

Small Towns and Small Enterprises: A Study of Workplace Relations in a Rural Town in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Scholarly literature on Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) view small scale businesses as employment generators, skills developers, and therefore, contributors to economic growth and poverty reduction. While this notion dominates scholarship and policy circles, it ignores other issues that are inherent in management-labour relations in SMMEs. This study explores the vulnerability of workers in small businesses. It examines the factors contributing to workers exploitation, the extent of workers vulnerability to exploitation and workers awareness of their rights in their workplaces. It focuses on employees of small businesses in Stutterheim, a small town in Amatole District in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect empirical data. Research findings reveal that workers in the study area are vulnerable to exploitation occasioned by high rate of poverty, scarcity of jobs, low levels of worker education, workers' unawareness of their rights, and official indifference to labour practices.