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## THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN WHO RESIDE IN DRIEKOP MINING COMMUNITY OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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### ABSTRACT

Mining operations are envisaged to improve the conditions of members of their host communities (communities where they operate) by creating employment opportunities, developing infrastructure and enhancing their wellbeing. Yet despite these operations, research shows that these communities are underdeveloped and impoverished, and women are more severely affected than men. As an advocate for social justice, social work is instrumental in addressing these impacts, particularly through scientific research. This qualitative social work study explored the experiences and challenges of women residing in the Driekop mining community of Limpopo province, South Africa. The findings revealed that women experience both the benefits and challenges associated with these mining operations.

**Keywords:** challenges, experiences, mining community, social work, women

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Mining is one of the crucial sectors of the global economy. According to the 2016 update of the Mining Contribution Index Wider (MCI-Wr), mining remains an important part of the economies of many nations, the majority of which are the low- and middle-income economies (Ericsson & Lof, 2019). During the period 1996 to 2016, for example, the highest contribution by mining was mostly in Western, Southern and Central Africa, Oceania, Central Asia and Latin America, with the Democratic Republic of Congo ranked highest in terms of mining's contribution to the economy (Ericsson & Lof, 2019). With these contributions to the economy by the mines globally, the potential benefits for host communities are undoubtedly significant for the wellbeing of the surrounding communities, particularly on the African continent, where poverty and underdevelopment are rife. Host communities can benefit from improved

structural economic support because of the accessible employment opportunities (Chuhan-Pole, Dabalén & Land, 2017; Que, Wag, Awuah-Offei, Chen & Yang, 2018). Progressive measures for mitigating gender imbalances and the exclusion of women from the mining sector are also slowly becoming noticeable. After years of being a hyper-masculine industry, mining is becoming more feminised (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015). But despite this feminisation of mining, the participation level of women compared to men remains low (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015). Whereas the reality is that the mining sector does play a significant role in driving economic growth, developing communities and creating employment opportunities, it is equally essential to acknowledge the risks and challenges posed by this sector (Chuhan-Pole & Dabalén, 2017; Haddaway, Cooke, Lesser, Macura, Nilsson, Taylor & Raito, 2019; Smith, 2017). Among these negative activities is the environmental degradation and pollution that adversely impacts on the livelihoods of workers and agricultural production (Chuhan-Pole & Dabalén, 2017; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015).

The expansion of mining operations and their subsequent impact on agricultural production result in the emergence of non-farm employment opportunities that severely affect women in particular (Chuhan-Pole & Dabalén, 2017). Muponde (2021) cites the experience of Margaret Molomo, one of the women from Mokopane in South Africa's Limpopo province who suffered a huge blow as a result of mining operations. According to Margaret, it is mostly women who grow the food that will sustain their families, but as a result of the water and soil pollution caused by mining operations, these women have to travel far just to fetch clean water, while agricultural production in general is reduced. One of the arguments is that women bear the brunt of the adverse effects of mining more than their male counterparts do, and their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities are lessened because they are excluded from these opportunities (Lahiri-Dutt, 2019; Parks & Buitrago, 2018). This argument finds support in an observation by Chuhan-Pole & Dabalén (2017) which estimates that in some countries the probability that women live closer to a mine and work in sales and services is between 17 percent and 30 percent, while the reduction of their participation in agriculture is estimated to range from 10 to 20 percent. The Minerals Council of South Africa (MINCOSA) reported in March 2020 that in the mining industry women account for only 12% (Muponde, 2021).

Evidence shows that it is men who are likely to benefit from mining projects through employment, greater income and compensation more than their female counterparts, and that males are prioritised more than females (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Muponde, 2021). This exclusion of women is also noticeable when companies negotiate entry into host communities, where they would prioritise men as family representatives and exclude women (Ontario, 2014). Consequently, very few opportunities are created for women, forcing them to become caregivers of family members who are made ill by pollution, and housewives of the mineworkers, and to engage in risky behaviours such as sex work, which aggravates their vulnerability and exacerbates the gender inequality (Abrahamsson, Segerstedt, Nygren, Johansson, Johansson, Edman & Åkerlund, 2014; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Muponde, 2021).

A woman's life in Africa is generally characterised by poor economic conditions and challenges that are political and environmental in nature leading, among other things, to illegal mining activities that further expose them to crime, prostitution, rape and HIV/AIDS (Hove,

Nyamunda & Mukwambo, 2014). According to Que *et al.* (2018), where men dominate, women feel like subordinates, particularly in mining, which is stereotypically masculine. Que *et al.* (2018) further observed that women and men have different attitudes, responsibilities and knowledge when it comes to natural resources and that the gender division of labour is related to race, age, ethnicity and income. Turning a blind eye to these factors in our quest to understand the dimensions of mining operations from a social work research point of view will therefore undermine the entire project of social work as the advocate of social justice. Consequently, programmes and intervention strategies developed to address mining-related challenges but lack an empirical basis, as argued by Alston (2018), lead to structural disadvantages that are difficult for women to overcome.

