

Through the Ups and Downs: Workers' and Families' Experiences with Seasonal Resource Employment  
in a Prairie Province

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

Subject to both seasonal patterns and fluctuating market conditions, workers in resource-based industries routinely experience employment volatility as workloads ebb and flow through peak and off-seasons and through ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ periods. Employment volatility can affect workers’ psychological and physical health, with attendant impacts on families. In small or rural communities, impacted workers and their families also may not have access to relevant or needed supports.

Seasonal work in general has received limited attention in academic literature, and while there is a body of research focusing on resources employment, it is mostly based in an Australian context. Internationally, research on social, psychosocial, and economic effects of resource work has been identified as relatively limited. There is also a noted lack of research on workers’ perceptions of resource work. As well, impacts of this form of employment on families appears to be an area of study in need of further development. Accompanying limited knowledge on impacts of resource employment, there appears to be even less research nationally and internationally on programs, services, and supports for resource workers and their families.

As a Canadian province heavily dependent on resource industries, there are no known studies of resource-based employment in Saskatchewan that incorporate an analytical focus on the issues associated with this type of seasonal work from the perspectives of workers and their families. Studies based in Saskatchewan have thus far largely maintained a focus exclusively on agriculture and are rooted in twentieth century experiences, with many decades having passed since participants’ experiences were originally documented.

Through an examination of workers' and families' experiences, this study sought to identify the salient factors impacting on individuals and households with involvement in resource industries. The study also investigated the various ways in which workers and families perceived and responded to emerging issues in natural resources employment. Based on these findings, the study proposes recommendations for relevant programs and services for impacted workers and families while also raising important policy implications.

Recruitment for this study was specific to workers and families with involvement in seasonal resource sectors in Saskatchewan, Canada. A qualitative case study methodology was employed to explore the experiences and impacts of resource work on workers and families in this understudied

jurisdiction with a view to improving access to and/or guiding development of relevant programs and supports. Twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals with involvement in seasonal resource-based employment (e.g. agriculture, energy, forestry and/or mining), either directly as a worker or indirectly as a family member of a worker with at least six months' experience in a natural resources sector in Saskatchewan.

Findings identified workers' and families' encounters with compounding factors. Financial precarity, temporal sacrifices and trade-offs, and work cultures were found to be prevalent forces acting upon workers and their households. Meanwhile, forging and maintaining social connections and affinity to their selected industry/industries helped workers and families manage the myriad demands they faced. At the same time, perceptions on availability of alternative options could effectively tether workers to resource industries. The findings generated from the study offer a roadmap for improving access to, and guiding the design or enhancement of, relevant programs, policies, and supports for impacted workers and families.

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I would also like to acknowledge my employment supervisors for providing me with flexibility and support to complete this project. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their ongoing encouragement through this experience. It would not have been possible to embark on, or see this journey through, without your support.

To conclude this section, as Wilson (2008) points out, “[*W*]hen you create something from an Indigenous perspective, you are creating it from that environment, from that land that it sits in” (as cited in Styres et al., 2013, p. 51). As the threads of this project were woven with experiences occurring within specific geographies, I feel it is important to recognize in particular that this project was originally conceptualized and inspired by the time I spent as a visitor on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. This land was promised to Six Nations on the Haldimand Tract and includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. I endeavor to ensure my work continues to be informed by, and responsive to, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

According to Canada's National Occupational Classification (NOC) hierarchical structure, natural resources occupations include agriculture, horticulture, logging and forestry, mining and quarrying, oil and gas, fishing, trapping, and hunting activities (Government of Canada, 2021). Within Canada, resource employment on the prairies (MB, SK, AB) represents 35.4 per cent of employment—the most of any region in the country. The prairie region therefore has the greatest reliance on resources employment in Canada (Stedman et al., 2004, p. 224).

### 1.1 Natural Resources Work and Features of Seasonality

Work in natural resources industries is inherently seasonal, whereby work is only available certain months of the year. Seasonal work is often therefore both short-term and precarious, but can span over multiple years in a recurring manner (Ainsworth and Purss, 2009). This type of employment has been characterized by a lack of security and limited career progression opportunities (Pegg et al., 2012). In this way, despite being largely overlooked as a research focus, seasonal work can be considered a form of contingent or non-standard work (Ainsworth and Purss, 2009).

A key-defining feature of seasonal employment is the “sporadic nature of the work” (Gerrard et al., 2004, p. 63). The rhythm of seasonal work involves peak production at specific times of year (Ahas et al., 2005) such that individuals engaged in seasonal employment can work a considerable number of hours during peak seasons (Mourdoukoutas, 1988). To be sure, a larger proportion of workers in energy, mining, agriculture, fishing and forestry work overtime or more than 50 hours a week as compared with other industries (Agri-LMI, 2019; Playton and Obrecht, 2007). At other times of the year, however, workers may be unable to secure enough work. So while at certain times of the year workers face overwhelming workloads, at other times, it may be difficult to stay occupied (Gerrard et al., 2004).

Seasonality has generally lent itself to highest levels of employment in summer months (MiHR, 2021). In agriculture, the largest number of hours worked is during spring planting and late summer harvesting seasons. Hours worked are significantly less in winter (Agri-LMI, 2019). Mining employment demand is usually highest in July and lowest in January, while demand for support activities in energy extraction is lowest in April and May before steadily increasing thereafter (MiHR, 2021). In the energy industry, wells are typically drilled and serviced in the summer or winter when

the ground is dry or frozen respectively; winter is typically the most active season (CAOEC, n.d.). Meanwhile, forestry and wildfire management activities tend to take place in the summer months (MBC News, 2018).

Seasonal trends can represent the largest fluctuations in employment for some industries (MiHR, 2021). With mainly outdoor-based work activities, resource industries are particularly susceptible to weather patterns (Gerrard et al., 2004). In 2021, for example, severe drought resulted in appreciable losses for the agriculture industry (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2021). On the Canadian prairies that year, agricultural output in Manitoba dropped by 22.3 per cent and nearly half of the harvest in Saskatchewan was lost, causing the sector's real GDP to fall by approximately the same amount (Conference Board of Canada, 2022a, p. 10; Conference Board of Canada, 2022b, p. 10).

## **1.2 Additional Vulnerabilities of Natural Resources Work**

As significant as the foregoing seasonal events were, additional vulnerabilities associated with natural resources employment have been observed, outside of nature (Flora and Flora, 1988). Along with regular seasonal patterns, volatility can also stem from economic cycles and considerable exposure to global commodity market conditions (Government of Canada, 2022b). Indeed, resource industries typically follow boom and bust cycles impacting employment levels (Shepard et al., 2020). Although employment opportunities expand in 'boom' times, production stalls and employment drops in 'bust' periods and can result in significant insecurity for workers and families (Lozeva and Marinova, 2010).

Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic wrought additional impacts for resource industries in the second quarter of 2020 with the largest declines ever documented, and as evidenced in the loss of 43K jobs in Canada (Morgan, 2020). Most of these job losses were in the energy sector (23.6K), along with mining and minerals (11.9K), forestry (6K) and hunting, fishing and water industries (1.4K). While these numbers are staggering on their own, within the energy industry, there may have been up to four times as many indirect job losses through supporting industries and supply chains in

2020 (ibid).<sup>1</sup> At the onset of the pandemic, commodity prices in fact tumbled to record lows, with energy products even fetching negative market values (Evans, 2020).

### **1.3 Potential Challenges Accompanying Natural Resources Employment for Workers and Families**

Separate from employment volatility and the risk of job loss, day-to-day work in natural resources sectors can be challenging on its own, potentially presenting a range of physical, psychosocial, safety, and family impacts (Langdon et al., 2016). Employee physical and psychological well-being is disproportionately at risk with unique work experiences consisting of long working hours; hazardous, fast-paced and labour intensive work with heavy equipment; and long-distance commuting arrangements with drive-in, drive-out or fly-in, fly-out schedules (Langdon et al., 2016; Playton and Obrecht, 2007).

Employment in resource sectors typically takes place in remote regions, often in difficult weather and physical conditions (Helbert, 2018). Workers in isolated, remote areas may face housing challenges and will often turn to motels, campgrounds, employer-provided workcamps or temporary housing units for their housing needs that could also take the form of trailer-style accommodations with bunk beds (Playton and Obrecht, 2007). Camps may be designed to dismantle quickly, given the seasonal, temporary and mobile nature of some resource work (PetroLMI, 2015). There can be particular issues with fatigue when commuting on “either side” of long shifts (Petkova et al., 2009, p.223). Camps can therefore also serve the purpose of preventing heavy traffic on roads after long work days, and in some cases, worksites are so remote that daily commutes would not be possible; company policies may even preclude personal vehicles on site (PetroLMI, 2015).

Rotational schedules are common in energy and mining industries. These schedules consist of a given number of days on and days off as determined by the employer and may be utilized to facilitate continuous (24/7) operations (PetroLMI, 2015). Work schedules often compress work days, allowing employees to work longer shifts across fewer days (Dittman et al., 2016). Twelve-hour shifts are typical, leaving very little time for other activities on work days (McKenzie, 2011). Compressed work schedules comprised of long days can be a source of physical and psychological strain

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<sup>1</sup> For additional context, in 2021, the agriculture industry employed nearly 252K individuals, while the forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying and oil and gas industries employed approximately 325K individuals in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

(Vojnovic et al., 2014; McKenzie, 2011). Days off are important for recuperation, although long commuting times and other responsibilities can compete for workers' time (Dittman et al., 2016).

Despite a prevailing industry image of single male workers, a recent study found that the majority (52 per cent) of rotational energy workers in Alberta is married or in a common-law relationship (PetroLMI, 2015, p. 30). As such, family and partner needs are important considerations. Resource development can have a strong (and oftentimes disproportionately negative) impact on women (Koutouki et al., 2018). Women are less likely to be employed in resource industries, and whereas men are more likely to hold highly compensated jobs, women tend to secure employment in lower-paid, service sector roles (Helbert, 2018). These realities can give rise to women's social and economic dependency, which has been identified as a risk factor for poorer mental health outcomes and specifically as a result of the strains of domestic work (Helbert, 2018). In this regard, it may be possible to find parallels in the seminal work of Luxton (1980), who identified women's domestic and support roles as the fuel for an industrial capitalist system that also facilitated their own economic dependency, isolation, and exposure to various forms of maltreatment in a northern Manitoba mining community. In the intervening years, with women's increasing labour force participation, subsequent research has noted a shift to a dual earner model unfolding across the country that has, in turn, increased burdens placed on women in navigating workloads both within and outside the home. This trend persists as women continue to carry majority responsibility for domestic work (Luxton and Benzanson, 2006).

In agricultural families, despite making essential contributions to the family and enterprise (e.g. accounting/bookkeeping tasks, running errands, labouring, and supervising), women often are not involved in decision-making processes and are instead identified as "helpers" and relegated to support roles (Bye, 2005, p. 136; Muenstermann, 2011; Beach, 2013; Gerrard et al., 2004). Women's contributions are often essentially "overlooked," despite the necessity in some cases of women's off-farm employment and income to maintaining the family farm (Beach, 2013, p. 213; Annes et al., 2021; Wright and Annes, 2016).

Employment in resource industries may also result in relationship stress. Irregular, nonstandard work schedules do not align with typical 9-5 hours, and along with work-related travel demands to remote worksites, can impact marital relationships and affect personal well-being (Helms, 2013). Nonstandard work schedules can present challenges to family life and heighten risk of



separation and divorce for families with children most especially (Presser, 2000). Work-family conflict can be exacerbated by both long hours of work and irregular shift work (Golden, 2015). With considerable social costs for individuals and families, rates of relationship and family dissolution for commuting resource families is greater than those observed in the general population (McKenzie, 2011).

Industry ‘boom and bust’ cycles create further instability for the family (Shandro et al., 2011), and economic uncertainties associated with resource sectors can increase levels of stress and anxiety for families (O’Mullan et al., 2018). Despite industry volatility, resource dependent areas are characterized by higher median family incomes (Stedman et al., 2004). While higher earnings and employment tend to have a stabilizing effect on family relationships, these positive effects may be negated for resource workers through experiences of boom and bust cycles impacting family income (Shepard et al., 2020).

#### **1.4 Geographic Situatedness of Natural Resources Work**

Non-seasonal work tends to be the mainstay of urban centres, and as such, rural residents may be most impacted by seasonal work; they may in fact only have access to seasonal employment options (Mourdoukoutas, 1988; Shepard et al., 2020). The situatedness of Canadian resources in smaller, more remote areas with less diversified economies means there are fewer job opportunities for resource workers, particularly at the same level of compensation (Coates et al., 2015). In the event of job loss, displaced workers in remote regions compete for a smaller number of alternate employment opportunities (if any are available at all), and typically require a longer period of time to secure reemployment (Swaim, 1990). Indeed, high industry average wages can make employment in resource industries difficult to replace (Gardner et al., 2018). Where they are able to find alternate work, workers may need to settle for a job at a lower salary level (ibid).<sup>2</sup> Further, there is potential that the skills workers obtained in resource employment could be job-specific and have limited transferability to other employment situations (Dansereau, 1998; Barker, 2006; Rixen and Blangy, 2016).

Resource workers therefore face uniquely challenging circumstances given a higher-than-average propensity of losing their current job in conjunction with lower-than-average assurance they

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<sup>2</sup> Displacement from a well-paying job may also raise workers’ reservation wages for subsequent employment (Goldstein et al., 2012).

will be able to secure alternative employment offering a comparable rate of pay. These realities lead to increased levels of employment insecurity and anxiety among workers, and contract workers often feel the most pronounced levels of stress as a result of their increased risk of employment loss (Blackman et al., 2014).<sup>3</sup>

Unemployment or risk of unemployment can be devastating. In general terms, work provides both material and psychological benefits and can be a source of self-esteem and confidence (Budd and Spencer, 2014). Consequently, the stress brought on by industry downturns can cause deterioration of workers' mental and physical health and other social challenges such as alcohol and substance use, risk-taking behaviours, and violence (O'Mullan et al., 2018). These risks may be heightened in remote communities where access to healthcare services, mental health supports, and other social infrastructure may be limited (Martin, 2011; Shandro et al., 2011).

### **1.5 Policy Context: Organizational and State-Sponsored Interventions**

A well-documented association between insecure employment and ill health (e.g. Kim and von dem Knesebeck, 2015; Green, 2020) calls for the design of appropriate interventions. Proactive interventions such as (re)training programs can play an important role in this process and have been put forward as a focused strategy to improve workers' well-being (Rudisell et al., 2010; McKee et al., 2005; Leana and Feldman, 1990).

Along with promotion of (re)training interventions, state-sponsored social security frameworks have been established to support workers and families notably through the provision of income support programs. Within Canada, the Employment Insurance (EI) program provides temporary income support to workers experiencing unemployment stemming from a shortage of work or seasonal layoff as they search for employment or upgrade their skillsets. To be eligible, individuals must have paid premiums for a prescribed length of time within the past year (typically 420 hours) and must be available for work but are currently unable to secure employment (Government of Canada, 2022c). Pandemic benefits such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the

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<sup>3</sup> This may be particularly alarming when considering that researchers have noted a general trend toward the use of contracted, non-unionized labor in resource industries (Perry and Rowe, 2015; Graham, 2010). Contractors especially may have highly variable employment patterns, depending on availability of work (McKenzie, 2016).

Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) were also available for individuals and businesses, respectively, directly impacted by COVID-19. CERB offered financial support to both employed and self-employed Canadians, while CEBA offered interest-free loans to small businesses (Government of Canada, 2022d; Government of Canada, 2022e).

Provincially, employment standards provide minimum protections for workers. These include, among others, limits on weekly hours of work without overtime pay and requirements for consecutive hours away from work each week. In some provinces, however, employees and employers involved in primary agriculture production are excluded from most minimum standards (e.g. Government of Saskatchewan, 2021d). Also at the provincial level, in the event of an employment-related injury, workers' compensation programs provide income replacement benefits for a given proportion of workers' income. In Western Canada, this rate is typically 90 per cent.

Public policies affect workers and families in myriad ways, from regulating terms and conditions of employment and establishing eligibility criteria for social benefits (as noted above) to provision of education and healthcare services (Gauthier, 2001). At the organization-level, employers may establish policies to supplement state-sponsored supports and to provide enhanced benefits above legislated minimum standards for workers and their families. Family policies, for example, may include supplementary health insurance, employee and family assistance programs, tuition support, emergency leaves, family events (e.g. picnics, parties), and provisions for additional programs to support workers in balancing obligations in their work, family and private lives (Chung, 2020).

## **1.6 Addressing Gaps in Existing Knowledge**

Seasonal work in general has received limited attention in academic literature (Ainsworth and Purs, 2009). The limited literature base has examined seasonality mainly in sports, tourism and hospitality sectors (Butler, 1998), and while there is a body of literature on resources employment, it is mostly based in an Australian context. The available literature does however suggest resource work can carry health and wellbeing effects (Blackman et al., 2014). For example, the Australian literature has revealed how intense work arrangements such as long hours and compressed shift rosters observed within resource industries have resulted in worker stress, fatigue, sleep disturbances, substance use, loneliness, social isolation, and limited ability to participate in sports and fitness activities (Torkington et al., 2011; Blackman et al., 2014; Sincovich et al., 2018; Vojnovic et al., 2014). James

et al. (2018) also found that levels of psychological distress were substantially higher among Australian workers in the mining industry as compared with those of the average worker. In this same study, associations were made between high levels of psychological distress and aspects such as shifts over 12 hours, poor social networks, and concern over losing one's job. Workers may also face increased levels of stress and anxiety from financial commitments and debt obligations, finding themselves potentially overextended from purchases made with large earnings and leaving them with heightened vulnerability in the event of a downturn (Misan and Rudnik, 2015). In the Australian agriculture industry, investments in new technologies and expanding scale of operations have similarly made more farming operations reliant on debt and banks (Wilson et al, 2015). At the interface of work and their private lives, workers have also encountered challenges balancing their work with family and leisure time (Gardner et al., 2018).

Crucially, resource work can also affect partners and families, and perhaps more acutely than workers (Sincovich et al., 2018, p. 27). Still within an Australian context, partners of resource workers have likewise experienced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and difficulties sleeping (Wilson et al., 2020). Elevated levels of depression, anxiety and stress have also been documented among resource workers' partners (Dittman et al., 2016). As well, women with partners in resource work have experienced heightened concern about their partners' wellbeing (Dittman et al., 2016), particularly when partners are either at work or commuting (Sincovich et al., 2018).

What is more, many women with partners in resource work manage frequent relocations and times of feeling like an 'outsider' through experiences of building friendships in a different location with each move (Sincovich et al., 2018). These authors also point out how, through frequent moves, children's education and schooling can be affected. During resource booms, and drawn by the attraction of high-wage employment opportunities, there are further reports of young people having been persuaded to leave school early for entry-level employment with attendant concerns over long-term consequences of limited overall community educational attainment rates (Sincovich et al., 2018).

As significant as these findings are, this body of Australian literature has however been identified as relatively limited. Australian researchers have noted how the social, psychosocial, and economic effects of resource work conditions on workers and their families, including those involving fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out arrangements, have received little research attention (Perring et al., 2014; Meredith et al., 2014; Dittman et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2018; Vojnovic et al.,

2014; Bowers et al., 2018). Rather, focus has largely been on environmental impacts of resource work (Sincovich et al., 2018). There is also a noted lack of research on workers' perceptions of resource work (Blackman et al., 2014), and how workers manage the realities of this type of employment (Vojnovic et al., 2014). As well, impacts on families appears to be an area of study in need of further development. Indeed, Gardner et al. (2018) noted how their study was the first to examine impacts on partners; however, it was limited to partners of Australian fly-in, fly-out workers exclusively, and the study's focus was restricted to only mental health and wellbeing impacts.

Most relevant to this project, there is also a dearth of research on impacts of resource work in Canada as experienced by employees and the family units to which they belong. As the foregoing international research suggests, the impacts could be significant and worthy of exploration in a local context. In particular, as outlined above, Australian research has begun to identify social, emotional, physical and psychological health aspects for both workers and their families (Misan and Rudnik, 2015).

### **1.6.1 Overview of Specific Study Context**

In regards to the specific context for this study, the province of Saskatchewan was selected as the designated setting for this research. With an abundant resource base, natural resources sectors account for approximately 35 per cent of the province's GDP (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022a). Additionally, at least 85 per cent of provincial exports are derived from natural resources (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021a).

Agriculture products generally constitute Saskatchewan's largest export (Conference Board of Canada, 2022a), and with over 40 per cent of Canada's farmland, Saskatchewan is the country's largest exporter of agri-food products (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022b). While the province has a large proportion of agriculture land, of note as well, more than half of the province is forested (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021c). With 30,000 active oil wells, the province is also a leading energy producer in Canada and is the world's largest uranium and potash supplier; nearly half of the world's potash reserves are found in Saskatchewan (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022b).

In terms of employment, even in figures excluding agriculture, the province has the second highest proportion of workers employed in natural resources industries in Canada, falling only behind Alberta (Government of Nova Scotia, 2021). Agriculture directly employs 28,800 workers in

Saskatchewan and 19,600 workers are employed in forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Largely as a result of rising commodities prices, Saskatchewan is positioned for significant economic expansion and is expected to lead the nation in real GDP growth in 2022 at 7.9 per cent (Conference Board of Canada, 2022a, p. 6). Growth is specifically projected across the agriculture industry as it recovers from a severe drought of 2021. As well, growth in the mining industry will be led most especially by strong potash and uranium production increases; mining output is expected to rise 8.3 per cent in 2022 and 3.5 per cent in 2023 (Conference Board of Canada, 2022a, p.6). Oil drilling has also been on the rise, accompanying recent price increases. Overall, Saskatchewan's commodity exports are expected to increase by 6.3 per cent in 2022 and 6.0 per cent in 2023 (Conference Board of Canada, 2022a, p. 11).

Of note as well, natural resources industries overwhelmingly employ male workers. The majority of farm operators (71.3 per cent) are male (Shumsky and Nelson, 2018, p.3), while 86 per cent of Saskatchewan's mining workforce is male (MacPherson, 2017). Men comprise 81 per cent of the province's energy workforce (PetroLMI, 2022). In the absence of information for Saskatchewan, data from Alberta's forestry and logging industry (including support activities) indicate that men accounted for 75 per cent of employees across the sector in 2019 (Government of Alberta, 2020, p. 8).

Work in resource sectors commands above-average earnings. The average weekly wage rate in Saskatchewan's mining industry was \$1,966 in 2020 (MiHR, 2021, p. 35). Extrapolated over a calendar year, this would equate to an annual income of approximately \$102,232. Average farm family combined on and off-farm income in Saskatchewan in 2018 was \$175,456 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021b, p. 2), while average energy income in Saskatchewan was \$94,000 in 2016 (PetroLMI, 2018, p. 15). A wage estimate for silviculture and forestry workers in Saskatchewan was \$99,200 in 2019, with further data indicating high school as the required qualification for entry into these roles (Government of Saskatchewan, 2019, p. 4). By comparison, median employment income in 2015 for full-time workers in Saskatchewan overall was \$55,368 (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

While education information is difficult to come by for Saskatchewan resource workers, approximately 16 per cent of the province's mining labour force has no certificate diploma or degree. However, approximately 33 per cent of the industry workforce has earned a high school diploma or equivalent, 23 per cent has obtained an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma, 16 per cent has

obtained a college certificate or diploma, and 11 per cent has obtained a university degree (MiHR, 2014, p. 17).

It is also important to point out that 35.6 percent of the province's population lives outside of a census metropolitan area or census agglomeration, whereas the corresponding rate for rest of the country is only 16.8 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2017b). As such, a large proportion of the province could be considered rural. Many of these areas are heavily reliant on resource industries (Stanford, 2021). Compared to other provinces, Saskatchewan's economy overall is indeed much less diversified; only Alberta, Newfoundland, and the territories have lower levels of economic diversification (Government of Canada, 2016).

### **1.6.2 Importance of Chosen Study Context Vis-à-vis Existing Literature**

Previous researchers have noted how employment-related perspectives are rooted within social and cultural norms of specific geographic spaces (e.g. Reed, 2003; Gardner et al., 2018). Each embedded within their unique local, historical, social, economic, political, geographical and physical contexts (Stedman et al., 2004; O'Mullan et al., 2018), findings from studies conducted in Australia therefore may not necessarily reflect realities experienced within the employment and family milieus contemplated in this project (i.e. within Saskatchewan, Canada). In particular, at the national level, approaches to social and economic policy development within Canada and Australia have not been uniform over recent past decades in view of different prevailing political climates and priorities (Huo, 2006). As examples, discrepancies are apparent in the evolution of social programming such as pension and healthcare benefits between countries while Australia has also increased focus on new investment spending in the mining industry, alongside goods and labour market reforms, and capital market deregulation that were not matched in Canada (Huo, 2006; Kirchner, 2022).

An additional consideration is that as natural resources work typically takes place outdoors, distinct topographies and climate profiles between geographies are relevant and could account for possible divergences in worker experiences (Khanna, 2020). Stedman et al. (2004) point out how, even within a country, there can be "regional variation in natural endowments-- land, climate, topography-- and associated social relations" (p. 218). Saskatchewan, for example, is a landlocked province with extreme climate conditions to the extent that these are recognized as among the most variable in the world, consistently over the seasons and through history (Prairie Adaptation Research

Collaborative, n.d). Harsh climates and environments can notably be additional sources of both physical and emotional stress (Lester et al., 2011).

Relatedly, Saskatchewan as a province produces natural resources commodity mixes distinct from Australia's, which may result in exposure to varying business or market conditions and operating environments that temper organizational, worker and family experiences. For example, Australia's commodity exports consist of a larger proportion of iron ore and a variety of metals (Stevens, 2009) that are less commonly produced in Saskatchewan. Instead, among others, agriculture and energy commodities are the most prevalent within this region (Stedman et al., 2004). Still in this vein, these two jurisdictions do not share the same geographical proximity to global markets for their products (Kirchner, 2022). Natural resources are also more pivotal to Saskatchewan's prosperity, accounting for a larger proportion of the local economy and GDP as compared with Australia (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022a; Government of Saskatchewan, 2021a; Government of Australia, n.d.). These aspects merit separate study that affords consideration to Saskatchewan-specific employment and family experiences.

As important as context is, there are no known studies of resource-based employment in Saskatchewan (a province heavily dependent on these industries, as mentioned) that incorporate an analytical focus on the salient issues associated with this type of seasonal work from the perspectives of workers and their families. Studies based in Saskatchewan have thus far largely assumed a historical frame focusing, for example, on a farm woman's conceptualization of work and gender in the Great Depression (Bye, 2005) or examining family life and farm enterprise development (Kohl, 1977). These studies maintain a focus exclusively on agriculture and are rooted in twentieth century experiences, with many decades having passed since participants' experiences were originally documented.

Accompanying limited knowledge on impacts of resource employment, there appears to be even less research nationally and internationally on programs, services, and supports for workers and their families (Gardner et al., 2018). Studies on social support interventions within resource sectors have been described by Australian researchers as "entirely lacking" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 251). However, Langdon et al. (2016) researched support services available in Australia through an Internet search and called for further research to understand preferences for specific types of support and to develop additional supports or improve existing ones as they relate to resource work. In this regard, it



has been noted how important it is to ensure programs, services, and supports address specific needs of intended end users such that they are both feasible and acceptable to these audiences (Tynan et al., 2018).

Within Canada, even with observed gaps in retraining options (Pichette et al., 2019), there is an absence of empirical research to direct design and implementation of high efficacy (re)training programs and practices for workers facing employment insecurity or job loss (Schwitzer et al., 2011). There is likewise nearly a complete absence of literature on how potential services and interventions can be designed to best meet specific and unique needs of resource workers subject to challenging work conditions in industries experiencing ongoing risks of employment loss within a distinct geographical, social, and political context on the Canadian prairies. This project seeks to fill these gaps. The dearth of literature in this important area has significant consequences for the development of human-centred, needs-based interventions and policies to address the distinct needs of workers and families involved in resource industries.

Against this backdrop, this study therefore fills an important gap in understanding how employment in resource-based industries is experienced by workers and families in an understudied Canadian prairie province, and in identifying the meanings participants ascribe to managing day-to-day realities encountered as a result of involvement in these employment contexts. Data generated from this study will have important implications for guiding the design and development of tailored programs and services that are supportive of contextualized worker and family needs. The availability of timely and relevant programs, services, and other social supports can be important contributors to individual and family health and well-being.

## **1.7 Study Purpose and Aims**

Following a case study design, the overall purpose of this project was to explore workers' and families' experiences with seasonal resource-based employment in Saskatchewan, Canada as an understudied jurisdiction in which a leading source of economic activity is through resource sectors. In this process, the project sought to document the impacts of resource employment for workers and families in the province. Having identified the salient factors impacting workers and families, the project also proposed relevant supports and determined key program and service design features from the perspectives of participants. This information provides an evidence base for organizations and various levels of governments to enhance policies, services, and supports for workers and families

with involvement in resource industries. This project was conceptualized as exploratory, given its focus on a burgeoning research topic that to date has received limited academic research attention internationally and has not yet been studied specifically in Saskatchewan.

Accordingly, through an exploration of workers' and families' experiences with seasonal resource-based employment, and with a specific focus on the Saskatchewan context, this project investigated the following research questions:

- With a view to informing development and/or enhancement of relevant and contextualized programs, services and supports, what are the factors impacting workers and families with involvement in seasonal natural resources employment in Saskatchewan, Canada?
- How do workers and families perceive and respond to these factors?

To address these questions, and consistent with the study purpose, the following objectives were identified for the project:

- Investigate experiences and perceptions toward seasonal resource-based work in Saskatchewan, Canada and the impact of this work at the individual and family levels
- Identify various ways in which workers and families navigate and perceive salient issues emerging through experiences in Saskatchewan natural resources sectors
- Determine relevant and beneficial supports for workers and families with involvement in seasonal resource-based work in Saskatchewan.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods and underlying methodology guiding the study. It begins by commenting on the selected research design and approach before providing a description of the study site and sample. A discussion on recruitment, data collection and analysis processes is provided, along with a summary of ethical considerations.

#### 2.1 Research Design and Approach

Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring the meaning participants assign to a social phenomenon and enables researchers to capture and report on the complexities of a situation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Relevant to this study as well, qualitative research plays an important role in studying family life and is capable of helping researchers understand routines and practices, experiences, stories, intentions, and challenges of and between family members (Weisner, 2014).

The specific design utilized throughout this project is case study research to explore the phenomenon of seasonal work, its impacts, and the role of social supports to facilitate worker and family well-being. Case study research was selected for its ability to accommodate in-depth and multi-faceted exploration of a complex social phenomenon in its context (Crowe et al., 2011; Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2018). It is appropriate when case(s) are bounded by place, context, or setting (Creswell et al., 2007).

Case study research is concerned with garnering understanding of participants' views and circumstances (Stake, 2005). Case studies attain and ensure the representation of context-dependent perspectives (Trent and Cho, 2014). They are capable of capturing depth and complexity of a particular situation from many angles (Thomas, 2016). Indeed, incorporating perspectives from different participants can identify multiple meanings to inform the project (Yin, 2018). Multiple informants are also considered essential in order to "deepen information" (Woodside and Wilson, 2003, p. 500). Within a case, multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon help to strengthen and expand understanding (Woodside, 2010). The central aim of a case study is to generate deep and situated understanding of actions, interactions and sentiments expressed and interpreted in a particular context as a result of a specific phenomenon (Simons, 2014; Woodside, 2010).

In the process of obtaining ‘deep understanding,’ (e.g. Miles et al., 2014, p. 101), case researchers may consider questions such as, “What exactly is happening right now?;” “What were the triggering events leading up to what happened?;” “What is the meaning of what just happened to the case participants?;” and “What is going to happen next because of what has just happened?” (Woodside and Wilson, 2003, p. 499). In-depth understanding, in turn, can also inform professional practice and policy development (Thomas, 2016).

## **2.2 Data Sources**

Consistent with a case study design and its intent to capture multiple perspectives, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the selected data collection method. Interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate data collection method, given the study’s focus on garnering in-depth views and perceptions from study participants. This is again in keeping with a case study design. Interviews more specifically allowed for deeper exploration of participants’ engagement with seasonal work experiences in natural resources sectors by providing opportunity for follow-up questions, probes, and deeper reflection (Thomas, 2016). In this way, the study was able to elicit the most complete accounts possible of the meanings participants ascribed to their involvement and interaction with seasonal work through open-ended questions, to which participants could respond freely (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Of significance to this case study, interviews prompt participants’ qualitative assessments of their experiences and can assist with situating individual experiences within their specific contexts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Indeed, interviews gather participants’ “unique contexts of time, place and personal experiences” (Taylor, 2013, p. 207). They garner the meanings interviewees ascribe, and the views they hold towards, events and phenomena (Yin, 2018). Interviews can therefore help fulfill the need to, as Thomas (2016) describes, “study the meanings that people are constructing of the situations in which they find themselves and proceed from these meanings in order to understand the social world” (p. 204). The use of interviews in this study, in sum, allowed for in-depth exploration with interviewees of concepts and subjective meanings associated with seasonal employment to optimize opportunities for better understanding their experiences with this phenomenon. As well, multiple interviews can help to achieve immersion and a researcher’s examination of multiple facets of a case (Gilgun, 2014).

