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### *Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps: Promoting Healthy Communities in Settings of Industrial Change*

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THE FIRELIGHT GROUP WITH LAKE BABINE NATION  
AND NAK'AZDLI WHUT'EN

Full report online at <http://www.thefirelightgroup.com/publications/>

**L**AKE BABINE NATION began research on the gendered effects of industrial camps during the environmental assessment process connected to the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission natural gas pipeline project. The PRGT project requires two industrial camps to operate in Lake Babine Nation's traditional territory, near the nation's communities. Common cause was found with Nak'azdli Whut'en, whose traditional territory hosts mining and forestry camps.

The resource extraction industry has fostered significant economic activity and revenues for government, industry, and local communities. The focus of the Indigenous-led research has been to review the impacts and benefits of siting industrial camps in close proximity to small and already vulnerable communities. A key effort was also made to develop strategies, policies and programs for Indigenous communities, municipalities, companies and the BC Government to implement for the protection of women, youth, and communities.

Indigenous women and youth are subject to a "risk pile up," related to many socioeconomic and historical factors. Indigenous women have often witnessed and experienced many different types of trauma. Part of this may be related to their individual experience or from witnessing sexual assault. However the collective experience of trauma also plays a role. Indigenous communities have been relocated, forced into new settlements, and suffered through residential school. This collective trauma leads to historical violence being perpetuated and cycled into new generations.

The protective factors of cultural continuity, language, and the warm arms of the family have been stripped away, leaving Indigenous women exposed and often alone. Indigenous women are more likely to be living in poverty, and therefore they often are housed in substandard or

marginal and crowded homes. Women and youth are at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence given the existing systemic challenges on reserves; there are very few services, programs, or opportunities to support them.

Many remote Indigenous communities face a high rate of physical, sexual, and substance abuse, with an attendant general lack of funding and support for solutions. In short, for a variety of reasons, Indigenous women and their families are already vulnerable. When industrial camps are built next door to already vulnerable communities, strategies for resilience are required.

Due to the long hours required and the intense work environment, as well as a lack of self-care while working in camps for extended periods of time, industrial camp workers have a tendency to “blow off steam” at the end of a work week. This is part of “Rigger Culture” in remote industrial camps, which refers to a place-based culture of hyper-masculinity, sexism, homophobia, apathy towards self-care, and disconnection from the local community (Goldenberg et al. 2008a, b, c; Shoveller et al. 2007). When young workers are exposed to “Rigger Culture,” this identity is something that comes to be expected of men within industrial camps, and is also expected of workers from communities that are located near camps. “Rigger” identity creates complex sexual dynamics with women in nearby communities. What is being referred to here is a structural problem associated with the isolation, distance from social and family relationships, tendency to stigmatize self-care or sexually-transmitted infection (STI) checks, and long work hours. While a company might build a gym for people to exercise, or make STI testing available, there is a larger set of dynamic factors that need to be considered when preparing for potential impacts of industrial camps.

Key findings of the research include:

- Indigenous communities, particularly women and children, are the most vulnerable and at risk of experiencing the negative effects of industrial camps, such as sexual assault.
- There are gaps in regulatory review and federal and provincial responsibilities that lead to failures in service provision in the construction phase.
- The focus of environmental assessment must change to ensure communities, and in particular women and children, do not shoulder the burden of impacts of industrial camps.
- There must be plans for review of social, cultural, and environmental issues in industrial camp review and siting.

- Companies and governments need to expect and design for grievances.
- Ministries and agencies need to plan service delivery in the north, specifically to manage shadow populations, and connect and adequately fund service delivery to already vulnerable populations.

There are systemic and historic factors that lead to patterns of violence being perpetuated in Indigenous communities, primarily on the Indigenous women and children. Industrial camps are being placed, both temporarily and in the long term, in these contexts without considering their cumulative social and cultural effects.

With many industrial camps operating in northern British Columbia and a potential for further expansion, resource development, particularly during rapid construction phases, can have negative effects on families, particularly women and children.

The potential for northern development is desired broadly in Indigenous communities, with projects such as the TransCanada and Spectra Energy pipelines, and New Gold's Blackwater Project. Operating projects, such as the Brucejack and Thompson Creek mines, provide opportunity for learning. The intent is that these projects will develop without perpetrating harm to women and their families.

The research identified many benefits and risks that require systematic planning and intervention, such as:

- Benefits, such as a returning Indigenous workforce, and the business ventures that are engaged by the Indigenous group;
- Negative effects that could make already vulnerable women and children even more so. There is a "hyper-masculine" industrial camp culture at play, at times, which leads to significant alcohol and drug consumption, and much higher access to these substances. This workplace culture and the demands of the higher transitory population for services (termed the "shadow population" in this report) can lead to:
  - Sexual harassment and assault;
  - Increased demand for sex trafficking and sex work;
  - Child care and gender inequity gaps;
  - Vulnerability of women as they seek transportation to gain access to services, and increase in road safety concerns;
  - Capacity strains on already limited social and health services, from the shadow population seeking work, and decreased access to services for community members;
  - Infringement on traditional use and rights through land use,

and through the pressure applied to resources as non-Aboriginal people hunt and fish on their time off; and

- Pressures on community-based and regional infrastructure.

The report shares best practices, and makes a call for collaboration between Indigenous leaders, industry, and agencies to protect communities, promote responsible stewardship, and maintain the safety of women, children, and vulnerable populations. Ann-Marie Sam, community leader from Nak'azdli Whut'en commented on this work:

*This work is about hearing the truths, exposing the hurts and finding our way to reconciliation through action and change. (29 June 2016)*

A series of detailed suggestions are made to Indigenous leaders, provincial and federal governments, and industry. There is a need to heed the call that Natural Resource Manager Betty Patrick issued at the start of the workshop in 2016 for emergency preparedness.

*Every community has a vulnerable group who are often remotely located, every single one. We women are the vulnerable ones in our community. We have been excellent crisis managers. We respond to crises very well. But we need to work on prevention now, that's why we're here today. For our daughters, for our grand daughters and for ourselves. (29 June 2016)*

The research has been generative of many different outcomes, including three new positions in the communities to prepare emergency response plans, and develop greater community resilience. The communities are jointly reaching out to universities, the United Nations Business and Human Rights branch, and taking the results out to other communities in the northern region. At the same time, the Province has developed a Working Group to respond to the findings and recommendations of the communities.

## REFERENCES

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