



# NEVER UNTIL NOW

INDIGENOUS & RACIALIZED  
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES  
WORKING IN YUKON &  
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA  
MINE CAMPS

August 2021

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## **PREFACE**

"We believe that this report holds the sacred stories of women who have endured violence in the mining industry and will help us to work with industry and governments in forming policies to change the environment."

Ann Maje Raider, Liard Aboriginal Women's Society

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society defined the need for this study and shaped the project purpose. We acknowledge the leadership and vision of Mary Maje, Mary Charlie, Leda Jules, Dorothy Smith, Melissa Charlie, Maryann Dick, Charlene Magun and Ann Maje Raider, Board members and staff from Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, which develops community Kaska language and cultural programs, and has supported participants in the *Gudene K'eh Gusani: Dene A'Nezen Gedi' Gutie Su'ajidege* (Following Our People's Way: Building a Circle of Dignity and Justice) advocacy training project for survivors of gender-based violence.

At the Tu Cho Elders Culture Camp in July 2020, when the group met for a "land is medicine" gathering on the shores of Frances Lake, Kaska Elders and advocates identified the need for a study to gain knowledge about Indigenous women's working conditions in the mining sector in northern Canada. This would inform LAWS participation in socio-economic and environmental assessment processes and other advocacy. The participant demographic was broadened to include First Nations, Metis and racialized women.

We thank the study respondents for their openness in sharing difficult workplace experiences that included racial and sexualized harassment and violence. We appreciate their courage to discuss paths to improve working conditions for Indigenous and racialized women employed in the mining sector. The title of the report comes from a respondent's disclosure of her personal experiences of discrimination when she worked at a mine camp:

*"...this is the first time I've ever talked about it until now, like nobody's ever asked: 'So how was your experience as a woman in camp?' Right. Yeah, seriously. Never until now."*

We thank Kendra McMillan, Jody Dick, Katelyne Porter and Carla Boss for their contributions to the research in developing survey and interview questions, outreach to respondents, conducting interviews, and preliminary transcript and coding preparation.

For project support, we appreciate the contributions of Charlene Magun (LAWS), report layout design by Sigourney Whipple-Grantham and Aja Mason (YSWC), interview training by Dr. Allan Wade, media training by Genesee Keevil, and flower identification by Julia Frisch.

This project was funded by the Indigenous Gender Based Analysis (IGBA+) fund of the Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC). The Yukon Status of Women Council provided funding for technology support (laptops, software access and phone cards) as well as staff support for training, data analysis, and report writing, with financial support from the Department of Women and Gender Equality.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Never Until Now: Indigenous and Racialized Women's Experiences Working in Yukon and Northern British Columbia Mine Camps* was initiated by Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS). LAWS is a non-profit, charitable, Aboriginal women's organization that amplifies the voices of Kaska and Indigenous Yukon women. Foundational to this study is the Indigenous value of reciprocity and Kaska law "*Dene A'Nezen*" which "opposes violence against the land and against each other, calling on us to be mindful of our words and actions, to uphold fairness, care and harmony in our relationship with all of Creation, and to know our place". *Reclaiming Power and Place*, the final report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG, 2019), has drawn a clear connection between the "man camps" that emerge from extractive industry activity and the increased dangers posed to Indigenous women at the camps and in neighbouring communities. Kaska Elders, advocates, community members, service providers and women mine workers also identified these concerns, and in particular the connections between the destruction of the land and of Indigenous cultures, as impetus to instigate this study.

This mixed methods research study used both qualitative and quantitative data to understand Indigenous and racialized women's mining camp experiences. The survey and interview format, content, and interview questions were collaboratively developed during training sessions with Kaska women and facilitated by the project team (LAWS, Yukon Status of Women Council, Centre for Response-Based Practice and CCSG Associates). Using a Community-Based Participatory Action Research model (CBPAR), Kaska women's participation in developing questions and interviewing other Indigenous and racialized mineworkers helped establish a cultural rapport that provided rich data to contribute to the current body of knowledge and assess working conditions in the mining sector. Counselling support was offered for anyone participating in the study (interviewees and interviewers).

Questions focused on women's health and safety in diverse mining sector workplaces (hard rock, exploration, placer, reclamation and field monitoring camps); inquired about their personal safety and whether they had experienced any discrimination based on sex, race, or Indigeneity; and knowledge of environmental safety, Indigenous safety and their economic safety. In-depth interviews combined Survey Monkey quantitative data collection along with

semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and probing enquiry to capture qualitative data. Interviews were transcribed and coded using the broad coding scheme developed in a participatory manner which categorized the study questions into themes of personal safety, family and community connection, economic safety, Indigenous safety, environmental safety, and workplace safety, with the goal of identifying trends, common experiences both positive and negative, and sub-themes.

A total of 22 respondents were interviewed in this study, a robust number that indicated they had hopes for the study results to gain positive outcomes, for example; *“Well, hopefully something that they can gather all the data and know, and work and learn from it,”* (R5); *“Truth and justice in relation to women’s issues, women of our community”* (R9); and *“More awareness to what Indigenous women have to suffer through in the mines because it’s never OK”* (R18).

The key findings from the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society’s *Never Until Now* study are that women’s jobs, across all age groups, education levels, racial background, experience in mining seasons, job type categories and camp type, are concentrated in typically low-paying and gendered roles, and that working conditions often compromise their personal safety. The study findings reveal:

- Limited job opportunity (55% cook or cleaning as compared to higher paying jobs) and pay equity (18% reported men were paid more than women, 64% did not know if there was a difference);
- Limited longevity of employment (1/4 worked 1-2 seasons, 1/5 worked 8 or more seasons), desirable employment (68% no longer working in mining), and financial security (32% were not financially secure while working in mine camps);
- Inadequate pay scale for hours worked (2/3 daily pay did not reflect hours worked) and overtime wages (1/4 paid overtime, 3/4 flat daily rate for long hours worked - 18.2% worked 60-70 hours/week and over 3/4 worked more than 70 hours/week);
- Unequal work expectations for women and men (3/4 higher expectations for women);
- Limited opportunities to advance in training, job status (55% had not received promotions) and increased pay (41% gained somewhat higher paying jobs, 18% had jobs paying substantially lower than their first job, the majority received little or no change in pay scale);

- Ineffective prevention of harm from harassment, discrimination, and assault based on race, Indigeneity, gender and/or sexual orientation in workplace and living conditions at mine camps (36% experienced both gender & race harassment or discrimination, 63% by gender or sexual orientation, 45% by race or Indigeneity, and 27% had experienced no harassment or discrimination);
- One or both forms of gender or race harassment or discrimination were experienced by 80% of those in hard rock mining, 75% in placer mining, and 70% in exploration camps;
- Absence of clear or available grievance mechanisms to report incidents of harassment, discrimination, and violence (43% had no way to report, 29% said the policy was unclear or they felt unsafe, of whom 9% were fired and many quit in response); 14% reported that clear mechanisms were available and 14% that it was not applicable for their experiences;
- Poor environmental record of mine practices, over half of the respondents (54.5%) rated the mine company environmental practices poor (13.6% rated as none, 40.9% in scale range '1-3'), 9.1% mid range, 31.8% upper range '7-9', and 4.5% rated excellent '10');
- Limited economic benefit to Indigenous people (45.5% rated scale range '0-3', mid range '4-6' rate by 18.2%, and 36.4% upper range (27.3% rated '7-9', 9.1% rated excellent '10'); and
- A predominantly masculine culture in the work environment (half the camps had less than 5% women, and over 3/4 of the camps had less than 20% women).

Indigenous and racialized women working in the mining industry experience high levels of harassment, discrimination, and violence in northern mining work camps. Generally, workers are not informed by their employers about legal standards that apply or how to safely report unequal pay, unsafe working conditions, harassment, discriminatory behaviours, and violence. Indigenous and racialized women isolated in a masculine working environment are undervalued, and have limited opportunity for advancement, scholarship and training. This results in precarious economic security and job retention.

All of these conditions contribute to the difficulty of protecting workers and holding employers accountable for women's health and safety in northern mining camps. Swift, effective action in response to reports of sexual harassment, racism, and violence is difficult to achieve. A reluctance to call the police and the remote nature of mining work camps contribute to unsafe working conditions for women in the industry.



