



The impacts of social exclusion and inequality in rural communities: A qualitative study in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Social exclusion is a complex and interrelated process that consists of breaking social ties, reducing opportunities for social interaction, and eroding social cohesion. As ugly as it is, South African rural communities have high rates of inequality and social marginalisation. Both the South African Constitution and the National Development Plan 2030 consider poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion to be essential to national policy mandates. It is against that backdrop that this study adopts critical social theory (CST) and thematic analysis in order to explore this quandary that thwarts South African villages in the democratic era. The effects of social exclusion and inequality on rural communities in South Africa's Limpopo Province are discussed in this article. This qualitative study examines how frequently social exclusion, inequality, engagement quality, and its effects on rural areas are narrated. The study's findings show that, despite a patchy penetration of sectoral policies, social exclusion and inequality are not addressed in rural communities. The greater levels of social exclusion and inequality found in rural areas can also be explained by the association between residing in a rural area and higher levels of social exclusion and inequality. The study also recommends that instead of focusing only on financial inequality, policy makers should look at human poverty and the lack of capabilities in order to empower inhabitants of rural communities. This would assist them in addressing the fundamental structural causes of inequality and social exclusion.

Keywords: Inequality; Limpopo Province; Poverty; Rural Communities; Social Exclusion; South Africa; Unemployment

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1. Introduction

Three centuries of turbulent history have seen segregation in South Africa, where a wealth of literature has referenced many forms of inequality, from racial to economic (Terreblanche, 2002; Du Toit, 2007). The nation has seen significant economic disparity, poverty, and social exclusion in the early post-apartheid era (Adato et al., 2004). Social exclusion refers to the exclusion of people or groups from participation in mainstream social and economic life. In doing so the concept recognises the social aspects of poverty as well as the power relationship dimensions (Walter, 2016). Despite significant advancements in the last twenty years, there is still a significant amount of inequality and social exclusion. This study starts out with a conceptual discussion of social exclusion and inequality. After that, it examines the scope and importance of the issue in the particular rural South African communities, with a particular emphasis on the Province of Limpopo. In rural communities, the connection between social exclusion and inequality is also examined. The report then goes on to discuss the sector-specific human rights measures that are pertinent to social exclusion and inequality. Next, the effects of social exclusion and inequality on rural communities are discussed. A discussion of the South African Constitution's and the bill of rights' roles in combating inequality and social exclusion follows.

The study concludes with a rationale for the use of a human rights-based approach to reduce social exclusion and inequality, as well as the necessary actions to ensure that this strategy can be implemented in rural regions. Poverty is defined as a state in which people or families have significant welfare deficits (Barrientos, 2010; Britannica, 2024). On the other hand, inequality is the feeling of being less than others. While poverty focuses on those whose standard of living is below a certain threshold, inequality is linked to variations in living standards across the population as a whole (McKay, 2002; Soudien et al., 2018). Both concepts have narrow definitions that focus on a single measure of deprivation or disadvantage (often income), as well as broad definitions that consider a wider range of factors deemed necessary to fully capture the experience of being poor or disadvantaged (Plagerson and Ulriksen, 2016).

Since apartheid was lifted, South Africa has made tremendous progress towards eradicating poverty. Approximately 2.3 million South Africans were brought out of poverty between 2006 and 2015. During this period, the poverty rate fell from 51% to 40% using the national lower-bound poverty threshold, which is set at ZAR 758 per person per month at April 2017 prices (World Bank, 2018). The prevalence of poverty has decreased somewhat, but only gradually, and the country's rates of poverty among the upper middle class remain quite high., 55.5% of South Africans could not afford to meet their basic necessities in 2015 (Zizzamia et al., 2019; Stats SA, 2017). This is an increase from 53.2 percent in 2011 but a decrease from 66.6 percent in 2006.

