTI rights on the African continent. The constitutional protections afforded to homosexual individuals in South Africa have not yet been fully translated into the lived realities for many, particularly in rural areas. Persistent homophobia, heteronormativity, and prejudice remain deeply embedded in everyday social interactions, often manifesting through verbal abuse, violence, or exclusion (Msibi, 2011). Research suggests that while the law guarantees equality, individuals who identify themselves as homosexual are frequently compelled to hide their sexual identities to avoid being stigmatised or targeted, particularly in rural areas where homosexuality is framed as “un-African” or contrary to moral values (Maotoana, 2023).

Compared to metropolitan areas such as Johannesburg or Cape Town, which offer more visible support and advocacy spaces, rural areas are characterised by strong cultural traditions, community surveillance, and limited exposure to diverse identities (Arndt & de Bruin, 2018). These challenges become more pronounced in rural contexts, such as social institutions like initiation schools, churches, and extended families often reinforce strict gender norms and heterosexual expectations. In such contexts, being openly homosexual may result in rejection, isolation, or violence (Walch, et al., 2016).

The Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province provides a valuable context for examining these dynamics, due to its predominance as a rural region rooted in Sepedi traditions, it reflects the tension between modern constitutional rights and entrenched cultural expectations. For individuals who are identified as homosexuals in that district, the act of negotiating identity often involves balancing personal authenticity with the fear of social exclusion. This can lead to behaviours such as selective disclosure, silence, or withdrawal from communal life, and all of that impact mental health and social belonging. However, despite these adversities,

homosexuals in rural area also demonstrate resilience. According to (Reid, 2013), homosexuals in rural contexts often employ creative coping strategies, ranging from forming discreet networks of support to drawing upon constitutional discourses to defend their rights. By exploring these experiences within Sekhukhune, the present study aims to highlight both the barriers faced by homosexuals and the ways in which they construct dignity and belonging in restrictive social environments.

This study is particularly significant given that rural homosexual experiences in South Africa remain underrepresented in academic scholarship. Much of the literature focused on urban queer life, and left a gap in understanding the realities of individuals who navigate their identities in rural context of South Africa (Msibi, 2013). As an effort to address this gap, this case study offers insights into the lived experiences of homosexuals in Sekhukhune, thereby contributing to broader debates on equality, inclusivity, and the realisation of constitutional rights in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Purpose of the Study

The study explores and documents the lived experiences of a gay individual residing in rural contexts within Makhuduthamakga Local Municipality, located in the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilising the case study design to explore the lived experiences of gay men in the Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate in this context as it foregrounds participants' voices, enabling a deeper understanding of their realities, challenges, and coping strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research design is relevant to explore in-depth complex social phenomena within specific cultural and geographical context (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The research was conducted in the Makhuduthamakga local municipality, within the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province, in South Africa. The setting is predominantly characterised by rural area with strong cultural traditions, religious influences, and communal social structures. The participant was recruited through purposive sampling approach, a qualitative research approach that

deliberately selected the participant to partake in a research process (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). A single participant was recognised on the basis that he openly identified himself as homosexual, and he was willing to reflect share his lived experiences. The demographic details of the participants are listed on the table below. Conducting research on sexuality in rural areas within South Africa is particularly challenging, as cultural norms and stigma often discourage disclosure (Msibi, 2011). The choice of a single case was intentional, as one well-documented case can yield rich insights into social phenomena, particularly where topics are marginalised or underexplored.