*"Being on the land as part of their family and practicing traditional cultural activities creates a sense of belonging, whereas being out on the land with a masculine work camp crew creates a sense of fear, you're remote and isolated and don't know if you will be safe."* (Kaska Elder, 2021).

Therefore, it is critical that Indigenous and racialized women be invited to provide leadership and oversight in developing future gender and racial equality policies, legislation, and training initiatives in order to fulfill Indigenous and racialized women's economic and social rights. Establishing women's support groups at mine camps might create a safe space to discuss and problem-solve concerns specific to women, and identify improved management responses with clear timelines and procedures to report, investigate and respond to complaints of harassment, discrimination, and violence.

*Never Until Now* documents Indigenous and racialized women's experiences of harassment, discrimination, abuse of authority, and violence in mine camps. These experiences are relevant to the contemporary policy and legislative initiatives of updating Yukon's mining legislation, and implementing the Yukon Government MMIWG2S+ Strategy and Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board 2020 *Violence and Harassment Prevention Regulation*. In addition, assessing mine proposals for worker health and safety plans that ensure the protection of women from harassment and discrimination based on race, gender or sexual orientation in the workplace and work camp living conditions, should become a priority for Yukon Environmental and Socioeconomic Assessment Board's assessments of the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of proposed resource extraction projects.

The study demonstrates the mining industry's colonial ethic of exploitation by revealing the degrading ways that Indigenous and racialized women mine workers are treated, both in the workplace and in their camp living conditions. This harassment and discrimination thwarts dignified working conditions, and jeopardizes women's personal safety and longevity of work security. The impunity for perpetrators of gender and race-based harassment, discrimination and violence as reported in this study is deeply rooted in systemic structures of oppression, misogyny, and male privilege that harm women in their daily lives in mine camps. *Never Until Now* amplifies Indigenous and racialized women's voices, acknowledging that their strength and resistance can lead the way to improving the safety, health and working conditions for all women working in the northern mining sector.

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# NEVER UNTIL NOW

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*Indigenous & Racialized Women's Experiences Working in  
Yukon & Northern British Columbia Mine Camps*

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) is a non-profit, charitable, Aboriginal women's organization that amplifies the voices of Kaska and Indigenous Yukon women. LAWS offers cultural programs, advocates for Indigenous women's social, health, legal, and economic wellbeing, and works with community, governments, police and the criminal justice system to improve institutional responses to domestic and sexualized violence. The Indigenous value of reciprocity and Kaska law '*Dene A'Nezen*' "opposes violence against the land and against each other, calling on us to be mindful of our words and actions, to uphold fairness, care and harmony in our relationship with all of Creation, and to know our place" (LAWS, 2020).

Executive Director Ann Maje Raider was LAWS expert presenter to the National Public Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and is a Co-Chair of the Yukon Advisory Committee that developed the Yukon Strategy on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ people (MMIWG2S+). LAWS organized *Together for Justice* (2011-2013) and *Creating Community Safety* (2012), initiatives that developed culturally-based action plans, orientation documents, and a protocol with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) designed to create safety and justice for women through increased collaboration (LAWS, RCMP, 2013). LAWS involves Kaska women in shaping research projects and preparing traditional knowledge submissions to Yukon environmental and socio-economic assessment processes.

The Yukon Status of Women Council (YSWC) has been promoting gender equality and gender justice in the Yukon since 1972 using the tools of research, policy analysis and

education. In 2000, Yukon Conservation Society and YSWC collaborated in the development of *Gaining Ground: Women, Mining and the Environment* (Moodie et al., 2001). An invitational gathering of close to 50 women from across the Yukon whose lives were directly impacted by the mining sector (from trappers to mine workers), along with women from outside the Yukon with experience in grassroots organizing, health, science and social science sectors was held. This shaped the first instance of a gender-based analysis related to mining in the Yukon. YSWC has since been reviewing and commenting on the potential gendered impacts related to mining in the Yukon and commenting within the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA)* framework.

In 2020, LAWS received funding from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) to commission a mixed methods research project aimed at amplifying the voices of Indigenous and racialized women who have worked in the mining industry in Yukon and Northern British Columbia.

## **1.1 Context: Colonialism, Royal Canadian Mounted Police & Mining on Indigenous Lands in the North**

The current context of mining in Canada is founded in structures of colonialism that were designed to enable access to resources on Indigenous lands through the free entry system of mineral staking. The 1873 establishment of the Northwest Mounted Police (since renamed the RCMP) supported the advance of colonization in Canada, by protecting the construction of infrastructure for transportation and trade, taking Indigenous children by force from their families to attend church-run and state-sanctioned "Indian residential schools", for the purpose of intervention to protect lands for mining privileges and facilitating the industrial extraction of resources from the land (Howe & Monaghan, 2018). This is relevant as an entrenched ethic of control, hierarchy and imposition of mining over First Nation communities, lands and waters may permeate the mining workplace and mining-affected community conditions for Indigenous women in the north (Bond & Quinlan, 2018). These conditions include racism, harassment and violence experienced by Indigenous women mine workers in exploration and mining camps, as well as nearby communities.

The 1876 *Indian Act* established a legal framework that facilitated colonial access to Indigenous foods, forests, furs, wildlife and mineral resources and disrupted traditional Indigenous ways of life. While the 1898 Gold Rush brought a huge influx of gold-seekers into the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory that displaced local Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in peoples,

it was the 1898 *Quartz Mining Regulations* that created a free-entry staking regime providing anyone over the age of 18 holding a prospector's license the right to enter, prospect, and claim minerals on Crown lands (Taggart, 1998). First Nations people were originally denied eligibility for a prospector's license. Today, a license is not required, anyone aged minimum 18 years can stake a claim for themselves, a corporation or another person, and this gives exclusive rights to minerals in the claim area (Yukon Energy, Mines and Resources, 2019). This means that anyone can cut 4 stakes from trees, or put up claim posts, gaining entitlement to the land for exploration and mining purposes, and securing proprietary rights over any minerals found.

Canada's free entry system of mineral staking assumes mining is the highest and best use of the land. The assumption behind the system is that mining is inherently good for the economy, and therefore mineral exploration should not be hampered by land-use constraints (Moodie et al., 2001). For some Yukon First Nations the dispossession of their lands is contested in political struggles to the current day. This is the case in Kaska territory where the Liard First Nation and Ross River Dena Council have not signed the *Umbrella Final Agreement 1993 (UFA)* establishing modern-day treaty rights, under which 11 Yukon First Nations have negotiated constitutionally protected *First Nation Final* and *Self-Government Agreements*. The parties to these treaty agreements wished to protect a way of life based on the economic and spiritual relationships between Yukon Indian people and the land; encourage and protect the cultural distinctiveness and social well-being of Yukon Indian People; enhance the ability of Yukon Indian people to participate fully in all aspects of the economy; and achieve certainty in relationships with each other and with respect to the ownership and use of the lands and other resources of the Yukon ("Yukon Indian people" is the language used in the *UFA*). For First Nations settled under the *UFA*, staking cannot take place on lands they have designated as Type A Settlement Land, however, it can occur on Type B Settlement Land if a financial security is provided (Yukon Energy, Mines and Resources, 2019).

These *Final Agreements* established the Surface Rights Board, YESAB, and the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, with members appointed by Yukon and First Nations governments. These Boards' enabling legislation establish practices that are seen as co-management regimes. Under Impact Benefit Agreements, some mines now pay royalties to First Nations, and mining companies operating in Yukon generally negotiate Socio-Economic Participation Agreements (SEPA) for recruiting local workers.

Everyone has the right to live in dignity and safety and to maintain and practice their identity and culture. Under international human rights law, states are obligated to do everything they can to ensure that rights essential to individual and collective well-being, such as the rights to education, health, livelihood, and the right to live free from violence, can be fully realized in the lives of all people, without discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognized that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Article 1) and that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (Article 3).

Specific measures to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples are consolidated in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada has publicly committed to implement (May 10, 2016). The UNDRIP affirms that whenever there is risk of serious harm to the cultures, well-being, and safety of Indigenous peoples, decisions should be taken only with their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).



