Harvesting the Truth about Salt Mining: An Assessment of the Factors and Demographics that Influence Women to Become Salt Miners, Katwe Uganda

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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Harvesting the Truth about Salt Mining:
An Assessment of the Factors and Demographics that Influence Women to Become Salt Miners, Katwe Uganda

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Abstract
Traditional and rudimentary methods of salt mining have been used to harvest salt from Lake Katwe in Uganda for over 400 years. Even though these methods are effective in extracting salt, they are proven to be hazardous to the miners. Though not often acknowledged, the role of women in salt mining operations is significant as they make up half of the workforce in East Africa. Regardless of the health risks associated with the mining sector, the number of women involved in small-scale salt mining increases by the year. The main objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of the population of women who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe in Uganda. This was accomplished by focusing on three specific objectives. The first was identifying the common demographics that are associated with women’s participation in the salt mining industry. The second was examining the factors that influence women to join the mining industry. The third was assessing the perceived benefits and disadvantages gained from working as a female salt miner at Lake Katwe.

Female miners from Lake Katwe were interviewed and asked to participate in focus group discussions so that data could be obtained. In total, there were 65 interview participants and 12 focus group discussion participants. In the interviews, questions about age, number of children, education status, marital status were included in order to get a holistic view of the women’s demographic characteristics. The other two sections, about influencing factors as well as benefits and challenges associated with mining, consist of more open-ended questions and explore a variety of women’s opinions, behaviors, and experiences as miners. Non-probability sampling was used and more specifically, a random convenience sampling technique was implemented to select women for interviews and focus group discussions.

The findings in this study suggest that there are common trends in both their demographic characteristics as well as the factors that influence women to get involved in the mining industry initially. The demographic trends show that the majority of female miners at Lake Katwe are older women without husbands who have been working in the salt mines for most of their adult life. The majority of female miners have had minimal educational experiences; many believe that their low levels of education is the predominant factor that influences them to begin mining because they have limited other income options they qualify for. Lastly, the perceived benefits and challenges of mining were also assessed throughout this study. The female miners reported minimal benefits and a plethora of challenges associated with working in the mining industry.
The main challenge female miners face is how to budget the low wages they receive, to cover the cost of necessities and the health issues associated with mining.

This study was a success in terms of gaining a better understanding of the population of women who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe, Uganda. The main conclusion from this study is that education is a prized commodity in the Katwe community that many families cannot afford. The majority of female miners have not been educated, therefore educating their children is their priority no matter the cost. Based on this, it is recommended that policy makers consider creating educational stipends that lower the cost of tuition for families that could not afford school fees then Uganda could bridge the educational gap and further its development as a country. Another conclusion drawn is that the women are fully aware of the health risks associated with prolonged work in the mining, but they participate in this field regardless of acquired physical ailments because they have no other option. Based on this, it is recommended that the women’s organization at Lake Katwe partners with a health organization or a local hospital that could donate free medical supplies. This would allow women to treat their injuries and wounds obtained while mining.

1.0 Chapter: Introduction

Salt is a valuable mineral necessary for food seasoning and food preservation. Salt mining, for the purpose of trading, has been prevalent in communities around the world for
centuries (Weldegiorgis, Lawson, and Verbrugge, 2018). The earliest known salt harvesting is believed to occur in the Chinese province of Shanxi around 6000 BC (Bhattacharya, 2018). Throughout history, many countries' salt mining methods have remained rudimentary with labor-intensive harvesting techniques even though society and technology have advanced dramatically (Veiga, 2003). Small-scale salt mining continues to grow with approximately 278,800 people worldwide directly involved, as well as countless additional individuals dependent on the sector for their livelihood (Jenkins, 2014). Though not often acknowledged, the role of women in small-scale mining operations is significant, as they make up around 30 percent of the total workforce (Weldegiorgis, Lawson, and Verbrugge, 2018). Although mining communities around the world are diverse and vary slightly based on region, women tend to be engaged in specific and similar mining roles. They are often allowed to work only in labor-intensive and low-paying tasks such as sieving, and washing within salt pans (Weldegiorgis, Lawson, and Verbrugge, 2018).

Their involvement in the salt mining industry is necessary for the industry and for their socio-economic mobility, but increasingly hazardous with poor working conditions. This is because, on a typical day, thousands of workers spend hours bent over under the scorching equatorial sun, harvesting salt from waters polluted with concentrated salt brine, ammonia, and hydrogen gas (Smith and Miller, 2013). The miners work without protective gear and suffer the consequences of prolonged exposure to hazardous chemicals and inadequate access to health care. Health issues can manifest due to several hours of digging, carrying large weights great distances, and bending over in awkward positions during panning (Veiga, 2003). Common physical ailments that result from long-term mining include inflammation of the uterus, dehydration and chemical-induced burns, and infections (Smith and Miller, 2013).

Mining techniques with limited safety regulations remain prevalent in many East African countries including Uganda (Kasedde, 2013). Within Uganda, salt mining provides a vital source of employment for thousands of people, as well as, significant economic contributions from international trading (Hinton, 2011). Lake Katwe, a saline crater lake, is Uganda’s largest salt mining quarry. The lake is primarily known for its substantial salt deposit, which has been used to produce quality salt for over 400 years (Kasedde, 2013). Through artisanal, small-scale mining, Lake Katwe produces approximately 15,000 tons of crystalline salt annually (Smith and Miller, 2013). Today, three grades of salt are produced at the lake. Grade I is high-quality salt
that is extracted from clean salt pans and is used mainly for domestic consumption. Grade II is extracted from the bottom of the mud-lined salt pans for animal consumption (Kasedde, 2013). There are over 10,000 individually owned salt pans around the lake linked by a series of trenches and channels (Hinton, 2011). Women are found in these salt pans extracting both grades I and grade II salt but never grade III. Grade III, rock salt, is extracted manually by men from the crust at the center of the lake beneath the surface (Hinton, 2011). Salt pans are privately owned by members of the community and are generationally passed down. Some of the women working in the salt pans inherited them from their families while others are employed by salt pan owners to harvest the pan’s salt during the dry season (Kasedde, 2013).

