

Article:

Resource Development in Canada's North

Impacts on Families and Communities

by
Glen Schmidt
Professor, PhD RCSW
School of Social Work
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, BC Canada

Keywords:

resource development, Canada, north, families, communities

Abstract

The growth of global economies, particularly in Asia, has resulted in an increased demand for natural resources. Canada is a large country rich in hydrocarbons and minerals, and the exploitation of these resources is a priority for Canadian provincial and federal governments. In their rush to reap the economic benefits of resource development, governments have concentrated on creating optimal conditions for the corporations that exploit and produce the resources in northern and remote regions of the country. The rapid promotion of development has meant that families and communities are usually given secondary consideration. The changes associated with resource development exert some serious negative effects on communities and families, and it is important for social workers to understand this reality in order to deliver service in an effective manner. This research used a case study method to examine three examples of the effects of resource development on families and communities in Canada: long distance commuting to the Athabaska oil sands and the effects on families in Newfoundland, diamond mining and the Tlicho people of Wekweétí in the Northwest Territories, and the large influx of construction workers to develop the processing and port facilities in the community of Kitimat in northwestern British Columbia. The results can inform social work education, as well as the practice of social workers located in remote communities affected by rapid resource development.

Introduction

The Canadian federal government stipulates that responsible resource development is a key element in its economic action plan, and that this type of approach will create jobs, foster economic growth and ensure long-term prosperity (Economic Action Plan). Indeed, the resource sector accounts for 18% of the Canadian economy and over half the country's exports, which translates into 1.8 million jobs and 30 billion Canadian dollars (CDN) in annual tax revenue (Economic Action Plan, 2014, 1). Ambitious plans for oil sands development, liquefied natural gas, offshore drilling, mining and hydroelectric projects have the potential to produce a further 650 billion dollar (CDN) investment over the next 10 years (Natural Resources Canada, 2008, 1). Most of the existent resource developments, in addition to the proposed resource developments, are located in the northern and remote parts of Canada. In this sense,

there are parallels with countries such as Australia, where resource development also tends to be in more remote locations (Storey, 2014). The discussion and debate around the various development proposals often take the form of a dichotomous argument that might be described as jobs versus the environment. While employment and the environment are extremely important issues that require extensive public and political debate, it is also imperative to examine the effects that resource development projects have on families and communities.

Social workers need to understand the challenges and problems that affect families and communities with the rapid expansion of resource development. Members of the social work profession not only have to work with people who have trouble coping with rapid change, but social workers are also in a position to advocate for people and draw attention to the consequences of the changes brought about by resource development. Too often, social workers and government agencies react to crisis situations. While gainful employment is a good thing, the changes that accompany rapid increases in employment opportunities also have effects on families and communities. It is therefore important to understand the systemic effects of development from an ecological perspective. Macro systemic or structural changes exert important influences on families and communities, and social workers need to be aware of this process.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Canadian resource development and its effects on families and communities within three different geographic and cultural contexts. In each case, the type of development is different, though there are similar consequences for families and communities. Research literature, news reports, statistical databases and personal communication inform the three case studies, examining the effects of resource development in three different northern, geographic and cultural contexts. Rubin and Babbie (1997, 402) point out that the use of multiple sources of information is a common practice in case study research. Although a case study is often associated with qualitative research, it is not unusual to incorporate quantitative data such as statistics drawn from databases or surveys. In this paper, three separate case studies are presented in what Rubin and Babbie (1997, 403) refer to as a multiple case study. The results of the case studies are connected to a

systemic analysis that examines some of the effects of resource development on families and communities, with the approach largely exploratory in nature (Yin, 2009, 6). The context of this paper is Canadian, but it is evident that similar processes have been occurring in other parts of the world. The effects of resource development are not new, but an increased globalization of commodities and expanding markets have increased the pace of resource development. This broader macro change exerts an influence at the community and family levels, and it is important that social workers approach the challenges with this understanding. It is hoped that this research will inform social work practice, as well as social work education.

The first example in this paper is that of rural Newfoundland communities that have large numbers of men who work in the Athabaska oil sands of northern Alberta and commute back to their families in Newfoundland on a regular basis. This type of work arrangement is usually referred to as long distance commuting (LDC), or fly-in fly-out (FIFO) work, which exerts clear effects on families. The second example focuses on the remote Tlicho region of the Northwest Territories and the Indigenous community of Wekweéti, whose men have found employment in the expanding diamond mining industry. The rapid shift from a traditional sustenance, or hunting and gathering economy, to a wage-based economy has created a fundamental change. Like many of the workers in Newfoundland, these men also structure their work according to a long distance commuting regime. The third example looks at the community of Kitimat in northwestern British Columbia, as it attempts to deal with a large influx of male construction workers engaged in modernization of the existing aluminum smelter and development of refineries and shipping terminals for the anticipated liquefied natural gas production. When a community virtually doubles in population size due to the influx of itinerant workers, there is social disruption and tension, as well as pressure on the price of housing. In the case of Kitimat, the most vulnerable and marginal community members experience the most severe effects of this rapid development.

