Mineral Metal Energy Oil Gas and Aggregate, *1(2): 88-95; 2024. DOI: 10.18311/2MEOGA/2024/v1i2/44668* *FEATURE ARTICLE*

INFORMATICS JOURNALS

Online **ISSN :** 3049-3455

**Mineral Metal Energy Oil Gas and Aggregate**

**Contents available at:** *www.informaticsjournals.com/index.php/2MEOGA*

2MEOGA

# 2MEOGA Discussion-Opinion-Editorial "Raise" Silence of the Women in 2MEOGA Sectors: It is Time the Industry Listens to the Unheard Voices and Confronts Acts of Violence, Harassment and Discrimination

**Jayanta Bhattacharya**

*Editor-in-Chief*

*We must send a message across the world that there is no disgrace in being a survivor of sexual violence. The shame is on the aggressor. – Angelina Jolie*

## Instances

In this discussion we will learn about some true stories and cases.

## 1.0 A Story

Kusumi, 14 and Rajni, 12 (both names changed) ran away from their home in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh in 2019, as their family didn't have enough food to survive after losing land and livelihood to a mining project. They were either not compensated or the parts of the compensation did not reach them. The two finally returned this week, on January 19, 2021 to their maternal grandparents after spending about 18 months in a shelter home in Mumbai. "Their families had thought these girls were dead. After losing everything to mining, their parents frequently migrate between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh for work and even at the time of reporting are not in the district. Fortunately, in Mumbai, the girls were rescued by a social organization who kept them safely in a girl's home. They educated them and trained them. They now returned after they revealed their real identity to the rescuers who contacted us and we traced their family," a member of district's child welfare committee in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh, reported.[1]

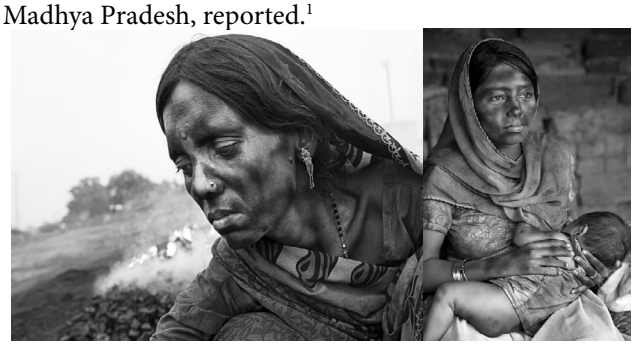


**Figure 1.** Women labour in Indian mining Courtesy, Creator: Asha Thadani.
Open Internet source

The case of these two girls just scratches the surface of the transition that a mining project triggers. When mining starts in any area, the loss of land and livelihood are the main areas of concern in most discussions. But one section of stakeholders that remain invisible in the discussion is women. With socio-economic changes, a disrupted social structure and the added burden of earning an extra income to make ends meet the transition to a mining area brings about a shift where women, who were formerly independent cultivators, need to now depend on others for their and their family's survival. Researchers, civil society organizations and experts, including those working with mining-affected communities, note that they have recorded that many women, including teenage girls, are pushed into sex work or trafficking due to the

lack of livelihood or other changes connected to mining. These women are usually like an invisible component in the mining sector even as the impact on them and their lives are enormous.



**Figure 2.** Women in Indian mining.

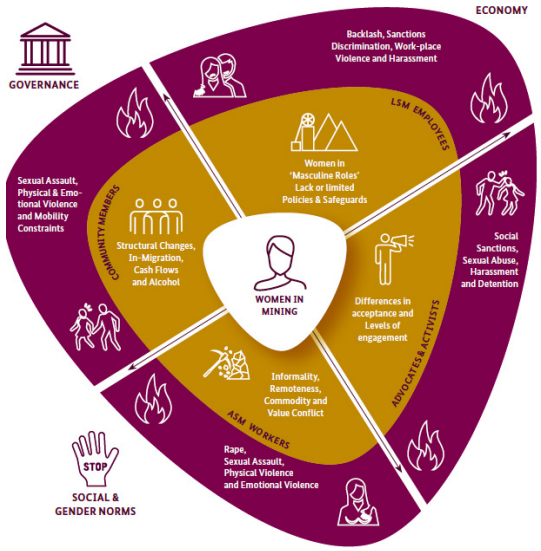



**Figure 3.** Domains through which women interact with the mining sector; their potential vulnerabilities, the potential forms of SGBV and the overarching 'macro' factors that may influence this. The yellow sections set out some of the potential drivers or vulnerabilities that women may face in their various roles in the sector.

