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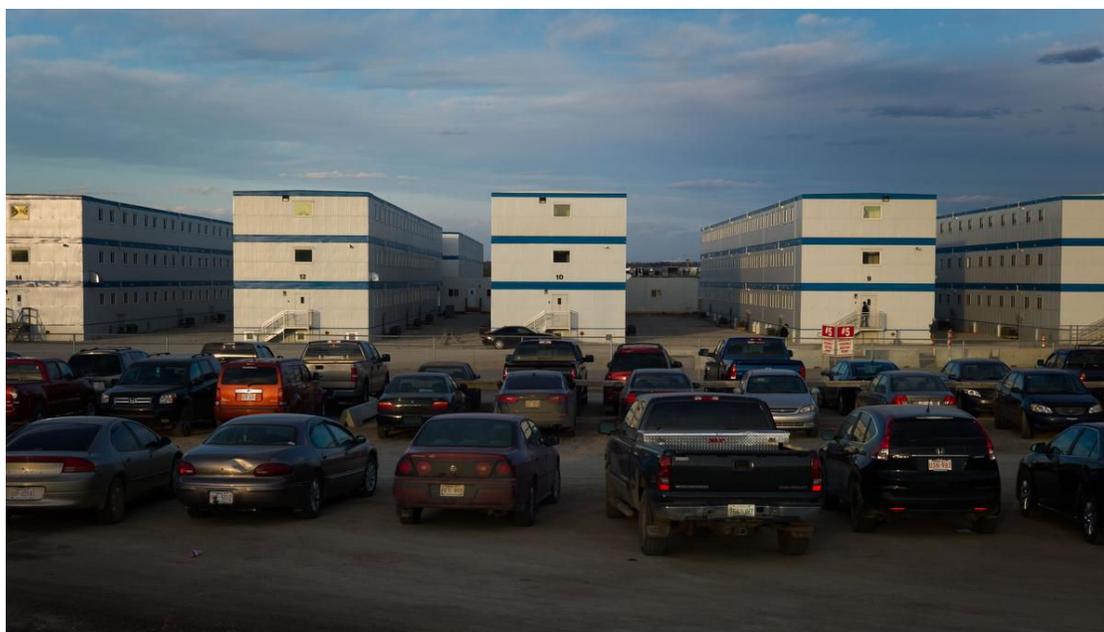
Link between rural work camps and violence against women is real, researchers say

By **KEVIN MAIMANN** StarMetro Edmonton

Tues., Dec. 4, 2018

EDMONTON—Remote work camps are linked to increased violence against women and it's a problem we need to address, experts say.

Conservative leaders slammed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau over the weekend for comments he made to a gender equality panel at the G20 summit in Argentina, in which he talked about “gender impacts” that accompany large infrastructure projects.



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A camp for oilsands workers, on April 27, 2015, outside of Fort McMurray, Alta.

“There are gender impacts when you bring construction workers into a rural area. There are social impacts because they’re mostly male construction workers. How are you adjusting and adapting to those?” he said in a minute-long clip circulated on social media.

Alberta’s United Conservative Party Leader Jason Kenney and federal Conservative Party of Canada Leader Andrew Scheer both slammed Trudeau, characterizing the comment as an attack on male workers.

Kenney tweeted that Trudeau thinks male construction workers “can’t be trusted,” and shared a Facebook post from someone identifying as an oilfield worker’s wife who said Trudeau’s comments are “absolutely insulting” to workers and their families.



Tamara Mack Robbins
Mr.trudeau's comments are absolutely insulting to many families across this beautiful country!! Personally when I saw this video it made my blood boil as my husband oversees a crew in the natural gas division. he sacrifices for our family by being out of town for work, staying in hotels with his crew throughout Alberta...where they spend money on hotels, eat in restaurants, shop in local grocery stores, have auto repairs done locally, and even shop in the local stores for gifts for their families...for Mr.Trudeau to even suggest these crews are not welcome or a danger in rural communities is

easy to be separated...but we also have a strong marriage with tremendous trust in both ends...the hint of accusations by Our Prime Minister that this is sinister is only proof how out of touch with all Canadians he actually is...there are many careers across this great nation that has spouses travelling away from home for work...these are not "frat boys" the workers he refers to are our husbands, sons, brothers, and Yes sisters! How dare he speak this way of my husband and many Canadian families!!! Shame on you ...I believe we as Canadians must stand up, this has been my breaking point to start rising up to have a PM that respects ALL



Jason Kenney
@jkenney

A powerful statement from the wife of an oilfield worker on Justin Trudeau’s hurtful remarks about folks like her husband. From my Facebook page

2,232 11:46 AM - Dec 2, 2018

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But several researchers say that while it’s not all workers, there is a link between camps and violence against women.

