



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CULTURE AND THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SMALL-SCALE MINING IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of culture in women's participation in the small-scale mining sector in the Bindura District, Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. The research explores the influence of cultural beliefs, the effects of a patriarchal value system, and the social status of women on their ability to actively engage in and participate in gainful activities in the small-scale mining sector. The research is anchored in the glass ceiling theory, the biological theory, and the symbolic interaction theory. These theoretical frameworks were instrumental in shaping the understanding of the systematic challenges women encounter in a typical male-dominated environment. The study adopted a descriptive research methodological approach, selecting a population of 60 women actively engaged in small-scale mining activities in the Bindura District. Judgmental and snowball sampling approaches were used to identify specific women in the small-scale mining sector as respondents to this research. Data were collected via questionnaires using a drop-and-pick method and analysed in SPSS version 25 using descriptive statistics. Respondents' demographics included gender, age, education level, and marital status. Findings showed that cultural value systems systematically excluded women from male-dominated work environments. The findings also indicated that though religion reinforced cultural value systems that limit women, acculturation has improved their chances of participating in the small-scale mining sector. The rising level of education is also enabling some women to attain leadership positions.

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INTRODUCTION

Women make up the majority of the national population in Zimbabwe; however, their dominance is not reflected in influential leadership positions in industry and politics. Literature has identified culture as one of the key stumbling blocks to the upward progression of women across different areas of economic endeavour. Women make up a mere 10 per cent of the 535,000 small-scale miners in Zimbabwe (Chimoio, 2022). Gendered cultural prejudices have been well documented in the literature, especially regarding the inclusion of women in mineral extraction activities across several economic jurisdictions (Adam, Adams, Gerber & Amacker, 2022; Buss & Rutherford, 2020; Kumah & Spear, 2021; Dzvimbo, Ncube & Monga, 2020). The systematic segregation of women from actively participating in mining activities has been well documented in both developed and developing economies. The underrepresentation of women in mining was related to the 19th-century Gold Rush, which led men to venture into mining and women into the service sector (Aguilar-Gomez & Benschaul-Tolonen, 2023). Research by Romano & Papastefanaki (2020) reiterated that culture influences the legal frameworks to restrict the inclusion of women in underground mining activities in several countries

that include South Africa, Estonia, Romania, and the Netherlands, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, and other states in Canada like Ontario, New Zealand, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. The systematic segregation of indigenous women in a male-dominated Australian mining industry has led to women occupying the bottom echelons within the mining hierarchy, where they experience sexism, racism, and additional burdens from their male counterparts (Parmenter, Leroy-Dyer & Holcombe, 2024). The under-representation of women is also evident in Brazil, where gender stereotypes that characterise the ideal traditional roles, women are supposed to occupy in society have contributed to their limited representation in engineering-based careers, leading to an imbalance in leadership positions (Silva, Silva & Fontana, 2023). Similar sentiments can also be found in the mining and construction industries, which are regarded as male-dominated. The cultural connotations that link mining to a male-dominated industry have created stigma, affecting women's participation in mining in Indonesia, despite it being a constitutional right for women and men to collaborate in different fields of labour (Sudaryat *et al.*, 2024). Apart from sexual discrimination, religious and cultural beliefs have also played a pivotal role in restricting and limiting the scope of activities that women can contribute to the diamond mining sector in Indonesia

(Priandhita & Lahiri-Dutt, 2023). Some of these cultural beliefs relate to the misfortunes surrounding women's menstruation and the bad luck that can bring to anticipated financial gains from mining activities (Mensah, 2024). There are cultural connotations that women cause bad luck when they are in proximity to mineral-bearing ores, a belief that has intensified the systematic exclusion of women from actively participating in mining activities (Dzvimbo *et al.*, 2020). Similar cultural taboos have been reported in the DRC, where women were restricted from entering mining sites because they are perceived as bringing bad luck to diggers (Bashwira & van der Haar, 2020). The exclusion of women from mining on account of the perceived bad fortunes they bring, like serious accidents, death, or even mineral depletion, is a result of embedded prejudices that perpetuate a patriarchal culture where the mining environment is the domain of men (Buor *et al.*, 2019). These cultural prejudices are reinforced by harsh operating conditions in which women lack the physical endurance to prevail (Valadares, De Carvalho Neto, Mota-Santos, & Diniz, 2024).

