

Exploring Gender Pay Inequality: An Inquiry in a South African Mining Organisation

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There is a paucity on academic studies on gender pay gap in the South African mining organisations. The current study focused on the effects of gender pay inequality on talent retention within the mining sector. This study was conducted through semi-structured interviews of women in a mining organisation. The interviews were conducted in a respectful way and within a safe environment in order for them to express their personal experiences and opinions on the gender-pay inequality. The findings revealed that many women in the company are aware of the existing inequalities and wage gaps between men and women. The findings show that gender segregation persists in the mines because women are considered weaker than men and are more vulnerable to violence in the mines. The findings of this study are relevant to both policy and practise. The findings shed light on the impact of the gender pay gap on talent retention in mining companies. The mining sector should review its pay policy and ensure that the pay of its employees (men and women) is fair.

Keywords: pay gap, pay inequality, gender segregation, talent retention

JEL Classification: M10

1. Introduction

Two distinct patterns of income have emerged in recent decades: persistent wage inequality, especially a gender wage gap, and a widening wage gap (Obloj & Zenger, 2022). Gender wage inequality is a persistent problem in the world of work. Gender pay inequality is a persistent problem in the context of equal pay. Harris et al. (2017) attest that it is difficult to achieve true equality because it requires constant review and monitoring. The phenomenon commonly referred to as the gender pay gap assumes that men and women are not paid equally for the work they do, which has been an economic and social problem since at least the 1980s (Artecona & Cunningham, 2002; Fields & Wolff, 1995; Risher, 2015). This pay gap means a difference between men and women in terms of their median income (Miller, Vagins, Hedgepeth, & Nelson, 2018). The gender pay gap has attracted the interest of researchers for decades (Barroso & Brown, 2021). Over the decades, wage gaps have been found between men and women regardless of their skills, education and experience (Erosa, Fuster & Restuccia, 2016; Mandel & Semyonov, 2016). Mafoea-Nkalai (2017) notes that the gender pay gap in South Africa is estimated at 15-17% on average. This means that a South African woman would have to work two months longer than a man to earn the same salary that he earns in a year. Mining and other heavy

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industries lag behind in gender pay equality (Mafoea-Nkalai, 2017). South Africa is not just immune to gender pay inequality. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2020), women earned on average 81% of what their male counterparts in full-time employment earned. Barroso and Brown (2021) confirm that women earned 84% of the wage compared to their male counterparts in 2021. A study conducted in Australia shows that women in the Australian mining sector often obtain low-paying jobs (International Labour Organisation, 2020), such that the gender pay gap has fluctuated between 13.4% and 19% in recent years (International Labour Organisation, 2020). This discrepancy has led to women leaving the mining sector to find jobs that match their value to the organisation or company (International Labour Organisation, 2020). These inequalities impact on the workforce and the performance of the company. Wood (2016) confirms that the wage gap and inequality between employees in a company affect the overall performance and behaviour of individuals. Rader Sipe, Larson, McKay and Moss (2016) report that gender pay inequality has a negative and discouraging effect on employees. Pay inequality has become a challenge in the employment sector in general. In some cases, employees with the same field of work and similar educational backgrounds are paid differently, making it difficult to retain talent in the company. In this case, women are the main victims (Constantopoulos, 2021).

On the other hand, equal pay for equal work is the right of everyone to receive the same wage, regardless of gender or race (Obloj & Zenger, 2022). These internal wage differentials reduce employee commitment (Buttner & Lowe, 2014). The International Labour Organisation study mentioned above raises another issue related to unequal pay and talent retention: equal pay for equal value, which was introduced in South Africa in August 2014 with the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (Langa & Bronkhorst, 2021). Despite this legislation, wage inequality still prevails. Furthermore, when women are employed, they are paid less than men because they are not considered breadwinners (Bussin & Nienaber, 2015). The above studies are still helpful in understanding how the problem of unequal pay has taken the world by storm and how important these pay gaps are in retaining talent. However, they may lack clarity on wage inequality in the mining sector. Despite the importance of gender wage inequality, there is little research on gender wage inequality in the South African context. As far as I know, it is unclear whether gender pay inequality influences employee behaviour that may affect organisational performance and their intention to leave. The aim of the study is therefore to examine the gender pay gap in the South African mining industry and determine how it affects talent retention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of the South African Mining Sector

The mining industry is a major contributor to South Africa's economic growth. In June 2019, the mining sector employed 514 859 people, of which 108 717 were employed in coal mining. In the same year, coal sales amounted to R148 billion (Statistics South Africa, 2019). It is therefore critical to ensure the sustainability of this industry through talent and human capital. Talent development brings economic benefits to companies by improving performance, increasing shareholder value and thus maintaining the company's competitive advantage (Heinen & O'Neill, 2004). In the past, the mining industry was dominated by men due to various factors. However, given the changing economic, social and operational environment in the mining sector, there is an urgent need to address gender diversity within the workforce. In order to manage the mining sector for the benefit of all stakeholders, there is a need to recognise and understand the benefits that women's participation in the minerals industry could bring, as well as the existing barriers that prevent women from being fully engaged.

