

**MINING THE GAP:
ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE MINING INDUSTRY**

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KEY MESSAGES

Based upon a synthesis of views and perspectives extracted from published studies on the matter, Canadian Aboriginal women were found to have the following views on the role and effects of extractive industries in their communities:

- Aboriginal women are sensitive to the social ills presented by the wage labour relationship between Aboriginal workers and extractive industries. Specifically, they are concerned about the extent to which this economic activity can contribute to substance abuse and domestic stress, and how wage labour reduces the time and motivation for community members to engage in cultural practices and shared family experiences.
- Aboriginal women are concerned about the effects of extractive industry activities on the environment and therefore on traditional practices that rely on maintaining the integrity of the environment.
- Aboriginal women wish to have a formal role in partnerships between industry, government and communities for the purposes of establishing legally binding protections of their rights.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We conducted a systematic review of the published, peer-reviewed literature to seek answers to two research questions: (A) What are Canadian Aboriginal women's perceptions of the impacts of commercial resource development? And (B) What are Canadian Aboriginal women's views on the formal processes related to mining? Using qualitative theme and content analysis, themes were extracted from the selected studies, which lead to the following key findings:

A. Aboriginal Women's Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Development

- Environmental contamination is a major concern among Aboriginal women, as they see themselves as having an important role as protectors of their communities' access to key resources, such as water.
- Related, a further concern is the extent to which extractive industries are deleteriously affecting environmental resources important for economic activity. The possible denuding of traditional hunting and fishing groups is a matter of some concern.
- The erosion of traditional culture, particularly practices related to spirituality, is also of concern. The linkages between land and history, identity and religion are expressed by several women, as is a concern that denudement of the land prevents the transmission of culture to future generations.
- This is such a concern, that some women suggest legal protection of key natural resources, such as berry patches, explicitly for the purpose of transgenerational communication.
- A gender dynamic is most certainly at play, as women are sensitive to the fact that jobs created by mining for men are not equivalent to those created for women, with the latter functioning mostly in a culinary or housekeeping role, thus making them lesser economic partners.
- The influence of wage labour on personal behaviour and traditional livelihood forms was also a point of concern. Increased income, segregated living, and concentrations of men away from their families are factors perceived to increase substance abuse and other social problems.
- Wage labour, being time intensive, reduces the time available to engage in cultural practices and family bonding, driving many to expend their limited free time on socially problematic behaviours.

B. Aboriginal Women's Views on Formal Processes Related to Mining

- The mining industry is perceived as having great potential to be a positive force in communities, by injecting resources and providing training.
- However, formal agreements between mining interests and Aboriginal communities are recommended, especially as they pertain to environmental protection. Doubt was expressed about the sincerity of mining companies to follow through on promises to invest in community development, perhaps indicating a stronger force of law to compel such action.
- The inclusion of women specifically in forging partnerships with mining interests was a strong recommendation.
- Concern was expressed that Aboriginal peoples and commercial mining interests might have divergent world views that prevent a shared vision for proper land management and conflict resolution.

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