Demographic Description

Participant	Sexual orientation	Age	Area of residence	Ethnicity	Educational level
Participant 1	Gay	22	Sekhukhune District	Black	Diploma

Data Collection

Data were generated using a qualitative semi-structured interview. This is a method well suited for exploring sensitive issues and capturing participants' lived experiences in depth (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between guiding questions and open-ended discussion, enabling participants to freely share their narratives while allowing the researcher to probe further into emerging topics. The interviews were conducted over two sessions, each lasting between 60-90 minutes, to allow sufficient time for reflection and detailed storytelling. Interviews were held in Sepedi, the participant's home language, to ensure comfort, clarity, and authenticity of expression. This also reduced barriers to communication and gave allowance for richer data. To ensure accuracy and preserve the participant's voice, the interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and field notes were captured to supplement the data. The researcher ensured that contextual details, non-verbal expressions, and reflections were likewise apprehended through the video recordings during the interview process. All interviews were subsequently translated into English for analysis and reporting.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through the thematic content analysis, as the methodological framework for analysing and fostering a comprehensive exploration of the raw data. The six-phase framework was adhered to: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were carefully developed and further refinement ensued, and themes underwent rigorous scrutiny and deliberation, ensuring their fidelity to the original data.

Quality Criteria

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, four key quality criteria were applied: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

- ***Credibility***

Credibility refers to the degree to which the study findings accurately represent participants' original accounts. This was achieved through building sufficient rapport with the participant and ensure the narratives collected reflects genuine experiences. The data was carefully transcribed and constantly compared between raw data and emerging interpretations to preserve accuracy. Secondary data was also consulted to strengthen the interpretation of themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

- **Transferability**

According to Nowell et al., (2017), transferability refers to the extent to which the study findings may be applied beyond this study. Although the research focused on one participant, a rich and detailed data was provided, and through presenting these contextual descriptions, readers can determine whether the insights may be relevant to other rural communities with similar socio-cultural settings.

- **Dependability**

Dependability emphasises consistency of research processes and findings (Nowell et al., 2017). This was achieved through a clear record of the methodological decisions made during data collection, transcription, and analysis of the study. Moreover, the interview was conducted in Sepedi, and later translated into English, and then back translated, ensuring linguistic accuracy and the preservation of the intended meanings of participant's responses.

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability pertains the extent to which the findings are shaped by the participant's experiences rather than the researcher's personal views. This was achieved through maintaining of meticulous records throughout the research process, while ensuring transparency and accuracy. The study also employed audit trails to document decisions made during data collection and analysis, mitigating potential biases and reinforcing the authenticity of findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which indicates that individuals belonging to socially marginalised groups are exposed to unique and socially induced stressors that extend beyond general life stress. These stressors emerge from structural inequality, stigma, and persistent exposure to prejudice at both distal (such as discrimination, hate speech, social exclusion, and institutional marginalisation) and proximal (concealment of identity, anticipation of rejection, and internalised stigma) levels (Meyer, 2003).

Through the lens of the Minority Stress Theory this study situates the participant's lived experiences within broader systems of heteronormativity and structural exclusion, while simultaneously foregrounding resilience as a dynamic and relational process. The framework enables an understanding of how intersecting sociocultural forces, such as sexuality, rurality, religion, and cultural norms shape both vulnerability and adaptive responses. Ultimately, the theory provides a robust conceptual foundation for interpreting how marginalisation

operates in rural South African contexts, and how interpersonal support systems, particularly family, serve to counterbalance its effects.

Findings and Discussion

The study findings indicate the challenges that gay people encounter in their day-to-day life. Two major themes and subthemes emerged from the study, and the first theme captures how gay individuals navigate societal, religious, and cultural expectations. The second theme highlights the importance of both family support systems in coping with these challenges encountered. Relevant literature is integrated in the discussion of the themes, broadening the body of knowledge while also showing how individual narratives shed light on the complex intersection of sexuality, rural life, and cultural dynamics in South Africa.

Table 1: Emerging Themes Arising from Data

Themes	Subtheme
Theme1: Navigating Societal, Religious, and Cultural Pressures	1.1 Hate speech 1.2 Discrimination 1.3 Religious Challenges 1.4 Cultural Norms and Expectations
Theme 2: Family Support	

Theme1: Navigating Societal, Religious, and Cultural Pressures

This theme reflects the participant's struggles with societal attitudes, religious expectation and cultural expectations in a rural setting. It is further divided into four subthemes, highlighting the multiple pressures faced as a homosexual man in a rural context.