### **2.3 Study Site/Setting**

Yin (2018) indicates how cases must be selected with care. This study was conceptualized spatially with provincial borders delineating the boundaries of the case (Mills et al., 2012a). As identified earlier, the specific location contemplated for this study was Saskatchewan, Canada. Situated within the geographic centre of the Canadian prairies, this province was selected for its relatively large proportion of workers in resource sectors to ensure access to participants. In addition, resource industries account for a sizeable share of provincial economic activity and are recognized as key economic sectors. This province also tends to receive little research attention with very limited studies having been conducted in this particular geographic region. Those that exist, as noted, are several decades old.

The province is expected to act as a typical case, capable of apprehending “commonplace situations” (Mills et al., 2012b, p.3). Delimitation of study boundaries along provincial lines will also allow for situated and contextualized assessments (Trent and Cho, 2014) to better determine how processes and outcomes can be “qualified by local conditions” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 101).

The experiences that animated participants’ stories were situated within the central and southern portions of the province. (Please see Appendix A for a general location of experiences described in this project). Geographic representation more specifically included the lower half of the province. Participants therefore had a home base and/or experience (either directly as a worker with involvement in a resource industry, or indirectly as a family member of a worker) in this region.

Some of the communities have very small population bases. To protect the identities of participants, the names of communities are masked (Michell et al., 2008). As well, participant cases will simply be identified by number (e.g. P01, P02).

### **2.4 Study Populations**

Participants in this study can be grouped into two categories: 1) resource worker participants and 2) families of resource workers. To help gather multiple perspectives (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) on the research topic and to understand the impact of seasonal employment arrangements on the family unit, this study sought participation from resource workers, their spouses and extended family members. Participants were advised from the outset that the scope of the project included workers and families to ensure fully informed consent (Baskin, 2005).

## 2.5 Recruitment

Recruitment of worker and family participants began via ads and postings placed on social media outlets, namely Kijiji and Facebook. Ads were posted on Kijiji across Saskatchewan communities, with a particular focus on areas with rich natural resource bases. Appendix B contains a sample of information that appeared in recruitment ads. As awareness of the project grew, word of mouth was then utilized to recruit successive respondents. Word of mouth was an important tool within small local geographies to reach an adequate sample size. For some participants within this study who shared how they learned about the study with me, referral by a trusted individual seemed to be particularly important and was helpful in identifying additional participants throughout the recruitment process.

Prospective participants typically contacted me directly by email to express interest in the project. In other cases, I was provided with the names of possible candidates who would be eligible for participation, and where consent was provided in advance for me to do so, I contacted prospective participants by telephone or by email to discuss the project. Of note, the names and contact information of potential participants were never shared with me without their permission.

Potential participants who expressed interest in the project received information and a consent form (Appendix C) outlining study aims and details on what participation would involve. Eligibility was confirmed through a preliminary email exchange or by telephone with participants. Once eligibility was established and participants expressed that they wished to proceed with an interview, an interview was scheduled.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, there were periods of time when recruitment was slow and may reflect in the final sample size. Looking back upon the events of these years, recruitment efforts may have been fraught to a certain degree by virtue of initiating a study in the midst of a pandemic as individuals contended with other, more pressing challenges in navigating an unprecedented public health concern.

In more concrete terms, the pandemic was known to have widely invoked general feelings of fear, uncertainty, economic instability, and isolation; it also necessitated adjustments relating to the imposition of lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing (Mobaraka et al., 2022). Since the pandemic precluded in-person interactions, the remote nature of the virtual interviews meant that participants were at home, possibly having to manage a myriad of household responsibilities and

other priorities simultaneously. For example, prospective participants may have been caring for loved ones who fell ill or were home-schooling their children. In these circumstances, participation in a research project may not have been possible (or indeed a priority) for prospective participants. What is more, as noted, the pandemic resulted in significant employment losses across natural resources industries. In the midst of prevailing uncertainty and possible employment-related concerns, the focus of natural resources workers and families may have been instead (and very rightly so) on managing day-to-day financial challenges at hand, along with maintaining their health and wellbeing.

## **2.6 Sampling**

Qualitative research involves deliberate selection of samples to incorporate into the study (Moser and Korstjens, 2018). In this way, purposeful sampling is utilized to recruit participants with specific experiences to best address the research question (Marshall, 1996; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In keeping with this tradition, purposeful sampling strategies were applied in this study to recruit adults over the age of 18 with at least six months experience in a resource sector in Saskatchewan either directly as a worker, or indirectly, as a family member. Six months experience was chosen to ensure participants had adequate time on-the-job from which to draw a description of their experiences, while also taking into account documented employment volatility associated with these industries (e.g. Stanford, 2021). As provincial boundaries were the selected demarcation for case study boundaries, so long as participants had six months' work experience in a seasonal natural resources sector in Saskatchewan (or were a family member of someone who did), specific home community or employment location in Saskatchewan at the time of recruitment did not constitute part of the inclusion criteria.

A total of 23 study participants (i.e. workers and family members) was recruited. Marshall (1996) notes how within qualitative studies, a suitable sample size is achieved when research questions are adequately answered and is a matter that typically becomes evident as the study progresses. Indications of an adequate sample size may include repetition of codes and reaching a point at which no new issues or themes are apparent from additional data collection in response to the research question (Saunders et al., 2018; Hennink and Kaiser, 2022; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020; van Rijnsoever, 2017).

The final sample size that was achieved following the indicators of an adequate sample size mentioned above is also consistent with guidelines that have been documented by other sources in the

extant literature. For example, citing Kvale (1996), Roy et al. (2015) note how studies often “settle on 15 plus or minus 10 interviews” making specific reference to the availability of resources and a law of diminishing returns (p. 248). Sebele-Mpofu (2020) likewise points to work by Marshall et al. (2013) suggesting 15 to 30 interviews for single case studies (p.8). Hennink and Kaiser (2022) take this narrative a step further by considering the ethics of continuing data collection for its own sake and thus accumulating samples “larger than needed” with the possibility of resultant data wastage (p. 8).

The table below identifies some key characteristics of the study sample. A slight majority of participants was male. Participants’ experiences in resource-based industries as either a worker or a family member ranged from 6 months to over 30 years, and age categories for workers and families ranged from 18-24 to over 60 years. Most participants discussed experiences in the agriculture industry (45 percent), along with energy (34 percent), mining (14 percent), and forestry (7 percent). Some participants had involvement in multiple resource industries, including combinations such as agriculture and energy, energy and mining, mining and forestry, energy and forestry, and agriculture and mining. Seven or 30 percent of participants were workers, another 7 (30 percent) were family members, and 9 (39 percent) were part of the family farm category, meaning that participants held roles as both worker and family member within a family farm operation. This lattermost category was created with the intent to recognize women’s contributions to the family farm operation. Individuals within the family farm operation were self-employed. The majority of family members were spouses/partners, but an adult sibling and an aunt were also recruited. Outside of the family farm category, all workers recruited for this study were male. This is consistent with the statistics indicated earlier identifying resource industries as largely male-dominated.

**Table 2.1:** Summary of Participant Characteristics

Total Participants	23	# (%)
Gender	<b>Overall</b>	
	Male	13 (57%)
	Female	10 (43%)
	<b>By Participant Category</b>	
	Worker Category:	
	Male	7 (30%)
	Female	0 (0%)
	Family Category:	
	Male	1 (4%)



	Female	6 (26%)
	Family Farm Category:	
	Male	5 (22%)
	Female	4 (17%)
Years of experience	<5-10	8 (35%)
	11-20	5 (22%)
	21-30	5 (22%)
	>30	5 (22%)
Age bracket	18-44 years	9 (39%)
	45-64 years	5 (22%)
	65-74 years	6 (26%)
	Unspecified	3 (13%)
Education background	High school and/or occupation-specific training	9 (39%)
	Post-secondary training (certificate/diploma/degree)	11 (48%)
	Unspecified	3 (13%)
Participant category	Worker	7 (30%)
	Family	7 (30%)
	Family farm operation (i.e. both worker & family member)	9 (39%)
Industry*	Agriculture	13 (45%)
	Energy	10 (34%)
	Mining	4 (14%)
	Forestry	2 (7%)

\*tally exceeds 23 count to indicate participants' involvement in multiple industries

Natural resources industries are increasingly mechanized and require individuals with ability to operate and repair machinery. Among others, representative occupation categories involved in natural resources work include truck drivers, machine operators, technicians, mechanics, millwrights, and skilled tradespeople (Macpherson and Cooper, 2021). These occupations were also reflected in the positions identified by participants in this study. More specifically, participants' accounts represented experiences in various occupations including general labourers, farm hands, farmers, tradespersons, service and maintenance workers, technicians, equipment operators, and supervisors.

## 2.7 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between August 2021 and August 2022. An interview/conversation guide (Appendix D) helped to guide discussions with participants and was designed to elicit responses that aligned with, and sought to answer, the research questions. Interview questions were crafted in an open-ended fashion and related to experiences with and perceptions toward seasonal resource employment at the individual and family levels. Within the parameters

established by study objectives, semi-structured interview questions offered latitude to ask clarifying or follow-up questions of interviewees on relevant topics that emerged throughout the conversation, and in this way, were able to elicit fulsome responses.

Interviews took place over the phone or through the Microsoft Teams platform and lasted between 25 and 90 minutes. The average interview length was 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. My own transcription of the interviews allowed for full immersion and further engagement with the data, and ultimately assisted as part of the continuous data analysis process (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), discussed in greater detail below.

## **2.8 Data Analysis**

Analysis in this project took place concurrently with data collection and was facilitated by an ongoing process of memoing (Saldana, 2014). Iterative generation of memos supported the development of possible codes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In turn, data were coded to facilitate the emergence of salient issues/themes that were then assessed and compared against existing literature (Crowe et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012). Descriptions and case-based themes were developed to facilitate understanding of the complexity of the case (Creswell et al., 2007).

Formal data analysis began with multiple, thorough readings of the transcripts (Bradley et al., 2007). Coding, a process of assigning meaning to collected information (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014 as cited in Elliott, 2018), then commenced. Open, line-by-line coding was first conducted to ensure comprehensive treatment of the data and acted as a verification measure to ensure that no codes or themes would be inadvertently overlooked or dismissed (Holton, 2010). Emerging patterns provided analytic direction for continued analysis (Holton, 2010) within the broad domain of study research questions and purpose (Thomas, 2006; Saldana, 2014).

At a more conceptual level, focused coding then allowed for the building of themes as analytically significant data fragments were used to categorize the data (Green and Thorogood, 2018). As interview data were organized into themes, constant comparisons were used to construct, validate and cross-check emerging categories within and across cases as an iterative process (Thomas, 2016). Mapping and remapping of key themes and processes into successive visual displays and diagrams played a significant role in identifying subsequent relationships between themes (Coffey and

Atkinson, 1996; Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2006). Key themes were then explored and interpreted in relation to concepts appearing in relevant bodies of literature (Gilgun, 2014).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the use of memos was essential and helped to document thoughts, impressions, ideas and conceptual linkages arising from interview experiences and data (Saldana, 2014). Memos also helped to note important contextual details that shaped how participant responses and data were interpreted. Although the virtual nature of interactions with participants was readily apparent, I attended carefully to verbal cues such as tone and pace of participants' speech and laughter to extract additional meaning from participants' stories. Listening carefully and empathically to participant stories also helped establish rapport with participants in a virtual environment. Theoretical memos documented key analytical ideas, tracked possible relationships between themes, and allowed for comparisons in the data both within and across cases (Green and Thorogood, 2018).

Alternating focus between foregrounded individual events and the background situation and contexts in which they occurred helped to further engage with the data (Pamphilon, 1999; Busch-Jensen and Schraube, 2019). As well, repeated reference back to full interview transcripts at various points helped to ensure analysis did not become detached from its broader context (Hansen, 2020; Guest et al., 2011) and facilitated "an examination of the whole to the parts" (Michell, 2013, p. 52).

## **2.9 Ethical Considerations**

The study was reviewed by and received approval from a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee [file #43209] on August 12, 2021. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to each interview. Information and consent forms provided to participants outlined the purpose and objectives of the study; measures to protect their confidentiality; how data would be utilized, managed, and stored; and what study participation would entail. Participants were informed that taking part in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point, up until findings were submitted. Where participants preferred to provide verbal consent, a script (Appendix E) was used to review points outlined in the letter of information and consent form. All participants were provided with an additional opportunity at the beginning of the interview to ask and have any questions they may have answered.

In addressing interview questions related to work and family situations, there was an increased awareness of the potential for interviews to evoke emotional responses in participants (McCosker et al., 2001). Recognizing this possibility, a list of community resources and available support services (Appendix F) was also prepared in advance and offered to all participants at the end of the interviews (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Participants were reminded through the informed consent process and again at the start of the interview of their ability to pause our conversation or withdraw from the project (Elmir et al., 2011; McCosker et al., 2001).

In recognition of their time and contribution to the project, worker and family participants were provided with a \$35 gift card from a national retailer (Gilgun, 2014). All participants received a verbal message of thanks at the end of each interview and were provided a feedback letter (Appendix G) reiterating appreciation for their participation in the study.

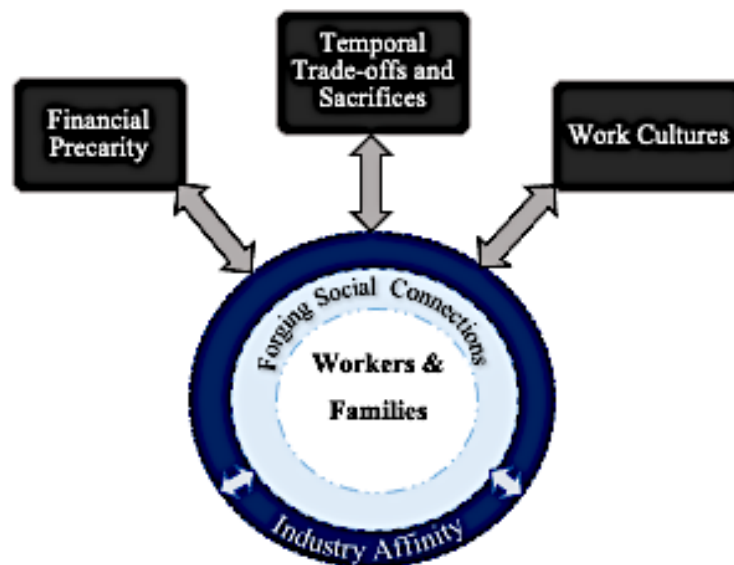
To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, interview audio recordings, de-identified interview transcripts, and consent forms were stored in an encrypted and password-protected folder on the UWaterloo server. As well, no personal, workplace, or specific community names appear in this final report to protect participant confidentiality (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

## Chapter 3

### Findings

With a focus on understanding the experiences of workers and families with seasonal employment in Saskatchewan resource sectors, this study identified five overarching, interrelated themes. The first three themes (financial precarity, temporal trade-offs and sacrifices, and work cultures) pertain to external factors acting upon workers and the family unit as a result of involvement in resource industries. These external factors, in turn, relate to the fourth theme (industry affinity), which identified factors keeping workers tied to employment in resource industries. As will be discussed, this theme could serve as both a factor acting upon families and also a protective factor. A fifth and final theme (forging social connections) is concerned with situational aspects and the adoption of strategies that helped participants persist through challenging work and family circumstances to maintain employment in industries that had oftentimes enduring personal significance to, and consequences for, them. A visual representation of these interacting themes and their interrelationships appears below to help situate the detailed results presented within this chapter. This chapter closes with a presentation of workers' and families' perceptions and responses to these impacting factors and prevailing realities.

**Figure 1:** Thematic Model



### **3.1 Financial Precarity**

The inherent nature of work in resources sectors meant that workers routinely experienced uncertainty in terms of earnings and also in the timing and availability of work. With respect to earnings, participants described how income fluctuated each year, and indeed, from month-to-month. Participant accounts revealed how it was not unusual to accumulate earnings in short periods of time followed by months without income.

Uncertainty in the way of income could be on account of regular seasonal patterns, or broader macroeconomic conditions. Economic and market conditions could fluctuate dramatically (Fetsch, 1998). As well, products in resource industries are typically commodities, and as such, in globalized commodities markets especially, producers are price takers and are heavily exposed to market movements (Ball, 2014).

#### **3.1.1 Risk, Rewards, and Luck**

Weather and market conditions were significant factors for worker and family participants, and critically, also outside of their control. Dependence on factors that were outside of one's control to maintain a livelihood led some participants to make comments about relying on and attributing success to chance and to 'luck.' These sentiments were expressed across industries, but most prominently among agriculture and energy workers.

In the agriculture industry, with marked reliance on factors such as climate, growing conditions, and markets for their livelihoods, a farm owner and operator noted of the unpredictability:

“[A] lot of us don't go to casinos because farming is a gamble in itself...”  
(P12, male, family farm category, >30 years' experience)<sup>4</sup>

This participant explained how gambles were taken on whether seeded plants would grow and if rain and heat would be favorable to obtaining a quality crop and yield. If a crop could indeed be

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<sup>4</sup> Participant quotations presented in this chapter provide an identifier number to protect participant identities. This number appears alongside the gender of the participant, the natural resources industry/industries with which they were involved as either a worker or family member, and the number of years of experience in these industries on which their accounts were based.

harvested, it would then also be a gamble on what price the crop products would fetch on the market at the end of the growing season.

A similar sentiment of ‘rolling the dice’ was expressed by another participant when describing his and his partner’s experiences with managing expectations to align with uncertainty in their operations:

“[W]e both knew what it was like to be on steady income, it was uninterrupted. So farming is not like that. We do take risks with the potential of having rewards at the end of it, but sometimes risk and reward doesn’t always match up... there’s always that uncertainty, so you’re rolling the dice. You’re always doing the best job you can with the expectations that you will be somewhat successful, and sometimes you are and sometimes you aren’t.”

(P09, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

Indeed, despite every possible effort, it sometimes was not possible to achieve an intended outcome; it was outside of one’s hands. P03 noted, for example, that even when doing “everything right” themselves, there were elements outside of one’s sphere of influence that could work against one’s best efforts [male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience].

It is possible that under such circumstances, a degree of determinism could take over. Evidence of this phenomenon was perhaps particularly apparent in the following account:

“...it’s I mean feast or famine. You’re going to have good years and you’re going to have bad years and you just got to hope for the best and get what you get, right. That’s all you could ever do...”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

Research indicates that individuals attempt to obtain control by aligning their environment with their wishes, or alternatively, by aligning themselves with their environment (Rothbaum et al., 1982). Recognizing that some aspects of life are not under personal control, limiting one’s perception of control can be a protective action and may actually support wellbeing (Lachman et al., 2011; Heidemeier and Goritz, 2013). Indeed, maintaining a strong sense of control in situations where there is objectively limited ability to exercise personal control can result in disappointment or self-blame (Heidemeier and Goritz, 2013). As such, achieving the most psychologically advantageous level of control oftentimes becomes a matter of balancing optimism with realism (Glavin and Schieman, 2014), and the specific approach that is chosen is usually a function of one’s environment and previous life experiences (Heidemeier and Goritz, 2013; Hickson et al., 1988). Most relevant to this

study, Glavin and Schieman (2014) likewise found that higher levels of perceived control are unproductive in decreasing the stresses associated with insecure work situations since eliminating the threat of job or income loss is typically outside the realm of most individuals' control and especially so during economic downturns.

It is also important to note there may be different kinds of risk profiles and abilities to control situations based on whether one is a business owner/operator or a paid employee. In particular, while farm and business owners may have more decision-making autonomy, they also take on more financial risk than employees. As one participant explained of emerging businesses in the energy industry:

“Well, it just becomes more risky because like for example... I had friends...that had...businesses...[T]hey would go out and spend huge amounts of money on equipment and sometimes never getting hired to use it. And so they spent a bunch of money, and then in the end, they couldn't turn around and sell the equipment... Some still have it after things have really slowed down and it's not worth anything near what they paid for it. And so the unpredictability of it all makes things like that where you can lose a lot of money if you start a company. And getting information from the...companies that hire you is not always reliable either because they obviously want to find means to their ends too...so that they get what they want and they basically pass the buck and kind of force people to take on risk and then kind of regret it later when it costs them a lot of money.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Because of the risks and significant consequences stemming from their actions, farm and business owners experienced additional pressures in every decision they made, as compared with waged employees. The following account from a participant with experience as both the spouse of a worker in the mining industry *and* a family farm operator demonstrates the distinction between business owner and employee roles more concretely:

“So on our individual farm, I spend time praying that we don't have a breakdown and then when we do, oh it's stressful. We have to run to get parts and try and figure out, but at the mine, [individual employees] don't care if there's a breakdown. It's like, 'Oh you know maybe I'll get the night off' or something, but the bosses are dealing with all those bottom line [issues]....”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

These experiences seem to suggest that, as compared with paid employees, while farm and business owners were afforded greater autonomy and decision-making latitude, they also assumed



greater personal and financial risk if something went wrong. Crucially, within resource industries, many of the factors determining such outcomes were outside of an individual's control. In addition to taking on more risk than employees, farm and business owners also assumed greater personal and financial responsibility for the consequences of their actions and decisions. Employee status, meanwhile, offered workers perhaps less autonomy, but also fewer personal and financial risks.

### **3.1.2 Income Fluctuations**

Participants across industries and employment categories went on to provide tangible insight into the experience of financial ups and downs. It was explained by one participant that income fluctuations could be dramatic in the sense of "...you might be three or four figures, but you could be six figures as well..." (P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years' experience).

The account of the participant below substantiated this statement and provided a description of attendant material and psychological effects associated with the latest market downturn for his family member:

"...when things went for a downturn, he was off for quite a while and you know money has been stressful for him...it's not like an everyday kind of position where you have guaranteed hours and guaranteed income right...You make lots of money and then you make none, and the last month you make none right..."

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Another participant described the experience of working (and earning) through busy times, and how these opportunities could dissipate:

"When it was booming, you were working good and you had lots of money coming in. But when it was bust, you were sitting around twiddling your thumbs and wondering when the next job was going to come up."

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years' experience)

As indicated in the preceding section, much of this fluctuation could be attributed to market conditions. Drawing from experience in the energy industry, a worker explained:

"...like how it worked is in the oilfield, when things are hopping and really really booming...like if it got busy, it would be busy for months and months straight. But then the slow times, it would be the opposite. It would be kind of slow for months on end as well, just depending on...[t]he mood of the market..."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Most recently, however, a post-pandemic recovery combined with global geopolitical events has resulted in increased demand for commodities produced in Saskatchewan. The following account highlights the magnitude of volatility in the energy industry since 2020, resulting in vacillations from too little to too much work:

“...when Covid started in 2020, when it first kind of hit, that caused a massive downturn in activity and global energy consumption tanked so then oil companies stopped drilling... it caused us to have...layoffs at that time. And then things kind of hovered around the bottom...and that time was very chaotic, very stressful for I think everybody in the oil patch... People watched...and they don't know what's going to come next and if the cuts will become deeper or not right. And then now we're at the other end of the spectrum where things kind of took off like a rocket and you can't bring on enough staff to cover the work you have...and then it's sort of like a stress the other way. There's too much work. It's crazy busy. The guys are getting called as soon as they're reset, it's time to go to work and it just grinds away.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years' experience)

In booming market conditions, workers would often indeed work for as long as they were able in the short-term. In the energy industry, workers could also expect an approximately two-month downtime each year on account of spring break-up when the ground thaws. These anticipated season-related constraints, combined with the probability of unanticipated downturns, provided an additional impetus to persist through extended work periods.

“[B]ecause they've been such---like they don't have enough staff, [partner] has just been continuously working. And [partner] tells me that's what he wants. He likes that because they only work so many months out of the year right so he's like, 'Well there's work, I want to work.’”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Similar views were expressed among those with involvement in the agriculture industry, where depending on the weather, workers could be called to work for additional weeks at a time for the season, or alternatively, not. Because operations became more time-consuming later in the season, simple determinations such as this could account for a significant fluctuation in workers' income—perhaps 25-30 per cent difference or more.

“...you go when the weather’s good, so there’s no saying how long you’re going to go... You may be done at the end of September, you may be done at the beginning of December. There’s no guarantee when the end date is.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

In the energy industry, peak seasons often coincided with winter months when outdoor working conditions were particularly challenging. As the weather improved, intense work schedules could be brought to a complete stop by spring.

“...January, February, March is the busy busy time, so you make most of your money then.... You’re working outside in terrible conditions in the cold and whatnot, and then April comes and all the work goes away... So in April when you still got bills to pay, but there’s no [work]... It can be stressful I think on people financially.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

These accounts illustrate how workers persisted through long hours for prolonged periods of time in challenging work situations. In this process, they were able to potentially accumulate significant earnings; however, these opportunities appeared to be ephemeral depending on availability of work. When work was no longer available, either due to market downturns or regular seasonal patterns, workers’ incomes could be impacted substantially.

### **3.1.3 Risk of Injury and Income Loss**

Based on participant experiences, risk of injury in natural resources industries was ever-present. Along with inherent demands such as heavy workloads and fast-paced work, fatigue from long hours could also increase accident risks as participants described experiences of becoming “tired and tired” [P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience] and how working longer hours meant that one was not as alert. Concern was also expressed by family members over safety in general, but especially over risks associated with their loved ones driving home after demanding shifts. Roads were sometimes worsened by treacherous weather conditions, particularly in rural areas where visibility could be severely limited by blowing snow. Becoming stranded in remote areas could also be dangerous if vehicles’ heating systems failed.

The risk of income loss in the event of injury could therefore act as an additional source of economic insecurity for workers and their families. Evidence of this was apparent in the following account:

“But like I know for [partner] for example if he has any kind of physical injury, like he [sustained his injury]... like he’s off work right. Like you *can’t* work, so if you’re sick or if you have any kind of physical injury, you’re just off work like you just don’t get money.”  
(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Faced with a substantiated workplace injury, the provincial workers’ compensation wage-loss benefit is 90 per cent of workers’ net earnings. The maximum insurable earnings amount is \$59,000. For highly paid workers in the province’s resource industries, this would mean a considerable reduction in workers’ income as compared with their regular wages. Of note, farming and ranching are altogether excluded from coverage under the *Workers’ Compensation Act, 2013* and therefore these industries are not subject to automatic workers’ compensation coverage. Voluntary coverage is available by special application (WCB, 2022). What is more, the province does not have legislated provisions for paid sick time. Within Canada, there is also a documented history of claims suppression in resource-based industries (e.g. Dansereau, 1998).

Provincial employment standards in Saskatchewan prohibit employers from terminating employees absent as a result of injury or illness for up to 12 days in a year, or 12 out of 52 weeks for a serious injury or illness. However, this provision is only available for workers with 13 weeks of service (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021d). In the event of injury, workers could face further income reductions in shifting to alternative employment opportunities should they be unable to maintain the physical rigors of the work. As one participant noted:

“Like a lot of comp cases...where maybe a [tradesperson] is used to working \$36 or \$40 an hour, and then he gets hurt, or she gets hurt or whatever, and they retrain them as like a truck driving dispatcher and now they’re making \$16/hour that...might not necessarily be worth it.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

### **3.1.4 Money Management and Planning**

A lack of a steady paycheque or possibility of either income or employment loss (whether temporary or longer-term) as discussed above meant that families had to adopt specific strategies and practices for money management. Situations were much the same for workers and families across industries, and had implications for household saving and spending patterns. These often had to be adjusted, depending on the nature of income flows in any given year.

“...I think that it instills that level of stress and anxiety maybe a little bit just about-- like the unknown, right. Like I know [partner] has said to me before like, ‘I only work six months out of the year, so you know you have to manage money in a different way than you usually do’...I just know that like definitely it’s always kind of hanging over your head to manage things appropriately just due to being able to get hours again. It’s just not steady. You don’t have that level of security that you would without seasonal work...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In terms of strategies employed, one worker specifically emphasized the importance of establishing and sticking to a budget based on estimated annual income, taking into account potential spans of time without earnings:

“One thing I definitely learned...is because of the uncertainty of the work that it’s very important to budget properly, like estimate what you would make per year and...just because one paycheque is really great, that probably means there might not be a paycheque over the next one so really it’s...budgeting properly because...you never know when it’s going to grind to a halt...”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The most extreme situations may be for those who were self-employed in agriculture where income could only be coming in once or twice a year and had to be managed accordingly:

“where the challenges can come with that is the balancing of spreading your income over the year...it’s likely not always the case that you’re going to have income throughout the year on a regular basis, but it could be lumped into one or two areas of time you know when the market accepts your product...”

(P09, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

Elevated costs of living, as observed at specific periods of time, could further complicate and exacerbate this situation:

“You would always try to, you know, save your resources or be able to manage your finances if...something unfortunate would happen that it would be able to carry you over for another year, but that isn’t always true because of the cost of everything. It’s sometimes very challenging to be able to do that.”

(P07, female, family farm category, >30 years’ experience)

As suggested by the following account, these circumstances could also lead to considerable financial challenges for those who may be inclined to spend their earnings all at once when the

income flows in. Drawing from what he observed from experiences working in the energy industry, one worker commented:

“[Workers] might make *serious* cash inside of six months. Most people don’t make that in a year. They might not work again for 8 more months, but the payments are still there right. So it’s always the uncertainty. So if you’re not good at saving, this is not the place for you. Like to run a budget, you never know. So temptation to spend it while you have it, because I’ll always make more money, but it’s so hard for that.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

These challenges appeared to be widespread, as was apparent in the following account shared by another participant:

“I’ve seen a fair bit of it now...and it is a huge problem. People just seeing their paycheques and thinking this is how much things I can buy but not realizing you might have to stretch that out for 12 months.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This participant went on to explain how serious it could be when the downturns caught up with workers and families in these situations:

“I don’t think a lot of people make it work very well, but in the industry itself, you see a lot of when the downturns come, people haven’t properly saved money and stuff so they’re in a pretty rough financial position because they haven’t adapted to the unpredictability of the industry.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Underlying these challenges could in large part be pressures and inclinations to spend and to make large purchases:

“Like you get this huge paycheque right and you don’t need to obviously but they drive you know a big truck and they go eating out at restaurants all the time...”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another specific example of day-to-day expenditures was being part of a crew and often carpooling, workers may stop at a gas station before work and spend heavily on items such as snacks and energy drinks. Whether because of convenience or part of peer pressure, these stops often became part of a daily work routine:

“...like you get up at 5 in the morning to get ready to go to your shift and yeah you stop at the gas station and spend your \$30 and like when that becomes a daily habit right, like you’re spending more money than the average person would. And then when you have a large paycheque, you think that’s kind of like an okay habit to have right until all of a sudden you don’t work for a couple months, right? Like it adds up really quick and then that money dwindles much quicker with that kind of habit.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Participants spoke about the importance of establishing a plan to manage spending and to save for the future or for retirement, with challenging lifestyle consequences for those who don’t or were unable to do so.

“I’ve found that a lot of young people especially, you know, they go from making maybe minimum wage to making huge money in the oilfield but then the problem is that they start spending it all and they’re spending huge money. So without saving anything for when it does go down or for a rainy day so to speak...that kind of creates a lot of trouble too because all of a sudden things do slow down and then they’ve got all these expensive payments to make and this expectation of this big fancy lifestyle too and sometimes like they have a hard time going back to how it was before.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Across participant accounts, the burden of managing ongoing expenses appeared to be a common challenge in the event of job or income loss. As this participant went on to explain:

“...whether you’re single or you have a family or whatever, if there is a big slowdown in your work and ultimately in your paycheque, like resulting in a smaller paycheque, that’s okay, you know, you can handle that. But here’s the thing--your expenses don’t go away. They don’t just magically disappear because you don’t have any work. And so that’s what makes it difficult is because they’re still there and all the other demands, from family and life and stuff like is still there as well. And so it’s obviously very stressful in those times and hard on people and their family.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another participant pointed out how unexpected expenses could further complicate workers’ and families’ financial situations:

“...and of course in life, there are things that pop up, right, like you might need that money for a rainy day kind of thing and it might not be there.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In these circumstances and through the ups and downs, meeting existing (large-scale) financial obligations can be most especially challenging in slow times and appeared to be quite prevalent:

“...there’s times where like they make this lump sum of money and then they commit to you know say like a mortgage or buying like a new vehicle or something like that and then they have this payment that sometimes can be difficult to fulfill once the work has stopped. So I’ve heard that quite a bit...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

For most, the largest expense (and therefore most significant concern) accompanying potential loss of income or employment was indeed housing. In small geographies likely to experience massive employment losses with the closure of local industry and where it was expected to be difficult to sell a home, other contingency plans were starting to develop.

“I would say houses are probably people’s main stressor....there’s been a lot of... people wanting to liquidate their house. I know good friends of ours they bought a nice house... and they said, “Well we’ll just move the house, like we’ll just take the top, leave the basement, but we’ll just move it to wherever we want” if they lose their job...[I]n their mind, they were comforted by the fact that we’re investing in this house, we’re paying lots for this mortgage but we can move the house.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience)

### **3.1.5 The Role of Supplementary Income Sources**

Supplementary income—in the form of reliance on partners’ income, turning to EI as needed, accepting side jobs, or even taking on alternative full-time work—afforded some families in this study additional financial flexibility to weather challenging situations.