Artisanal salt mining is a field in which women occupy a number of critical roles in both mineral extraction and processing. Despite common misperceptions of “mining as men’s work”, the amount of female artisanal miners is highest in Africa making up approximately 50% of the total number of employed miners (Hilton, 2011). This holds true at Lake Katwe as well; of the 5,000 employees at Lake Katwe, approximately 50% are women (Hilton, 2011). This statistic is significant because historically, salt mining was a male-dominated field in East Africa. This is largely due to social constructs limiting women from laborious jobs. In general, there have been few occupations in which women and men share duties or responsibilities and this is a result of deep-seated gender roles in traditional societies such as Uganda (Weldegiorgis, Lawson, and Verbrugge, 2018).

Women’s increasing involvement in the salt mining industry has come with plentiful benefits including increased household income, increased socio-economic independence, and a job with relatively reliable wages with no educational requirements. However, the numerous challenges that accompany opportunities like salt mining cannot be ignored. One of the largest challenges is that it is a seasonal job since the wet season interferes with the harvesting process. This interferes with workers' ability to obtain continuous reliable wages throughout the year and has a negative impact on the women and families that depend on the salt revenue. Additionally, familial responsibilities often indirectly penalize women by rendering them unable to take full advantage of the employment possibility salt mining offers them. They cannot spend long hours mining while also rearing a family or taking care of the older generation. This hampers their “mobility, rendering artisanal mining, usually a transient activity, extremely difficult” (Labonne, 1996).
This study, therefore, aims to gain a better understanding of the factors and demographics associated with women’s participation in the salt mining industry, as well as the perceived benefits of mining over other lines of work in lieu of common health hazards.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although salt is abundant on earth, it still requires extraction from saline lakes such as Lake Katwe (Dinye, 2012). Harvesting techniques remain traditional with rudimentary tools. 2,500 female miners work at Lake Katwe and many are not from Katwe but travel great distances to work in the salt pans (Weldegiorgis, Lawson, and Verbrugge, 2018). The techniques to harvest salt from the lake remain rudimentary and require the women to operate under hazardous and labor-intensive conditions. There are significant health risks associated with prolonged work in alkaline lakes such as skin wounds from salt edges, lung diseases from overexposure to dust and salt particles, and chronic back pains from bending in awkward positions (Lu, 2012). However, for many women, artisanal mining signifies an opportunity to relieve the strains of poverty, so despite the challenges and often poor working conditions that accompany small-scale mining operations, countless women seek out this field of work over other professions (Dinye, 2012). Other roles women in Uganda commonly occupy are waitresses, agricultural workers, craft-makers, teachers, and stay-at-home mothers. Similar to salt mining, the positions listed, with the exception of a stay-at-home mother, have a high ratio of women and can guarantee relatively reliable salaries. Dissimilar to salt mining, these jobs usually have better working conditions and few health risks associated with them (Labonne, 1996). This reality prompts inquiries about the elements persuading women into this line of work.

Both the process of extracting salt from saline lakes as well as the health hazards of harvesting this salt have been studied throughout the literature (Kirabira, and Kasedde 2013). Nevertheless, the salt miners and more specifically, the women are rarely part of the objectives in other studies. Although the number of women working in labor-intensive environments is growing exponentially there is still little known about their background or their motivations for working in sectors such as salt mining (Jenkins, 2014). Moreover, little is known about miners’ education levels, marital status, family size, and our daily wages (Kirabira, and Kasedde 2013).
Given the background, this study aims to assess factors and demographics that influence women to become salt miners at Lake Katwe village, Uganda.

1.2 Objectives:

General Objective:

To provide a better understanding of the population of women who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe in Uganda.

Specific Objective:

I. To identify the common demographics that are associated with women’s participation in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe?
II. To examine the factors that influence women to begin working in the mining industry.
III. To assess the perceived benefits and disadvantages gained from working in salt mines at Lake Katwe

1.3 Study questions:

I. What are the common demographics that are associated with women’s participation in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe?
II. What are the factors that influence women to begin working in the mining industry?
III. What are the perceived benefits and disadvantages gained from working in salt mines at Lake Katwe?

1.4 Significance and justification:

The salt mining industry has been around for centuries and employs hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. The process of extracting salt has been studied in many other works of literature but the individuals working the harvesting tools, especially the women, are seldom acknowledged. There is very little known about the background of the women who work in labor-intensive sectors such as the salt mining industry. The lack of information on this
population of people, which is growing by the year, makes this study urgent. This study will help inform scholars and policymakers on the characteristics of the population of women who work at Lake Katwe as well as by identifying the factors influencing women to work in a country where the majority of women do not work, let alone work in a field that was traditionally male-dominated. A better understanding of the common demographics associated with mining women as well as perceived benefits and challenges of the job can help inform policymakers on how to better support women who work in labor-intensive industries. This will be pertinent information for the future of Uganda, a developing country, because of the increasing number of women seeking out work in these industries.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Women’s contributions to the mining sector are “masked by the dominant reflection of men’s roles in discussions of mining, thus erasing the participation of women” (Jenkins, 2014). A potential reason for this invisibility problem is that literature has historically focused on digging practices, putting emphasis on the deeper section of the lake and excluding women who are primarily engaged in activities like washing, panning, sieving, or sorting (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff, 2003). The majority of studies about female miners predominantly focus on the various health risks that women face within this sector (Lu, 2012).