Birch basket with porcupine quill work made by Leda Jules, Kaska Elder (Volfova, 2021)

The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, said that states should generally presume that FPIC is required for any large-scale resource development project because of the inherently high risks to Indigenous land use and traditions. He argues that before an exception to this requirement can even be considered, there must be a compelling and objective rationale, alternatives must be fully explored, any harmful impact must be minimized, and care must be taken to ensure that Indigenous peoples enjoy more benefit than harm (Anaya, 2013). Domestic human rights protections are also set out in Canada’s Constitution Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act and territorial human rights legislation.



## 2.0 STUDY INTRODUCTION

The discovery of gold in the Yukon in 1896 on Rabbit Creek that sparked the Klondike Gold Rush was accomplished by 3 Yukon First Nation people, Shaaw Tláa (Kate Carmack), with her brother Keish (Skookum Jim) and nephew Káa Goox (Dawson Charlie), who were facilitating an American prospector George Carmack (married to Kate and with a daughter Graphie). Kate Carmack is the first notable Indigenous woman miner in the Yukon, credited in oral histories as being the original discoverer of the first Klondike gold nugget and working the ground

through the Yukon winter until the pay dirt could be sluiced and shipped south for payment in 1897 (Backhouse, 1995). She was finally inducted in 2019 by the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame, this being 20 years after George Carmack had been recognized in 1999.



Shaaw Tláa (Kate Carmack), George Carmack and daughter Graphie at family home on Rabbit Creek where they found the gold starting the Klondike Gold Rush circa 1896 (University of Washington Libraries).



Shaaw Tláa (Kate Carmack), George Carmack and daughter Graphie in Seattle after bringing their gold to Seattle circa 1897 (University of Washington Libraries).



Klondike Gold Rush stampeders on Chilkoot Trail circa 1898 (University of Washington Libraries).

The Yukon is perhaps most famous for the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush which, 2 years after the discovery of gold, brought stampededers up over the Chilkoot Pass on a quest for gold when word of the find got out down south (after all the claims had been staked in the north), and has left a residual regional identity that is for some residents deeply rooted in a highly masculine mining culture. Over the past 130 years, the mining industry has scaled up in size, exemplified most recently by several new, large-scale hard rock mines slated for development near Dawson, Mayo and Watson Lake. However, the gendered and racialized social impacts of the mining sector in the Yukon and Northern BC are a serious concern for LAWS and YSWC. A lack of local research regarding how the extractive industry impacts women's lives means that the existing policy and legislative frameworks are potentially failing to adequately prevent and/or mitigate gender and racial-based harms.

*Reclaiming Power and Place*, the final report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG, 2019), has drawn a clear connection between the "man camps" that emerge from extractive industry activity and the increased dangers posed to Indigenous women at the camps and in neighbouring communities. This increased rate of violence is largely the result of the migration into the camps of mostly non-Indigenous young men with high salaries and little to no stake in the host Indigenous community (MMIWG, 2019). Patterns of violence against women and gender and sexual minorities occurs consistently with resource extraction projects in Canada's north (YESAB 2020). Industries that create "boom town" and "man camp" environments are implicated in increased rates of drug and alcohol-related offences, sexual offences, domestic violence, and gang violence, as well as sex industry activities in the host communities (MMIWG, 2019). These occurrences disproportionately impact Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people (MMIWG, 2019). These camps are also often far from law enforcement, and therefore are largely unpoliced (MMIWG, 2019).

Research from other jurisdictions indicates that women are at higher risk of experiencing domestic abuse once a mine opens in those places where acceptance toward domestic abuse is already high (Kotsadam et al., 2017). Acceptance and tolerance of gender-based violence (GBV) is extremely high in Canada's territories. Routine provincial and territorial crime reporting shows that the territories are home to the highest violent crime rates in Canada (Rotenberg, 2018). The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences *Visit to Canada* reported that rates of female victims of violent crime were 8 times higher in the three northern territories and that Indigenous women are 3 times

more likely to be victims of violence than non-Indigenous women (Dubrauka, 2019). The Native Women's Association of Canada (2010) has noted there are many limitations to government-collected statistics and that community-based research has found levels of violence against Aboriginal women to be even higher than those reported by government surveys.

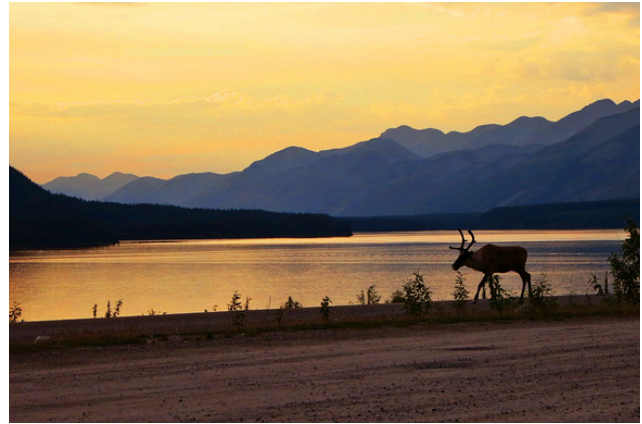
The authors of *Gaining Ground* also noted Yukon's tolerance towards gender-based violence in 2001: "...the Yukon appears to have a higher degree of acceptance of violence towards women as demonstrated by the RCMP's lapsed adherence to their mandatory charging policy and the "low range" sentencing patterns of the judiciary, even in the most severe cases" (Moodie et al., 2001). Watson Lake has 5% of the Yukon's population yet in 2002 it reported 20% of the Yukon's spousal assaults. Between 1997-2001 the spousal assault rate in Watson Lake averaged 16% of the total number reported in the Yukon (Kaska Tribal Council, 2004). In October 2003, a B.C. Provincial Court judge requested Liard Aboriginal Women's Society to gather community input on how to deal with family violence issues in the Watson Lake and Lower Post area where spousal assaults against women rates are very high, prior to sentencing a Liard First Nation Chief for physical and sexual assault of his intimate partner. Citing privacy concerns, the RCMP and Yukon Bureau of Statistics no longer provide disaggregated data of sexual and spousal violence rates in small rural communities.

The examples above implicate the Yukon as a place that not only has high rates of reported gender-based violence, but also a high degree of acceptance of gender-based violence, and in particular violence against Indigenous women.

Beginning in 2019, LAWS Gudene K'eh Gus'ani: Following Our People's Way project has offered advocacy training for survivors of gender-based violence to connect Elders, youth, and families with each other and Kaska cultural and ancestral traditions, honour individual and collective resistance to violence, and learn and practice advocacy skills to help women and children feel safer and supported in the community (LAWS, 2020). Kaska Advocates have identified as structural barriers to their personal safety the racism embedded in historic (e.g. the violence of the "Indian residential school system") and present day colonial child welfare, health, social, educational, police and justice institutions. Indigenous people may encounter violence, harassment or discrimination from professionals in these institutions as clients, coworkers or community members.



Rose Creek downstream showing metals deposition from acidic mine drainage from Faro Mine on Kaska traditional territory (Yukon Conservation Society, May 2017).



Caribou alongside Muncho Lake (Volfova, June 2016).

LAWS advocates, along with Elders, community members, service providers, and mine workers met in Watson Lake and Ross River in February 2020 to inform submissions to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board about BMC Minerals project application for a copper, lead, zinc, gold, silver mine in the *Kudz Ze Kayah* (Land of the Caribou) region of Kaska traditional territories. In these community meetings, Kaska women had shared incidents of violence at mining camps. “Women might be assaulted, and then told they can report it but they will lose their job, or they can stay quiet and keep working.” (Moodie et al., 2020). Additional targeted interviews with Indigenous women who had worked in mining camps supported the need for this study (Moodie et al., 2020).

In July 2020 Kaska advocates, youth, and leaders met for a week on the land at Tu Cho Elders Culture Camp on Frances Lake, and proposed a research project to build on LAWS previous advocacy to protect women from violence. Elders shared memories of growing up on the land, and stories about how exploration and mining activities have destroyed habitat and subsistence food sources by damaging Indigenous lands and waters. Mining scrapes away caribou lichen, a critical winter food source for the now threatened Finlayson Caribou Herd. At one exploration camp, heavy equipment was used to bury trailers, appliances and food rather than packing it out or giving it away. Grave markers have been destroyed. Such activities disrespect Indigenous cultural values of reciprocity and care for the land. People had personal knowledge of Kaska women encountering racism, discrimination, harassment or violence while working for mining companies, and wanted primary research done to investigate, assess, and document Indigenous women’s working conditions. The study demographic was broadened to include First Nations, Metis and racialized women.

