

African Journal of Gender, Society and Development
ISSN: 2634-3614 E-ISSN: 2634-3622

Indexed by IBSS, EBSCO, COPERNICUS, ProQuest, SABINET
and J-Gate.

Volume 12 Number 2, June 2022
Pp 47-77

The Role of Women in Indigenous Conflict Management in the Mokgalwaneng Village in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality, South Africa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2022/v11n2a3>

Lovelyne Mboh

*Department of Social Work,
University of Fort Hare,
South Africa.*

Orcid id- <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3773-4801>

Email-lovyfavour@gmail.com

&

Gabriel Ekobi

*Department of Social Work,
University of Fort Hare,
South Africa:*

Email: gabriel.ekobi@gmail.com / gekobi@ufh.ac.za

Abstract

Women have been occupied with managing conflicts in African indigenous communities. However, their contribution in conflict resolution has not been documented in South Africa. The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the role of women in managing indigenous conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng community. The data were collected from 14 participants from the Mokgalwaneng community by means of semi-structured and unstructured interview guides and thematically analysed. Three main themes were identified:

the types of indigenous conflict, causes of indigenous conflict and the role of women in indigenous conflict management in the Mokgalwaneng community. Findings revealed that there are several types of indigenous conflict in the area. Land, domestic, theft and adultery, fornication and rape were raised as the causes of conflict. Women used indigenous conflict management techniques such as accommodating, collaborating and compromising to manage indigenous conflicts in the area. Also, women in the Mokgalwaneng village assisted indigenous institutions of elders and traditional leaders in resolving conflicts. Although women played a role in the indigenous conflict management, they were being marginalised in relation to indigenous conflict management. This study recommended that gender inclusive conflict management policy should be introduced as this might help promote gender equality and alleviate gender bias.

Keywords: *Conflict, Indigenous conflict, Indigenous conflict management, Women, Women role.*

1. Introduction

Conflicts are part and parcel of every social system worldwide. Conflicts can take place at all levels – from the local to the global level; from intra-individual to the group level, not leaving out small to large communities, which is the focus of this paper (Tsongo, 2012). Conflict can either be functional or dysfunctional. *Functional conflict* is regarded as a productive vigour that can stimulate community members to increase their knowledge and skills, encourage new thinking and build relationships. However, *dysfunctional conflict* is rooted in the concept that communities are created to realise goals by creating structures that perfectly define individual and communal responsibilities, authorities and other tasks (Slabbert, 2004; Weeda, 2014). Indigenous conflict can become problematic, however, if they turn violent. A well-established fact in international development co-operation has it that indigenous or violent conflict hinders socio-economic development and may reverse any kind of development progress (Schweitzers, 2017). Indigenous conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive power of conflicts through different measures and by working with and through the parties involved in the conflict (Gashie, 2007; Best, 2004).

In South Africa, emerging and recurring indigenous conflicts such as land and water disputes and women-related conflicts (marriages, rape and

domestic disputes) in communities, most especially in rural areas, often lead to violence. Land and water conflicts can result in tribal wars. Civilians are killed in tribal wars; people die because of a higher prevalence of diseases and an increase in crime. It leads to poverty, loss of income, food insecurity, trauma and unemployment due to disruption of economic activities such as agricultural and livestock production (African Development Bank, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2018). Women are the most vulnerable group whenever there are indigenous conflicts or wars in any society, even though they hardly contribute to the events that lead to these conflicts. Women suffer the most from the consequences of indigenous conflicts and social fragmentation in communities ravaged by war devastations (Mzvondiwa, 2007; Iloh, Chukwuemeka, & Reuben, 2020). Studies have shown that women play crucial role in indigenous conflict management. Women are advocate for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. Involving women in indigenous conflict management brings peace which is vital for reconstructing social, economic, political, legal and cultural structures of the country (African Development Bank, 2018). However, women are discriminated against by patriarchy society in many parts of the country. Empowering women in conflict situations would help prevent gender-based violence such as the terrible crimes of rape, forced marriages, theft, sexual slavery and others (African Development Bank, 2018; Alemu, 2020). A study on women role in conflict management could help policy-makers appreciate the positive roles they can play in managing conflicts and implement effective policies and programmes that can help in indigenous conflict management within communities.

The paper sought to answer the following research questions: What types of conflict exist in this community? What are the causes of these conflicts and how do women apply indigenous knowledge in resolving conflicts? These questions were guided by the following objectives: to identify the types of indigenous conflicts and causes of conflicts, and also to assess the roles of women in indigenous conflict management in the Mokgalwaneng village. Feminist conflict theory was the basis for answering the objectives of this paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Feminist conflict resolution theory

Feminist conflict theory focuses on the women's non-violent struggles for peace across the globe (Bailey, 1989). The theory seeks to define the importance of the relationship between women and peace in conflict management. It identifies the elements of women's voice, insights and understanding of reality. The theory argues that centuries of exclusion, subjugation and discrimination have given women perspectives on social issues which more deeply reveal the true structures and actors of the world than men (Kriesberg, 1991). The conventional perspectives of peace and security often begin in absolutely male-dominated settings and tend to privilege the men, governments and power elite. Feminist peace scholars, researchers and activists have insisted that the roles women play in both the escalation and the de-escalation of conflicts depend on the particular historical, cultural and socio-political context as well as on the conceptual framework one utilises to explore the gendered dimensions of conflicts (Peterson, 1992). Derived from these certainties, the feminist conflict resolution theory informs this paper by focusing on the importance of women in conflict management based on their existing indigenous knowledge.