“When there’s a large-scale industrial development, when there’s construction camps that are co-located, we have documented increases in the rates of sexual assault, the rates of

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Firelight's 2017 report cites a 38 per cent increase in sexual assaults reported to RCMP during the first year of construction on an industrial project in Fort St. James, British Columbia.

It also notes a "sharp increase" in sex trafficking in Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, attributed to the rise in "increased income of young men, social isolation from families and relationships, and the hypermasculine context of camps."

Jean L'Hommecourt of Fort McKay First Nation, a community near several oilsands work camps north of Fort McMurray, said she has seen crime follow the resource extraction industry in northern Alberta.



Jean L'Hommecourt of Fort McKay First Nation lives near several work camps in the oil sands, and says crime has followed the resource industry in Northern Alberta. (SUPPLIED / JEAN L'HOMMECOURT)

Some workers will go into the bush to drink and have parties, scaring women away from former fishing spots. Others will threaten community members, L'Hommecourt said. Once, she said she opened the door to her late mother's trapping cabin and found a group of men had broken in.

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Though the men left that day without threatening or hurting anyone, L'Hommecourt has had to abandon the cabin — she said people kept breaking in, smashing windows and kicking in the door.

“The men in the camps are away from their wives and they seek companionship through sexual favours, through what have you,” she said. “It makes for a dangerous situation for our women and girls ... Most of the time, it's Indigenous women and they don't go forward with (filing complaints) because they've been shamed.”

Gibson said women in isolated communities face additional barriers to reporting sexual assaults, including a lack of access to health resources. Many Indigenous communities where construction camps are set up don't have rape kits or people trained in sexual assault investigation.

“So, right after being sexually assaulted, women will often have to not shower, not change, travel up to eight hours to a place where they (can access health care),” she said.

Gibson notes her research has also documented many benefits work camps can bring to nearby rural communities, including employment, investment and local infrastructure.

When an energy company building a pipeline near Hudson's Hope, in northeastern B.C., in 2015 decided to bar workers from leaving the camps and interacting with neighbouring residents, it sparked complaints from some Hudson's Hope business owners who had hoped to reap economic benefits from the project.

Gibson said many view their time in work camps as being positive if they never witnessed any violent or criminal activities, but that doesn't mean the problems don't exist.

“We have the narrative, we have the data, it's all there to say this is happening. Obviously not all people are doing it, obviously there's many wonderful hardworking men and women who are not experiencing this kind of violence,” she said.

“But there are some. And turning our backs to that violence is not a terribly productive strategy.”

Tracy Porteous, executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C., also studies communities where resource extraction happens.

She said it's true that most men don't commit violence, but a large enough percentage do that communities need strategies to prepare when a predominantly male working camp is about to move in.

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violence ... all brought into that town at the same time,” she said.

“That is essentially what the issue is. It’s not that mining or extraction or camps create violence.”

She said it’s important to do gender-based analysis work in communities before the projects start, to ramp up support services in the community and educate workers on how to speak out when they see troublesome behaviour among co-workers.

Most anti-violence programs are funded based on static population rates, so a small community might only have one anti-violence worker who could get overwhelmed when the population suddenly balloons.

A 2014 study by the Ending Violence Association noted services to address violence against women and girls in Fort St. John, B.C. were “non-existent or operating beyond capacity” when an influx of workers arrived. In 2012-13, the community’s sole anti-violence counsellor had 130 women referred to her.

Porteous said working men being under stress, away from their family, subjected to peer pressure and using alcohol and drugs can contribute to the likelihood they will abuse women in the neighbouring community.

Meanwhile, a glut of workers with high incomes for longer-term projects can result in an “accommodation squeeze” that pushes out the poorest residents as they can’t keep pace with community-wide inflation, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

Stephane McLachlan, an environmental scientist who studies the social implications of industrial development in northern Canada, worked on the Clean Environment Commission’s May report documenting sexual violence committed against women when 4,000 hydroelectric workers descended on the small northern Manitoba community of Fox Lake Cree Nation in the 1960s.