LAWS received Northern Participant Funding from Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada through the Indigenous Gender Based Analysis capacity building funding (IGBA+). The purpose of this project was to:

- Interview current or former Indigenous and racialized mine workers to assess personal safety, health and race related issues that may have impacted job quality and the retention of women employed in the industry;
- Train Kaska advocates to conduct interviews with former and current Indigenous or racialized women employed in Yukon or northern BC mines, mining resource offices, or exploration camps; and
- Provide information from the interviews for LAWS and Kaska advocates to compile and analyze the qualitative data gathered to assess Indigenous women's working conditions at Yukon mine sites, to identify ways of improving their safety and the safety of Indigenous women and girls living in communities near industrial work sites, and to contribute to ongoing community participation in Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB) processes.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has noted that Indigenous women's identities encompass world views, cultural practices, social responsibilities, and economic realities that are significantly different from non-Indigenous peoples (Bond & Quinlan, 2018). This research project inquired into northern Indigenous and racialized women's experiences in mining camps and contributes to the current body of knowledge about working conditions in the mining sector. Questions focused on women's health and safety in diverse mining sector workplaces and mine camp living conditions, inquired about their personal safety and whether they had experienced any discrimination based on sex, race, or indigeneity; workplace and economic safety; actions for environmental safety; family and community connections; and knowledge of Indigenous cultural values and protocols for Indigenous safety.

The study adds to community knowledge about working conditions in exploration and mine camps. It may help in determining ways to assess for the safety of women working in northern mine environments and measures that would aid in preventing discrimination and gender-based violence in the hyper-masculine culture of man camps and the mining industry. Suggestions from Indigenous and racialized women mine workers can be useful to employers, environmental and socio-economic assessment, employment standards, and occupational health and safety officials for mine planning, policy development, and ensuring that legal rights, employment standards and safety measures are respected.

## 3.0 METHODS

This is a mixed methods research study involving both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Using a Community-Based Participatory Action Research model (CBPAR), Kaska women's participation in developing questions and interviewing other Indigenous and racialized mineworkers helped establish a cultural rapport that provided rich data. The survey and interview format, content, and interview questions were collaboratively developed September 9-11, 2020, during training sessions facilitated by Dr. Sue Moodie (CCSG Associates), Lois Moorcroft (LAWS Advocacy Secretariat), Dr. Allan Wade (Counselor, Centre for Response-Based Practice) and Aja Mason (Yukon Status of Women Council).

Survey Monkey was used to format the questions and serve as the database. The study was fine tuned after pilot testing and reviewed by advisors who were knowledgeable about conditions for Indigenous or racialized women working in mining camps. The interviews were recorded on phones or by Zoom for qualitative content, and on Survey Monkey for quantitative data. All audio files were destroyed upon their transcription, and transcriptions were scrubbed for any identifiers (e.g. any mentions of names were replaced with a specific code to ensure anonymity of both interviewers and interviewees).

The advocates were also trained on preparing for interviews by international freelance journalist Genesee Keevil. They were interviewed by CBC radio which generated a lot of public interest. Facebook was also used to contact potential Indigenous or racialized women mine workers in the Yukon or northern British Columbia. The high interest in participation, with a waiting list of close to 50 additional Indigenous women who could not be included due to limited financial resources and time available, shows a need for further CBPAR informed research on this subject.

All researchers who were involved in the project signed an "Oath of Confidentiality" to protect the rights and anonymity of the respondents. Respondents' consent forms explained their rights, including anonymity, the option to withdraw from the project or stop the interview at any time, and how to access counselling paid for by LAWS. Respondents received an honoraria. Respondents were contacted through known sources locally, social media, and recruited by newspaper and radio interviews with advocates.

Interviews were conducted with Indigenous or racialized women who have worked in mining camps of various circumstances (hard rock mining, exploration, placer mining) and



locations (remote or road accessible) in Yukon or Northern BC. There was an initial focus on interviewing Kaska women, followed by outreach to others throughout the Yukon. Dr. Moodie co-conducted the initial interviews with the advocates to ensure consistency and appropriate interview techniques. Counselling support for both interviewees and interviewers was provided upon request by Dr. Allan Wade and associates.

The second training held in Whitehorse on November 21-23, 2020 supported learning interview transcription, coding and qualitative analysis of the interviews. The Kaska interviewers learned how to use software for transcription (Trint), how to clean transcript data and identify themes, and to use Atas.ti 8 software to code transcripts for qualitative analysis and determine poignant quotes for writing a meaningful and resonant report.

The broad coding themes were developed in a participatory manner which organized the interview content into categories of personal safety, family and community connection, economic safety, Indigenous safety, environmental safety, and workplace safety. Listed below, code categories and sub-codes were chosen with the goal of identifying trends, common experiences both positive and negative, and iteratively analyse the qualitative data using the colour code for both TRINT and Atlas.ti programs.

**Table 1**

*Broad Coding Themes Used to Analyze Qualitative Data*

THEME	SUB-CODES
Personal Safety	Physical, cultural, social - access to personal safety, constraints to personal safety Rape culture/sexualized assault Acts of resistance Ownership of responsibility to community/personal Violence against women, gender-based violence Sexism Solidarity/connection, social safety, supports Safe transportation Alcohol and drug policy/addictions Human/sexualized trafficking
Family and Community Connection	Family obligations Family stress Rotational work Solidarity
Economic Safety	Money/financial security Financial stress
Indigenous Safety	Awareness or acknowledgement Traditional knowledge First Nations acknowledgment/hunting and fishing practices Racism Respect or disrespect for Indigenous lands rights
Environmental Safety	Clean drinking water Environmental destruction and violence YESAB Health and safety training or lack thereof Environmental justice and protection
Workplace Safety	Health and safety training/conditions General training and scholarship Opportunities for promotion Transportation Alcohol and drug policy / addictions

*Note.* Table listing the broad coding theme categories for personal safety, family and community connection, economic safety, Indigenous safety, environmental safety and workplace safety with identified sub-codes.

## 4.0 WORKER INTERVIEW RESULTS

Interviews were conducted between October 2020 and March 2021 with 22 Indigenous or racialized women who have worked in hard rock mining, exploration, and placer mining camps in both remote and/or road accessible locations in Yukon or Northern BC .

Respondents described what they hoped would come out of this research. Some wanted to share their positive experiences, for example, *“A story sharing and seeing if other people have gone through the same experiences that I have because I have a really positive experience out of mining and I know that I’m a stronger person personality wise.”* (R2) Most wanted to see changes such as to:

- provide better protection for women on and off mining job sites;
- acknowledge what happens to women working in mining: sexual harassment, violence, and discrimination being brought to light and dealt with;
- raise awareness about the racism women encounter in mine camps;
- create workplaces without discrimination towards Indigenous and racialized workers;
- get equal pay and access to training, job opportunities, and promotion;
- see more respect for women demonstrated in the mines;
- develop tools for management to use to respond to violence, harassment or discrimination and to stop these behaviours.



Corduroy road protecting permafrost to wall tents in Beaver River camp, Wernecke Mountains (Crawford, 2006)

Some summary comments of their purpose for participating in this study were: *“Well, hopefully something that they can gather all the data and know, and work and learn from it.”* (R5); *“Truth and justice in relation to women’s issues, women of our community”* (R9); and *“More awareness to what Indigenous women have to suffer through in the mines because it’s never OK.”* (R18)



## 4.1 Respondent Demographics

A total of 22 respondents were interviewed in this study, some of whom identified as being from more than one Indigenous or racialized origin (Table 2).

For respondent's age at the time of the interview, there was an even distribution of 1/3 each for ages 25-34 years and 35-44 years, 4.5% 18-24 years, 13.6% 45-54 years and 9.1% 55-64 years (Figure 1).

The majority of respondents were single without dependents or single with dependents (Figure 2). Sixty-three percent of the single respondents had children (22.7% with dependents, 32% with adult offspring) and 37% had no children. Respondents reported being married (13.6%), common-law (9.1%), and other (4.6%) (Figure 2).