The gendered norms that deter women's active participation in small-scale mining have remained invisible in Sub-Saharan Africa (Buss & Rutherford, 2020). The culturally assigned gender roles and the perception that women are not strong enough have adversely deterred women from engaging in small-scale mining (Baumann-Pauly, 2023). On the other hand, women are excluded from active engagement in small-scale mining due to inadequate regulation that prevents them from contributing to the sector. In some instances, the biological makeup of women, such as going through the menstrual cycle, has been used to their disadvantage when it comes to their inclusion in participation in small-scale mining, as it is a taboo that is associated with bad luck and the perceived extinction of mineral-bearing ores (Mafongoya *et al.*, 2021). It has been noted that the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector is not being optimised for economic advantage, despite it being a source of sustenance for people, especially in poor communities (Shangase, 2022).

Mensah (2024) underscored that the existence of a capitalist patriarchy that characterised male-centred judgment calls and tenurial tendencies intensifies the marginalisation and exclusion of women in small-scale mining in Africa. Research in Tanzania justified the cultural exclusion of women from partaking in the artisanal mining activities on account of the stressful working environment, challenges in securing adequate housing, and the insecurities associated with working in a polluted and unhealthy mining environment (Bryceson, Jönsson & Shand, 2021). Similar sentiments were raised by Ncube, Dzvimbo & Mawonde (2024), who intimated that, despite the positive benefits associated with gold panning in the Gwanda District of Zimbabwe, it noted that, despite the positive benefits associated with gold panning in the Gwanda District of Zimbabwe, its appeal to women was likely driven by challenges arising from poor ventilation, ineffective occupational health and safety, and poor sanitary conditions. Such unfavourable working conditions of gold panning are more suitable for men as opposed to women, which entrenches the existing systematic segregation of women from engaging in economically gainful activities. The complexities associated with promoting women's empowerment are evident in Ghana, where isolation is a key obstacle towards women's involvement in informal mining activities (Adam *et al.*, 2022). Relatedly, the works of Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia

(2021) noted that women in Ghana's artisanal and small-scale mining sector operate on the fringes, with their contributions to the sector overshadowed by culturally assigned roles, among other hindrances. Relatedly, the participation of women in artisanal mining in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has remained obscure due to the trajectory being shaped by a culture of sexual violence and discrimination against women who intend to participate in the mining activities (Bashwira & van der Haar, 2020). The threat of violence against women is heavily entrenched in some economies that systematically exclude women from gainful engagement in mining activities, and they end up occupying the periphery and assuming low-income activities. Buss *et al.* (2021) stressed that in Mozambique, women in small-scale mining are likely to fall victim to arrest compared to men, leading to their marginalisation. Cultural connotations and traditionally assigned roles influence the legal framework, especially regarding property ownership, which creates a subservient attitude toward women who lack legal entitlement to property (Chikwanha, 2023).

Research undertaken in Zimbabwe suggests that social exclusion has resulted in women in artisanal mining in the Midlands province occupying peripheral roles as labourers and providers of services and entertainment for male miners, with the predominant responsibility for women being domestic chores (Dzvimbo *et al.*, 2020). Women are generally excluded from actively participating in artisanal mining activity. When they are in their menstrual periods, they are accommodated within the sector in other ancillary roles, such as sex workers and nightclub entertainers, as well as occupying traditional gender roles like taking care of the sick, fetching water, firewood and cooking (Jackline, 2022). The view of women as sex objects has been well documented in the Solwezi mining town of Zambia, where mine workers are a sought-after commodity for sex workers (Johnston *et al.*, 2024). Women who venture into informal mining activities in Solwezi, Zambia, are usually there to provide commercial sex work and other forms of night entertainment. Apart from this, women faced gender-based violence of a sexual, emotional, and physical nature on account of their participation in the mining sector in Zimbabwe (Mafongoya *et al.*, 2021). The violence against women is a consequence of their perceived second-class citizenry, where their voices are not heard in the wider society in general and in the mining sector in particular (Tiernan & O'Connor, 2020). Even though feminist and empowerment groups are making frantic efforts to improve the life chances of women in small-scale mining, women still encounter hurdles related to favouritism, unfavourable social and cultural norms, and social class visions (Arthur-Holmes & Mengba, 2024). In addition, the existence of incoherent and fragmented legal frameworks that affect the active participation of small-scale miners in the economy is heavily stacked against women's inclusion in the sector (Chikwanha, 2023). The culturally inspired occupational segregation of women goes against the dictates of equal opportunities, which advocate for the elimination of gender-based inequalities and discrimination against any individual or a group of individuals with respect to their ethnic origin, race, religion, creed, health status, or their economic or social standing (Jackline, 2022). Spiritual sanctions limit women's participation in gold mining in Ghana (Omotehinse & Ogunlade, 2022). This is notwithstanding their realisation that poverty cuts across diverse cultural and religious beliefs in Africa, which necessitates the need for women to venture into mining as a

viable option to supplement family income and alleviate poverty. Outcomes from a study in Ghana highlighted that, although no religion dominated artisanal mining, people of Islamic faith were more likely to engage in illegal mining than those of traditional African religions (Baddianaah *et al.*, 2022).