## The Disenfranchisement of Women

"In India, most of the mining areas are either forests or areas that have a significant population of indigenous people. Their land holdings are not clear and they do not have any knowledge of managing money. Then there are usurpers around who would trick them. When mining starts in these areas, these people lose their land and livelihoods which ultimately impacts their whole family system. This transition is unfair on women who from being the cultivators become dependent on men or are pushed to undertake unorganized labour work. The worst part is that the mining debate in the country doesn't even acknowledge women or their issues," one NGO told Mongabay-India.[2]

However, even with the restriction on women from working in mines, they were always impacted, directly or indirectly.

A 49-year-old tribal community leader Indu Netam, who has been associated with tribal community for mining, forest and livelihood related issues for the last 30 years in Chhattisgarh, said, "The impact of mining on women is not a simple straightforward one but it disturbs every aspect of their lives."

"In the tribal-dominated areas where mining has now taken over, the tribal women used to go to the jungle to collect forest produce in groups with others – for them, the value of the forest produce doesn't matter much but the time they spend together is important for them. Their social structure is disturbed. But after they lose their land and forests to mining, the mental pressure increases on them. They are forced to work in houses of other people for money and this marks their journey from being

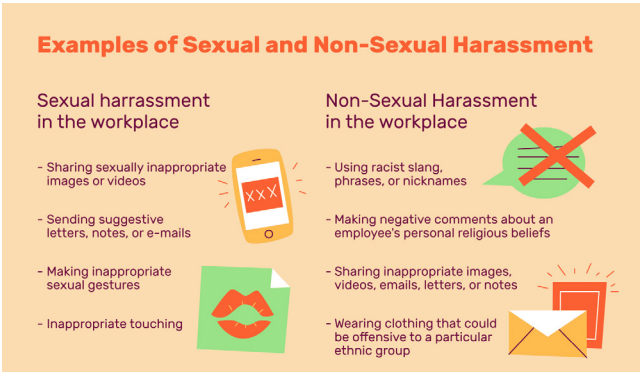



**Table.**1. Examples of sexual and non-sexual harassment

independent to being dependent on others for survival," Netam told Mongabay-India.

## Sexual Violence

Mining leads to an uptick in sexual violence against women. It is not just the land use, wildlife or biodiversity that changes when mining starts in an area, the lives of many of the women changes irreversibly – some are forced into sex work while some are trafficked to other parts of the country on the pretext of better opportunities. Netam, who belongs to the Gond tribe and lives in the north Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, said while women seek all kind of labour work or domestic work for survival, their "physical exploitation has become a usual affair" and the "worst part is that they don't even have a space to protest. "Even if they try sometimes, such cases are suppressed. Moreover, there is this stigma of being the society not accepting them after sexual abuse," said Netam, who is the convener of the Adivasi Jan Van Adhikar Manch, a network of indigenous people.

The story of sexual exploitation of women in mining-affected areas or them being trafficked is the same across the major mining areas across the country whether it is Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka or Madhya Pradesh. As on date there are 650 sex workers, who are registered in the Singrauli area, and the majority of them are connected to the mining-affected families. In fact, experts note that there are so many layers of impact on the lives of women in mining areas including mental health issues. One NGO noted that if one takes "Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand or any other major mining area for example there are clear routes of trafficking from where young girls are taken for sex work or labour work to bigger cities like Delhi and Mumbai."

"For the mining-affected families, sending the girls out for work is not an option but a forced decision as their survival depends on them in absence of a proper livelihood strategy after losing their land. The influx of hundreds of trucks also increases the vulnerability of young girls and women. The social structure of the area completely transforms – we have documented so many cases of single unwed mothers who were left behind by men who were stationed in those mining areas for limited times," reportedly said by Bhanumathi Kalluri, who is the director of Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Child Rights while stressing that there is a vicious cycle of the impact of mining on livelihood and emotional health of women.

## Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Africa

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is a term that encompasses harmful acts perpetrated against a person's will, based on gender norms and unequal power relationships (UNHCR). Whilst often thought of as synonymous with violence against women SGBV can take many forms and can affect women, men, girls and boys, although it disproportionately affects women and girls on violence against children). Critical to understanding SGBV is the concept of gender relations – forms of power relations between women and men in a given society (Danielsen & Hinton, 2020). Gender relations can be expressed through gender norms: collective definitions of how women, men, girls and boys should behave. In 2012, a South African woman mine worker was found dead in North West Anglo Platinum's Khomanani mine - she had been attacked during an underground shift with 13 male mine workers and was found with a used condom next to her body.

The North Mara Mine, a large gold mine in Tanzania, has been subject to allegations of violence and environmental contamination for the past two decades. The mine site was acquired in the mid-1990s and members of the local community were then forbidden from carrying out artisanal mining in the area, which had been a source of income until the arrival of the mine operator. This has led to members of the community coming into the area to look for gold granules among the tailings pond. There have been confrontations with police and guards at the mine. According to an investigation , security guards at the mine and police in the area stand accused of killing members of the local community and raping numerous women. According to one rape survivor, she was caught by mine security guards and taken to the nearby airstrip by car where one guard raped her and the other kept watch. She stated that this was routine for women who were caught. Another woman later tested positive for HIV after being raped, whilst another still struggles to walk due to the beating sustained during her assault. Many rape survivors did not tell anyone as they were ashamed to tell their husbands. After over a dozen women complained, and the case was taken up by lawyers,



**Figure 4.** How women work in mining.

and survivors were paid a sum of money, no admission of liability was made by the mine operator. Survivors allege they were asked to sign a document without full awareness of what it stated and were not allowed to take a copy with them. A lawsuit against the mine was settled against in 2015 and no subsequent allegations of rape have been made and shootings near the mine have declined. However additional lawsuits are pending.

In another case, a woman was raped in the changing rooms during the early hours of the morning whilst a security guard was on site. In the tragic case of the woman at the Khomanani mine, a man was ultimately sentenced to 50 years in prison for rape and murder. However, sexual harassment was noted to remain prevalent, with underground lighting minimal, making it hard for women to identify the perpetrator. Whilst women miners are members of trade unions, the evidence shows that these unions were not responsive to women's needs and issues. Women felt let down by unions on issues including provision of appropriate PPE and sexual

harassment complaints and issues were dismissed as women's complaints and not seen as part of workplace culture. Research conducted by Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the Rustenberg Municipality, the capital of South Africa's platinum mining belt found that 45% of women surveyed had experienced Intimate partner violence (IPV), whilst 18% had experienced non-partner rape. MSF noted failure to recognise sexual violence as a medical emergency, poorly defined minimum standards of care, lack of trained staff and a weak referral network, among other areas, as gaps in quality service provision for survivors (MSF, 2017). Whilst this research does not tie incidents of rape to mine workers specifically, it states that Intimate partner violence (IPV) and rape are extremely common among women and girls in Rustenberg. It was concluded in their quantitative study that women living closer to ASM mines in eastern DRC are at higher risk of sexual violence than those in non-mining areas, both by partners and non-partners. The World Bank (2015) noted that rape was described as commonplace in mining towns in eastern DRC and that state and non-state institutions limited survivors' access to justice. In a 2016 survey by *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF) in ASM areas of eastern DRC, it was established that 74% of women had been subjected to sexual violence (WILPF, 2016). The report also noted police and security harassment (WILPF, 2016). In eastern DRC women take on numerous roles within and surrounding ASM operations. However, women are generally in more supporting roles in the sector and the World Bank (2015) note they are more vulnerable to sexual and economic predation. SGBV has been used to operationalise harmful gender norms by reinforcing who is in control and has power, from terrorising incidents led by rebel groups to exploitation and humiliation in more secure areas. These present examples of sexual violence and psychological violence. Some of the norms surrounding women's work in ASM in the DRC seems, whether purposefully or not, to concentrate women either out of the sector in general, or out of higher value roles within the ASM sector, which could be viewed as a form of socio-economic violence.[3]