One study focused on the risks of prolonged mining exposes the harsh reality that women are prone to health issues such as lung diseases, skin irritations, and eye damage through dust and salt (Larhiri-Dutt, 2012). Additionally, a study in 2012 that focuses on occupational health and safety of women miners in the Philippines findings showed that miners also suffer from musculoskeletal disorders such as back pain since in mining women are often responsible for manual lifting and carrying materials far distances (Lu, 2012). These back issues can emerge early on in their career and last long after a woman ceases to mine. Lastly, a study conducted in Uganda about women’s reproductive health in high-intensity jobs identified that women working in salt mines reported suffering from genital corrosions and miscarriages due to prolonged standing in concentrated saltwater (Hayes, 2008). In response to the plethora of challenges faced by women in the mining sector, women’s centered organizations are emerging from mining communities across the global South (Jenkins, 2017; 2014).
The poor working conditions and the plethora of health risks associated with prolonged salt mining lead researchers to speculate on what motives women have for seeking out jobs in this field (Kirabira, Kasedde, and Semukuutu, 2013). One study was found to mention factors that cause women to join the mining industry. The author noted from surveys that some women’s lack of education or inability to engage in other work, due to gender discrimination, makes the mining industry appealing (Hayes, 2008).

There is a lack of information throughout the literature on the demographic characteristics of female salt miners. In contrast, there is a plethora of demographic information on individuals who work in sectors like education, healthcare, or business. These careers are often viewed as ‘more prestigious’ than careers in laborious fields such as salt mining. As a result, the only demographic information known about the salt miners at Lake Katwe is the gender breakdown of the workers, which is estimated to be an even fifty-fifty split.

Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Study site: Katwe Lake Salt Mines

Lake Katwe is a closed saline crater lake located in Western Uganda about 15km south of the equator and has been a traditional salt mining site for over 400 years (Kasedde 2013). The climate of the lake is relatively predictable with two distinguished climate seasons; the dry season and the wet season. The dry season can be characterized as hot, dry, and semi-arid and it stretches from February to April then again from July until September (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff 2003). While the wet season can be characterized by short but heavy intense rainstorms. The wet season is observed from October to January then again from May through June. Salt can only be harvested from Lake Katwe during the dry season since the harvesting process relies on solar evaporation (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff, 2003). Although Lake Katwe does not have an outlet, the water levels within the lake are maintained through the balance of intense evaporation and the inflow of water from neighboring lakes with higher elevations (Kasedde 2013).
Lake Katwe is in Busongora County which is within the Kasese district. Busongora County is home to 702,029 Ugandans and women make up 51.7% of that population (Kasedde, 2013). The average household has five members (Kasedde, 2013).

3.2 Methods

The primary method used was face-to-face individual interviews with women miners. Every morning a different section of the lake was visited and the female miners present in that section were asked if they would be willing to answer a few questions. The interview consisted of three distinct parts. Firstly, the demographic section focuses on the statistical characteristics of the women who work at Lake Katwe. In order to get a holistic view of the women’s lives in and outside of the salt mines, questions about age, number of children, education status, marital status were included. This section consists of multiple-choice categories as well as yes and no questions. This organization method will allow the results to be described visually through a series of graphs and pie charts. The other two sections of the interview are the factors that influence women to begin mining as well as the benefits and challenges associated with mining. These two sections consist of more open-ended questions and explore a variety of women’s opinions, behaviors, and experiences as miners. Through this part of the interview, the hope is to better identify the factors that influence women to join the salt mining industry (see appendix for an in-depth view of the questions covered in the interview and focus group discussions).

In tandem with interviews, focus group discussions were conducted with women from Lake Katwe in hopes to gather a different type of qualitative data. Female salt miners who were not individually interviewed were chosen from the community at random and asked to participate in a focus group discussion. Unlike the interviews, the questions asked in the focus group were less rigid, and more liberty was afforded to the subjects to lead the conversation in the direction they saw fit. This being said, there were questions on hand in case the discussion did not flow well.

3.3 Study design

This study aims to survey the population of female miners who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe in Uganda. The sample group of women will be chosen using a non-probability convenience sampling method. The study also had elements of causal research
design methods. This is because the relationship between the collected demographics of the women and the factors that influence them to work in the salt mining industry have been examined for any causal effect. Moreover, a thematic analysis will be utilized to analyze the data qualitatively since it emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Dinye, 2012).

3.4 Data collection instruments and resources

In order to collect data for this study, both interview questions and group discussion topics were needed. It was necessary to have a translator to effectively communicate questions to the women interviewed. To record the subject's responses a pen and notebook were used. In order to analyze and depict the data google sheets were used. Lastly, consent forms were used to ensure that the women interviewed were able and willing to be a part of the study.

3.5 Sample size

Lake Katwe has 5,000 employees in total and approximately 2,500 of these employees are women (Kirabira, Kasedde, and Semukuuttu, 2013). The target interview population was 5% of the women who work at the salt lake which is approximately 125 women. However, because the study was not conducted during harvesting season, it was difficult to gather 125 female miners. The sample size ended up being 65 female miners instead. Although this number is not significant enough to accurately represent the population in a significant way, conclusive information was still gathered.

The focus group size was kept relatively small, approximately four to five individuals, to create a non-intimidating space so that each woman feels comfortable speaking their mind. Three focus groups were conducted in a discussion-based and limitedly structured manner relative to the interviews. In total, 12 women were involved in the focus group discussions.