Small-scale mining activities in Zimbabwe are one of the most prominent means of supplementing family income following the collapse of the formal economy and the exponential rise in the informal sector (Chimoio, 2022). Several considerations are pushing women into small-scale mining activities in Zimbabwe, most of which are influenced by the unfavourable economic environment, implying that reliance on men as breadwinners is insufficient to sustain the family (Mkodzongi, 2023). Zimbabwe has one of the highest inflation rates in the world, which is pushing most people to live below the poverty line in abject poverty (Makoto & Ngendakumana, 2023). This is coupled with inconsistent currency reforms that have led the public to lose confidence in their own currency (the Zimbabwe Gold-structured currency) in favour of the United States dollar. In this instance, small-scale mining activities, particularly gold ore mining, are among the most reliable ways for people to generate the required United States dollars, mainly for daily transactions (Ncube *et al.*, 2024). Most women engaged in small-scale mining activities in Zimbabwe do so part-time, and they rarely generate enough income from gold panning to save (Dzvimbo *et al.*, 2020). They earn just enough to get by each day.

There are inconsistent statistics relating to the level of formal unemployment in Zimbabwe. Some sectors put the level of unemployment at 85% given that most people are engaged in the informal sector which also includes informal mining activities that are not legally recognised by the government (UNICEF, 2024). Climate change and persistent droughts have rendered agro-based activities unreliable, leading many people to turn to street vending (Chigudu, 2021) or small-scale mining as the most viable means of supplementing family income (Mafongoya *et al.*, 2021). A considerable number of women are actively engaged in economic activities, particularly the small-scale mining sector, despite the setbacks and cultural prejudices they suffer. The mining sector in Zimbabwe is broad; it comprises large, established mining companies that operate alongside small-scale miners and informal and artisanal miners who usually work on riverbanks and in other abandoned mines. The focus of this research was on small-scale and informal mining ventures that have relatively easier entry barriers for women in terms of the formalities required to actively participate.

Having discussed the systemic challenges that women face in their endeavour to participate in small-scale mining, the main objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of culture in deterring women's active participation in the small-scale mining sector in Zimbabwe. Specific objectives of this study are to explore the influence of a patriarchal societal value system on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector; this study also seeks to explore the influence of religion and social status, particularly the level of education and skills base, on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. It is also within the scope of this research to explore the deterrence caused by a male-dominated culture in the mining sector on women's participation.

Theoretical Literature review: Several theories have been proposed to explain the systematic exclusion of women from gainful employment and from achieving influential leadership positions across business, politics, religion, and other endeavours. The review of literature examines the main theories that might explain the occupational segregation of women, including the glass ceiling theory, the sticky floor theory, the biological theory, and the symbolic interactionist theory. Perhaps one of the most prominent of these theories is the glass ceiling theory, which explains the challenges that women systematically face in their endeavour to rise the corporate ladder and achieve success (Ngwerume, 2023). Glass ceilings are viewed as invisible yet effective barriers that constrain the upward progression of women despite their abilities, competencies, and qualifications similar to those of their male counterparts (Ginige *et al.*, 2017). The glass ceiling theory has been widely applied in gender-based research, as it helps articulate the shortcomings that women consistently endure on their path to success.

The intangible impediments arising from glass ceilings systematically make it challenging for women to achieve the desired leadership positions, which, in the context of this research, incorporate achieving success within the small-scale mining sector (Dzvimbo *et al.*, 2020). Discriminatory tendencies arising from glass ceilings intensify the segregation of women in achieving decision-making positions in society, which can serve as a launchpad to uplift other women (Sudaryat *et al.*, 2024). A related concept is the sticky floor, which explains why women are consistently kept out of economically valuable positions and into inferior, low-level ones, despite their efforts to achieve executive-level positions (Valadares *et al.*, 2024). The contribution of the glass ceiling and sticky floor theories in this research is that they show that, despite women's academic achievements and skill sets, they still face invisible barriers that limit their scope of achievement across different leadership arenas. This theory can have significant implications for explaining how culture affects the upward progression of women in the small-scale mining sector.