3. Literature Review

Women make significant contributions to indigenous conflict management and peacebuilding at different stages in the society. They contribute to reducing direct violence as peacekeepers and relief aid workers. Women also work to transform relationships as mediators, trauma healing counsellors and policymakers; they play an active role in preventing indigenous and violent conflicts by acting as participants (UNESCO, 2003; Alemu, 2020). Over the last few decades, studies have shown that supporting women's capacities to actually participate in indigenous conflict management is a central part of their advancement and ability to contribute to peace, socio-economic development and security. Engaging women in indigenous conflict management helps achieve sustainable peace and growth (United Nations Women, 2017). Moreover, it helps build amicable relationships between entities in conflict management. Indigenous conflict management and peace

agreements are more effective and sustainable when women are involved in the peacebuilding process. Bringing women in indigenous conflict management improves the quality of resolving conflicts and enhances the likelihood of implementation because of the unique skills and experiences that women possess (Klein, 2012; Shepherd, 2018). In Kenya, women are central to the upbringing of children and socialisation of children, acquiring values such as responsibility, honesty and loyalty that teaches peace and reduces conflict. Women also inculcate in their children the importance of humanity. This makes women to be looked upon as peace builders by the society (Nwoye, 2008; Kariuki, 2015). Substantial inclusion of women and civil society groups in indigenous conflict management makes the resulting agreement 64% less likely to fail, and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years (Nilsson, 2012; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2018). During conflicts in communities in Tigray, Ethiopia, women's contribution was evident in the indigenous conflict management, development and peace. Women in the Raya community in the southern part of the regional state of Tigray in Alamata woreda utilised their own indigenous way of indigenous conflict management mechanisms to address the cause of conflicts, build solidarity and enhance good relationship within themselves and their neighbouring communities (Berhe, 2012; Alemie & Mandefro, 2018).

South Africa is conscious of the central role women play in indigenous conflict management as peacemakers and facilitators in indigenous processes and peacebuilding initiatives, particularly at the grass-roots level (Rukuni, Shanyisa, Madhuku, & Maxwell, 2016; Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Nilsson, 2012). Women at all levels of society have a role to play in indigenous conflict prevention and peacebuilding as agents of change (Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, 2019). The involvement of women helps address some components of community planning which are responsive, such as: mixed land use; accessibility, mobility, safety and security; distribution of services, community buildings and infrastructure; housing, water and sanitation; land tenure; livelihoods; employment; and transport (Mabuyakhulu, 2007; United Nations Habitat, 2018). Sisulu (2019) reveals that post-apartheid South Africa witnessed the formation of the Harambe Women's Forum, which, despite the poverty, trauma and violence its members witnessed, helped in rebuilding and developing their devastated communities and got involved in indigenous conflict management.

3. Problem Statement

Despite being the major victims of indigenous conflicts and conflicts in general, research has shown that women are hardly recognised as stakeholders during peace negotiations for management of conflicts. They hardly participate during peace talks as the talks are often seen as male affairs. This is evidenced in a report by the United Nations, which shows that, from 1990 to 2018, women only constituted 2% of conflict mediators and 8% of peace negotiators globally (Sisulu, 2019), an indication that they are relegated to the background when solutions for peaceful resolution of conflicts are being sought. Chapter 2 of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognises equal human rights for all, and also the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities. The Constitution makes provision for the recognition of the role of women in indigenous conflict management. Since 1994, there have been major developments towards the recognition of the equal rights of South African women. Nonetheless, these changes are cosmetic in nature, in that they exist “on paper” only (Bentley, 2005). Only a small proportion of women are allowed to participate in the traditional council that resolves communal conflicts. Women were treated as minors and do not participate in decision-making by their communities (Okiror, 2016; Sisulu, 2019). Therefore, the need to conduct a study on women’s role in indigenous conflict management to demonstrate the contribution they make in managing conflicts.

4. Methodology

4.1 Location and selection of the study area

Mokgalwaneng community is found within Moses Kotane Local Municipality, which is part of Bojanala Platinum district municipality in the North West Province. The area has a total population of 8,691 of which 49% of the population is male and 51% female. It is situated 75 km from Mogwase Township and 25 km west of Swartklip mines. It is located within tribal land; operations there are communal in nature. Communities within this area source their livelihood from a variety of economic activities such as agriculture, mining, income-generating projects, and old-age pensions. The Mokgalwaneng village was selected

for this study because of the continuous increase in indigenous conflicts such as livestock theft, rape, domestic violence, blood feud and looting in the area (North West Provincial Government. 2018; Statistics South Africa Community Survey, 2019).

4.2 Research approach and design

The qualitative research approach was used in this paper because it allowed the researcher to get a better understanding about the research problems. Qualitative methods provide the basis for a more interpretive, descriptive and thematic analysis that facilitates ways of understanding human spectacles within the context in which they occur (Creswell, 2014). In terms of research design, the study employed an exploratory research design. An exploratory research design was adopted since there is little or no information about women's role in indigenous conflict management. Using the exploratory design helped obtain information from knowledgeable individuals such as the case of the key informants and women of the Mokgalwaneng village in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality (Gray, 2014).

4.3 Sample size and sampling procedure

A sample size of 14 participants took part in the study. Six women, educated or not, were drawn from the Mokgalwaneng community. Eight key informants were drawn from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2), Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2), South Africa Police Service(2) and the Traditional authorities(2). In terms of sampling, purposive sampling and snowball techniques were utilised to recruit participants and key informants. These women were contacted and asked whether they could participate voluntarily in the study. The participants were informed about the objectives of the study. They were also informed that they were at liberty to exit the discussions if they wished to do so. The adoption of the purposive sampling method employed was due to time and limited resources. The advantage of purposeful sampling lies in the fact that the few cases which are studied in an in-depth method provide a great deal of insights about the topic. The participants and key informant interviews covered issues such as the types of conflict, causes of conflict, role women played in conflict management and conflict management

strategies. Key informants were selected purposefully on the basis of their age and knowledge about the role women played in indigenous conflict management. Additionally, COVID-19 protocols such as hand sanitising, wearing of face masks, checking of temperatures and social distancing were observed.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through interviews, employing semi-structured interview guides to obtain information from participants in the area. The semi-interview guiding questions were formulated in such a way so as to produce responses on the types of indigenous conflict and causes of indigenous conflict, and to explore the role of women in indigenous conflict. The unstructured interview guide was also employed to collect information from the key informants from the officials from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, South African Police Services, (SAPs) and Traditional authorities. Interviewing key informants also added depth into the finding because they have knowledge about the role women played in indigenous conflict management in the area. Further, the study also utilised secondary data to obtain information very relevant to the study. Secondary information was obtained from sources such as the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, SAPs and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. In relation to data analysis, themes and categorisation were employed to analyse data from participants and key informants.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section of the paper presents the findings and discussion on the role of women in indigenous conflict management in the Mokgalwaneng village. The finding is presented in three main themes namely: types of indigenous conflict, causes of indigenous conflict and the role of women in indigenous conflict management. The key findings are discussed in accordance with the themes.