3.6 Sampling techniques and procedure

Non-probability sampling was used and more specifically, a random convenience sampling technique was implemented to select women for interviews and focus group discussions. Random female salt miners working in Lake Katwe were selected and asked if they
were willing to be interviewed. A translator was present so that an accurate interpretation of answers can be gathered.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis will include a combination of two qualitative analytical methods, both content analysis and descriptive analysis. The data from the individual interviews will also be split into three parts for analysis: the demographics section, the influencing factors section, and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of working in the mining industry section. The data from the demographic section will be analyzed through descriptive analysis. Graphs and pie-charts will visually represent the population as well as identify common trends observed throughout the data. The results from the rest of the interviews will be coded and trends in characteristics of the individuals interviewed will be examined. The data from both the ‘influencing factors’ section and the ‘perceived benefits and disadvantages’ section will be analyzed with both descriptive analysis and content analysis. The content analysis will use the findings from the interview and provide a connection for the respondents' answers. The descriptive analysis will allow meaningful conclusions to be drawn from the interviewed women at Lake Katwe. This will further allow for a holistic summary of the collected information from the interviews and focus groups to be obtained.

Chapter IV: Data presentation, Analysis, and Results Interpretation

4.1 Objective I: Demographics

Demographic information for female miners can be found in Figures 1 through 6. In total, 65 women were interviewed ranging from 18 to 68 years old. The population of female miners at Lake Katwe is primarily composed of an aging population of women. It was found that (71.2%) of respondents are 40 years or older (Fig. 1). The younger generation has been slow to join the mining industry and currently, women between 18-30 only make up a small portion of the female miners at Lake Katwe (12.1%) (Fig. 1). There is a correlation between the breakdown of female miners’ ages and the breakdown of the number of years female miners have worked at Lake Katwe. Of the women interviewed, most respondents reported having worked in the mining
industry for at least a decade (Fig. 2). Nearly half (48.5%) of the respondents have participated in salt mining for over 25 years (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. Breakdown of the age of the female miners.

Figure 2. Breakdown of the number of years female miners have worked at Lake Katwe.

A large portion of the female miners interviewed reported to have no educational experience (46.2%) or only a primary level (36.9%) (Fig. 3). The only women who spoke English during the interviews and did not require a translator were noted to have made it to secondary school level (16.9%) (Fig. 3). In the focus group discussion, women expressed that
educating their children is a priority since many of them did not have the opportunity when they were young.

Of the sampled women, (72.3%) do not have a husband and, therefore, are the sole breadwinners for their families (Fig. 4). The two reported reasons for their singleness were that they were either never married or that their husbands had passed away. Of the 65 respondents, only 13 had husbands who had an income activity. The women that did have husbands were asked about their husband’s professions in order to get a sense of the family's socio-economic status. The most popular response was that they were also salt miners (n=6), followed by fishermen (n=4), drivers (n=2), and then self-employed (n=1) (Fig. 5). The presence of a fresh lake and salt lakes make being a salt miner or a fisherman a very popular profession in Katwe.

![Figure 3. Reported education levels](image)
Most of the female miners sampled reported to be native to the Katwe area (81.5%) when asked where their family originated from (Fig. 6). This leaves only a small portion of the women
(18.5%) to be migrant workers who left their place of residence to work at Lake Katwe during harvest season (Fig. 6). It should be noted that this study was conducted during the wet season in which migrant workers make up less of the female mining population at Lake Katwe.

Figure 6. Breakdown of respondents who are native to Katwe compared to migrant workers

4.2 Objective II: Factors that Influence the Women to Salt Mine

Family connections to the salt mining industry are a factor that was assessed to determine if it has an influence on women joining the mining industry. The results show a relatively even split between the number of respondents' who had parents that worked as miners in the salt industry. Of the women interviewed (58.6%) reported that at least one parent worked in the salt mines and many suggested that this influenced their decision to work in the mines (Fig. 7). In tandem, there is a relatively even split between the number of respondents' who inherited a salt pan (44.6%) compared to the number of respondents who did not (55.4%) (Fig. 8). It should be noted that many of the women who reported that they own a salt pan actually inherited it through marriage rather than a direct familial line. Either way, an inherited salt pan remains a factor that influences women to work in the salt mines.
During the interviews, the women were asked about the factors that influenced them to begin salt mining in an open-ended question format. Their responses could be narrowed down to four categories: 1. familial expectation, 2. convenience/familiarity, 3. money, or 4. no other option. The main reported factor that influenced women to begin salt mining was that they felt it to be the only job option they had (n=31) regardless of the harsh condition involved with mining (Fig. 9). Many women discussed both their low levels of education and lack of capital which impacts the types of income activities they can participate in. Similar factors were strongly
pronounced in the focus group discussions as well. Nine out of the twelve women in the discussions said that without land they cannot do agriculture, without cattle they cannot raise and sell livestock, and without resources, they cannot build a business. The women also articulated that if given the opportunity they would work in a different industry however they feel as if that is not an option.

Another factor that appeared to strongly influence women to join the mining industry is a sense of family expectation to do so. This is primarily the case for women who inherit a salt pan or whose parents worked in the industry. Although familiarity and money appeared to be additional factors that influence women to join the mining industry, they were much less prevalent reported factors than the previous two mentioned.

![Figure 9. The factors that influence women to begin salt mining](image)

The majority of women (65.3%) do not have another income activity during the wet season. Therefore, they rely solely on either their husband's income or savings from their own income during the harvesting season (Fig. 10). The women that do have other sources of income throughout the year participate in relatively similar income activities. The most popular answer from respondents was ‘farmer’ (n=5) (Fig. 11). The women who self-identified as agricultural workers are migrant salt mining workers who usually only stay in Katwe for salt harvesting.
season since the Katwe area does not have a garden. Women native to Katwe are unlikely to work in agriculture unless they move away. Some women sell items like food (n=4) or firewood (n=3) to make a bit of small cash on the side (Fig. 11).