2.2. Inequality in the Mining Sector

Hilling (2020) acknowledges that gender pay gaps exist in the world of work and discusses how women's work is undervalued. This pattern suggests that the basis for discrimination is not the nature of the work activity, but the gender of the person doing the work. Adelekan and Bussin's (2018) study found that despite government efforts to intervene by passing legislation to promote gender equality, women in South Africa remain underrepresented at all salary levels and the gender pay gap between women and men doing the same work remains prevalent. However, it is encouraging that many countries have launched programmes to promote gender equality. Eliminating gender inequalities requires coordinated efforts by different actors such as the government, workers' organisations and employers. It is a lifelong effort that requires commitment given the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace (Langa & Bronkhorst, 2021). Although little literature focuses

on the mining industry, it plays an important role in our study. Several decades ago, the South African Mining Charter introduced quotas that required mining companies to meet a 10% quota for women (Worldwide Recruitment Solutions, 2014). However, the statistics on the gender pay gap remain so alarming that one has to wonder whether companies are addressing the issue. The statistics focus on gender pay inequality and the racial and occupational segregation that white supremacy shows in the corporate environment. In addition, the study reflects the difficulty mining companies have in retaining talented women, especially in leadership positions, as statistics show that 60-83% of women remain in the mining industry (Pugliese, 2021). Women are expected to meet higher standards when it comes to promotions (Pugliese, 2021). For example, according to Worldwide Recruitment Solutions (2014), it takes about six months for a woman to be recognised as a manager. It took seven years for her to get the job as mine manager.

A report on inequality trends published by Stats SA confirms that women earn 30% less than men in the same position, and the average pay gap for CEOs is 37% versus 15% (Zwane, 2020). Litman, Robinson, Rosen, Rosenzweig, Waxman and Bates (2020) argued that the gender pay gap is also strongly influenced by the difference in experience between women and men in the industry: 43% of male employees had the highest level of experience (1,001-10,000 HITs), compared to only 33% of female employees (Litman et al., 2020). Due to segregation laws and restrictions enacted in the early 1970s, whites continued to be the most represented in leadership positions. Statistics show that the proportion of whites is 63%, compared to 37% for all other races combined (Litman et al., 2020). Many factors affect women's well-being in the mining sector, including dangerous working conditions. It is therefore important that employers implement gender-sensitive regulatory measures and programmes to promote gender equality in the mining sector (Dinye & Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2012). Despite progressive gender-sensitive legislation, women in the mining sector still experience inequalities, including discrimination in decision-making and pay, such that women have to work harder to earn the same as their male counterparts, resulting in low productivity (Kaggwa, 2020). Ellix, Farmer, Kowalik, Little, Moonsamy, Mussacaleca, Ruban, and Zapata (2021) argued that women are attracted to the mining sector to advance professionally and contribute their expertise; however, due to inequalities and the fact that opportunities for practical experience are proactively provided for men, women are sidelined, especially in technical roles. This systematically impacts the pay gap as men have more experience compared to their female counterparts, resulting in women losing interest in a career in the mining industry.

2.3. Drivers of the Gender Pay Gap

Trends going back to the 1960s show a long period when women's earnings were around 60% of those of their male counterparts, followed by an increase in women's earnings from the 1980s onwards that began to narrow, but not close, the gap that remains today (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Litman, Robinson, Rosen, Rosenzweig, Waxman and Bates (2020) note that the extensive literature attempting to explain the gender pay gap and its evolution over time in traditional labour markets suggests that it is a function of multiple structural and individual processes that reflect both the short-term and cumulative effects of gender relations and roles over the life course. Nevertheless, women continue to perform the majority of domestic work, which significantly affects their employment and economic situation (Adema, Ali, Kim, Lunati, Piacentini & Queisser, 2014). Research on the gender pay gap often starts from the premise that men and women have different occupations and earn significantly different salaries (Greer & Carden, 2021).

The pay gap becomes a challenge when men and women are employed in the same occupation with similar skills and are not paid equally for their work. Constantopoulos (2021) affirms that the gender pay gap is one of the most discussed problems related to gender inequality. Moreover, this problem exists in different cultures and countries, confirming that it is a universal problem that requires complex solutions. However, this problem is far from being solved, as different countries have different strategies to tackle wage inequality. Wekwete (2014) notes that well-documented gender inequality has implications that take the form of inequalities in pay, human capacity development and access to career opportunities. The persistence of a significant gender pay gap to the disadvantage of women is well documented in all societies (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Wage inequality for women is a complex global issue, and many countries have enacted laws to intervene (Kohout & Singh, 2018). Adelekan and Bussin (2018) reported a gender pay gap of 35.5% in the private sector and 27% in the public sector. Despite equal levels of achievement and education between men and women, women's pay is still lower than men's in some cases (Adelekan & Bussin, 2018). Whitehouse (2003) notes that even decades after the introduction of equal pay provisions, a significant gender pay gap

remains in most countries. Despite the widespread increase in women's educational attainment and labour force participation in the second half of the 20th century, there is still much to learn about gender wage inequality (Whitehouse, 2003). In the South African context, equal pay for work of equal value is the provision of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 in South Africa, which was introduced in August 2014 (Ebrahim, 2016). Despite the introduction of this Act, wage inequality still prevails. Furthermore, Franssen, Plantenga and Vlasblom (2012) confirm that the gender pay gap used to be attributed to the fact that women were not suitable for a job due to their educational qualifications and work experience. Noonan, Corcoran and Courant (2005) identified the causes of the gender pay gap as follows:

1. Human capital or productivity factors such as education, skills and work experience;
2. Industry or occupational segregation, which some estimate accounts for about half of the wage gap;
3. Gender constraints on time flexibility, which can affect promotions and pay; and finally
4. Gender discrimination in hiring, promotion, task assignment and pay.