Addressing the mining-related challenges should include the deliberate attempts by social work researchers to develop knowledge around the experiences and challenges of women, specifically in this study those women who reside in a mining community such as Driekop. Authors such as Lahiri-Dutt (2015) argue that the literature on industrial labour does not align adequately with feminist literature and that some of the key concerns in this regard are gender and the working class struggles in mining communities, and particularly women in mining. The significance of social work in addressing the challenges of women in the mining communities lies in the nature of social work as a profession. As noted by Dhavaleshwar (2016), social work is an organised profession aiming to extend a helping hand to individuals, groups and communities in order to help, improve and sustain themselves through various professional strategies. For social workers to be effective, an understanding of these factors must underpin their practice and research (Alston, 2018). This study sought to address this gap by exploring the experiences and challenges of women who reside in the Driekop mining community of the Limpopo province.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

A theory is a big idea for organising several other ideas for their explanatory power (Collins & Stockton, 2018). It is a broader framework for explaining ideas that emerge from a study. In understanding the experiences and challenges of the women in the Driekop mining community, researchers adopted a feminist approach as a theoretical framework. The word ‘feminism’ derives from the Latin word ‘femina’ meaning a woman, and was first used to address issues of equality and women’s rights (Riana, 2017). Central to a feminist approach is the empowerment of women by raising awareness based on their experiences (Gelling, 2013; Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019; Kiguwa, 2019). Thus, if we are to empower the women who reside in mining communities, such as Driekop, we need to focus on raising their awareness of the meaning of their experiences and challenges. Conducting research studies that deliberately investigate their experiences and challenges may be one of the means for raising awareness.

Feminist theories are founded on the notion that gender and specifically gendered racial inequality shape all aspects of social and economic life (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor & Tienari, 2019). Although there are various approaches to and types of feminism, the three common ones are liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). Liberal feminism originates from legal political ideologies and it uses legal means for achieving equal rights for women. Socialist feminism confronts the intersection of class and gender that

disempowers women. Radical feminism confronts patriarchy by calling for the rearrangement of society by eliminating male domination and oppression of women (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). All forms of feminism can be incorporated (by drawing lessons from each approach) in order to conscientise researchers, practitioners, organisations and communities about the plight of women. According to Kiguwa (2019), the general principles upon which the feminist theoretical framework is founded include the following:

- **Prioritising women’s experiences and voices in knowledge production:** this means researchers need to deliberately prioritise the experiences and voices of women in our research studies. According to Kiguwa (2019), part of the reason for prioritising women in knowledge creation is that most studies have focused on dominant groups such as men and not women. Adopting data-collection methods like semi-structured interviews, which enable participants to freely narrate their challenges would be one means for prioritising their experiences and voices.
- **Adopting multiple methodological framework:** in their quest to develop knowledge, researchers should adopt multiple methodological frameworks. Although qualitative research is in itself a single method, the use of diverse sources of literature, research designs, data-verification techniques and interviewing skills may enable implementation of this principle.
- **Understanding and engaging differences between and among women:** researchers should understand women in terms of the differences between and amongst them in order to present multiple ways of understanding their experiences, and to present the power that women across the world experience (Kiguwa, 2019). This principle requires researchers to avoid studies that will generalise the experiences of women. They should rather prioritise studies that promote an understanding of the diverse and unique experiences of women; hence this study adopted individual semi-structured interviews.
- **Flexibility in nature and practice:** research studies do not guarantee neutrality on the part of the researcher; hence this principle requires researchers to consider reflecting on their experiences and the possible impact they can have on the research process (Kiguwa, 2019).
- **Exploring the analytics of power in society and their intersecting impact on women:** Kiguwa (2019) posits that feminism seeks to challenge the arbitrary dichotomy prevailing between the individual and the social explanatory frameworks of gender by engaging the psychosocial dimensions relating to gendered subjectivity and practice. By engaging the dimensions of gender in terms of the challenges and experiences of women, researchers are undertaking an analysis of societal power and its impact on women.
- **Adopting an ontological view of patriarchy as a central organising principle in society:** this involves challenging historical and political perspectives on social relations that undermine the potential power and privileges of groups such as women in society (Kiguwa, 2019), including mining practices that contribute to marginalisation of women.
- **The principle of intersectionality:** this principle has its origin in the writings of black feminist theorists, who believe that it is important to deliberately take into account the

voices and experiences of marginalised groups such as black African women in particular (Kiguwa, 2019). The researchers took a purposeful decision to focus specifically on the experiences and challenges of women from Driekop (which is a predominantly black community).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with a qualitative research approach, which adopted an exploratory, descriptive and case study design. Qualitative research was considered appropriate given the overall purpose of the study, which was to explore the challenges and experiences faced by women who reside in the Driekop mining community. Furthermore, qualitative research is founded on interpretivist and constructivist philosophical paradigms (Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah, 2016). Whereas interpretivists seek to generally understand participants as opposed to predicting outcomes, constructivists believe that people construct their own understanding and knowledge by experiencing and reflecting on such experiences (Adom *et al.*, 2016; Tanh & Tanh, 2015). Both paradigms were considered relevant for this study given the ability of qualitative research to provide a systematic description and interpretation of the challenges and experiences of women living in the Driekop mining community from their own point of view (Haradhan, 2018). As argued by Creswell (2013), qualitative research is associated with problems that need to be explored because researchers want to hear the silenced voices (such as those of women in the Driekop community) and identify immeasurable variables (such as experiences and challenges). Exploratory qualitative research is a flexible strategy for providing the initial groundwork for future research and the relevance of this approach for this study was derived from the limited number of studies around the phenomenon under investigation (Thomas & Lawal, 2020). Regarding descriptive research design, the researcher is concerned with the ‘what’ as opposed to the ‘how’ or ‘why’ something happened. It seeks to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). A case study design is a type of research through which researchers study one or more cases such as an individual, community, a school, a hospital or a programme (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015), hence the Driekop community was chosen as the case for investigation.