Several of the advancements gained since 1994 run the risk of being reversed due to the reversal in the trend of poverty reduction between 2011 and 2015. These trends show that the general depth and severity of poverty significantly decreased between 2006 and 2015, which improved the livelihood of individuals living below the poverty line. However, over the past five years, particularly in rural areas, things have returned to their previous state. Unemployment is one of the primary causes of social exclusion and inequality in rural areas. Being unemployed puts one's health at risk, and the detrimental effects of unemployment on one's health are linked to both its psychological effects and the financial hardships it brings about. Looking at poverty more broadly, one facet of the suffering that jobless people go through is the loss of independence that results from their joblessness. Poverty and material deprivation are often the outcome of unemployment due to the loss of

benefits provided by the employer and the decline of income. Second, quitting one's employment can be a stressful event that throws off daily schedules and lowers self-esteem.

1.1. Social exclusion and rural inequality

According to Taket, Crisp, Nevill, Lamaro, Graham, and Barter-Godfrey (2009), social exclusion is a notion deeply embedded in our institutions of politics, culture, and economy. The person best recognised for having influenced the idea of France is René Lenoir. After Lenoir's initial attempt, a large body of literature has evolved that is thought to address a remarkably wide variety of social and economic issues and has considerably added to the already long list of those who are seen as "socially excluded" (Sen, 2000, Faisal, 2023). The failure of integrative institutions was a contributing factor in the rise of the concept of social exclusion in France and throughout Europe. As to Aasland and Flotten (2001), the concept of social inclusion has gained significant traction in European policy discourse, surpassing the notion of poverty by encompassing a broader spectrum of characteristics of individuals' lives. Francis (2000) emphasises the power of social exclusion in an attempt to illustrate the complexity of social deprivation, especially its institutional and cultural elements. Despite having its roots in France, social exclusion has spread to all past oppressed or unequal societies throughout history. Strong organisations like the World Bank have supported the concept, which has allowed it to spread swiftly over the globe in spite of criticism in places like Sub-Saharan Africa where concepts like poverty, sustainable development, human rights, and basic necessities are more important. There are two broad meanings of social isolation, and each suggests a different approach. The most widely used approach is the "shopping list method," which defines a "state" that certain groups experience by excluding others, including native peoples, the poor, the homeless, people with mental illnesses, and those with impairments (Popay, 2010).

A social exclusion lens is more important in sub-Saharan Africa than it is elsewhere since the reasons of poverty and injustice are more subtle there. In addition, emphasising social exclusion might help illustrate how social policy itself acts as an exclusionary force. Studies show that despite Africa's political and economic progress, social isolation has actually gotten worse over time (Ferreira and Ravallion, 2008). While many would argue that social exclusion is primarily caused by unemployment, Atkinson (1998) argued that social exclusion is not entirely a function of a country's or state's economic status. It is true that a person who is unemployed could not have enough money to maintain a subsistence lifestyle, which pushes them towards social marginalisation. On the other hand, many individuals who work may not be fully integrated into the society in which they live. Since more employment could result in a larger income disparity between low- and high-paid workers, social exclusion may neither decrease or disappear. Studies on inequality, which is strongly linked to social exclusion, frequently centre on income, although wealth, consumption, or any other appropriate proxy for well-being can also be used to measure inequality. According to Francis and Webster (2019), inequality in South Africa has not received the same level of attention as poverty for a decade.

Households in South Africa either face the prospect of sliding into poverty or are already living in extreme poverty. South Africa continues to have one of the most unequal wealth and income distributions in the world, and many families lack basic access to energy, clean water, health care, or education (May, 1998). Since inequality studies became a separate academic discipline relatively recently, two major narratives have evolved in South Africa. The first contends that the distribution of capabilities determines inequality (Sen, 1993), while the other suggests that the country's income distribution and market power may be the main

causes of inequality rather than the unequal distribution of capabilities (Francis and Webster, 2019). According to Francis et al. (2020), in 2015, the leaders of 193 states pledged to reduce inequality under Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Development Finance International (DFI) and Oxfam launched the first Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) index in 2017 as a way to evaluate nations' dedication to reducing the wealth gap. The three areas of social expenditure, taxes, and labour rights that have been demonstrated to be essential to reducing inequality are evaluated by the CRI index. It is predicated on an indicator database encompassing 157 countries. Inequality has not yet lessened in South Africa, despite the anticipated decreases.