Figure 10. Breakdown of if the women have another source of income during the wet season
4.3 Objective III: Perceived Benefits and Disadvantages of Salt Mining

On a typical day, the majority of women (58.5%) reported that they receive 7,000-9,000 UGX from their work in the salt pans; while 30.8% of women reported earning less than that, between 6,000 - 4,000 UGX (Fig. 12). The most common items mining women spend their wages on are food and then school fees. Respondents were permitted to answer with more than one category; however, the majority of them did not choose more than two categories because their wages do not stretch that far. The most popular category chosen was, ‘food’ (n=48) for their families. However, many women reported eating minimal food to save money for other necessities (Fig. 13). The second most popular choice was, ‘school fees’ (n=23) (Fig. 13). Many of the women wanted their children to have opportunities other than mining, so they’ve saved a
good portion of their earnings for school fees. At the moment, school is out due to COVID-19; women from the focus group discussions remarked that the two-year school closures have allowed women to have slightly more flexible budgets. Regardless, they remain nervous about schools reopening in the future. The other categories (rent, medical bills, savings, clothes, and supporting other businesses) were mentioned but not nearly as prevalently (Fig. 13).

*Figure 13. How respondents use the majority of their earnings*

Salt mining is very labor-intensive and difficult work. It requires women to be bent in awkward positions while under the scorching sun for long hours throughout the day. When asked if there are injuries that accompany working in the mining industry, the female miners had long lists. The commonly reported physical injuries associated with salt mining were ‘wounds/blisters’ (n=38) (Fig. 14). The women explained that these wounds occurred due to the sharp edges of the salt rocks they worked with that hide under the murky waters. The second most popular answer is ‘backaches’ (n=32) (Fig. 14). The women explained that they spend most of the day bending to harvest salt as well as carrying heavy salt bags long distances. Other
answers that were mentioned, but were less prevalent, were (fatigue, joint pain, dehydration, abdominal pains, uterus pains, itching, and chest pains) (Fig. 14).

![Graph of physical ailments]

*Figure 14. The physical ailments associated with mining*

**Chapter V: Data presentation, Analysis, and Results Interpretation**

**Summary**

The main purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the population of women who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe in Uganda. This was accomplished by focusing on the demographic characteristics, the influencing factors, and the perceived benefits and challenges associated with mining. The primary methods used to collect data were face-to-face individual interviews and focus group discussions. Female miners were randomly selected from different sections of Lake Katwe and asked if they would be willing to
participate in a study. In total, there were 65 female miners that participated in the interviews and
12 female miners that participated in the focus group discussions. The gathered data was entered
into excel; graphs and pie charts were constructed based on the data to give a visual
representation of the results. The findings showed trends in both the demographic characteristics
as well as the factors that influence women to begin mining. For the section about the benefits
and challenges associated with mining, women reported minimal benefits and a plethora of
challenges.

Discussion

Section I: Demographic

There were several notable findings in terms of determining the cumulative factors that
influence women to join the salt mining industry. To start, there were numerous trends in the
results sections for demographics. The results showed evidence for an aging population of
female miners at Lake Katwe. Of the sample of women interviewed (43.9%) were above the age
of 50 years old and only (12.1%) were between the ages of 18-30 years old (Fig. 1). Their age
seemed to be correlated with the amount of time they reported working in the salt mining
industry. Similarly to the breakdown of their age, nearly half of the women, (48.5%), reported
participating in mining activities for over 25 years, and only (9.1%) reported to have been
involved for under 7 years (Fig. 2). One possible reason for the aging population of women is
that (72.3%) of the sampled miners reported that they didn’t have a husband and that they were
the sole breadwinners for their families (Fig. 4). The majority of the women without husbands
also reported that they were widows who had begun working at the mines due to their husbands
passing. The widows’ were all older women which helps to identify a potential reason for the
aging population of female miners as well as a factor that influenced them to begin mining
originally.

Another possible reason for the aging population of women is that in 1997 Uganda
instituted a Universal Primary Education policy which allowed four children per family to attend
primary level tuition-free (Asankha and Takashi, 2011). This policy was then reformed in 2007
to allow tuition-free access to secondary education if students get specific grades on each of the
four primary school-leaving exams (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). These policies have helped to revolutionize education in Uganda as well as have an effect on decreasing the number of young people dropping out of school to join the workforce. Historically, many families had parents earning low wages and education was viewed as an unattainable luxury because of the high costs of school fees (Asankha and Takashi, 2011). This held true for many families from Katwe. Many children did not attend school before these educational policies were put in place in 1997, and therefore were left uneducated (Asankha and Takashi, 2011). The lack of education dramatically limited the carriers these individuals were eligible for. A job in salt mining however does not require prior educational experience which has proven to be beneficial to a large population of people (Lincove 2012).

This also helps explain the reason for the aging population. Prior to 1997 education was limited to families with the means to pay school fees which influenced many young girls to join labor-intensive jobs such as salt mining (Asankha and Takashi, 2011). Now that education is more accessible, fewer young girls are dropping out of school to begin participating in income-generating activities (Lincove 2012). This helps give context to a potential reason the results show evidence for an aging population and a decline in the younger generations joining the salt mining industry. More specifically, of the sampled women, (46.2%) reported having never gone to school, and only (16.9%) of women reported making it to the secondary level of school (Fig. 3). A study conducted in 2000 about poverty and the lack of opportunity echoes this. A conclusion of this study was that poverty, in its various forms, prevents women from obtaining crucial things like educational training, health services, or the legal status they require to escape poverty (Carr, 2000).