Driekop is a rural settlement area situated in South Africa’s Limpopo province under the Sekhukhune District Municipality. It is a very impoverished area with limited access to running water and police stations, and mining is the main source of economic activity (Sekhukhune District Municipality, 2021). Researchers focused on this site because there was a lack of studies around the experiences and challenges of women who reside in this community. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who (a) had to be a woman of 18 years or older; (b) were residing in Driekop mining community; and (c) were willing to consent voluntarily to an audio-recorded interview. In total, thirteen participants were selected before saturation point was reached.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In upholding research ethics, the researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of South Africa’s Social Work Departmental Research Ethics Committee (Ref: R&EC: 26/1017/45878196\_09), after which permission was granted by the Driekop tribal authority to

access the research site. All participants consented to the study by signing informed consent forms, while confidentiality and anonymity were upheld by limiting detailed reporting on identifiable features as well as using pseudonyms for participants' real names. In securing the data, hard copies were transformed into digital data (scanned and saved as pdf files) and secured in the researchers' password-protected personal computers to which only the researchers had access.

## THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are presented through demographical profiles of the participants and analysis of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data collection. A total of thirteen African participants took part in this study, of whom nine were employed (with eight employed at the mine and one in the community). The remaining four were surviving through various self-employment activities such as running tuckshops. Four participants had post-matric qualifications (post-matric certificate, diploma or degree) and nine had high school certificates. Regarding age categories, five participants were in their thirties, six in their forties and only one was in her twenties. Table 1 below summarises the demographical data of the research participants.

**Table 1: The demographic profiles of the participants**

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Occupation	Educational qualification
1. Mmilo	33	African	Conveyor Belt Assistant	Grade 10
2. Mmupudu	48	African	Community Caregiver	Grade 11
3. Mogokgomeng	39	African	Laboratory Assistant	Grade 10
4. Mogwane	36	African	Unemployed	Post-matric Certificate
5. Mohloko	41	African	Performance Management Development Officer	Human Resources Management Diploma
6. Mohlwareng	47	African	General Assistant	Matric
7. Mohlwehlwe	21	African	Environmental Health Intern	BSc
8. Moilatsepe	44	African	Unemployed	Matric
9. Mokgokonkoane	50	African	Human Resource Development Officer	Commercial practice diploma
10. Molope	36	African	Unemployed	Grade 11
11. Moruleng	46	African	Social Worker	Bachelor of Social Work
12. Motlouma	38	African	HR Assistant	Matric
13. Motshidi	40	African	Unemployed	Matric

## THEMES AND SUBTHEMES THAT EMERGED FROM ANALYSIS

A total of five themes and 13 subthemes were generated from the data analysis. These themes are reported below.

### Theme 1: The benefits derived from mining operations

Regarding the experiences faced by women in the mining community, participants described several that were categorised under one theme and three subthemes, as introduced and discussed below.

***Subtheme 1.1: Benefiting from employment opportunities created by the mine***

Participants told researchers that, as a consequence of living near a mine, their lives changed for the better from a formal employment perspective. This is what Moloko had to say:

*I came in this community looking for employment and I have also brought my family to stay with me since I started working here... The positive side for me was that since I came here I managed to get a job and I could bring my family and all is well up to so far.*

Another interview which reflected the benefits of employment opportunities was conducted with Mogokgomeng, who said:

*Life has been great because I am working, and I managed to improve my education.*

In supporting this point, Mohlwareng also explained the benefits of the mining community through the creation of employment opportunities.

*The mine gave me an employment opportunity and since I started working I can provide for my children. With the job opportunity, my life has changed.*

Unemployment and the need to provide for families, as noted by Benya (2015), appear to be the main drivers behind the motivation of the women to look for employment opportunities in the mines. Being employed in the mine for women like the participant Mohlwareng means that the entire family is in a better economic position, since their dependants' needs can be met. Visaya-Cenisa (2015) mentioned that women use mining employment opportunities as a survival strategy to care for their families. Whereas women's participation in the mine is one of the benefits (Lahiri-Dutt, 2019), the sector also benefits the entire family. According to Ackerman, van der Walldt and Botha (2018), about 4.5 million dependants are supported through the mining sector, and the livelihoods and income of a significant number of families depend on this sector. This evidence clearly indicates how beneficial the sector is for the women and their respective families.

