



# **Long Distance Labour Commuting from a Northern Canadian small town: The Workers' Perspective**

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# Outline

- Background
- Study
- Evaluations of LDLC
- Discussion

# Background





# LDLC Background I

- Remote resource development
  - “Rushes”
  - Boomtowns
  - Instant town
  - Fly-in, fly-out (FIFO), long distance labour commuting (LDLC)
- Historical trade off between new towns and LDLC
  - Remoteness
  - Length of production run
    - LDLC cheaper in short run, costly over long-term
- Shift cycle norms were different for new towns and LDLC



# LDLC Background II

## Contemporary tradeoffs between new towns and LDLC

- LDLC costs are decreasing
- More sophisticated / comfortable camps
- New town costs increasing dramatically
  - New environmental standards
  - Land claims issues
  - Access routes
- Transition in worker expectations
  - ‘Golden handcuffs’ of salary replaced by quality of life desires for whole family & multiple employment opportunities
- Worker shortages
  - Migrant / temporary foreign workers



# LDLC Background III

- Offshore oil industry origins in 1940s
- Growth in application since 1960
  - Especially for remote mines
  - First in Canada in mid-1960s
- Dominates new developments
- Hybrid models:
  - Fort McMurray (town with massive worker mobility)
- Changed shift schedules to fit:
  - Dominant model in several sectors
  - i.e. 20/8, 21/7, 42/14

# Study









# Mackenzie, BC

- Instant town
- Built in the late 1960s
- New regional forest industry
- Significant economic downturn in 2008
  - Closure of all major forest industry operations
  - Many forest workers had to engage in long distance labour commuting (LDLC)



# LDLC Study

- Household survey
  - 1,537 households, 633 returns (41.2% response rate)
- Key informant interviews
  - Impacts on community
  - 17 community groups / organizations
- Worker interviews
- Preliminary investigations to set stage for multi-year study



# LDLC Study

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## Worker project:

- 22 workers interviewed – May 2012
- Explore the impacts of LDLC on:
  - Workers
  - Family / community life
  - Contributions to community capacity



# Worker Evaluations of LDLC

- Scale
- Benefits
- Concerns



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# Worker Evaluations: Scale I

Did any household members work out-of-town following the 2008 mill closures?

	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Yes	170	26.9
No	461	73.1
Total	631	100.0

2012 Household Survey



# Worker Evaluations: Scale II

## Gender of family member(s) who worked out-of-town

	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Male	159	85.4
Female	27	14.5
Total	186	99.9

2012 Household Survey





# Worker Evaluations: Scale III

Do any family member(s) continue to work out-of-town?

	<b># of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Yes	69	40.1
No	103	59.9
Total	172	100.0

2012 Household Survey



# Worker Evaluations: Scale IV

Where did family member(s) go to work out-of-town?

	<b># of Respondents</b>
British Columbia	156
Alberta	71
Other	12

Note: some people identified multiple locations.

2012 Household Survey

# Worker Evaluations: Scale V

## Out-of-town sector (s) worked?

	# of Respondents
Forestry	44
Oil and Gas	40
Mining	37
Services	14
Trades	14
Construction	13
Transportation	12
Health Care	8
Road Maintenance	6
Education	4
Communications	2
Production	2
Agriculture	1
Other	5



# Worker Evaluations of LDLC

- Scale
- Benefits
- Concerns



# Key Benefits I

- Financial support
  - Income
  - Travel / living allowances
  - Company vehicle to offset transportation costs
  - Good / flexible benefit packages

“The benefit package in Fort McMurray is a **flexible benefit package**. So maybe one year, you didn’t spend any money on dental, so you could afford to spend that much more on something else. Whereas, **here, it’s basically one blanket**. You’re basically told you spend this much money on dental and then this much money on message therapy” (LDLC Interview #20)



# Key Benefits II

- Education and training
  - First aid training / safety courses
  - Driving courses
  - Industry specific trade certificates

“When you’re trained at [job site], you’re **trained as a team**. At the mill, you’re trained as an individual. That’s one of the things I brought back. My training to work as a team instead of as an individual. There can be that “It’s not my job, it’s somebody else’s” (LDLC Interview #11)



# Key Benefits III

- Expanded networks / job contacts
  - Enhanced reputation to start own business
  - Expand support network
  - Efficiently access key decision-makers in distant centres

“One of the key things is when you actually work in [job site], you get to personally **know the gatekeepers** in those offices in [job site]. That makes a big difference. I can call up people I got to know quite well personally. It’s a different world. I now know who to call and they know who you are” (LDLC Interview #5)



# Key Benefits IV

- Work experience in other sectors
  - Experience with new vehicles / equipment
  - More transferrable skills
  - More supervisory skills / responsibilities
  - More communications / conflict management skills
  - Opportunities for advancement

“Coming from a mill environment, you’re just basically doing a job. But at [job site], I had to go back to using computers, logging people in. I had to do a lot **out of my comfort zone**. On the mill lines, you’re just pushing a button, pushing a button” (LDLC Interview #11)





# Key Benefits V

- Access to additional services / amenities not available in Mackenzie
  - Health care
  - Shopping

“But a lot of times, hey lets go meet daddy in Grand Prairie or lets go meet daddy in Edmonton and do a whole whack of shopping there” (Mackenzie Group Interview #15)



# Worker Expectations of LDLC

- Scale
- Benefits
- Concerns



# Key Concerns I

- Financial costs
  - Costs to maintain 2 households
  - Costs of commuting to work site

“The job I had, the wages dropped and I had to pay my own benefits. That’s why I say the only thing was you had a full-time job. But then you have to **maintain two households** and pay your bills at both ends and then you take a look at your wages and go hmm....**was it worth it**” (LDLC Interview #21)



# Key Concerns II

- Safety concerns
  - Winter driving
  - Lack of sleep
  - Long distances to commute

“Concerns would be winter driving. That would be one of my biggest concerns to long distance commuting in northern BC. The highway conditions and **driving in snowstorms was the worst** (LDLC Interview #11).”



# Key Concerns III

- Emotional impacts
  - Loneliness from family
  - Stress
  - Burnout / fatigue
    - Time off spent paying bills / household repairs

“You can lose touch with your kids. When you return after 7 days, you may be focused on one aspect of your kids’ lives, but they have moved on to other things (LDLC Interview #23).”



# Key Concerns IV

- Health impacts
  - More frequent sickness
  - Poor diet
  - Depression
  - Addictions

“You’re diet’s affected because you’re not eating home cooked meals. You’re eating out a lot. You’re eating camp food; although, the camp food at the last one was pretty good (LDLC Interview #24).”



# Key Concerns V

- **Household impacts**

- Spouses assumed more household duties

“Well there was a lot of fatigue and stress on your relationship. It’s tough to keep up with the responsibilities, especially with kids missing out on activities. I had to work full-time and deal while looking after the house”  
(LDLC Survey #162)



# Discussion I

To build capacity / resiliency:

- Flexible shift schedules
- Adopt flexible benefit packages
- Support workers' ongoing capacity / skills development
  - Foster team learning environment / succession planning
  - Monitoring / evaluation
- Invest in communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills for workers





# Discussion II

- Invest in fatigue management training
- Adopt stricter safety procedures
- Broaden infrastructure / opportunities for interaction to connect workers / families with support networks
  - On the job site counseling supports
- Lobby for more resources / outreach supports (i.e. flexible child care, home maintenance / repairs, snow removal)

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