The gender schema theory has also been proposed to explain the assignment of gender roles, which determine which activities are acceptable or unacceptable for women (Belle, Tartarilla, Wapman, Schlieber & Mercurio, 2021). The gender schema theory posits that gender identity shapes levels of personal growth and self-esteem in women (Canevello, 2020). According to this theory, men are more powerful than women because they are stronger, more independent, and more aggressive in decision-making, making them better suited to work under the tedious operating conditions that characterise small-scale mining (Adom & Anambane, 2020). On the other hand, women are more submissive, docile, delicate, and sentimental, which limits their contribution to the small-scale mining sector to ancillary and supportive roles, with most activities confined to maintaining the family support system (Mwanderingana & Ye, 2023). From this perspective, the gender schema theory appears to support the systematic segregation of women from actively participating in small-scale mineral extraction; they are considered the weaker sex and may not effectively contribute to the success of the secure small-scale mining sector. The biological theory is a key framework that can also explain how culture negatively affects women's ability to realise financial gains from mining activities (Nuralievich, 2022). According to this theory, an individual's career progression is determined at birth upon

realising their sexual orientation (Pasterski et al., 2022). It specifies that the socially acceptable roles are assigned to individuals based on their biology, either as men or women.

From this perspective, the biological theory holds that women are expected to occupy more compassionate and sensitive sectors of the economy, while their male counterparts are expected to undertake duties requiring agility and strength, since they are viewed as more powerful (Buhai & van der Leij, 2023). Subscribing to the tenets of the biological theory has reinforced gender inequality and intensified stereotypes against women as the weaker sex, which contributes to the systematic exclusion from small-scale mining activities, given the perceived male domination. The theory of symbolic interactionism holds that society expects the biological differences between men and women to manifest in their behaviour; people are expected to conform to social expectations regarding behavioural norms (Meltzer & Petras, 2023). The theory of symbolic interaction is also closely related to the principle of labelling when it comes to conforming to socially acceptable gender roles by assigning such titles as gays, prostitutes, or lesbians (Charmaz et al., 2019).

With respect to the principle of symbolic interactionism, we can specify that the theory does not grant individuals the right to self-determination and independence; they are expected to conform to predefined social norms regarding their attitudes, behaviour, and the confirmation of social expectations. Other negative attributes associated with reliance on symbolic interactionism relate to the stigma and slack of a social support system, especially to women who might choose to venture into what is normally regarded as a male-dominated arena of endeavour. Such a lack of social support is usually associated with the stifling of women's career advancement and limited opportunities for women's empowerment.

Empirical literature review: The role of cultural influences on women's participation in artisanal mining is a central focus across different economic jurisdictions, yet these jurisdictions have produced inconsistent outcomes. A Brazilian study focused on the gender stereotypes which contributed to the underrepresentation of women in mining, resulting in women occupying peripheral roles in the sector. The study incorporated a qualitative analysis conducted through semi-structured interviews targeting female students pursuing the engineering profession. The study highlighted that occupational imbalance severely affected women's prospects of occupying influential decision-making leadership positions (Silva et al., 2023). Outcomes of this study appear to support the operationalisation of the glass ceiling principle, where, despite achieving high levels of education, women are systematically segregated from occupying influential positions in society due to the existence of gender stereotypes. A related Brazilian study by Priandhita & Lahiri-Dutt (2023) examined the subtle barriers and overt prejudice that women face in mining. Incorporated semi-structured interviews with 27 women, with the research outcomes indicating that the existence of unfavourable work-life balance discriminated against women in the workplace. An Indonesian study confirmed the adverse effects of cultural practices as they restrict women from active engagements in diamond mining activities during their menstrual periods, which is associated with bad luck (Valadares et al., 2024). Research in the Philippines confirmed that women face challenges in

managing the work-life balance, as well as the occupational health and safety issues associated with the chemical exposures to cyanide and mercury used in extracting gold. The study proposed enforcing gender-sensitive policies that promote gender equity and equality to improve women's participation and safeguard occupational health in the mining sector (Leilanie, 2022). Related sentiments were raised on the participation of women of childbearing age in the artisanal gold mining activities in the Peruvian Amazon (Gonzalez et al., 2019). The study collected data through a survey of 200 women aged 18-49. Data were analysed using generalised linear mixed models. Research results highlighted that, apart from cultural determinants, disease, health, and safety issues related to potential medical contamination and related health concerns could deter women's active participation in artisanal gold mining in Peru.