Sub-theme 1: Hate speech

Hate speech was a central issue highlighted, and it emerged strongly in the participant's narrative. The participant indicated that verbal abuse in the form of insults, slurs, and derogatory terms was a daily reality, and those are used to police non-heterosexual identities and reinforce community boundaries. This linguistic violence is not experienced as isolated incidents

but rather as a systemic form of symbolic exclusion, such that derogatory language normalises the perception of homosexuality as deviant or unacceptable.

Research indicates that hate speech functions as more than just offensive expression; it actively legitimises discrimination and promotes an atmosphere/environment where hostility towards sexual minorities is normalized (Msibi, 2011; Maotoana et al, 2023). According to Matebeni (2017), in rural communities (where culture and tradition dominate the social life), verbal aggression is frequently defended as reflecting tradition or moral order. The following are the participants' responses in support of the subtheme:

'They (perpetrators) would insult you when they see you in the street. For example, they would say *Ntoto ya gago* (your penis). Like you are passing the street, and they will go like, *a tše ntoto yela* (here comes the penis).'

...yoh! words like, *stabane*; *sesi buti*; *pinky-pinky*, those are words they would normally call me.'

So, they (perpetrators) would say *ntoto yaka*, *sesbuti* and it is threatening because they come towards you as a group.

They would say this one is crazy, *o nyaka re mo ja matanyula*- meaning he wants us to have anal sex with him'

Remember in Sekhukhune attacks happen every single day. It's not easy being gay in Sekhukhune. If you are not lucky or respond, they (perpetrators) would even attack you physically. I know some of my gay friends responded to them (perpetrators) and they beat and hurt my friends.

The narrative illustrates how hate speech operates, in rural areas, not only as a direct form of discrimination but also as a mechanism of social control, with an intent to silence and marginalise sexual minorities. Consistent with other South African studies, the persistence of verbal hostility reflects a broader context in which homosexual people in rural areas must navigate identity under constant surveillance and linguistic violence daily (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015).

Legally, South Africa recognises the harm associated with hate speech, through the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), which prohibits unfair discrimination and

hate speech on the basis of sexual orientation, among other grounds (Geldenhuys & Kelly-Louw, 2020). The Constitutional Court in *Qwelane vs South African Human Rights Commission* (2021) affirmed that speech defamatory to LGBTI individuals constitutes hate speech, and it causes harm or incites hatred, underscoring the balance between freedom of expression and constitutional protections for dignity and equality (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC], 2021).

Empirical studies reinforce these legal provisions and show that verbal abuse and derogatory language contribute to social exclusion, concealment of sexual identity, and psychological distress among sexual minorities, particularly in rural and traditionally conservative areas (Brooke-Sumner et al., 2025). Despite these legal protections, enforcing hate speech laws remains a challenge, especially in rural communities where derogatory speech is often normalised as a reflection of tradition or moral standards. Consequently, the existence of legal safeguards does not always translate into meaningful improvements in the daily experiences of those targeted by verbal hostility.

Sub-theme 2: Discrimination

Discrimination was a persistent challenge in the participant's narrative, which manifested behaviourally due to his sexual orientation. This included being treated with less respect and regarded as an outsider. Regardless of the South African Constitution formally protecting the rights of sexual minorities, in practice, homosexuals in rural communities continue to face deep-rooted forms of inequality (Cock, 2003). Researchers have further argued that discrimination is perpetuated by cultural and religious ideologies, which construct homosexuality as deviant or immoral (Matebeni, 2017). For the participant, these prejudiced practices was a constant reminder that he did not fully belong in the village. The following responses supports the abovementioned sub-theme:

In public spaces, I still experience situation where for example I am in a line, in a shop or pharmacy and people, especially heterosexual males, would not want to be next to me or touch me.