Historical segregation has had an impact on the rural inequalities in Limpopo, this can be witnessed through the lack of equal distribution of resources. According to the National Census of 2001, Limpopo is home to 11.8% of South Africa's population. Measured by its total current income, Limpopo is ranked sixth of all the provinces in South Africa in terms of total income. In per capita income terms, however, the province is the poorest (SSA, 2003). Limpopo is marred by high poverty rates, inequalities in the distribution of income between various population subgroups, and unemployment. The people of Limpopo are very disadvantaged in terms of their per capita incomes, with African, rural and agricultural households, especially in the Bohlabela and Sekhukhune regions being worse off in terms of poverty rates.

1.2. South African Constitution and the bill of rights in addressing inequality and social exclusion

Francis et al. (2020) report that as part of Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 193 state leaders made a commitment to address inequality in 2015. In order to assess countries' commitment to closing the wealth gap, Development Finance International (DFI) and Oxfam introduced the inaugural Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) index in 2017. The CRI index assesses the three areas of social expenditure, taxes, and labour rights that have been shown to be critical to lowering inequality. It is based on an indicator database that includes 157 nations. Despite the predicted declines, inequality in South Africa has not decreased as of yet. Heywood's (2021) assertion that political attempts to reverse the systemic injustices resulting from apartheid are gradually diminishing and that South Africa's constitutional democracy is starting to fade, coupled with the possibility that the expectations of the impoverished will never be fulfilled, necessitates an examination of the contradictory factors that currently divide the country from the grandeur of its recent history.

After apartheid, political action in South Africa was meant to be defined by the Constitution's sections 26–29, which guarantee a variety of socioeconomic rights, such as housing, healthcare, food, water, social security, education, and child welfare. These sections also defined the framework for governance and policy direction (Ngang, 2021). The idea that economic policy should be developed with the goal of upholding rights and that decision-makers (as well as the judiciary when necessary) should evaluate the policy at every turn is supported by the structure, contents, and significance of the Bill of Rights to the overall Constitutional framework (Heywood, 2021). The principles of equality, freedom, and human dignity are upheld in Sections 7(1) and 8(1–2) of the Bill of Rights. These sections are meant to serve as a guide for the interpretation of all other laws, as well as for the actions of the legislature, executive branch, judiciary, and other state organs, as well as natural and juristic persons. Therefore, checking to see if a law or action complies with the human rights standards provided in the Bill of Rights is the only method to determine if it is pertinent and consistent with the Constitution (Ngang, 2021). No matter what the policies say, the foundation of South Africa's constitutional democracy is a determined attempt to eradicate the inequalities that unfairly limit the choices accessible to

the vast majority of people. The criteria for change outlined in the constitution are not fully upheld by the current administration.

1.3. Poverty rate in South Africa

Poverty can be deemed a crime against an individual's level of living. Because it is not affordable, poverty causes people to live lives that are inconsistent with their desires. A person enters a state of poverty when they are unable to pay for needs like clothing, food, and shelter. Similar to unemployment, poverty is a problem in many African nations (Dang & Dabalén, 2019). Africa's Sub-Saharan area is the most impacted. Azzarri and Signorelli (2020) underscore the significance of combating poverty within a state, positing that such efforts enhance the living standards of the populace. 50% of South Africans live in poverty due to the country's severe poverty issues (Francis and Webster, 2019; Mdluli & Dunga, 2022). The black population was purposefully denied a fair opportunity to engage in the economic operations of the state since poverty was more prevalent in South Africa during the apartheid era; things were marginally improved during the independence era. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution Africa (GEAR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the current programme, the National Development Plan (NDP), are just a few of the initiatives the South African government has attempted to implement since 1994 to combat poverty. More attention has been paid to providing free essential amenities including water, health care, and education through these programmes. The government has also made an effort to offer social security programmes, which are designed to help weak and financially incapable groups in society by giving them financial support. These include grants for children and the elderly, individuals with impairments, etc. According to data released by the South African Statistics in 2017, the country's poverty rates have been rising steadily since 2011.