5.1 Types of indigenous conflict

All the participants interviewed revealed that there are different types of indigenous conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng village. The indigenous conflict types include land, domestic, theft and adultery, fornication and rape conflicts. One of the women said:

Land conflict was common between communities and community members.

An official indicated:

Conflicts such as jealousy and misunderstanding between lovers regularly exist in the community which at times results to [in] death.

In addition, fornication, marriage, adultery and rape are another types of conflicts in the community mentioned by the women and the officials from the Department of Justice and South Africa Police Service as one of the women put it:

Adultery is a very common type of conflict in our area. I am tired of hearing about it every day.

An official indicated:

A day will never pass without you hearing of adultery.

Also, the women indicated that another type of indigenous conflict in the community is domestic conflict. One woman reported:

There are always disagreements in households between wives and husbands. In addition, there are always disagreements between parents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts.

Also, the women and the traditional leader (chief) reported that another type of conflict existing in the community is scarce resources conflict. One participant had this to say:

The lack of scarce resources (basic needs) such as security, housing, recognition, identity and human development are at the core of deep-rooted conflict.

Another one lamented:

The absence of basic needs like housing, security and electricity to the people leads to protest.

Furthermore, the participants indicated that theft is one of the types of conflict in the Mokgalwaneng village. One of the women mentioned:

Livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, and camels) are the most frequently stolen property amongst the Mokgalwaneng village people. Livestock's theft results to conflict among community members.

Other types of conflicts raised by the officials and the women are child fights over authority in the household, differences in opinions ranging from communities' moral values, alcohol and drug abuse.

The views above from the participants clearly demonstrate that there are several types of conflicts such as land and water, domestic, marriage, livestock theft and adultery, fornication and rape conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng community. These types of conflicts lead to the decline of local commerce and decrease in population, as some community members tend to travel to cities in the hope of living in a more peaceful environment. The views of the participants are consistent with Tillet and French's (2005: 12) and Tillet's (1999: 45) studies which state that conflicts such as domestic relationship, family, neighbourhood, theft, commercial, consumer and environmental conflicts occur regularly in Ethiopia. The existence of conflicts in indigenous communities makes it pertinent for women to engage in peace making.

5.2. Causes of Indigenous Conflicts

All the participants interviewed indicated that indigenous conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng village are caused by land, domestic, theft and adultery, fornication and rape.

5.2.1 Land and water conflicts

Conflict is not new to indigenous communities in the world in general and South Africa in particular. The manifestation of conflict is more pronounced in agricultural production areas. It is also experienced along

river settlements where crop farming (furrow irrigation) is practised. The data obtained during interviews from the women and officials from the Department of Traditional Affairs and the traditional authority of Mokgalwaneng village revealed that disputes over land and water often occur among members in the Mokgalwaneng village. One participant claimed:

This conflict occurs because of ownership of land, and border related issues of farmland. Also, the conflict occurred on the ownership of the farmland, because agriculture is the mainstay in the Mokgalwaneng village.

Another one said:

The prolonged recurrent drought and some other challenges such as water scarcity they faced lead them to change their way of life thus resulting in dispute over ownership of farmland. This sometimes causes conflict starting from individual and further leads to intra-clan conflict. The conflict as a result puts pressure on vital resources such as pasture and water, and thus leads to increasing levels of violent competition and tension between local communities.

Another participant stressed:

The disputes concerning farm boundaries occurred when a farmer encroached on a farm adjacent to theirs. It usually occurred when members of the community were claiming the same farmland.

Another one reported:

Cattle's grazing in other people's land is another cause of conflict in the Mokgalwaneng village. Scarce grazing land and water resources have forced some community members in the area to scout for alternative pasture resources.

Another official mentioned:

We have been battling with this type of conflict in the Mokgalwaneng village for a long period of time now. This type of conflict happens due to the scarcity of available natural resources such as water points, farming and pasture lands.

Another official lamented:

Farmland conflict occurs because of weak demarcation and expansion of the land among the neighbouring farmers that always create disputes. This type of conflict may take a longer period to get resolved.

As explained by these participants, land and water conflicts occur as a result of boundary encroachment and expansion of the land by one farmer to that of the neighbouring farmers. The participants added that farm land disputes occur because of weak demarcation and when members of the community are claiming ownership of the same land. The participants went on to say that grazing of cattle on other people's land is another cause of conflict in the community. Scarce water resources and grazing land have forced some community members to scout for alternative pasture resources. Land and water are important economic assets and source of livelihoods to communities. Land is closely linked to community identity, history and culture. Land and water conflicts reduce agricultural productivity substantially, hence loss of income and food insecurity. This finding is in line with Alemie and Mandefro's (2018) and Tseer's (2020) studies which state that there is the practice of lending a piece of farmland to a person for the purpose of only cultivation within a short period of time usually during the rainy season. However, sometimes it happens that the person may argue later that the farmland belongs to him, and this leads to a dispute between the two persons.