For several participants, supplementary income sources were looked upon as a safety net that afforded families financial flexibility through difficult times. As an example, two workers in the energy sector had made arrangements for back-up jobs they could have ready in the event of a downturn.

Worker participants also described exploration of entrepreneurship opportunities or pursuing side-jobs in areas that bore a strong relation to the industry in which they worked. Some examples that were mentioned in the agriculture industry specifically included assembly, welding, fabrication,



or invention of new ideas for the industry. These self-made opportunities were portrayed as being more favorable than working for someone else.

In other cases, participants described taking on full-time jobs *in addition to* their current roles. This could certainly add to the overall workload and was a further draw on a worker's time, but it also seemed to provide an additional measure of financial security. As was noted:

“...and then I'm out working bailing half the night and working a full time job in town. Just the way it is though right...I just I always carried on and I guess I had the job on the side so you know I didn't have to worry about 'Okay, you know we're not going to be able to pay this' or whatever you know. But then I also put in the time to do it, right.”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience)

Such comments may even position farming in particular as a chosen way of life, and to the extent that taking on employment in another resource industry helped to maintain involvement in agriculture and the family farm enterprise, as indicated by one participant:

“My father-in-law... his whole life pretty much he was farming *and* working at the mine so when my husband took over the small family farm, he also found he needed the cashflow of working at the mine as well. And he worked full-time...”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

Another participant likewise described using earnings from a role in the energy industry to fund and establish his farming enterprise.

For others without supplementary income sources, more difficult discussions and decisions would need to eventually take place, for example:

“...we have the farming income as well and lots of other men that work at the mine also have cattle or farm. But especially for those with young families that have full-time jobs, I remember talking with a few of the families, and from my conversations they would say, 'Well I'll just work there as long as I can and then I'll figure it out.' But I do know of a few families where the husband was employed full-time at the mine...they have switched to working full-time [somewhere else, outside of community]...[T]wo men that I know were worried about the uncertainty and they moved...”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

Taking steps to find more secure work, making alternate arrangements, or having back up employment lined up seemed to be common for worker participants, particularly among those in

forestry, mining, and energy industries. These steps were made seemingly to avoid taking up employment insurance, since, by contrast, turning to and relying on employment insurance appeared to raise a number of concerns among participants. For instance, a worker stated:

“Just, yeah, it takes some figuring out, it does...Otherwise you’re going to be a seasonal worker and go from job to job and on unemployment to work, back to unemployment again. That’s a lifestyle that’s just not that healthy in my opinion.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

This participant went on to explain how, in particular, a partner would have to be supportive of workers being home in the off-season. He further explained how relying on unemployment insurance would also mean individuals would not have the ability to afford “big fancy houses” and “toys” such as pickups, skidoos, all-terrain vehicles, and boats. It was also thought to be a challenge managing on EI with rising costs of living.

To be sure, the basic EI benefit rate is 55 per cent of a worker’s average insurable weekly earnings, up to a maximum of \$60,300; workers therefore receive a maximum benefit of \$638 per week (Government of Canada, 2022c). As a short-term measure, participants raised questions about what would happen when employment insurance inevitably ran out as well.

In a particularly dire situation and facing a prolonged downturn, a worker in the energy industry considered applying for EI, but required coaxing from a friend to do so, favoring instead to use his savings:

“...one time years ago, it kind of looked like we’d have such a slowdown that I might have had like...3 or 4 or 5 or maybe 6 months where it was really really slow. And so a friend convinced me that I should apply for employment insurance...I’ve never done it before, I’ve never taken EI. Even sometimes during slow times, I never did. I just kind of used my savings.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another participant similarly noted how he had not relied on any form of government support program:

“Right now...like we’re...self-supportive and...we’ve not had to rely on any kind of government programs...I guess there are some like now with the pandemic, there’s some business loans available and a few things that are out there. But like I say, we haven’t had to kind of research or go down that avenue.”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience)

In addition to predispositions of avoiding accessing government programs, there may be tangible barriers to doing so. For example, some workers may be so short-term that they are deemed to be ineligible by virtue of not having met the minimum EI contribution period, and therefore sought out other employment opportunities:

“...that used to be 16 weeks when I first started out and when I was [in position], we were going to get 12 or 13 weeks, so that was tough. You’re looking at the short-term of it, that was real tough. You’d have to go do something else...”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

This was perhaps also necessary, given that in some cases, workers may be seasonal for 10-15 years before obtaining full-time work.

Being on unemployment insurance could also cause additional challenges financially, both within and outside the home:

“So yeah, it’s tough. The bank wouldn’t give you a loan maybe because you don’t have full-time, they don’t like to see unemployment insurance on there. It’s a lifestyle. If your wife or partner is working, that’s fine but then when the kids start coming along, it’s real tough to be unemployed for part of the year, greater than half the year and collecting employment insurance--if you get your 16 weeks...Yeah, seasonal work is not that great, in that respect.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

Indeed, the level of benefits in some cases was so low that industry participants were induced to seek out other opportunities:

“...on EI...it was kind of like some people would be okay with that amount and I think others just weren’t. Because when you’re making however much money and then you go down to what you get on EI, it’s quite a drop so I think that impacted people wanting to find something different too.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

A final barrier to accessing EI benefits among participants was a challenging application process and the program’s seeming lack of understanding around the nature of resource work. After initially being hesitant to apply, one participant finally did, and had a negative experience doing so:

“But this one time I did [apply] just because I was curious and to make a long story short, I had a heck of a time trying to deal with the CRA with what I needed to do to get set up for EI...I remember one particular phone call with them where I was arguing with them about the nature of how [occupation] worked because the questions that they were asking me, they

were trying to get me to answer yes or no questions to very structured 9-5 type of thinking...they would ask me to give them like estimates of time and money and stuff earned and worked and I said, 'Well, it all depends.' I mean with [occupation], if there is work to do, then some days the days are longer and there's more work to do than others. And so over the course of day-to-day...and week to month to month, not only it makes it uncertain for the amount of time that you're working but also the amount that you'll be making or not making. And so this one woman that I was talking to...it just seemed like she was unable to...understand that the nature of [occupation] is a lot different than 9-5 office work...."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

The negative experience discouraged this worker from proceeding with the application.

"...and in the end result, I was like, 'Okay, fine. I'm not going to even continue with the application.' And so I just didn't continue and I didn't bother trying to get EI at the time either, I just used my savings. I mean I could have kept pushing to continue and stuff like that, but it was a really really *unpleasant* experience, and so I just said, 'Nope, I'll just do something else' and so I just used my savings for however long the time was that it was slow."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This participant knew of several others who had faced similar experiences with the application process.

For those who did collect EI, it was very short-term and typically only for a couple of months. During slow times, workers may also just take the time to enjoy a welcome break. As one worker explained:

"...break-up normally is when everything thaws and it's too wet to do anything anyways. So normally at that time, a lot of people I work with collect EI anyway, which is kind of a nice break and you can catch up on other things you've been missing out on."

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

For female partners in these circumstances, there were also accounts of how they would likely assume a more pronounced role in the family's financial situation. As the account below alludes to, however, this appeared to be a speculative exercise in the event of a particularly dire situation, and in which case, the household may also turn to EI:

"I could foresee you know if a partner, like for example, I have fulltime work, so if something happens and finances are in the dumps with the other partner, that for example, I would probably have to step up right to make those payments because I have steady work or whatever. But I know [partner], he'll pick up [side work], so he's pretty lucky in that sense,

or there's other times too like if for example if it's not breakup and there's just no work, [partner] does get asked to fill in on different rigs. But I would assume that yeah sometimes it would probably fall on the other partner or having to apply for maybe EI or something like that.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Another family member spoke about how her off-farm income provided some insulation against the risk of a downturn. Nevertheless, the family remained reliant on the farm income or her partner's earnings as a comparatively large proportion of overall household earnings.

“...for my family, I have an off the farm income...So we have a little bit more flexibility that way I guess, but it's still--it's uncertainty and he earns more than I do. So I guess that you know there's always that to consider too, so. And he traditionally has earned more than I have in the past, and that's just you know how it's been. So we rely heavily on the farm income...for our livelihood.”

(P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years' experience)

These accounts suggest the possible presence of a strong prevailing male primary wage earner arrangement in these sectors, whereby as the participant below indicates, a focus on employment opportunities for spouses may still require a shift in mindset:

“...[it's] a very significant mind shift for our portion of the province because typically folks who work in that sector, it's never been a concern, right. Finances have never been a concern. The husband goes to work and makes so much money that the wife never ever has to worry about it ...”

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years' experience)

### **3.1.6 Personal and Family Impacts**

A perceptible impact of the financial uncertainties workers and families faced was described as follows, and how ultimately,“...it's a fearful thing to be in a position that the finances aren't coming in the way that you know you had foreseen or projected.” This can be especially so when engaging with external actors such as bankers, accountants and lending agencies that also happen to be asking for additional information surrounding the family's current and anticipated financial situation. As this participant went on to explain:

“Well you can put anything down as a yearly projection. And I know with [us], when they're saying things like, ‘Well what do you think your yield is going to be this year?’ Well that is pretty difficult...”

(P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience)

Dependence on weather added a great deal of uncertainty. In the agriculture industry over the past number of years, the financial implications of drought and lack of rain led a participant to note:

"I think [producers] are having a hard time like with feed for animals and livestock or even being able to pay for their bills."

(P07, female, family farm category, >30 years' experience)

Under circumstances of volatility and uncertainty, and especially for those who were contract employees, it seemed difficult to focus on higher-order goals, including advancement ambitions. These were oftentimes dampened and replaced with mere survival goals as securing work (and therefore income flow) became the primary focus. As one participant with experience in both agriculture and energy remarked:

"...for the most part...there's not advancement. There's getting a paycheque every two weeks. That's what the goal is."

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years' experience)

In busy times when work was available, the draw of high earnings also attracted many individuals to work in resource sectors. This could have the effect of increasing competition and reducing opportunities for those already working in the industry. The following describes the experience of a worker in the energy industry specifically:

"When it got to be really really booming, it got very very competitive as well. So competitive as in like a lot of people showed up to do the work and so it was good for the companies that needed people, but there was lots of us around and so even though we had gone out there to do the work and you know a lot of the times there was lots of pay and good pay, there was lots of other people that were doing the same thing and so it was hard to get work at times too."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

At the family level, financial uncertainty could have wide-reaching effects. Unpredictability, whether in terms of seasonal, economic, competitive, or market conditions, had compounding, trickle-down effects for contract workers who relied on a call from their employers to come into work. The experience of waiting for such a call and the implications it had for household dynamics, finances, and wellbeing could be substantial:

"... everything gets tense right when the phone doesn't ring. You know you're at home, you've already cleaned the kitchen eight times that day and you know the wife will come

home and she already knows that there's nothing going on because the house is spotless and you're on edge right. So it's--that's where the uncertainty comes from and throws in the anxiety and you know the financial, and realistically, there's nothing more important than the financial aspect when it comes to this stuff because it's tied to everything else right.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years' experience)

As the quote above suggests, financial impacts could have a profound impact on family life. While seasonal impacts could be anticipated, economic conditions were more difficult to predict. An uncertain economic environment could lead to psychological and family impacts, even for those who do not directly experience income or employment losses. This was expressed most clearly in the following account:

“...you see that time and again, like the stress that it puts on people in the these up and down cycles. In the down cycle, you know, they're obviously worried about their job, and then if they aren't the one getting fired, they're still kind of worried about employment...and then those stress levels bleed into their personal lives...you know marriages ending or at least being difficult in a lot of ways.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years' experience)

Financial concerns can indeed pose as a significant stressor resulting in conflict within relationships and could give rise to marriage and family destabilization (Shepard et al., 2020). A possible pathway leading from financial strain to relationship dissatisfaction begins with the experience of emotional distress at the individual-level. Internal distress translates into harsh interactions with partners as expressions of support and warmth are overshadowed by irritability, criticism, and arguing (Falconier and Epstein, 2011). Financial strain can also lead to compounding negative life events resulting in increased frustration and more problematic family interactions (Vinokur et al., 1996; Lietz, 2013). The next section will discuss additional family-level impacts of work in resource sectors.

### **3.2 Temporal Trade-offs and Sacrifices**

Maintaining employment in resources sectors results in oftentimes competing tensions at the intersection of work, life, and family spheres that is typically well in excess of what is seen for those in other occupations. In addition to confronting financial precarity and scarcity in downturns or through off-seasons, participants provided insight into the challenges of managing demanding work

obligations during peak operating periods. Work obligations at these times invariably included long hours spent at work activities.

As resource reserves are typically located in remote regions, commuting is an inherent part of workers' and families' experiences. This was common across industries, even if commuting was simply out to the fields as in the case of farmers and agriculture workers. However, as farms increased in size and scale, these commutes became greater.

Depending on the situation, workers' schedules took them away from their homes and families for up to 70 days in a row. As one worker explained:

“[B]ecause of the nature of the work...you could be gone mornings, evenings, through the night. It was all just whatever was necessary to get the work done.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This worker went on to describe how, as noted in the previous section, as much as weather impacted workers' and families' finances, it could also impact their time available for family and leisure activities:

“...with the weather, that kind of factored in a lot of the times too because if you had let's say 8 hours of work to do in a day, but it was raining all day, well you still have that 8 hours of work to do but you just have to kind of plan around when the rain stops. So weather was a big issue. And so on those days, like if it was dry enough to go out and do work, well then, you might have went through the night or something like that or odd things like that, and then that's what kept you away from your family.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

### **3.2.1 Time-Based Sacrifices for the Job: Implications for Personal Time & Well-Being**

Consistent with the accounts above, participants described the extent to which, when work was available and needing to get done, it became the central event in one's life. These situations often translated into workers having to incur significant costs in their personal lives. As one worker expressed:

“There really wasn't much time for anything else. It was the 12 hours of work and then usually like an hour before and after with the travel, so like 14 hours. So it was essentially just sleep and maybe an hour more of another thing and then back to work.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)



Work-related obligations could have profound impacts on workers, their families, and the ability to maintain other important commitments in their lives. Providing further insight into these experiences, a family member explained how it was difficult for workers to even schedule (and keep) day-to-day maintenance and health-related appointments, particularly when they could be called at a moment's notice and worked through the night:

“I just remember it being difficult to just like if [partner's] vehicle needed an oil change to book that or [he] needed a dentist appointment, well like forget it, because if you're working like that, you just don't have time to do that sort of stuff even.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Making time for activities outside of work would often mean foregoing hours of sleep, as expressed in the following account:

“I'm the type when I'm done work, I want to do quite a few things so oftentimes I'd go with like 5 hours of sleep a night just because I mean it's probably necessary to get like 8 hours of sleep, but I'd just want to do stuff besides work. So my sleep would [take] a toll, which isn't great.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

In addition to foregoing sleep, time constraints also meant that additional areas of one's health could be neglected in other ways as well:

“So you'll just compromise in other areas of your health...like you don't have time to go to the gym or it's harder to want to cook yourself a healthy meal. It's easier to just throw a frozen pizza in the oven. So I guess it's just easier to be unhealthy.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

In follow-up to the issue raised earlier around heavy spending on food at convenience stores, time constraints could certainly figure into these purchases. They also may not be the most healthy options:

“...just for like staying healthy... sometimes you are forced to eat food that isn't the best nutritionally because if you're on the road and you don't have good food with you, then you have to buy whatever's available.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Work in resources sectors indeed found various ways of encroaching on workers' personal lives. Speaking from years of experience, a partner explained: "there are sacrifices you have to make sometimes" (P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years' experience).

Vacations or trips to other locations appeared to be a common sacrifice workers and their families made when work obligations were high, particularly in peak summer seasons. For example, the spouse of a farm owner/operator described the race to complete harvest before the end of the season:

"...it's sometimes hard when you want to go to the lake in the summer and you can't because...you're you know starting to swath and combine. Some of those beautiful days where you might want to just jump in the car and go somewhere you can't, because you have to you know you have to work...[B]ut...you're running a race against the weather and against time.."

(P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years' experience)

For those involved in resource-based industries then, even on the weekends and times when others typically had days off, there was often an imperative to continue working in order to see seasonal tasks through to completion.

Participants also described experiences of missing out on interaction and socialization opportunities with friends and family. In this process, uncertainty and unpredictability were additional considerations factoring into workers' socialization experiences. Making sacrifices as a result of unpredictable schedules could lead individuals to work during unsociable hours, as was explained by a worker in the energy industry:

"You definitely have to sacrifice your social life and other things like that because I worked a lot of night shifts that were [12 hours] and a lot of weekends too and crazy amounts of days both on and off in a row. So there's a sense of unpredictability in sort of your schedule as well as the pay. So I'd say it was very volatile, but like anybody would say when it's busy it can be great in terms of money, but there's definitely flaws and lows...."

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

As a consequence, participants also described experiences of close relationships and friendships dissipating:

“...you’re not around to spend time with your friends so naturally they began to fade away and you don’t have sort of any time to build a relationship with a partner or anything... I’d say all relationships really take a toll if all you’re doing is working.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These thoughts were elaborated upon in the following account, detailing how broader relationships could also be impacted over time:

“...it’s just hard when you can’t see [friends] or you don’t see them very often. They don’t ask you to come hang out, right or whatever. You kind go off the map or go offline I feel. And sometimes [partner] would work [his] holidays and stuff too... I think it goes broader than just a spousal or romantic relationship because it impacts your extended family to an extent. I don’t think that you absolutely need to see your aunt and uncle but I mean most people I think get together with their family at special times, or it affects your ability to go down to people’s birthdays, holidays. Like those little things too I think they matter and they add up over several years if you don’t get the time to see those people.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The following account provides a summarizing, overarching thought on making sacrifices:

“Yeah I think it’s sort of an idea of sacrificing pretty much everything else for a nice paycheque and what that will do for your family. And so everything takes a backseat compared to the paycheque itself.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Although sacrifices made for a paycheque were intended to support families’ overall wellbeing as indicated in the account immediately above, this process could also result in significant challenges for workers’ personal and family lives. While intimated within this section, family impacts will be explored further in the next subsection. As will be discussed, challenges maintaining relationships could reach beyond friendships and affected maintenance and possibly formation of close family ties as well.

### **3.2.2 Trade-offs and Consequences for Family Life**

As an extension to the process of making sacrifices described in the section above, a worker with long-distance commuting experience in the agriculture and energy industries perceived participation in work away from home as a “trade-off between the money and the time.” He went on to explain how “[a]nything that’s commuting, for the most part, pays better than staying at your home base right.

And that's why we do it." As part of this trade-off, however, for those already in established family units, workers invariably missed or were absent for significant family moments and life events.

As this participant further explained:

"So when you set off on this lifestyle, you know you're going to miss birthdays, you know you're going to miss anniversaries, like that's--it's going to happen. That's part of it. You miss Christmas, you miss first steps, first teeth, first--all the firsts. Sometimes you get lucky and you know get to see them, but most of the time it's pictures over the phone or whatever you have right."

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years' experience)

Apart from school events, holidays, and larger milestones such as birthdays, not being together for day-to-day conversations and activities could also impact on families, especially children.

As another participant described:

"...let's say just missing out on like gathering as a family for supper each evening...[I]f it's a chronic thing where it's like...your dad's not home every day for supper, and that goes on for every day and then every week and then every month kind of thing, routinely, then like for kids I know, like they don't understand, they just kind of learn to accept it. 'Oh Dad's not going to be around at supper, because he never is.' And if the family's busy and people are busy with school and homework and stuff like that, sometimes small times like that are the only times to maybe talk about things with your family. And then if you miss out, I mean maybe the things don't get talked about and then it just seems to cause trouble."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This participant went on to illustrate:

"Yeah, it creates a lot of stress and tension because you know people don't like to miss out on things to begin with and then if work gets in the way and you don't really have a choice, it just creates a lot of extra tension and stress and friction in the family."

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

In keeping with the notion of a "trade-off" noted above, in this way and despite these challenges, remuneration level then appeared to present as a compensating factor for the sacrifices made by workers and their families. As another participant likewise went on to describe of his family member:

“But I mean, [he] is young and wants to make money and wants to make lots of it fast and he’s been out there [in Saskatchewan] for a little while now, and you know I commend his effort, but it certainly is challenging.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Further in this regard, this participant explained how the distance between his sibling and other family members meant that they had similarly missed out on being part of substantial portions of each other’s lives. Speaking of his brother’s absence, this participant went on to describe, “[My sister’s] engaged now you know. He hasn’t been around for any of that, right.”

An earlier participant succinctly commented in this vein, “...it’s hard on family...because oftentimes, you’re never around” [P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience].

Managing trade-off situations can indeed have significant implications and impacts for spouses and families as well. In this respect, a husband and father pointed to the propensity for issues to arise within the household on the day he was set to leave again for work:

“And whenever you’re leaving, that’s when something goes wrong in the house or with the family. So on your [departure] day, like that’s the rule, something has to go wrong and you’ve got really no time to deal with it, and that’s the way it is.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

These realities mean then that family members remaining behind would by default need to find ways to navigate emerging household challenges on their own. Partners themselves described the weight of managing family and household obligations and activities independently. These responsibilities could be most pronounced in the presence of young children. As one family member explained:

“...when you have families like if you have any little ones at home or anything like that, you’re doing it alone....So like I think that there’s a lot that falls on the shoulders of the family and the work that goes on behind the scenes that people don’t realize. Like I think it’s really hard for the worker, but I think it’s also hard you know for the family unit.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The following account describes the impact on children within a family unit when a father is away for work and a spouse is left to manage on her own:

“...like I mean, it’s just hard when your family member is away. It’s not the same, especially with it being dad gone because he’s like kind of like the main guy in the house, you know. I have sons and they like to do what their father’s doing. And then he’s gone, it’s like “Oh, it’s just mom here.” [laughs]. So I think that affects their development too when dad’s not around.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

An eventual ability to adapt seemed to be a prevailing concept among worker and family members’ accounts:

“But I think for the most part, families kind of adapt for the scheduling problems where their significant other is not going to be there very often. I think most families kind of come to terms with that eventually.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This was also corroborated by a family member introduced above, when in considering whether time away impacts family, she commented, “A little bit, but we’re pretty good at adapting” [P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience].

Taking the concept of adaptation a step further, the partner of a worker in the energy industry expressed how the support of the family unit was in fact integral to *sustaining* a loved one’s employment in a resource industry. She described a typical work day in her household from her standpoint in situations where long hours consumed her partner’s daytime and evening schedules:

“From my perspective, you’re alone a lot. My life I would say basically revolves around keeping his life going... Like I’m doing the grocery shopping, I’m making the meals, I’m making the lunches, I’m doing all the running around because he can’t right. Like he leaves before many things open and comes home usually when things are closed. So if he needs anything, I’m doing that...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This participant stated that family support is needed for a worker to be successful in their position, conveying “the importance of maybe having someone at home that supports [workers] to be able to do these things.”

Another participant described a similar experience with the following account:

“I remember he would work 6 pm to 6 am and then during the daytime, he’d want to sleep, so I even just remember doing grocery shopping for him because he couldn’t even go grocery shopping...Like I kind of helped with that, because otherwise [he’d] have to somehow make time or compromise sleep because [he’d] need to go do those errands during the day.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

With workers’ demanding schedules, partners take responsibility for day-to-day household tasks. When a worker returns home from work, the late hour and his exhaustion from a long day often preclude opportunities for in-depth discussion or bonding. Even though some workers may return home every day through drive-in, drive-out work arrangements, when they work a string of consecutive weeks, there can be a pronounced sense of emotional separation. A partner identified above explained how it feels “like living in the same house, but living different lives.”

“So there’s not very much time to connect, like if you can imagine, you’re exhausted when you put in a day like that. So when you get home, the last thing you want to do kind of is have big talks or do that much around the house...That can be challenging for me because I like to connect and spend time together... like even if it’s once a week but that can be really hard when he’s doing long stretches...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

With partners oftentimes falling asleep at the supper table after protracted shifts of physically demanding work and multiple-hour round-trip commutes each day, there would be very few opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations or activities as a couple.

Another female partner likewise described of her experience:

“It was just kind of hard because you knew you couldn’t see your partner like all the time and if you did, it would be for little bits because then they would want to go to bed so they could get up and pull off the next 12 hour shift.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This account was corroborated by the following described experience told from a worker’s perspective, with possible implications for close relationships:

“I’d say you definitely can’t spend as much time in your relationships with your significant other...as much as you’d like because it’s a lot of essentially just working and getting ready for the next day, so your relationships kind of take a hit just not being able to put time into them.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

A similar experience was shared by a worker in the agriculture industry. Holding at times two jobs, he explained how during peak seasons:

“...it wasn’t even comparable the time spent farming compared to...at home. Home was--you went there to sleep, when you went home.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

With such demanding jobs, day-to-day impacts on the family unit could reach even beyond the nuclear family into the extended family as well. This was most especially the case for assistance with childcare. As one half of a busy couple, one worker explained:

“So we have family support sort of to have the careers we have and be as busy and as challenged as we are. At the end of the day, if we didn’t have family support, we couldn’t do those things...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Support with childcare was a crucial consideration, since, as an earlier participant pointed out in reference to workers’ demanding work schedules, “You can’t keep a kid in childcare from 4 am to 8 pm right” [P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience].

When a day off finally arrived, family members noted how workers may just take those days to “recoup” after being “so physically drained” and “sleep deprived.” These realities were clearly demonstrated within the following account, which also highlights the additional pressures families may experience when engaging with such challenging work schedules as a result of a financial impetus:

“...the long hours and then the long stretches, like you do [consecutive days] of 14-16 hours...and so by the end of it, like he didn’t know whether he was coming or going, like he was just sleep-deprived. So yeah I think if there’s no balance then or if you’re doing a lot of overtime because you have bills to pay, things like that, like I think that can be a challenge.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

What is more, fatigue could also impact quality of exchanges between couples; as one family member noted of her partner’s long work days:

“And just the emotions that run with it too right because you get so exhausted and your patience is low then and all that kind of stuff...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)



For couples then, even when at home and physically present and available to help out with family or regular household activities, workers may not have the energy or capacity to assist their partners in the completion of these tasks.

### **3.2.3 Communication Challenges and Attempts to Make Up for Lost Time Together**

From day-to-day, difficulties with available communication technologies while away toiling for long hours at remote worksites could further complicate efforts to maintain a sense of connectedness with loved ones at home. As described by participants, uncertainty of communication created additional challenges for workers and their families separated by great distances and long working hours.

“...like there’s no wifi, there’s no so, you know, talking. Facetime is a complete luxury. You’re happy if you can get cell service just to communicate with the family back home or you know phone dad every once in a while just to let him know you’re alive ...”  
(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

For other workers, depending on location, telephone may be the only means by which to connect with family back at home, if any is available at all:

“...the only connection you have is by phone and it’s after the shift is over that day...you can only phone out if you have access. If you’re stuck in the bush, you sometimes don’t have access. It comes with the job and you pretty much know this before you accept a position like that.”  
(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

Even when communication services and infrastructure were available, the set-up of the worksite in some cases also precluded a sense of connectedness. As a family member explained:

“Like the thing is for example if I even need to contact [partner] while he’s at work, it’s very challenging because you can’t hear. Like it’s so *loud* out there too right, so if they do need to do things or call people or whatever...you can’t almost. It’s almost like going for hours with no service.”  
(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Resources work could also present significant challenges for those attempting to form a new relationship with someone involved in this kind of work. A partner explained:

“...because I met him and...some days he’d work for [multiple weeks] in a row, so [multiple weeks of] 12-hour days. And then when he’s home, he wants to sleep. So it kind of adds, like in a new relationship when you want to spend a lot of time with somebody, it’s not necessarily the best job to get to spend all your time with someone... So that was kind of tough just me being in a new relationship.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

As indicated above, shift work and long stretches of work during peak seasons meant there could be protracted periods of time when families were physically and emotionally separated. When opportunities were finally available to connect on days off, these were capitalized upon in efforts to make up for lost time to the greatest extent possible. This same participant went on to explain:

“So we just I mean like when he was off, like if he had a week kind of where there was no work, I know we would literally spend probably every single waking minute together.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Similar experiences of attempting to make up for lost time were recounted by other family members:

“You know, they kind of do rotations...So communication is difficult and, you know, it makes it certainly challenging for him and challenging for our relationship right. There’s time where I need to you know catch up with him. When he gets off, we spend hours and hours and hours catching up, right.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In this particular case a multi-day drive separated this worker from his family, and as such, they relied heavily on communication channels such as Skype. Although helpful to maintain a semblance of connection, these technologically mediated circumstances weren’t ideal and had a strong impact on the family relationship.

“We’re all close, but you know, we try to have Zoom connections and stuff, but it’s not the same, looking at others across the screen right. Because you know there’s no physical presence of him, right, and it’s difficult, right.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

### **3.2.4 Shift Work, Scheduling Challenges, and Family Relationship Strains**

Irregular shifts and at times unpredictable schedules were reported by several study participants, with attendant impacts on workers and the households to which they belonged. The following participant

account, for example, discussed experiences with graveyard or shifts that otherwise ran through all or part of the night:

“...it would be like a 12 hour overnight, alternating with days kind of thing...but for the night shift that my husband is on, it only ever goes to [early hours] in the morning. And so he can still get home and have at least a little chunk of sleep before sunrise. But it was hard when he would come home and it was sunrise kind of thing.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

Another participant also described the impact of waking in the night due to her partner's work schedule:

“I can just imagine like if you had little kids or if I was working like a day job...like if I was up at 2 in the morning...I just think that there's probably a lot of people that if that happened to them and they had kids, it would just kind of disrupt everybody's routine, so to speak...But yeah, it certainly affected me, right. Because when he's up, I want to be up. So I think everyone's routine kind of adjusts when that sort of thing happens.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Schedules in some cases were described as “scatterbrained,” alternating between afternoons and days on and off that complicated family life. Although workers may like to “mix things up,” and manage such schedules as “just an adjustment,” for families, it was expressed that having predictable days on and off was preferable:

“...because you get to count on it and now when you have time off and this it's like you have to go and consult the calendar and make sure everything is okay.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years' experience)

At times, schedules could also be altered and perhaps without notice, affecting workers' routines and sleep patterns.

“I remember that it happened one time where I was night shifts for like a month straight and then I had a day that it switched to day shift and I actually couldn't fall asleep for close to 48 hours, just because it was so out of my routine.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

A partner's account depicts how challenging rapid changes in scheduling could be:

“...a complete swap of the 12 hour [shift]. And I just remember that being like, ‘Oh my gosh,’ like who is able to do that without kind of a little lapse in start to adjust your sleep schedule? And I just think that if you work nights and that’s your thing or you work days and that’s your thing, you can get accustomed to that you know time change. But when it was switched like, yeah, [partner] didn’t even have 24 hours’ notice I don’t think either. So it’s just like when there’s that, you’re trying to sleep in the middle of the night when you’re usually awake, that can be pretty tricky I think too.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Unpredictability of schedules could strongly interfere with life and family plans outside of work as well, even when days off may be planned in advance, as identified below:

“Well I think that the thing is [partner] very much plans his life around his time off...like on his time off that’s when he gets to see [his child]. On his time off that’s when he gets to go to the lake or you know do normal things that people do on weekends that he doesn’t get to do. So I know if certain things fall through, it really does change a lot of his life plans.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

When on-call 24 hours a day, work scheduling could be even more unpredictable and could add an additional layer of complexity in managing already demanding positions:

“It’s relentless...like, I’m 24 hours on call, 365 days a year... So it’s 24 hours a day my cellphone can ring...you’ve got to be married to your cell phone, so to speak. And kind of never get a time off when it comes to that....”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

The situation could be so extreme that some families found it impossible to make day-to-day plans at all, as detailed by another participant:

“Yeah, and there’s certainly uncertainty well with my job at least. Some of them have schedules, but you can’t really make much plans or something like that because you would always be like you could get called at a moment’s notice to work tomorrow and stuff like that. So there wasn’t much planning and like basically you couldn’t make any plans.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Unpredictable schedules could make it particularly difficult to plan and find dedicated time to bond with a partner:

“I do remember that it was always tough, like we’d just kind of have to wing it and go on spontaneous dates I guess or hang out and sometimes you’d just be disappointed because all of a sudden he has to work soon...”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Given the unpredictability of scheduling, and the impetus to work for as long as there was work available, the following account details how these realities impact families over time, and especially for those who wanted to plan ahead:

“...because it is so unpredictable depending on the amount of work and everything...let’s say you had a wife and kids and a family and you said, ‘Okay well I’m going to be busy for two weeks straight that we’re not going to be able to make any plans or do anything as a family. But on such and such day, we’ll do this or we’ll get this done, or I’ll be available to go here with you or go on a vacation or whatever, and so you go ahead and book that,’ and then have to cancel. And then the next month or the next time, it’s the same thing because it’s unpredictable, you have to cancel....[T]hat creates a lot of extra stress and then hard feelings and stuff like that and then just long-term effects of missing out on important things and you know not having a family life and not being able to make happy memories and all that sort of thing because work gets in the way....it is still much, much harder and different than like a 9-5 career.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

If these patterns continued in the long-term, in some cases, the relationship consequences could be severe for families:

“And at the end of the day, you know, with the nature of the work...a lot of married people and families and stuff like that, if that went on for months on end and years on end, it led to a lot of breakups and divorces. Because you know spouses, they can put off doing things and making plans, and even just vacations and stuff like that, they can put it off for a little while. But people tend to not want to wait around forever for things and some people don’t. And then they break up or get divorced or whatever.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

For couples especially then, *as much as financial issues could present as a strain on relationships as indicated earlier, physical absences and scheduling challenges similarly placed what could ultimately turn out to be unbearable strain on family relationships.* P04 explained how of the eight-person crew with which he began working, he is the only one still “married to the same woman.” Recalling from his stays in motels while working on the road:

“But it is trying...I don’t know how many divorces I’ve heard through the walls or you know what I mean, just all out scraps or stuff going on with the kids. *It is not* for everyone by any stretch of the imagination.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

As someone who has been able to maintain this lifestyle, P04 explained how “it has to be worth it to the family...” As well, ensuring partners’ mutual understanding and organization around a common purpose seemed to be important. It was suggested that, “...it is best to have a common goal with your spouse or your partner or whatever. And it’s still tough but you both have to realize this needs to be done at the time. That’s just life as we know it right now” [P04].