Prickly saxifrage and low bush cranberry flowers on shore of Rancheria River (Volfova, 2020)

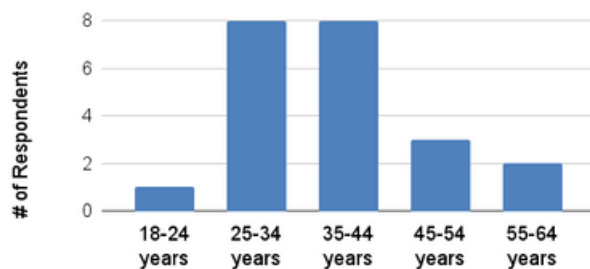
**Table 2**

### *Respondent Origin*

Liard First Nation	12
Ross River Dena Council	2
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations	2
Metis	3
A person of colour (Black, Asian, Hispanic etc)	2
Status Indian under the Indian Act regime	11
Other	3

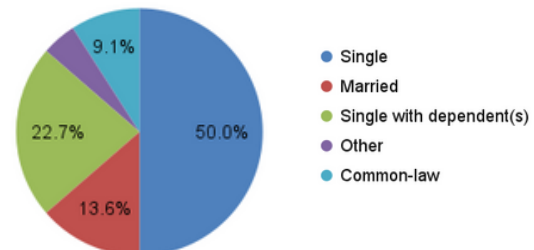
*Note.* Table of respondent origin (number of respondents, n=22, respondents could indicate more than one origin).

**Respondent Age**



*Figure 1.* Chart of respondent age (number of respondents, n=22).

**Family Status**



*Figure 2.* Pie chart of family status (percent of respondents, n=22).

Age of Respondent's Children

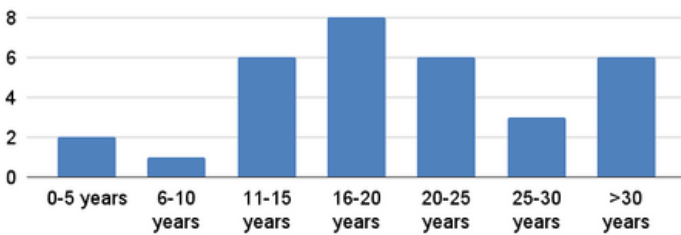


Figure 3. Chart of age range of respondent's children (number by age at time of interview).

A total of 28.6% of these did not have children, while 71.4% did. The age of the respondent's children (at time of interview) ranged from 4 years to 38 years, for a total of 32 children, with 1 to 6 children reported per respondent, most commonly 2 children (Figure 3).

Eighteen percent of respondents graduated from high school, 18% had some high school, 5% had a GED, 9% completed an undergraduate university degree, 5% had a graduate degree, and 45% had taken "other" forms of training. Other included a variety of accredited or non-accredited college or training courses in First Aid, trades tickets, upgrading, business administration, early childhood education, art, renewable resources, advocacy, justice or Indigenous studies (Figure 4).

Education Level

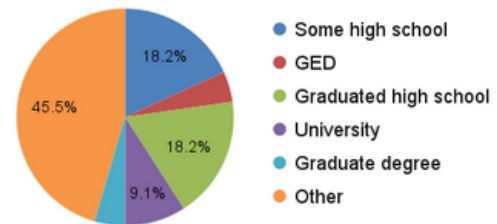


Figure 4. Pie chart of education level (percent of respondents, n=22).

Most of the respondents started working in the mining industry between the ages of 16 to 29 years (77.3%), and 22.3% started between 30 to 49 years of age. The current employment status of respondents is 31.8% full-time and 18.2% part-time work; 22.7% looking for work and 9.1% not looking for work; 9.1% were disabled and not able to work; and 9.1% were students (Figure 5). Currently, 68% of respondents reported they no longer work in the mining industry (Figures 5 & 6, see discussion in section 4.2.3, p. 25, on non-return to mining work).

Current Employment Status

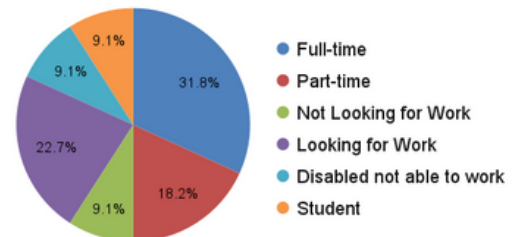


Figure 5. Pie chart of current employment status (percent of respondents, n=22).

Almost half (47.6%) of the respondents have worked between five and seven seasons, while almost a quarter (23.8%) worked only one or two seasons in mining. One respondent had worked in the mining industry for over 25 years. Less than a third (28.5%) worked more than 8 seasons (Figure 6).

Respondents in this study worked in different mining sector camp settings: exploration (34.5%); hard rock mining (34.5%); placer mining (13.8%); and other types (mine site reclamation, environmental monitoring etc., 17.2%) (Figure 7).

More than half the jobs reported by respondents were as a cook, cook's helper, and various cleaning jobs (55%) (Figure 8). Higher paying jobs included heavy equipment operator (4.2%), rock truck driver (5.6%), environmental monitor (5.6%), geologist (2.8%), staker (2.8%), office, human resources or administration (7.0%), first aid attendant (2.8%) and builder (1.4%) (Figure 8).

Number of Seasons Worked in Mining Industry

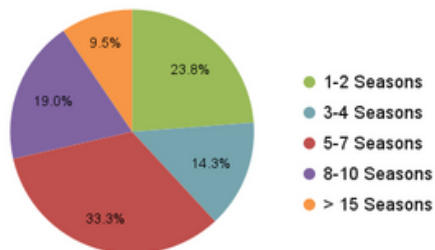


Figure 6. Pie chart of number of seasons worked in mining (percent of respondents, n=22).

Mine Camp Type Worked In

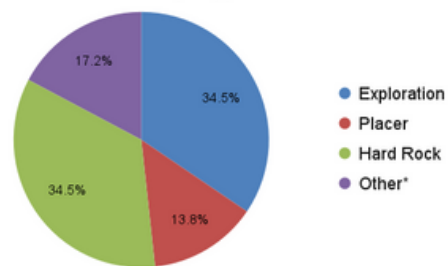


Figure 7. Pie chart of mine camp type worked in (percent of respondents, respondents could indicate more than one camp type, n=22). The "other" category includes mine site reclamation and environmental monitoring.

Job Types

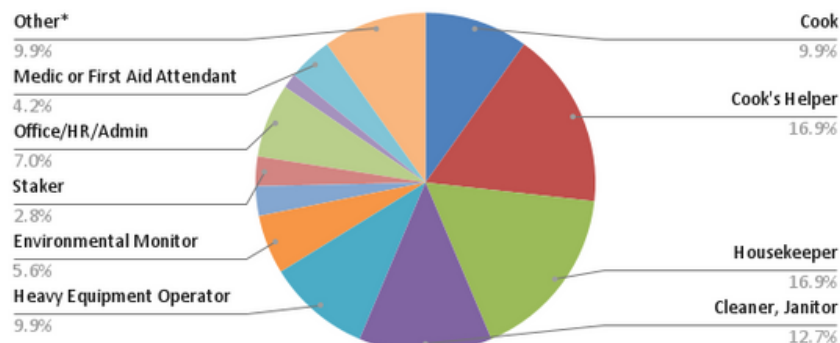
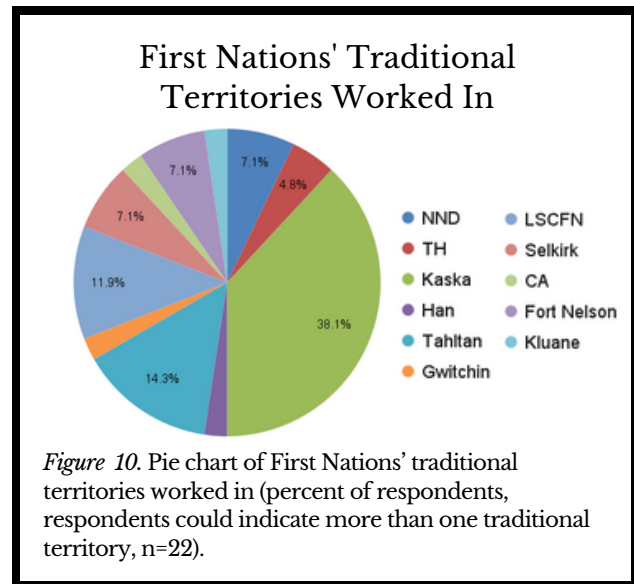
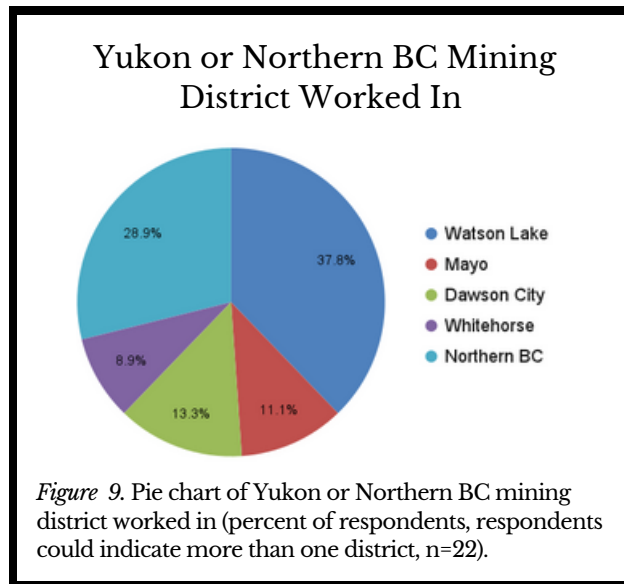