5.2.2 Adultery, fornication, rape and marriage conflicts

The data obtained from the women and the officials from the traditional authority and the South African Police Service indicated that adultery, fornication, rape and marriages also are responsible for conflicts in the area. One of the women had this to say:

A girl's marriage without the consent of her father or her brothers is very sensitive and causes conflict when it happens without their contribution. If a girl marries a man without the knowledge of her parents, then it may create a problem because they may refuse the marriage.

Another official reported:

When parents give their daughter to a man without her consent, the parent has the right to choose the husband of their daughter according to tradition. Sometimes the girl may refuse such offers and go with the man of her choice while the first offer of the man is there; this may lead to a dispute between her family and the family of the man of her choice.

Adultery, fornication and rape were another causes of conflicts raised in the Mokgalwaneng village although not widely accepted in public as reported by an official:

An adulterous person is considered unclean and is subjected to ceaseless and vigorous rituals of cleansing the moment the culprit is proven guilty or caught in the act. Another woman claimed that fornication attracts a similarly harsh punishment like adultery.

Another official said:

Women are usually vulnerable to rape in times of conflict and violence. Adultery and rape cases have always been veiled in secrecy. Just like other crimes, the parties involved are given enough time to present their story.

According to the participants, adultery, fornication, rape and marriages are some of the causes of conflicts in the community. The participants added that marrying a girl without the consent of the father or brothers results in conflicts. The participants went on to say that committing adultery and fornication causes conflicts and attracts harsh punishments which might lead to death. The participants added that adultery and rape cases have always been veiled in secrecy and women are usually vulnerable to rape during conflicts and violence. Fornication and adultery might lead to the decline of communal values and morals. Rape might lead to disappointment and regret (depression) over loss of virginity for first-timers, unwanted pregnancy and abortion. The finding agrees with Sisulu's (2019), Mboh's (2018) and Alemu's (2020) studies which acknowledge that rape, fornication and adultery are the causes of indigenous conflict.

5.2.3 Domestic conflict

Interviews with the officials and the women indicated that domestic conflicts also lead to disputes in the Mokgalwaneng village. Participants shared their experiences:

At the family level, disputes do occur between the family members. A man and his wife or wives might quarrel over issues such as lateness, poor milking skills, selfishness, and disobedience or general laziness. If a man fails to provide food for his wife or wives, quarrels also arise. In polygamous homes, a husband might be accused of spending too much time in a certain house (wife). The wives might also pick quarrels among themselves and so can their children.

The sharing of dowry gained from marrying off a daughter is another source of domestic conflict communities in the Mokgalwaneng village. However, according to some of the women, there is an elaborate procedure for determining who gets what. Nevertheless, quarrels emerge during the process of sharing the dowry.

Conflict usually occurred on how to share and, or manage the deceased property. This normally creates disputes since there are no written wills.

Further, an official had this to say:

The issue of inheritance is another major cause of domestic conflict in the area. It is a customary principle that all the children are entitled to their father or mother's property particularly when they are about to break off from the family to start their own homes. In such cases, some children might claim that their mother or father's property was unevenly distributed.

Another official claimed:

In polygamous families, a woman might rouse her children to demand certain things from their father to match her co-wife's children. In isolated cases, a man might refuse to hand over part or all of his property to his children advising them to seek their own by raiding neighbouring communities. Inheritance disputes also arise after the death of the head of the family.

According to these participants, domestic conflicts are usually caused by polygamous families where a woman might ask her children to demand certain things from the father. Moreover, domestic conflicts occur because of disputes between family members and the sharing of a deceased person's property. The participants added that domestic conflicts can occur when a man and his wife or wives quarrel over issues such as lateness, poor milking skills, selfishness, and disobedience or general laziness. Domestic conflicts might also occur due to disagreement over the sharing of dowry gained from marrying off a daughter. Domestic conflicts affect one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours and can significantly impact one's mental stability. It can increase anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and death. The views of the participants are in line with Berhe's (2012) and Mengesha, Yesuf and Gebre's (2015) studies which found that domestic conflicts usually occur due to polygamy, inheritance and the sharing of dowries.

5.2.4 Theft conflict

All the participants interviewed reported that livestock's theft was rampant in the area which resulted in conflict. Quotations from the participants support these claims:

My brother, I have been suffering from cattle theft, this affects the milk, egg supply for which we are responsible. This often leads to retaliation and loss of income. Theft of cattle often results in conflict that restricts increase in stock productivity. Insecurity due to theft has a negative impact on the whole community's development efforts, most particularly with regard to basic services such as schools, health facilities and water resource development.

I have been involved in cattle trading for more than six (6) years and was a victim of theft. I have eight families who are totally dependent on this trade. I do not have any intention to continue with the trading.

We also engaged in selling food as a useful income supplement, but because of theft and insecurities our movements are restricted. When there is theft, we lose our trade opportunities. Grains, poultry, clothes and cell phones are items frequently stolen in the area.

The views of the participants above cattle theft were the cause of conflict which leads to retaliation and loss of income. Theft of cattle often restricts increase in stock productivity and supply of milk and eggs. The participants stated that they engage in selling food as a strategy to supplement income. However, because of insecurities and theft, their movements are restricted. Loss of livestock through theft has a significant economic impact on households. Grains, poultry, clothes and cell phones are items frequently stolen in the area, and this leads to loss of well-being. This finding is in agreement with Isike and Okeke-Uzodike's (2010) studies which affirm that livestock theft has a domino effect on livelihoods. According to the woman, this is a crime punishable by a range of fines, prison sentence and even death. Remarkably, Mokgalwaneng village regards stealing from fellow members in the community as a serious crime, whereas stealing from other communities is not a crime but a just cultural practice of restocking.

5.2.5 Scarce resource conflict

Interviews with the officials and the women revealed that basic needs such as security, housing, water, electricity, recognition, identity and human development are at the core of deep-rooted conflicts. One participant said:

During illegal strikes and public protests due to the needs of housing, water and electricity, some of us that are involved in trading are exposed to theft. As a result of security problems, our movements are restricted, and that has both economic and social consequences on our lives. Limited movement because of insecurity limits the ability to maintain our social relationships within the community and the neighbouring ethnic groups.