Rural Newfoundland and Long Distance Commuting (LDC)

Newfoundland and Labrador did not join the Canadian Confederation until 1949. Newfoundland, the “newest” Canadian Province, has experienced consistently high

rates of unemployment, a situation that was exacerbated with the 1992 moratorium on cod fishing. Codfish was an economic staple of Newfoundland, and it was what first attracted English, French and Portuguese settlers to the area. Overfishing as a result of modern trawling techniques and poor international regulation destroyed the once abundant population of codfish. With the imposition of the codfish moratorium, unemployment rose to 18.4% (Schrank, 2010, 417) as more than 30,000 Newfoundlanders found themselves out of work.

People were desperate for work, and large numbers of Newfoundland men resorted to work in the Athabaska oil sands of northern Alberta, located 4000 kilometers away from Newfoundland (Storey, 2010, 1173). Although many of these men moved to Alberta, significant numbers engaged in work that is called long distance commuting (LDC), or fly in fly out (FIFO) work. The LDC experience is not new for Newfoundlanders, as they first engaged in this type of work arrangement in the 1950s when large numbers of men went to work in offshore oil drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico. The work rotation schedules employed by the oil companies were relatively successful and this model was soon adopted by Canadian mining companies, and later by the offshore oil industry in Newfoundland itself. Other countries, such as Australia, have also used this model, particularly in the mining industry (Carrington and Pereira, 2011, 2; Measham et al., 2013, 188).

In the Athabaska oil sands of northern Alberta, there are over 39,000 workers (mostly male) who live and work in remote sites and 16%, or more than 6,240 of these remote site workers, are commuting from Newfoundland and Labrador (University of Alberta, 2013, 78). LDC workers typically spend anywhere from several weeks to several months away at the worksite and apart from their families. For many, this may be a challenging arrangement, but abundant employment opportunities and the appeal of steady work and high wages ensure that there is always a continuous supply of people willing to engage in the LDC lifestyle.

However, this has negative consequences for families and communities. The LDC lifestyle places a strain on personal relationships that can lead to relationship conflict and breakdown (Ryser, Schwamborn, Halseth, & Markey, 2011, 8; Sandow, 2014,

527), which also results in fundamental changes to the community structure and community relationships (Storey, 2010, 1173). The absence of male workers deprives the community of volunteer resources that might include coaches for children's sports teams, service club members and church members. The absence of male workers also diminishes the capacity of the extended family in terms of its ability to provide residual support, particularly to the elderly. Newfoundland is an aging society, and by 2036 population projections indicate that 31% of its people will be over the age 65. This will be a higher proportion of elderly than any other Canadian province (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2011, 2). In small communities, the effects of working away are exaggerated because the absence of male residents is more noticeable than it might be in a large urban area.

Heather Whalen (2013) conducted research with women from west coast Newfoundland communities, whose male partners worked in the Athabasca oil sands. In all cases, this was not the preferred choice or lifestyle arrangement for the women who participated in Whalen's study. The eight women that Whalen interviewed in-depth described the various challenges associated with the LDC lifestyle, including the effects on their relationships, parenting and general household management.

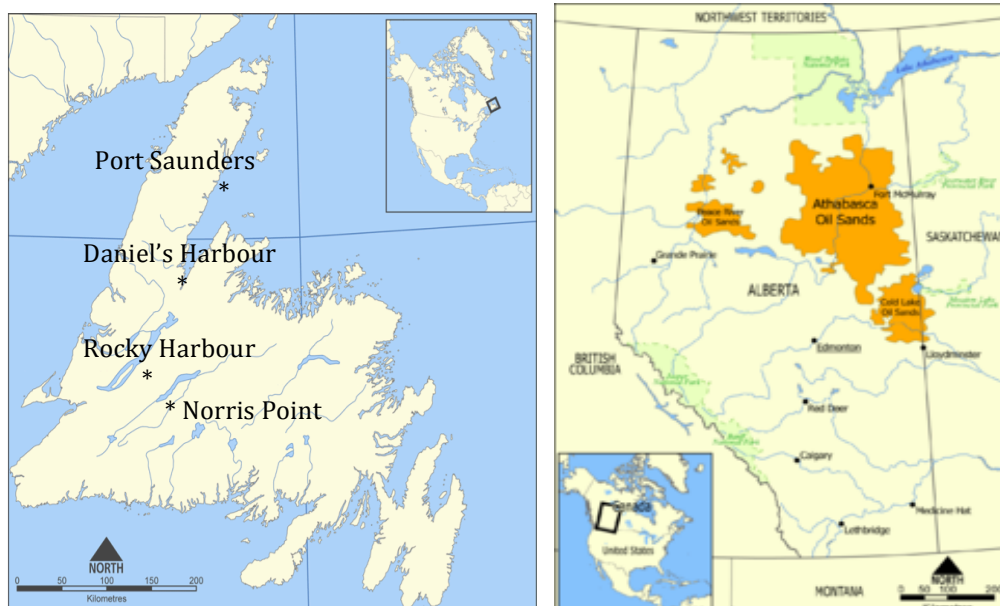


Figure 1: *Map of Communities*

An interesting finding in Whalen's work was that the absence of their male partner changed the way in which the women celebrated holidays and marked family events.