Figure 8. Pie chart of job types (percent of respondents, respondents could indicate more than one job type, n=22). Rock truck driver included with heavy equipment operator. The "other" category includes lab, soil sampling, environmental monitoring, warehouse, expediting, builder.

Respondents worked in all the Yukon mining districts (Figure 9), and worked in many of the Yukon or northern B.C First Nations' traditional territories (Figure 10).



Selwyn Mountain drill core samples and exploration instruments (Crawford, 2007)

## 4.2 Workplace Health & Safety

The study asked respondents about occupational health and safety, regulatory standards and inspectors visits, workplace safety training, and whether they had been on safety committees. They were asked about incidents of workplace fatalities or incidents of violence towards them, and the availability of subsequent supports or counselling. In particular, respondents were asked about any experiences of harassment, violence, or discrimination in mining camps, and whether they felt safe to report such incidents to employers or to the RCMP.

Overall, 72% of the respondents indicated that their workplace in the mining industry operated in a safety-conscious manner, 5% said that it was not a safety-conscious work environment, and 23% reported that they didn't know. For some who reported feeling workplace conditions were unsafe, this kind of sentiment was noted, *"The catch is that a lot of exploration camps and smaller time placer mines that are kind of like the Wild West, like they're not super regulated and they're and even the regs, they're hard to implement because of the remote nature of the camps. So. Yeah, it's pretty loose out there."* (R22)

When asked if they had ever seen mine inspectors onsite, 63% said yes, 37% no. Energy Mines and Resources conducted 27% of inspections, Workers Compensation Health and Safety conducted 36% and the rest were unidentified by the respondent, i.e. 39% saw an inspector of some type but they weren't provided information on for what purpose, or who they were. Few had interacted with the inspectors but one said that you gear your responses to the inspector based on their background, *"One inspector was a geologist, so he would look more with the geology and see because he knew those risk factors. So if an inspector came from a certain trade, that's the trade that they would go to a mine with and thoroughly inspect that because that's what they knew about. So you just played their game, you showed them the electrical stuff or you showed them the geology stuff."* (R2)

Fatalities had occurred at sites where 19% of the respondents were working at the time (in small camps but not personally witnessed ) and 75% of these reported that health and safety violations were a factor in the cause of the fatalities, while 25% were attributed to accidental causes. Little to no support was offered to the workers who were present at the mine when these fatalities occurred, one respondent said she was only offered a ride home. The feeling in the camp after the worker's death was described as, *"Well, it was just basically like everybody gets a fever."* (R9), but there was no support offered. Another said, *"Well, no, I didn't, but others*



*they may have, I think if we wanted it, then we could have had counselling.” (R7) At another camp where there was a fatality, “Somebody came in and talked with everybody, support workers, about what was going on. It was a huge accident, there was a new bridge and he drove right into the lake. Everybody had to get up, just go way too late. I had to get everybody up, the crew and his crew and the housekeeper, and we went up to this big gymnasium and then they had to sit there, and they actually brought in counsellors to help.” (R16)*

Respondents gave various answers to the question of how safety could be improved. They noted that training for workplace safety needs to consider different aspects of the employees, *“what we’ve noticed is like I came from [mine name] where they just like made you read stuff all the time because you’re dealing with Indigenous people who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and different learning abilities, then we have decided to make things easier.” (R11)* Changing training approaches is important because *“just understanding the demographic you’re working with are not seen as a hardship since it is an opportunity to advance everyone’s learning.” (R11)*

Regular check-ins were suggested, *“I guess individually talking to each and every one of them [women], maybe once a week or something to try to do a check in. Just talking to each other more, I guess, communication, there were little mistakes happening, somebody or something broke down or something like that, something wrong.” (R3)* The need for consistency was emphasized, *“There needs to be open dialogue and that it’s crucial that the dialog be part of everybody’s psyche, all the employees or everybody who’s partaking in the mining process know that, you know, women have the right to privacy, to personal space if they say no.” (R22)*

When asked if they had been involved in a safety committee, 68% responded that they had not and 32% had been on a safety committee. One indicated that she had been asked but declined, because management doesn’t want to listen, never actually come out with results and won’t spend money on safety measures. *“You can bring the same subject to the same people and they still will go with a blind ear, they just need to do it for legal purposes... Bottom line for us, it’s frustrating.” (R1)* One respondent said that safety committees can work well but are a lot of work. As co-chair of a safety committee she *“did all the minutes, you assign or discuss with the company all the deficiencies that have been identified by the work group and actually looked at the deficiency to see if it’s actually a risk factor, if it’s a safety thing, or if it’s actually just something that needs a little bit of housekeeping. Look at all the regulations, policy, safety policies within the company, review them with the committee, see if there’s something that could be worked out better.” (R2)*

One respondent said the problem is that there are “*policies for a reason, but they never, ever follow them.*” (R18) “*There should be something more in real life situations because nothing ever happens, it [harassment] just happens over and over again and it looks like nothing ever gets taken care of.*” (R18)

First aid and health facilities, staff and supplies varied with size of camp, temporary nature of some camps, and company protocols. “*They had a first aid office, but all their equipment was expired.*” (R8)

Some reported being part of a safety committee with a regular process to provide input and encourage improved safety. “*So basically, the safety committee was just like a group of people that get together and usually have to pick a topic, and then we'll try to make it better, or something that's troubling or brainstorm as a group on that topic.*” (R17) “*Usually we check on equipment, but in the mornings we were just talking about things. We had this one little form we filled out every morning and your goal was to have something from your shift that you could add that you wanted to change that would make it more safer that every morning. And if you don't have anything I just mentioned something you did that was safe.*” (R4)

In some camps there have been changes in what people report:

“*More progressive reporting of safety because twenty five years ago, nobody reported any accidents because they were scared to get fired. And it was everybody, nobody reported any accidents because you were scared to get fired. Where now realistically you're reporting all accidents and all near misses so that you can get those, that near miss information too in case you need to develop a policy for that. Well, I think for a long time, nobody reported anything, and then they decided we need to start reporting things, and then they decided, OK, now we're reporting things we're going to do with the reports, let's turn them into safety. So it was a long time to develop that.*” (R2)

This respondent described a positive change, “*the mining industry is a proactive industry in the sense that they're not reactive, they don't wait for a problem to be there to resolve it, they look and look for the problems ahead of time and say if this happens, what are we going to do? And then they'll set a policy on that.*” (R2)

Many expressed concern about lack of action on complaints of sexual harassment or assault, especially when assaults of a criminal nature are reported, “*No, they don't. They don't call police*