***Subtheme 1.2: Benefiting from self-employment opportunities created by the mines***

Another subtheme extracted from the accumulation of economic benefits from the mining operations was the self-employment opportunities created by the mines. This emerged during an interview with Molohe:

*The truth is that the mine cannot hire everyone, and that is why some of us look for opportunities to provide for ourselves like running Spaza shops, selling food near the mine, even lending people money.*

An opportunity for self-employment was also highlighted during our interview with Mmilo, who implied that people with health conditions and age limitations also have an opportunity to take up self-employment in this community. This is what Mmilo told researchers:

*I believe with the mine operations the community has the potential to provide other employment opportunities like taking part in the tender businesses and even renting rooms. And because a lot of people are working, selling products is becoming financially effective and beneficial.*

Mogwane, who was also employed by the mine, explained how she supplements her income through self-employment initiatives:

*And I am also selling Tupperware and Avon to supplement what the mine is giving me.*

In line with the participants' narratives, Lahiri-Dutt (2015) states that the major benefits of mining operations are not necessarily in direct employment by the mine itself, but in the booming economy, and the employment and business opportunities resulting from mining operations. This is a view shared by several researchers (Abrahamsson *et al.*, 2014; Benya, 2015), who observed an opportunity for informal employment, particularly among women in mining communities. As champions of the interests of vulnerable populations such as women in the mining communities, social workers can facilitate community-based economies by forming enterprises that improve the socio-economic conditions of families or supporting existing ones (Sambo & Spies, 2014).

***Subtheme 1.3: Benefiting from staying closer to the workplace by living in a mining community***

The last subtheme under the theme "Benefiting from mining operations" deals with accessibility to a workplace by virtue of living in the mining community, particularly for women who are employed by the mine. Among the interviews that supported this subtheme was the one conducted with Mogokgomeng, who revealed that for her:

*The positive thing about residing and working in this community is that it is economically viable... I am residing with my children and most of my family in the same environment and is very conducive.*

Mokgokonkoane supported Mogokgomeng's sentiments:

*Is very important for every family to stay closer and together, and now that I work with my husband and my kids are around I think it helps financially and socially.*

In another interview with Motlouma, it became very clear that residing in Driekop mining community made life easy, as she explained:

*...now that I am closer to home, I can see my kids regularly and I know their development and challenges.*

From the above extracts, it is clear that the presence of a mine in the community has made things easier for participants, particularly their proximity to the workplace. This part of the findings seems to contradict the result of Kotsadam and Tolonen (2015), whose data revealed that a woman lives on average 246 km away from a mine and 363 km away from an active mine. Proximity to a workplace can have some advantages as well as disadvantages. It has been found, for instance, that as much as the mine provided women with opportunities for employment, some disadvantages such as noise, vibrations and gigantic machines that were seen moving around the area sparked fear and a sense of insecurity among them (Botha & Cronjé, 2015).

Our data also revealed that being a resident of Driekop mining community did not only bring formal and self-employment opportunities to women, there were also several challenges faced by the women. Their comments in this regard were categorised into three themes: the gender-based challenges, the general social challenges, and community development-related challenges.

### **Theme 2: The gender-based challenges**

The second theme that emerged from the analysis addressed the gender-based challenges faced by the women of Driekop mining community and this theme was divided into two subthemes: “The mine’s preference for men over women in terms of employment” and “Gender stereotypes around the community and within the households.”

#### ***Subtheme 2.1: The mine’s preference for men over women in terms of employment***

Participants alluded to the way in which they felt subjected to unfair discrimination by the mine, which preferred male applicants over females in its recruitment process. Mogwane supported this by saying:

*... the mine only hires twenty percent of women which most people are not aware, and that brings in the issue of knowledge/experience, skills and education into effect because now the competition increases in that I do not have anything above matric in the soft skills....*

Along similar lines to Mogwane’s view, Mohloko was also not impressed by the fact that males were preferred more than their female counterparts. In Mohloko’s case, being employed in the high-paying jobs such as underground work was more challenging, while her male counterparts found it easy. She described her experiences by saying,

*For example, there are certain jobs, especially underground, that pays more than administrative job and I tried to apply, and I was never shortlisted and the panel cited [lack of] experience, but my mind tells me it is because I am a woman and very few women are driving underground and it is really sad that gender programmes are [evident] only on paper but none in practical.*

Mmilo also expressed her disappointments regarding the mine’s preference for males:

*...the way I struggled to get an opportunity was just too difficult as compared to our male counterparts. Sometimes even being employed in the contracts or on a contract basis was a challenge....*

What is reported by the participants corroborates some of the observations made by Leburu-Masigo (2020), who states that patriarchal attitudes often result in men being more privileged than women. The literature has established that resistance to women in mining entrenches unfair discrimination and perpetuates unfavourable practices as far as women are concerned (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Moraka & van Rensburg, 2015; Nxele, 2016). Authors like de Klerk, de Villiers and van Staden (2015) are of the view that regardless of the South African mining charter’s prescription of 10% of women in the mining industry, women still face discrimination during the recruitment processes at the mine. Similar sentiments are echoed by Botha and Cronjé (2015), who state that mines still prefer men over women, regardless of the targets sets

by the Chamber of Mines. In a study aiming to evaluate the impact of industrial mining on local economies within a context of a developing country, Nxele (2016) found in what she described as the “hypothesis of mining impacts on communities” that there was a strong gender bias evident in the lack of employment opportunities for women in the Rustenburg mining area.