One woman described the situation this way:

That was the worst, that was the worst. It was when he had to work Christmas... I went to a friend's for my Christmas day dinner...but it wasn't even like Christmas. I never even opened the few gifts I had until he came home, same as any other day here. One year, I didn't even put up no Christmas tree because he wasn't going to be home. (Whalen, 2013, 44)

In families where the male partner is away for extended periods of time, the family no longer celebrates holidays or birthdays in the same way. Instead, they mark the family life cycle through the comings and goings of the male LDC worker. These comings and goings necessitate periods of adjustment that place a strain on relationships and adds a burden to the female partner. One woman had this to say about the time period shortly after her partner returned from working in the oil sands:

When he comes home, the adjustment of the first week of him being home of having like the extra laundry and his messiness, because he's messy...it's just his untidiness and stuff I got to get used to in that first week that he's home right, because I keep everything just so, and when he's home it's not like that (Whalen, 2013, 45).

These factors create tension in relationships. Costa (2007) noted similar effects on families that included communication problems, distress from partings and reunions, role conflict, negative effects on family social life, increased risk of substance abuse and depression and feelings of guilt and helplessness (Costa, 2007, iii). In Whalen's research, she also noted that women often had to perform two jobs due to their partner's prolonged absence. Most of Whalen's subjects worked outside the home, but they also held the primary responsibility for childcare and household management. The quote from this woman describes what it is like for her:

It's hard sometimes with decisions with the kids, or running the kids around, that sort of thing, because it's tiring and I have to work as well, and during the summer the kids would be out, they'd have a curfew but how would they get home except for me to go get them? And I still had to get up in the morning and go to work right... that's exactly what it's like, being a single parent for those weeks. (Whalen, 2013, 46)

The lifestyle exerts an emotional toll on the women, who are left with the childcare and household responsibility. Another woman said:

I cried and cried and cried a lot. Like I'm gonna quit, I can't do it, or he's gotta come home...I'm constantly frustrated how in the hell am I going to do this? This spring I started another part-time job and he was gone, and it was rough, really rough. I was depressed. I was stressed out. (Whalen, 2013, 48)

The absence of a father also creates stress for children. Although they seem to adjust to parental absence, it is difficult, particularly when they are at a young age and know that their father is going to leave for a period of time. One of the women in Whalen's research described the type of dynamic she witnesses:

Now that Logan's [son] in the picture it's harder for him [husband] to go away, and as he gets older now, he used to say "well daddy's going away to make money to buy you things" and now he's at the age that he says "I don't want things, I want you home dad." (Whalen, 2013, 53)

Sadow (2014) noted similar difficulties and challenges in Sweden. She states that commuting marriages or relationships are difficult enough, but when children enter the dynamic it makes things even more challenging, especially for the woman, as she is usually the one who has responsibility for the child or children (Sadow, 2014, 529). The question arises as to why do families embark on this kind of arrangement if the lifestyle is so unpleasant and challenging?

Costa notes a number of factors that make the LDC lifestyle attractive. To start, there are very clear financial rewards since the incomes of oil sands workers are high. For example, Fort McMurray, the northern Alberta community in the center of the oil sands has the highest yearly average household income in the country at \$191, 507 CDN (Alberta Government, 2014). Whalen also noted that financial reward was the primary motivator as expressed by the women in her research (Whalen, 2013, 64). In addition to financial reward, Costa states that workers like the long periods of time off when they are away from the northern Alberta worksite, as well as the independence that results from the LDC separation. Even so, women feel that they do not have a great deal of choice in the matter, in addition to the fact that the LDC lifestyle creates a strain in relationships. The high wages and improvements in the standard of living are also motivating factors, though these are offset by the challenges associated with the lifestyle. Increased household and childcare responsibilities, loneliness and the disruption of family events and celebrations are all factors that negatively affect Newfoundland families as part of the LDC lifestyle.

Lastly, the absence of men has an effect on residual support systems. The absent men and fathers are not available to coach youth sports or participate in youth activities such as Boy Scouts and school trips. This affects the entire community due to the reduced number of men who are able to make contributions to the social fabric of the town or village. There are also implications for a family that has an elderly parent or grandparent, as the responsibility to provide support falls almost entirely on the female partner who is left behind. The women function as single parents for significant portions of time, and they also bear the additional stress that arises from this role.

The Wekweètì, Resource Development and a Wage Economy

The Newfoundland experience of the LDC lifestyle applies to non-Indigenous communities, but it is clear that resource development also affects both Indigenous communities in Canada and Indigenous people in other countries. Some of the effects are similar to non-Indigenous communities, but there are also other factors that result in profound change and disruption. This has been the experience of the Tlicho people in northern Canada.