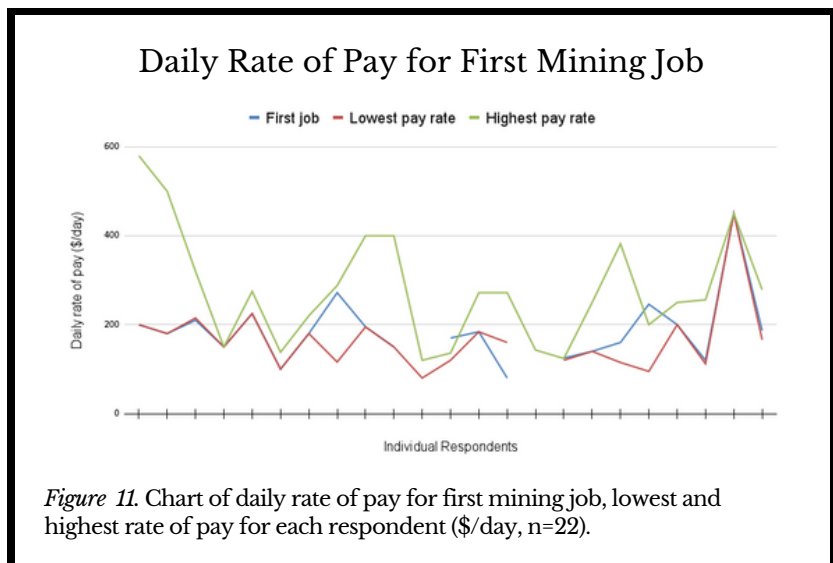
*about the harassment. And, you know, a female can bring forth this complaint and basically nothing gets done about it and that female gets shamed and she has to leave her employment.”*  
(R10)

Some were hopeful that this could change, saying, “*You know, I really think that it can be improved, things can be improved to help with intense stereotypes and discrimination against people everywhere. Hear about it all the time, you know, still very, very rampant among us.*”  
(R7)

#### 4.2.1 Wages

Rates of pay ranged from \$80/day for a cleaner’s job to \$580/day for a contract worker who also received a Christmas bonus. Daily wages comparing each respondent’s first job, and their lowest and highest pay rates appear in (Figure 11). Note that where the blue line is not visible it is either because they did not remember their first pay scale or that was their lowest pay

scale and it didn’t change. Of all respondents, the average rate of pay was \$187/day for their first job (minimum \$80-maximum \$450), \$166/day for their lowest rate (minimum \$80-maximum \$450) and \$278/day for their highest (minimum \$120-maximum \$580).



Beadwork by Leda Jules, Kaska Elder (Volfova, 2021)



### Financial Security While Working in a Mine Camp

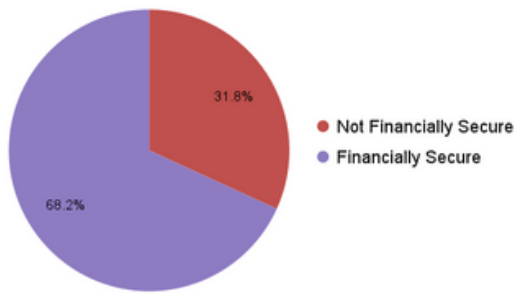


Figure 12. Pie chart of financial security while working in a mine camp (percent of respondents, n=22).

When asked if they were financially secure and able to provide for their family when working in the mining industry, 68% responded yes, and 32% no (Figure 12). One respondent described financial insecurity, having to shuffle pay cheques to make ends meet. *“One cheque would be straight to bills and then the next one we get to for to be comfortable, you know, back and forth.”* (R3)

Others described their pay cheque as the main reason they worked in mine camps, for example, *“The best part was being able to provide for my family, gaining new work experiences and then meeting people too.”* (R13)

### Typical Hours Per Work Week

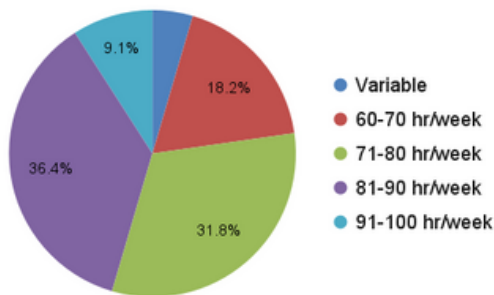
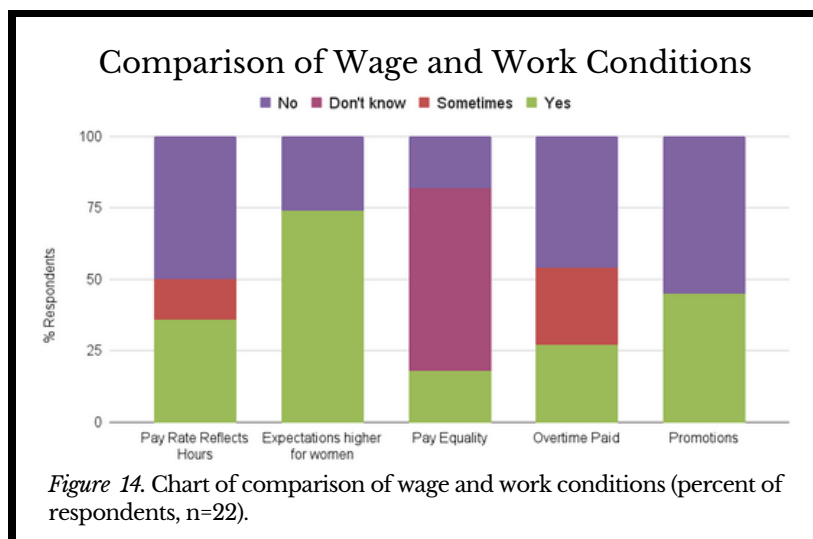


Figure 13. Pie chart of typical hours per work week (percent of respondents, n=22).

The typical number of hours worked per week was often variable and a majority of respondents worked unpaid overtime hours. Eighteen-point-two percent of respondents reported working 60-70 hours/week, 31.8% worked 71-80 hours/week, 36.4% worked 81-90 hours/week, and 9.1% worked over 100 hours/week (Figure 13).



Placer mine near Mayo, YT on Na-Cho Nyäk Dun traditional territory (Mason, 2018)



When asked if their pay rate reflected the hours they worked, almost 2/3 of respondents reported their daily pay rate did not reflect the hours worked, i.e. they worked for longer hours at diminishing hourly pay rates. Fifty percent indicated this was all the time and 14% reported they were sometimes paid for all the hours they worked, as compared to 36% who felt their pay rate was appropriate for the

hours they worked (Figure 14). Respondents described how their pay was inadequate, gave details on pay shortage, or ‘the cheque’s in the mail’ delays of payment, and incurring unanticipated expenses because the camp did not provide sufficient work gear and supplies or cover extra costs of camp work, etc.

Overtime was paid to 27% of the respondents, was sometimes paid to 27%, and was not paid to 46% of the Indigenous and racialized workers interviewed. Most respondents said the practice of not paying overtime was inappropriate, *“I received regular pay, and so I didn't agree with not getting overtime for those extra hours.”* (R3)

Many noted it was hard to estimate the total number of hours worked due to the variability of work expectations. *“That's about the extent that a body can really endure of like hardcore labour, so, yeah, but then the thing was living in camp is that it's hard to gauge when the day is actually over, because there's always things to do.”* (R22).

Promotions had been awarded to 45% of the respondents, and 55% had not received a promotion.

### Pay Equity

While women and men were not always paid equally for the same job, notably 64% did not know if there was a gendered pay difference (Figure 14). Eighteen percent reported that men were paid more than women, 18% said there was equal pay for the same job, and several commented that it is rare to see men working as cooks and cleaners. *“There was one man who was a male housekeeper, but he made the same.”* (R7) Women described working long days for poor pay. One said of women workers, *“They're the hardest workers and the lowest paid is the truth of it, and often the people that are most affected are women.”* (R13)

The following comment illustrates circumstances where a respondent didn't initially know that there was pay inequity between men and women:

*"I had been working for him for a couple of months and doing just fine and keeping up with everyone else on the crew, and he needed an extra body for one of the jobs. And so he hired a friend of mine who I'd introduced him to. And he right off the bat, paid my friend five hundred bucks a day and there I was, the only girl in the crew making half of the wages of everybody else on the crew because I am a woman. So I had to fight for that at the risk of possibly being fired."* (R22)

The pay equity conditions were highlighted as unfair and unwarranted by one respondent when comparing the qualifications of workers in one camp, *"And I do want to point out that the women on our site are more educated than the men."* (R11)

A few noted that job descriptions can be written differently to pay men more than women who are doing the same work, *"They also pay people more to do the same work but that they have different labels."* (R9) This can lead to different opportunities for men than women later on, *"They can legally say no or yes because it all depends on experience and what contributes to women getting opportunities for experience versus men."* (R1)

