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Navigating rurality and oral health access in post-apartheid South Africa: Challenges and opportunities

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South Africa's history of segregation and discrimination has had a profound effect on its citizens. The current challenges facing the country are linked to its apartheid history. The socio-economic and present spatial design reflects this history and play out in both urban and rural contexts. While the impact of colonialism, apartheid and their resultant effects on the health of South African population have been highly researched, there is little to, no mention of the impact of these on oral health. According to the World Bank, 37% of the South African population is categorized as rural. Rural living is characterized by and associated with poor access to basic amenities like water and sanitation, healthcare services and transport, to name a few. Access to oral healthcare services is limited, with a large proportion of this care is provided by the state in rural communities and limited largely to the relief of pain and sepsis. The quality of and access to oral health services is determined along socio-economic lines. The country's shift towards radical health policies indicate that the country is ready to find innovative solutions to its health crisis. These developments offer an opportunity to develop solutions and further bridge the oral health access gap for rural communities. The modern rural economy offers untapped potential for oral health professionals. Additional research is needed to explore the potential of the rural economy while carefully navigating its inherent challenges, but this can no longer wait as the demand for services soars with migration into, population and the economic uptake of rural communities.

Biography

Bulela Vava is a Dentist with 4 years' experience in public sector working in rural South Africa. He has completed his Post-Graduate Diploma in Community Dentistry and has volunteer experience in healthcare advocacy. He is currently an Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity in South Africa.

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