In South Africa, economic inequality is thought to be one of the main causes of poverty. Francis and Webster (2019) claim that the failure to address the state's current economic structures and political reforms that perpetuate poverty and inequality in society is the reason that poverty and inequality persist in South Africa. In order to combat poverty in South Africa, new and efficient approaches to calculating total household income are needed, as well as better living and health conditions, especially in rural areas. A person was deemed impoverished in 2022 if their monthly income was 945, or about 51.02 USD, according to data released by Statistics SA (2023). Furthermore, according to official South African criteria, a person was considered to be living in poverty if their monthly food expenses came to 663 South African rand (about 35.80 US dollars). Furthermore, it has been reported that 50% of the population does not make R1417 every month, indicating that poverty is a natural state for them. Since most impacted residents cannot afford basic necessities like food, this effect poses major challenges to food security (Daily Maverick, 2021). In addition, there is significant income inequality in South Africa due to the country's high rates of poverty. Put another way, there is a growing divide between the wealthy and the powerful.

1.4. Unemployment rate in South Africa

South Africa's unemployment rate ought to be at least 6% by 2030. The government has set a goal of employing at least 2 million people through public employment programmes, or at least 61% of adults, in order to fulfil the Millennium Plan (Selebi, 2019). Additionally, make sure that by 2030, the GDP per person or per capita is

increased to R110 000 while maintaining price stability or continuous inflation. Additionally, the NDP intends to guarantee that the South African government owns a larger share of assets, for example, by making sure that the state's exports exceed its imports. In the global context, many governments continue to view unemployment as a major issue (Matyana & Thusi, 2023). Unemployment does occur in rich nations like the United States of America, England, Germany, etc., but it is far lower than in poor nations like South Africa (Ghavidel et al., 2011; Zemtsov, 2020). This is because of the types of economic endeavours and the state of technology in these nations. For instance, developed countries are more concerned with manufacturing, whereas developing ones are more concerned with developing raw materials. According to Metelerkamp et al. (2019), high rates of unemployment are a problem throughout Africa, affecting the majority of the continent's nations and regions, including South Africa. "South Africa continues to face stagnant economic growth, decreasing investment, and high unemployment," claim Pasara and Garidzirai (2020: 01). According to Nkhumeleni et al. (2022), the government continues to find the South African unemployment rate to be a significant concern. It is among the main causes of poverty. The unemployment rate in South Africa is mostly caused by a lack of knowledge and skills needed for the labour market (Maisiri et al., 2019; Maijama'a et al., 2019). In South Africa, the unemployment rate has been rising over time. The rate rose sharply during the Covid-19 epidemic. South Africa was listed as having the highest unemployment rate in the world in 2021. When examining individuals who are actively seeking employment alone, the unemployment rate was 34.4 percent; however, when accounting for or include job seekers who are not actively seeking employment, the situation became much worse, with the unemployment rate rising to 44.4 percent (Naidoo, 2021). According to the first quota of 2023, 32.9% of South Africans are unemployed, a significant ratio when compared to other nations globally, according to a recent report published by Statistics of South Africa. This percentage exceeds the 6% unemployment rate that the NDP hopes to attain by 2030 by 29,6%. This high percentage is brought on by the state's limited job possibilities, high rate of inflation, and sluggish rate of economic growth. The claim that South Africa has high unemployment rates and no easy way to lower them is further bolstered by Sekwati and Dagume (2023), who argue that the government must devise very smart methods to address this predicament.

1.5. Research question

This study's primary research question is: What are the impacts of social exclusion and inequality in rural communities?

2. Theoretical framework

While critical theory is laden with scepticism, critical social theory (CST) looks for amicable ways to transform and improve society (Gordon, 2011). White et al (2017) argue that rather than being sceptical about anything in existence, critical social theorists like Pease et al (2020) believe that the community can develop, transform, grow, and become more humane. The community under the CST perspective has a potential to be nurturing, caring, developmental, transparent, and comforting to all the people who live in it. Dobusch (2021) adds that in order to be developmental and comfortable for everyone, the community has to be inclusive of everyone in a sense that everyone must have dignity and a sense of belonging. In other words, CST does not only claim criticality about the status quo, but as Bemme and Behague (2024) argue it also encourages the betterment of

human condition in the community or society. In this study, this theoretical framework is most relevant because the researchers seek to explore the social issue of exclusion and development of the community for enhancement of freedom. In short, the researchers critically believe that all South African communities can change towards betterment through social inclusion than exclusion.