Another official stressed:

Women most often do not participate and are not directly involved in conflicts related to illegal protest, they suffer more in terms of death and injury than other community members since they lose their husbands, sons or other family members due to conflict. Loss of a husband usually means that the woman either has to leave the community or be inherited by her husband's brother or close relatives. Inherited wives are often of lower social status than full wives.

The views expressed by the participants indicate that the absence of scarce resources such as housing, water and electricity are the driving force behind conflicts. Scarce resource conflicts, also known as basic human needs conflict, takes place when there are insufficient resources in a community. This happens when some members in the community start complaining that others are favoured in resource distribution while others are impoverished or ignored. Consequently, it leads to illegal strikes, xenophobia, public protest movements and death. This is very detrimental to the country at large and the Mokgalwaneng community in particular. This finding is supported by Isike and Okeke-Uzodike (2010) and Alemu (2020) who reveal that conflict arises when those in political positions fail to apportion scarce resources in a manner that wins the goodwill, trust, confidence and loyalty of citizens. This frequently results in the disintegration of relations between citizens and the state, and within citizens in the competition for access to increasingly scarce resources, manifested in communal conflicts.

5.3 Role of women in indigenous conflict management

5.3.1 Role in traditional council

All the participants interviewed reported that women, although minimal, play crucial roles in managing almost all types of indigenous conflicts such as domestic violence, theft, land and jealousy. As one official put it:

Elders are the ones who are influential from the community and know both conflicting parties. Elders in the community, serve as negotiators or facilitators during the indigenous conflict management procedure. However, despite that fact women do not lead the indigenous conflict management procedure in the area, nevertheless, they are included in the traditional council, and assist by providing suggestions about the process of indigenous conflict management.

The chief's wife is the leader of the women in the community. She heads sensitive cases concerning women. The chief wife is assisted by some most elderly women who serve as advisers. The women also assist indigenous institutions (like community elders, clan and religious leaders) in managing conflict.

Another official said:

The elders acquire this position by virtue of their age, knowledge of culture and tradition of the community or within the community.

The conflict case could be brought to the elders in three ways: the conflicting parties; the community members; and the police officers, as one of the women reported:

We meet with elders when requested to do so. They get information about cases from conflicting parties, community members and police. Police officers support the women and the elders in many ways including bringing conflicting parties to them and executing their decisions. They create opportunities for conflicting parties to have open discussion and dialogue about the conflict. The elders in support of the women do their best to resolve conflicts and restore relationships.

Another one indicated:

We work with the elders and focus to maintain and re-establish what the two conflicting parties lost as result of the conflict. The conflict destroys the normal relationship of conflicting parties as well as families and surrounding communities.

An official said:

The women assist the conflicting parties to come together, discuss their issues and resolve the conflict. The offender will compensate for any kind of harm made up on the victim. Finally, peace and order ensues through reconciliation of the two parties.

Moreover, according to the participants, women are also used (or accepted to be used) as bridge-building blocks between hostile or fighting communities, notably through inter-communal marriage whereby a daughter of one community is given in marriage to a son of another community as a way of sealing an alliance for peace and reconciliation.

As explained by these participants, despite the fact the elders are the main players in managing conflicts, women are included in the traditional council, and they help in providing suggestions about the process of

indigenous conflict management. The participants stated that the chief's wife heads sensitive cases concerning women and she is assisted by some elderly women who serve as advisers. They went on to explain that conflict cases are brought to the elders by the conflicting parties, the community members or the police officers. According to them, when these cases are brought, they work with the elders to re-establish peace between the two conflicting parties. Women assist elders, the chief's wife creating possibilities for peace, and subsequently facilitating communication and peace negotiations. According to the views above, women play a crucial role in managing indigenous conflict, which promotes peace and harmony. This finding corroborates UNESCO's (2018) research on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, whereby women were found to be part of the traditional court community in South Africa. Similarly, feminist conflict resolution theory supports the peaceful role women play in conflict management through non-violent struggles for peace across the globe (Bailey, 1989).

5.3.2 Handling skills

Most of the women interviewed indicated that they normally have good indigenous conflict handling skills such as collaborative, accommodating and compromising skills to convey appropriate values and attitudes during conflict management. One of the women revealed:

Resolving indigenous conflict will depend not only on our attitude to relational aspects of the conflict but also on its content. In other words, it is not only knowledge of how a conflict can be addressed by using handling styles but also the underlying nature of the conflict in question that guides the women's choice of actions.

We are quick in addressing problems using collaborative style of indigenous conflict management that is also called the mutual problem solving which involves bringing together the conflicting parties in order to work out their problem in a joint situation. Collaborating is attempting to find a solution that satisfies both parties' concerns.

When dealing with conflicts at the community level they tend to be very strict. Their aim is always to solve the conflict as fast as possible since they believe that otherwise it can have negative effects on the development of the community.

Further, some women also disclosed that they use an accommodating style to manage indigenous conflicts in the area. One woman had this to say:

Using the accommodating style helps in managing conflict by consoling the conflicting parties using supportive, effective language and facilitating participation.

Moreover, according to some women, a compromising style – different from that of men – is used to handle conflicts. One participant stated:

We often use compromising styles while men employ competing or avoiding strategies in situations of conflict. Adopting a compromising style rather than a competitive one can be of great advantage. This is because it produces more constructive outcomes for the disputing parties.