A related study in Australia by Sharma et al (2019) focused on vertical segregation, with respect to challenges and issues that women engineers encountered. The research methodological focus of the study is on engaged women in engineering professions, in middle management, regarding their lived experiences with respect to the upward progression to leadership positions. Research results indicated that occupational segregation and employment security were the most significant barriers to women's upward progression in the engineering profession. These barriers were underscored by subtle stereotypes, institutional and cultural connotations, which are the key impediments to the upliftment of women in engineering professions. These findings have significant implications to this study, given that engineering is a profession that has an influential role to play in influencing the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. A Zimbabwean study by Tiernan & O'Connor (2020) highlighted that a patriarchal society and cultural prejudices reduced the bargaining power of women, thereby preventing them from negotiating better financial conditions in the mining sector. Research conducted in the DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda, using a survey strategy, highlighted deeper contexts in which men earn more from activities at and outside mining sites, as they have more experience than women. Outcomes of the study appear to indicate that the underrepresentation of women in mining may not be exclusively attributable to cultural prejudices, but to the lack of requisite skills needed to perform efficiently and contribute meaningfully to mining activities. Research conducted in the Karamoja sub-region of Uganda by Serwajja & Mukwaya (2020) indicates that women are relegated to the periphery in artisanal gold activities. The study incorporated key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The study highlighted that even though artisanal gold mining activities provide diverse opportunities for women in terms of employment, the most lucrative opportunities are not available to them since they occupy under-valued, less remunerated and less lucrative labour-intensive activities. Moreover, customary and social cultural practices further marginalised women's contributions to small-scale mining activities. An alternative view explored the differentiated occupational roles that women occupy in formalised mining activities, distinct from those in the small-scale mining sector. The organised structure within the formal mining setup, women occupied differentiated influential positions contrary to the middle to lower roles as they relate to the small-scale mining sector (Ofosu et al., 2022). Research in the Taita Taveta county in Kenya confirmed that despite women occupying 50% of mining areas, their contributions were overshadowed.

The study used inferential statistical analysis incorporating probit regression and linear regression with the results confirming that women are mainly relegated to subordinate fewer paying activities in the mining sector and there is need for legal frameworks to protect the economic interest of women in the mining sector (Mugo et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The study culminated in the adoption of a descriptive research design that involved distributing a structured research instrument to a cross-section of women who were either directly or indirectly involved in small-scale gold mining activities in the Bindura District, Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. The data collection included 60 women engaged in gold mining activities. A combination of judgmental and snowball sampling approaches was used to identify specific women in the informal mining sector as respondents to this research. Data were collected via a survey, with questionnaires distributed using a drop-and-pick technique. Data analysis incorporated descriptive statistics, which we processed using SPSS version 25. The measurement instrument used a five-point Likert scale. Statistical tests conducted included descriptive statistics, particularly the mean and standard deviation, to analyse respondents' views (Schindler, 2022).

Analysis and findings: The analysis of data used respondent demographics, including age groups, marital status, highest level of education, and religion, as key variables that explain the systematic exclusion of women from active engagement in this Moscow mining sector.

Demographics: Respondent demographics are presented in Table 4.1 by religious belief type, marital status, highest level of education, and age group. The predominant religious group was Christianity, at 51.7%, with Muslims in the minority, at 13.3%, as religion is relevant, as empirical literature has shown that it significantly influences societal views of women. Christianity, for instance, recognises the need for women to be subservient to their husbands, which might help explain the religious influences that lead women to occupy low-profile roles within the small-scale mining sector, given their religiously acclaimed social status. The same applies to the traditional African religion, where women are expected to be subservient to their husbands. From this perspective, it is clear that religion influences women's participation in the small-scale mining sector. The demographic profiles of respondents by marital status indicate that most women are married with children (25%), married without children (15%), separated with children (16.7%), and separated without children (13.3%), divorced (10%) and widowed (3.3%). These statistics indicate that women are participating in the small-scale mining sector across different categories, which also underscores the need to supplement family income to meet daily needs, especially for women with children who are not living with their spouses. These results are distinguished from the works of Ofosu et al. (2022), who established that women in formalised mining activities occupied differentiated, influential positions, contrary to the middle-to-lower roles they hold in the small-scale mining sector.