Of the female miners sampled, 81.5% reported being native to the Katwe area while 18.5% reported being migrant workers who came to Katwe solely for the job opportunity. A study was done in 2018 estimated that one-third of the female miners at Lake Katwe are migrant workers who leave their homes and families to work at Katwe during harvesting season (Bhattacharya 2018). A possible reason for the low level of reported migrant workers in this study can be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted at the beginning of the rainy season. Salt can only be harvested from the lake during the dry season so fewer migrant workers were remaining in the area while this study was done.
Section II: Factors that influence women to begin salt mining

There are factors that influence every woman to join the mining industry. The purpose of this aspect of the study was to uncover some of these factors as well as identify any common trends. Previous research suggests that some women’s lack of education or inability to engage in other work, due to gender discrimination, makes the mining industry appealing (Hayes, 2008). Although there were less noticeable trends in the data when compared to the demographic section, this finding from the 2008 study was echoed in the results. There was a relatively even split between the number of respondents whose parents did or did not work as salt miners; (41.5%) of the women did not have direct familial connections to the salt mining industry and other factors were responsible for influencing their participation (Fig. 7). However, (58.5%) of the women reported that their parents did work in the salt mining industry which therefore influenced them to participate out of familiarity and convenience (Fig. 7). In addition, (44.6%) of sampled women reported that the salt pan they work on was passed down in their families (Fig. 8).

It should be noted however that many of the women who claimed to own a salt pan actually inherited it through marriage rather than a direct familial line. In many traditional societies in sub-Saharan Africa the transfer of land, housing, or property between generations is regulated by customary law, which largely excludes women from property ownership and inheritance (Lahiri-Dutt, 2012). Although women are permitted to own their own salt pans, many do not directly inherit them because of deep-seated gender biases which keep communities stuck in traditional mindsets. Without secure land and property rights, widows and orphans are often left homeless and destitute after the death of their husbands or father. These forms of disinheritance seriously undermine women’s economic security and independence by keeping women reliant on the men in their lives to provide economic security (Smith and Miller, 2013). The denial of land rights to women also contributes to the feminization of poverty and stunted economic development in countries where harmful inheritance practices are common (Smith and Miller, 2013). Either way, an inherited salt pan remains a factor that influences women to work in the salt mines. This is because harvesting salt from the pan and general upkeep is required to
keep the salt pan viable; additionally, working within the pan is considered women’s work (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff, 2003).

During interviews and focus group discussions, women discussed numerous reasons as to why salt mining is the only attainable career option for them. The first was their lack of education which drastically limits the income activities they are eligible to participate in (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff, 2003). Without education, women can really only work labor-intensive activities or own small shops. Education allows people to have more options, however, in many African countries education still comes with a price tag. This aids in causing a cycle of poverty because a plethora of individuals cannot afford to educate their children past primary school level; therefore their children's future career opportunities are limited which, in turn, likely makes it challenging for them to educate their children (Lincove, 2012).

In addition, many female miners discussed their lack of capital which directly impacts the types of income activities they can participate in. Only about 16 percent of Ugandan women own land or other property in their own right (Rugadya 2010). Even housing, which is often socially referred to as a combined asset in a family, is also overwhelmingly owned by men (Rugadya 2010). Female mining from the focus groups echoed these sentiments by saying, “without land they cannot do agriculture, without cattle they cannot raise and sell livestock, and without resources, they cannot build a business.” Unlike many other jobs, salt mining does not require workers to have capital before working (Smith and Miller, 2013). The only materials necessary are a bucket to carry salt and a tool to lift the salt from the salt pan into the bucket. This makes salt mining an attractive field for those who do not have the means to acquire capital for other lines of work (Smith and Miller, 2013).

The family expectation seemed to also be a popular influencing factor among mining women. As previously discussed, some women inherited salt pans and some women’s parents or even husbands worked in the salt mines. This familial involvement or familial ownership of salt pans became another factor to influence women to work at the salt mines.

The least popular category was convenience/familial expectation, chosen by mostly women who are native to the Katwe area, and this is likely a combined result of a few factors. Lake Katwe is situated in a relatively small town outside the boundaries of Queen Elizabeth
National Park (Dinye, 2012). The land is inhospitable for gardens so the main professions of people who live in this area are fishing at Lake Edward, salt mining at Lake Katwe, or owning a small shop. Women are not allowed to fish so that leaves them with very few job options. Katwe is such a secluded area and many women remarked on the convenience and familiarity that the mining industry offered them (Dinye, 2012).

Another factor that appeared to influence women into mining roles was whether or not the women had other sources of income throughout the year. When asked, (65.3%) of the sample women reported that they did not have a second source of income during the wet (Fig. 10). Salt can only be harvested from Lake Katwe during the dry season; however, to maintain the salt pan throughout the dry season, the mud that accumulates at the bottom has to be removed every week (Campero, Rodriguez, Harris, and Kunz, 2019). Therefore, women get paid as seasonal workers for the quantity of salt they harvest but they end up maintaining the salt pans all year around (Smith, and Miller, 2013) This responsibility can make it exceedingly difficult for women to acquire other income activities throughout the year. In addition, many female miners also explained that their lack of employment in other parts of the year was due to the few employment opportunities available to them. This results in the women, and the families they support, to rely solely on their income during the harvesting season.

Section III: The benefits and challenges associated with working in the mining industry

There are perceived benefits associated with women’s increased involvement in the mining industry. Mostly, it gives uneducated women a steady and reliable source of income and does not require prior capital to begin the position (Veiga, Hinton, and Beinhoff, 2003). This being said, the women sampled in the study did not have many positive things to say about the mining industry. Although this section was originally supposed to encapsulate both the positive and negative aspects of mining, the challenges ended up being exceedingly more prevalent in the results section. Within the literature, women’s increased roles in small-scale mining operations are viewed as a form of female empowerment because it allows women to gain a sense of economic independence by earning money for their family in a field that was once male-dominated (Campero, Rodriguez, Harris, and Kunz, 2019). While aspects of this remain true, the sentiment does not consider the reality that many women in the mining sector face. The
women from the focus group discussions explained that there is no socio-economic independence gained by working in the mines because they do not earn enough money from their work to be emancipated from their struggles. The discussion continued and they were then asked, “if you don’t earn enough money then how do you manage” in which they responded, “we do not manage, we suffer.” There was an additional consensus between all the women that there are no aspects of mining in which they enjoy. It is extremely physically demanding work and they only do it because they have to.