Another participant described how he coped with matters relating to being away from family while also being cognizant of the work and responsibilities involved in safety-sensitive industries. Again in keeping with a philosophy of balancing a ‘trade-off’ between time and money established earlier in this chapter, he stated:

“We looked at it this way. We were gone to do a job, a job we loved to do and we were paid very well for our services and everybody knew that...we were going to come home with a lot of money. So family always comes first, but when you’re out [at work], you try to keep the family issues at the way bottom of your mind because you’ve got to focus--hard. You have to be on top of the situation... [Y]ou’ve got to be focused. You can’t be thinking about how you miss everybody back home because one little issue and you might not come back home at all—alive. So it’s one of those situations you know, you can’t let your guard down very much or very often because it could prove to be fatal.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

### **3.2.5 Reflections on Career Trade-offs and Sacrifices**

As time went by and participants reflected on their careers in natural resources employment, some shared thoughts on their experiences and the impact of past decisions:

“It’s not easy, no. When you get older, you ask yourself, ‘Is it more important to make all this money, or is it more important to have less stress and less stuff in your life?’ You know spend more time with the family than at work and maybe not make as much money but have a better life. That’s the question. Some of us don’t figure that out until a couple of divorces you know...”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

This view was supported by another participant with accumulated work experience:

“And with the pipeline, we’re travelling across three provinces so you’re living out of a suitcase, and in a motel and a restaurant all the time. It’s okay when you’re young but I guess as you get older and a family and stuff there, you’re away from home all the time...with the farm, I’m home every night and I guess [it’s] kind of one of the benefits..”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience)

Some participants discussed the need for an “industry standard” providing for a designated number of days off, given the after-effects of what they had observed:

“I just feel like someone should be allowed to have employment, make good money, but also have a day off...because I think there were sometimes...like [my partner] was *exhausted*. [He] wasn’t even [himself] for a little while...So I wish there was just some kind of standard they had to follow, it wouldn’t just be like, ‘Hey, you’re working tomorrow for 14 hours and for the foreseeable future’ because I don’t think any human should have ...to work for such lengthy periods of the day for lengthy periods of time. Like sometimes it would be months, right, and I just think that people need time off even if there is still work to do. I just think that’s super taxing on not just people’s physical health like if you’re getting 5 hours of sleep for months on end, not eating the best, yeah, being isolated from the people that you love, or just not being able to fulfill those meaningful relationships in your life.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In further support of an industry standard, a worker stated:

“...because there was lots of people I worked with that sure they were making good money but everything else was out of balance. Like there’s people that lost all their friends pretty much or were in their like middle-aged years and they didn’t have a meaningful relationship, stuff like that. So you sacrifice everything else for work and I feel like there should be more of a balance there.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This participant continued in this vein, going on to comment, “I don’t think anybody can balance it happily, at least what I was doing” [P22].

In Saskatchewan, except when their work involves fighting forest or prairie fires, employees who work at least 20 hours/week must have at least 24 consecutive hours away from work every seven days. Employers can, however, apply for a permit to alter day of rest requirements. Overtime rules are also triggered after 40 hours each week. Employees must consent to work over 44 hours/week, and unless in the case of an emergency, employees cannot be disciplined for refusing to work over this threshold (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021d).

As a concluding thought on sacrificing, with the time constraints associated with demanding and unpredictable schedules, it could be exceedingly difficult finding time to explore other employment opportunities, as explained below. However, the impact of the pandemic was so severe that some workers were compelled to explore other career options:

“Like [partner] is doing something else now and he basically had to be laid off or there had to be absolutely no work before you could start to like get an education or kind of look for other jobs. So even just sacrificing kind of that ability to *try* to do something else.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The participant in this situation explained how she felt the relationship was “better off,” and that she and her partner were “healthier” and “more financially stable.” In particular, her and her partner’s schedules were now better aligned, they were able to live in the same community, and they did not have to worry about maintaining a long distance relationship. In her opinion too, these conditions better enabled their young relationship to grow and strengthen.

Among members of a younger generation, there also appeared to be emerging concern about company reputation in the community, how a particular position would benefit one’s family, and an interest in pursuing their interests, apart from financial motivations. This was apparent in the following account, where after experiencing a particularly challenging downturn during the pandemic, a worker explained:

“I think it’s important for pretty much everyone to find something that actually interests you rather than chasing dollars.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

### **3.3 Work Cultures and Constraints**

Participants explained how overcoming many of the aforementioned difficulties individually and as a family were to some extent fraught by structural challenges deeply embedded within resources industries. In particular, entrenched imperatives and conventions demanded conformity to established rules of engagement, that if not upheld, left individuals with very few options for continuing work in these industries.



Drawing from experiences in the energy industry, one family participant commented how organizations “just make things so cut and dry;” and essentially, “You’re kind of a number and that’s it” [P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience]. A “regimented” and “segregated” feel to the industry was described as not being “healthy,” and this participant further described, in speaking of his loved one, “it’s like he *is* in the Army”[P01]. These parallels were perhaps most apparent in demanding work conditions, routines that emerge within safety sensitive industries, and rosters subjecting workers to long hours and corresponding time away from home, family, and social networks. In reference to the use of camps and barrack-style accommodations described across all resource sectors, this family member explained how it seems like, in reference to the employer, his family member “is like a soldier to you.” [P01]. Another participant similarly described workplaces in the forestry industry employing what would be akin to “military style command” that could have a silencing effect on workers [P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience].

Prevailing work norms and arrangements commanded rigidity and uniformity that could be considered a form of organizational control. Another family member elaborated on this thought through the following reflection:

“If [partner] has a bad day at work, or if something goes wrong, I do know that it falls on his shoulders... The oil and gas industry is very black and white, like it just is what it is. It’s like if you can’t adapt, then you can’t be in it right. I don’t really know if families do deal with it, it’s just like it is what it is... So it’s like if it doesn’t work, then you have to go into a different industry. There’s not a lot of accommodating on their end...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These realities were crystallized through an example of a time when her partner was recovering from an injury, which threatened to relegate this young man to the periphery, or even out of his workplace altogether:

“Like I know for [partner] for example, when he [sustained his injury], it’s like okay now he can’t work, so then he misses out on like [# of days] and he’s in like trying to get... better so he’s doing physio and massage and all of that as fast as he can so he can go back. And it’s just kind of like you’re with it, or you miss the train kind of thing...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Although work with one employer may only be available for a relatively short period of time in a year, participants also spoke about restrictions employers placed on their ability to seek out other employment:

“So you’re working as a seasonal person in one position and then you’ve got to ask [employer] because they kind of own you. You sign a waiver, sort of something that says you can’t say what you do, what happens on the job and you can’t go for another job unless we give you permission. Yeah, they kind of own you.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

The account below demonstrates another example of employers’ control over employees’ time and personal lives. Small businesses are common across the province’s energy industry (e.g. one-person or family operations), and in these cases, there may not be the staff available to accommodate requests for time off:

“And so you can’t just say well you know, ‘I’ve got an important wedding or graduation to go to...and I need this weekend off.’ You only get time off if it works with the schedule and works with the company. Otherwise, there’s not a chance because like if it’s booming and you’re doing all you can just to get your work done every day, that’s just the way it works. You can’t just schedule time off. You only get time off if it works out so that it doesn’t affect the company.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

While workers who followed a rotation could expect to have dedicated time off, those who did not have such schedules struggled to obtain time away:

“...there is lots of jobs...where there is like a rotation, but...it’s basically just you work when there’s work and if you really really need to have something, you can book time off and you *might* get it off. It’s basically just work when there’s work kind of thing.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These realities can put employees in difficult situations of deciding to attend important events at the peril of their employment:

“...like obviously sometimes that makes the employee mad and then they just go and do what they want anyways. But in those circumstances, the first chance that the boss or the owner of the company has to replace you, then they will because they can’t have that...They need their employees doing what they need done. Otherwise...they’ll lose their work and fail as a company too.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another participant described experiences of workers moving into new roles within an organization and receiving very little orientation, effectively becoming a matter of “kind of throw them into the fire and hope that they survive the role and do well...” [P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience]. Thrusting workers into difficult situations may be deliberate tests of workers’ resolves and capacities to handle the work (Barrett, 1996).

Cultures such as these could capitalize on (or take advantage of) workers’ strong sense of commitment. Indeed, a consistent topic discussed by participants was the requirement of hard work and the presence of a strong work ethic that was fundamental for individuals within resources industries. Illustrative of this prominent ethos across participant accounts, it was noted:

“...you got to have a strong work ethic if you’re going to make it... or try to make it you know...I can’t let myself, you know, some days I don’t want to be there or don’t want to do a good job, but I just, my conscience won’t let me. You know, you’ve worked all your life and you just do it right.”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

Another experienced family member described her partner:

“...he doesn’t take any days off, unless they’re weather-related shutdowns. So it’s go, go, go until it’s finished. There are no days off.”

(P02, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

Substantiating claims were shared by those with involvement in other industries. The following account, however, also articulates attendant repercussions and concerns raised by these work demands:

“I almost think it’s not humane working those hours and it’s almost like working yourself past the limit like just pushing yourself past what’s like I don’t want to say normal, but...[l]ots of people they’re just too exhausted...like I think it wears people down...”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This is problematic, particularly when considering the possibility of fatigue in occupations that are already among the most hazardous. Average fatality rates across Canada’s mining and petroleum sectors are the highest of any other sector. The fatality rate for these sectors in 2018 was 5 times higher than the average rate across the broader Canadian economy (Stanford, 2021, p. 74).

Participants who maintained employment in resource industries tended to adopt specific practices, in keeping with a strong work ethic. In the agriculture industry, a participant discussed experiences of enduring through challenges, in the sense of “[w]hen you’re in it, it’s kind of like you just white knuckle through, that’s just what you do” [P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience]. Another participant noted of the challenging reality workers may experience, “So we just do it. So I’m not saying that it’s you know pleasant...” [P09 male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience].

In team-based work situations, if such approaches are not accepted by all, it could contribute to challenges within the group. As one participant noted:

“And it does shatter the group when you got someone that doesn’t want to do their share.”  
(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

Another participant further explained how not putting forth effort in a helpful way could affect the team:

“It also impacts your day-to-day experience, like if you have a co-worker that would rather sit in the shack for most of the shift while you’re out there in -40 [degrees] doing your job and they’re not really taking part and being like, ‘Hey, do you need a break?’ when you can’t feel your hands and your feet, because it’s awful until you warm up. I think sometimes just sharing the load of whatever the workload was sometimes was uneven too. Like not all the time, but depending on who you were with.”  
(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Indeed, not doing one’s share could make the work of others on the team more difficult. As one worker elaborated:

“...it’s just a matter of wanting to do as much as you can to help the person next to you. You don’t want to have someone break their back because they’re doing everything and someone else is just kind of dragging their feet. I think it’s the idea of just doing your part.”  
(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Fatigue and workers spending long hours together away from their homes and families could have effects on workers and may also contribute to strained inter-team dynamics with additional consequences for interactions with colleagues:

“...somebody’s complaining, you know, three or four people are happy but somebody doesn’t want to work as hard as somebody else. You know, all these factors come into play and it can make for a negative workplace... Sometimes... everybody does their thing, “Yes, sir,” “No sir,” you know. Other times, it’s like, “Ah, I don’t feel like this anymore” you know. Oh yeah. Personalities involved, especially toward the end of a two-week shift when you’re not at your home base. That can be really challenging, yeah.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

This participant further explained the necessity of “[h]ard work and play the game, you know, be part of a crew and do the best you can.”

Those who did not find ways to be helpful, contribute, and work cooperatively with the group could face consequences for their careers:

“Usually people get pretty fed up and go to management and there’s generally a pretty short leash in the oilfield. That’s the one industry where I’ve seen probably the most people let go, yeah, just for things like that, just people not kind of doing their fair share.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In managing and surviving these workplace situations, a participant introduced earlier stated:

“...you’ve got to be fit and you’ve got to be strong and then you need to do the work and keep your mouth shut and make good money...”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

The reason for this was expressed in the following way:

“When you go through life and you have experiences working in a union and a non-union situation, it’s best to you know draw from that experience, especially if you’re still working. Otherwise your opinion might not be so well-received if you’re still working in a non-union situation and you make a comment about how things are going [laughs].”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

Even in unionized workplaces, however, feedback may not always be well-received. Despite a prevailing ethos of it being “best just to keep your mouth shut and fit in,” [P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience], there was an exception observed in situations where natural resources industries employed men who ran their own farms. The introduction of men with experience running their own businesses could, at times, create interesting workplace dynamics and also attendant impacts on morale, as explained below:

“...I think it’s sort of the culture of the men that are employed at the mine. Lots of them are, they run their own farms. They’re not used to listening to a boss or lots of them they just think they know a more efficient way...And like my husband, you know, he just follows directions, and he says, ‘Oh, this is how they’re choosing to manage this.’ But I know a lot of people have actually quit because they don’t agree with the way that the decisions about the business operations are made.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience)

Within these environments, there could also be a sense that workers’ employment is subject to external business environments and therefore renders workers relatively interchangeable and dispensable. As evidence to this claim, one worker explained how, “In the oil business, you’re either always hiring like crazy or people are getting laid off like crazy” [P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience].

Further in this regard, another participant stated:

“I think the industry as a whole could do a better job of you know realizing that people have lives too and that you know if it’s going to be a boom or bust industry they have to respect that people are human beings and you know that type of lifestyle may not be healthy for everyone...”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

As suggested in the account immediately above, it is also interesting to note various participant references to workers’ involvement in resource work as a way of life, with implications about whether it can be incorporated into one’s own lifestyle.

“It’s *not* the easiest life. You work shift work, you work outside and work in -40 [degrees] with...the elements trying to get at you. But the pay has been always been good. It’s just whether people’s lifestyles can handle that right.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Tolerance for difficult conditions was indeed presented as a prerequisite for involvement in natural resources work. For example, a worker with experience in agriculture and energy noted:

“...people have the ability to do what I do, obviously, but they don’t have maybe the inclination or the tolerance to work that kind of schedule to be away from home that long. I’ve lost a lot of guys over the years...so it’s not easy...you’re away from your kids, you’re away from your spouse, that’s how it is. So if people can’t deal with that, and there’s people that won’t...it’s not for everybody...”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Despite the pressures and demands of employment in these industries, workers' reluctance to reach out and seek formal support for any emerging personal challenges they may be facing (for example, financial, relationship, or health and wellbeing matters) was also noted. As explained by participants, this was largely on account of workers attempting to uphold a particular self-image.

"I don't want to stereotype anything, but you get those, like the guys who are like rough and tough right and just kind of like, they're good on their own kind of thing...and so with that, like asking for help is almost like weakness or asking for support is kind of like I guess like a sign of vulnerability, which they don't want to portray."

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Parallel notions of self-sufficiency were expressed by those with involvement in the agriculture industry:

"Well farmers are typically socialized to be--it's a male-dominated profession, so all those things that come along with that, and just the pride that goes along with being able to cope within oneself, it deters us from asking for help. You know so, 'We're self-sufficient, we can do this on our own, we don't need help.'"

(P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years' experience)

Another participant described possible feelings of projecting an outward image of failure associated with reaching out, which by implication meant individuals were not able to handle challenges within themselves:

"I think it's hard for people to reach out. I think they don't feel comfortable reaching out because I think they feel like they're looked at as a failure then, which it shouldn't be that way but I do think there is like a stigma with that."

(P07, female, family farm category, >30 years' experience)

With his experience in the industry, a male agriculture worker summed up his thoughts on what others might be thinking on this topic by stating as well, "Some people are just 'I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to do that. I don't need nobody to tell me what...,' you know" [P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience].

However, there is some evidence that culture changes may be desirable among younger cohorts. As one participant from, and with knowledge of, younger generational cohorts noted, for example:

“If you’re going to have a demanding job, you know, there should be supports there to help you though. I think is kind of most people’s mindsets.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

### **3.3.1 No Escape: Complete Melding of Work and Personal Spheres**

Although always demanding of workers’ time and energy while on-duty, in some cases, work in resources sectors could almost completely subsume a worker’s personal life too. One of the strongest demonstrations of complete integration of work into one’s personal life occurred in situations where workers stayed in employer-provided accommodations in remote regions. Indeed, while at remote sites far away from home, workers may not experience any meaningful physical or psychological separation from work, even when their shifts end.

When geographically closer to home—perhaps within an hour’s drive—workers in peak-seasons may still decide to remain on their employer’s property when their work finished for the day. This would spare them from traveling home at exceptionally late hours after very long days of work. As one agriculture worker explained:

“So what we did is we set up campers in the yard and often when we were doing that, we would spend the nights there at the yard site. So yes, we could always go back home if we wanted to, but it meant less sleep and when you’re getting home at 2 or 3 in the morning, that extra hour during the night was big time.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

The location of worksites in remote areas also had implications for accessibility of services. Although camps typically provided food, lodging and medical, workers would need to leave camp for any other services; however, it would not be uncommon for a major centre to be 3-4 hours or more away from a rural worksite. In these cases, travel to a larger centre and back in order to access services, or even just as a reprieve from camp accommodations, would consume the better part of a full day.

In some cases, workers did not have personal vehicles at the worksite and relied on others for rides. A lack of transportation and the associated costs of arranging travel to a major centre could add to the isolation workers may feel. Workers in this situation would receive little liberation from a work atmosphere, even while off-duty. Indeed, it is possible there may be very limited “breaks from this environment” for workers [P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience]. For one



worker, over a span of several years, time away from the camp environment could be counted on “two hands.”

These experiences were summed up by another participant in the following way:

“So sleep, eat and work. Drive to work, phone home after work. Stay in a camp or stay in a hotel with the crew. Yeah. It’s not an easy life on families.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

This could be especially challenging, since these environments may not necessarily be conducive to providing workers with a strong sense of relief or recovery from the demands of their work; they were simply not the same as being at home.

“When you’re away and all you’re doing is working, like the downtime doesn’t seem the same because you’re not at home. Relaxing at camp isn’t the same as relaxing at home. You’re not in your own, I mean you have space, like they each have their own room and I think a shared bathroom, but like you can’t just go to the kitchen and get yourself whatever you want kind of thing. I mean they have a fridge in their room, but it’s not the same kind of downtime as you would have at home, so I think that contributes to like--I think he was a little bit stressed as well because of the, just because of the long hours and being away from home.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

With the vagaries of seasonal work, workers also often moved from worksite to worksite to begin work in a new location, perhaps with a different set of colleagues, and needed to integrate into a “strange crew” [P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience].

In these cases, particularly in the energy industry, work-based relationships may be short-lived, in the sense of “...a lot of these men, they transfer from rig to rig. They’re going from here to there and substantial relationships don’t--they don’t last.” [P01]. Unable to develop meaningful connections whilst away from family, it is possible workers may experience not only geographic seclusion, but also social and emotional isolation.

Under these circumstances, it may not be surprising that addiction issues were reported by participants. Though work schedules consumed a great deal of workers’ time, downtime on designated days off while away from amenities and family in camp-style accommodations could give rise to drinking:

“...some of those guys can really go at it, right so. Yeah, sure, Friday night means Friday night, but you know when people are off for [#] days...some of them have gotten really obnoxious right.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

These situations could also have implications for the quality of living conditions for workers who do not participate in these activities.

In other cases, workers would take up shared residences (e.g. staying with friends, coworkers, or perhaps even bosses) in the same house or would rent a room within a shared space, given very limited availability of housing or rental properties in small, rural communities. Other participants discussed experiences of sleeping on the ground in tents and “using whatever facilities are there for bathroom and shower and kitchens” [P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years' experience].

While the gravity of separations weighed heavily on family members, the pressures under which workers were placed understandably also caused family members great concern and worry, adding to their overall stress levels. Speaking to the challenges of living and working in unfamiliar and sometimes harsh environments with large distances separating workers from family members while far away from general services, a family member expressed concern for his loved one's well-being:

“I just always worry about his safety and you know just the isolation factor, it's not very--well I can't imagine it's good for anyone to distance themselves from family or, you know, just general amenities so much. So I always worry about how he's kind of feeling and how he's doing, right. So it is stressful always having that in the back of your mind...”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

While families acknowledged the challenges they experienced when apart from their loved ones for work-related reasons, there was a sense that it would be perhaps more difficult for the workers to manage these circumstances, given a sense of isolation they may feel:

“For my husband, I think it was more difficult than for the rest of us [other members of the family] because we all had each other and he was alone out there, working long hours...”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years' experience)

For farm families, the boundaries between work and family life could likewise become obscured, with both enterprise and household activities occurring in the same locations or in relatively close proximity to one another in rural areas.

While farm owners/operators may have the autonomy of self-employment, in agricultural enterprises that included livestock or other animals especially, operations were continuous and could preclude opportunities for travel, holidays, or other leisure activities. There could likewise then be very few opportunities for a retreat from the work environment. As one cattle farmer noted:

“And there was times when the wife and kids were going to the beach and swimming and, like I say, I was still putting in my second or third shift you know...But...we just carried on and did it.”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience)

As well, when work and home were effectively the same place, trying to manage tension in one domain could have consequences for the other. For example, when work presented as a stressor, one female farm owner/operator explained how it effectively became like a “double-edged sword,” in the sense that to ease farm-related tensions, she would often turn to outdoor activities that often meant “connecting with the land that’s stressing you out” [P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience].

### **3.3.2 Families' Thoughts and Wishes for Pursuit of Alternative Employment**

Given the realities of the work and resulting implications for families, family participants shared frank wishes and desires for their loved ones and his or her continued involvement in these industries. In particular, there were wishes expressed for workers to enter into “much more stable” lines of work. In some cases, these wishes were tacit and purposefully withheld from workers, so as not to seem as interfering with or dampening career goals or aspirations of their loved ones. This course of action was taken especially since, for the time-being at least, loved ones may be “making progress financially,” and did have “good periods of happiness at [the] job.” As explained by one family member:

“...we haven't really voiced it to him because it doesn't really help to encourage him, but we definitely want to see him get out of the industry. It doesn't lay the groundwork for you know close relationships and normal living right. We'd like to see him get out.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

In this case, the participant referred specifically to taking up residence in “barrack” style camps and moving around from worksite to worksite in “nomadic” fashion while being far away from home. These arrangements could be seen as deviating from conventional work arrangements in a fixed work environment with more hospitable living accommodations such that it would be possible to establish a greater sense of ‘home.’

“So I think...we’re going to start to bring that to the table, that you know, ‘Hey, we really miss you, and we’d like to see you maybe look into these other things right that would get you closer to home. You could be coming home at night, and you could have a home,’ right. Instead of, you know, for a lack of a better term, like they term it, a camp. Like that’s not a home, it is a camp.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The design and location of employer-provided accommodations in remote areas could indeed affect workers in myriad ways (Lozeva and Marinova, 2010). Camp policies and cultures are likely to align very closely with broader organizational policies and culture (PetroLMI, 2015). In these situations, the oftentimes strict rules and governing principles of male-dominated work cultures spilled over from work environments to permeate workers’ home environments while they resided in employer-provided accommodations. In these cases, workers would receive limited release or escape from the work environment. Given workers’ residences on-site in remote work areas, combined with policies that typically prohibit personal vehicles, companies are indeed able to exercise considerable control over workers and the overall environment in which they live and work (Petro-LMI, 2015).

A sense of ‘home’ could also be elusive for those in this study who described continually moving from site to site, living “out of a suitcase,” relying on restaurant meals for weeks on end, experiencing challenges from time-to-time securing accommodations in small boom towns, travelling long distances to find accommodations, and continually adapting to fit into new communities while travelling for work.

Another important consideration is that with the volatility of employment in natural resources industries, families often have to make a choice between finding alternative employment or relocating. In small communities where natural resources employment is the main, or indeed, perhaps the only source of employment, families very often have to move when industry closes or slows down. This experience can be challenging for families, as described below:

“Sometimes I have moved with him and other times, I’ve stayed at home. It just depends. Like a camp situation, he’s gone by himself, but if it’s been like a total change in career and area, then I’ve moved with him... [S]ometimes it’s unsettling, but at other times it’s exciting to move and see new places. Just personally, we have [# , >3] children. Each of them has been born in a different town. So that can tell you how many times we’ve moved. And sometimes, yeah, I would like to just put down roots and stay in a spot and sometimes that’s possible and other times it’s not.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

For workers with young families most especially, participants also identified high levels of stress associated with making decisions about where and whether to set down roots. These situations arose as natural resources industries in some communities faced an escalation of uncertainty and unpredictability that was attributed to shifting government policy and priorities.

Another respondent shared how on many occasions, she had considered, after taking into account difficult aspects such as commuting time (which oftentimes was uncompensated), long hours, and intensity of the work involved in resources industries, whether overall remuneration would in fact be as lucrative as compared with employment in other sectors. Such factors could figure into a decision about whether it would be beneficial to remain in a resource industry. Speaking of a relative of hers, a young man in the energy industry, she surmised:

“If he decided he was going to walk away from the energy sector and put his mind to becoming an office professional, I think in the long run, he would be rewarded probably equally financially based on hours worked, time away from home, that kind of thing.”

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

More than just a conjectural exercise, in other cases, wishes and thoughts were expressed directly by family members to their loved ones in very concrete, pragmatic terms. As a result of financial uncertainty and not knowing if work would be available, another participant shared, “I always encouraged [partner] to go to school and do something different kind of because of that almost.” She went on to express: “I would just encourage [partner] to find a different, like just leave that sector kind of...” [P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience]

As in the instance below, these sentiments of partners were not always taken to heart by workers, and instead were received with some resistance.

“...because the thing is I’ve said to [partner] too you know, there’s no pension in this industry there’s no-- and your body is going to get tired, right, and so what does that look like? And it’s like, ‘Well this is just what I want to do.’ So this is his gig, I guess.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

### 3.4 Industry Affinity

As the passage in the preceding section illustrates, despite fundamental industry uncertainty, financial volatility, demanding working conditions, and challenges with being away from home and family, seasonal worker participants discussed their desire to maintain work in resources-based industries. Even in the event of layoff, there was tendency to return to their chosen industries at the first available opportunity.

A compelling illustration of sustained connection to one’s industry is showcased below. This account details how, through the wave of ups and downs, workers displaced from their industries in recent downturns demonstrated a propensity for returning. Speaking to the experience of a young man in the energy industry, a participant recalled the following situation:

“...his parents over the past few years have tried to dissuade him because his rig has been shut down and then he goes back, and then it’s shut down, and then he goes back...[He] got a job, not in the energy sector, in a local business...and his dad tried very, very, very hard to say, ‘You know what, why don’t you just stay there. Sure, the money doesn’t equal, but you know, it’s guaranteed, it’s all of these things.’ ‘Yeah I think I will.’ Well a week or two later, he got a call from his rig and said, ‘Yeah we’re going to fire back up,’ and away he went.”

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

From an outside perspective it could seem somewhat puzzling that, when offered an opportunity for employment in a more stable and secure position, a worker would return to a position in a highly volatile industry where the probability of another work interruption could be quite substantial. This respondent went on to state:

“...it is very interesting to see those folks, they just keep going back. It just keeps sucking them back in...[This particular person is] a very hard worker, he is very smart. He could do anything he put his mind to, but he just can’t seem to get away from being on that rig.”

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

When discussing this situation in greater detail, this participant contemplated, “Is it because you don’t think you’d be good at anything else? Is it because that’s truly what makes your heart beat?” Perhaps there could be some merit to the second question most especially, with similar

sentiments expressed by others. Indeed, even after being away and spending several years working in other industries, a participant in the agriculture industry noted how “it was the farm heart strings that just pulled a person back” [P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience]. For some, as will be discussed, financial considerations such as remuneration and comparative earning potential could be additional dynamics at play.

A participant with experience in the mining industry upheld these sentiments when stating how he would respond in the event of a downturn or layoff:

“I would try and find another job in the mining industry for sure, and then if that doesn’t work out, well then I guess I’d consider a different option.”

(P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

First alternative options tended to also be within other resource industries; as another worker reflected:

“... So it would be resources at the end of the day, nothing outside of that I guess.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

In attempting to better understand this trend, this section provides an overview of some factors that may be contributing to workers’ engagement in, and strong connection to, their chosen industries. What was found is that from participants’ perspectives, there were definite advantages and rationale associated with remaining in, or returning to, their chosen industry as the case may be.

### **3.4.1 Identity**

A sense of industry connection was so deep in some situations that participants considered it to be part of their identity. As a farm owner/operator explained of her father-in-law from whom the family inherited the farm:

“I think [he] really identified with being a farmer you know... I think he really identified with that as a person.”

(P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

Further to workers’ propensity to retreat from steady and more secure employment opportunities back into the embrace of uncertainty, an informant identified earlier shared some family

history that may illuminate underlying facets of these situations that could help to apprehend reasons for the bonds workers have to their industries:

“...the other side of my...family were fisherman, so there’s that affinity you know, ‘once a fisherman, always a fisherman’...it feels the same way with people who are truly oilmen...Once that...mentality...is in your blood, for some people, it’s who you are....”  
(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

Involvement in high-volume, high-energy work may also be a draw for some. For example, being part of the “action” could be appealing.

“It’s great, you know, hmm, another day on the job. I’ve got lots of action here you know.”  
(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

Another participant elaborated further on this sentiment:

“And you know, I can see it, I’ve been on rig decks of working rigs. I can see how that gets in your soul for lack of a better term, I really can you know...there is a level of adrenalin in [that occupation]...maybe that’s part of it right. I mean...that’s a rush.”  
(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

### **3.4.2 Feeling Accomplished**

Workers detailed how they perceived engagement in resources industries as a way to see meaningful outcomes from their labours and they took obvious pride in the work they did for a living. An informant identified how, through this type of employment, “...there’s still that physical work, that hands-on piece, that might satisfy what they need to feel accomplished” (P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience).

In support of this claim and drawing a distinction between his professional and farming experiences, a participant also described the ability at the end of day to see a tangible product or demonstrable progress from one’s labours.

“[I]t was such a contrast to what I did when I was [in a professional role]. And at the end of the day, [in a professional role], you don’t see a lot done...With the farming, I loved the part that you could see at the end of the day, this got done and that looked good or this, it was done.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)



A similar view was expressed in the following account, with an additional note about being part of providing an important service to the local community.

“...you kind of get to see things through to completion. You go on a...job and you do that job that day and see it from start to end and that’s kind of cool and you know what you’re doing is valuable to society and your community. You’re producing oil and gas that at the end of the day is energy for the country you live in and communities you live in...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Among farming participants, there also seemed to be a sense of pride in being able to provide a vital service not only within their communities, but also to others around the world as well through the production and export of their crop products. One participant noted how, “[T]o supply people with food is kind of an achievement in itself” [P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience], while another contended, “... I do feel a lot of pride in the way that I can grow crops that will feed a lot of people and that all over the world.” [P12, male, family farm category, >30 years’ experience].

Workers also expressed an interest in challenging themselves, solving problems, and learning from having experienced and persisted through difficult situations. As a typical account, one worker noted:

“...it’s outdoor work, so I’ve worked in -53 [degrees] with everything we do...it’s crazy challenging but once you get through it, you can kind of get to put a feather in your cap and be proud of it.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Along with workers’ strong sense of pride in their work, also perceptible in these accounts may be gendered aspects of stoically performing strenuous physical work, and in the process, successfully working against natural elements such as extreme cold and unforgiving storms as a demonstration of masculinity (Brandth and Haugen, 2005).

### **3.4.3 Pecuniary Benefits**

Higher-than-average weekly wage rates may attempt to compensate, at least in part, for long hours and challenging work conditions (Stanford, 2021). High wages can also be an impetus for workers to pursue employment in these industries (Lozeva and Marinova, 2010). Despite prevalent and

recognizable challenges, as a worker in the mining industry remarked, “I mean at the end of the day, it’s worth it. I mean the pay is really good.” [P16, male, <5-10 years’ experience].