The Tlicho people live in a remote part of the Northwest Territories, and under the Tlicho Agreement ratified in 2005, the Tlicho people agreed to a form of limited self-government within the Northwest Territories. There are four Tlicho settlements in the territory and the smallest is called Wekweètì, with a population of 141 residents (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2012). These communities are very isolated, and contact with outsiders was limited before access to modern transportation.

Of the four communities, Wekweètì is relatively new, being established in 1962 when Alexis Arrowmaker, a Tlicho elder, moved to the site with several families who wanted to maintain a traditional lifestyle. This group of people were concerned about the encroachment of non-Aboriginal people and the resulting loss of traditional values and skills, particularly among younger people. Arrowmaker and his small group situated the community of Wekweètì on the migratory path of the Bathurst Caribou herd, which was the primary reason for relocation to this site in 1962. The people at Wekweètì engaged in a traditional lifestyle, hunting caribou for food and using the caribou skins for clothing and temporary shelter. The community is not accessible by all season roads, so the primary method of transportation for trips into and out of the community is by air or by winter roads when the ground and waterways are frozen.

Wekweètì is located 195 air kilometers almost directly north of Yellowknife, the capital city of the Northwest Territories. The people developed an economy that was largely self-sufficient, living off the land, much like their ancestors did for hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans. This type of lifestyle results in a particular annual rhythm governed by the seasons and by the availability of food sources (Schmidt, 2000, 10). Hunting camps are established when the caribou are migrating through the territory, just as fish camps or berry camps are established to take advantage of other food sources. Because the window of opportunity to harvest a food source is often very limited, it is very important that people respond as quickly as possible to the availability of a food source. Foraging or hunting and gathering societies, at least in a Canadian context, are seen to be poor, as their cash income is very low. However, Collier notes that outsiders, such as social workers, often measure things like poverty in ways that are different from how the foraging society chooses to evaluate prosperity (Collier, 2006, 55). A foraging or country economy is

not bound by the same rules and expectations found in industrial or post-industrial societies. If wild food is plentiful, people do not suffer or feel deprived. In fact, they usually feel very fortunate and prosperous, and people take a sense of pride in the rewards that come with self-sufficiency.



Figure 2: Tlicho Lands Map

In 1998, the Wekweèti people experienced some abrupt changes when the Ekati Diamond Mine opened on the border between the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Wekweèti was the closest settlement to the mine, so its relatively close proximity to the diamond mine meant that there were employment opportunities for the people of Wekweèti. Many of the males of Wekweèti began to work for the

diamond mine on rotation shifts, where they would be out of the community for several weeks at a time, thereby participating in an LDC type of work arrangement.

The mine employs 800 people on site, of which 33% are Aboriginal people (Natural Resources Canada, 2012). The employees work 14 days of 12-hour shifts, followed by two weeks away from the work site. Paci and Villebrun note that the transition to a wage-based economy exacerbates social problems, including substance abuse, family breakdowns, abuse of women, elder abuse, child abuse, sexual assaults, sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancy (Paci & Villebrun, 2004, 78).

In 2003, Victoria Deegan, a graduate student in social work, lived in the community of Wekweètì for six weeks, conducting a participatory action research project with the women and youth of Wekweètì in an attempt to understand the effects of the lifestyle change brought about by the rapid transition to a wage economy, and one that was based on the LDC lifestyle. During this time period, she interviewed women and youth, and held talking circles with groups of residents to hear the different perspectives of the women and youth. The talking circles function in a manner similar to a focus group, except that the talking circle aligns itself with traditional Aboriginal practice. Deegan was able to gather the views of over 50 women, youth and elders in the community. During her time in the community, the residents described the material prosperity that was realized with employment at the mine, but they also noted that this prosperity often brought financial hardship, as people were unaccustomed to managing money. This paradox is best illustrated by two of Deegan's research participants, with one woman saying:

A lot of people, because of the mines they got things that they never had before, like skidoos to go hunting, boats and kickers that they can go out in the summer, they have a vehicle in Yellowknife to use when they fly out of the community and to go on holidays. (Deegan, 2004, 64)

At the same time, another woman said:

When the people work at the diamond mines . . . some have credit cards and they get stuck and they make more bills and that hurts the families. (Deegan, 2004, 64)

People make large amounts of money as a result of their work in the diamond mines, though this comes at a certain cost. There are clearly problems with managing money and, despite a high income, some of the people appear to be struggling with debt and an over-extension of their finances.

The community has also experienced an increased use of alcohol and drugs since the opening of the mine. One woman described this problem by saying:

I have noticed that there is more alcohol and drugs since . . . spouses that are working at the mine, that there is more drug use and alcohol around here. There's more drinking. Like every time they come back I have noticed that there is more and more. (Deegan, 2004, 67)

These problems with alcohol and drug use also affect parenting, as well as family relationships. Some women commented that male spouses who work away from home may develop a sense of jealousy and mistrust in their partner and what she is doing during his absence (Deegan, 2004, 71).