3. Methodology

Using a qualitative exploratory study approach, the effects of social exclusion and inequality on rural communities in the province of Limpopo were thoroughly studied. Using focus groups as a means of data collection, the study looked at the impacts of social exclusion and inequality in rural Limpopo. A purposive sampling technique was employed to choose participants (N = 20) for three (3) focus group discussions and five (5) in-depth interviews. Every focus group discussion was observed by the researchers, who also kept an eye on the recording equipment, drew a diagram of the seating arrangements, listened to notable quotes, took notes during the discussion, and gave an oral summary and feedback at the conclusion of each focus group session. Concerning unemployment and poverty, a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions guided the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The candidates were from the Capricorn District in the province of Limpopo in South Africa. About 35 miles separate it from Polokwane, the provincial capital, and the University of Limpopo, which is located about 25 kilometres east of the provincial capital (Alberts & Burger, 2002). To be examined for the study, volunteers had to meet a number of prerequisites. For starters, this study only included South African participants, and only those in the group between the ages of 35 and 90 were included, this age range providing rich responses on the experiences of inequality in the province. The qualitative data was managed using the NVivo programme. The majority of people living in the province of Limpopo are Black Africans. A theme analysis was used to display the results. The primary objective of the analysis is to detect, examine, and record patterns in the data, which are often referred to as "themes". Ethical considerations were considered, autonomy to ensure the participants were of free will to participate and withdraw as necessary. Written signed consent forms were provided for each of the participants and allowed for anonymity during the process of data generation. Pseudonyms were used as well to ensure the protection of the identity of the participants.

4. Results

The results presentation and the lectures that follow centre on two themes: unemployment and poverty. We highlight the findings with statements from the participants, mentioning the name of the residence and whether or not they participated in an in-depth interview or focus group discussion.

4.1. Poverty

Each participant in the study from a rural community was living in poverty. The interviewees stated that poverty is the main factor contributing to social exclusion and inequality. When questioned about what poverty meant to them, their answers showed a complex understanding of the term that went beyond precarious

financial situations. The participants recognised poverty as a human rights concern and a factor in social exclusion and inequality. One of the participants said:

"We live in hunger and unable to afford to buy food. Not having enough food to eat deteriorates our health. This does not only affect me alone, but also my family."

The impact of poverty on rural inhabitants was also investigated. People believed that social exclusion and inequality were negatively impacted by poverty. People would frequently blame poverty for symptoms like stress, depression, fatigue, and low self-esteem.

"I am bothered by my living condition. As a result, I become depressed and excluded socially."

"Poverty will always be a problem to people from rural areas, especially in Limpopo Province. Government should assist us with programmes that will eradicate poverty. This is really a concern for me and hope that our government will really address this."

"Due to poverty, I am now taking medication for depression. We are suffering. Most of us are not working."

Due to their experiences with poverty, they were disrespected by other residents of the rural town and experienced feelings of hopelessness, poor self-worth, and insecurity. One participant said that his poverty shaped both her identity and how other rural communities perceived him:

"It hurts to know that we are judged by what we have, but not who we are...This creates a feeling of not trusting myself...I sometimes feel hopeless."

"The experience of poverty has made me feel disrespected in the community. I feel insecure. The government has tried to propose policies to eradicate poverty, however, these policies are not implemented."

The participants also highlighted how poverty is a socially alienating status that causes them to feel stuck, unhappy, and depressed. It was an unfortunate fact for the majority of participants that they were unable to afford to attend social events (such neighbourhood and family get-togethers). They understood how difficult it was to remain strong in the face of hostility, censure, compassion, and humiliation.

