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Women's representation in senior and executive management positions in a South African coal mine: a case study

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the gap between policy and practice in addressing women's representation in senior and executive management position at a coal mine in South Africa. The study was guided by the perspectives of gender, gender relations and gender inequality. The study followed a qualitative approach, which utilised in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary search on exclusively women participants purposively sampled from core mining, middle management, and senior management. The study found, amongst other things, that a toxic masculinity and prejudice that characterizes informal organizational culture is both a source of discrimination when considering leadership roles and scepticism of women leadership at the mine. Multiple societal and cultural roles in the workplace, home and community are a barrier that was observed to the advancement of women, particularly black women, to senior level management positions at the mine that was studied. Socio-economic disadvantage inhibits women, particularly black women in core mining from upgrading their qualifications and skills that would make them more suitable for leadership positions and as a result, the women often do not advance to senior management positions. Low entry level is restrictive to women as it is rare for women in core mining to be promoted up the employment ladder and to develop their academic qualifications and skills in preparation to compete for those leadership and higher positions. The mine should take more active measures to address the discriminatory informal culture at the organisation and more responsibility for the development of women. Mine management could expand its Family Friendly Work Practices (FFWPs) so that women at lower levels of employment have enough time on their hands to develop themselves and devote to career advancement. Government and management are encouraged to revisit the policy and practice to ensure that policy and practice exhibit a consciousness to the seriality of women.