

Study shows correlation between B.C. extraction industries, domestic abuse

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An increase in domestic and sexual violence against women is among the troubling social impacts of resource extraction industries, according to a B.C. victims' services association behind a new \$40,000 initiative aimed at drawing awareness to the issue.

Tracy Porteous, executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C. (EVA BC), pointed to recent Canadian and international research showing that factors such as a largely transient and male work force, increases in drug and other substance use and income disparity between sexes associated with such industries contribute to an increase in violence against women.

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In response, EVA BC is working to produce a training video aimed at new employees involved in resource extraction, focusing on identifying the risks and responding appropriately. The B.C. government and energy producer Encana Corporation will contribute \$20,000 each to fund its production.

“It’s important to be said that the vast majority of men who work in resource extraction don’t commit violence,” Ms. Porteous said. “It’s those people that we want to tap into, so they can speak to the people who are struggling.”

Clarice Eckford, project co-ordinator at Fort St. John Women’s Resource Society, found that in that northeastern B.C. boomtown, the average income for men in 2006 was \$56,000 – \$12,000 more than the national average – due largely to new jobs in construction, oil and gas, transportation and communication and mining. By contrast, the average income for women in Fort St. John that year was just \$27,000. This income disparity results in women becoming financially dependent on their partners, Ms. Porteous said.

Ms. Eckford also found that nearly one-third of men in Fort St. John reported having “no fixed workplace address” in 2005, which was double the national average.

Meanwhile, towns with populations of less than 20,000, such as Fort St. John and Kitimat, do not meet the threshold to have provincially funded community-based victim assistance programs, Ms. Porteous said.

“These are key programs that help [victims] navigate a complex set of systems [such as] child protection, police, corrections, social assistance and social housing,” which all have different policies and procedures, she said.

Richard Dunn, vice-president of government relations Canada at Encana Corp., said the video is a result of Encana’s involvement as a founding partner in the Be More Than a Bystander campaign, an anti-violence initiative by EVA BC and the B.C. Lions football club.

“Taking this same message into our field operations aligns with our commitment to ensuring a safe, respectful workplace and is a proactive step to address this difficult issue which exists in every community,” Mr. Dunn said in a statement.

Stephanie Cadieux, B.C.’s minister of children and family development, said the training initiative will help raise awareness of the effects of domestic violence, which are not limited to the home.

Ms. Porteous said the goal is to have the video, which is currently being storyboarded and is expected to film later this summer, available at every resource-extraction work site. It will also be distributed through EVA BC’s network of 240 anti-violence programs.

In 2008, EVA BC launched a training program targeted at men in the forestry and mining sectors called Renewing Resources: Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence on the Workplace.

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