For some, and especially those in mining and energy industries, it was apparent that the main motivation for participation in these industries was indeed pecuniary-- that is, “strictly financial” [P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience].

As another worker further explained of his career in the energy industry:

“I was kind of looking to get the best job I could and earn the most money I could in a short time and that’s kind of where I went.”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience)

This was particularly the case for those who were just beginning their careers. As a family member remarked of an early career worker in the energy industry without a background in the work:

“I think it was money right so I’m not sure if there was anything else really. He is attracted to the money, right.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

While pay may appear to be a primary motivation for some, and particularly for those who weren’t local to a region with resource activity, it did come with caveats and expectations, as explained in the account below:

“The biggest thing is that it’s above average pay but...you have to commit to long days and long hours. Like the pay per hour was good to begin with but usually you work more than 8 hours and so sometimes you get overtime as well and so the money can really add up. And that was probably the primary reason for most people to come out and do that sort of work, especially people that weren’t from the area and came from cities and stuff like that after they heard about it.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

A worker with a family and additional years of experience made similar comments in stating, “If you’re going to do the same thing, get paid for it, right.” [P04]. As a tradesperson, he typically performed similar duties as others with the same training, but was able to command a higher rate of pay in resources sectors. As he went on to explain:

“When the money is good, it’s great. And that’s the bottom line. And I’ve tried to track it, from when I was in a shop...to when I was out you know in the field doing what I do...you can’t compare it. You really can’t. The money is that different that it makes it worthwhile...the difference was tremendous...”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Most recently, participants noted that a high wage rate was especially important given the rising cost of living in 2022. Speaking to experiences in the mining industry, a family participant stated, “...it’s a good job. We’re thankful that it pays well...”[P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience].

### 3.4.3.1 Means to Other Ends

For others, work in resource industries was not necessarily about the money per se, but about the ability to use their earnings to support hobbies or other interests. As one worker explained:

“...I had some goals to save up some money for other things that I wanted to do and so...the pay was really good and the amount of hours and stuff like that was why I did it.. And it was kind of a means to an end.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another participant likewise expressed:

“I used to say that I would take a job just so that I could have enough money to buy my gear and to buy gas and a pickup truck so I could go and [participate in outdoor hobby]. So if I was working on a drilling rig...for two weeks and I came out of there with 10 grand, I mean geez, you can go to [nearby parks for hobby]...And at that time, you can have some really top of the line gear.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

Although financial motivations appear to be a strong dynamic at play, there is some evidence to suggest there may be other factors influencing workers’ decisions to stay in their respective industries. In the energy industry, for example, a consequence of the latest downturn was that workers took significant pay cuts. This was attributed to global price declines and company cost-cutting measures (Stanford, 2021).

Especially since this was a phenomenon that had not been experienced by other industries in the broader economy, it could be expected that workers with a strong financial motivation would try to find work in one of these other fields. As was described by a family member familiar with industry compensation, "...it's take a salary cut or don't work. They choose to take the salary cut." As this participant went on to explain, "It's very interesting because I know so many people who work in that sector, they could do anything they wanted" (P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years' experience).

This participant further reflected on recent observations:

"It is fascinating to me as well, just to hear these folks and listen to you know what their plans are and to sit here and think, 'Oh gosh...you have an opportunity here to get out of the elements, to work less hard' ... but it just, at this point, there hasn't been an appetite for that yet. The mind shift hasn't happened."

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years' experience)

Looking ahead to the future, whether this shift occurs likely will depend on the timing and impact of the next downturn. Or perhaps the aspects that seem undesirable to onlookers, including arduous work, are precisely what appeal to workers.

#### **3.4.4 Love for the Work**

Further to participants' emotional connections to the work described earlier in this section, several participants indeed described the "passion" workers had for involvement in their industries. Strong interest in the work was described as a reason why workers continue to go back, even after a downturn or a layoff. As one family member explained of her partner:

"[He] is very passionate about his job, like he loves the work. I know that's not the case with all people right, like they don't like the long hours, they don't like being so physically---like it's super physically demanding. But [partner] is so passionate about it, like he *loves* it...so when he gets up in the morning, it's not like he drags his heels...*He's up and ready to go*...Like he loves that work so it's actually harder to keep him away than it is to get him to go."

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This family member went on to describe how her partner has said on numerous occasions that he "could never do a desk job," and how his position meets a need to be active. He is also good at what he does. As she explained:

“Like I know a lot of people have gotten into the work because it’s quick money, it’s good money...But I know for [partner], like this would be his first choice...for him, there is no alternative because this is what he loves.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Having this level of passion and enthusiasm appeared to be important since, as one worker participant stated:

“Because if you don’t enjoy it, you’re not going to survive it or continue with it.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

Participating in work with an element of danger, for example, seemed to also specifically be a draw from some. As one worker explained:

“...and sometimes it’s scary and I like that... and it’s ‘not everybody can do it, so I like doing it’ type of thing...”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

The opportunity to see new places, to be liberated from a shop environment, and the ability to work outside and in some cases in nature were also identified as important parts of workers’ jobs:

“...being outdoors with the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees, that’s pretty much heaven on earth right there.... There’s some places where you know after work or even at lunch time, you can throw a line in the water and catch a fish and you can have it for supper after work you know. That’s pretty cool.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience)

The enjoyment of work that provided the opportunity to learn new skills such as how to operate different kinds of machinery on-the-job was also discussed:

“...he likes to work with machinery and with the mining... he’s learning even more machines than he knew before and so he likes the challenge of that. It’s stimulating, right...”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

For another worker in the mining industry, the opportunity to work underground was a rare occurrence that others typically would not have a chance to experience potentially within their lifetimes, much less as part of the backdrop of their day-to-day work:

“You know, it’s something different. It’s not your typical 9-5 job at an office or at a store or something like that. You know, it’s a unique work environment. We travel down in a giant elevator, you know 1 kilometer underground beneath the surface. It’s kind of like a whole different world down there... it’s just something unique. Something that not really everyone gets to experience.”

(P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

A preference for 12-hour shifts was expressed by some too, seemingly favoring these work arrangements over 9-5 schedules:

“...my husband always liked the 12 hour schedule, as opposed to the 9-5 Monday-Friday.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience)

The accounts in this subsection illuminate additional facets involved in the performance of difficult and dangerous masculine work as a showcase of gender. These include, for example, the use of tools and operation of heavy machinery often associated with masculinity (Brandth and Haugen, 2005). At the same time, participants appeared to enjoy a degree of freedom with opportunities to work outside and within the open spaces of nature. In this way, accounts distinguish natural resources work performed in remote and at times harsh outdoor conditions from indoor office and service sector work carried out within the confines of perhaps more controlled built environments (ibid).

### **3.4.5 Family History**

Participant experiences in all but four cases detailed how previous generations in their families had participated in resources industries. Typical of this experience for farming families, it was stated, “Well we were both just born into it, right...so it was just, you know, natural for us.” [P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience].

Participants from the agriculture industry indeed described the commonality of farms being “passed down from generation to generation,” and cases of family members working together, with “three generations working on the same farm at a time” [P09, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience].

Similar comments were made by those familiar with the energy industry. P05, for example, spoke of a young man with involvement in the industry and whose father “has worked in the energy sector his whole life” (female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience).

Reflecting on early experience in the mining industry, one participant identified how having a family connection could even be a prerequisite for working at a particular site:

“So mining was, I grew up...around it. My parents were in the mining industry...I got a [job] because my parents worked at the mine so it was...high-paying...work compared to the other options you could get. Because your parents, prototypically, the family member has to work at the company to get those jobs.”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years' experience)

Being part of a family legacy meant that workers had a level of familiarity with the demands of the work. They would also have a level of understanding about what could be expected and what work in these industries would entail. It is possible as well that family members' experience in, and knowledge of, a particular industry offered workers support and encouragement to continue participating in the industry.

### **3.4.6 Limitations on Alternative Career Opportunities**

Just as much as the above-documented accounts detail inherent interest, passion, and advantages in continuing with selected industries and career paths, there are some dynamics that may illustrate important caveats to these statements. When asked, for example, about whether there would have been consideration given to leaving their industries, especially maybe during a downturn, some challenges were identified. As one participant responded:

“Perhaps, but only mindful because well we didn't have an education to fall back on for anything else...So it would have been hard to leave the farm and look for other ways...”

(P07, female, family farm category, >30 years' experience)

This account was corroborated by another participant in stating:

“...opportunities were very few, you know, if you were raised on the farm, that's probably what you were expected to do...maybe it's the only life you knew. So other opportunities were very few...”

(P08, female, farm family category, 11-20 years' experience)

Other participants also described needing to stay within an industry and managing its challenges typically “out of necessity.” It was further explained how:

“A person just has to work in that field because that’s all they know. So it’s not a matter of planning something different because the people that have been doing that forever, they’re just not willing to sacrifice the income or they can’t sacrifice the income because they’re too overly leveraged. They kind of have to just go with it.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These accounts illustrate important points worth elaborating further. In particular, continuing with work in a given industry and being part of a family legacy, while perhaps a source of pride, could also be constraining. Whether as a sense of obligation or being the only livelihood possibility to which one was exposed, pursuing a career in a resources industry could be less a desired choice and possibly the only (actual or perceived) option available to those embarking on this career path. This could lead individuals into a situation whereby they made a decision of “...staying within the...industry because what else are you going to do? What else can I do? I have to stay here because I can’t do anything else” (P07, female, family farm category, >30 years’ experience).

The second point to highlight is that there may have been objectively few alternatives that would provide families with a comparable income. As one family member reflected of her partner:

“There was a time where he talked about you know possibly doing something different, however, his, you know, his dad farmed and so I think it was just a matter of carrying on the tradition. And really when he looked around at other jobs, what else could he replace his income with? That became the question, so it was, at the end of the day you know, what he felt would be the better choice for him, just to continue with it.”

(P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

On the other hand, however, this may not be a universal dynamic and could be changing for future cohorts. As one participant commented, there is a desire for successive generations to explore and identify a career journey of their own choosing.

“Now this is something that we have chosen to take on as our livelihood and we encourage all the grandkids to definitely go forth into the world and get an education and if they feel that they want to come back...the farm is there, but it is important that they make a pathway of their own in life also.”

(P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

This account reinforces an important consideration, in the sense that education decisions and opportunities could be a key factor in determining workers’ career options and ultimate career selections. As one participant commented:



“...I think for a lot of people in the oil patch or the energy industry, probably a lot of it had to do with money and their ability to make a very very fine income compared to their education level...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years' experience)

Another worker explained how employment in resource industries may be one of very few ways to earn high incomes quickly at a given level of education:

“Well if I'm being honest, it is one of the only ways that people with a minimal education can make *very* good money. I think that's all it comes down to. There's definitely lots of things that aren't great about it, but there really is no other way or not many other ways where someone with minimal education can make that kind of money...”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This was echoed by another participant, indicating that industry education levels may be at or even below high school, depending on the industry and workplace. An approach that has been taken in the energy industry is described as follows:

“I mean a person with no high school, comes from a farm base in western Canada can go and take some training courses, get their first aid and their CPR, and they can get their H2S [hydrogen sulfide safety ticket] and they can get their other tickets in about a week or two weeks. They can spend a couple thousand dollars on gear and all they got to do is go knocking on doors and phoning all these companies, and they're on, they're hired. Yeah. And they're coming out of there, they're entering into a \$100K/year job right away. If they're working...But when the sun is shining and you're making hay, you're making big dough when you're doing it [laughs]...and then they gave you an allowance if you're a certain distance away from home...I bet that's probably \$200-\$250/day just for your living allowance now if you're away from home...”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years' experience)

As workers became established in the industry, even if alternative employment opportunities were available, they would not offer comparable levels of compensation:

“[A]nd I think once someone gets the taste of how much money they're making, it's kind of difficult to, you know something's better as a career perspective, it's difficult to take that pay cut for a long term thing.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

To this point, another participant further explained:

“...and then when you become so accustomed to that lifestyle, I think it’s really hard to want to change that and it’s just too challenging to change your life, so you just continue working in it.”

(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

In the event of a downturn, a worker in the mining industry similarly explained how alternative career options could be particularly delimited for individuals without tertiary education.

“Most of the workforce here is you know people that you know don’t have anything more than a Grade 12 education. The only people that would be able to work in a different industry would be people that have post-secondary education, whether it be like a tradesperson or an engineer or a geologist or something like that.”

(P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Another worker in the energy industry also explained:

“Unless you have qualifications to go anywhere else, then there’s not a lot of places to go, so whatever you’re hired for is where you stay usually.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

With the potential for job loss, education levels may then afford individuals more latitude in the way of exploring alternative career options. Navigating the highs and lows of the energy industry in particular could be a challenge, and caused some to make an exit. In speaking of *individuals with post-secondary training specifically*, it was observed:

“Some of the people I know have been laid off like three times and then they’re just kind of done with it I guess. They would rather go work a job, maybe they’re not making as much as they could here, but they feel like they have better stability and they’re not going to be looking over their shoulder for that next layoff notice...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

It is possible that in a downturn, education levels also help to insulate workers from job loss. In the case of a complete industry closure in small, single-industry communities, the acquisition of a diversity of skills was expected to protect workers from unemployment; however, others without such skillsets could fare worse. A spouse explicated:

“They say the mine is supposed to close...So I don’t know exactly what that means...so I mean he’s got other skills that it wouldn’t really affect him, he can just do something else. It might affect others more I suppose, because that’s what they’ve always done. Like there’s

guys there that have worked there for their lifetime, they've worked like for 30 years or more. I think that would affect them more. But we would just move on if that was the case...So you just move, or you find something different to do.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years' experience)

Participant accounts also identified that a lack of options could be on account of not just education levels or limited alternative employment opportunities available locally, but also hesitancy to leave single industry towns where there are extended kinship ties and strong connections to place that root families in particular geographic regions.

### **3.5 Forging Social Connections**

Although workers and families faced numerous challenges and myriad factors remained outside their control, participants nevertheless took it upon themselves to seize opportunities and undertake specific actions, individually and collectively, in an environment of prevailing uncertainty. Working diligently within their span of control, participants described strategies and techniques they employed with the time and resources they had available to them.

#### **3.5.1 Cultivating and Leveraging Social Networks**

Recognizing that self-care needs may differ from person-to-person, there were some common measures that were accessed and utilized among participants. These largely involved forging social connections and included, for example, leveraging friendship and co-worker support networks. Social support typically involves interactions with others that offer affirmation, information, and both emotional and instrumental support to help individuals manage stressors (Vinokur et al., 1996; Lepore, 2012).

In the present study, socializing with friends and neighbors in a reciprocal process of listening and sharing seemed to play a particularly important role in the lives of participants and helped to guard against feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Examples of these activities included, for example, “...neighbours coming into the yard and having like a two-hour tailgate conversation,” where they essentially, “just stop by for a minute but you sit out there for a couple hours BS-ing” (P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience).

Similarly, gathering with friends and neighbors at a local coffee shop was cited on multiple occasions as a commonly used mechanism to support wellbeing for all. Chatting and joking were

oftentimes mainstays of these encounters, part and parcel of interacting with others, and allowed participants to assume different and yet helpful perspectives on the challenges they were all facing.

“I would stop at a local coffee shop and sit at the big table and visit with everybody and you know have a good time, drink a couple cups of coffee and tease and joke and all that...So those kinds of things outside of the box kind of thinking you know. Like so that you’re not really trapped in your own environment sometimes and looking outwards to see, that yeah, there’s other people that are having tough times too and there’s people that can share in your experiences.”

(P09, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

Participant accounts detail how these interactions had strong, positive impacts for participants; for example:

“I think that really relieves a lot of tension, pressures, things like that...I think they go away from there feeling much healthier or knowing that they can face the day, that there was somebody that they were able to talk to, have a voice, and share.”

(P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

To another participant, this same activity was viewed to be a means of breaking the isolation and providing an avenue for expression, whereby, “Everybody talks about their own hardships and you’re like okay, you’re not in it alone...” [P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience]. Knowing that others were facing similar situations and that they weren’t unique in having these experiences provided some with a sense of comfort. As well, in the case of anticipated employment losses, there was similarly solace in realizing “other people are in the same boat,” in the sense of, “you know, the guys on their crew would also be out of a job and they would figure it out” [P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience].

While at work and away from home and family, participants also described the significant role colleagues played in providing support and enhancing their overall work experience. In particular, being surrounded by coworkers with shared attitudes and approaches toward work was crucial. One worker with experience in both the agriculture and energy industries explained:

“If you don’t have good people to work with, there’s no point in even getting up... if the guys are you know, bad attitude or don’t want to be there...that job’s not worth being there... That’ll make you or break you. The boss could be a tyrant, but if the guys are good, you’ll still stay, because it’s worth it. And if they’re not good, it’s time to move on.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

The extent to which coworkers could impact overall job experience is detailed in the following account:

“...if you have amazing coworkers then you’re spending the vast majority of your day with those people so that will directly impact how your day is. If you really enjoy these people and they’re pleasant to be around, you’ll probably have a good work experience... I think your coworkers are probably more important than the job you’re doing itself in terms of how you like it.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These sentiments carried through and were also reflected in comments made by another worker participant in stating, “...if you can get on with...a working crew, it’s tight and everybody respects each other, it’s awesome” [P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years’ experience).

Quality coworkers seemed essential given that workers spent long working days together away from home in challenging work environments and employees could become very much like ‘family’ to one another (P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience). One participant in the mining industry similarly spoke of a sense of ‘camaraderie’ in working with a crew (P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience).

Although tensions could arise due to fatigue and by virtue of spending long working hours together in close quarters, when they were surrounded by quality coworkers with shared values and attitudes, workers could form a strong support network for one another. This was illustrated in the following account:

“...like they’re away from their families...For a lot of these guys, they honestly see their coworkers more than they see their family so it’s a huge support network. I mean with digital technologies, cellphones and that these days they’re still in touch with their family...but that’s digital communication whereas they’re in front of, in-person with these crews every day...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

While geographic mobility and changing work locations could mean workers may not form long-term relationships with co-workers, these relationships nevertheless appeared to be important while they lasted.

Where possible, some families also planned visits to see their loved ones while they were away for extended periods of time at work. Visits to see loved ones were discussed among participants in the energy and agriculture industries.

Family in many cases also provided relief and support to workers after long work days and shift patterns. As one family member noted, “I think we provide a little bit more of that balance at home for him” [P18]. To the extent possible, planned family events also allowed members of the family unit to jointly establish a goal or something to look forward to together. This participant went on to explain:

“My husband, he’s got a planned holiday coming up for the family and so he’s working a little overtime to make up the extra for the holiday, but I think just something to look forward to do, *as a family*. I think that really helps, just knowing that we’re working toward something together.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

In this regard, social activities such as camping, visiting the lake, sports, and religion were also mentioned as outlets for workers and families.

Some participants’ schedules were more accommodating of opportunities to take advantage of social and family leisure activities. In some cases, participants employed in mining and energy described set blocks of days off within each scheduling cycle and efforts made to make the most of this time. In other cases, workers were afforded blocks of time off that were for longer durations. With a greater distance between himself and family, consecutive days off enabled the worker in the following account to travel back and forth to see his partner:

“I’d...drive 1,000 km to [worksites], do my [shifts] and then drive 1,000 kilometers back. I think there was only probably two sets of days off that I didn’t go back to [community where partner was located].”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

While longer commutes naturally resulted in less time available with families, longer rotations can reduce frequency of work-related travel and may favor workers who work farther away from home; for some, it is also possible that longer periods of time off to spend with family could counterbalance being away from home for a prolonged period of time and potentially missing family events (PetroLMI, 2015).

As the following quote indicates, however, partners who are returning home after long periods of time at work may welcome having the ability to choose the types and timing of leisure activities, and may need time and space to recover immediately upon their return (Chandler et al., 2018).

“I really appreciate the downtime or the time he has off so that he can catch up on that rest and put his energy into family.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Along with finding creative ways to carve out devoted time for family, developing a collective perception and understanding of change as a new adventure for the family was also mentioned. For example, in adapting to different employment in new locations with the volatility of resource industries, finding various ways for family members to learn together, connect with, and understand one other was emphasized:

“...my family really likes change and doing something new and so it's like an exciting adventure. And then like my little children, when they go out to play when he was doing logging last year, they would pretend all their trucks were logging trucks and they'd be loading them up with logs. When he was mining, we got books from the library about mining and then he took them on a mine tour and then all their play became about mining and the sandbox became a mine site...So I mean... it's kind of learning along with him and like my husband, when he was doing mostly [specific occupation], he would get [occupation-specific] magazines and so I would read those just so that I could kind of keep up with him and understand where he was coming from.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years' experience)

### **3.5.2 Nurturing and Strengthening Relationships through Communication**

To help manage ongoing uncertainty, especially in the event things did not unfold according to plan for families, participants also placed a strong emphasis on maintaining strong relationships or alliances with external actors whose involvement was integral to families' continued participation in their chosen industry. As one participant described:

“So we try to keep a very good close relationship with our bank representative and our bank in general and our...supplier[s]...and we try to keep an open, transparent conversation with them on a very regular basis just so if we foresee something in the future, we let everybody know so there's no surprises you know. And generally speaking, we've had very good success with getting through some of the rough spots by having those kinds of relationships and allies in what we're doing.”

(P09, male, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience)

In pragmatic terms, this essentially meant laying one's cards on the table, proactively communicating any prevailing or unexpected issues, and being open to joint problem-solving.

A "communicative environment" was fostered, and on a personal level as well, participants described the importance of nurturing relationships with spouses and with their families to the best of their abilities with the time and resources they had available to them. To get through some of the more difficult times especially, one participant described how he and his partner at times would proclaim, "*let's stop and have a date.*" The following is an account of what this process may look like:

"With [spouse]...we'll just sit...and just have a conversation and just take a break away from the day to day. You know it's probably going to get done in the end anyways, but it's those times that you take to rebalance yourself in your day...And it's sometimes sharing those good things instead of going, '[Gasp!] we had a terrible day...' [laughs]...So that's where you get your strength and support is in sharing good times with family, and then that comes back you know, it returns to you and then you have the strength to go forward."

(P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience)

In essence, a guiding mantra was "communication, communication, communication" and being creative and attentive in finding ways to do so, which helped workers and families manage and "face the realities" with which they were met. This would be in contrast to a perceived more detrimental approach of "hiding and not dealing" with problems and challenges [P10, female, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience].

Another participant, in support of this notion, also stated:

"...if you don't communicate, the little things get bigger and bigger and bigger and then all of a sudden there's a blow-up."

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years' experience)

These findings accord with existing literature, which identifies open communication, ability to discuss difficult topics, mutual support, accessing social and economic supports, problem-solving and reaching agreement on viable solutions as building blocks of family resilience (Hawley, 2013).

Where prevalent challenges were related to finances, part of this process could also involve partners working together on budgeting and planning. These activities were considered to be very important to families and included establishing long-term, short-term and intermediate-goals for the



year in relation to where annual cashflow was expected to be and also in relation to household needs. Relatedly, planning to stay ‘a step ahead’ was also mentioned by a participant, in that “you’ve got to be—what’s the saying. Prepare for the worst but hope for the best...you’ve always got to think a step ahead, or try to anyway so.” With experience in natural resources industries, this participant also identified how families reach a point where they come to expect there will be downtimes and plan accordingly. More specifically, among farmers this involved things like:

“...let’s make sure we save enough money to buy seed in the spring and let’s make sure we save enough money to make that biannual payment in case this year is a flop, right. You always kind of want to have a little nest egg because paydays aren’t steady right.”

(P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

As well, deliberate exercises such as going through and analyzing what-if scenarios on a variety of topics were emphasized. In this case, should an issue arise, families would then be prepared to a certain degree by virtue of already having discussed or analyzed possible eventualities to better manage and move forward accordingly.

### **3.6 Participant Views on What Is Needed to Improve Work and Family Lives**

As we have seen, there are numerous factors impacting the wellbeing of seasonal resource workers and their families. With the myriad challenges identified above by those with involvement in Saskatchewan resource industries, the availability of timely and relevant programs, services, and supports ought to be prioritized. Based on participant accounts and findings from this project, there are a number of implications for the design, development, and accessibility of such support services and programming. These will be discussed in greater detail within this section.

The first subsection below (3.6.1) will discuss participant perspectives around community support services, and in particular, those aimed at assisting with personal and family challenges stemming from resource employment. As will be discussed, these include support for relationship, financial, or psychological strains that arise through the demands of seasonal natural resources work. The latter subsection (3.6.2) outlines participants’ views toward (re)training initiatives as a means of potentially insulating workers and families against documented employment volatility and possibilities of job loss across natural resources sectors.

### **3.6.1 Programs, Services, and Supports for Personal & Family Health and Well-Being**

Participants identified various community resources and services of which they were aware. Although it was known that some services were available to address personal challenges, further to the realities apparent in male-dominated work environments discussed above, a common issue raised by participants centred around whether these services would be accessed. This was an issue that cut across industries. In the agriculture sector, a participant remarked:

“Like I believe there are...help lines and stuff like that which is great, as long as people access them and use them, right.”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years' experience)

A family member of a worker in the energy industry similarly noted:

“I feel like resources are available to the problems that are prevalent in this industry, but at the same time, it's like are people accessing them? Probably not. And how do you make people access them, you can't, right.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Recognizing that some individuals will exercise their right to decline or refuse services aimed at providing assistance with any personal challenges they may face given the demands of the work, taking steps to enhance and optimize access to services that are available is nonetheless a key consideration. Although some elements that result in underutilization of services are more difficult to address in the short-term (e.g. stigma), other aspects identified by participants can more easily be remedied. In this regard, findings from this project suggest a number of steps that could be taken. These will be addressed in turn below.

#### **3.6.1.1 Encouraging Proactive Utilization of Services**

In regards to managing personal and family stress, and observing its impacts on those with whom they had worked over the years, participants identified the importance of proactive engagement with support services to the extent possible to assist with the sources of these forms of stress (for example, emerging personal, relationship, financial, or psychological health matters). As we have seen, with financial and time-based demands of natural resources work, associated stresses affected both workers and families.

The cyclical nature of resource industries and the possibility of job loss could specifically place significant stress on family relationships. As one participant described:

“...employees and their families they almost get to a breaking point and then you know there’s been some people end up divorced. If there’s a resource there that they access a month, or two or three or six prior, that could even change that for them potentially right...Because I think people won’t reach out to somebody until they’re at their breaking point...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

With the demands of the job, and in particular the time away from family during peak seasons of the year, another participant described how the associated stresses likewise affected families:

“There’s got to be a lot of family stress in that, with the time away. So there should be some support with that, but I don’t know how you would set that up so that they would use it-- before. Most times it isn’t until the blow up happens in the family....whereas if you could get them to use the support before that, it would be 200 times better.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

This participant also drew from the experience of an individual with whom he worked. This individual’s marriage ended in divorce after experiencing overwhelming stress. Ultimately, farm stress led to family stress. Although the family received “a little bit of couples counselling,” it came “too late” [P15].

### 3.6.1.2 Building Awareness around Available Services

Based on participant experiences, one way to potentially achieve proactive engagement with services could be for service providers to take steps to increase awareness of services that are available.

Participants were most familiar with helplines and private counselling options, but few others were noted. Apart from these options, a participant commented:

“I don’t know of any other supports that are out there for farming. Now there could be, I’m not aware of them, so maybe there’s other supports that maybe need to be publicized more so that people know that they’re out there.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

In corroboration of this claim, another participant commented:

“...So it’s trying to add to those resources and make them more apparent for people...so communicating what’s there a lot better and adding more and then letting people know what the benefits are...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

This was substantiated by another participant who identified how industry events and conferences typically discussed other topics to the exclusion of human-centric services and supports for industry participants, leaving tremendous opportunity for event organizers to enhance awareness through these channels:

“...I honestly think like when there’s farming conventions...to me it seems like it very much focused on you know like watershed and how the land is being managed and different bylaws and different RM rules, but it didn’t seem like there was ever a social or mental piece worked into it...”

(P13, female, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

Given the important role of finances to individual and family wellbeing, development of financial support services may also be an important consideration. This is especially so, given participants’ noted views that EI benefits may provide insufficient financial support for families with involvement in resource sectors. In the situation below, there was acute concern about finances in the event a large employer in the area ceased operating, and as such, need for financial planning resources or programs was identified.

“Like I know with [partner’s] work and the paycheque, there’s an option so some of the money would come off your paycheque and it goes into an investment portfolio...and it makes sense, like the company matches that. And it pays off long-term, it’s a nice deal. But [partner] said lots of guys don’t even do that, but maybe if they had more education about you know how those programs work, they would feel less stressed about long-term finances knowing that they’re paying into that. Or even like they’re very confused about what would happen with their pensions if the [employer] would shut down, maybe education about that.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience)

In the energy industry, efforts to increase awareness of supports to help with managing family finances were similarly discussed. A lack of interventions to enhance financial literacy through the school system at an early age was specifically raised as an issue. Support with money management--budget development, debt consolidation and debt counselling--may be important services to ensure are available, particularly in areas that may not historically have had access to these resources:

“I would think, to make aware, I know they exist out there, but like a debt consolidation type of deal thing. That’s the biggest thing that I usually hear about at my work now is that we’re never taught about credit in high school right so people just don’t understand you know. We didn’t stop during the pandemic at all, but guys were deferring their mortgages so that they could fly to Mexico as opposed to just paying their stupid mortgage.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

A similar account was shared by a worker in the energy industry, in stating:

“Well overall I think it’s just a problem with...financial literacy. Because if you’re a lot of these people and you’re making over six figures, realistically there should be no reason after a few months of not working, you’re out of money and you’re in a really rough situation, so I think financial literacy would be a very good program. Or just really teaching everybody...of the power of managing your finances properly and that would just not only benefit the worker of course but their families.”

(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Similar financial concerns were apparent in the agriculture industry as well where the need for supports to address the financial stresses associated with owning and managing a farming operation was also noted. Participants identified the growing strains and responsibilities owners and operators faced in managing the ever-expanding scale (and perhaps corresponding debt-loads) of contemporary agriculture enterprises simply in order to remain viable.

It is worth noting that it may be challenging to come forward for support regarding financial challenges. Although such challenges can most certainly impact psychological health, they have also been associated with lower rates of help-seeking (Handley et al., 2014). However, the consequences of not addressing these challenges through health-conscious ways was apparent. As one participant observed, “I think with the farming part, I do believe a lot of drinking gets done to handle the stress...” (P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience).

From a family perspective, as suggested above, financial matters could also result in marital challenges. Propensity for delayed access to counselling for couples identified in an earlier section could perhaps be attributable to a relative lack of awareness around the availability of these services in all geographic areas:

“And then of course, when there’s problems with money, there’s usually problems in your marriage because they go hand in hand. A little bit harder to solve, but then I guess like couples counselling or whatever, it seems to be like you don’t see a lot of that for the most part.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years' experience)

### 3.6.1.3 Program Design and Scheduling Tailored for Workers' Convenience

With such demanding work schedules, participant accounts alluded to the reality that efforts to access services could be frustrated by limited hours of availability. As such, taking into account workers' demanding schedules could be an additional way to facilitate increased access to services. For workers on a set schedule with predictable time off, these challenges may be less pronounced, but for a participant below, this wasn't her partner's experience.

“...like the amount of hours, and I'm just speaking on [partner's experience], because some people...during those...days off, they might have more opportunity to access services or not have as many barriers, but I know for [partner], that just hasn't been his reality so like I would say that's just a huge barrier because when and how is he going to access them, right. Like he can't.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

This participant went on to describe how, with the challenges of the work, taking time to access supports became just one more demand placed on workers and their time. As was emphasized:

“[W]ith the work hours and like with the commitment that you have to that, it's like anything outside of that is just kind of extra work, and it's like you're not motivated to do those things.”

(P11, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

For workers in particular then, ensuring that services are available at their convenience may reduce some barriers to access. Given the many challenges that workers and families may face, particularly if left for too long without address, the bundling of services together into a package was identified as a possible benefit. Interventions could then be available that would allow workers and families to access couples counselling, stress management, and financial management for instance through a single access point for convenience.

### 3.6.1.4 Expanding Supports in the Absence of Employer-Provided Benefits

Employer-provided benefits play a role in supporting worker and family health and well-being. They can offer employees and their families access to important employer-paid supports and services.

As mentioned above, helplines were cited as the most well-known services available. In many cases, these services were also most accessible should workers not have employer-provided benefits plans. As one worker explained:

“But I know they exist, but for the most part, I haven’t really heard of anything other than like a kid’s help phone for somebody that maybe doesn’t have that insurance package you know what I mean? If the employer doesn’t provide it, or if you’re just you know a flat out contractor, probably not right.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Ultimately, increasing and diversifying the array of services available to workers without employer-sponsored benefit plans is a key consideration, especially as the proportion of individuals engaged in precarious work expands across the economy. Without address, this could present as a significant and growing public health and policy concern.