Generally, women’s participation in the large-scale mining sector is low, whilst in the small-scale mining sector their participation is often restricted to risky and low-value roles (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) observed that formal employment opportunities are generally granted to men because of the lower levels of education of women and some gender stereotypes that are perpetuated by socio-cultural factors. The entrenchment of gender-based discrimination in the recruitment practices of the mines is also evident in Benya (2015), whose study of the occupational culture in the mines revealed that women are subjected to a rigorous recruitment practices and skills audit such as demanding possession of a matric certificate (school-leaving certificate), while their male counterparts can simply refer to their experience and not qualifications. Kotsadam and Tolonen (2015) observed that those women who happen to be employed in the mines are often segregated into the services and sales sectors, and not production and manufacturing like the male employees.

Alongside the discriminatory practices of the mine on the basis of gender, women were also subjected to gender-role stereotypes by community members and members of their own households.

### ***Subtheme 2.2: Gender-role stereotypes in the community and in their households***

Emerging from data on the gender-based challenges in Driekop mining community were also gender-role stereotypes from both the community and the households of the participants. Attesting to this was a comment in an interview with Mohlwareng, who told researchers that:

*[some] of the challenges women face in the community are patriarchal by nature in that there are women whom their husbands does not want them to work in the mines even though the mines... Even me, my husband did not want me to work and I sometimes feel like he is jealous of me.*

For Moilatsepe, her family took issue with her participation in the community forums, which are aimed at lobbying the mine to employ people from the neighbourhood. She explained her predicament by saying:

*My husband and in-laws are against me taking part in the forum because I am a woman and my family think that I don’t need a job and taking part in the community forums is for people who need employment and to a certain extent I feel like being a woman is not important to my family.*

In the case of Motlouma, her husband was one of those perpetuating these gender-role stereotypes:

*... as a woman, I am expected to earn less than my husband and with my situation that is not happening, because I started working on the mine before my husband, and that means my salary is more than his considering the work I am doing and that has*

*caused challenges in my household, because whatever I do he refers to the salary as the issue.*

Participants' narratives should be understood in the context of Alston's (2018) view that when societal resources are distributed, the ideals of motherhood and family restrict women to marginalised positions. What is expressed by the participants above reflected the patriarchal nature of some parts of our society, which generally associate women with unpaid care work as opposed to actively taking part in the labour market such as mining.

Leburu-Masigo (2020) observes that patriarchal values and social norms that encourage male dominance, control and power over women, perpetuating their subordination, are still valued and prevalent across the races and ethnic groups in South Africa. Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka (2014) note that women across different regions, socio-economic classes and cultures spend most of their time trying to meet the expectations of their domestic and reproductive roles. It is these societal expectations highlighted by the participants that prevented women from participating in the mainstream economy as the employees of the mine and key role players in decision making. According to Chisale (2015), African and Chinese cultural norms encourage women to prioritise marriage over a career, something which can also be seen from the narratives of participants, like Molohe, whose in-laws find it difficult to accept her involvement in community forums aimed at addressing the interests of women in the mining community. A Rwandan research study by Buss, Rutherford, Hinton, Steward, Lebert, Côté, Sebina-Zzizwa, Kikombo and Kisekka (2017), highlighted some of these expectations, which often manifest as misconceptions and stereotypes that women working in the mine lack good manners. It is most unfortunate that some of these expectations and misconceptions are also evident within the immediate households of these women. Similar societal expectations were reported by Dinye and Erdiaw-Kwasie (2012) in their study of gender and labour-force inequality in small-scale gold mining operations in Ghana, where the careers and roles of married women were determined by their husbands. The reports by participants of the current study are also a reflection of the cultural feminist approach, which describes the challenges that women face as deriving from the value that patriarchy attaches to their qualities (Pasque & Wimmer, 2010). In addressing some of the above misconceptions, Alston (2018) argues that social workers should challenge these ideological misconceptions and advocate for changes in the structural arrangements that impact negatively on the lives and wellbeing of women.

### **Theme 3: The general social challenges**

The general social challenges that were reported by the participants were exposure to crime and violence, exposure to alcohol and substance abuse, and exposure to prostitution, infidelity and sexual exploitation.