The views of these participants indicate that, in managing conflicts, they do not depend only on knowledge of how a conflict can be addressed but also on the handling styles. The participants disclosed that they use collaborating, accommodating and compromising styles to manage conflicts. Collaborating is attempting to find a solution that satisfies both parties' concerns. Collaborating in conflict management involves getting inputs from both the conflicting parties in order for a case to be established and conflict to be resolved. Collaboration calls for all parties to work out their differences and realise that, without full cooperation, all of them will fail. Accommodation style plays down the differences while also emphasising common interests. Accommodating style is sacrificing one's own concern for the sake of another. Compromising is attempting to find a middle ground, which satisfies only partly both parties' concerns. Compromising conflict management style helps ensure harmonious and lasting relationships between the conflicting parties. Using these styles in managing conflicts yields better results because they provide the platform to identify, extract and combine the diverse skills, abilities and perspectives to develop high-quality decisions. This finding is consistent with Collins' (2003), United Nations Women's (2017) and Settee's (2007) studies that conclude that collaborative and accommodation skills provide the necessary strategies to reduce altercation and promote peaceful solutions. Also, feminist conflict

resolution theory supports the peaceful role women play in conflict management through different methods to achieve peace across the globe (Bailey, 1989).

5.3.3 Mediators

All the women interviewed reported they serve as peacemakers, especially within the family because they are good in conciliation, discussion, negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Participants provided the following responses:

When there is a family dispute, I always mediate and negotiate between the children or the children and their father. In most cases, elderly women were seen as knowledgeable in the peace process.

Women create the platform of understanding between her husband and herself when there is conflict. Also, bonds her husband's family and her family. In addition, she builds a bridge between her community and that of her husband that brings about unity and cooperation.

Some of the women play very vital roles in managing indigenous conflict in the village through arbitration, since we are also victims of conflicts such as theft, rape and domestic violence.

I employed negotiation and conciliation strategies to handle a conflict as a result of theft. When one boy was accused of stealing a goat, the villagers were about to beat him to death. Negotiation strategy allows me to resolve the issue in a way that both parties find acceptable. In a negotiation, each party tries to persuade the other to agree with his or her point of view.

Through negotiation, all involved parties try to avoid arguing but agree to reach some form of compromise.

The women employed indigenous approaches because they understand the norms, values, rules, sanctions and principles of their communities.

The women further stated that, in a polygamous marriage, the first wife is the main mediator of conflicts in the family. She is responsible for maintaining tranquillity and peace when conflict arises between the

husband and one of his wives, or among the latter. One of the women had this to say:

She ensures that perfect harmony exists between the young brothers-in-law and their wives. Women are also able to persuade their husbands, sons, brothers and fathers to stop fighting and settle their cases through negotiation.

Another one said:

We encouraged older children and men to participate in the different forums to discuss conflict management and conflicts in order to learn, bear witness, ask questions, express their opinions, as well as participate in decision making mostly when asked to do so.

The views above revealed that women utilise conciliation, mediating and negotiation methods to manage indigenous conflicts in the area. According to the participants, adopting conciliation, discussion, negotiation, mediation and arbitration to manage conflicts helps in promoting peace and stability in the community. A mediator assists the parties through constructive discussion and negotiation of their issues to reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Arbitration is an out-of-court method of resolving conflicts. It is a procedure in which a dispute is submitted, by agreement of the parties, to one or more arbitrators who make a binding decision on the dispute. Conciliation is an alternative dispute resolution process whereby the parties to a dispute use a conciliator, who meets with the parties both separately and together in an attempt to resolve their differences. Negotiation happens when people accept to talk to each other to find a solution to the problem (Collins, 2003). The views of the participants are consistent with Boege (2006) and Endalew (2014) who state that indigenous Ethiopian women tend to use conciliation and negotiation to handle and control acts of revenge and conflicts in their communities. This act tends to pass on knowledge about conflict from one generation to the next, thereby ensuring that indigenous knowledge is not lost among communities. This view is endorsed by the feminist conflict theory which encourages women to be part of peace processes (Bailey, 1989).

Furthermore, interviews with the officials from the Department of Traditional Affairs, SAPs and traditional leaders indicated local conflicts

in land acquisition have been a common phenomenon since time immemorial. They are often characterised by competition over land, housing and water. Such kinds of conflicts were further intensified with the government's inability to provide communities in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality in general and Mokgalwaneng village in particular with water, land and housing. According to the participants, the principles of *Ubuntu* have been used by women in managing conflicts. The connotation and practice of *ubuntu* in Southern Africa can be inferred from a Zulu maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which literally means 'a person is a person only because of other people'. *Ubuntu* societies developed mechanisms for resolving disputes and promoting reconciliation and peace with a view to healing past wrongs and maintaining community relations, social cohesion and harmony (Okeke-Uzodike, 2010). Mangaliso and Damane's (2001) and Sisulu's (2019) studies reveal that the most important attribute of *ubuntu* is the high degree of harmony and continuity throughout the system. To maintain the harmonious relationship, individuals have to be directly involved in social and moral roles. Rukuni et al. (2016) opine that women are the primary agents of socialisation; they educate their children about the norms, principles, sanctions, beliefs and values of their society. One official indicated:

Women are an emblem of cooperation, sharing, empathy and peace when there is conflicts such as rape, theft, blood feud and domestic violence. In other words, women advocate for the principle of Ubuntu in managing conflict in the area. Ubuntu highlights the importance of public participation in the peacemaking process when there is conflict.

Another official revealed:

Women also play an important role in child rearing and instructing peace that helps in the prevention of conflict such as illegal protest and public protest due to poor service delivery.

The role played by women in managing indigenous conflicts contributes to the reduction of regular court case loads. Additionally, they contribute to saving the public money and also minimising the problem of shortage of judges who work in the regular courts, and budget constraints. One official revealed:

Women are complementary to modern government structures and are not competitors as some government officials think and worry about. They give access to many people who do not find modern systems of conflict management comfortable and affordable to their needs.

Furthermore, women engage in village committees, women's clubs and churches where they assist in managing conflicts. One participant indicated:

When there is conflict, we sometimes use the church to manage the conflict. We act as mediators since we were considered to get more respect and legitimacy through the church and thus, enhance their role in providing peace in the area.

Another official revealed:

Women also provide psychological help, advocating and lobbying for human rights and the issue of gender inequality.