The research team made numerous recommendations for future work camps that included cultural sensitivity programs, education programs, and programs to have people accompany women so they don’t have to walk alone in their own community.

“The prime minister’s comments, I think, are on point in that regard, that we need to think through these things,” McLachlan said. “And it’s just too bad that these conservative politicians have these knee-jerk, opportunistic responses where they say, we can slam him and criticize him for in turn criticizing our good, hardworking energy workers.”

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Still waiting for Trudeau to apologize for his out of touch characterization of workers in Alberta. In the meantime, here you go.

Michelle Rempel @MichelleRempel

Replying to @TrevorMorin

So glad you asked. I was waiting for someone to ask me.

527 9:30 AM - Dec 3, 2018

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A UCP spokesperson did not provide additional comment from Kenney, but referred StarMetro to his previous social media posts on the topic.

B.C. Premier John Horgan said Tuesday that the PM is right to weigh the social and gender impacts on rural communities where work camps are established.

“There’s been no shortage of work done on the negative impacts of putting a whole bunch of people in one place that don’t necessarily live there or have the same connection to community,” Horgan said.

The conversation is relevant to his province, where a \$40-billion LNG Canada project promises to bring up to 10,000 to the small rural community of Kitimat, many of whom will be housed in work camps. The B.C. municipality is no stranger to temporary worker accommodations, having hosted thousands of workers to update the town’s Rio Tinto smelter between 2011 and 2015.

Greg Halseth, co-director of the University of Northern British Columbia’s Community Development Institute, said in a previous interview that the experience has made Kitimat well-equipped to accept more temporary workers, but he cautioned the province should play an active role in making sure those workers have adequate access to housing and health services so that their presence in Kitimat does not overwhelm the community.

Horgan said he doesn’t see the need to add “an additional layer” of legislation to make gender and social impacts on communities a condition for project approval.

He said it’s important to consider the positive impact construction workers have on the communities they work in, also. “But that does not mean you get free licence to be unruly or inappropriate or to violate peoples’ liberties or the law,” he said.

Trudeau’s comments in the now-viral video were in support of the federal government’s

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initiatives.” The 2017 federal budget was the first to include a gender statement aimed at ensuring all budget measures help advance fairness, workforce participation and gender equality.

Braeson Holland, a spokesperson with the federal office of the Minister of Status of Women, said in an email that the federal government knows decisions it makes impact people in different ways based on a variety of factors, including age, where they live, how they identify and their official language of choice.

“That’s why we apply a gender and diversity lens as we develop various policies across government,” he said. “By ensuring that we consider how decisions impact different groups, we can make better, more informed, and more inclusive policies and decision.”

With files from Emma McIntosh and Alex McKeen

Kevin Maimann is an Edmonton-based reporter covering education and marijuana legalization. Follow him on Twitter: [@TheMaimann](#)

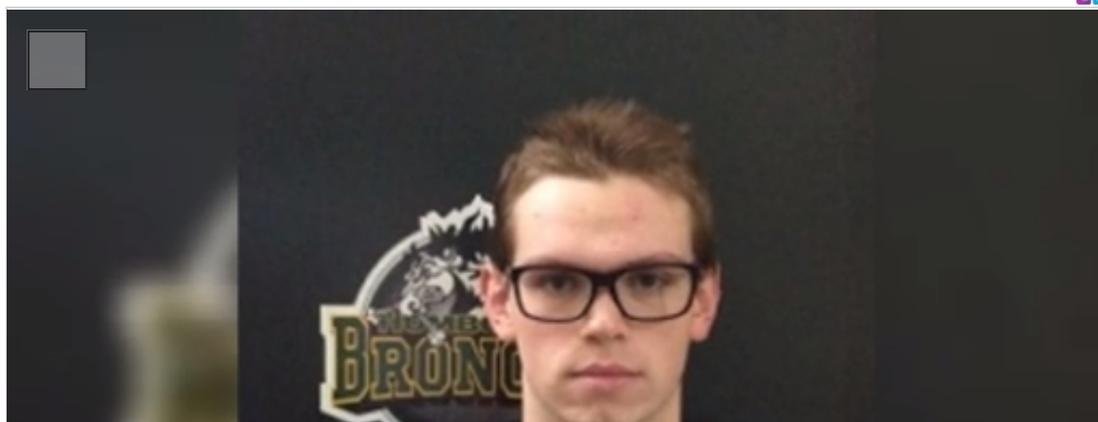
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