The largest challenge noted during the focus group discussion was budgeting the money made in the harvesting season in order to make it last for their families throughout the wet season. This is made increasingly difficult because the women are only being paid by the landlords once the salt they harvest is sold by the salt pan landlords to a buyer. Therefore, women can be waiting unknown lengths of time between the times they get paid which makes budgeting difficult. A study showed that this was especially troublesome during the start of the 2019 pandemic. During this time, the number of buyers traveling to Katwe decreased significantly and therefore many of the miners suffered (Campero, Rodriguez, Harris, and Kunz, 2019).

On a typical day, (58.5%) of the women sampled reported earning between 7,000-9,000 UGX and (30.8%) of the women reported earning even less than that (Fig.12). Therefore, the average female miner is making between 210,000- 270,000 UGX a month. According to a study about salaries in Uganda, this is significantly lower than the average wages for a low-skilled employee in Uganda which is 389,700 UGX a month (Tate, 2020).

The women were asked if these wages were enough to keep their families comfortable but many women reported, ‘no.’ They then proceeded to explain that this money was mostly used on food, and if there was extra leftover it was saved for school fees (Fig.13). Many women agreed that saving money for their children’s school expenses is the largest priority after purchasing food. Some of the female miners explained that they never had the opportunity to be educated when they were younger and this limited their opportunities. Therefore it is important, to them, that they educate their children in order to give them the opportunity to choose their line of work someday. At the moment schools are not in session due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the
focus group discussions, the women acknowledged that the closing of schools has given more room for flexibility in their strict budgets. However, they also brought up concerns with schools potentially opening again in January; many women fear that they have not saved enough money during the Covid-19 era to keep their children in school for longer than a semester or two. An additional issue that many female miners face is not having any savings. Of the sampled women, only 10 women reported earning enough money to have savings in case of unforeseen medical bills or an accident occurred (Fig.13)

Another perceived challenge of mining is the physical ailments associated with the work. All of the ailments reported by the sampled women aligned with the ones reported by other women throughout the literature. In a study about occupational health and safety in small-scale mining, many women experienced musculoskeletal disorders coupled with chronic back pain because the manual lifting of harvesting materials is usually done by women. (Colina, 2006). The two most common injuries reported in this study were wounds/blisters as well as chronic backaches (Fig. 14). The female miners explained that the main struggle from getting wounds on sharp edges of salt rock is not having medical supplies to treat the wounds and the occasional infection that follows. Some even admitted resorting to super glue to protect wounds against further injury if they take too long to heal.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

**Objective 1: The Common Demographics Associated with Women’s Participation in the Salt Mining Industry**

The findings in this study suggest that there are common trends in the demographic characteristics as well as the factors that influence women to get involved in the mining industry initially. Of the sampled women, the demographic trends showed that the majority of female miners at Lake Katwe are older, uneducated women without husbands who have been working in the salt mines for most of their adult life. This trend can be partially attributed to a large number of female miners becoming widows due to husbands’ untimely passing. This leaves them as the sole breadwinners for their families. Additionally, the Universal Primary Education policy passed in 1997 plays a role in these demographic trends (Lahiri-Dutt, 2012). Prior to 1997 many children from impoverished families did not attend school because they could not afford the
school fees. The lack of education dramatically limited the careers these individuals were eligible for and essentially forced them into the mining sector.

Furthermore, a recommendation is extended to researching and planning to conduct similar studies in the future. More studies done about women’s participation in labor-intensive industries will give politicians a better understanding of the demographic characteristics of the women who work in the mines. This will, in turn, allow politicians and decision-makers to better support their needs. Replicating this study in an alternate labor-intensive industry, in which women participate, will allow for comparisons to be drawn between the demographics and factors that influence women’s initial involvement. Additionally, many impoverished women participate in small-scale salt mining around the globe. Future researchers could replicate this study in other cultures where salt mining is prevalent to understand if the factors that influence women to mine salt are comparable throughout the world.

Objective 2: The Factors that Influence Women to Begin Working in the Mining Industry

Additionally, the findings suggest that there are trends in the factors that influence women to get involved in the mining industry initially. Many of the observed demographic characteristics relate to the factors that influence women to join the salt mining industry in the first place. Both the interviews and the focus group discussions showed evidence that many women feel as if they had no other option than to join the mining industry due to poverty. The majority of female miners have had minimal educational experiences. This low level of education is the driving force limiting many women’s opportunities and forcing them into careers they would not have otherwise selected for themselves. In tandem with this, poverty results in a lack of capital which prohibits women from joining other income activities, such as operating small businesses, or agriculture.

Based on this, the main recommendation would be given to the decision-makers in charge of educational policies in Uganda. Education is an incredibly important tool for both individuals and developing countries. The female miners at Lake Katwe are acutely aware of this fact and blame their low levels of education for being trapped in the cycle of poverty and having limited job options. If there were educational stipends that lowered the cost of tuition for families that could not afford school fees then Uganda could bridge the educational gap.
Objective 3: The Perceived Benefits and Disadvantages Associated With Working in Salt Mines at Lake Katwe

Throughout literature, women’s increasing involvement in the salt mining industry is perceived to come with plentiful benefits including increased household income, increased socio-economic independence, and a job with relatively reliable wages with no educational requirements. While a number of these might hold validity at other salt mines, the female miners at Katwe believe that the challenges that accompany mining overshadow the benefits. They had few positive things to say about participating in the mining industry. The main challenge female miners face is how to budget the low wages they receive to cover the cost of necessities, like food and ‘luxuries’ like education for their children. This challenge, coupled with the physical ailments associated with mining lead many women to disdain the need to participate in this industry.