At a very minimum, the availability of a 24-hour support line was suggested by one worker. This individual noted, “And I’d say if there’s a company out there that doesn’t have that, then they should probably get one...just so it’s always available for the workers” [P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience].

### 3.6.1.5 Access to Professionally Trained Staff and Confidential Services

When workers and families find the courage to reach out for support with any personal challenges they may be facing, there may be additional barriers preventing them from fully engaging with the services that could be of assistance. Although helplines appeared to be well-known and effective, one participant described the experience of reaching out through an available program only to be connected with individuals who did not seem to be fully trained to offer necessary support, with implications for the quality and effectiveness of services rendered:

“They basically just go off it almost sounded like a...diagram. If this is the answer, you go down to this. If this is the answer, you go to this right. It smelled scripted, which is fine. If that helps people, you know perfect. Everybody is not trained for psychology or whatever the case may be to deal with somebody over a phone, right so. You know, I get it. A little help is better than no help, but as far as effectiveness, 30% you know 25%, somewhere in there...”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Where possible, the ability to access services through an online platform with video capabilities and that could make appropriate referrals was mentioned by some participants as being

preferable to strictly over-the-phone options. In this way, it would be possible to interact more fully with those providing services and gauge reactions through the course of the call.

A family member of a worker in the energy industry left similar remarks regarding an absence of adequate counselling services provided by the employer. This could be particularly troublesome in terms of being able to access services while working in rural and remote camp-style accommodations where, as noted, communications technologies could be unreliable and at times difficult to come by. Such circumstances may leave a worker with nearly complete inability to access these services. As was explained:

“...there’s no counselling service. There’s no you know oil industry type of person that *they* provide that will fly into the camp and help these men you know kind of with their challenges. And those are things that you know, these companies could do a better job of providing.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

As indicated in this account, a possible remedy in this regard may be onsite counsellors who could also be on a rotational schedule to ensure accessibility.

At the same time, others expressed concern about what the employer may think and about whether utilization of available services would be confidential:

“...So I think there’s that apprehension to it. I think people worry about you know what the company thinks. There’s probably some concern about like is this truly anonymous...”

(P17, male, worker category, energy and mining industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

Assuring confidentiality and encouraging utilization of services at the workplace-level may help to alleviate these concerns.

### 3.6.1.6 Enhancing Workplace Social Programs

With the many pressures workers face, and given the important role of co-workers to the overall work experience, participants identified a need for additional social programs within the workplace. The need for this type of programming could be strongest in situations where workers are away from their home communities and have shared accommodations. Although there appeared to certainly be interest and engagement with the work itself, efforts such as these aimed at building, strengthening and



maintaining social relations outside of work hours could also have a potentially strong influence on personal fulfillment and life satisfaction away from work.

A participant explained of his family member:

“[H]e doesn’t mind the work, but their social kind of thing...you know they have like Christmas parties for the guys, but there’s no, you know, greater community to them you know...And I just think, internally, they could do a better job of having a more community type of setting towards how they treat their employees and how much they offer them in social interaction that’s away from work right.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Examples of these events were apparent in other workplaces and were very well-received. In the situation described below, events were designed not only for workers but also their families:

“...the mine here recently had a family day for families, like a family barbeque get together so we went to that. And that was nice. It was nice to get together like outside of work and for the family members to meet the coworkers and so that was kind of neat...”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

### 3.6.1.7 Evaluation of Industry and Government Programs and Policies

Given a noted hesitancy on the part of industry to take the leading role in delivery of some wellness and employee support services, there may be an identifiable space for government agencies to facilitate these opportunities and enhance access to support programs. Speaking specifically to the possible implementation of onsite counsellors noted earlier, a family member of a worker in the energy industry explained the importance of ensuring “...those options are available and not frowned upon,” going on to explain how:

“maybe the government can recognize that you know a lot of these guys go through a lot of tough stuff right and maybe the government...can be the people that implicate, you know, other options for them, right. I know the oil industry doesn’t have an interest in it.”

(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Very often in remote areas and away from home and family, further explanation of the noted “tough stuff” workers experience was shared below by this participant:

“...people that work in that industry are under a lot of isolation and social stress... And...their general resolve to stay positive is weakened by the industry they work in, and I just think that they could be more forthcoming with having those options available.”  
(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Time available outside of work appeared to be a key area where improvements could be made:

“I think too like how mentally taxing sometimes that job was, like it wasn’t necessarily the work, but just kind of the work-life balance kind of stuff...I think there was a lot of people [partner] worked with that kind of were depressed...”  
(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

This account was corroborated by a participant introduced earlier in stating of his family member:

“Well, he is a hardworking guy, so I mean, the work adjustment wasn’t hard...but the distance and isolation factor definitely [took] a toll on him, you know, he was saying that he really misses being with our family and his friends back here...[Y]ou know, the workload wasn’t so much, it was just socially, it was really hard...”  
(P01, male, sibling, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

These accounts may speak to a need for evaluation of industry practices as they relate to existing employment standards and time away from work.

“Like I just think even just bringing that awareness to that’s a tough position to be in, so even just like support services for those people, right like if someone needs a break because they’ve worked [an extended number of] 12-hour shifts in a row. Like there should kind of be some standards to me in terms of just like you don’t want people working *too much* because that’s not good in my opinion either.”  
(P23, female, partner, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

Although severe and demanding, such work schedules were possibly facilitated through employers’ use of legitimate mechanisms. For example, within Saskatchewan, permits and modified work arrangements allow variations to provisions of the *Saskatchewan Employment Act*. Modified work arrangements allow employers to average hours of work for up to a 4-week interval, and which thereby permit employers to implement work scheduling arrangements deviating from the 8 hour-day and 40 hour-work week (before overtime) standard. Available permits, meanwhile, include those for averaging of hours; one day’s rest in seven; and scheduling variation. The first permit type, averaging of hours, makes provision for longer work days or a longer averaging period than identified within a

modified work agreement (i.e. longer than a 4 week interval). A one day's rest in seven permit provides an exception to the *Saskatchewan Employment Act* requirement for employers (depending on the industry, number of employees, and the amount of time an employee works per week) to provide a certain number of days off per week.<sup>5</sup> Through the scheduling variation permit, an employer may change the work schedule (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022c). Under the *Saskatchewan Employment Act* (2013), employers may also provide less than 1 weeks' notice of a variation to an employee's schedule in the event of an "unexpected, unusual or emergency" circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

With the implementation of permits, employers may need to prepare a fatigue management plan, particularly for occupations requiring physical effort and where extended shifts can affect workers' alertness. An employer's average time loss work injury rate could be taken into account when an application is made for shifts longer than 10 hours per day (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022c).

### **3.6.2 (Re)training Programs**

The pronounced downturn accompanying the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 provoked public discussion around the role of (re)training programs in providing resource workers with upskilling options to maintain a competitive advantage or to support possible career transitions (PetroLMI, 2020). As such, interviews included questions to gauge participants' interest in (re)training programs and to elicit responses on the kinds of program design features that would be most beneficial, should participants wish to pursue these opportunities.

Findings from this study indicate that a relatively small proportion (approximately 25 per cent) of participants expressed that they or their loved one had no interest in changing careers or (re)training. These individuals were most typically young men in the energy industry or those already

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<sup>5</sup> In general, employees typically working over 20 hours per week are entitled to 1 day off each week (Saskatchewan Employment Act, 2013). However, it is possible that depending on the availability of work throughout the year and during certain seasons, 20 hours per week may not be a typical schedule for workers in resources sectors; and as such, this could also create an exception to existing employment standards for some workers in these industries.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, and as a further exception, the standard prohibiting an employer from requiring an employee to work more than 44 hours per week may not apply in the event of "unexpected, unusual or emergency circumstances" (Saskatchewan Employment Act, 2013).

established in their careers. A number of factors may contribute to retraining reluctance; many of these could be associated with the earlier finding of strong connections to chosen resources industries. A lack of interest in (re)training or continued learning opportunities, however, was not universal across participants. In general, individuals with prior experience in post-secondary environments, those looking to make career transitions through industry downturns, and those seeking to attain specific additional skills were most likely to have expressed interest in (re)training initiatives.

### 3.6.2.1 Factors Important to Participants When Considering (Re)training

For participants who did indicate an interest in training/retraining or continued learning opportunities, findings from this project illuminate a number of factors that may facilitate access to these opportunities. Without consideration to these factors (as outlined in turn below) given their significance to participants, access to potential learning opportunities could be delayed or possibly precluded altogether.

#### 3.6.2.1.1 Geographic Proximity and Accessibility

The significance of geographical proximity in the sense of being able to access training services close to home was emphasized by participants. Ensuring geographic accessibility such that a learner wouldn't have to commute 200-300 kilometers away from their home, in addition to convenience, also allows individuals to be close to their support networks. Close proximity to in-person learning opportunities may be important for rural learners too as availability of, and access to, internet services was identified as a challenge by participants and may limit online learning options.

#### 3.6.2.1.2 Family, Life and Financial Situations

Within this project, participants highlighted the importance of taking into consideration each individual worker's family, life, and financial situations. These factors could either facilitate, or alternatively and most likely, cause a worker to give pause to the thought of (re)training.

From this perspective, entering into a training program could be more challenging in situations where this decision would need to be made taking into account not only a worker's own interests and needs, but also those of the family unit. An appreciation of the human element involved with taking a decision to enter into a training program was emphasized.

Taking a decision to pursue training opportunities could also have significant financial implications, particularly considering the impact of potential income loss. Financial considerations could be so significant that they would determine whether an individual would be able to attend training altogether. As one worker explained:

“And then also if you stop doing what you’re doing so that you can take a training program, then that sometimes means that you go from earning a nice income to earning nothing for a period of time until your training is done so that makes it a big challenge as well.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The length of the training program could also impact the financial commitment required, with broader impacts for those with families. As a worker participant questioned:

“If it’s going to be a month or two, where am I going to get that income for my family?”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

Concurring with this assessment, another participant noted in more concrete terms attendant family considerations with not only the loss of income while participating in training, but also having to incur tuition costs:

“It’s really hard when you’re trying to feed your family to go to university right, to stop and do something else when it’s not paid for because then you have to pay for it out of your pocket. Like at one point [spouse] thought about [it], when he was just limited in the industry... but then yeah you have to take that time off, you have to get a student loan and so I mean yeah, it’s not as feasible with a family, right.”

(P18, female, spouse, mining and forestry industries, <5-10 years’ experience)

Given the importance of finances to prospective learners, there may be an identifiable role for enhanced government support programs. Indeed, those who did participate in (re)training took advantage of targeted government funding programs. Two participants, for instance, were offered \$15K each through a program designed for self-employed workers to retrain for up to four years between 2006 and 2009.

Another important aspect to take into account is the earning potential of jobs for which workers would (re)train with available training programs. Adjusting to a lower salary level can be challenging. As one worker detailed:

“The biggest thing though is you know people, once they get into this kind of work and things are booming and you’re making lots of money, well one of the barriers to switching to a different job or career is that oftentimes you can’t make as much money. And so if people get used to earning a certain level, it’s hard to go down.”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

The spouse of a farmer similarly explained how the earnings potential from available training programs was “not enough to, you know, replace his income is what he felt” [P02, female, spouse, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience].

These accounts suggest that (re)training initiatives may be viewed by some as a relatively risky endeavor, with limited certainty in securing employment after making what were considered to be substantial investments of both time and money. Participation in training also involved a period of time in which one potentially would not be working, and could challenge a preference (or indeed, even a social identity) some workers may have constructed around being engaged in employment and, in the process, pursuing tangible financial rewards (Archer et al., 2001).

#### 3.6.2.1.3 Age-related Perceptions and Beliefs

In discussions on training programs, more mature participants described their interest in these opportunities through an age-related lens. Having obtained valuable on-the-job skills, as a typical response, one worker identified a strong attachment and commitment to his chosen occupation to the exclusion of involvement in formal training, specifically noting:

“...and now you know people say, ‘Oh go back to school,’ well I mean I’m not a young man anymore. I’m not saying I can’t better myself, but I just I’ve always been, you know, I’m a labourer. So that’s what I’ve grown up working, physical labour so.”

(P14, male, family farm category, 11-20 years’ experience)

While more mature participants tended to feel that programming was beneficial and indeed even crucial for those who are looking to upgrade their skills or who are overwhelmed by work in resources industries and looking for an exit route, there was limited interest for themselves. However, this didn’t necessarily preclude the acquisition of skills for the benefit of their current role, which was particularly evident through their current involvement in informal learning opportunities such as webinars, podcasts, equipment trials, and seminars.

On the other hand, findings from this project indicate that when students from a more mature demographic base made a decision to attend a formal training program, they tended to have a unique focus on optimizing their return on investment and readily applying their learning. When reflecting on his latest experience in a short training program, a worker specifically recalled:

“Well to start with, all the classmates...they weren’t 20 years old, they were more like 45 and 50 [laughs]. But they all kind of, I guess, they all wanted to learn... It was all valuable time that was used to learn things. Kind of when you’re paying for the class and the course, you’re wanting to gain and get the most benefit out of it... And I think everybody was really kind of on the same page, they wanted to learn something and at the end, come out and be experienced and ready to use that knowledge...”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years’ experience)

Perhaps for these reasons, another participant explained how more mature learners should be considered part of a separate cohort distinct from the traditional college-age student.

“I think there’s a lack of appreciation when establishing...programs to understand the psychological and emotional element of the...worker-student versus what would be a training program designed for the typical student coming in at 19, 20, 21 years of age. They’re not the same...”

(P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

#### 3.6.2.1.4 Confidence and Knowing What Will Be Expected

A key dynamic that may be at play for prospective learners is confidence levels. Participants identified the importance of acknowledging how prospective learners may question of themselves, ‘*Can I do it?*’ This was a common perspective across participants and industries. In many ways, stepping outside of the workplace and entering into a classroom can be a dramatic adjustment and daunting experience. As one worker explained:

“It’s out of your routine. It’s the unknown. What am I going to have to do? It’s scary not knowing what you have to do, because then you’re put on the spot. ‘Can I do that, will I be shown to be a fool or foolish?’ That’s hard for people. We like routine. Out of our routine isn’t comfortable.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

It is important for service providers to recognize the various fears that may exist for prospective students and how they could prevent someone from readily pursuing learning opportunities. A fear of failure or lack of confidence may specifically raise concerns about one’s ability to do the work and to be successful, ultimately hindering their participation.

“So a lot of those kinds of fears...the fears of the uncertainty, the fears of failure, the fears of a different environment. All those things I think sometimes lead to a person not being as willing to jump in with you know both feet and say, ‘This is going to be the best thing for me.’”

(P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

Fears may stem from a lack of familiarity or a great deal of time having passed since last being part of a learning environment. As such, before learners can be receptive to training, they may need to achieve a level of comfort with the very idea of doing so. This may be most important for those who have spent an extensive amount of time in their career and worked their way up the ranks of an organization through on-the-job experiences as opposed to through post-secondary education. A participant explained how this process may unfold:

“...in my opinion, it’s more about getting them comfortable with receiving education initially than educating them because some may have never been in a post-secondary classroom and for some it’s been years right, so to get them comfortable will be I think the first task...”

(P05, female, family member category, energy industry, 21-30 years’ experience)

Helping learners realize a sense of comfort with training opportunities may be achieved by providing reassurance, tailored supports, and offering a preview of what they may be entering into. An understanding of what could be expected going into the new learning experience for learners was paramount. Informal opportunities to talk with and ask questions of someone who had gone through a program was identified as a particularly useful approach for prospective learners in the opinions of workers with experience in post-secondary learning environments.

Experiences could inevitably vary between individuals. This is apparent when considering the accounts of participants from different backgrounds. Most tradespersons in particular, after having been through a training program, would already be familiar with a post-secondary learning environment and the expectations of these institutions. Participants felt this would increase their interest and willingness to participate in (re)training.

#### 3.6.2.1.5 Consultation with Prospective Learners

In order to ensure workers’ and families’ needs are addressed to the greatest extent possible, participants emphasized the importance of consulting with those who would be impacted by training



programs. This can help garner an improved understanding of program participants' interests, goals, and program impact on families.

Particularly in rural areas where there may not be a long list of training options available and where consequently participants could simply be directed what to take by default, consultation and preliminary research on total training needs and anticipated enrollment can help to dismantle a key potential barrier for learners:

“...a barrier that is simply going to be--okay this is what is being offered to me, is it really what I want? It's the only thing that's around here. You know typically again a lot of these retraining programs, there's not a smorgasbord of things that are being offered. You don't get training program ABCDEF, you get training program A. Take it or leave it. And that level of or lack of choice I think has a big part to play in terms of a person's desire to be able to or desire to enter into that particular program because it's really maybe not what I wanted.”  
(P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience)

When developing training programs, it is also important to determine in advance how many positions small communities in particular would be able to absorb from a graduating class such that adequate employment prospects would be assured for learners:

“Like we live in an area that is very sparsely populated and so like small niche markets can very easily get saturated...you would have to [have] very diversified training.”  
(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

Speaking to the need to provide diverse offerings that do not narrow options down for students, a worker similarly expressed in relation to (re)training opportunities:

“...people vary so widely [in terms of] what they might be good at and what they might want to pursue as a career...”  
(P22, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years' experience)

Ensuring programs are well-researched, meet learners' needs, and are aligned with market demand can position training programs as more than a “band-aid” solution (P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years' experience). In this sense, preferred measures of success are to see if long-term employment is achieved 1-5 years after the training intervention and whether there are opportunities for advancement. These latter metrics may also help to overcome common criticisms of programs

being “short-sighted” or “narrow focused” (P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience).

### 3.6.2.2 Possible Program Design Features

Governments often offer funding for programs that may be developed and implemented when a particular geographic region experiences reductions in employment. To make certain these programs are relevant to, and take into account, learners’ long-term needs it is important that programs are researched in advance to the extent possible. In this vein, participant accounts provided insight that could translate into possible program design features that would be beneficial for prospective learners. Consideration for these aspects could help to ensure that future government funding is directed toward programs that have the strongest impact for all stakeholders. These are identified in the subsections below.

#### 3.6.2.2.1.1 Relatability

From an andragogical standpoint, it would appear that based on the foregoing findings of this project, the principles of adult education could be particularly relevant for workers in resources industries who find themselves in training or retraining. Presenting information in a way that resonates with students and that allows them to draw connections to their previous experiences may be helpful. A worker participant questioned:

“...when you’re doing the training, is the person doing it in a way that I can relate to or understand it? Because a lot of the unsuccessful are being trained by people that aren’t giving the information in a way that the learner is picking it up or can handle it.”

(P15, male, worker category, agriculture industry, >30 years’ experience)

#### 3.6.2.2.2 Practical Learning

For workers with involvement in resources industries, integration of practical, hands on learning with theory would likely be another chief design element. A worker with experience in the trades described of his time as an apprentice:

“...in any kind of trade...we spend an hour or two in the classroom while we’re spending six...in the shop or lab, or whatever the case may be. Like it’s huge to have that hands on.”

(P04, male, worker category, agriculture and energy industries, 11-20 years’ experience)

This is an important consideration with some drawing specific comparisons between college and university-level studies:

“I went to school when I was 40...because I wanted to do what I always loved to do and that was be out in nature. So instead of university four-year degree of learning everything from a book, I went to college and I had hands-on experience with lab work and field study work.”

(P21, male, worker category, energy and forestry industries, 21-30 years' experience)

### 3.6.2.2.3 Learning within a Familiar Environment

In keeping with preference for practical, hands-on learning, another worker participant suggested, and saw the benefit in, transporting the classroom to the learner such that it would be possible to engage in learning within a familiar environment:

“Well, in my opinion, could you actually bring the class to the farm, on your own farm maybe. Could they bring, say, instead of having a classroom, could you have consultants or teachers come out and say neighbors or even get a small group together on a farm and actually be in your own kind of environment and your own kind of equipment and surroundings.”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years' experience)

This approach could also appeal to those who may be apprehensive about entering through the halls of a post-secondary institution, particularly if some time had passed since they last attended school or if they may have been deterred by negative prior experiences in education.

### 3.6.2.2.4 Short-Term Training Options

Another option that may be afforded consideration by program designers is short-term programs. This concept seemed to indeed resound throughout participant accounts, with a number of stories shared (>7) in which workers enrolled in short-term programs to obtain truck driving licensure, for example. A worker participant provided a more detailed description of his positive experience in this regard:

“I think in my case, like when you're kind of busy, it's the short-term... I've found that with even the short term ones, you've still got decent benefit from it where you were still able to kind of learn and use that experience later on in life too.”

(P03, male, worker category, energy industry and family farm, >30 years' experience)

These programs thereby allowed students the opportunity to re-enter the workforce relatively quickly to take advantage of emerging job opportunities. An added benefit is that shorter programs

may be offered more frequently and are therefore more likely to be available when learners need to access them. This was apparent in the following account:

“...you don’t always know ahead of time when the slow times are coming, but I mean if the programs were available whenever I guess, then you could kind of just jump from one activity to the next and that would be ideal...”

(P19, male, worker category, energy industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

For longer-duration programs, an interested learner may have to wait 8-10 months for a particular program under the normal program cycle. Employers, meanwhile, also tend to favor programs which are “short, to the point, meet a very specific need,” as in “get in, get on, get out, get employed type of a situation” (P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience).

#### 3.6.2.2.5 Career Counselling

Career counselling options can help workers in industries characterized by uncertainty, especially through downturns, to identify career interests and potential career pathways. Participants identified the possibility of sitting down with a career counsellor to explore the transferrable skills workers have and matching them with opportunities in other industries. These services and resulting individualized career information could help inform proactive program design.

Although resources industries provide opportunities for those with a high school education to “still make very good money,” understanding the full extent of one’s capabilities could be a powerful tool in helping individuals unlock their full potential, as observed by a worker in the mining industry:

“Some people might not see their own potential and they think that they’re just going to be a low-level grunt worker for the rest of their life kind of thing but in reality they might be good at something that they don’t even consider that might help them advance kind of thing.”

(P16, male, worker category, mining industry, <5-10 years’ experience)

#### 3.6.2.2.6 Desired Areas of Study

The skills and abilities workers in resources industries typically hold, according to participants, include mechanical aptitude, equipment operation and repair, and communication, problem-solving, decision-making and leadership skills acquired through the process of managing, motivating, and team-building among a group of people. Workers also have an ability to take on harsh working conditions (e.g. outdoors, cold weather, long or unregulated working hours, physically demanding work with a level of danger) and are able to work effectively in safety sensitive industries.

In general, a participant explained that it is helpful for workers to enroll (and indeed, possibly be more successful) in programs training for occupations where they are able to “make immediate connections with what they might have been doing for the previous 2, 3, 4, 10, 15 years” [P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience].

In this regard, technology and trades-related careers appeared to be well-aligned with workers’ existing skillsets and interests. Multiple participants even saw a future for family members in the burgeoning ‘green economy’ utilizing surveying and hydraulics capabilities that could readily transfer, along with hands-on equipment operation and repair skills.

Participants were indeed willing and able to work in the renewable energy space, if jobs are available locally and well-paying. As a typical account, it was stated by a participant:

“...well my husband has said before, he said, “If this was a solar panel farm and we had good jobs working there, I would have no problems working for the solar panel farm...” I thought maybe some people wouldn’t want to do that work, but that tells me right there that if they had the opportunity, like if it was paid for, they would pursue further education.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years’ experience)

Over the years, another participant also identified possibilities for training programs that would facilitate entrepreneurship. Such programming would be dedicated to developing or enhancing skillsets to be a successful entrepreneur and could specifically involve “working individually with each participant to help him or her build their business case,” and offering guidance with seeking out “funding or financing for that particular business” [P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience].

Advocating for this approach and speaking from prior experience for individuals who have a clear idea of what they would like to do, this participant observed:

“I think there needs to be a little bit more consideration given to the ability for persons to look and say, ‘Well here is what I’ve learned over the years... here’s the skillsets that I’ve developed, now how can I take and turn that into a business for myself.’”

(P06, male, family farm category, 21-30 years’ experience)

Below is an example in practice where individuals decided to explore related opportunities outside of natural resources work and pursued apprenticeship training. Some even indeed decided to start their own businesses:

“A few people I know have taken up welding or just you know other sources of income or I know someone who they got their apprenticeship ticket for mechanical training and they did their schooling for mechanical training and then they quit at the mine and started a mechanical repair business.”

(P20, female, spouse, mining industry and family farm category, <5-10 years' experience)

Crucially, participants identified how entrepreneurship could also help individuals realize advancement opportunities for themselves.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

Through an exploration of participants' experiences in Saskatchewan resource sectors, this study elucidates the salient factors impacting workers, families, and their households. As illustrated in the findings section above, matters relating to financial precarity, temporal sacrifices and trade-offs, and work cultures were all factors that could exert considerable pressure on seasonal resource workers and their families. Affinity to their chosen industries along with perceptions on availability of alternative options could effectively tether workers to seasonal resource work. However, to the extent that workers' affinity with their selected industries was on account of an inherent passion and interest for the work, meeting a need to feel accomplished or because the work suited their preferences, these aspects may help insulate workers against the more adverse external forces associated with involvement in resource work identified within the study. As well, utilizing the time and resources available to forge connections with friends, family, and coworkers were protective actions taken by participants to manage the most demanding factors acting upon them. For couples, engaging in relationship maintenance activities such as open communication and problem solving also appeared to play an important role in navigating the challenges with which they were faced. As well, planning together and looking forward to shared activities helped families persist through times of separation.

#### **4.1 Study Contributions**

This study adds to existing knowledge about seasonal resources employment by documenting the diversity of factors impacting workers and their families involved in these sectors within a particular context (Saskatchewan, Canada). Exploring the meaning and impact of resources employment for workers and families, this study specifically reveals a distinct interplay of factors interacting to affect levels of work-life satisfaction, health, wellbeing, and relationship quality for workers and their families in a Saskatchewan-specific context.

Expanding on existing international research to further understanding of the social, psychosocial, and economic impacts of employment in resource sectors for workers and families, this study fills important gaps as they relate to knowledge of seasonal employment. This study specifically expands a limited evidence base centred around workers' perceptions of resource work and attendant effects on families. It also provides insight into the ways in which seasonal resource workers and their

families managed the myriad challenges with which they were faced in their daily experiences. In what follows within this discussion section, it will be revealed how, through an examination of participants' experiences with seasonal employment, this study also extends the frontiers of existing knowledge at the intersection of work-life balance and precarious employment literatures. Findings have important implications for the design, development, and enhancement of relevant social programs, services, and policies tailored to the specific needs of workers and families within the scope of the study. This is important since, as mentioned in earlier sections, very little has been written (even internationally) on initiatives to support workers and their families across resource sectors. These contributions collectively are important to advancing knowledge of seasonal employment more broadly as an understudied area of research.

#### **4.1.1 International Literature on Resource Employment**

Existing research from Australia notes how the most positive aspects of work in resource industries are financial benefits and gains (Torkington et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2018), with some sources suggesting that workers largely enter into resource-based employment to achieve financial security (e.g. McKenzie et al., 2014). This source actually describes resource work (and fly-in, fly-out arrangements in particular) as offering advantages such as “regularity” and “security” (McKenzie et al., 2014, p. 434). This was not often the experience of participants in the present study. Perhaps counterintuitively, findings from the present study demonstrate the extent to which workers, through their involvement with resource work, actually encountered high levels of financial precarity and instability.

In more concrete terms, across sectors, workers and families experienced severe income fluctuations based on seasonal and economic patterns. Speaking to this lattermost point, a key underlying factor contributing to economic uncertainty is the industries represented within this study are highly exposed to global commodity prices and geopolitical risks leading to pronounced industry volatility. While existing literature highlights high income potential in resource industries, as noted above, it does not spotlight or offer insight into how dramatic income swings as a result of exposure to aspects outside of individual control are experienced by workers and families.

Although workers and self-employed individuals in resource industries may face distinct risks, they are both subject to market forces and seasonal patterns. Risk of injury leading to absenteeism in physically demanding and at times hazardous work also posed another possible



avenue by which workers could experience earnings declines. While partners' earnings can supplement overall household income, wages in resource-based employment typically exceed earnings available in other local industries. As such, there appears to be evidence of a strong male primary wage earner model in this provincial context as these industries continue to be overwhelmingly comprised of male workers (as noted earlier). Based on these findings, financial instability from resource work therefore has a strong impact on household earnings and can, in turn, affect marriage and relationship quality.

In view of these risks and realities, participants emphasized the importance of implementing money management techniques. The literature indeed highlights how income can be managed to help families realize their financial goals; however, temptation to spend high earnings to the detriment of setting money aside for downturns can lead to financial challenges (Misan and Rudnik, 2015). Large paycheques earned when work is available can result in unsustainable spending, leading individuals into debt. Findings from this study indicate that it is possible to accumulate high debt loads and to become accustomed to an expensive lifestyle workers can only afford through resource work. This parallels findings by other researchers, who go so far as to deem such circumstances as effectively "trapping" families in resource work (Meredith et al., 2014, p. 10; Gardner et al., 2018). It might not be surprising then that other researchers have noted how engaging in resource work chiefly for financial reasons has been associated with high psychological distress (James et al., 2018; Considine et al., 2017). Within the present study, however, workers typically maintained ties to resource work for reasons other than (or at least not exclusively because of) the financial rewards it could offer. This could, in turn, perhaps play a role to some extent in safeguarding their health and wellbeing.

Although immediate financial rewards have been identified as the paramount reason for entering into resource work based on previous international research (e.g. Carrington and Pereira, 2011), findings from the present study suggest that participants' rationale for entry into and maintaining employment in resource industries is far more nuanced. Participant accounts indeed identified a variety of reasons for involvement in seasonal resource-based employment that are more complex than simple financial motivations. For many participants, despite the ever-present reality of employment volatility and financial precarity, work in resources industries was perceived in many cases to offer a higher level of compensation than what could be realized through alternative available employment opportunities, perhaps given factors such as geographic location, personal or educational preferences, or life circumstances. At the same time, enduring identification with the work and

lifestyle may help to explain continued perseverance, despite physical, social, emotional, and family costs incurred. Indeed, at various points in time, participants would frame their chosen career paths not as an occupation, but rather as a way of life or lifestyle choice, albeit often an exigent one. Theory suggests that person-organization fit can be optimized when work provides benefits and supports that align with families' goals and needs (McFadyen et al., 2005).

Resource work in some cases could indeed form part of a worker's very identity, with the majority of participants having a family connection that would likely also allow them to realize a level of familiarity with the work and provide them with understanding of how to manage the challenges it entails. Some had a strong interest and passion for the work that included an ability to be physically active, to be released from an office environment, and to work outside. This type of work also enabled participants to feel accomplished through hands-on tasks that provided them with an opportunity to see tangible results from their labors and to derive a sense of pride in producing valuable resources for their communities and society. For some participants, there were no alternative desired career options that would be considered. Importantly, these positive aspects could serve as protective factors for workers, leading to a propensity for returning to resource work at the first available opportunity in the event of a downturn.

Consistent with participants' deep engagement and passion for the work and accounts of resource work forming part of their identity, it may be helpful to consider application of the notion of occupational identity to these findings. Occupational identity has been conceptualized as a consistent composite of an individual's career goals, interests, and capabilities, with positive psychological impacts having been linked to developing a strong occupational identity (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011). One's choice of occupation can feature prominently in the construction of one's overall identity, and since identity is a source of meaning, structure, and purpose in one's life, identification with one's occupation can have important consequences for wellbeing and life satisfaction (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009). What is more, occupational identity can be an important determinant of work performance and decisions workers make around continuity of employment in a given position (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011). In this way, participation in an occupation that is satisfying, aligned with one's interests, and with which one identifies may be a critical factor in maintaining workers' overall wellbeing and desire to continue on in a specific role, even despite the demanding nature of positions represented in the present study.

Psychological satisfaction and engagement with one's work can also reflect alignment with workers' intrinsic values. Intrinsic work values such as challenge, variety, and achievement identified within this study may therefore contribute to the realization of workers' higher order needs (Dahiya and Raghuvanshi, 2021).

Also embedded within study findings, however, is the suggestion of an important caveat that family legacy and lower earnings potential in alternative employment opportunities for those without tertiary education could be additional factors effectively binding workers to resource work. As there could be few other (actual or perceived) employment opportunities aligned with worker interests and skillsets, workers may not be able to walk away easily from employment in these industries. In this way, industry affinity could be both a challenging and protective factor for workers and families.

Drawing upon again occupational identity literature to explain this caveat, it is important to note that identity formation is often a complex process. Previous experience, personal values, and social and cultural elements can all be brought to bear on occupational identity formation (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009). Development of occupational identities can be shaped by both important relationships and social expectations; social acceptance and social influences are therefore important in occupational identity formation, with parents/family, peers, and the broader society playing roles in this process (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011). Even in modern-day societies emphasizing free choice, individuals may therefore face restricted career or identity formation options due to the power of social influences, or perhaps personal limitations, economic situations, or other constraints (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009).

