



# Impacts of Resource Extraction on Inuit Women

## *Background*

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (Pauktuutit) is greatly concerned with the impacts of resource extraction activities on Inuit women. Of equal concern is the lack of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis (GBA) during the assessment of resource extraction proposals. Pauktuutit is the national non-profit organization representing all Inuit women in Canada. Its mandate is to foster greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women, and to encourage their participation in community, regional and national concerns in relation to social, cultural and economic development ([www.pauktuutit.ca](http://www.pauktuutit.ca)). All of its work follows the six guiding principles of Inuit Qaujumajangit (IQ – Inuit knowledge).

As climate change is rapidly warming the Arctic, greater access to the region is leading to increased interest in the development of resource extraction activities in the North. While mining, oil and gas industries can provide significant economic opportunities for Inuit, there are also human and social costs associated with these activities that must not be ignored. For instance, an increase in migration of employees can pose a strain on the already limited social, health and recreational services and infrastructure and may also threaten traditional values and culture.<sup>i</sup> Resource extraction activities also increase water and food exposure to contaminants.<sup>ii</sup> When looking at the impacts of resource extraction in communities, gender is often ignored in this male dominated field. For example, research points to miners' vulnerability to occupational and mental health disorders leading to an increased use of alcohol and other forms of substance abuse. Such substance abuse can contribute to higher rates of domestic violence.<sup>iii</sup> Links between the sexual commodification and exploitation of women and girls in and around resource extraction sites is being brought to light.<sup>iii</sup> Therefore, women experience specific health and social impacts caused by resource extraction activities.

**While mining, oil and gas industries can provide significant economic opportunities for Inuit, there are also human and social costs associated with these activities that must not be ignored.**



## *Issue*

As resource extraction activities are increasingly taking place in Canada's North--from the Bay Nickel Mine in Nunatsiavut to the Mackenzie Gas project in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region--it is expected that Inuit communities will benefit from significant economic growth. However, considering the issues caused by resource extraction, there are concerns that economic growth might come at the expense of the communities' environmental, social, cultural and physical wellbeing.<sup>iv</sup> In particular, women's health can be seriously affected by the impacts of resource extraction activities, particularly their reproductive and social health. For instance, women in mining communities have experienced "poverty, sexual exploitation, dislocation, family violence, and workplace harassment".<sup>v</sup> Further, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like HIV/AIDS continue to be reported in epidemic proportions in mining regions around the world.<sup>vi</sup> Inuit communities already have eight times the national average for STI rates.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, there are concerns about potential sexual exploitation of women

**There are concerns that economic growth might come at the expense of the communities' environmental, social, cultural and physical wellbeing.**

and youth in mining communities due to mine workers' high income earnings, long periods of time spent away from spouses, and marital friction arising from work-related issues and stress.<sup>vii</sup> Members of Pauktuutit are concerned that these resource extraction activities may have negative impacts on women's physical, mental and sexual health.

Review processes for resource extraction companies' proposals (such as Areva's 'Kiggavik' uranium mining proposal) do not include a culturally relevant gender-based analysis in their Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) guidelines. Yet women often experience specific physical health, environmental and social impacts caused by resource extraction activities uniquely, due to the multiple roles and relationships that exist within communities.<sup>viii</sup> Employment in mines is generally male-dominated, and the women who are employed generally occupy lower-paid positions. An additional barrier for women attaining lasting, full-time employment is inadequate childcare facilities for rotational work schedules. Further to this, additional barriers can be created by gender discrimination and sexual harassment on the job site.<sup>ix</sup> Therefore, with the economic opportunities that resource extraction brings comes the potential for significant negative impacts on women and their communities. The complexity of this issue points to the need for more extensive research at the community level in order to understand how such negative impacts might be prevented or mitigated.



## ***Consideration***

There is a need for a more comprehensive social, economic and health analysis that includes an assessment of the potential impacts--both positive and negative--that resource extraction activities have on Inuit women. These issues can properly be addressed by including a culturally relevant gender-based component in Environmental Impact Statement guidelines. A gender-based analysis (GBA) refers to research and reports that use:

...gender as an organizing category. It addresses the similarities and differences that exist between women and men and girls and boys due to the social context. It refers to social roles, behaviours, activities and attributes as well as the complex, interpersonal interactions and relationships between individuals and groups of individuals.<sup>x</sup>

For a GBA to be culturally relevant, it must take into consideration the social and cultural realities of life in Northern communities, including the fact that it has only been two generations since Inuit have been relocated into permanent communities.