The transition to wage employment also has an effect on traditional cultural practices. Hunting caribou is an integral part of the culture, and while caribou hunting continues, for many families it has lost its traditional form of practice, and in some ways it has become more peripheral. Workers in the mines may not have the time to go out onto the land to hunt and, as a result, people who depend on the traditional food may not have a reliable source. One woman said this when asked about the practice:

If there are caribou, it is hard to find somebody to go hunting for us. If they come home from work, that is when they go hunting for their spouse. That is when we can start to make dry meat. Until then, there is nothing we can do.

This is especially difficult for elders. In traditional Indigenous societies, hunting and the provision of food were central to the people. Within this context, elders played an important role in providing wisdom and guidance, and it was expected that successful hunters would provide for the group's elders (Borg, Brownlee, & Delaney, 2010, 17). Healthy, adult males would normally hunt and provide for the community, including the elders within the community. The demands of a wage-based job make hunting more difficult.

Deegan notes that the transition to a wage-based economy has not been well managed. The mining companies have been very supportive in terms of providing training and employment opportunities, but the social impact of the change has not been addressed (Deegan, 2004, 88). As a result, there have been social casualties, as people succumb to alcohol and drug addictions in addition to problems associated with debt and over spending. The impact has also affected family relationships and, to some degree, traditional family practices such as hunting. The culture is deeply rooted in the caribou hunt, and as people move to a wage-based economy there is also a fundamental effect on their connection to the land and cultural traditions. In the longer term, the shift away from a traditional diet to a diet that includes more processed foods raises the risk of diseases of acculturation such as diabetes. Poor health outcomes for Canada's Indigenous people have been documented by social workers and other health care professionals (Habjan, Prince, & Kelly, 2012, 210), with the people of Wekweètì being particularly vulnerable as they move away from reliance on a traditional diet. This shift has eroded traditional culture, hence affecting the overall physical health of the community.

Oil and Gas Development in Northwestern British Columbia

The situation in Kitimat in northwestern British Columbia is somewhat different than the examples of Newfoundland and the Wekweètì. The difference arises from the fact that people in Kitimat are not migrating for work; instead, they are the recipients of a transitory workforce that has been attracted by new employment opportunities because of resource development. Resource development exerts a strong effect on the community of Kitimat, but it is because large numbers of people are arriving for work, rather than leaving for work. This macro level change exerts an important

influence on families and the community of Kitimat itself. The increased opportunities for employment are important, although they come with some social cost to the community and the families who live and work within the community.



Figure 3 :Kitimat, British Columbia

Kitimat is located 650 kilometers northwest of Vancouver at the head of Kitimat Arm, which is a fjord that extends from Douglas Channel off the Pacific Ocean. The Indigenous Haisla people are the earliest known inhabitants of the region, and their descendants continue to live in a small village adjacent to Kitimat. In 1950, the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) chose the present day site of Kitimat as a location for a large aluminum smelter. There was the prospect of plentiful hydroelectricity, and there was also a deep-water harbor with access to the Pacific Ocean. Construction of the town site began at the same time as the smelter and port

facilities. Kitimat and Elliot Lake in Ontario were the first planned resource communities in Canada, and up until that time the development of settlements for resource extraction and production had been somewhat haphazard. Conditions were often unpleasant, and the communities were unattractive for families. The Kitimat town site was completed in 1953, with further industrial expansion occurring with the addition of a pulp mill (Eurocan) in 1969 and a methanol plant (Methanex) in 1982. Alcan was sold to the European and Australian multinational Rio Tinto in 2007, and it became Rio Tinto Alcan in 2008.

In 2005, the Methanex methanol facility was permanently closed, and in 2010 the Eurocan Pulp Mill ceased operation. The Eurocan closure occurred amidst great uncertainty about the future of the aluminum operations run by Rio Tinto Alcan. However, since 2011 Kitimat has experienced significant growth. In 2011, Rio Tinto Alcan announced its Kitimat Modernization Project, which is intended to increase aluminum production by 48%. Over the course of three years, the Modernization Project will employ 2,000 construction workers and, once completed, the new smelter will provide 1,000 permanent jobs (District of Kitimat, 2014).

In addition to the Modernization Project, there is increased activity related to pipeline and port facilities for both liquefied natural gas (LNG) and oil sands bitumen. Extraction of both these substances does not occur in the Kitimat area, but Kitimat is the planned terminus for pipelines that will bring LNG from northeastern British Columbia and oil sands bitumen from northern Alberta.

