

**Breaking down gender barriers: Exploring experiences of underground  
female mine workers in a mining company**

**A research report presented to**

**The Department of Social Work  
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for the degree Master of Arts in Occupational Social Work**

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and has never been published or submitted elsewhere in fulfilment of any other degree.

Ms. Sally K. Ledwaba

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Signature

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Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Research Title:** Breaking down gender barriers: Exploring experiences of underground female mine workers in a mining company

Women have previously been discouraged from pursuing careers in the mining industry given the nature of the work in the field and the physical strength needed to do the work. However, literature has reported an increase in the number of women penetrating the field in recent years (Benya, 2009; Singer, 2002). New legislative frameworks in South Africa, such as the Mining Charter of 2002 (amended 2010) and the Mineral Petroleum Resources Development Act have made provisions for females to be absorbed into the field of mining, but this has not gone without challenges. This study thus sought to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences of underground female mine workers and demystify gender barriers that affect the functioning of women within the mining sector.

The study was qualitative in nature and adopted a case study design to richly understand the phenomenon. The study used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Ten participants and two key informants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data collected from participants was analysed using thematic analysis, in conjunction with the literature reviewed.

The study addressed the social and human needs of female mine workers. It was found that, the mining industry has not been progressive in adequately addressing the unique needs of women who work underground. The study was essential in unravelling the experiences of female mine workers and thus made recommendations that can be used to introduce workplace appropriate interventions to be implemented to ensure that underground women mine workers are well accommodated within the industry.

**Keywords:** underground female mine workers, gender, mining industry

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
HTS	Heat Tolerance Screening
ILO	International Labour Organisation
GDP	Growth Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution
MPRDA	Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NPO	Non-Profit- Organization
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
TEBA	The Employment Bureau of Africa
WIM	Women in Mining

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Table 4.2 Summary of themes and subthemes