The relocation of families, the promotion of southern lifestyles and the rapid transition from subsistence living to a wage-based labour economy continue to have negative side effects on the socio-economic well-being of Inuit families. Therefore attention to the multiple roles women play in present-day community life is necessary.<sup>xi</sup> Pauktuutit has done the initial development of an Inuit-specific culturally relevant GBA in relation to proposed revisions that were made to the food mail program. This framework would be a useful starting point for discussions related to mining and extractive resources in the North. It is Pauktuutit's position that women must be consulted about mining activities near their communities, and relevant health and safety measures must be fully considered, as a fundamental part of the review process.

Regarding increased resource extraction activities in the North (such as Areva's Kiggavik project and the ArcelorMittal's Mary River project), Pauktuutit has opened a dialogue with the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB), resource extraction companies and key stakeholders. These discussions are to find ways to work together to prevent or mitigate the potential negative impacts of resource extraction activities on Inuit women. Inuit women and Pauktuutit should be involved during the impact assessment regulatory process.



ᐱᐸᐸᐸᐸ  
ᐱᐸᐸᐸᐸ ᐱᐸᐸᐸᐸ ᐱᐸᐸᐸᐸ  
**PAUKTUUTIT**  
**INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA**

## **Current Work**

- Pauktuutit is developing working relationships with a number of other organizations and academic institutions working on mining and resource extraction issues specific to women in the North. This includes sitting on the Women and Extractive Industries in Canada's North informal Network steering committee.
- In close collaboration with the Canadian Women's Foundation, Pauktuutit has submitted a funding proposal (Feb 2012) to conduct research with youth and elders in the Baker Lake mining area. This research will assess the impacts of resource extraction activities on Inuit women. We are still waiting to hear back about this funding proposal.
- Pauktuutit has recently met with the Mining industry Human Resources Council (MiHR) to discuss possible partnerships in developing gender and Inuit specific labour market forecasts in the mining sector. This information could be used in cross-cultural and gender specific training program that MiHR would like to do with Aboriginal women across Canada including Inuit women in the North.

## **Contact Us**

For more information or if you would like join the dialogue and help us pursue this area of work, please contact:

### **Erin Strachan**

Manager, Special Projects

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada [www.pauktuutit.ca](http://www.pauktuutit.ca)

Phone: **(613) 238-3977 ext. 234**

Toll Free: 1-800-667-0749

Email: [estrachan@pauktuutit.ca](mailto:estrachan@pauktuutit.ca)

<sup>i</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008). *Exploring Community-Based Responses to Resource Extractive Development in Northern Canada* – Issue Paper: Social. Ottawa: Author.

<sup>ii</sup> The Nature of Things, *Tipping Point: The Age of the Oil Sands*, <http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/natureofthings/2011/tippingpoint/>, aired January 27, 2011

<sup>iii</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008) *Resource Extraction and Aboriginal Communities in Northern Canada: Gender Consideration*. Ottawa: Author.

<sup>iv</sup> Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2008). *Resource Extraction and Inuit Sexual Health: Sexual Health is Everyone's Responsibility* – Conference Report. Ottawa: Author.

<sup>v</sup> MiningWatch Canada (2004). *Overburdened: Understanding the Impacts of Mineral Extraction on Women's Health in Mining Communities*. Ottawa: CCSG Associates

<sup>vi</sup> International Women and Mining Network (2005). *Conference Report: Third International Women & Mining*

*Conference*. Hyderabad: Mines, Minerals & PEOPLE. Prepared by Bhanumathi, K. et al.

<sup>vii</sup> Gibson, G & Klinck, J. (2005). Canada's Resilient North: The Impacts of Mining on Aboriginal Communities. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous and Community Health*, 3 (1), 115-141.

<sup>viii</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008); Archibald and Crnkovich (1999)

<sup>ix</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008); Status of Women Council of the NWT (1999); Mercier (2011)

<sup>x</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008)

<sup>xi</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008)