Extraction of both these commodities is controversial for various reasons. Much of the LNG is derived from a process of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking as it is commonly called. The fracking process has been associated with increased seismic activity, as well as the degradation of ground water. The oil sands extraction process is even more controversial, as it uses vast quantities of water, and there are also legitimate concerns regarding pollution of surface- and ground water. Of greater worry for Kitimat is the behavior of bitumen in the event of an oil tanker accident. Bitumen is much more difficult to clean up than conventional oil as it sinks, and the effects of a spill on commercial and sport fishing, tourism and the Indigenous food industry could be devastating for years. First Nations, environmental groups and

communities along the proposed pipeline route, including Kitimat, have expressed their opposition. However, there is not the same level of opposition to the pipelines that would be required to carry liquefied natural gas. It is the LNG development and the Rio Tinto Alcan Modernization Project that are driving the current development in Kitimat.

There are a number of LNG proposals in the planning stage, although none have been approved, and no decisions have been made regarding construction of LNG export terminals. Nonetheless, a number of corporations such as Chevron have begun extensive advance site preparation work. This work, along with the Modernization Project, has resulted in a large influx of itinerant construction workers. In the case of the Modernization Project, 1,700 construction workers are housed in portable trailers at a temporary site close to the aluminum smelter. Rio Tinto Alcan found that this was not adequate and they are also using a cruise ship that was brought in to house an additional 500 workers. Two of the LNG companies have set up construction camps that house a total of 1,000 temporary construction workers, and other large camps are also in the planning process. In 2013, the permanent population of Kitimat was 8,363, but the increased construction activity could see as many as 10,000 temporary workers added over the next two to three years (BC Stats, n.d.). The rapid influx of workers has also meant that the rental vacancy rate for existing housing has dropped to .04% (Hume, 2014).

So what does this have to do with social work? First, the sudden increase in the demand for housing has resulted in an acute shortage, and marginalized population groups are being dislocated. The provincial government in British Columbia has taken a laissez-faire approach to housing, assuming that the market and existing protective legislation around housing will ensure that everyone is housed and people will not be rendered homeless. Nevertheless, this has not worked. According to Anne Moyls, the Housing Resource Worker for the City of Kitimat, housing and rental costs have become unaffordable for people on fixed incomes (Moyls, Interview, 2014). This is borne out by data from the Canada and Mortgage Housing Corporation. In 2009, the average rental cost for a one-bedroom apartment was \$444.00 (CDN) per month. In the same year, a two-bedroom apartment rented for a monthly average of \$503.00 (CDN). By the end of 2013, the monthly average for a

one-bedroom apartment was \$842.00 per month, whereas it was \$871.00 per month for a two-bedroom apartment (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). Brent Jang of the Globe and Mail wrote that the cost of buying a house in Kitimat increased by 71% in the first three months of 2014 (Jang). At the same time, the provincial Housing Minister, Rich Coleman, stated that the province has no plans to create additional affordable housing, and during a radio interview he said, "I think you'll find that the market would help quite a bit" (Coleman, Interview, 2014).

Highly paid construction workers struggle to find a place to live, but the situation is grave for people who do not have a regular income, particularly the elderly, people with disabilities, people with mental illness and people with substance misuse problems. Despite Minister Coleman's claims that there are protections in place, many landlords have resorted to a tactic that is commonly referred to as a "renoviction." Under the Residential Tenancy Act, landlords can increase rent by 2.2% on an annual basis (Residential Tenancy Act, 2014). Even so, landlords have found a way around this limitation through closing their rental units for renovations, which allows them to evict their tenants. Long-term tenants are forced to leave, and when the rental unit is reopened, the rental costs are typically triple what they were before the facility was renovated. This leaves elderly people on limited pensions, people on disability benefits, lone parents (usually single mothers) and other people with minimal incomes without a place to live.

Anne Moyls, the Housing Resource Worker for the City of Kitimat, says that marginalized and lower income groups are being forced to move in with family and friends, or in many cases, they have to leave the community to find more affordable housing. People are also couch surfing, living on the street or living at camp grounds. These options increase the level of vulnerability and risk for marginal population groups such as people with mental illness and substance abuse problems (Moyle, Interview, 2014). Cliff Grant, the Senior Advisor for the BC Aboriginal Housing Centre, notes that the employment opportunities have also attracted Indigenous people back to the Kitimat area. He notes that while they have been able to find work, housing is a different matter, as the returning people are often forced to live with friends or family in overcrowded housing situations (Grant, 2014).

A second factor that is beginning to surface in the community of Kitimat is what American social workers Joseph and Judith Davenport referred to as “boom town bifurcation” (Davenport & Davenport, 1980, 43). They conducted research and writing about rural social work in the late 1970s and early 1980s during the energy boom in the western United States, and noticed that with the influx of newcomers to work on resource development, existing communities often became somewhat divided between the newcomers and the established residents. They stated: “Inhabitants of small towns and rural areas which tend to be conservative, homogenous, and slow to change are confronted with a dramatic influx of people who frequently have markedly different attitudes, behavior, expectations, lifestyle, and values” (Davenport & Davenport, 2014, 44).

