Gender and Impact Assessment in the Northern Alberta Oil Sands Region: An Exploratory Review

International Association for Impact Assessments

Session: Gender and Impact Assessment
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Supervisory Committee: Dr. Heather Castleden, Dr. Jeff Masuda, Dr. Diana Lewis
Positionality

- Settler (non-Indigenous person) from Nova Scotia of Scottish descent
- Interested in how the environment intersects with health in a gendered way since 2019
- PhD (year 1) in the Social Dimensions of Health at University of Victoria
  - Nestled within the Indigenous Environmental Health Risk Assessment (IEHRA) Project - 3 Indigenous communities in Northern Alberta
Research Question

How are impact assessments taking up gender in the Northern Alberta oil sands region?
Athapaskan-speaking Dene and Algonquian-speaking Western Woods Cree.

In the late eighteenth century, European fur traders entered the region and a new Indigenous people were established, Métis.
Oil Sands Region
Resource extraction and Gender

- Consideration of extraction as an extension of colonialism
- Consideration of settler colonialism as gender based violence
- Consideration of extraction as gender based violence
- Male dominated economy
Resource Extraction and Development Projects: Gendered implications in the Canadian Context (2-4)

01 Gender based violence
- Influx of male workers:
- Man camps
- Substance use
- Shift work

02 Economic inequity
- Childcare
- Lack of job opportunities
- Increase in housing costs

03 Loss of land
Loss of land and parts of traditional territory can have profound impacts for Indigenous peoples, including women
- Cultural
- Spiritual
- Communal
Federally Mandated GBA+ (5-7)

- 2019 - Subsection 22 (1) of the Impact Assessment Act mandates a GBA+

- Many critiques of GBA+ and how it has been used in IA, including:
  - Lack of practical work the “plus” section (intersectional piece)
  - Lack of queer representation
  - Lack of context on colonialism and Indigenous women’s specific experiences
  - Lack of community based standpoint
- Native Women’s Association of Canada has developed a Cultural Relevant Gender Based Analysis Framework and Toolkit
Methods (8)

- Selected three published IAs related to oil sands development in Northern Alberta at three different points in time
- All assessment documents were searched for:
  - Gender, sex, female, wom*, girl*, Two-Spirit, men, male
- Documents and excerpts that contained gender content were then analyzed using CRGBA’s guiding questions
1. **Positionality**

Does the program or policy recognize and account for the distinct lived experiences between and among First Nations (both on-reserve and off-reserve, both status and non-status), Inuit (land claim beneficiary or not, living in Inuit Nunangat or not), and Métis (urban or rural) individuals?

2. **Gender Diversity**

Is the program or policy gender-inclusive and non-binary, recognizing that gender, sex, and sexuality are spectrums? For example, assigned sex includes male, female, or intersex; gender expression includes possibilities beyond masculine or feminine. While the following list is not exhaustive, gender identities include cisgender, transgender, gender fluid, or agender, and sexual orientations include Two-Spirit, queer, heterosexual, bisexual, or demisexual (i.e., attraction only to those with whom a deep emotional connection has been established).

3. **Intersectionality**

Does the program or policy account for intersecting identities as the foundation rather than as a matter of inclusion? Remember to consider:

- Cultural identity
- Race
- Class
- Ability
- Sex
- Gender identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Location
- Impact of colonization

These axes are simply a starting point. There are many more aspects that influence how someone experiences structural systems, and we must consider how all these intersecting identities interact with one another and influence the amount of privilege and/or oppression one will experience.

4. **Indigenous Knowledge**

Does the program or policy place value on non-Western ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge, such as storytelling, ceremonies, sharing circles, or land-based learning?

Does the program or policy place value on Indigenous women’s ways of knowing?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRGBA Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Teck Resource Ltd. Frontier Oil Sands Mine EIA Report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctions Based</strong></td>
<td>Multiple cultural impact assessments were conducted with Fort McKay Métis Nation, Fort McMurray Métis Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. Instead of amalgamating all impacted Indigenous communities, each were engaged distinctly. Yet, not included were the voices of urban Indigenous peoples living in affected areas, such as Fort McMurray.</td>
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<td><strong>Gender Diversity</strong></td>
<td>Gender was positioned strictly as a concept with women and men as discrete categories. Specific impacts to Indigenous women regarding resource extraction and the subsequent disruption to community and family relations were highlighted extensively, as well as economic inequalities. Impacts related to queer, Two Spirit, and non-binary peoples were absent from all documents.</td>
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<td><strong>Intersection-ality</strong></td>
<td>While cultural assessments continuously contextualized Indigenous women’s experiences within colonization and cultural identity, they lacked mention of sexual orientation, class, and location. It is difficult to assess whether intersecting identities were the foundation, rather than a matter of inclusion, when not many axes of oppression were present besides gender and impacts of colonization.</td>
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<td><strong>Indigenous Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous knowledge was captured in each cultural impact assessment heavily, especially in terms of traditional land use. Yet, the specific knowledge of Indigenous women was overlooked.</td>
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- **Does the IA recognize and account for the distinct lived experiences between and among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals?**
- **Is the IA gender-inclusive?**
- **Does the IA account for intersecting identities as the foundation rather than as a matter of inclusion?**
- **Does the IA value on non-Western ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge, such as storytelling, ceremonies, sharing circles, or land-based learning? Does the program or policy place value on Indigenous women’s ways of knowing?**
Narrative of 3 IAs

**Imperial Kearl Oil Sands Project - Mine Development (2007)**
- No mention of human sex or gender
- Analysis of non-human female animals

**Teck Resources Ltd. Frontier Oil Sands Mine project (2016)**
- Several cultural IAs
- Distinctions-based
- Indigenous knowledge
- Minimal intersectionality
- No gender diversity
- Approved by province but discontinued in 2016

**Suncor Base Mine Extension Project (in progress)**
- The first oil sands project to be reviewed under the new 2019 Act
- Gender details beyond other projects - but prescriptive
- Gender diversity and intersectionality mentioned
- Currently paused through assessment process
The cost of not including gender in IAs

As scope or requirements become more inclusive and comprehensive and proponents have to meaningfully include gender based-violence, economic disparities, and land based losses, they will need to come up with appropriate mitigation measures to get project approval.

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls
Future Research Possibilities

Continue monitoring how gender is taken up in IAs

Ways to ensure intersectionality and gender diversity in IA

Culturally-relevant gender based analysis
References


References