Even in a taxi, public transport, some people would even look at you with disgust in public.

They (members of the community) will look at you as if you have a disease or virus.

This reflection demonstrates how discrimination extends beyond individual prejudice, extending to broader social norms that regulate belonging and identity. Previous research has shown that gay people in rural areas often experience heightened vulnerability (Epprecht, 2013). Subsequently, discrimination against homosexual people in rural areas, functions not only to reinforce heteronormative dominance but also to suppress visibility and expression of non-heterosexual identities.

Most research on rural sexuality and stigma show that discrimination is frequently embedded in everyday social practices, such as avoidance, gossip, and hostile gazes, which cumulatively undermine psychological well-being and social integration. In South African school and village contexts, research has reported how sexual minorities face persistent marginalisation, internalised stigma, and barriers to social support precisely because of community norms that view non-heterosexual identities as threatening to cultural cohesion (Francis, 2017). This aligns with the participant's experiences of discrimination, that in rural communities, ingrained social norms and heteronormative belief systems produce a landscape of inequality, exclusion, and hostility that significantly shapes the lived realities of sexual minorities.

Sub-theme 3: Religious Challenges

The theme emerged as a key source of difficulty in the participant's religious experiences. Instead of being a space of comfort and acceptance, religious environments often became sites of tension and exclusion. The participant reported that he was often "used" by churches during revivals, because he is a good singer, then discarded like he never even existed. According to (Woodell et al., 2015), many faith-based communities uphold heteronormative values that marginalise sexual minorities (Msibi, 2013). The following responses from the participant underpin the central theme.

I am a Christian and I sing in the praise and worship team. Most churches would 'use' me for revivals, to sing for maybe two days.

They would actually thank everyone in the worship team, but never even mention my name.

I would remember one pastor even called me after revival and talk to me about my sexuality. He said my sexuality will be a problem in the church and I cannot continue to be a member of the church. Eish, that killed me more than anything (emotional).

I enjoyed singing at church, but I struggled so much, because I knew after being I sang for the weekend, is the end.

Despite these challenges, the participant maintained a desire for spiritual connection and growth, by continuing to engage in prayer. This concurs with the findings from Ysseldyk et al., (2010) who indicate that LGBTQ+ individuals often attempt to navigate and integrate their religious and sexual identities simultaneously.

Scholarly literature supports the notion that religious spaces can be experienced as sources of both support and stress for sexual minorities (Woodell et al., 2015). Research on sexuality and faith suggests that many christian communities, particularly in South Africa uphold heteronormative values that frame homosexuality as immoral, problematic or incompatible with religious teachings (Msibi, 2013). This results in individuals concealing or suppressing their identities in order to maintain community membership, which can contribute to internal conflict and psychological distress (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000).

According to Ysseldyk et al., (2010), LGBTQ+ individuals engage in identity negotiation strategies as they attempt to reconcile their spiritual and sexual identities. They indicate that many sexual minorities experience ongoing tension between the desire for spiritual connection and the need for authenticity, often resulting in selective engagement with religious practices, adaptive reinterpretation of faith, or distancing themselves from communities perceived as hostile. Research specific to African contexts similarly underscores how religiosity can be both a source of resilience and vulnerability; while spiritual practices may provide meaning and coping resources, doctrinal exclusion and religiously justified prejudice can undermine well-being.

In the study, despite encountering rejection and emotional harm, the participant continued to pursue a spiritual connection through prayer and negotiated religious identity. This pattern aligns with research indicates that LGBTQ+ persons often seek ways to maintain their faith while resisting the exclusionary practices of religious institutions (Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

Sub-theme 4: Cultural Norms and Expectations

According to Msibi (2011), in many rural contexts, individuals who do not follow cultural expectations often face disapproval, exclusion, or stigmatisation. The participant described feeling constant pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and heterosexual behaviours. This includes the community's emphasis on family continuity, social conformity, and adherence to established customs. His experiences were strongly shaped by the cultural norms and societal expectations of his rural community. He explained that expectations such as participating in customary rituals created a sense of alienation when he could not meet these demands (ibid). Studies has reported similar pattens, indicating that strict cultural prescriptions regarding masculinity and sexuality often compel sexual minorities to conceal their identities or risk social marginalisation (Reddy, 2010). The theme was supported by the following responses:

Limpopo generally, is a traditional area with gender roles which are very heavy. An area like Sekhukhune is even worse.