"It is challenging for me to face every day with confidence since I believe that some members of the rural community view me as a shame due to my poverty. I become upset with myself occasionally and think, what did I do to deserve this poverty?"

"My family has become a burden to our neighbours, seeing that when we lack salt, cooking oil or mealie meal we run to them."

Because of our poverty, it is difficult for those of us who live in rural communities to engage in social activities. This makes me feel like a failure. A few of the participants' viewpoints are highlighted in the following passages:

"You feel completely inadequate as a woman or man due to your inability to support yourself financially and your poverty. This is incredibly unjust."

"We do try to start projects here, but the government does not fully support us. Last year, I started a project which did not materialise because of lack of financial support. My wish is to see the government implementing policies which will address the issue of poverty."

4.2. Unemployment

Unemployment came up as well during the participants' discussion of social exclusion and inequality. Getting a job was one way out of poverty. Their discontent was rooted in the lack of tools or support for landing well-paying jobs. Chances to improve their financial situation didn't appear to be abundant. The participants also stated that unemployment was the main cause of social exclusion and inequality. It was acknowledged that their unstable finances were lowering their standard of living and kept them mired in a never-ending cycle of debt and financial obligations. They expressed sentiments of frustration, anxiety, remorse, and hopelessness as they discussed how being unemployed affected them and how they never had enough money to meet their responsibilities. The following passages reflect some of the opinions expressed by the participants:

"The expense of life is high, particularly for those of us who are unemployed and experiencing physical hardship. The social assistance I receive for my two children is insufficient to cover the necessities for our family."

"Unemployment rate is very high in our province. National Development plan for 2030 hopes to achieve 29,6%. How will that be achieved if the government does not assist us with our projects?"

"Even if you are working, you get paid today and tomorrow, you do not have money to maintain your family. Our monthly salaries are very little to keep up with our daily lives and responsibilities."

"My boss just told me that the salary increase will be 2,4% this year. How am I going to survive with 2,4% when I am already struggling with my current salary? I am very frustrated since I am the only one working at home."

The participants' monthly household income came from social grants and their own business. The bulk of participants were pensioners, whose only source of income was an R2180.00 monthly old age payment. One person gave the following response when asked about their source of income or means of subsistence:

"I am unemployed at all. I depend on social grant."

It is obvious that unemployment may be a problem in rural places. A second observer concurred with the previous remarks and said:

"Sometimes I even fail to support my family with this social grant. It is very little."

A few respondents stated that it is challenging for them to land good jobs because they lack work experience.

"I quit attending school when I was in grade 11. You are aware of the cause. I had to go hunt for work, even though it was difficult for me to find any because I had no prior work experience."

"As an old man like this, I do not know the gate or entrance of a school. I grew up knowing that a man must become a herdsman."

5. Discussions

The literature shows that there has been substantial progress in reducing poverty in South Africa since the end of apartheid. The participants' explanations, however varied and vivid, demonstrated their understanding of the relationship between social exclusion and inequality and the causes of unemployment and poverty. Participants in this study were drawn from the rural population, as the majority of them experience social exclusion and inequality (Sliwa et al., 2014). Members of rural communities may face social exclusion and inequality for a number of reasons. According to the report, social exclusion and inequality are major causes of poverty and unemployment among many residents in rural communities. Poverty and unemployment lead to stressful circumstances.

Disadvantageous situations are conceptualised through social exclusion and inequality, which are commonly associated with poverty and work. They are all focused on the concept of material deprivation and the individual's resulting yearning, anguish, and suffering (Boardman, 2011). Levitas (1998) asserts that there are divergent views on the origins of inequality and social exclusion. One viewpoint highlights how poverty limits rural community members' ability to participate in social activities and leads to social exclusion and inequality. Similarly, it should be mentioned that social exclusion and inequality refer to various forms of economic, social, and psychological hardship that people living in rural areas go through since they lack the means to sustain a minimal level of living. It is a complex problem that impacts many aspects of day-to-day living, such as housing, education, health, nutrition, credit availability, income, consumption, and crisis management (Wazed, 2012). The inability of the participants to change their situation and meet some basic needs was their definition of poverty. Their remarks expressed horror, helplessness, and hopelessness. Many participants saw poverty as a violation of human rights and regarded it as a social justice issue when they were unable to achieve their basic needs. It should come as no surprise that the concept of poverty contained the feeling of shame, discrimination, and contempt felt by the poor person.

