

Unexpected challenges for LGBs in outer metropolitan areas

April 23 2015, by Verity Leatherdale

Lesbian, gay and bisexual Australians living on the outskirts of major cities experience similar levels of discrimination and social isolation to those living in rural and remote areas.

This surprise-finding is from the first nationwide survey comparing the experiences of LGB communities in a range of metropolitan and rural locations.

"This could have important implications for [health promotion](#) and service provision to vulnerable lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations," said James Morandini, a PhD candidate from the University of Sydney's School of Psychology and lead author of the study published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

"Previous research has found lesbian, gay and bisexual people in remote and [rural areas](#) experience higher levels of disadvantage than their city counterparts but the finding for people in outer city areas was unexpected."

The survey found those in rural-remote and outer metropolitan areas experienced similar levels of 'minority stress' such as internalised homophobia, concealment of sexuality from friends and concern regarding disclosure of their sexuality.

Compounding this disadvantage, LGBs in rural areas and outer city areas

also reported reduced social support relative to their urban peers, including less involvement in an LGB community.

The survey used a government census classification to define rural and metropolitan areas. It defines outer metropolitan as a location outside a 10km radius of the general post office of an inner city.

"Our findings reinforce those of past qualitative research, indicating that LGBs living in rural and remote Australia experience a greater likelihood of risk factors linked to adverse mental health outcomes including substance abuse and suicide," Morandini said.

"A tentative explanation for the unexpected findings from outer metropolitan areas is demographic factors such as low socioeconomic background, which are more highly represented in some of these areas and may contribute to a more stigmatising environment for lesbian, gay or bisexual people."

Those in outer metropolitan areas also reported increased social isolation, something not seen among the rural sample. The researchers suggest LGB individuals in outer [metropolitan areas](#) may face many of the disadvantages of rural LGB individuals without the protective factors associated with rural living such as close-knit and cohesive communities which can assist in countering the experience of [social isolation](#).

"A common sentiment from people in outer metro areas is 'I don't see or know about anyone else like me in my area or any services for people like me and I wouldn't feel comfortable being out to people in my neighbourhood, which is pretty conservative.' At the same time they were often aware of a large gay community in the relatively nearby [inner city](#)," said Morandini.

"These insights may assist in informing [public health](#) and health service

interventions to reduce homophobic stigma or discrimination in these localities, and in improving awareness among medical and allied health professionals of the disadvantage faced by LGB individuals in these areas," Morandini said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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