Empirical research has proven that the economic status and level of financial independence of women are key driving

factors towards venturing into the male-dominated sector in search of improved economic conditions, the level of desperation of women with respect to their type of marital status. They expose themselves to the vagaries of sexual exploitation and occupational insecurities as they are taken advantage of by men in the small-scale mining sector. These results corroborate with outcomes from the Taita Taveta county in Kenya where it was confirmed that despite women occupying 50% of mining areas, their contributions were overshadowed (Mugo et al., 2021). The demographic profile of women by age group indicates that the most prominent age group was 36 to 45 years, accounting for 48.3%. The least prominent age groups are the 18 to 25 years and the 56 to 65 years. There was no respondent who indicated that they were greater than 65 years old. The demographic profiling of respondents demonstrates that most economically active people are resorting to gold panning mainly as a means of subsistence, given the socio-economic and climatic conditions that have rendered alternative sources of sustenance, such as agriculture, unreliable. This in addition to the failure to get alternative forms of employment in the formal sector due to the current economic climate characterised by a high rate of deindustrialisation coupled with higher levels of inflation and currency instability. Respondents to this study with respect to their age groups showcase that women engaged in the small-scale mining activities, of high-value minerals like gold, come from different age categories. The demographic profiling of respondents with respect to their highest level of education has shown that the majority of women have relatively low levels of education, such as those who have completed primary education (41.7%), and those with non-formal education (18.3%). Women with secondary education made up 15% of respondents. These respondents are likely to hold a relatively influential position in the small-scale mining sector, as owners of mining claims. While those with low levels of education were engaged in manual and supportive roles within the small-scale mining sector. Low levels of education have significant implications for access to the requisite knowledge, technical skills, and competence. They might enhance financial gains in the small-scale mining sector.

Descriptive statistics: Descriptive statistics were analysed using mean interpretation, as demonstrated in Table 4.2.

Cultural beliefs and participation of women in small-scale mining: The first objective focused on the influence of cultural belief systems on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector; the descriptive statistics are demonstrated in Table 4.3. Responses from women who participated in this research were largely indifferent regarding the efficacy of cultural taboos in affecting their active participation in the mining sector.

For instance, the majority of respondents were indifferent to the statement that cultural taboos confined women to ancillary work because it brings misfortune to small-scale mining activities, with a mean of 3.32 and a standard deviation of 1.017. The respondents were also indifferent that they are viewed as objects of both sexual pleasures, with a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.976; indifference was also expressed with respect to women being viewed as the weaker sex, with a mean of 3.47 and a standard deviation of 1.081. However, women agreed that the belief that menstruating women contribute to depression, with a mean of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 0.873. Overall, it appears that there is a general agreement that cultural taboos play a pivotal role in

Table 4.1. Demographics

Type of religious belief				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Traditional African	12	20.0	20.0	20.0
Christianity	31	51.7	51.7	71.7
Muslim	8	13.3	13.3	85.0
None	9	15.0	15.0	100.0
Marital status				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
Married with kids	15	25.0	25.0	41.7
Married with no children	9	15.0	15.0	56.7
Separated with children	10	16.7	16.7	73.3
Separated with no children	8	13.3	13.3	86.7
Divorced	6	10.0	10.0	96.7
Widowed	2	3.3	3.3	100.0
Age group				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18 to 25 years	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
26 to 35 years	11	18.3	18.3	21.7
36 to 45 years	29	48.3	48.3	70.0
46 to 55 years	16	26.7	26.7	96.7
56 to 65 years	2	3.3	3.3	100.0
Level of education				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary Education	25	41.7	41.7	41.7
Secondary Education	15	25.0	25.0	66.7
Tertiary Education	9	15.0	15.0	81.7
Non-formal education	11	18.3	18.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2. Mean interpretation

Range of mean	Interpretation
$1.0 \leq \text{mean} < 1.8$	Strongly disagree
$1.8 \leq \text{mean} < 2.6$	Disagree
$2.6 \leq \text{mean} < 3.4$	Indifferent
$3.4 \leq \text{mean} < 4.2$	Agree
$4.2 \leq \text{mean} < 5.0$	Strongly Agree

Table 4.3. A cultural beliefs and participation of women in small-scale mining

	Score	Mean	Std. Dev
Cultural taboos have confined women to ancillary work, as it is perceived they bring misfortune when directly involved in small-scale mining activities.	Indifferent	3.32	1.017
The view of women as objects of sexual pleasure have contributed to sexual harassment, which limits the active participation of women in the small-scale mining sector.	Indifferent	3.38	.976
The cultural belief that women are the weaker sex has led to systematic segregation from high-paying roles and activities within the small-scale mining sector.	Indifferent	3.47	1.081
The belief that menstruating women contribute to mineral depletion severely affected the participation of women in small-scale mining.	Agree	3.52	.873
Overall mean and standard deviation	Agree	3.4225	0.98675
N = 60			