The latter mechanism is often estimated to be a function of the unexplained residual effects of gender on pay after other factors are taken into account. This approach is most convincing in studies of narrowly defined groups of workers, such as lawyers and academics in specific fields. Considering that previous research has documented a negative relationship between wages and domestic work (Baxter, 1992; Bonke et al., 2005; Bryan and Sevilla-Sanz, 2011; Carlson and Lynch, 2017; Cooke and Hook, 2018; Coverman, 1983; Hersch, 2009; Hersch and Stratton, 1997, 2002; Keith and Malone, 2005; McAllister, 1990; McLennan, 2000), the unequal intra-household division of domestic work could be a driver of the gender wage gap. The study of the gender wage gap in the mining sector is of particular interest as this sector is an important contributor to economic growth and is obliged to pay equal pay for equal work. In the South African context, the Equal Employment Act requires that female and male employees in the same establishment be paid equally for equal work defined in terms of skill, effort and responsibility requirements.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theories of human capital, equity and labour discrimination. The human capital theory was developed by Adam Smith and states that capital is the acquisition of talent through education or training (Grybaite, 2006). According to Lips (2013), human capital theory assumes that a worker's salary or earnings are directly related to their investment. This is one of the many reasons for the existence of the wage gap. Grybaite (2006) affirms that human capital theory reveals a critical wage structure that contributes to the existing wage gap. Women often work more part-time than men because they had to withdraw from the labour market at some point after having children (Becker, 1985 & Lips, 2013). This means that women have less incentive to invest in education and training to ultimately improve their labour income (Grybaite, 2006). Although this has been the case for some time, Becker (1985) confirms that this situation has changed with the rise in divorce rates and the decline in family size. Human capital theory is a lesser factor in the gender pay gap (Grybaite, 2006). Brynin (2017) argues that the narrowing of the gender pay gap can be explained by the better access to education that women now receive. Constantopoulos (2021) claims that women's education increases their value in the labour market. Investment in women's education contributes to higher earnings. Furthermore, human capital has been criticised by scholars for not fully explaining discrimination, leading to the theory of labour discrimination (Grybaite, 2006).

According to Grybaite (2006), the part of the wage gap that is not due to gender skills differences could result from labour market discrimination. Labour market discrimination occurs when people from two different groups, men and women, are paid differently even if they have the same qualifications (Grybaite, 2006). Discrimination is often used to explain factors related to the social context. This is also true of the work of Garry Becker. Becker (1971) assumed that some individuals in the labour market have a tendency to discriminate. Becker (1971) proposed the theory of discrimination, which explains various sources of discrimination that affect women's earnings in companies. Discrimination based on taste occurs when employers prefer not to be associated with a particular group of people because of their gender, race, ethnicity or other personal characteristics (Becker, 1971). According to discrimination theory, employers, customers, employees and other stakeholders can contribute to discrimination (Becker, 1971). In this study, discrimination by customers is excluded. Discrimination by the employer occurs when the employer considers a person of a certain sex for a certain job. Discrimination by employees occurs when employees are unwilling to work with other employees because of their gender. This can lead to 'crowding discrimination', where women are excluded from certain jobs. There are two types of gender segregation: horizontal and vertical. Vertical

segregation refers to men and women working in different jobs, while horizontal segregation refers to men and women working in different jobs (Brynin, 2017). Constantopoulos (2021) confirms that gender segregation can lead to lower wages for women due to market displacement.

As explained earlier, this study also draws on Adams' equality theory. The basic principle of equality theory confirms that workers who experience inequality are not necessarily motivated (Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1987). In general, people respond positively to fair treatment when they believe they have made the same effort and will be rewarded fairly. There is an exchange relationship here: the reward for work done. Evidence shows that most expressions of dissatisfaction by employees are primarily due to unequal pay. Employees are motivated when they are treated fairly or rewarded according to their contribution to improving organisational performance (Adams, 1963). Equity theory further states that the expectation of fairness and justice is compared to that of peers in the workplace. Whether employees performing similar tasks are rewarded equally affects motivation and retention of talent. Supervisors need to consider equity theory in all aspects of the organisation, not only in pay, but also in other areas such as performance rewards, assignment of projects, training opportunities and promotions (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012). Unequal pay can have a negative impact on organisational performance and make it impossible to retain talent (Fitri, Pribadi & Astuti, 2018). To mitigate the impact of equal pay for equal work and the issue of gender pay, it is important to review legal provisions to see whether the principle of equal pay for equal work is strengthened or restricted (Kamiri, 2021). The following section discusses the findings on the gender pay gap.

3.1. Talent Retention

The term "war for talent" was first coined by McKinsey and Company (1998), a renowned global management firm that advises leading companies and governments. The term is now frequently used to describe the competition for the best talent. The battle for talent is the subject of extensive research and it seems that talent is still a scarce commodity in the business world. Retaining talent is critical for any business; however, very few employers focus on retaining female talent, so there is a need to identify the patterns that prevent them from leveraging female talent, such as pay disparities (Ammerman & Groyberg, 2021). Long ago, retaining talent meant paying workers their salaries or wages for services rendered (Daniel, 2019). Money was the only factor necessary to ensure that employees were satisfied. Merrel (2016) noted that it was used by owners and employers as a tool to assert their power and level of hierarchy in an organisation.