## LSM and ASM Employees

Dominated by men, large scale mining (LSM) and artisanal small mining (ASM) record Sexual harassment as the main form of violence. A report in 2014 noted that found women working underground in South Africa providing sexual services to men in return for their assistance. A study in South Africa - on interventions to promote gender equality in the mining sector - found that 31% of women miners surveyed listed abuse by colleagues as a challenge they faced in the workplace. An interviewee in South Africa noted sexual bribes in return for jobs to be an issue and that SGBV was a factor in low retention of women in the workforce. A study in Tanzania revealed that one operation had sought to address sexual harassment through introduction of 'gender friendly' safety gear, after previous gear was reported to leave women at risk for harassment as their physical features were more exposed. Similarly, research in Tanzania found sexual harassment to be a major problem in mining. The women employees felt they were not in a position to say no to 'advances' by male employees as this could result in job loss or denial of promotion. There was clear evidence of discriminatory gender norms, with managers expecting women to be 'submissive' and medical staff on site noting that women had been denied promotions when they became pregnant. In South Africa too, women noted mine management having a preference for men due to perceptions of physical strength and ability to work harder or longer. The safety of women living in mining camps was a concern and that women were particularly exposed to sexual harassment at night.

## Sexual Violence Triggered by Funding and Investment

A not-so-old report castigates Canada for its role or lack of it to prevent sexual violence at the work place. A majority of the world's mining companies, operating at over 8000 sites in over 100 countries, are headquartered in the North-American country, Canada. Many of these mines are also sites of serious human rights violations, including direct violence against local women and environmental degradation that destroys women's ability to support their families. Canada's mining companies are involved in such abuses and conflict more than any other countries.[4]

At Papua New Guinea's Porgera gold mine, operated for years by Canadian miner Barrick Gold, local women have accused mine security personnel of a decades-long campaign of violations including systemic sexual violence and brutal gang rape.

"The allegations against Canadian corporations are not isolated incidents," says Marco Simons, General Counsel

at ERI. "There is a systemic pattern of reported abuses associated with Canadian extractive sector companies operating outside Canada." While some women have received remedies, or are pursuing litigation in Canada, most women have not. Women face barriers in accessing justice in both their home countries and Canada.

Canada is obligated per law to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination of any women by national corporations operating in other countries, and is required to do so by taking measures to prevent, prohibit and punish violations by those corporations. It also requires them to provide effective remedies to victims of such violations. "Despite calls from civil society, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, individual Members of Parliament, and numerous U.N. treaty bodies to take proper legislative action to regulate its corporations, ensure accountability for involvement in harm and access to a remedy for victims of corporate related abuse," said Catherine Coumans of Mining Watch Canada, "Canada has failed to do so."

Canada's current approach is failing to stop and remedy abuse. Instead of regulating its corporations and preventing them from discriminating against women, Canada, like many other countries, supports its mining companies. Export Development Canada provides financial loans to companies associated with alleged human rights violations; and Canadian development aid is used to expand the extractive industries' operations abroad.

## The Cases in Australia

Recently in Australia, the women in the resources industry joined chorus to speak out against gendered discrimination, bullying, a lack of opportunity and, at the extreme end, sexual harassment and assault. Convicted perpetrators are being sent to jail, mining companies are investigating their workplaces and governments are tabling reports as the sector, still dominated by men, tries to clean up its act. But the incidents are not going down. Women across different facets of the resources workforce and at different levels of their careers want the mistreatment to stop.[5]