As the number of women getting involved with labor-intensive industries increases in developing countries like Uganda, it will become increasingly important to continue research in this field. Based on these findings, the main recommendation is that the women’s organization at Lake Katwe partners with a health organization or a local hospital that could donate free medical supplies. This would allow women to treat their injuries and wounds obtained while mining. More importantly, it would reduce infections associated with salt mining and allow the women to be more efficient workers.

All in all, the number of women working in labor-intensive careers is growing exponentially however little is known about their background or their motivations for working in sectors such as salt mining. The intention of this study was to gain a better understanding of the women who work at Lake Katwe since Uganda is a developing country and increased studies about the working citizens are essential for a better understanding of the needs of the population. This study was a success in terms of gaining a better understanding of the population of women who participate in the salt mining industry at Lake Katwe, Uganda.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations noted when conducting the study. Firstly, most of the female miners interviewed did not speak English; so there was a reliance on the translator to
accurately convey both the research questions as well as their responses. On a few occasions, the chosen translator had personal matters to deal with therefore a different translator was used. It is possible the research questions were slightly altered due to differences in translation by using a different translator.

Moreover, even with the presence of a translator, a few of the questions were incredibly confusing to the women and they did understand what was being asked of them. For this reason, they were taken out of the list of interview questions.

Additionally, harvest season occurs during the dry season, however, this study was conducted during the wet season in Katwe. There were very few women working at the mines and migrant workers had left Katwe until the next dry season began. This likely had an effect on how accurately the sampled population represents the total population.
References


Appendix

Ethical Considerations

There are minimal ethical considerations in this study as the purpose is to gain insight into women’s role in the salt mining industry. Respondents were only interviewed after prior content was obtained. The study itself does not involve any vulnerable populations. Participants were asked about a few personal questions involving their socio-economic status but they were briefed beforehand that they are not required to answer if they feel uncomfortable. There were significant attempts to minimize any power dynamics associated with light-skinned researchers coming to an established place of work to learn about women’s livelihood. A small compensation was given to each participant for their time and willingness to be interviewed.

Verbal consent form

Introduction

Hello, my name is Nellie Simmonds and I study abroad student with a program called SIT. I am conducting an independent study project to learn about the demographic characteristic and the factors that influence women to join the mining industry. I am asking you to be a participant in this research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not you would like to be interviewed. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research and anything else that is unclear.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the population of women who work in the mining industry. Results from this study will add to the greater knowledge in literature about female salt miners and will also included recommendations to both the female mining organization policy makers.

Procedures
You will be asked questions about your demographics, the factors that influence you to mine and any perceived benefits or challenges associated with working in the mining sector. Answers will be anonymous, and any personal information will not be included in the research.

**Participation**

Participation in this is completely voluntary. You may decline or withdraw from participation without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

**Participants Statement**

I understand the above purpose of the study and my role in participating. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions and I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older and freely give my consent to participate in this study.

**Work Plan**

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<tr>
<td>November 15th</td>
<td>Arrive at Lake Katwe, unpack, get settled</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 16th - December 2nd</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 3rd</td>
<td>Return to Kampala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 4th-12th</td>
<td>Data analysis and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13th - 14th</td>
<td>Finalize ISP presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15th</td>
<td>Submit ISP</td>
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Budget

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>2420000</td>
</tr>
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Interview Questions

Section I: Demographics

1. Age?
   a. (18-30)
   b. (30-40)
   c. (40-50)
   d. (50+)

2. How many years have you been working in the salt mines?
   a. 0-7 years
   b. 8-15 years
   c. 16-24 years
   d. 26+ years

3. What is your education level?
   a. No education
   b. Primary school level
c. Lower secondary
d. Secondary school level
e. Postsecondary

4. The number of children?
   a. (0)
   b. (1-4)
   c. (5-7)
   d. (8+)

5. Do your children help you harvest salt?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. Do you have a husband?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. Does your husband work?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Was the salt pan passed down in your family?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Are you from Katwe or are you a migrant working in the salt mines?
   a. Native to Katwe
   b. Migrant worker

Section II: Factors that Influence the Women to Salt Mine

10. Why did you choose to work as a salt miner over another profession? (Check all that apply)
   a. Expectation - due to familial salt pan passed down
   b. Convince - the woman may be a resident of Katwe and has limited opportunity to work elsewhere
   c. Money - pays better than other accessible jobs
11. Do you have another source of income during the dry season?
   a. Yes
   b. No
12. Do you have another source of income during the wet season?
   a. Yes
   b. No
13. Were either of your parents salt miners?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Section III: Perceived Benefits and Disadvantages of Salt Mining
14. How much do you make mining per day?
   a. 0-3,000 UGX
   b. 4,000-6,000 UGX
   c. 7,000-9,000 UGX
   d. 10,000+ UGX
15. Does this amount of income satisfy your family's needs? ___________
16. How do your families use the money from salt mining? ___________
17. What other jobs do you qualify for in the area? ___________
18. Does mining offer a larger source of income than other accessible jobs in the area?
   a. Yes
   b. No
19. What are the challenges involved with mining? ___________
20. What are the perceived benefits involved with mining? ___________
21. What are the physical ailments, if any, associated with mining? ___________
22. How do you manage to complete domestic duties when you work so continuously during the dry season? ___________
Focus Group Questions

1. Do you feel that working gives you a source of economic independence?
2. Have you ever wanted to work a different job?
3. Do you expect that your children will also work in the mining industry?
4. Do you feel you are paid enough for the work you do?
5. How has Covid had an effect on the wages you earn from mining?
6. Schools are out of session due to Covid, what do your children do during the day when you work?
7. Are the wages you earn taxed?

Nuts and Bolts

For this ISP project I stayed at Njovo Lodge in Katwe Uganda. I payed 25,000 UGX a night for accomodations. The price was originally much higher but I told them I was a student conducting research on a budget and they gave me a discount. My contact was named Nicholas and he is the manager at the eco-tourism office.