However, a small proportion of women revealed that they do not play any meaningful role in managing indigenous conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng village. These women are of the view that they are being marginalised in relation to indigenous conflict management. Excerpts from participants support these claims:

We are not allowed by their domineering husbands to take decisions in indigenous conflict management. Even in the peace talks, we do not have an opportunity to decide. We wait for the men to decide although some women have now defied the rules.

We are victims of assorted forms of physical abuse and sexual violence based on a misrepresented understanding of African patriarchies. The issues of sexuality and patriarchy were employed to dissuade women from participating in conflict management.

We have good knowledge in handling conflicts and peace building. Nevertheless, we are not allowed by the traditional leaders, elders and government side to take part in managing conflict. The traditional leaders, elders and government did not give women adequate support in managing indigenous conflict.

We often lack self-belief because we are discriminated against at birth. Patriarchy places pressure upon the women at their earliest stages of development.

Women were said to be physically weaker than the men and they are afraid of conflict. These stereotypes, which are stigma, lower the people's self-esteem and demoralize women, hence inferiority complex.

The views above demonstrate that the issues of patriarchy and sexuality had reduced women involvement in indigenous conflict management in the area; they were given inadequate space to articulate themselves in meetings by the men. Efforts should be made to create more spaces for women, especially those in rural areas, to participate in indigenous conflict management through strengthening the linkages between less educated rural women and more exposed and literate peace activists in urban areas. However, a small number of women claimed that the accommodation style is generally ineffective because it does not resolve conflicts but calms the parties down temporarily. This finding is consistent with Sisulu's (2019) and Iloh et al.'s (2020) studies that state that women have generally been denied access to the levels and kinds of power in the establishments that manage conflicts. Sisulu (2019) and Iloh et al. (2020) further reveal that the most powerful positions were appropriated for men. Mengesha et al. (2015) submit that the absence or minority presence of women in discussions about conflict management or the implementation of outcomes of such discussions brings about unfortunate results. Bailey's (1989) theory supports the challenges women face by noting the existence of male dominance in peace processes and supporting the participation of women in conflict management through culture, in this case, the indigenous knowledge. Their experience must be considered in all conflict management efforts of negotiations and discussions, otherwise the peace process will only be obtained for half the indigenous population, thus limiting the growth and development of indigenous communities.

6. Recommendations

Regarding the research findings on the role of women in indigenous conflict management, recommendations were made to mitigate, prevent and promote peacebuilding in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality as a whole and Mokgalwaneng village in particular.

6.1 The provision of training

It is recommended that women should be provided with adequate training on matters related to the indigenous conflict management. Appropriate training will help women grow and develop their skills that will improve women's voices in conflict management and reduce lack of self-belief among women. This can be done through organising workshops and seminars for the women in the area.

6.2 Gender inclusive conflict management policy provision

The gender inclusive conflict management policy should be introduced because this could prevent the discrimination of women. Moreover, this will promote gender equality and alleviate gender bias. Further, introducing gender inclusive policy on conflict management will provide equal access to justice to all citizens irrespective of their status. The provision of the policy might also guarantee peaceful coexistence among women and men. The promotion of the policy can also improve the creation and development of programmes to promote and protect the role of women in indigenous conflict management in the area.

6.3 Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Systems teaching

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and its role in augmenting and enhancing women's role in indigenous conflict management should be brought to the knowledge of the younger generations through formal education curriculum in the Mokgalwaneng community. This process can be achieved through the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in secondary and high schools and also within the Moses Kotane Local Municipality indigenous communities. It should be introduced in school curriculums with different aspects, such as conflict management, taught. More importantly, programmes on women and traditional authorities' role in indigenous conflict management should also be noted. It is believed that, if such is done, women and traditional leaders will not be undermined by members of the communities in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality and the youth who, in some instances, barely have knowledge on indigenous conflict management processes and some, who

also see these processes to be old and outdated, can be brought back to their roots.

7. Conclusion

The role women play in society, most specifically in the management of indigenous conflicts in the Mokgalwaneng village, can no longer be ignored. A look at the different types and causes of conflict paved the way for discussing women's role in managing those conflicts. The finding of the study indicate that there are several types of indigenous conflicts in the area and are caused by land, domestic, theft, adultery, fornication and rape. Women play an important role, although limited in conflict management, in the promotion of peacebuilding both as individuals and groups in the area. Women in the Mokgalwaneng village use different indigenous conflict management styles such as accommodating, collaborating and compromising to manage indigenous conflicts in their community. Similarly, women in the Mokgalwaneng village also assist indigenous institutions (community elders, clan leaders and religious leaders) in managing conflicts. However, some women revealed that they are victims of assorted forms of physical abuse and sexual violence based on a misrepresented understanding of African patriarchies. The issues of sexuality and patriarchy are employed to dissuade women from participating in conflict management. Patriarchy places pressure upon the women at their earliest stages of development. Appropriate training through workshops might help women grow and develop skills that will improve women's voices in conflict management, and thus reduce lack of self-belief among women, thereby promoting indigenous knowledge and the development of indigenous communities.