#### ***Subtheme 3.1: Exposure to crime and violence***

Mining operations have the potential to introduce various kinds of crime and violent activities that impact on women. Mohlwehlwe attested to this by saying:

*My discomfort in the community started when community members started fighting over control of the community leadership in relation to the mine and community*

*trusts, because instead of that bringing the community together, it actually brought violence and mistrust among community members.*

For participants like Mogokgomeng:

*The mine has brought work but also an increase in house robbery... Crime affects me in different ways, like financially, because I have to find someone to take care of my kids when I am not around and psychologically is challenging because I am always worried about the wellbeing of my children and family.*

Although Mogwane did not indicate her personal experiences regarding crime, she mentioned her concerns:

*It is worrisome that young people from our community take part in criminal activities, because I can say at least in each family there is one person working, but as peaceful as our community used to be, it is no longer the same, instead the community is scary with violent activities every now and then.*

Crime was also raised as an issue by Mokgokonkoane, who explained how as a migrant worker she was threatened with violence. This is what she told researchers:

*I remember when the community riots started. Though people were talking in general, there were questions about how I was appointed, while there were women in the community that were not employed, and they even started calling [me] names about where I came from, and it was not a nice situation because I was always on the edge wondering what would happen next.*

The above accounts confirm that women bear the brunt of criminality and violence. Research evidence demonstrated that mining zones can indeed be hostile for women (Kotsadam, Østby & Rustad, 2016). Some researchers are of the view that violence in the mining communities is influenced by an inherently violent culture that prevails in the mining sector (Kotsadam *et al.*, 2016). The view held by researchers is that all boom communities undergo upheaval, particularly because crime always follow the boom (Ruddell, Jayasundara, Mayzer & Heitkamp, 2014). Boom communities are characterised by rapid population and economic growth (Ruddell *et al.*, 2014). As a result, the law enforcement agencies in these communities become stretched thin because of the demand for services. An examination by Ruddell *et al.* (2014) of the boom-crime relationship in resource-based boom countries revealed the existence of a relationship between crime and resources in the emerging mining communities. A quantitative study conducted by Kotsadam *et al.* (2016) in 15 sub-Saharan African countries aimed at determining whether prevailing norms moderate the effect of the exploitation of resources, with a specific focus on mineral mining and domestic violence, revealed some interesting dynamics on this topic. Their study found that mining can lead to domestic violence in areas of a downsized mining sector, resulting in a number of grievances as in Zambia, for example, as opposed to the operations in Tanzania that are associated with goldrush and a generally optimistic outlook and less traditional lifestyle. The findings by Kotsadam *et al.* (2016) regarding the downsized mining sectors above is not really surprising in the light of Axbard, Poulson and Tolonen's (2015) view that criminal activities like burglary and robbery often take place as a result of a decline in the level of mining productivity, leading in turn to

lower income opportunities for workers and the community. A study conducted by Atim, Mwangoka and Martins (2020) in South Africa and Tanzania, focusing on sexual and gender-based violence in the mining sector in African countries, found that violence against women in Tanzania and South Africa often goes unreported because women fear that their partners will lose their jobs as a result of sexual and gender-based violence reports.

Furthermore, mining operations are attractive to single men, which has the potential to increase alcohol-related offences, drug abuse, property-related crimes and domestic violence (Atkinson, Schenk, Matebesi, Badenhorst, Umejese & Pretorius, 2016; Ruddell *et al.*, 2014). Women often find themselves at the receiving end of these crimes. Violence is also perpetuated by high levels of unemployment, and is often characterised by scapegoating of migrant workers by local inhabitants who accuse them of taking employment opportunities from them (Mensah & Okyere 2014; Negi 2014). In some instances violence and conflicts are as a result of poor consultation with community members by the mine and misinformation by community leaders, particularly regarding any rewards and benefits associated with the operations (Mensah & Okyere 2014). Gxubane (2017) states that crime should not be seen simply as an offence committed against the state; it is also a violation of people's relationships, which therefore means that social workers are among the central role players in attempts to eradicate it. The role of social workers in addressing crime-related challenges is also emphasised by participants in Phillips and Abdulla's (2021) study focusing on the experiences of judicial officers regarding the inclusion of victim impact reports during the criminal justice process, who expressed the need for social workers to be involved in the criminal justice systems.

Violence and substance abuse go hand in hand, with substance abuse aggravating violence and violence leading to substance abuse.

### ***Subtheme 3.2: Exposure to alcohol and substance abuse***

Another issue that was reported as part of the social problems faced by the participants was being exposed to alcohol and substance abuse. Molope explained how she is worried about the increasing number of liquor outlets in the community. This is what she told researchers:

*As a parent I am concerned about the upbringing of my children. I am around most of the time, but I am worried about the number of bottle stores in the community... Seeing your eighteen-year-old child coming home drunk is not a nice thing to see...*

Exposure to alcohol and substance abuse was also raised during our interview with Mogokgomeng, who explained that she is concerned about the impact of crime and drug abuse on the youth, particularly her own children:

*With the crime rate and drug abuse among the youth, I worry as a parent of what is happening to [my] children when I am not around... It affects one psychologically as a parent that my kids might find themselves involved in wrong things.*

Mmupudu was also worried about liquor stores that could easily attract children, particularly because the community did not have recreational programmes for them:

*There are more [liquor stores] than schools and as a mother to girls, I am concerned because without any programmes or activities to keep our children busy, they are exposed to wrong things at an early age.*