## Violence against Children

Violence against children is a form of SGBV. The women can have varying various roles in relation to the mining sector. Children, similarly, have varying interactions with the mining sector. Work from UNICEF (2015) has noted that children have innate vulnerabilities to the impacts of the mining sector, particularly during their early years, where risks like exposure to chemical waste may have more serious impacts for children than for adults. In-migration as a result of mining – noted above as a risk factor for SGBV - can increase the risk of sexual exploitation and violence against children and child pregnancy, risks that can spread along the route where mining companies transport materials by truck (UNICEF, 2015). Similarly to risks of violence against women from security forces, insufficient screening of security guards could create the risks of guards with a history of child abuse or violence against children being recruited (UNICEF, 2015). In addition to these risks, the mining sector also presents the risk of child labour. Child labour can be understood as a form of structural violence against children and a violation of their rights; and mining is considered by the ILO to be one of the worst forms of child labour. The precise scale of child labour in the mining sector is not known, although estimates suggest that around one million children work in mines and quarries. In Tanzania, 2014 survey data indicated there were 30,827 children working in the ASM sector, whilst estimates in Uganda put child labour in ASM around 12,000. In Katanga alone in the DRC, estimates put children in ASM at around 40,000 – around a third of total workers. Children may enter ASM through their parents, but there is also evidence of children being trafficked into the sector. Within the sector, children carry out a range of tasks, which vary depending on mineral and geography, but can include digging pits, working underground, carrying and crushing ore and mixing and burning mercury. Much of the available data focuses on children working in the ASM sector. UNICEF (2015) notes that LSM operations do not directly hire children, so the risks of child labour are more present in the supply chain of LSM projects – particularly during construction, where companies work with a large number of suppliers. Child labour in the mining sector is associated with a range of harmful outcomes for children, including physical dangers and strain, exposure to mercury and cyanide poisoning and use of drugs to cope with pain and fatigue. These impacts may be felt for the rest of their lives. Child labour can impose health risks and prevent children from accessing an education (UNICEF, 2015) and is the most hazardous sector for children for fatal injuries

(OECD, 2017). There are also risks of sexual harassment and abuse of children in mining environments. The girls particularly to be vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault in and around ASM sites. Additionally, UNICEF (2015) notes links of the mining sector to armed militant groups, increasing the risk that children are recruited into militias.

## Harassment and discrimination in South America

The first time a woman employee entered the cafeteria at BHP Billiton's massive Escondida mining operation in northern Chile, she couldn't help feeling countless eyes fixed on her body as she walked across the vast hall. "It can't get worse than that," she thought. Then as Requena looked for a place to sit, the noise started. Thousands of men began banging their knives and forks against their plates. The pace of the deafening clattering picked up as she searched for an empty seat. That's how it went day in and day out at the world's largest copper mine. It was 2012, and Requena was working 10-day shifts as an Escondida safety officer for BHP Billiton contractor Villatol. Soon she began eating in her room alone.

In a separate incident, five years later, Soledad Caceres, another safety worker, witnessed an almost identical scene in the cafeteria of Antofagasta Plc's Zaldivar mine. Caceres relayed what she had witnessed to her employer, as well as to Antofagasta management. Officials brushed off her complaint, she says. Three months later, the contractor she worked for, Rentalmin, declined to renew her contract. She was later told by one of her former co-workers that her comment was seen by Rentalmin management as "out of place," Caceres says.

Mining is by far Chile's largest industry, accounting for about 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product and more than half of the country's exports. Women now make up about 8 percent of the workforce. By comparison, in Canada, just under 20 percent of mining industry workers are women. "I would like to see a faster incorporation of women," said Chile's Mining Minister, who added that some companies find "**women are less prone to suffer accidents, and machines operated by women at the mines require less maintenance.**"[6]

## In the USA

**In the US, women constitute 13% of the mining workforce and 16% of mining related college programs.** One gold miner, Hanna Hurst, described her harassment at work as rougher than any she endured serving in the military in Iraq. Men made remarks about her ovaries, passed around cellphones with pornographic pictures and circulated a sticker showing a man in a hard hat on his hands and knees and a woman on her back with her legs spread out. The caption: "A miner's work is never done." She left after her drill and walkie-talkie were both tampered with so that she could neither work properly nor hear instructions, jeopardizing her safety. "Mining gets in your blood," said Ms. Hurst, who now works as a mining inspector for much less money than what she earned in the mines. "At the end I walked away. They made it so miserable for me that I had to quit." Women in these jobs also often endure deliberate humiliations like not having bathrooms provided for them on construction sites. They can be blacklisted in construction or similar fields where tight networks and referrals are crucial to win the next job.