Table 4.4. Social status and participation of women in small-scale mining

	Score	Mean	Std. Dev
Relatively low levels of education affect the bargaining power of women in the informal mining sector.	Indifferent	3.32	.892
Religious beliefs relating to the role of women have led to their occupation of lower echelons within the mining hierarchy.	Indifferent	3.45	.964
Occupational segregation confines women to low-paying jobs within the small-scale mining sector.	Agree	3.80	.988
The culturally acclaimed low social status of women affects their recognition and contribution in decision-making within the informal mining sector.	Agree	3.80	.819
Overall mean and standard deviation	Agree	3.5925	0.91575
N = 60			

Table 4.5. A patriarchal value system and participation of women in small-scale mining

	Mean Score	Mean	Std. Dev
Culture influences the legal framework that restricts the inclusion of women in small-scale mining activities.	Agree	3.77	.927
Patriarchy affects access to finance by women.	Agree	3.87	1.112
Patriarchy perpetuates gender stereotypes against women's participation in small-scale mining.	Agree	3.90	1.003
A male-dominated culture affects access and control of property rights by women.	Agree	4.02	.911
Overall mean and standard deviation	Agree	3.89	0.98825
N = 60			

contributing to the segregation of women and respect for their participation in these small-scale mining sectors, with an overall mean of 3.4225 and a standard deviation of 0.98675.

These views might suggest that cultural taboos are present in the small-scale mining sector, where they are exploited to exclude women from active engagement in the mining activities systematically. These views can lend support to existing views suggesting that cultural taboos affect active participation in different jurisdictions, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, and even in developed economies, such as Indonesia and Brazil. Current research results are consistent with a related Brazilian study by Priandhita & Lahiri-Dutt (2023), in which women were subject to subtle barriers and overt prejudice that they face in mining.

Social status and women's participation in small-scale mining: The second research objective examined the influence of social status on women's participation in the small-scale mining sector. Research results are presented in Table 4.4. There were mixed feelings about the level of social status the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector has. For instance, the respondents were indifferent as to the effect of low levels of education on the bargaining power of women in the small-scale mining sector, with a mean of 3.32 and a standard deviation of 0.892. Respondents were also indifferent about whether religious beliefs influenced women's participation in the small-scale mining sector, with a mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.964. However, respondents agreed that occupational segregation confined women to low-paying jobs, with a mean of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.988. Respondents were also in agreement that the culturally acclaimed low social status of women has affected their recognition within the decision-making circles in the small-scale mining sector, with a mean of 3.818. Overall, there is strong agreement that social status influences women's participation in the small-scale mining sector, with an overall mean of 3.5925 and a standard deviation of 0.91575. Current research findings regarding the social status of women in the small-scale mining sector corroborate those of Sharma et al. (2019), which indicate that vertical segregation affected the active participation of professional women. This demonstrates that women are generally socially excluded when it comes to making decisions, especially in a male-dominated environment. This has lowered to the conceptual appeal and influence that women can have in shaping the decision-making and leadership within masculine industries such as mining and construction. Current research results corroborate a Brazilian gender stereotypes contributed to under presentation of women in mining resulting in women occupying peripheral roles in the sector (Silva *et al.*, 2023). The low levels of social status of women have also been associated with the cultural bias in favour of educating the male child against the female child, which has reduced their skills and competing capabilities to assume influential positions of leadership later in life. These research results corroborate outcomes from the works of Gonzalez *et al.* (2019), which showed that the social status of women in the Peruvian Amazon determined their life chances. It stands to reason that lower social status has a historical context, which was also recognised during the 19th-century gold rush, where women were accustomed to service-sector industries, whereas men were confined to industries like engineering, mining, and construction (Aguilar-Gomez & Benschaul-Tolonen, 2023).

