

Gendering Understandings of Resource Development Research Priorities Summary

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Gender has been a neglected category of analysis in research on northern Aboriginal communities and resource development. The literature that does exist however, suggests that the perspectives of Aboriginal women can offer crucial insight into how northern economies and cultures are changing. There are many indications that resource development is profoundly re-shaping gender relations in northern communities, altering the flow of wealth through families and kin networks, the status and power relations between women and men, and social and cultural practices and beliefs.

The literature is limited, however, in that most studies have adopted a case study methodology and focus on Aboriginal women rather than on a more complex understanding of gender relations. Furthermore, much of the research does not draw connections between economic, social, cultural and governance spheres. We therefore make several recommendations.

1. Scaling-up, moving beyond the case study

To increase the generalizability of research across the north we see a strong impetus for comparative research and for the use of mixed methods, such as the inclusion of some statistical analysis.

2. Critical analysis of gender

Second, we feel that the absence of a more critical understanding of gender constitutes a significant research gap. We feel that a more nuanced approach is necessary to understand the complexity of community change resulting from resource development.

3. Systematic investigation of gender and mineral development

Third, we feel that there is a need for a systematic investigation of the ways in which gender intersects with mineral development. Such an investigation would need to be sensitive not just to women but to men and masculinity, and would account for the complex ways that gender intersects with Indigeneity, colonization, sexuality and class. It would also involve a critical examination of taken-for-granted understandings of the gendered dimensions of Indigenous community life, many of which are based on outdated (and thoroughly gendered) anthropological scholarship. Wachowich's (2001) groundbreaking study of three generations of Inuit women will be a useful resource for such work. We hope that this research can help to link gendered dimensions of social suffering in the north, such as high male suicide rates and lower male high school completion, to mineral development.

4. Key questions

We have identified key questions through three themes in our gap analysis. We expect to draw linkages between these questions that are structured around three themes: economy, governance and socio-cultural impacts.

Economy

How does mineral development alter the flows of wealth within families and to community services used by women and families?

How do women and men understand mineral work?

To what extent do the wages remain in northern service centres and not return to communities?

Governance:

How is mineral development influencing the roles played by men and women in community and resource governance?

What types of negotiation or board structures foster the participation of women?

Socio-cultural:

How is mineral development influencing the educational choices of young men and women in northern communities?

How is mineral development influencing understandings and performances of masculinity and femininity? What are the impacts of these new understandings of gender?

How does mineral development alter the valuation and distribution of reproductive labour?