However, over the years, this has changed drastically and a company's human resources have become the most important factor in any organisation. A strong retention strategy becomes an effective recruitment tool and retaining key employees is critical to the success of an organisation. It is also known that retaining the best employees leads to customer satisfaction, increased product or service sales, satisfied colleagues and employees, effective succession planning, and deeply embedded organisational knowledge and learning (Balaji et al., 2017). Unequal pay can have an impact on both the organisation and its employees. According to Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan and Haslam (2011), organisations may struggle to retain talented female employees because they do not reward their performance. In organisations, employees often receive bonuses in recognition of consistent diligence and determination (Kulich et al., 2008). If a woman is denied such recognition, she is less likely to try hard in the future, avoid challenges, or view work as a whole (Ryan, Kulich, Haslam, Hersby, & Atkins, 2008). According to Kulich et al. (2008), this leads to a shortage of women in certain occupations and a shorter length of stay in employment than men.

3.2. Wage Inequality

The slow pace at which the pay gap is being addressed is having a detrimental effect on employers' efforts to attract and retain talent. This is exacerbated by the lack of transparency in determining compensation levels, which causes qualified employees, especially women, to leave companies (Muller-Heyndyk, 2021). Transparency can reduce inequalities by creating compensation structures (Muller-Heyndyk, 2021). Chiekezie, Emejulu & Nwanneka (2017) argue that the success or failure of an organisation depends on its ability to retain talent through appropriate and transparent compensation policies and affirm that employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be loyal and increase their productivity. According to Chicha (2006), the pay gap persists despite the remarkable progress women have made in education. This is attributed to gender differences in job classification, which results in companies struggling to retain talent. The pay gap is an

important factor in turnover, as workers are more likely to quit if they are paid less than their colleagues for comparable work (Kale, Reis, & Venkateswaran, 2014).

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4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

A qualitative interpretivist research paradigm was used in this study. Crossan (2003) confirms that interpretivism contributes to a better understanding of phenomena. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) affirm that interpretivism aims to understand problems, ideas and situations from people's perspectives and experiences. Saunders et al (2019) further added that interpretivism provides a detailed description of the experiences and perceptions of people in the study. Interpretivism suggests that the realities of the world are interpreted differently from person to person (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, we have consistently interpreted participants' responses and generated new knowledge. This is because we are concerned with how people make sense of the world. This approach was suitable for gaining a deep understanding of the meanings that people (miners) associate with their organisational lives.

4.2. Participants and Procedure

As indicated in Table 1, the current study had ten participants, women with diversity in age, educational background and occupational levels. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Participants participated voluntarily in the current study.

Table 1: Profile of participants

Pseudonym	Occupation	Gender-pay gap views
RP1	Supervisor	This participant provided some good opinions about the inequalities in the organisation.
RP2	Supervisor	This participant provided some interesting information regarding the pay gaps and inequalities between men and women at different levels of the organisation.
RP3	Administrator	This participant provided more general answers to questions about the gender pay gap and inequalities; however, it still contributed significantly to our study.
RP4	Officer	Participant 4 gave an alternative opinion about the gender pay gap to all the other participants
RP5	Unit Manager	Participant 5 gave some interesting information and statistics regarding the pay gap within the mining industry. She also provided some other reasons as to why the pay gap exists.
RP6	Acting Manager	This participant also introduced some other factors contributing to the gender pay gap
RP7	Unit Manager	This participant provided some excellent information on what the organisation and the mining industry are doing to integrate women to ensure equality on all levels.

RP8	Administrator	This participant provided more insight into the qualifications needed in the organisation and how this contributes to the pay gap.
RP9	Artisan	This participant also provided some other factors contributing to the pay gap. She was unsure if there are pay gaps within the organisation but did state that there were general inequalities between men and women.
RP10	Administrator	This participant gave her opinion about women's inequalities in the mining industry and how their initiatives have fallen short.

Source: Author's fieldwork

4.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used for our research. According to Leavy (2020), this is also not standardised. However, we created a list of questions that should be covered in each interview (the questions may change slightly in each interview). In some interviews we added or removed certain questions depending on the organisational context. In this way, we were able to ensure that we obtained comprehensive data to answer our research questions. To ensure trustworthiness, Tracy (2010) suggested using an interview protocol to ensure consistency in the process with all participants. In addition, the in-depth study will provide a body of knowledge for human resource management to determine the impact of the gender pay gap on talent retention in the mining sector. The researcher scheduled an appointment with the participants. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated constraints, interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom platforms so that participants were connected from home. Each participant was given an informed consent form prior to the interview. All ten participants agreed and confirmed their participation in the study. The study was extended to the private and public sectors, where inequalities are still widespread. In order to obtain confirmations at the data analysis stage of the current study, due diligence was conducted to ensure that the results were consistent with the research data.

4.4. Data Analysis

In the present study, the data were analysed thematically, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019). Thematic analysis can be described as the process of analysing data to identify significant patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allows us to organise our data in rich detail (Campbell et al., 2021 & Byrne, 2021). To achieve reliability, the researcher cross-checked interpretations with participants' archival data. This ensured that all aspects of the research study were included in the final report. Applying the criterion of reliability enabled another researcher to investigate the same study in the future (Shenton, 2003). This is also confirmed by (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010), which states that poorly designed research can lead to poorly conducted research.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The present research was conducted in accordance with the University of Johannesburg Ethics Committee. The research proposal went through a process and was approved by the University of Johannesburg. An application to conduct the research was then sent to the relevant organisations. Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form to participate in the study. They will remain anonymous and their responses will be kept confidential. Participants were reminded that their participation is voluntary; they can withdraw from the interviews if they wish to do so, and they can choose not to express their opinions or answer questions if they feel uncomfortable answering them. Participants were reminded that they remain anonymous throughout the data collection and cannot be identified in any way.