Currently, I don't attend funerals at Sekhukhune because of the cultural expectations. For example, they would expect that I go and dig the grave with a spade (diphiri), that time I don't even know how to hold a spade, eish, gender roles.

they (Diphiri) would expect me to put the soil in the graveyard holding a spade.....hence I don't go.

The rituals or expectation at the graveyards broke me (Emotional). That would kill me.

...hence, till date I don't attend funerals of Saturdays, I would rather go during the week, where I would peel the vegetables and bake.'

Thus far I think I got away with not going to diphiri (digging graves), because my father is still alive and I think they (community) respect him. And my worry is when my father dies, I am going to struggle big time. Because these men (community) will come for me. I know my dad protects me now, but I will suffer when he dies.

Despite these pressures, the participant employed strategies to navigate cultural demands, including outwardly conforming in certain settings while maintaining his personal authenticity. According to Msibi (2013), homosexuals in traditional contexts often negotiate between societal expectations and self-expression to preserve both social acceptance and personal identity. Recent studies emphasise that cultural norms do more than prescribe behaviour; they regulate who is recognised as a legitimate member of the community (Ratele, 2013). Within the South African context specifically, studies have shown that adherence to traditional rites of passage, familial obligations, and community rituals are central to social acceptance, and inability or unwillingness to participate can lead to ostracism (Epprecht, 2013; Reid, 2013).

Furthermore, sexual minorities in rural African contexts suggest that individuals often engage in identity negotiations, and they strategically manage cultural demands while attempting to retain personal authenticity. Msibi (2013) states that some sexual minorities adopt outward conformity in certain settings while privately maintaining their identities, and this is a strategy that can mitigate overt conflict and preserve social relations. Similarly, some studies highlight the emotional and psychological consequences of cultural exclusion, including internalised stigma and social withdrawal (Nanja, 2018).

Despite the pressures imposed by cultural norms, the participant in this study demonstrated adaptive coping strategies, such as selective engagement with cultural practices and reliance on family protection, that enabled him to navigate these expectations without complete social withdrawal. His narrative aligns with scholarship which suggests that individuals in traditional contexts continuously negotiate the tension between personal authenticity and cultural conformity (Msibi, 2013).

Theme 2: Family Support System

Family support was a critical influence in the participant's ability to navigate his sexuality in rural environment, particularly that of his family. Through the emotional support and safe space created, he was able to express his identity in a society that was less accepting. A supportive family can act as a protective buffer that promotes resilience and providing emotional security when individuals are confronted with challenges, including stigma or prejudice (Yarbrough, 2004). The participant emphasised the significant role of family as a source of strength while

navigating his sexuality. He emphasis how family support creates a sense of safety; and on the other, rejection or lack of understanding from the family, exposes homosexuals to stigma, hurt and in extreme situations, death. The following responses from the participant support the abovementioned theme.

My family was very supportive from a young age, and they still are.

My sexuality doesn't bother me in my village, due to my family support.

Without my family, I would be dead by now...

I pity homosexuals without family support, because without it, you won't be able to defend yourself outside.

Although it was difficult for me, but I had support from my dad who would fight for me.

You need confidence to deal with all the hate, and you can get that from a family support system.

The responses highlight the impact that family support has on building one's character, identity, belonging, and overall well-being for those living with marginalised identities. The extent of acceptance, care, and encouragement offered by family members influences how the participant managed cultural and social pressures.