In the case of Kitimat, this is perhaps best represented by the controversy over an application to open an escort service business. Local people, particularly those affiliated with Kitimat’s religious or faith communities, voiced strong opposition to the idea. One resident, Don Reid, the pastor of a local church, spoke to CBC News and said: “You’re taking a high, at-risk business, and putting it into a small town. And the only reason there’s an application is that there’s a money trail at this point in time coming into Kitimat with all the boom that they’re talking about” (CBC News, 2013). Reid, along with other religious leaders in the community, organized their parishioners and mounted strong opposition to the proposed business development. Arguably, the escort service is a development proposal that depends almost entirely on the temporary and itinerant construction workforce, which is comprised largely of male workers.

Ann Moyls, a Housing Resource Worker, also noted that there is increased hostility to the newcomers (Moyls, Interview, 2014). It is usually not expressed in an open manner, though established residents are concerned that the influx of workers is resulting in negative changes to their community. There is an increased demand on community infrastructure, and the presence of a large number of single male workers creates a sense of apprehension and concern among many established residents. Storey (2014) echoes similar ideas when he notes that impact communities, like Kitimat, typically experience increased housing costs, higher prices for groceries and

other retail goods, increased noise and traffic and an itinerant workforce unwilling to become involved in the community.

The effects of resource development in Kitimat have been twofold. First, there has been a dramatic increase in the price of housing, both with ownership and rental housing. This has placed pressure on the poor and marginalized groups, who are forced to leave the community or make arrangements to share space with others. Second, the influx of newcomers associated with resource development has created a sense of bifurcation and tension between established residents and the newcomers. These outcomes present challenges for social workers in the community, and the social workers provide service to the poor and marginalized groups of people. Safe affordable housing is an important mechanism for creating stability in the lives of people who may be outside the mainstream. Social workers are engaged with community, with the sharp division between the itinerant workforce and established residents presenting challenges in community work.

Resource Development, Families and Communities

The three case examples, the LDC workers and their families in Newfoundland, Wekweètì in the Tlicho region of the Northwest Territories and the community of Kitimat are all different in terms of geographic location and population characteristics. However, they share a common experience that relates to the impact of resource development, as macro systemic and structural changes have strong effects on families and communities in each of the case study examples.

A recurring theme is the failure of Canadian governments at the national and provincial levels to anticipate, plan for and respond to the social impacts that are a product of rapid resource development. In the case of Newfoundland, the growth of the LDC workforce was not accounted for in terms of its effects on women and the families of male LDC workers. Health and social services, including social workers, were not prepared to fully understand the impact on families as well as communities. Women and children have had to adjust to the prolonged absence of partners and fathers. Moreover, formal supports are not readily available, and women have had to rely on residual support systems.

For the people of Wekweètì, there has been a rapid transition from their hunting and gathering economy to a wage-based economy. Problems with money management and debt accumulation are new challenges for the people of Wekweètì, although perhaps a more fundamental change is the loss of connection to the land and the traditional caribou hunt. It is not that this lifestyle has disappeared entirely, but that participation is becoming more peripheral, and with this there is a distinct sense that the people are experiencing an erosion of traditional culture. Social workers are concerned about the poverty and marginalization found in many remote Indigenous communities like Wekweètì. Social workers generally support economic development, which provides jobs and an increase in the standard of living. However, the case example demonstrates that the situation is more complex, and that economic development comes with some serious costs.

In Kitimat, the situation is different in that residents are not commuting to distant work sites. Instead, the community has experienced an influx of itinerant workers who have arrived to build the infrastructure for anticipated resource development. The resulting rapid expansion has placed tremendous pressure on infrastructure, especially on affordable housing. Marginalized groups, such as the mentally ill, the elderly, single parents and people with disabilities, are being forced out of the community, or at best find themselves in housing situations that are more precarious and less certain. The influx of newcomers has also begun to show the characteristics of bifurcation, with a division and increasing tension between the established population and the newly arrived construction workers.

Resource development is inevitable given the global appetite for minerals and hydrocarbons. And to be fair, resource development provides high paying employment and an increased revenue base for governments at all levels. However, in Canada, neoliberal governments at the national and provincial levels have primarily focused on creating ideal conditions for corporations to exploit resource opportunities. The effects of resource development on people and communities are usually given secondary consideration, if they receive any consideration at all.

This research demonstrates that it is important for social workers to understand the effects of rapid resource development on families and communities. It is also critical for social workers to become strong advocates for people and communities that are

likely to become casualties in the rush to exploit natural resources. Social workers are trained and educated to understand the relationship between macro systemic or structural changes and the well-being and health of families and communities. The profession also knows about the effects of marginalization and poverty. However, there is not a good understanding about the impact of resource booms on families and communities, and these case studies indicate that employment and wealth do not necessarily translate into well-being at the family and community levels.