5. Findings and Discussion

Five themes emerged from the data, namely (i) wage inequality, (ii) gender segregation, (iii) support mechanisms regarding the gender pay gap, (iv) perceived pay fairness; and (v) talent retention.

Theme 1: Wage Inequality

Participants experienced gender pay gaps in their workplaces. Most women believe that there is a gender pay gap in South Africa.

Participant 1 confirmed that she believes that the gender pay gap exists in South Africa. Her response was as follows:

"Yes, for example, women are not considered for the same positions as men and even if they are selected for these positions, they are still paid less. Also, a CV might not be considered just because you are a woman"

Participants 3 and 4 did not go into specific details, *but confirmed that there is a gender pay gap in South Africa*. their responses were more related to the mining industry or their current company. Participant 3 response was as follows

"Yes, I definitely feel that especially in mining a man with the same qualification is paid more. For example, I know a few men who are a bit behind me but they get paid more"

Participant 4's response was also as follows:

"Yes, even in this mine I know male co-workers who do the same work as me, in our department we know what everyone is paid, so I know people who are paid more than us, two of us women who are paid the same and our male colleagues who are paid more and we do the same work. So that kind of thing happens in this company".

Participant 5 confirmed that there is a gender pay gap in South Africa. However, she did not elaborate on this issue. Her response was as follows *"Yes, there is still a gender gap and even a racial gap when it comes to wage differentials"*

Participants 7, 8 and 9 expressed concern about the low number of women in senior positions. Salary grading in the mining industry is alphabetical, meaning the higher the alphabet, the higher the pay. Therefore, their biggest concern was the lack of women in the higher classifications, including the D-band and the E-band. Their responses are as follows.

Participant 7: *"Yes, definitely, I really think so. I mean, if you look at our company for example, I do not see any VP up there (E band), even in government I hardly see any women in high positions"*

Participant 8: *"Yes definitely, at the lower level I am not sure if the gap exists, but I know it seems to be getting bigger at the management level."*

Participant 9 gave us detailed information about the gender pay gap in the mining industry and within the company. The participant referred to the different levels within the company itself. She explained:

"There is a gender pay gap. There are many, for example in [the company], how many women are at the D level, right? How many women are at the E level? I do not even want to go further into C2. How many are there? A small number compared to their male colleagues. We know they have been cut in a male-dominated profession, but still. The pay is also different from my male colleagues. Right. There is a big pay gap."

Theme 2: Gender Segregation

According to the concept of gender segregation, men perform certain activities while women perform others. In order to find out whether participants thought there was gender segregation in the workplace and to understand which gender was treated more fairly, participants were asked questions about this issue. Only three participants acknowledged gender segregation in the organisation; their responses are as follows:

Participant 2 stated that:

"Women are still overlooked, even though there is so much emphasis on women in the mining sector, and even though they say we want to give preference to women, women are still overlooked because we may not have the same years of experience, but our expertise and experience are not taken into consideration. And even when they say we want to give preference to women, women are still overlooked because we may not have the same years of experience but our expertise with the level of experience that we have is not taken into account". She further adds that:

"They will still be stuck in offices, and they will still be stuck in lower positions, and men will still automatically move up. They have tried to identify these women-friendly positions and make sure that we fill them with females."

Participant 4 mentioned that there is gender segregation in the mining sector, but not in the department where she works, she explained: *"Yeah, I think there is, although at my level I can't not say there is, but I think there is a gender divide in the mining industry because mining is a men's industry. I think men were the first to be employed in mining; women came after and then they were treated a little bit inferior because mining is generally a male industry. So I think if we check higher positions, we will find these gaps"*

Participant 9 notes that there is still a distinction between men and women in the organisation in terms of ability to do the job. She said: *"Yeah, that is because.. Ah, there's a lady that once came to me and said she wanted to operate a winch, but the shift supervisor, even the team leader and the manager said, no, you are a lady. You can not operate a winch, so they still think women can not do what men can."*

Theme 3: Support Mechanism Concerning the Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is deeply rooted in the mining industry. This is all the more true as the mining industry has historically been dominated by men. Within the mining organisation, pay gaps exist; in general, men are paid more than women, regardless of the fact that they perform the same tasks. Ten participants were asked if there were any workshops or programmes in their company to raise awareness of gender pay gaps or to empower women. Participants in this research shared their views based on their experiences and observations. Only two participants seemed to have had experience of initiatives implemented by the organisation to reduce the gender pay gap.

Participant 2 agreed that some awareness raising workshops were held; the only limitation is that these workshops are coordinated and led by women and men do not participate or support them in finding solutions to this phenomenon of gender pay gap. In response to the question posed, the participant shared her views as follows: *"So, they have quite a few workshops, and they're trying to raise many of them."*

The participant further expressed limitations experienced in the initiatives to alleviate gender pay inequalities:

"Most of the awareness is being created by a woman and you'll never find a man attending this workshop. You'll never find men being there to open their minds, and the men are still on shaft. Of emphasis being placed on it by women. So, it's like the women are trying to fight for it. But you'll never find men attending these workshops. You'll never find these issues being addressed with men directly. It's being raised by women, for women between women, but the men are not involved. Men in management are not involved. Because if the company is trying, but then the people who are supposed to be helping are not helping then it's a huge issue.")