References

- African Development Bank (2018). *The consequences of conflict file*. [http://Users/toshiba/Desktop/conflict%20pdf/African%20/Development%20Report%202008.2009_03_Chapter%20II\(2\).pdf](http://Users/toshiba/Desktop/conflict%20pdf/African%20/Development%20Report%202008.2009_03_Chapter%20II(2).pdf) Accessed March 21, 2021.
- Alemie, A., & Mandefro, H. (2018). Roles of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for maintaining social solidarity and

- strengthening communities in Alefa District, North West of Ethiopia. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 7(2), 2164-9170.
- Alemu, A. (2020). The role of women in indigenous conflict resolution: The case of Dokko community in Gamo Zone, SNNPR, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 9(9), 2319-7064.
- Bailey, M. J. (1989). *Mediation as a "female" process* [Paper presented at the National Conference on Peace and Conflict Resolution, Montreal].
- Bell, C., & O'Rourke, C. (2010). Peace agreements or pieces of paper? The impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on peace processes and their agreements. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 59(4), 941-980.
- Bentley, K. A. (2005). Are the powers of traditional leaders in South Africa compatible with women's equal rights? Three conceptual arguments. *Human Rights Review*, 6(4), 48-68.
- Berhe, Y. (2012). *An assessment of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of Mezard in rural Alamata Woreda, Tigray National Regional State, Ethiopia*. <https://www.grin.com/document/214145>
- Best, S. G. (2004). The methods of conflict resolution and transformation. In S. G. (Ed.), *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Boege, V. (2006). *Traditional approaches to conflict transformation: Potentials and limits*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management. <http://www.berghof-handbook.net> Accessed March 17, 2021.
- Collins, L. (2003). Building caring communities through conflict resolutions: The new challenge for principals. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 69(2), 17-19.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. California: SAGE.
- Endalew, L. (2014). Ethiopian customary dispute resolution mechanisms: Forms of restorative justice? *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14(1), 125-154.
- Gashie, K. (2007). *Traditional mechanisms of conflict transformation among the rural Hadiya community: A social psychological analysis* [Unpublished MA thesis, AAU].
- Gray, D. E. (2014). *Doing research in the real world*. London: SAGE.
- Iloh, E. C., Chukwuemeka, O. U., & Reuben, O. O. (2020). *The role of women in conflict resolution in Rwanda: Lessons for peace building in Nigeria*.

- <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339041476> Accessed April 11, 2021.
- Isike, C., & Uzodike, U. O. (2010). Towards an indigenous model of conflict resolution: Reinventing women's roles as traditional peace builders in neo-colonial Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 11(2), 32-58.
- Kariuki, F. (2015). Conflict resolution by elders in Africa: Successes, challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Alternative Dispute Resolution*, 3(2), 30-53.
- Klein, R. S. (2012). *The role of women in mediation and conflict resolution: Lessons for UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, 18 Wash. & Lee J. Civ. Rts. & Soc. Just. 277 (2012). Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol18/iss2/7>.
- Kriesberg, L. (1991). Conflict resolution applications to peace studies. *Peace & Change*, 16(4), 400-417.
- Mabuyakhulu, M. (2007). Address by KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Local Government, Housing and Traditional Affairs, The International Conference on Traditional Leadership, the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre, Durban, October 25, 2007.
- Mangaliso, M. P., & Damane, M. B. (2001). Building competitive advantage from "Ubuntu": Management lessons from South Africa. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 15(3), 165-186.
- Mboh, L. N. (2018). *Re-appropriating indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for social justice: A case of the Batswana communities in the North West province, South Africa* [Unpublished PhD thesis, North West University].
- Mengesha, A. D. Yesuf, S. S., & Gebre, T. (2015). Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Kembata society. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 225-242.
- Mzvondiwa, C. N. (2007). The role of women in the reconstruction and building of peace in Rwanda: Peace prospects for the Great Lakes region. *Africa Security Review*, 16(4), 199-106.
- Nilsson, D. (2012). *Anchoring the peace: Civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace*. Laurel Stone: International Peace Institute.
- North West Provincial Government (2018). *A profile of the North West Province: Demographics, poverty, income, inequality and unemployment from 2010 till 2017*. Mahikeng: Government Printers.
- Nwoye, M. A. C. (2008). *Philosophy and religious studies*. <http://www.afrika-world.net/afrel/chinwenwoye.htm> Accessed Jan. 03, 2021.

- Okiror, S. (2016). *Who can stop the threat of genocide in South Sudan? The new humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/11/14/who-can-stop-threat-genocide-south-sudan> Accessed April 03, 2021.
- Peterson, V. S. (1992). *Gendered states: Feminist (re) visions of international relations theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynne and Rienner Publishers.
- Rukuni, T., Shanyisa, W., Madhuku, J., & Maxwell, C. C. M. (2016). Enhancing women participation in peacebuilding and decision making processes in Zimbabwean rural communities. *Public Policy Adm*, 6(9), 208-220.
- Schweitzer, S. (2017). *What determines violent conflicts over natural resources? Evidence from land conflicts in South Africa and Zimbabwe*. https://sarpn.org/documents/d0002714/Article_Land_Conflicts_Schweitzer.pdf Accessed Feb. 16, 2021.
- Settee, P. (2007). *Pimatisiwin: Indigenous knowledge systems, our time has come* [Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon].
- Shepherd, C. (2018). *World Development Report 2012: Gender equality and development*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Slabbert, A. D. (2004). *Conflict management styles in traditional organizations*. Cape Town: Cape Technikon.
- Statistics South Africa (2019). *Community survey 2019*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Tillett, G. (1999). *Resolving conflict*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Tillett, G., & French, B. (2006). *Resolving conflict*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Tseer, T. (2020). *Exploring the impacts of ethnic conflict on educational activities in Ghana: A case study of Chereponi District in North-Eastern Ghana*. 2343-6891.
- Tsongo, P. (2012). *Introduction to conflict resolution, prevention and resolution* [PhD thesis, University for Peace, Costa Rica].
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2003). *Women and peace in Africa: Case studies on traditional conflict resolution practices*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2018). *Gender equality, heritage and creativity*. <http://uis.unesco.org/default/files/documents> Accessed April 21, 2021.

- United Nations Women (2017). *Peace building and reconciliation*.
<http://www.swdcsom.org/what-we-do/peace-building-reconciliation>
Accessed Dec. 03, 2020.
- UN Habitat (2018). *Gender and urban planning: Issues and trends*. Nairobi:
UN Habitat.
- Weeda, J. J. (2014). *Regenerating industrial flagship buildings: Multiple case study
research on the conflict-outcome relationship within inter-organisational decision
making teams* [Master's thesis, Utrecht University, Utrecht].
- Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (2019). *Women,
peace and security*. New York: United Nations.