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The Role of Social Support on Identity Disclosure and Concealment Among Sexual and Gender Minorities in Mauritius

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Abstract

This study examined how different forms of social support systems influence sexual and gender identity disclosure and concealment among LGBTQIA+ individuals in Mauritius, where cultural and religious norms, despite recent legal reforms, continue to stigmatize non-cisheteronormative identities. Drawing on Concealable Stigmatized Identities (CSI) Theory and the Rejection Sensitivity Model (RSM), the study explored how perceived support from family, friends, romantic partners, and online communities shaped identity management decisions. Cross-sectional, quantitative data from 123 LGBTQIA+ participants aged 18–45 were analysed using responses from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the Online Social Support Scale (OSSS), and the Nebraska Outness Scale (NOS). Correlational analyses and multiple linear regressions revealed that family support significantly predicted higher levels of identity disclosure, while support from other sources did not. No form of support significantly predicted concealment, though concealment was negatively correlated with non-familial offline support, suggesting that internalised stigma and heightened rejection sensitivity— amplified by systemic discrimination, family rejection, and institutional violence— could play a more decisive role. A Friedman test showed significant differences in social support systems, with family rated as least supportive and friends and romantic partners as most supportive, underscoring the importance of ‘chosen families’. These findings highlight the complex, context-dependent nature of LGBTQIA+ identity processes in Mauritius and call for culturally grounded interventions that address both interpersonal support deficits and the broader sociopolitical structures that perpetuate fear, concealment, and psychological distress.

Keywords: concealable stigmatized identities; lgbtqia+ studies; identity management; sociocultural norms; family support