People living in rural areas of South Africa's Limpopo province are currently facing comparatively high rates of poverty and unemployment. Limpopo Province is the poorest province (48.5%) (Statistics South Africa, 2012). In addition to its economic aspects, poverty can also be defined as a profound lack of resources to lead a life that is at least passably pleasant (Vorster, 2010). The study showed that two hallmarks of poverty are low personal income and few employment opportunities. Numerous studies (Harris et al., 2011; Ataguba et al., 2011) have shown that people with the lowest socioeconomic position typically have lower health outcomes and are sicker. South Africa was shown to be among the countries with the highest unemployment rate (that is, adopting the restricted definition of unemployment) based on statistics provided by STATSSA (2008) (Kyei

and Gyekye, 2011). In the province of Limpopo, residents of rural communities had strong and positive predictions about unemployment (Kyei and Gyekye, 2011). A job helps in organising daily activities, provides financial support, and fosters a sense of identity. The CST as theory that guides this study will assist in transforming and improving the lives of rural communities. Furthermore, rural communities will have to be inclusive of everyone in the sense that everyone must have dignity and a sense of belonging. This study indicates that unemployment is the primary cause of social exclusion and inequality. While seniors make up the bulk of the community's population, some of them work as farm labourers on neighbouring farms. The area's unemployment rate is very high. The participants (N=20) depend on government social handouts to survive because of their low income. Social exclusion and inequality in rural areas are caused by a multitude of interrelated social, economic, and political issues (Albertyn, 2009). Customs, social norms, and traditions continue to shape the intricate relationships within rural civilisations, restricting their ability to engage in certain activities, obtain gainful employment, and become financially independent.

5.1. Recommendations

The challenges that poverty and unemployment offer should be known to social workers and other social service providers. These two issues are brought on by social exclusion and inequality. Social workers can play a proactive role since they regularly deal directly with people who are in danger. Social workers ought to assess inequality and social exclusion from a variety of perspectives and acknowledge that different issues call for different strategies to address them. Instead of focusing only on financial inequality, policy makers should look at human poverty and the lack of capabilities in order to empower inhabitants of rural communities. This would assist them in addressing the fundamental structural causes of inequality and social exclusion.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has few limitations. The aim of this study was to determine the impacts of social exclusion and inequality in rural communities, in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The main themes were poverty and employment. Future research may extend our findings by conducting similar research study in all nine provinces in South Africa. This research study should be conducted in order to validate if the findings of this study are also applicable to other provinces in South Africa. In terms of the limitations, some missing information (e.g. implementation and effectiveness of South African Government policies on eradicating poverty and reducing high rate of unemployment) can lead to different results. Future studies can be conducted with a larger sampling.

6. Conclusion

It is evident from each participant's individual tale that social exclusion and inequality are complex problems that have an impact on a variety of facets of their lives. In addition to a lack of financial means, the participants stated that low social involvement, restricted access to general services and education, and a lack of power, all contribute to social exclusion and inequality. But the main idea according to the findings is that social exclusion is one of the uncomfortable situations that some people commonly find themselves in. Even without much mention, this issue is one of the pertinent issues that seem to be at the height of undermining democracy and

freedom that all South Africans should be enjoying in this era. By far, this study argues that without social inclusion of all democracy and freedom of association in South Africa will continue being meaningless for those affected by social exclusion. South African government should implement all the policies on eradicating poverty and unemployment. This will help ensure that living conditions and the standard of living of many rural communities are improved and improved. This will also help reduce social exclusion, inequality, poverty and unemployment.

Declarations

Author contributions

M.M.: Literature review, methodology, data collection, recommendations Z.P.: data collection, data analysis, recommendations, references S.D.: data collection, results, conclusion. All the authors critically revised the manuscript and revised it. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declared that there were no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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