According to Puckett et al. (2019), research corroborates the vital role of family support for sexual minorities. Family acceptance has been associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among LGBTI individuals, as well as greater self-esteem and life satisfaction. Conversely, family rejection has been linked to higher risk of substance use, homelessness, and psychological distress (Ryan et al., 2009). In rural contexts, where external support systems may be limited, supportive family environments can be especially protective, helping sexual minorities resist internalised stigma and maintain adaptive coping strategies (Snapp et al., 2015).

Additionally, social support suggests that family support not only provides emotional security but also facilitates social confidence and resilience, enabling individuals to navigate hostile or unsupportive environments more effectively (Rueger, et al., 2016). This is consistent with

the participant's reflections on how his father's advocacy and his family's ongoing encouragement bolstered his confidence in the face of community hostility. The participant's narrative, supported by existing scholarship, highlights that family support plays a central role in shaping the well-being and resilience of individuals living with marginalised sexual identities. The extent of emotional acceptance, understanding, and advocacy offered by family members can significantly influence how homosexuals manage stigma, negotiate their identities, and sustain psychological well-being in challenging social contexts.

Discussion

The study reveals a persistent tension between exclusion by the wider community in rural areas and affirmation within the family. The exclusion manifests in discriminatory attitudes, derogatory language, and the imposition of heteronormative values that impacts one's sense of belonging. Family support on the other hand, emerged as a crucial site of affirmation and support, serving as a counterbalance to these negative experiences.

These dynamics are not unique to the participant, but mirror broader patterns in rural South Africa, where sexual identity is continually negotiated within the intersecting forces of culture, religion, and kinship structures. Research has consistently highlighted how rural communities often adhere strongly to traditional cultural and religious norms which continue to reinforce heteronormativity and stigmatise same-sex relationships (Msibi, 2013). Simultaneously, studies also point to the pivotal role of familial support in buffering against these external pressures, offering a protective layer that fosters psychological well-being and identity affirmation (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). In essence, while external societal forces constrain and silence sexual minorities, family support can enhance resilience.

Conclusion

This case study provides an in-depth account of how sexual minority lives and negotiates within a rural South African context, illustrating the continuing gap between constitutional protections and everyday experience. Although South Africa is internationally recognised for its progressive legal framework on sexual orientation, the participant's story

from Sekhukhune reveals that these rights are not equally felt across all contexts. In rural settings, culture, traditions, religious beliefs, and entrenched gender norms continue to shape social acceptance, often limiting the practical reach of constitutional equality. The study returns to the central concern raised in the introduction, citing that while legal transformation is essential, it does not automatically translate into social inclusion or personal safety for sexual minorities living outside urban centres.

This individual story also reflects wider social patterns in South Africa. It mirrors the country's ongoing struggle to reconcile progressive constitutional ideals with deeply rooted social attitudes. The participant's need to balance visibility with concealment, authenticity with conformity, and faith with rejection echoes the experiences of many sexual minorities in rural areas. His journey illustrates how rurality can intensify marginalisation, while also revealing the creative strategies people use to preserve dignity and belonging. The findings suggest that meaningful transformation requires more than legal reform, and calls for community engagement that includes families, religious institutions, and traditional structures. Efforts to promote inclusion in rural contexts must therefore be culturally sensitive and locally grounded, while strengthening existing sources of support, particularly within families.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The case study approach of a single participant is the main limitation of the study, as findings could not be generalised. While the narrative provides rich insights into the lived experiences of a gay individuals within a rural context, voices from individuals with varied backgrounds and identities could provide a more comprehensive understanding. The study further focused primarily on one geographical location, which may not fully represent the complexities of rural experiences across South Africa. Future research should consider including a larger and more diverse sample within rural context. A comparative study between rural and urban areas could provide deeper insights into how geography shapes the experiences of sexual minorities. Furthermore, investigating the perspectives of families, community leaders, and religious figures could enrich understanding of the social dynamics influencing LGBTQ+ individuals within rural communities.

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