References

- Alberta Government (2014). *Alberta's Oil Sands*, n.d. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.
- B.C. Stats (2014). *Population estimates*. n.d. Web. 12 June 2014.
- Borg, D. Brownlee, K., & Delaney, R. (2010). "Postmodern Social Work Practice: Respecting Canada's Northern and Rural Aboriginal Peoples." *Social Work and Aboriginal Peoples*. K. Brownlee, R. Neckoway, R. Delaney, & D. Durst (Eds.), Thunder Bay, Ontario: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies. 12-30. Print.
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2014). *Fall Rental Market Survey*. Web.
- Carrington, K., & Pereira, M. (2011). "Assessing the Social Impacts of the Resources Boom on Rural Communities." *Rural Society*, 21. 1: 2-20. Print.
- CBC News (2013). "Escort Service Proposal in Kitimat Draws Concerns." *CBC Radio* (2013).
- Coleman, R. (2014). "Inside the Housing Crisis of Northern BC." Interview with George Baker. *CBC Radio*. Web.
- Collier, K. (2006). *Social Work With Rural Peoples*. 3rd ed. Vancouver: New Star Books Print.
- Costa, S. (2007). "An Overview of the Commuter Mining Model." *LabMag*, November 2007. Web.
- Davenport, J., & Davenport, J. (1980). "Grits and Other Preventive Measures for Boom Town Bifurcation." (Eds.), *The Boom Town: Problems and Promises in the Energy Vortex*. Laramie, Wyoming: The University of Wyoming. 43-53. Print.
- Deegan, V. (2004). "Women and Youth of Wekweéti Reveal the Impacts of the Diamond Mines Located in the Tlicho Region." MSW thesis. University of Northern British Columbia. Print.
- District of Kitimat (2014). *Kitimat Economic Development Projects*. Web. 22 May 2014.
- Economic Action Plan (2014). *Canada's Economic Action Plan*. Web. 19 May 2014.
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2011). *Canadians in Context – Aging Population*. Web. 3 October 2014.
- Grant, Cliff (2014). "Promoting Housing Quality, Affordability, and Choice for All Canadians." *New Realities New Relationships: Canadian Rural Revitalization*

- Foundation Conference. Coast Hotel, Prince George, BC, Canada. 27 September 2014. Panel Presentation.
- Habjan, S., Prince, H., & Kelley, M. L. (2012). "Caregiving for Elders in First Nations Communities: Social System Perspective on Barriers and Challenges." *Canadian Journal on Aging*. 31.2: 209-222. Print.
- Hume, M. (2014). "Kitimat Smelter Operator to House Temporary Workers on Cruise Ship." *Globe and Mail*. 28 January 2014: Web.
- Jang, B. (2014). "LNG Dreams Power Kitimat Housing Boom." Web. 8 April 2014.
- Measham, T., McKenzie, F., Moffat, K., & Franks, D. (2013). "An Expanded Role for the Mining Sector in Australian Society?" *Rural Society*, 22. 2: 184-194. Print.
- Moyls, Anne (2014). Phone interview. 6 June 2014.
- Natural Resources Canada (2008). *Ekati Diamond Mine Northwest Territories*. Web. 19 May 2014.
- Natural Resources Canada (2012). *Defining the Opportunity: Assessing the Economic Impact of the Natural Resources Sector*. Web. 3 October 2014.
- Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics (2012). *Wekweèti Statistical Profile*. Web. 19 May 2014.
- Paci, C., & Villebrun, N. (2004). "Mining Deneendeh: A Dene Nation Perspective on Community Health Impacts of Mining." *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 3. 1: 71-86.
- Residential Tenancy Act [Victoria, B.C.] (2002). Ministry of Housing. Web.
- Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (1997). *Research Methods for Social Work*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company. Print.
- Ryser, L., Schwamborn, J., Halseth, G., & Markey, S. (2011). *Working 'Away': Community and Family Impacts of Long Distance Labour Commuting in Mackenzie, BC: Final Report*. Prince George, B.C.: Community Development Institute University of Northern British Columbia. Print.
- Sandow, E. (2014). "Til Work Do Us Part: The Social Fallacy of Long-Distance Commuting." *Urban Studies*, 51. 3: 526-543.
- Schmidt, G. (2009). "What is Northern Social Work?" *Northern and Rural Social Work Practice: A Canadian Perspective*. R. Delaney, & K. Brownlee. Thunder Bay, Ontario: Centre for Northern Studies Lakehead University. 1-17. Print.

Schrank, W. (2010). "The Newfoundland fishery: Ten Years After the Moratorium." *Marine Policy*, 29. 5: 407-420. Print.

Storey, K. (2014). "Fly-In/Fly-Out: Addressing New Realities in the Resource Economy." New Realities New Relationships: Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Conference. Coast Hotel, Prince George, BC, Canada. 26 September 2014. Keynote Address.

Storey, K. (2010). "Fly-in/Fly-out: Implications for Community Sustainability." *Sustainability*, 2. 5: 1161-1181. Print.

University of Alberta, Department of Economics. (2013). "An examination of Alberta Labour Markets." Web. 19 May 2014.

Whalen, H. (2013). "Experiences of Rural Newfoundland Women: Partners Working Out West." MSW thesis. University of Northern British Columbia. Print.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th ed. London: Sage Limited. Print.