As we have seen, for a number of reasons, workers persisted through challenging work conditions. As a result of workers' involvement with employment requiring long hours, often in remote locations, this study confirms findings from previous international research on natural resources work highlighting challenges workers and families experience with time apart from their loved ones. Indeed, earlier research identifies time away from home and family separations as primary disadvantages of resource work, particularly with fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out work arrangements (Langdon et al., 2016). Consequently, partners (typically female) experience loneliness and an uneven balance of household tasks and responsibilities such as caring for children and shopping (Torkington et al., 2011; Langdon et al., 2016).

The impacts of time apart, however, may be more pronounced among study participants as compared with international literature. In line with international research (Torkington et al., 2011; Blackman et al., 2014), findings from the present study indicate relationship development and maintenance with friends and family could be impeded with constraints on time available to connect as workers were often fatigued upon arriving home and needed time to recover in preparation for their next upcoming shift. Workers in the present study though described experiences of essentially having *no time* available for anything apart from work, including simple tasks such as appointments or meal preparation. This could be attributed largely to exceptionally long hours, extended commutes, and demanding, unpredictable schedules.

These results also accord with findings within the broader precarious employment literature identifying challenges younger workers most especially face with synchronizing their schedules (often consisting of unsociable working hours) with those of their friends (Woodman, 2013; Wilson and Ebert, 2013). Long hours associated with nonstandard work arrangements can also lead to time-related constraints affecting workers' physical health, particularly in the way of fatigue, adopting a poor diet, and low levels of exercise (Fagan et al., 2012).

In the present study, although rotational schedules offered some level of stability, these could be changed, sometimes without much notice. With limited predictability and "scatterbrained" schedules, it was difficult for participants in the present study to plan ahead. Individuals and families were not able to make plans in some cases at all. While the international literature also documents experiences of workers missing "important" or "special" events (Meredith et al., 2014; Bowers et al., 2018), families in the present study noted the significance of missing out on *day-to-day happenings* within the family as well. Of particular consequence were fathers' routine absences for supertime when busy families would otherwise be able to sit down together for a meal. As well, in the view of a female participant, her spouse's absence was thought to have specific impact on male children who looked to their father as a role model and who took an interest in the activities in which their father participated. With stated qualitative implications for children's development, this finding contrasts with earlier quantitative studies identifying no adverse emotional or behavioral impact of resource work on children (e.g. Dittman et al., 2016).

With impeded ability to spend time with friends and family due to demanding work schedules, this study confirms previous findings suggesting the possibility of negative resulting

impacts on relationships (e.g. Meredith et al., 2014; Torkington et al., 2011; Bowers et al., 2018). This study, however, provided insight into the mechanisms by which marriage and relationship breakdowns may occur for resource workers with respect to time apart. More specifically, participant accounts detail how partners become unable to “wait around forever” to spend time with their loved ones after plans either cannot be made, or are made and then routinely cancelled, due to unpredictable schedules. Having a common understanding between partners/spouses that this is “life as we know it right now,” and agreeing on the acceptable level of trade-off between time and money helped to maintain close family relationships. However, as participants accumulated years of experience, some began to tire of “living out of a suitcase,” eating out at restaurants on the road, and believed that it was more important to spend time with family than to amass earnings and accumulate material goods.

One of the most unique contributions of this study is its ability to illuminate defining features of work cultures that contributed to the establishment of workers’ employment conditions with spillover consequences for their personal lives. Chief among these was the need for a strong work ethic that could very easily be exploited by high work demands made by employers. At the same time, workers could become essentially “a number,” with market conditions causing companies to either “hire like crazy or fire like crazy.”

Findings detail how workers seemingly cannot participate or do not maintain participation in resource work if they are unable to adjust to the nature of their chosen industry/industries. With seemingly little willingness to make accommodations on the part of the employer, workers and families needed to adjust. This was particularly apparent with limited flexibility such that it could be challenging for workers to request and take time off. Findings from this study suggest that a key underlying factor could be that many companies, especially in the energy industry, are small businesses with limited staff trying to maintain their competitiveness and even viability.

International literature highlights an ability to realize a distinct division between work and personal lives as a benefit of resource work (particularly for fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out arrangements with dedicated and even “quality” time off) (Meredith et al., 2014; Blackman et al., 2014; McKenzie et al., 2014, p. 434). This included, for example, physical separation between work and home, allowing workers to detach and disconnect from work while at home (Blackman et al., 2014). Relatedly, Gardner et al. (2018) found that work and life were viewed to be separate domains. In the present study, however, divisions between work and home could be blurred, especially where

work activities took place in close proximity to, or indeed even at the same location, as home. Under these circumstances, work could completely subsume personal lives, essentially becoming a matter of “sleeping, eating and working.” In a camp environment, workers were away from their families and amenities and could be subject to employer rules and regulations while onsite, perhaps resulting in a “regimented” atmosphere. As a result, workers often were unable to relax when off-duty. With long working hours, unpredictable schedules or being on-call at all hours, it could also be challenging for workers to carry out activities within their personal lives. As noted, it could be difficult to plan for a day off and to carry out day-to-day tasks such as purchasing groceries or scheduling appointments. Work also spilled over into home life as some workers at times were too fatigued to immediately participate in family, leisure or other activities outside of work and needed time to recoup after a series of long work days.

In non-unionized work environments, there was a prevailing sentiment of keeping one’s “mouth shut,” doing the work, and getting along well with the team. The literature identifies how workers in precarious employment situations most especially may not feel comfortable speaking openly on workplace matters for fear of negatively affecting their employment (e.g. Lewchuk, 2017). Communication between workers and supervisors may be further constrained due to workers’ concerns about destabilizing workplace relationships, perhaps due to the threat of retaliation from others; an organizational climate or norms that do not support employees coming forward and speaking freely on their ideas, opinions, or concerns; or job-specific characteristics such as heavy workloads or time pressures that preclude opportunity for issues to be brought forward. Culture-based issues, including perceptions that management is unsupportive and does not value input from workers, appears to have the strongest bearing on whether employees feel comfortable bringing issues forward. Employees may therefore be less willing to express their opinions out of fear of inviting negative consequences for themselves. This is important, as employees who are not comfortable bringing concerns forward to their supervisors in regards to organizational practices may not raise safety-related issues (Manapragada and Bruk-Lee, 2016). This can be especially dangerous in safety-sensitive industries typical of natural resources work.

Even in unionized work environments, management was not always receptive to hearing suggestions for improvements. As part of these work cultures, some workers (perhaps not all) may avoid raising concerns or reaching out for help. This is consistent with findings from other studies of

male-dominated work organizations, whereby men tend to maintain stoic outward appearances and limit help-seeking (Torkington et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2018).

Though resource work provided workers with comparatively high levels of waged compensation, participants discussed the (in)availability of some supplementary benefits such as healthcare and pension benefits. As noted earlier, self-employed farmers are also not automatically covered by workers' compensation. Given the physical nature of the work, this could be a cause for concern as workers' bodies tire accumulating years of experience performing hard physical labour. Given these realities, families shared candid thoughts and concerns about their loved ones' continued participation in resource work. Although families made the best of these situations and found ways to adapt and adjust such that their loved ones could maintain participation in resource work, there was a preference among some that their partners and family members would seek out alternative work. This would allow families to spend more time together and for more mobile families to set down stronger roots in their communities.

Finally, this study confirms earlier findings regarding the importance of social support and forging social connections for individual health and wellbeing. The importance of maintaining regular communication with, and leveraging support from, family members has been noted in existing literature from Australia (e.g. Gardner et al, 2018; Torkington et al., 2011). Consistent with the strategies employed by workers in this study, support from colleagues can also be a protective factor within workplaces and may help to buffer against job insecurity (Considine et al., 2017; James et al., 2018). Valuing and looking forward to opportunities for families to spend time together was noted in the present study and was also a finding in Torkington et al. (2011). Some schedules and rosters were more supportive of these opportunities than others.

#### **4.1.2 Precarious Work & Work-Life Balance**

Separate from its contributions to the international literature on natural resources employment, this study illuminated a number of challenges participants faced at the work-life interface. In this regard, the present study adds to the existing work-life balance literature base by foregrounding the experiences of workers and families involved in seasonal natural resources-based work. The experiences of workers and families in seasonal resource sectors appear to have been excluded from this body of literature that thus far has appeared to be relatively narrowly focused. Indeed, as identified by Warren (2021) and earlier works such as Yu (2014), very little has been written on

work-life balance and work-life conflict issues for workers engaged in forms of precarious employment. Instead, existing literature in these areas tends to focus most especially on professional office workers and the time pressures they may face (Lewis et al., 2007; Warren, 2021). In this way and as an additional contribution, the present study furthers the work-life balance literature as it relates to occupations outside of professional and office roles by exploring the specificities of seasonal work as a form of precarious employment.

In many cases, participants in the present study indeed drew distinctions between structured 9-5 office jobs and outdoor, extended shift work natural resources workers typically performed in industries subject to the vagaries of weather, market conditions, and broader seasonal patterns. Along with time-based constraints professional office workers often experience too, this study highlights additional considerations for resources workers, including financial and job-based strains that may incorporate multidimensionality into the traditional work-life balance construct. In particular, a desire to work for as many hours as possible in peak seasons in anticipation of slow times or broader economic risks such as market downturns often led to periods of overwork. These realities carried implications for the level of work-life balance participants were able to achieve across seasons.

The risk of facing seasons with reduced hours or lack of work could lead to fears of financial insecurity that disciplined workers into working more or longer hours for as long as work was available. It seems then that contrary to career-related reasons often motivating professional office workers, financial imperatives stemming from aspects of precarity, and most especially financial insecurity, associated with natural resources work could lead to work-life balance challenges for participants in this study (Warren, 2021; Yu, 2014). Workers' acceptance of unpredictable schedules and long hours motivated by hopes of attaining financial security limited the time available for participation in activities and social interaction outside of work. As participant accounts illustrate, demanding work conditions in dangerous and difficult work environments could also deplete workers of the energy necessary to be fully present with their families immediately when arriving back home (Fagan et al., 2012). In addition, with resource-based work typically located in remote areas, workers' days were often extended by hours-long commutes.

As identified in this study, the possibility of seasons with either too much or too little work resulted in sacrifices made by both workers and their family members. Interestingly, rather than conceptualizing tensions at the family and work interface as a 'balance' issue, some participants



perceived participation in resource work, and particularly forms involving commuting, as a ‘trade-off’ between two finite resources: time and money. Whether the resulting trade-off was worth it to the family was a decision made by each family unit.

This trade-off could be unique to workers in seasonal natural resources industries, particularly given the higher-than-average wages they are able to earn. Although workers may feel compelled to work long hours for as long as possible given the possibility of slow seasons or downturns (and thereby introducing elements of precarity into workers’ employment), workers can also be motivated to work extended hours to earn overtime wages and increase their earnings above their standard wages (Fagan et al., 2012). The possibility of earning increased compensation on top of already elevated wages is an additional dimension of the ‘trade-off’ discourse workers raised. Workers could also establish and become attached to lifestyles built around higher incomes that additional hours afforded them, further incentivizing them to continue working these hours (Golden and Altman, 2008).

For workers in the present study, accumulation of higher-than-average income seemed to compensate for the demands and challenges of the work, including the potential for work-life conflict. Research has indeed identified that the level of available compensation may counterbalance negative outcomes associated with long hours (Fagan et al., 2012). This is important, given that many workers in the study belonged to the highest earning occupations across the provincial economy (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

This raises an important distinction between participants within the present study and other workers and families experiencing precarious employment. While existing literature notes the social and family impacts of various forms of precarious employment, most of this scholarly work centres around the home and work situations of low-income workers (e.g. Smith & McBride, 2021). Lewchuk (2017) also found that it is low-paying and insecure employment that most often leads to adverse social outcomes (e.g. anxiety about work that affects one’s personal life; delayed relationship and family formation; and social isolation). This source goes on to identify how increased income can reduce some effects of precarious employment, with these effects more likely to be reported by precarious workers earning up to \$80K. This is worthy of mention, since, in the present study, participant accounts indicate (and provincial statistics confirm) that entry-level jobs in resources industries could command annual earnings over \$100K. As findings from the present study showed,

workers and families made decisions on the degree to which time was traded for money, but they did not delay home ownership/taking on mortgages, forming relationships, marriages or parenthood as suggested in the broader precarious employment literature (e.g. Wilson and Ebert, 2013; Lewchuck, 2017; Cuervo and Chesters, 2019). Proceeding with these major life decisions was likely facilitated by high incomes.

Within the present study, in addition to higher earning potential, another unique factor worthy of further discussion at the work-home interface is that many participants also reported generally enjoying the work in which they were engaged. Accordingly, *why* one works in a particular role and industry may be an important consideration. Burke and Cooper (2008) highlight how some individuals toil for long hours because of a love of their job. Those who love their jobs tend to feel their particular position is the only one that they would consider and that suits them as well (Noonan, 2008). Working for the love of a job can increase commitment to the role, work fulfillment and life satisfaction, while protecting against burnout (Burke and Cooper, 2008). Workers who love their jobs also have increased physical, psychological and social resources to expend in their roles (Noonan, 2008), and work engagement supports fulfillment, vitality, dedication to, and absorption in one's work (Dahiya and Raghuvanshi, 2021).

Importantly, a preference for non-standard work and its resulting schedules, hours, and shifts can be a determining factor in workers' levels of satisfaction with the work-life balance they are able to achieve (Omar, 2013). In this way, 'balance' can be a subjective, situational concept, whereby the degree of satisfaction with one's work-life balance depends on workers' own perception of their circumstances (Kelliher et al., 2019). As Fagan et al. (2012) state, "A subjective assessment of whether long hours are worthwhile—in terms of jobs satisfaction, financial rewards and career progression—may be more important than the hours worked per se" (p. 26).

Therefore, although non-standard work schedules, including shift work, can increase the potential for mismatch between work and family spheres, the perceived 'fit' between work schedules and personal and family needs is a crucial consideration, with perceived 'fit' enabling both role and relationship quality (Fagan et al., 2012). Long working hours then may not impact marital relationships if there is satisfaction with the hours worked (ibid).

In effect, the impact of long working hours on health and wellbeing is determined to a large degree by the extent to which workers' hours align with their preferences (Fagan et al., 2012). Work-

life interference is more likely when workers take on overtime due to pressure from supervisors; health challenges are also more common when long hours or overtime are not voluntary (Golden and Altman, 2008). Even so, there are likely to be spillover effects with excessive hours, even if these effects are unrecognized; these may include arguments and less leisure time (Golden and Altman, 2008).

## **4.2 Furthering Understanding of Personal & Family Implications of Resources Work through Military Experiences**

Although all families encounter stressors, participants in this study identified additional, compounding challenges that appear to be unique to their specific employment situations. At the same time, however, the distinct confluence of factors workers and families in this study faced illuminated some difficulty identifying appropriate bodies of literature upon which to draw and with which to compare in order to advance understanding of, and extract additional meaning from, participant experiences. A review of existing research on work-life balance considerations revealed that this body of literature is incomplete, particularly as it relates to workers and families involved in seasonal or other forms of precarious employment. Indeed, according to Kelliher et al. (2019) and as established in the preceding section, "...little is known about the work-life balance of individuals who have non-standard employment arrangements..." (p. 98). Within the various forms of precarious employment, as discussed, resource work appears to be an unexplored area at the intersection of non-standard employment and work-life balance literatures. Crucially, these bodies of literature do not fully address the panoply of issues raised by participants in this study. In view of these gaps, and in seeking a fit with an appropriate body of research, it is instructive to turn to existing military literature to better understand the wider range of implications entailed by seasonal resource employment for workers' private lives and families, as identified within this study.

This approach is in keeping with participants' own comments and accounts identifying comparisons with military life elucidated in this study's findings. Upon further investigation, the available research on military families and servicemen/women illuminates deeper parallels and striking similarities to participants' described experiences. It may not be surprising then that in reviewing online job postings for careers represented in this study, some resource companies specifically state a preference for individuals with military/Canadian Armed Forces experience.

Accordingly, turning to the military literature provides some helpful insights meriting further discussion here.<sup>7</sup>

In particular, participants described experiences of extended periods of time involved in work activities in remote regions and oftentimes apart from family. In this regard, the findings from this study are consistent with research on the impacts of separation due to deployment among military couples, whereby the majority of families experience stress associated with loneliness; barriers to communication; relocations; concerns over the health, safety and well-being of their loved ones; and spouses attending to household matters on their own (Anderson et al., 2013). The requirement to be available at any time can also make it exceedingly difficult to establish family plans (Segal and Segal, 2004). In this way, recurring limited term deployments could be akin to cyclical peak operating periods in seasonal resource work. Deployments and peak seasons may therefore share implications for family separations occurring at these times.

To be sure, the findings of this study tell a story of workers and families trying to exist in, and persist through, challenging situations. Much like their military counterparts, workers in this study also encountered “intense work environments” (Redmond et al., 2015, p. 9). These included unforgiving weather conditions in harsh outdoor workplaces, requirements for arduous physical work, large workloads, long and variable hours of work, and at times indeterminant work locations (Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020; McFadyen et al., 2005).

Although they may take different forms, all family units appear to make considerable sacrifices in pursuing resource employment. For partners, managing on their own is very often one of the largest challenges. Among military spouses, separations have been identified as the main

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<sup>7</sup> It may also be important to consider possible differences that could be identified between military and resources work. Although income fluctuations typical of what has been identified by participants within this study may not be present to the same degree within the military, the military literature notes how finances can be a recurring concern and stressor among families, particularly through processes such as deployments, relocations and reintegration into home life (Drummet et al., 2003; Ross et al., 2017). Knobloch et al. (2016) found that financial challenges were common at the reunion stage, with financial gains realized by families during deployment. Similar to described experiences within participant accounts, economic necessity can also keep individuals attached to the military life (Harrison and Laliberte, 1994). Military salaries, however, tend to not be as high as in natural resources industries; commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Canadian Forces earn between \$63,700 and \$72,400 in Saskatchewan (Government of Saskatchewan, 2019). Natural resources workers are also not actively engaged in combat, though they are involved in dangerous work on a day-to-day basis. As noted, mining and energy have the highest mortality rates across industries within the broader economy.

complaint, in potentially facing loneliness, role overload, heightened parenting responsibilities, financial concerns, and limited access to community supports (Drummet et al., 2003).

With long work hours and extended absences, resource workers with children may be absent for significant proportions of their children's lives, and brief periods of time away can still represent a large part of a child's life (Riggs and Riggs, 2011; Drummet et al., 2003). In these situations, parents of young children may miss considerable growth and change in a short period of time (Segal, 1986). Consistent with accounts in this paper, as a function of being away and more than just routine events, parents may miss important mileposts in their children's lives (Joseph and Afifi, 2010). Crucially, involvement in these key markers in a child's life can strengthen relationships and bonds within families (Hall, 2011). Being in a position of pursuing work activities at the expense of family time and missed family events can cause a great deal of emotional stress for parents (Drummet et al., 2003). Literature relating to the military also demonstrates that separations decrease the time available for parents' direct interaction with children, and in this way, may reduce their ability to guide children's development (Willerton et al., 2011).

For children as well, with relocations, it can be difficult to establish roots as friendships, peer groups, and school systems change (Segal and Segal, 2004). There may also be gaps in students' education and learning (Sorries et al., 2015). On the other hand, military literature shows that frequent relocations can increase children's adaptability, maturity and social skills (Ruff and Keim, 2014).

Woven through participant stories, and consistent with military experiences, was the potential for (or actual lived experience of) isolation in its various forms—social, emotional, or geographic, particularly given the situatedness of resource activities in remote locales. For families, separations can result in the loss of an important source of emotional support (Riggs and Riggs, 2011). For workers, mobility between worksites could result in feelings of isolation and alienation (Hall, 2011). Work-related geographic and time-based separations, much like military deployments, were stressful for workers, couples, and families and could place significant strain on relationships (Chandler et al., 2018).

Having established how military life aligns with many of the aspects of participants' lived experiences, a further comparison with the military experience is helpful to enhance understanding around some of the unique challenges workers and families may have been experiencing at the work and life interface. In some cases, work demands came into acute conflict with other areas of workers'

lives (McFadyen et al., 2005). Indeed, some sources even consider the workplace and families to have competing interests, requiring continuous negotiation and each demanding concessions from the other (McFadyen et al., 2005).

Drawing from the military literature, at the heart of work-life tensions may then be the presentation of work as a '*greedy institution*' requiring significant time and commitment from workers (Drummet et al., 2003). There is evidence of this phenomenon taking shape across participant accounts in this study as well, with expectations of workers in these organizations typically exceeding those of others with standard 8-hour work days--especially in terms of time commitments, flexibility demands, and challenging outdoor work conditions.

Particular tensions at the work-life interface may relate to "how much, when and where work occurs" (Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020, p. 170). Figuring prominently into this discussion are the implicit expectations organizations and industries have of workers. Within the '*greedy institution*' framework, work organizations, including many of those in resource-based industries, demand what could be considered "overemphasized commitment levels from the individual..." (Ohlsson et al., 2021, p.2). These could be in terms of time, energy or loyalty (Segal, 1986). Such demands could be firmly entrenched into work cultures and include working more than standard hours each week, heavy workloads encouraging workers to put forth additional efforts, and requiring workers to make adjustments in their personal lives or to their lifestyles in order to accommodate the work and the organization (Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020; Ohlsson et al., 2021).

Participant accounts indeed detailed how workers put forward steadfast effort for as long as work was available to them. The centrality of work and dedication to this degree can naturally result in challenging implications for family life, and to the extent that work may become akin to a second family (Hall, 2011). Elements of this ethos were suggested in participant accounts, where workers in some cases came to view one another as 'family.' These situations could be beneficial where colleagues felt they could turn to and rely on one another for support to persist through difficult work contexts. But these situations could also present challenges in terms of workers managing participation in two 'families.' Perhaps this was no more apparent than in cases where workers indicated their implicit participation in a 'marriage' of sorts with their work and instruments of work, as identified earlier, and necessitating they regularly, or indeed, continuously be on call.

Perhaps taking this line of inquiry a step further is the concept of a ‘total institution’ coined and introduced by Erving Goffman (1961). With relevance to this study, a ‘total institution’ has been conceptualized as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (as cited in Harrison and Laliberte, 1994, p.21).

The merging of work and life spheres in these situations is problematic to the concept of work-life balance (DeBruin and Dupuis, 2004). Indeed, these work situations saw the complete integration of what could otherwise be considered two separate work and life spheres, offering workers little semblance of ‘balance’ between the domains. By living and working in the same context, workers may be subject to complete institutional (i.e. employer) control.

In the present study, perhaps this was most apparent in cases where workers not only shared long working hours together during peak seasons, but also lived in shared accommodations situated in remote, sparsely populated regions. In cases where accommodations were employer-provided, workers could be subject to employer rules and dictates when off-duty as well. In a perfect merger of home and work, workers in these situations were isolated from their families, amenities and services, and these challenges could be exacerbated where employees did not have access to personal vehicles on-site. In this way, workers could be, as P01 described, “segregated” from aspects of broader society. It may not be surprising then that participants described experiences of workers struggling to find a sense of ‘home’ and reprieve in these shared environments when off-duty and away from their families in high seasons. For farm families located in rural regions, this could also mean performance of work and domestic activities in close geographic proximity for long hours.

Even in cases where participants neither resided at the worksite, nor were expected to be available at any hour, work consumed an extensive amount of their time and encroached on personal lives in nontrivial ways nonetheless. This could have consequences for the pursuit of family activities. In addition to spending precious time with family, days off were also when workers typically participated in leisure activities that most others enjoyed regularly at the end of a work day or at the end of a work week. Participants noted, however, the possible inability to make plans due to scheduling unpredictability. There were also impacts of interruptions to expected time off. Any interruptions could potentially be disruptive to plans a worker makes on days off to participate in highly anticipated family, social or other non-work activities.

Much like the military experience, it is very clear the culture of workplaces described in this study demanded that workers bend to organizational requirements, with little indication of reciprocation or regard for costs to workers (Drummet et al., 2003). A lack of accommodation on the part of organizations was also particularly apparent in accounts from P01 and P11 attesting to “regimentation” of the industries that compelled employees to adjust and organize themselves and both their work and personal lives around rigid rules, structures, and demands (Ohlsson et al., 2021). In reference to the military, Segal (1986) explains how “[c]onflict between the military requirements and family needs is avoided when the family adapts to the military’s demands” (p. 24). Demands on workers can therefore also have significant effects on family members (Lester et al., 2011).

In this way, and in addition to strong demands placed on workers, organizations often also hold implicit expectations of workers’ family/partners (Drummet et al., 2003). In fact, the findings from this study suggest that, as in the case of military families, continued participation in resource work in many cases requires extensive commitment and support of the family unit and all of its members. In more precise terms, without family cooperation and family members’ continued efforts in completing necessary tasks at home, it would not be possible for a worker to maintain focused attention on the job at hand, particularly from a distance (Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020). A disproportionate amount of this responsibility for family and domestic tasks could fall to partners or spouses. It is important to note that, much like all industries represented in this study, the military remains a male-dominated work environment (Ely and Meyerson, 2006). This means that when a partner or spouse is very often called upon to showcase commitment to a partner’s work, this is done by a female partner. This may bear out in several ways, including: conforming to automatic expectations that she adjust to the challenges of having her spouse away during peak seasons; subjugating potentially her own interests to attend to new or additional household tasks in her partner’s absence; adopting new routines; willingness to relocate the family; managing new roles and responsibilities independently rather than as a family; and where children are involved, managing as a single parent for a large part of the year (Hall, 2012; Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020; Redmond et al., 2015; Alfano et al., 2016; Segal, 1986). A significant part of these duties also involves the emotional work of keeping up a strong outward appearance and readily accepting demands that work in these industries requires of the family. These are uncompensated, unrecognized activities that enable the worker to continue employment within their selected industry (Ohlsson et al., 2021).



These activities performed by partners and spouses are in many ways essential tasks. Military research highlights how, contrary to a statement made by a female participant that “Oh, it’s just mom here,” mothers play an important role in regulating connections between children and their fathers and overall relationships within the family. These activities can compensate for a father’s absence and positively influence child and family wellbeing (Kaczmarek and Sibbel, 2008).

Drummet et al. (2003) observe how families have traditionally been expected to adapt to norms and values of the institutions employing husbands and male partners. Accordingly, with these implicit expectations, there is likely limited organizational and industry consideration that is afforded to the impact on families and their needs. Indeed, as identified earlier, a female participant and mother in the present study identified how she and her family “are pretty good at adapting” to the realities of the industries in which her husband has worked. A second female participant also identified how family support was required to shoulder a number of day-to-day responsibilities to keep her partner involved in resource work.

Harrison and Laliberte (1994) note how “all women are made extremely vulnerable by the expectation that they will do, largely by themselves, the invisible work that keeps social institutions going” (p. 15). Luxton (1980) similarly notes how important of a role work plays in shaping relationships within the home, and regardless of whether they are engaged in employment outside of the home, women are nevertheless chiefly responsible for domestic labour. In farming, the male-dominated enterprise has also typically required women “to make adjustments or compromises” (Gerrard et al., 2004, p. 63), even as modern family farming operations typically rely on the labour and off-farm income of female partners (Beach, 2013).

These findings are consistent with social reproduction theory. Social reproduction encompasses the essential day-to-day work of food preparation, caring for children, shopping, and cleaning that is necessary to maintain a household and to reproduce labour power such that working adults are able to continue earning wages for the family each day (Luxton, 2006). This valuable work can also include the provision of “love and support that most people need to give meaning to their lives” (Luxton, 2006, p. 32). In this way, this work helps to manage and maintain social relations within the household (Winders and Smith, 2019).

As has been asserted, this work is foundational and enables members of the household to participate in other forms of work (Winders and Smith, 2019). Crucially, the processes involved in

social reproduction involve significant and complex forms of labour, and when performed by members of the family unit, they are often unpaid and performed by women (Luxton and Benzanson, 2006; Luxton, 2006). As women's labour force participation increases, women may therefore carry increasingly heavy burdens within both 'work' and 'life' spheres, and particularly so when boundaries between these spheres blur (Winders and Smith, 2019), as in the case of maintaining family farm operations.

A further consideration is that within the 'greedy institution' construct, scheduling of work hours impacts men's ability to participate in and contribute to household routines (meals, caregiving) and social activities. In particular, men's long working hours can exacerbate the gendered household division of labour and limit men's participation in parenting and other household activities (Fagan et al., 2012). Taken together, these realities may affirm organizations as a vehicle for construction and reproduction of gender norms, and specifically, they can reinforce male-dominated workspaces as conduits for the solidification of gender inequality at work and at home (Ohlsson et al., 2021).

It is also worth noting that an organization's influence and expectations can even extend reach beyond a partner, spouse, or immediate family (Ohlsson et al., 2021). For additional assistance, in the present study, reliance on extended kin networks in some cases was necessary to allow both partners to participate in paid employment, and for the male resource worker in particular, to continue involvement in a resource industry.

Greater recognition of the demands placed on the family unit by industries and organizations may play a positive role in supporting workers' and families' efforts in attempting to balance work and family commitments (McFadyen et al., 2005). As well, supports for spouses and families may be another way in which any possible tensions could be abated between family and 'greedy' work institutions (Hall, 2012).

### **4.3 Managing Work-Induced Challenges through Informal Supports**

Forging social connections and investing in relationships were ways in which participants in the current study navigated the challenges with which they were faced. Research indicates that supportive family and social networks are important for adaptation and resilience against adversity (Riggs and Riggs, 2011). In this way, social support can offer stability and support in turbulent situations and may even facilitate adjustment to challenging circumstances (McFadyen et al., 2005).

Returning once again to the military experience, evidence from this body of literature indicates that prioritization of family time can be an important relationship maintenance strategy when such opportunities present themselves (Knobloch et al., 2016). This is important, as couples and family members who take steps to maintain and invest in their relationships are less likely to perceive stressful events as a threat (Afifi et al., 2020). They're also better able to respond to stressors more positively by employing collaborative problem solving (Afifi et al., 2020).

Family leisure activities in particular are a means of facilitating quality communication and time together (Chandler et al., 2018). Simple, low-cost leisure activities at home can enable positive family interactions, cohesiveness, communication and relaxation while allowing family members to take advantage of opportunities to be “physically and psychologically present together” (Chandler et al., 2018, p. 638). Within the current study, some participant schedules were more supportive of these opportunities. For example, participants in the mining, forestry, and energy industries described blocks of time off that were more accommodating of these opportunities. For children, along with emphasizing family time and fun together, engaging in hobbies or activities can support their wellbeing (Lester et al., 2011; Lester and Bursch, 2011). Evidence of this could be seen in the present study where children participated in playtime together with toys that mimicked the tools and machines of the industries in which their father worked.

Drawing again from military experiences, and as participant accounts substantiate, the literature also identifies regular and quality family communication as an important means to reducing isolation (Riggs and Riggs, 2011). Important for family cohesion, high-quality communication is typically characterized as clear, honest, patient, empathic, and open emotional disclosures (Drummet et al., 2003; Riggs and Riggs, 2011). Communication helps families work together to balance work demands with the needs (material, social, and emotional) of family members (McFadyen et al., 2005). Issues that aren't addressed before family members are separated once again for work obligations can worsen while family members are apart from one another (Drummet et al., 2003). During a work-related separation, services that help families develop their social networks are important, and upon a partner's return home, communication is recommended as the main focus (Andres, 2014). Along with regular and quality communication, social and community supports can similarly help to reduce isolation, and both of these factors have been linked to improved well-being among military spouses (Riggs and Riggs, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2020).

Many of these strategies employed by workers and family participants to manage the challenges with which they were faced could be considered informal supports. Though a role for support services could certainly be identified to work in tandem with informal supports as means to countering the challenging circumstances and demanding lifestyles experienced by workers, specific barriers may impede access to more formal supports outside of family and friend networks. Chief among these is an existing and persistent stigma around seeking formal support services that was noted by participants in the present study and across resource industries.

These findings are consistent with those prevailing in other male-dominated work situations (e.g. Hall, 2012), with the implication that it is important to consider how strongly work cultures can influence uptake of programs, services and supports (Drummet et al., 2003). Traditional male stereotypes that take hold in male-dominated work environments often result in pressures to maintain an image of stoicism and suppression of feelings and fears (Hall, 2011). A dominant image of masculinity is therefore often one of independence, toughness, tenacity, loyalty, and bravery (Barrett, 1996; Abrahamsson and Johansson, 2021). These attributes urge workers to persist through trying situations such as physical demands and arduous work schedules (Barrett, 1996). In keeping with this imagery, there is an implicit expectation that individuals are able to manage difficult situations on their own (Hall, 2011). Some workers (and even families) therefore may not be willing or able to recognize when help is needed (Wadsworth and Southwell, 2020). The next section may illuminate reasons for why these realities persist.

#### **4.4 Workplace Culture and Endurance Versus Accommodation**

Some have described resource workplaces as ‘hyper-masculine’ cultures (Henderson, 2020). Chen (2016) explains how workers in these settings exhibit toughness, a willingness to work under any conditions, and live according to rules or codes that are rooted in these stereotypical notions of masculinity. Traditional ‘male’ jobs often emerge as spaces to validate one’s masculinity, with organizational structures and practices acting as the vehicles for expression of ‘maleness’ (Ely and Meyerson, 2006).