Participant 7 confirmed the latter in relation to the organisation's efforts to undertake initiatives to integrate women in the mining industry, such as forums for women in mining. However, it was unclear how such initiatives would directly improve the gender wage gap. In her response to this question, the participant acknowledged the following: *"So, there are training on such matters."*

The participant further elaborated on some of the efforts by the company to integrate women empowerment programs in the mining industry; she stated that:

"I mean, we are one of the most prominent companies when it comes to the integration of women in the mining industry, and that includes discussing and finding a solution to all the problems related to the integration of women. In the mining industry. Committees on women and mining have now been established. These are issues that are discussed and/or come back to in these forums, and also in the North West Province [the organisation] plays a very big role in the forums for women in mining."

The participant concluded her response by appreciating the initiatives:

"So forward thinking is happening in terms of including more females in the mining industry and for that I think we set a benchmark."

However, about seven participants said that they were not aware of any initiatives to raise awareness on eliminating the gender pay gap in the company. Participant 3 expressed in her own words that the mine may not yet be ready or willing to introduce workshops or programmes to address gender pay gaps, as follows;

"I don't think they'll ever scratch that box. I think they know they're guilty of a lot of things there. I think because [the organisation] has bought up so many different companies, I think it's all over the place, not necessarily just gender specific, but I think it's very skewed. I think a lot of Russian companies are jealous of

what we earn here because it's much less. So I think that even here you can find a man who earns less than a woman. I think that's a box they don't want to open."

Participant 2 who has been working in the mine for a while supported the latter and seemed to have no knowledge of any initiatives or workshops to alleviate gender pay inequalities, in her direct response she shared her views that: *"I don't know any workshop that has been conducted regarding that. I don't have any information. I have never seen anything like that since working here."*

When responding to a question on how often the organisation conduct workshops or training focused on women's empowerment, Participant 4, 5, 6 and 8 agreed that they had not experienced any training programmes to raise awareness of women empowerment.

Theme 4: Perceived Pay Fairness

Perceived pay fairness, in this case refers to workers' thoughts and understanding when it comes to the fairness of an employee's pay. In the interviews, most participants stated that there is still a significant pay gap or pay disparity in the workplace. Nine out of ten participants were able to identify that these pay differences were due to discriminatory and stereotypical reasons.

Participant 2 states how women are not even considered for managerial positions:

"Women are not even considered for the same level of positions that men are and a lot of times when they are on the same positions, they are paid less."

Participant 3 also explains how the pay difference at her workplace is not related to experience, skills, or performance but is caused merely by a difference in gender.

"Yes, definitely. And even at this point, I know of male people doing the same work as I am doing. Like with us in finance, we know what everybody pays. So I know of people that pay more than us, two of us paying the same, both women and then the male counterpart paying more and we do exactly the same work."

Most participants, including males, corroborated what was said by the two participants mentioned above. They also went on to explain how it was unfair and that it may be because mining is a male-dominated industry. Participant 4 speaks about this below:

"Yes it does, like I said in the beginning I think this is the men industry and it will always be so we will never be treated the same, men are preferred more on certain positions."

Theme 5: Retention

Only five of the ten participants interviewed noticed how to pay disparities impact talent retention.

Participant 9 was asked if other factors contribute to the pay gaps rather than the female or male situation, and she noticed that the gaps impact talent retention. Below is the response given by the participant:

"What I have observed right, it's about who you know. It's about who you know that determines your pay. And the company is losing a lot of good people because of that."

Participant 3 further indicated that the mining organisation is losing talent because of gender pay gap.

"No, that's even a bigger concern if now they're starting to lose people because of such things."

Participant 6 indicated that she will consider to leave the organisation if the gender pay gap still persists.

"But ultimately, I'd be very disappointed in the organisation, its visions, its missions and its value and I would possibly sit down and think back and workout whether I actually want to be part of this organisation or not, do I see my future here if I'm being held back because I'm a woman, or earning less because I'm a woman, without necessarily being given the feedback and I find out secretly"

Participant 10 noted that in most cases, employees leave the organisation where they are not well cared for financially. *"If a person is not paid appropriately they're going to look elsewhere and then we will lose our most talented people which is really shooting ourselves in the foot"*

In addition, Participant 7 indicated that rewards offered by the organisation could be the primary reason employees leave their jobs; in this case, a gender pay gap makes things worse. I have experience this before.

"It may well be that it becomes a question of retention. That's probably why I left my previous employer to work for the current organisation. But my supervisor paid black people more because she felt that black people had suffered from the legacy of apartheid. But I said that was no reason to pay people more, that could be fixed through the BEE plans or through training, but they could not give them 10%, and if I had a better performance review they would give me 4%.

6. Discussion

Over the years, the persistence of gender pay inequality and the growing wage gap has become an issue of concern. When participants were interviewed and asked questions about the gender pay gap in South Africa and in the mining sector, all ten participants agreed and identified a pay gap in South Africa and in their mining company. According to Grønning et al. (2020), women earn less than men because the work is seen as culturally less valuable and therefore they are paid less. Accordingly, women's knowledge and overall performance are valued and paid much less than men's.

