

## Abstract

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### **Navigating Barriers: Assessing the Healthcare Experiences of Rural Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)**

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**BACKGROUND:** While research has documented the healthcare experiences of men who have sex with men (MSM), studies have predominately featured urban populations, leaving rural MSM underrepresented in the research. Because the landscape of healthcare is different in urban versus rural areas (particularly in LGBT health), this study seeks to examine the healthcare experiences of MSM residing in rural Oklahoma.

**METHODS:** A total of 40, self-identified MSM (aged 21 through 66) living in designated rural areas were recruited and interviewed. Data was analyzed using a qualitative approach to identify themes and emerging concepts.

**RESULTS:** Three themes emerged from the data: First, cultural differences were cited by a majority of the participants as a central motif of their healthcare experiences, largely centered around the conservative and largely religious culture of Oklahoma, particularly in rural areas. Next, a sizeable portion of the participants commented that doctor-patient relationship quality was a contributing factor to either a detrimental or beneficial healthcare experience (i.e. when doctors learned the patient's sexual identity, the relationship deteriorated). Lastly, a final theme of the healthcare experiences of MSM was predicated on the idea of doctors having knowledge of current LGBT health issues and treatments (i.e. doctors uninformed about PrEP).

**CONCLUSION:** Certain healthcare aspects regarding the rural experiences of MSM that were identified differed between rural and urban MSM. Implications include support for programs that bridge the gap between practitioners and patients, while better informing both MSM and healthcare providers of current LGBT health issues.

Public health or related research Social and behavioral sciences