"**Regardless of who you work for, you will run into the same people over and over again who will not want to work with you just because you reported harassment**," said a worker in Utah, wrote. "**In most cases women become unemployable because of it.**"[7]

## At the end of this discussion

Women working across the resource industry continue to face challenges around bullying, discrimination and inequitable treatment, all over the world. **In a survey in 2022, 70% of female respondents said bullying is common, and 85% said gender inequality is common. Close to 67% also said sexual harassment is common in the mining industry**, which was more than double the proportion of male respondents. On the experiences of women working on-site, the survey results show women in fly-in, fly-out and drive-in, drive-out roles are more likely to rate workplace inclusion as poor compared to the survey average, that is, 41% compared to 28%. Women in these roles are also more likely to rate workplace diversity as poor, at 41% compared to 34% in the survey average.

However, 85% of female respondents said they were earning more than the average national female salary. Interestingly, when asked to indicate what they most

value in their careers, female respondents emphasized the satisfaction that comes with interesting, technically complex and fulfilling work.

**Finally**

Industry must realize the Gen Z's pithy sensitivity to such abuse and violence, the growing consumer and investor awareness of women's rights, alongside new legislation governing human rights in supply chains. These raise the reputational, operational and legal stakes for organizations operating in or sourcing from high risk locations. But with risks widespread across major producing countries in a host of key industries, sourcing responsibly is no easy task. Such aspects should be raised in the work order. By proactively examining abuses and where they lie, organizations can enhance their human rights due diligence measures and bolster their protection against reputational risks. They must stop producing twisted narratives and negativism that have been the historical legacy of the sector. This also comes with benefits; those who act quickly to understand their risk exposure can secure a competitive edge over industry peers.

**Disclaimer**

This article is not a summary statement about the harassment, violence and discrimination that women face in mining. The article is a collection of mostly anecdotal references on the subject. The stories, however, provide a picture of the status.

## References and Reading


1. Mayank Aggarwal. Ignored and invisible: The burden of mining on women "the Mongabay report. 2021; 20 Jan. https://india.mongabay.com/2021/01/ignored-and-invisible-the-burden-of-mining-on-women/
2. Mayank Aggarwal, Lack of alternatives force women back to work in stone mines, which are health hazards, https://india.mongabay.com/2021/02/lack-of-alternatives-force-women-back-to-work-in-stone-mines-which-are-health-hazards/
3. Lucy Atim, Mesiya Mwangoka, Laura Martins and Sophie Rickard. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Mining Sector in Africa. Evidence and reflections from the DRC, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda, This report related study was commissioned by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH/Programme Extractives and Development on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Multi-Stakeholder-Initiative Women's Rights & Mining". 2020 September.
4. Report to UN Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, 65th Session. Canada Complicit In Mining Companies' Pervasive Abuses against Women". 2016 Oct. https://miningwatch.ca/sites/default/files/eri_hrc_mwc_cedaw_committee_report_october_3_2016.pdf
5. Rachel Pupazzoni. 'Not acceptable': Women in mining speak out against sexual harassment and discrimination. Business Reporter. 2023 Aug 12th. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-12/women-in-mining-speak-out-against-decades-of-sexual-harassment/102699944
6. Bloomberg News Humiliated for years, women are fighting back in Chile's mines. 2018 August 8. https://www.mining.com/web/humiliated-years-women-fighting-back-chiles-mines/
7. Susan Chira We Asked Women in Blue-Collar Workplaces About Harassment. Here Are Their Stories, New York Times. 2017 Dec. 29. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/29/us/blue-collar-women-harassment.html
8. Jess Middleton. Mining worst performing industry for indigenous, minority and gender rights. 6 October 2022. https://www.maplecroft.com/insights/analysis/mining-worst-performing-industry-for-indigenous-minority-and-gender-rights/