Research shows that despite numerous efforts by the South African government to ensure equality in the workplace through various laws, the average gap between men and women in South Africa based on monthly salaries remains at 30.3% (Bosch & Barit, 2020). This was confirmed by many participants who had identified a potential pay gap within the company. This finding shows that there is a perception that the mining industry is only for men. However, studies show that in Africa, 40-50% of the mining workforce is female (Reichel, 2020). Despite their significant contribution, it is evident from the findings that economic opportunities for women do not match those of their male counterparts. This finding is also an important statistical contribution to this study, as many other authors have pointed out that the basis for discrimination in relation to the significant wage gap is not the type of work activities, but rather the gender of the person doing the work, with Stats SA confirming that women earn 30% less than men in the same job (Zwane, 2020).

Our findings show that gender inequalities in the mining sector are a source of exploitation. Even though the number of women in male-dominated positions has slightly increased (Adeleken & Bussin, 2022), the wage gap in the mining sector is still a pressing issue. According to Adeleken & Bussin (2022), the percentage of women in male-dominated industries varies between 26.7% and 38.8%; this shows that it can take longer for women to secure promotions and possible leadership positions. According to an analysis by Adelekan & Bussin (2018), men in salary grades A, B, C, D and E-Low are paid significantly more than women, meaning that men and women doing similar work are paid differently. This leads to our first research question, "How are gender-equitable pay levels currently determined?" According to research, the Employment Equity Act No. 85 (1998) Code of Good Practise, unequal pay on the grounds of gender constitutes discrimination. This legislation allows employers to establish fair pay structures and pay bands for men and women. In many cases, the women in the discussions with the participants noted that the company does not provide transparency about the salaries of its employees

As a result, it is difficult for all workers to determine whether they are being paid fairly, as they do not face these potential problems in some of their positions in the company. The level of gender-equitable pay in South Africa is usually determined by legislation. According to Vettori & Nicolaidis (2019), the international conventions on pay discrimination that are relevant to South Africa emanate from the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO requires its members to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities and treatment for all workers. However, it is difficult to say whether the organisations take full account of South African equality laws and regulations, mainly due to workers' concerns about the gender pay gap in the organisation and in the mining sector in general.

The findings revealed that many women in the company are aware of the existing inequalities and wage gaps between men and women. According to Fitri et al. (2018), equal pay has a positive impact on organisational commitment. This means that employee engagement is higher when they have a good idea of the compensation they will receive. The common theme of the current pay gap in South Africa and the mining sector has created a difficult working environment for employees.

Fisher et al (2020) note that despite the introduction of policies to promote gender equality, the gender pay gap remains prevalent and women are unfairly deprived of their basic rights and opportunities in the workplace. The research study highlighted some of the factors that lead to gender pay gaps, particularly in the mining sector where the employer or a supervisor indirectly excludes female employees by imposing work requirements that require heavy skills for longer hours and favours a male employee to perform the task so

that the same male employee is paid more for overtime than the female employee who has the same competence and academic background because the male employee has more skills and experience to perform heavy tasks. In contrast, the female employee was never given a fair chance to perform the same tasks. Adelekan and Bussin (2018) confirmed that male pay is consistently higher than female pay in all pay grades, with the lowest in grade F, and further pointed out that government efforts in this regard seem to have yielded minimal results. Such practises systematically lead to a gender pay gap in the mining sector, hence the need to regulate the equitable distribution of labour through company policies and enforce compliance in line with the South African Gender Equality Act, No. 55 of 1998.

Adelekan & Bussin (2018) found that despite government efforts to intervene by enacting legislation to promote gender equality, women in South Africa remain underrepresented at all salary levels and the gender pay gap remains prevalent between women and men doing the same work. Unequal pay can have a negative impact on organisational performance and make it impossible to retain talent (Fitri, Pribadi & Astuti, 2018). Overall, it can be said that persistent gender pay inequality has a negative impact on the company and plays a major role in company morale and the overall workplace environment. If the company does not address this issue, it can result in low production rates and a high turnover rate due to a lack of talent retention. Since the mining industry has historically been seen as being dominated by men, a sizable portion of the environment and infrastructure have developed primarily to meet the needs of male miners (Zitha et al., 2018).

The findings show that gender segregation persists in the mines because women are considered weaker than men and are more vulnerable to violence in the mines (Greer & Carden, 2021). Inequality has a long history in South Africa and the legacy of the mining industry has made the gender gap between men and women particularly evident (Madiba, 2022). Madiba (2022) notes that men used to go to work and women stayed at home to take care of the house and family, as gender roles were fixed in the past. However, this has changed drastically and women now play a more important role in various sectors, including mining. Worryingly, pre-existing prejudices persist (Madiba, 2022). Madiba (2022) adds that some people still believe that women are not strong enough for certain jobs, and that there are patriarchal attitudes and prejudices against women, who are often evaluated on the basis of their gender rather than their actual skills.

Organisations are feeling the impact on their ability to attract and retain key staff, while the gender pay gap continues to grow slowly (Gender Pay Gap Impacting Attraction and Retention of Talent, 2019). Retention and attraction of staff is negatively impacted by the gender pay gap, according to more than a quarter (27%) of companies (Gender Pay Gap Impacting Attraction and Retention of Talent, 2019). The findings show that women feel discouraged, unhappy, incompetent and unappreciated.

7. Conclusion and Contributions

7.1. Contributions of the Research

This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on gender pay gap in South African mining organizations, which has been relatively scarce. By focusing on the effects of gender pay inequality on talent retention within the mining sector, the research addresses an important gap in academic studies. The study adds to the understanding of the specific context of the mining industry and its impact on gender pay disparities. One key contribution of this research lies in its methodology. Conducting semi-structured interviews with women in a mining organization provided a platform for these women to express their personal experiences and opinions on gender pay inequality. By ensuring a respectful and safe environment, the study facilitated a deeper understanding of the lived realities of women within the mining sector, particularly regarding their awareness of existing inequalities and wage gaps.