Although an argument could be made that substance abuse and alcohol abuse are common in the average South African communities, the literature points to the extent of these problems, particularly within the mining communities. One of the observations made by Lovell and Critchley (2010) is that a lack of, or poor, social facilities in mining communities along with a high disposable income contributes to alcohol and substance abuse in the mining communities. A South African study by Rice, Boccia, Carter, Weiner, Letsela, de Wit, Pursell, Jana, Buller and Gafos (2022), focusing on the health and wellbeing needs and priorities in the country's fifteen mining host communities, revealed that alcohol is the most commonly misused substance, followed by cannabis, compounds mixed with pharmaceutical products, codeine and nyaope (a South African street drug). The impact that substance and alcohol abuse had on the host communities included school drop-out, child neglect, teenage pregnancy, crime, gangsterism and gender-based violence (Rice *et al.*, 2022). Smook, Ubbink, Ryke and Strydom (2014) also state that individuals residing within the ten-kilometre radius of the mine are more likely to have excessive alcoholic drinking tendencies than those who remain out of the mining community. It is therefore not surprising to hear participants' concerns about their communities being characterised by substance and alcohol abuse as some of the challenges. The culture of the mining communities generally contributes to the social challenges such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence and prostitution (Lozeva & Marinova, 2010). The employment opportunities created by the mine for the residents may also contribute to the community's social ills by dissolving the personal and community social relations as a consequence of the impact of alcohol and substance abuse. Substance abuse might be seen as a coping mechanism for migrant miners who feel isolated from their families in their search for employment.

### ***Subtheme 3.3 Prostitution, infidelity and sexual exploitation***

In addition to alcohol and substance abuse, participants reported that the mining activities contributed to prostitution and infidelity. Mokgokonkoane attested to this by saying:

*And with the trucks coming in and out of the mine and some parking not far from my house, they attract prostitutes and I sometimes must explain to my kids the type of work these women roaming around the trucks are doing. I am afraid of the impact on my children.*

Moruleng described how, as mothers, they are affected by infidelity:

*Moreover, ... they [referring to migrant workers] start engaging in sexual relationships with women in the community. In addition, some of the women get into those relationships for wrong reason like hoping to get money or be supported. And some of these men sometimes just use our kids or young women for sexual pleasure and leave them with kids, and that affect mothers because when a child gets pregnant, as a mother you take responsibility.*

Molope expressed her concerns regarding infidelity in clear terms:

*Let me put it this way, one of my pain, though, is indirectly [caused] by my husband, is also from another woman who does not respect my marriage. And that is also perpetuated by men's ideology of entitlement in that I am a man, cheating is not an issue.*

Concerns regarding prostitution, infidelity and exploitation in the mining communities have been flagged by several researchers and authors (Kounta, Sagaon-Teyssier, Balique, Diallo, Kalampalikis, Mora, Bourrelly, Suzan-Monti, Spire & Keita, 2019). An African study of sexual and gender-based violence in the mining sector by Atim *et al.* (2020), for example, revealed that artisan and small-scale mining communities are often characterised by sexual abuse and exploitation of women. According to Nxele (2016), the establishment of squatter camps in mining communities increases crime, rape and communicable diseases such as TB and HIV/AIDS. It was also found in Uganda that women who were working in the mining sector often traded sex in order to get favours from men (Atim *et al.*, 2020). Another study by Bashwira and van der Haar (2020) seeking to account for women's migration to the mining communities in the DRC found that women who engage in prostitution move to the mining areas seeking rich miners and the prospects of success in their trade is even higher if the level of mining production is high. The challenges associated with mining, according to Atim *et al.* (2020), should not mask the advantages that women derive from these communities. The findings of the study by Atim *et al.* (2020) are supported in a multi-country analysis of the local employment impacts for men and women of large-scale mining on the African continent by Kotsadam and Tolonen (2015), whose findings revealed that as much as the mining operations lead to a decline in agriculture, there was also an increase in employment opportunities for women in the services sector. The need to address issues of prostitution, infidelity and sexual prostitution is central to social work, and achieving social justice in these areas is of paramount importance to social workers and the social work profession. According to Ogbomo, Jardstedt and Gran (2019), social workers have always been working to address sex work-related issues. The concerns raised by participants therefore suggest a need for social work interventions to assist in addressing these challenges.

#### **Theme 4: Community development programmes-related challenges**

The challenges pertaining to community development included the failure by the mine to contribute to developing community infrastructure and the lack of empowerment programmes specifically for women.

##### ***Subtheme 4.1: The mine's failure to develop community infrastructure***

Despite the presence of a mine in the community, participants reported that infrastructure in the area is underdeveloped. This underdevelopment appeared to be a concern particularly because the mining operations have various structural impacts on the area. This was highlighted by Mohlwareng who said:

*...the other challenge that seems not to be resolved is the infrastructure. ...The mine has been operating for over fifteen years, but we still don't have water. The roads are a mess and when it is raining is difficult to move around and yet there is nothing I can point.*

For Mohlwehlwe, her expectation was for the mine to assist in developing infrastructure:

*I believe that the mine was supposed to be assisting the community with certain things, especially the basic infrastructure services like water and roads construction.*

The issues of access to clean running water and roads that are in good condition were also raised by Mokgokonkoane:

*Yes, I understood that this is a rural area or community but having water for anyone, especially clean running water is a need that everyone should not struggle to have, but here I am having to struggle with water, and again, the roads are bad, and worse during summer or rainy seasons.*