Drawing from illustrations in the military, Barrett (1996) points to an inherent paradox between the seeming coexistence of male demonstrations of tough, individualistic masculinity and compliance with rigid rules and unforgiving norms and practices. In attempting to understand this discrepancy, it may very well be that exercising independence, control, and autonomy becomes less

important in work situations where masculine perseverance, strength, and stamina are emphasized (Barrett, 1996). This could at least partially explain workers' willingness to endure unpredictable hours, being away from family, and difficult working conditions. Persisting through these challenges could essentially play into a discourse of masculinity. The adoption of this discourse helps to establish a narrative whereby tolerance of these adverse conditions and subordination to restrictive organizational norms and rules becomes in effect a demonstration of masculinity (Barrett, 1996). There is evidence of this in this study, particularly where it was emphasized how involvement in these industries is not an easy life and how withstanding circumstances such as being away from home are "not for everybody."

The inference here may be that only the strongest, most enduring individuals are able to thrive (or indeed, even survive) in physically and psychologically demanding conditions (ibid). In addition to potentially creating an exclusionary culture, these norms and practices can also be a means of continuously exhibiting, validating, and asserting masculinity, in effect distinguishing a specific group from others who did (or could not) persist (Barrett, 1996).

Looking ahead, perhaps it will be possible to transition this discourse of tolerance to one of accommodation. A commitment to changing industry and workplace practices would then shift responsibility currently borne by workers to tolerate, handle, or adjust to the stresses associated with challenges such as time away from family, commuting, confinement to camps when off-duty, loneliness and social isolation. Instead, the onus would shift onto employers to address or mitigate these challenges to the extent possible such that workers could be relieved of these burdens rather than having to endure them as a signal of one's strength and masculinity in the process of reinforcing the cultures that perpetuate and normalize these challenges.

Current work cultures indicate a lack of support; however, as McFadyen et al. (2005) contend, "Within the greedy institution, the demands are numerous, but so can be the resources the institution supplies to assist a family with meeting those demands" (p. 143). Although meaningful culture change is possible, until more sweeping changes are introduced in male-dominated workplaces, participants' accounts suggested some promising areas for improvements or augmentations to existing programs, services, and supports. These will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

## 4.5 Policy Implications and Recommendations

Throughout this study, participants offered their views on what could be beneficial to improve their work and family lives. These suggestions fit into two broad categories: 1) those that would support personal and family health and wellbeing through challenges such as relationship, financial, or psychological strains arising with the demands of seasonal resources work and 2) (re)training initiatives as a means of insulating workers and families against documented employment volatility and perennial risk of income and/or job losses.

Suggestions within the first category included steps to enhance access to services such as marriage counselling in response to personal and relationship stresses. These stresses largely stemmed from families' experiences with financial uncertainty and the time workers spent away from home during peak work seasons. In particular, encouraging proactive utilization of services rather than waiting until families reach a breaking point was offered as a recommendation by participants. In support of this suggestion, participants provided instances of individuals they knew accessing services "too late" when marriages and financial stresses became overwhelming and had already reached a point of relationship dissolution. According to participants, increasing awareness around available support services and their benefits may help to address the challenge of delayed help-seeking.

Additionally, participants identified a clear role for improved financial literacy and support with money management. Within marriages, existing literature identifies how it may be helpful for both spouses to participate in financial programs and services addressing financial literacy and financial management practices (Ross et al., 2017). Financial counsellors may be able to provide guidance on these matters (Falconier and Epstein, 2011). As well, financial planners can help workers and families develop financial goals to manage above-average earnings and mitigate the risk of indebtedness (Red Deer Express, 2013).

Participants emphasized the need for these services given recurring uncertainty workers and families face around the (un)availability of work throughout the calendar year, the potential for closure of local industry, and mounting debt levels families may incur due to overspending and trying to maintain a certain lifestyle initially facilitated through high incomes. In general terms, financial challenges can arise from periods of unemployment, income reductions, reduced savings, and increased debt (Falconier and Epstein, 2011). Acquiring financial literacy skills early in life (within the K-12 system) would be ideal, although learning opportunities at any age appeared to be welcome.

Previous research identifies how financial management can influence the quality of partner relationships (e.g. Ross et al., 2017), and participants' own observation of the potential for money problems to translate into marriage problems underscores the importance of financial literacy skills.

Given the demanding nature of the jobs participants occupied, expanding hours of operation for support services to accommodate worker's schedules was also suggested. Otherwise, participants noted how seeking out services would become yet another task to add to workers' already demanding schedules. Onsite counsellors were suggested as a way for workers in camp-style accommodations to access services in remote areas. Accessing specific services such as couples counselling, stress management and financial management through a single point of access for convenience is another option that may be helpful to workers. Since contract employees may have limited access to employer-provided insurance packages, organizations could consider expanding supplemental benefits for workers. At a very minimum, access to a 24-hour helpline was considered to be essential for all employees.

When individuals are courageous enough to reach out for assistance with any personal or family challenges they may be facing, access to adequately trained professionals would ensure workers receive quality services. Assuring that services are confidential may help overcome concerns workers have around anonymity, which could otherwise present as a barrier to access.

Within the second broad category identified above, upskilling and retraining options were discussed with participants in view of a severe COVID-19 induced downturn across several commodity-producing industries. To maximize uptake of retraining opportunities, the availability of course and program offerings close to home was highlighted. Participants also emphasized the need for training institutions to consider learners' family and life situations, and particularly the financial feasibility of returning to school with a family to feed. In this regard, grants to cover tuition and living expenses would significantly enable workers to take optimal advantage of learning opportunities. The jobs for which (re)training opportunities prepare students would also need to offer comparable levels of compensation to interest resource workers. It is important for learners, and in particular those from more mature cohorts, to see a return on their investment in further education. At the classroom-level, institutions may need to address a possible lack of confidence and fears of failure among students, especially if they have had negative prior experiences in learning. Providing learners with an understanding of what to expect and getting them comfortable with the idea of learning may be

beneficial. Conducting market research or otherwise taking into account industry demand for particular positions is critical since small local markets are only able to absorb a given number of jobs; it would of course be devastating for workers to invest time and resources into training for jobs that do not exist.

In terms of program design features, ensuring that curricula are taught in a way that resonates with students' various learning styles and that is relatable to students' experiences was suggested. In this regard, the provision of learning opportunities with a hands-on component was strongly emphasized and seemed to be paramount. The possibility of receiving training in a familiar environment such as a worksite could help allay fears some learners may have around returning to a formal educational institution. Participants indicated a preference for short-term training programs allowing them to access training and then return to employment quickly. A promising development in this regard may be so-called 'micro-credentials' that can be standalone, or launch learners on a "road to longer formal training" (Cooper, 2011, p. 15). Micro-credentials are short-term, stackable and often competency-based courses that can be customized to learners' training needs. Participants also discussed a potential role for career counselling to identify workers' strengths and alternative career possibilities that would align with their interests and capabilities. In terms of areas of study, participants suggested the most viable would be those with a clear connection to the work they had been doing for the last number of years. The general consensus among participants was that the most suitable areas in which resources workers would seek retraining is in another hands-on trade. These roles would be consistent with workers' occupational identities established earlier, and would allow workers to leverage their mechanical abilities and other skills they have been utilizing in their careers thus far. Some family members also saw possibility for workers' skills to transfer into jobs within the 'green economy.' Another possible avenue for workers would be to take the skills they've accumulated throughout their careers and turn them into a business for themselves. Entrepreneurship was positioned as an opportunity for workers to advance their careers.

From a *policy perspective*, participant accounts detailed how there was not significant uptake in income support programs. In specific regards to government-funded programs, EI and WCB benefits were perceived to be largely inadequate to support workers and their families after having been accustomed to high-wage employment. In addition to issues around benefit adequacy, other reasons for not accessing government programs, and EI in particular, were (in)appropriateness of program application processes designed around assumed 9-5 jobs that didn't seem to appreciate the



unpredictable hours and income flows of resource work. Workers may also be ineligible if they did not meet minimum contribution timeframes. Never having drawn from EI, some participants preferred to rely on savings if they were able to and others chose instead during the especially challenging pandemic-induced downturn to find alternative employment or to take on odd jobs as they waited for their industries to rebound.

Against this backdrop, in order for government income support programs to benefit more workers, consideration could be given to tailoring these programs to meet the specific needs of resource workers. Based on participant accounts, specific steps may include increasing benefit levels; improving application processes to better account for income and working hour fluctuations typical in these industries; and reducing benefit eligibility periods to address what may turn out to be a short work season in any given year.

Among participants with involvement in the energy industry especially, during peak work times, there was also demand for implementation of industry standards specifying a limit on number of consecutive days that could be worked. In competitive landscapes, industry standards would ensure no individual company would be at a disadvantage for aligning with the standard.

To better support work-family balance, improved mental health and wellbeing, and sufficient recovery time, additional provisions or enforcement mechanisms could be implemented to ensure that employment standards are adequate and upheld. This would mean ensuring that, in the absence of special permits altering day of rest requirements, workers receive a minimum of 24 consecutive hours away from work every seven days and that employees do not face reprisals (either implicit or explicit) for refusing to work over 44 hours per week. Adequate enforcement mechanisms are particularly important where workplace cultures may encourage employees to resist conformance to these rules and internalize organizational pressure to work long hours (Peetz et al., 2003).

Investments in social infrastructure such as daycares that are able to offer extended hours could also support workers, since as one participant noted, it is not currently possible to leave a child in daycare for 16 hours/day. However, perhaps a careful balance must be struck, as extended service hours could also push industry work-life balance concerns onto other industries within the community.

At the *organization-level*, supportive policies and practices could reduce some of the strains workers encounter (McFadyen et al., 2005). Working conditions such as job demands and levels of

social support in the workplace can impact workers' overall health and wellbeing. On the part of supervisors, listening to staff and encouraging them to express their needs and concerns can be an important means of providing social support within the workplace (CSCU and HeadsUpGuys, 2022). These actions may also help to normalize discussions and reduce stigma around mental health issues at work. Crucially, experiencing social support at work and at home can help to mitigate stress exerted on workers (Yu, 2014).

Participant accounts similarly detail an interest in seeing a strengthened sense of community at work. Specific desired actions in this regard included the addition of off-duty social or recreational activities. Activities outside of work could help support interaction in camp-style accommodations most especially, and contribute to preventing social isolation in remote work locations away from home (PetroLMI, 2015). While social support can indeed buffer against the effects of stressors, research has found that in order to be most beneficial, social ties must be 'close' or 'significant;' indeed, research does not support the proposition that casual social ties can mitigate the negative impacts of stress (Lepore, 2012, p. 495). Expanded social programming could therefore positively influence not only employees' overall health and wellbeing but also workplace cultures. Activities such as these may specifically help to facilitate and strengthen social connections while reducing feelings of isolation and boredom that could otherwise lead to substance use (Perring et al., 2014) while off-duty and away from home.

To help workers achieve a greater level of work-life balance, organizations could take further steps to evaluate the distribution of work to ensure it is manageable, and where improvements could be made, consideration could be given to bringing on board additional staff and supporting workers taking leave (CSCU and HeadsUpGuys, 2022). Relatedly, organizations may consider offering measures such as additional paid leave, family leaves or vacation days and affording workers flexibility to utilize these days (ibid). Organizations could also improve scheduling practices to ensure workers have adequate notice of their upcoming shifts. As noted by participants and confirmed within the extant literature (e.g. Graham, 2010), several of the industries represented in this study are among the most profitable in the broader economy and could afford to offer not just wages but also supplementary benefits above, rather than merely at or possibly below, minimum standards.

## 4.6 Study Strengths and Limitations

A distinct strength of this study is its incorporation of multiple perspectives with purposeful efforts to represent 1) worker and 2) partner/ family standpoints and the direct experiences of both participant categories. This was thought to be important given the notion that certainly within families, and even in couples' relationships, there are indeed multiple perspectives to explore (Ohlsson et al., 2021).

With the gathering of multiple perspectives, the triangulation of views (Carter et al., 2014) was a helpful tool in adding dimensionality to participant accounts and descriptions of experiences. Family members' comments on workers' experiences in natural resources employment also helped to deepen understanding of this type of work and its attendant impacts across the entire family unit.

I was also fortunate to have achieved good rapport with participants, yielding thoughtful accounts of their lived experiences. My sharing that I have roots in Saskatchewan may have assisted in this rapport-building process.

Through an exploration of multiple perspectives, this study was able to uncover more complex reasons for participants' involvement in and persistence through challenging resource employment in the specific study setting. In addition, the study identified specific features of work cultures that played an important role in defining employment conditions that also had consequential effects on participants' work and personal lives.

At the same time, a few limitations could be identified in the course of this study. One of the most prominent is that despite digital posters and ads placed in mining and forestry communities across the province, there was limited representation from individuals involved in these industries within the study. However, the accounts provided by participants with experience in the mining and forestry industries shared notable similarities with those from other industries with stronger representation in this study. Some participants from mining and forestry industries had experience in other resource industries as well.

Another limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size. To be sure, conducting a study at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic presented specific challenges that perhaps reflected in the final sample size. Although recruitment was certainly impacted due to workers' and families' involvement in resource work during busy peak seasons and with the emergence of favorable market conditions that presented in late 2021/early 2022, there were nevertheless periods of time during non-peak seasons when recruitment was still slow. With continuing challenges associated with lingering

presence of the pandemic, it is possible that individuals who otherwise would have considered or been interested in participating were unable due to preoccupations that arose in managing day-to-day life through a pandemic. Another possible contributing factor is that although the province where this study is based has a high proportion of workers involved in resource-based industries, it also has a relatively small overall population base in comparison with other western provinces.

Having said that, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) note how rather than simple counts, data adequacy plays a leading role in determinations around sample sizes in qualitative research. As such, these authors state that “effective sample size is less about numbers (n’s) and more about the ability of data to provide a rich and nuanced account of the phenomenon studied” (p. 9). Participants with deep knowledge can provide a rich discussion and reduce the required sample size (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). In this study, most participants brought extensive experience that enriched our interview discussions in relation to the research questions. In this way, small samples can also be very capable of representing “the full dimensionality of people’s experiences” (Young and Casey, 2019, p. 12 as cited in Hennink and Kaiser, 2022, p.9).

Perhaps a final limitation of this study that could be identified is its focus on one geographic area. That being said, and as demonstrated earlier in this section, results are indeed relevant to wider audiences beyond the provincial boundaries presented in this study. With contributions to an international body of research on resource employment and to work-life balance, precarious employment, and seasonal literatures more broadly, this study has implications for, and applicability in, other geographic spaces where seasonal resource work exists. In turn, findings have extended utility for service providers seeking to enhance programming, supports and services for seasonal resource workers and their families.

#### **4.7 Future Directions**

The results of this study illuminate additional avenues for future research. At the family-level, one such area may include the impact of resource work on children. This line of inquiry is warranted given findings from this study suggesting developmental impacts on children while a parent is away, potentially for a significant proportion of their childhood. This research may be particularly helpful since most studies examining work-life balance issues focus on collecting workers’ perspectives (Fagan et al., 2012).

Related areas of focus may include how children adjust to a parent's absence on both a day-to-day basis and during larger events and vacations, and how children manage frequent geographical relocations when local industries collapse or market conditions change. These areas of study could be considered against a backdrop of existing knowledge indicating that although workers may make decisions that trade time for money to support their families and provide them with material benefits as suggested in this study, previous research has identified how most children generally prefer their parents work fewer hours in order to spend more time with them (Burke and Cooper, 2008). It may also be interesting to examine how parental involvement in resource work impacts children's own goals and career aspirations, further to the finding of strong industry affinity within families.

Additionally, future research could explore and further articulate the tangible effects of chronic stress and isolation both parents may experience during peak operating seasons and how household circumstances, social climates, and relationships may change during non-peak seasons.

By definition, natural resource industries are heavily reliant on nature (Lozeva and Marinova, 2010). Although this reality makes employment in these industries inherently based on seasonal patterns, there are implications for the environment and for Indigenous people on whose lands these activities often take place. The connection Indigenous people maintain to the land in areas with resource activity has received limited research attention (Lozeva and Marinova, 2010). Additional research is also needed to better understand the impact of resource activity and rotational workforces on Indigenous people and local communities (PetroLMI, 2015).

Geographically, many Indigenous communities are also situated in close proximity to resource-based projects within Canada (Rheaume and Caron-Vuotari, 2013). In rural and remote areas of the country, natural resources employers such as mining or forestry companies typically make the largest contributions to local GDP and may be one of the largest (or perhaps the only) local employer (Macpherson and Cooper, 2021; Government of Canada, 2022a). In terms of employment levels, mining companies in particular are indeed among the largest industrial employers of Indigenous people (Coates et al., 2015). In Saskatchewan, 48 per cent of employees within northern mining companies are Indigenous (Graham, 2017), and Indigenous people account for 27 per cent of the province's forest industry workforce (Government of Saskatchewan, 2021c). Within Canada's energy industry, workers self-identifying as Indigenous rose by more than 24 per cent between 2009 and 2019 (Canadian Energy Centre, 2022, p. 5).

In addition to market volatility and technological trends affecting employment levels, threats to landscapes and traditional activities from resource activity due to soil degradation, water and land contamination and wildlife impacts can have strong repercussions for nearby communities (Race et al., 2011). These aspects are important areas for future study to help improve contextualized understandings of associated impacts and to guide meaningful action and engagement moving forward.

#### **4.8 Contributions**

Through an exploration of workers' and families' experiences, this study sought to garner an improved understanding of the context-specific factors and salient issues associated with seasonal resource-based employment in Saskatchewan, Canada. As discussed earlier, study findings contribute to a broader understanding of how workers and families navigate the realities of perennial employment volatility with which they are continually confronted. Findings expand existing literature by documenting these strategies, along with the prevailing factors exerting pressures on workers and families. In doing so, this study identified ways in which a sample of Saskatchewan resource workers and their families persisted through challenging circumstances while providing a roadmap organizations and service providers may consider to strengthen and enhance access to existing services and supports for those involved with resource industries. In this way, and with an improved understanding of distinct aspects of industry work cultures, another noteworthy contribution of this study is its ability to ascertain a possible role for organizational culture changes that could enhance workers' health and wellbeing through the adoption of relevant and beneficial supports, as identified in the study. This study also distinguishes that through their varied experiences, workers and families have specific reasons for maintaining close ties to resource industries in spite of, and that may actually buffer against, the demands entailed by involvement in these industries.

The value of this study is its ability to inform tangible and feasible social supports and interventions, with specific attention given to addressing the needs of seasonal resource workers in Saskatchewan. To my knowledge, this is the first study of its kind. It is hoped that findings will benefit current and future generations of workers who are confronted with what could be considered daunting realities associated with employment in these industries. In this way, the study may contribute to social and economic development opportunities while helping to grow a body of literature on impacts of seasonal work to guide design, development, and improvement of tailored

social and organizational supports that specifically address the needs and preferences of workers and families in rural and remote resource communities.

The study was sensitive to participants' diverse and collective experiences with seasonal work. Focus on programs, services and supports that address holistic health needs remained central in discussions, including a focus on prevention alongside opportunities for enhanced service provision (Caxaj, 2016). As findings from this project revealed the myriad challenges associated with seasonal work, as experienced by workers, their families and communities, there is significant opportunity to work toward developing and improving access to supports for workers and families that will together promote individual and collective health and well-being.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

This project explored how a sample of participants in Saskatchewan, Canada experienced, perceived, and managed seasonal resource employment with corresponding impacts on family life. Findings from this study highlighted the realities faced by, and challenges acting upon, workers and families in Saskatchewan resource sectors. These included financial precarity; temporal trade-offs and sacrifices with time spent apart from loved ones; work cultures; and perceptions around available alternative career opportunities. At the same time, forming social connections and affinity to chosen industries helped families navigate and persist through the myriad demands they faced. Findings also helped to identify barriers to accessing support programs and services from the perspectives of participants. Based on these findings, the study offered important policy implications and provided recommendations to enhance delivery of, and access to, beneficial programs and support services from participants' perspectives.

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Appendix A  
Study Location



## **Appendix B Recruitment Ad**



**DO YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE WORKING IN A NATURAL  
RESOURCES SECTOR  
(e.g. AGRICULTURE, ENERGY, MINING, FORESTRY),  
OR ARE A FAMILY MEMBER OF SOMEONE WHO DOES?**

**IF SO, WE'RE KEEN TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES**

We are looking for volunteers who have at least 6 months experience working in a natural resources sector in Saskatchewan, or who are a family member of someone who does, to participate in this research project.

As a participant in this project, you will be asked to share your experiences in an interview of approximately 30 minutes in length. Interviews will take place either by phone or through an online platform (Microsoft Teams).

Interview questions will focus on experiences, either directly as a worker, or indirectly as a family member and will help to inform the development of programs, services, and supports for workers and their families in natural resources sectors.

A \$35 Amazon gift card will be provided to participants, in recognition of their time and contribution to the project.

For more information, or to volunteer for this project,  
please contact:

Nicole Carleton  
Email: [nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca)

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance  
through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee [file # 43209]**

# Appendix C

## Information and Consent Form



[Date]

Dear [Prospective Participant]:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project focusing on the experiences of employment in natural resources sectors (e.g. agriculture, mining, energy, forestry) for workers and their families. The interview information collected will help to better understand how programs, services, and supports can be optimally designed to contribute to individual, family, and community well-being.

This project will be undertaken by myself, Nicole Carleton, as a doctoral student-researcher in the School of Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo. I am from and currently based in Saskatchewan.

If you agree to participate in this project, I will ask you questions about your perspectives, experiences, and the impacts of work in natural resources sectors at the individual and/or family level. Questions requesting your age, education, and employment income may be asked during the interview. This information is being collected to better understand which supports and services may be most suitable for various age and demographic groups, but you do not need to answer these questions if you would prefer not to.

Participation in this project is voluntary and will involve an open-ended interview that will be approximately 30 minutes in length. There is no need to prepare, as it will be like a conversation and you can choose what you would like to share. The interview will take place either over the phone or over an online platform, Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams has implemented technical, administrative, and physical safeguards to protect the information provided via the Services from loss, misuse, and unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or destruction. However, no Internet transmission is ever fully secure or error free. If you are concerned about this, I would be happy to make alternative arrangements for you to participate by telephone. Please feel free to contact me if you have any concerns.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that I can accurately capture what you share with me, and the interview will later be transcribed for analysis. During the interview, you can choose not to answer any of the interview questions and/or share personal information with me. Participants may also withdraw from this project at any time up until findings have been submitted for publication by contacting me. There will be no negative consequences if you decide to end your participation in this project. If you decide to withdraw before project findings are submitted for publication, your interview transcript will be erased, along with all research notes that were taken during the interview process.

Audio-recordings will be captured on the hard-drive of a computer, digital recorder, or encrypted smartphone. (Microsoft Teams function for cloud-based recording and storage will *not* be used, and the platform will otherwise be configured to optimize privacy). After the session, audio files will be immediately transferred using an encrypted connection to a password-protected folder on secure servers at the University of Waterloo and deleted from any device used for recording or file transfer.

I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality and protect your privacy. Neither your name, nor any other personal identifying information will appear in any research papers or publications resulting from this project; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. All data collected during this study will be de-identified (e.g. your name will be removed) and kept in electronic form and retained for a minimum of 7 years in encrypted, password-protected files on secure servers at the University of Waterloo.

I do not anticipate that any significant adverse effects will result from your participation. I will take care to preserve your confidentiality so that your participation is private. If you have any concerns, before, during, or after the interview, please feel free to contact me.

There is potential participants may experience some discomfort answering questions about work and family situations. If you experience distress, I will pause the interview and you may choose to end participation. As well, a list of community support services will be provided to each participant.

This project may not provide direct personal benefit to you; however, the specific purpose of this project is to better understand the impacts of employment in natural resources sectors, as experienced by workers and their families, to inform optimal design of programs, services, and supports.

In appreciation of your participation, a \$35 Amazon gift card will be provided to you. Please note that this amount received is taxable, and it will be your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes. If you end your participation partway through the interview, you will still receive a gift card.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee, file [# 43209]. If you have questions for the Committee, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca).

To help you reach a decision about participating in this project, I'm happy to provide additional information or answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me at [nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca).

Many thanks for your consideration. I very much look forward to the opportunity of speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Nicole Carleton

### CONSENT FORM

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the project being conducted by Nicole Carleton, School of Public Health Sciences, University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this project, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. If I do not wish to be audio-recorded, I will not complete this consent form or participate in the interview.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the final report and publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that, if interviewed, I may withdraw my consent without penalty at any time up until project results are published by advising Nicole Carleton. I understand that once the project results have been submitted for publication, withdrawal of information I have provided will not be possible.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee, file [# 43209]. If you have questions for the Committee, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca). For all other questions, please contact Nicole Carleton at [nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca)

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this project.  
 YES  NO

I agree to participate in the audio recorded interview.  
 YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any publication that comes from this project  
 YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix D

## Interview/Conversation Guide



### Interview/Conversation Guide

#### Workers

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about the communities or regions where you work/have worked?
  - Possible prompts:
    - How long have you worked in these regions/communities?
    - What was it like to have worked in your current or most recent region/community?
      - Travel to/from the worksite
      - To possibly have been away from family?
- 2) Can you tell me about the jobs you've had?
- 3) What have you liked most about these jobs? The least?
- 4) Can you tell me about whether you may have experienced any barriers to advancement in your positions? If yes, what were they and why do you feel these barriers were encountered?
- 5) Can you tell me about what attracted you to working in your industry and in your most recent job specifically?
- 6) Can you tell me what the sometimes unpredictable or unstable hours or unavailability of work has meant for you? For your family?
- 7) Have you considered other kinds of work or another job? Why or why not?
  - a. If yes: What have your experiences been of searching for new or different employment (if any)?
  - b. If yes: Is/are there particular job(s) or career(s) you might be interested in or are considering for the future? Can you tell me what these may be?
- 8) What would an ideal job look like for you? For your family?
- 9) Would you be interested in attending a (re)training program for this or another job or career, if applicable? Can you tell me why or why not?
- 10) Thinking back to the last time you were in school or attended training, can you describe what the experience was like? What stood out most?
  - Which aspects of the learning experiences were positive?
  - Which aspects of the learning experiences would you like to have seen changed?
  - Possible prompts:
    - welcoming/inviting atmosphere;
    - quality of interactions with faculty/staff/trainers;
    - accessibility: timing or length of training;
    - accessibility: cost of training;
    - admissions/enrolment requirements and processes;
- 11) Can you tell me, what would an ideal (re)training program look like?
  - length, location, skills learned, delivery method, class size

- 12) Have there been any programs, services or supports that you accessed during the downturns?
  - a. If yes, how effective were these?
  - b. If no, why not?
- 13) Are there any additional programs, services, or supports you can think of that might be helpful to have available during the downtimes in your work? If yes, what might these be?
- 14) Is there anything I missed that you might like to add or share?
- 15) If you don't mind, may I ask you some specific demographic questions? I just want to note though that these are completely optional and you don't have to answer if you would prefer not to.
  - Age
  - Highest level of education
  - Income at job
- 16) Thank you very much for your participation. As mentioned earlier, as this is a project on worker and family experiences in natural resources sectors, would there be anyone in your family you might suggest I could talk to?

#### **Families (e.g. Spouses) of Natural Resources Workers**

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about your current community?
  - How long have you lived in your community?
  - What has it been like having a family member working in the industry that they do?
- 2) Can you tell me what sometimes unstable or unpredictable hours of work, or unavailability of work has meant to families?
  - Possible prompts:
    - i. Household budgeting
    - ii. Family dynamics
- 3) How have workers and families in your community responded to the realities of unstable or unpredictable hours of work, or periods without work?
- 4) What have been or are some challenges to family and/or worker health and well-being in these situations?
- 5) How have families and the community worked to overcome these challenges?
- 6) What might be some programs, services, or supports that could help workers and families during downturns?
- 7) Could there be new career possibilities that would be helpful or desired for your spouse/affected family member? For you? For your children? Why or why not?
  - a. If yes, what might these be?
- 8) What role might (re)training programs play in realizing these career goals, if any?
  - a. If yes, what might (re)training programs ideally look like?
  - b. If no, what would be some possible barriers? How could these be addressed?
- 9) Is there anything I missed that you might like to add or share?

# Appendix E

## Verbal Consent Script

### Introduction:

Hello. I'm Nicole Carleton. I am conducting research about experiences and impacts of natural resources employment (for example, in agriculture, energy, forestry, and mining) for workers and families. This interview is part of my PhD research at the University of Waterloo's School of Public Health Sciences. The interview information collected will help to better understand how programs, services, and supports can be designed to contribute to individual, family, and community well-being.

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research.

Have you had time to read the Letter of Information I sent?

*[If the participant responds that they have read the LOI]*

Great, then I would like to take a moment to review some main points from the Letter of Information before we continue. [See below].

*[If it is not possible to email the LOI to the participant, or the participant responds that they did not read the LOI in advance, then I will proceed to go through the full LOI in detail with the participant.]*

### Confirm the following with the participant:

- Your participation in this project is voluntary.
- If you agree to participate in this project, I will ask you questions about your perspectives, experiences, and the impacts of work in natural resources sectors at the individual and/or family level.
- Questions requesting your age, education, and employment income may be asked during the interview. This information is being collected to better understand which supports and services may be most suitable for various age and demographic groups, but you do not need to answer these questions if you would prefer not to.
- Participation in this project will involve an interview that will be approximately 30 minutes in length.
- With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that I can accurately capture what you share with me, and the interview will later be transcribed for analysis.
- If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the project.
- You can decide to stop at any time, even part-way through the interview for whatever reason.
- Participants may also withdraw from this project at any time up until findings have been submitted for publication by contacting me. There will be no negative consequences if you decide to end your participation in this project.



- If you decide to withdraw before project findings are submitted for publication, your interview transcript will be erased, along with all research notes that were taken during the interview process.
- Audio-recordings will be captured on the hard-drive of a computer, digital recorder, or encrypted smartphone.
- After the interview, audio files will be immediately transferred using an encrypted connection to a password-protected folder on secure servers at the University of Waterloo and deleted from any device used for recording or file transfer.
- Neither your name, nor any other personal identifying information will appear in any research papers or publications resulting from this project; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.
- All data collected during this study will be de-identified (e.g. your name will be removed) and kept in electronic form and retained for a minimum of 7 years in encrypted, password-protected files on secure servers at the University of Waterloo.
- I do not anticipate that any significant adverse effects will result from your participation. I will take care to preserve your confidentiality so that your participation is private.
- There is potential participants may experience some discomfort answering questions about work and family situations. If you experience distress, I will pause the interview and you may choose to end participation. As well, a list of community support services will be provided to each participant.
- In appreciation of your participation, a \$35 Amazon gift card will be provided to you. Please note that this amount received is taxable, and it will be your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes. If you end your participation partway through the interview, you will still receive a gift card.
- This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee.

Do you have any questions or want me to go over any study details again?

**Consent questions:**

- With full knowledge of the foregoing, do you agree, of your own free will, to participate in this project?
- Do you agree to participate in the audio recorded interview?
- Do you agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any publication that comes from this project?

If yes,

- Can you also confirm to which email address I can send the e-gift card?

If no, "Thank you for your time."

# Appendix F

## Community Support Services

### Community Support Services

Discussions about work-related topics and family situations can sometimes trigger strong and/or difficult feelings. If, after the interview, you would like to speak with someone, the following is a list of support services. These include community health services and urgent and emergency services.

**If you are in need of immediate assistance, emergency services are available by dialing 9-1-1**

#### HealthLine 8-1-1

This is a provincial health line that provides confidential, free 24-hour health and mental health advice, education and support. Services are provided in English, with translation available in more than 100 languages.

How to Access:

This service is accessible by dialing 8-1-1.

If you experience technical difficulties by dialing 8-1-1, you can also call 1-877-800-0002 to be connected.

Additional resources are available at:

<https://www.healthwise.net/saskhealthauthority/Content/CustDocument.aspx?XML=STUB.XML&XSL=CD.FRONTPAGE.XSL>

#### 211 Saskatchewan

This service provides confidential, free 24-hour support that connects individuals to local services

How to Access:

This service is accessible through a variety of options, including dialing 2-1-1, texting 211, or online chat through <https://sk.211.ca>

#### Crisis Services Canada

This is a national crisis services help line.

How to Access:

This service is accessible by dialing 1-833-456-4566, or by texting 45645

Additional resources are available at: <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/>

## Appendix G

### Feedback/Appreciation Letter



[Date]

Dear [Participant],

I would like to thank you very much again for your participation in this research project focusing on how employment in natural resources sectors is experienced by workers and their families. The interview information collected will contribute to a better understanding of how programs, services and supports can be designed or tailored to optimally contribute to individual, family, and community well-being.

By participating in this project, your identity will be kept confidential. Once all data is collected and analyzed for this project, this information may be shared with the research community through a final report and publications. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of the project, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca).

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee, [file # 43209]. If you have questions for the Committee, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca).

Sincerely,

Nicole Carleton  
[nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:nicole.carleton@uwaterloo.ca)