The findings of the study reveal significant insights. Firstly, the research highlights that gender segregation persists in the mines due to the perception of women as weaker and more vulnerable to violence. This finding underscores the need to address not only the gender pay gap but also the broader issues of gender inequality and workplace safety in the mining industry. Moreover, the study sheds light on the impact of the gender pay gap on talent retention within mining companies. The findings emphasize the importance of fair pay policies that ensure equitable compensation for all employees, regardless of gender. This has practical implications for mining organizations, as they need to review their pay policies to promote a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

The research findings have relevance for both policy and practice. From a policy standpoint, the study highlights the need for the mining sector to address gender pay inequality and promote fair pay practices. Additionally, the findings contribute to practice by raising awareness among mining companies about the impact of the gender pay gap on talent retention and the importance of fostering an equitable work environment. Overall, this research significantly contributes to the understanding of gender pay gap issues in South African mining organizations. By shedding light on the experiences of women in the sector and their awareness of gender pay disparities, the study provides valuable insights that can inform policy changes, promote gender equality, and enhance talent retention in the mining industry.

7.2. Implications

The findings of this study are relevant to both policy and practise. The findings shed light on the impact of the gender pay gap on talent retention in mining companies. The mining sector should review its pay policy and ensure that the pay of its employees (men and women) is fair. This pay policy should be guided by the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, which will contribute to equal opportunities between men and women by eliminating the gender pay gap. In addition, it is important that trade unions are aware of the gender pay gap and participate in negotiations to support employers in the mining sector to implement new pay policies. Unions also provide a platform for mining workers to raise their concerns and possibly a space to negotiate with the employer. In addition, the mining organisation needs to conduct consistent workshops and training to promote women in the mining sector and improve morale, which could ultimately lead to higher retention rates. Equal pay audits can help companies address the gender pay gap. It is important to look for pay gaps and ensure that all employees, regardless of gender or colour, who have the same expertise and perform a similar function are paid equally. The company needs to invest in women who have leadership skills.

The consequences are, firstly, that when there is a gender imbalance in the workplace, those who are discriminated against never reach the level required for a high-level job and consequently do not have greater job satisfaction. Secondly, women are more likely than men to quit highly paid managerial positions due to lack of opportunities, rigid working hours and a shortage of female colleagues. Therefore, every time an employee quits, the cost of hiring and training a new employee increases. Third, when a person experiences injustice or inequality at work, their anxiety and dissatisfaction are greater, making them less productive. In addition, employees work less efficiently and take more rest when they face injustice.

7.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The first limitation of this study is that it cannot be generalised because only ten women from one organisation in the mining sector were interviewed; therefore, their opinions cannot be generalised to the entire mining sector. In addition, some women chose not to participate in the interviews due to the sensitivity of the research topic. Their participation was voluntary and therefore their decision was respected. In addition, several women were unable to take time for the interview due to work commitments. All questions were answered; however, it was noted that the organisation is not transparent enough about its pay policy, making it difficult to understand how gender-equitable pay levels are determined. This study also deliberately did not ask participants about their gender, marital status and geographical location. This placed women at the centre of our study, meaning that no interviews were conducted with men.

7.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the gender pay gap and inequality in the workplace, especially in the mining sector, is still a major problem. Perhaps over time, as more women are integrated into the mining sector, things will change and gender will no longer be a contributing factor to workplace inequalities.

The findings of this study on the gender pay gap in the workplace and its impact on retention show that the gender pay gap has significantly affected talent retention in the South African mining sector. After interviewing participants, almost all identified a gender pay gap in their company and in the mining sector as a whole. As they described their experiences to us, we can understand how this wage gap affects women, making them feel discouraged and undervalued. Although some of the participants appreciated some of the

measures and initiatives, this is far from enough to close the gender pay gap in the mining sector, as most women still feel demotivated.

Furthermore, the results of this study allowed us to identify other factors that contribute to inequalities in the workplace besides the gender pay gap. These factors include racism, nepotism and experience. In one way or another, participants had experienced or identified some kind of inequality in the organisation that led to a pay gap. The biggest factor in the pay gap is still gender, especially in mining, and it is very clear that women are still underpaid because of this. We could see that this affects their morale as they are not willing to take on certain tasks as they are seen as "incapable" or are told that they need to be assisted by a male worker. This has led them to seek other work where their skills are valued in the workplace, which in turn affects talent retention as the mining sector cannot provide fair remuneration for men and women for the same or similar work they do.

Retention of key employees is critical to the long-term health and success of a company. It is well known that retaining the best employees ensures customer satisfaction, increased product sales, satisfied colleagues and reporters, effective succession planning, and deeply embedded knowledge and learning within the organisation. The sooner companies eliminate pay disparities in the workplace, the better they can retain their talent. This is a benefit to the company because retaining talent directly impacts the branding and reputation of the company. A fair and equal pay system ensures that the reputation and standing of these two components remain high and reliable. Finally, the company's reputation will attract capable, skilled and experienced employees and maintain a highly efficient, productive and profitable organisation with a low turnover rate as its current employees are well retained. The gender pay gap has a direct impact on talent retention, which we were able to establish through this study. Although we were able to successfully demonstrate this, further studies should be conducted to improve this pay gap and be able to determine, analyse and prove whether it has improved or worsened.

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