The infrastructure-related challenges of the mining communities go to the very heart of social work and should therefore be a course for concern for these professionals. Social workers are professionally bound to be concerned with the whole person, within the context of family, community, society and the natural environment, and to understand the entirety of their lives (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). In the context of mining, this suggests that social workers should be concerned about the impact of the operations on the community infrastructure, which in turn affects the living conditions of the families and individuals and can further aggravate the conditions of vulnerable groups such as women. Turok, Smith and Moola (2017) observed that mining companies do not have a glowing record when it comes to community development. This has been the case for centuries, as documented by authors such as Eduardo Galeano, who documented the misery wrought by the Spanish conquistadores as they emptied the bowels of earth in South America, and by Adam Hochschild who, in his *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998), describes the brutal dehumanization of Congolese people while the mineral resources were exploited in the 1890s. In South Africa the British colonisers subjected Africans to underground labour, while their shanty towns mushroomed on the periphery of Johannesburg. What the participants described seem to be a continuation of these historical practices (Turok *et al.*, 2017), which therefore raises the question of the significance of the role of social work as a profession championing the interests of social justice. For women, these infrastructural impacts are more severe. A South African study by Davies and Mundalamo (2010) for instance, has established that polluted water from the mines leads to nutrient deficiency and contamination of the soil, in turn having a causal impact on the osteoarthritic disease that afflicts two thirds of women. Infrastructure-related challenges are a social work issue, given the profession's commitment to embracing a human rights approach to nature, ecological injustice and the creation of sustainable environments (Powers & Slominski, 2017).

#### ***Subtheme 4.2: Lack of empowerment programmes for women***

Concerns were raised regarding the absence of women's empowerment programmes. The participants felt that the mine and government should support women in one way or another, so that they can develop the means to survive in this community. Moilatsepe explained the need for the mine and government to assist in promoting humanitarian programmes for women:

*I just wish that the mine could assist women in the community... And I just wish that there could be programmes that accommodate those who cannot be employed in the*

*mine with income-generating programmes, because the mine cannot employ everyone.*

Mohlwareng also thought the government and the mine have a role to play in creating opportunities for women:

*... if government and the mine could provide women with opportunities, especially those who cannot work in the mines, be empowered and funded to start their own businesses, it would make a huge difference in so many people's lives.*

The need for empowerment programmes for women was also raised by Mmilo:

*In addition, I just wish the mine and the government can have programmes to [develop] skills [for] women and I would take part.*

Women empowerment is an important national priority. During his speech for the inaugural Women Economic Assembly, President Ramaphosa reiterated that empowering women is integral to achieving inclusive growth, creating job opportunities and expanding economic opportunities for all (South African Government, 2021). According to Nxele (2016), women could potentially be empowered through horizontal economic linkages stimulated by mining, but they are not necessarily empowered by the overall mining sector because of a decline in their overall participation in mining. Pimpa (2019) undertook an investigation in Thailand of the impact of corporate social responsibility programmes on gender equality and life experiences of female workers; he found that the mining company initiated activities that enable house husbands to discuss strategies to support their wives. Most of the women participants from his study confirmed that the mining company does promote representation of women in various activities such as microfinance training schemes and that they are even engaged in traditional male roles (Pimpa, 2019). Since social workers play a crucial role in leading projects or programmes sanctioned for the community, their involvement in educational programmes for women in this community is essential (Dhavaleshwar, 2016). It is therefore crucial for social workers to encourage the creation of more opportunities to reduce gender violence and liberate women from male subjugation as a result of domestic violence, which increases poverty among women.

## CONCLUSION

This study adopted a feminist approach by affording women an opportunity to share their experiences through an investigation of the impact of societal power dynamics have on women in a mining community. It contributed to women's empowerment by raising consciousness of the experiences and challenges faced by these women, such as the benefits of employment, self-employment and proximity to workplaces, while at the same time highlighting the challenges associated with the impact of mining operations. The study corroborated the central tenets of feminism by enabling women to challenge historical and political perspectives on social relations through addressing their concerns regarding unfair discrimination perpetuated by the mining industries' recruitment processes and the dominant patriarchal culture in their communities and households. Their exposure to crime and violence, alcohol and substance abuse, as well as prostitution, infidelity and sexual exploitation, justifies the radical feminists' call for a rearrangement of society by eradicating male domination and the oppression of

women. The need to address inequality by empowering women was highlighted through the expression of the frustrations regarding lack of infrastructural development and empowerment programmes for women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study prompted the following recommendations:

- Some educational programmes to empower women and educate the communities around the gender-related issues should be designed and rolled out by social workers in the Driekop community;
- Social workers should lobby for sustainable mining operations as prescribed by legislation such as the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act No. 28 (RSA, 2002);
- Social workers should support women in initiating community structures aimed at preventing crime, violence, drug and substance abuse, and prostitution by promoting dialogue and mutual support based on the principles of *ubuntu* in the Driekop community;
- Social workers should facilitate the design and promotion of programmes that are aimed at enhancing solidarity and economic independence among the women in the Driekop community;
- Further research of a broader scope should be conducted from a social work disciplinary angle examining the experiences and challenges facing women in South Africa's mining communities in order to determine the full extent of the problem.

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