A patriarchal value system and participation of women in small-scale mining: The third objective of this study was focused on the influence of a patriarchal value system on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. The research results are presented in Table 4.5. Results suggest that patriarchy had the most influential impacts on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector, as it influenced the restrictions of women in participating in the small-scale mining sector, given a mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.927. It was also believed that patriarchy affected access to finance by women as they failed to control the means of production and property rights, which were required to be presented as collateral security in the financial sector. These views are demonstrated by a mean of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 1.112. In addition, patriarchy was believed to contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes against women participation in the small-scale mining sector with the means of the integration of one. A climate of a male-dominated culture also affected the access and control of property rights by women, with a mean of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.911. Overall, the mean of the 3.89 and a standard deviation of 0.98825. These statistics indicate a general agreement that a patriarchal value system in the small-scale mining sector negatively affected the active engagement and participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. Research findings of this study pertaining to a patriarchal value system corroborate existing literature that has documented the drawbacks associated with the male-dominated culture as they have affected women in different facets of life in conformity with the principles of the biological theory, as well as the glass ceiling theory. Current research results support a study in the Philippines that confirmed that women face challenges in managing the work-life balance as well as the occupational health and safety (Leilanie, 2022). These theories have systematically elaborated on the negative effects of culture in a male-dominated environment on the upward progression of men into areas of influence and leadership, especially in the construction and mining sectors, which are largely regarded as male domains. These results conform to outcomes from a study undertaken in the Karamoja sub-region of Uganda by Serwajja & Mukwaya (2020), where women were condemned to the periphery when it comes to their participation in artisanal gold activities.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this research confirmed that culture has a role to play in affecting the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. However, due to the process of acculturation and the adoption of new cultures, the traditional cultural value systems that were there in the past are losing their relevance in the modern day, which has resulted in a significant number of women venturing into formal employment and penetrating domains that were largely recognised as being a preserve of men. The research managed to generate mixed feelings regarding cultural taboos and the view of women as sexual objects, the view of women as the weaker sex, which keeps women out of mining activities. However, there was also a segment of respondents who believed that some traditional cultural values significantly influence their systematic exclusion from actively participating in the small-scale mining sector, as it is believed that women might bring misfortune.

While the research has established that social status has an effect on the participation of women in the informal sector, we have noticed that there is a relatively significant improvement in the number of girl children who are acquiring advanced studies like tertiary education at different vocational training centres, teachers' colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. These improvements are steps to enhance women's social and industry status, as well as their religious leadership, thereby enhancing their active participation in influential positions of power. This stems from the realisation that low levels of education reduce women's bargaining power in the informal sector. In addition, the study has established that religious beliefs appear to have no significant influence on women's participation in the informal sector. This might stem from the presence of different religions that place different emphasis on the roles women can play in society. However, despite the acclaimed level of education and the limited influence of religion, the study highlighted that occupational segregation is omnipresent when it comes to the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector. The study established that a patriarchal value system has an overbearing influence on the participation of women in the small-scale mining sector, since women are systematically being regarded as second-class citizens, even if they have acquired qualification skills and education. The adverse effects of a male-dominated culture, unfavourable legal frameworks which systematically isolate women from acquiring property rights, which are instrumental when owning small-scale mining claims and getting financial assistance from the financial sector, which requires collateral security which women cannot pledge since they do not own any property. This is even though there are some influential women who have managed to break through the glass ceilings and occupy influential positions of leadership, and are still subject to the benevolence of the patriarchal value system if they are to achieve success, especially in the small-scale mining sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government must champion the cause of empowerment of the girl child by giving them opportunities during the formative stages so that they can challenge the existing male-dominated and patriarchal system, which systematically excludes them from achieving influential positions in different sectors of the economy and even in politics. There is a need for women's empowerment groups to sensitise and educate women on the benefits of networking with other successful women as a strategy to cope with the challenges they are likely to face if they intend to penetrate a male-dominated small-scale mining environment. It is also imperative for financial institutions to recognise the legal constraints against which women are judged when it comes to ownership of property and land, which are required for the woman's employment. The bank can bridge the gap in access to finance by providing collateral-free loans to women who are eager and demonstrate the capability of success in the mining sector. Women's empowerment and gender equality studies should form part of the new curricula from the primary level through to tertiary education as a way of sensitising the girl child and women to the need to break the glass ceiling and achieve success despite gender differences with men. Moreover, it is imperative to revisit existing legal instruments that appear to favour men in access to finance. The current legislative amendments to the Marriage Act are a step in the right direction, as they enhance women's empowerment

over property rights, which can influence their chances of success when they intend to venture into a male-dominated industry like the small-scale mining sector. Women must recognise that, to achieve success and recognition in a male-dominated small-scale mining sector, they have to uplift each other. Women should not look up to men to voluntarily pass the baton, but they should support other women to have their voices heard, to navigate through the complexities associated with a male-dominated and patriarchal culture.

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