Many recommended structural changes for improving work opportunities for women, *"Give women up to get a higher opportunity of doing heavy equipment and putting more men into the kitchen, the men are strong they can take it."* (R8) Others noted that on the ground, the quality of work provided by women can be better than men, *"For sure, there is some gender diversity problems in positions, especially when it comes to the equipment, because they always say the guys can do better but I think the women are actually more safer and we do what we call 'more loads', we've increased our machines, and service started with our safety checks."* (R13)

#### **4.2.2 Expectations of Indigenous & Racialized Women in the Workplace**

Seventy-four percent of respondents reported that the expectations of Indigenous and racialized women in the workplace were higher for them than for men, and 26% said that the expectations of men and women were equal. Those who work in predominantly "feminine" jobs like cleaning or cooking (55%) are expected to work long hard hours as part of the daily wage. *"I think the chambermaids and the cooks and stuff are the hardest working people in the camps. Like, seriously, they were slave driven. Like you have to clean, say, 50 rooms a day, do the laundry, if you're the management of the housekeeping you have to be really on the ball as to how to get it done."* (R13)

One respondent described being harassed as part of the increased expectations that are put on women from male co-workers, *“Sometimes I’d be in the kitchen washing dishes and, you know, like the male coworkers would make jokes about how women are supposed to be in the kitchen washing dishes, or it would be time to get off work and go. And then my male supervisor would be like, oh, no, you’re a woman so you have to stay back and finish cleaning and be serious about it.”* (R18)



Laundry Day at Beaver River Camp in the Wernecke Mountains (Full Photo from cover) (Crawford, 2007)

Women often work harder out of concern for being judged and a feeling of needing to prove themselves, *“That’s one thing that is hard, and I think that in the industry, just because women are hypercritical themselves for anything that is small can be perceived as an attack on themselves. And that’s just something that we’re taught in school and taught in life that, you know, it’s society’s versus it’s just part of the job.”* (R11)

Some described higher expectations of racialized women’s work as *“officially not, but myself, I would feel that I have to prove myself, like I feel like I’m more open to scrutiny than others.”* (R21) An Indigenous woman found that, *“As a native woman contractor, I am not taken seriously, like, if I get any work, I have to fight for that work.”* (R10)

Additional burdens on women who were working in the field was also a common experience, *“No matter what I was doing, I would bust my ass in the bush all day and then get back to the wall tents and do ALL the cooking and ALL the cleaning.”* (R22) In other jobs most women stated that they work extra hard to prove their work as “equal” to men’s work. One respondent described a field example where it was necessary to demonstrate field competency, *“actually, I felt like expectations were less because I’m a woman, like, for example, when you’re in the field, the guys always want to carry the gear, and I’m capable of carrying my own, right.”* (R11), stating that a man in the same position wouldn’t be scrutinized or have to prove their worth in the same way.



Some reported being treated in a racist way that didn't acknowledge their skill level, *"The head cook right away, I guess she thought that I couldn't do the job, I wasn't qualified, that I wasn't good enough or something, and she bossed me around and was really rude. But then after the third week, I proved to her I guess I could do all this stuff, so she changed and we got along well after that."* (R7)

Some workers reported that they arrived at camp and were then assigned to lower paying jobs that they had not been originally offered, such as cook's helper or dishwasher, instead of the higher wages and duties of the head cook position they were hired for. In some cases, additional unanticipated work was required on top of what was offered when they were hired, *"working and having to work in the kitchen, not wanting to or not knowing that I was going to, I didn't even have my Food Safe training, they should let me know, just should have let me know that I'd be doing other stuff too when they advertise."* (R3)

#### **4.2.3 Workplace Security & Working Conditions - Layoffs, Quit, Fired, Non-Return to Mining Work**

Describing their employment status, 86% reported being hired as employees and 41% as contractors, with an overlap of 27% who had worked both as an employee and contractor in different settings; 5% were paid off the books, and 9% had paid their own Employment Insurance and Worker's Compensation. A total of 32% of the workers had been laid off due to a mine closure, while 68% had not. One recalled, *"Layoffs happened when the market prices shut it down for 3 mines I worked at, another it was infrastructure breakdown, you know, some of them will end the season and end the contract."* (R2)

Some noted that there were signs indicating when there was going to be a shutdown and people were going to be laid off, *"About a month before the lay off, things were starting to happen on site that I noticed and I recognized all the writing on the wall. So when the company made an announcement about a temporary shutdown, I knew it was going down. When I went out on my last rotation before I was laid off, I brought home all my personal stuff, everything, all my work, everything, because there was three weeks that there was going to be a possibility of that mine closing."* (R2)



Faro Mine reclamation, tailings and roads (Yukon Conservation Society, LightHawk, Whitley, 2017)

## QUIT

A significant number of respondents had quit their jobs (36%), citing reasons such as sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, fear of rape, return to teaching, needs of family and children, pregnancy, feeling isolated in remote camp with poor accommodations, poor pay and bad treatment. At one camp, racial discrimination and harassment led to 4 women quitting at the same time; *“So you're being discriminated against, again and again, racially. It's the way that we were being treated also led to that, so we all just quit and they ended up giving us a ride back.”* (R7)

Family concerns were cited, *“I quit before, my job, because of my kids, I had to come home to my kids.”* (R3)

Under federal and territorial law, it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of pregnancy. Employment rights were not always made clear for pregnant workers, *“I got maternity but I had to fight for it, getting doctor's notes and everything that the people who do it helped me with. Because apparently I ‘quit’, but you have to quit when you're pregnant because of safety. That was sexist because you know, you're pregnant, it should have been just a lay off.”* (R4)

After quitting because of the low pay, one respondent said, *“It kind of made me not want to go back, but then when someone offered better pay I was like ‘OK, I’ll go back’.”* (R3)

A common reason for quitting work was the camp environment, *“Yes, I would call it like a hostile work environment, I quit because of the backstabbing, it was just terrible.”* (R11) Camp accommodations and work conditions were cited as reasons for quitting, *“They just had a shitty camp where we were working in, and it's not the greatest accommodations, I suppose, I just had enough after a certain point, I could work like six weeks straight without a day off and I was just over it.”* (R17)

Another was the isolation of the camp in combination with worker harassment, *“I’ve just been in a remote place that I wasn’t comfortable there, so I quit.”* (R17)

Some who had no support from their boss quit over safety concerns, for example:

*“I quit actually, because the people there were awful. So basically I was soil sampling and I saw something. So it was because of an experience in the forest, we got put to this line where I actually walked through a bear zone and then the bear was stalking us. So then I called the chopper and I called the boss and indicated that, I believe that today we’re going to chill on the mountainside and make it out. I did not refuse to work, it was unsafe work.”* (R9)



Minto mine camp accommodations (left upper middle, white buildings), mill and processing, dry stack tailings benches leading to steep valley and Yukon River (centre) on Selkirk First Nation traditional territory (Anonymous, 2014).

A safety violation when an employer denied transportation to access health services was another respondent's reason for quitting, *"I quit because they wouldn't bring me in to the nearest town to get antibiotics when I had strep throat, and I told them I was going to have someone pick me up, we actually had to go on like a big barge across the river to get to the route to camp, and they wouldn't put my name on the barge to cross the river from camp."* (R18)

One respondent who quit because of sexual harassment faced antagonism and threats, *"I just left it, I got another job immediately after that, but I just left it. But I guess I could have waited and probably reached out for support on that because I did feel like it was, I was sexually discriminated against. And then they told me, oh, well, you're not leaving here until you get to work because we're not leaving. You're not leaving here unless it's through us anyway. So that was a threat, like you know, you're not leaving, right. So. Absolutely."* (R13) Another described constant fear of threats of violence, *"That's probably why I quit. You don't feel safe, like, am I going to get raped today? It's literally a thought in probably everyone's head."* (R18)

## FIRE

Fears of being fired for reporting harassment were founded, as the respondents who were fired by their supervisor (9%) had reported harassment. One said, *“I was afraid all the time to be by myself and my girls. It was scary because you have so many buildings that you have to deal with. But not only that, they are such little rooms and there's like I mean, there's sexual harassment left, right and center. When I was sexually harassed and bothered and everything like that because the guy had a higher job, like his job meant more to the camp than my job. So they got rid of me.”* (R5) In another case, *“When I asked for support, I felt like I didn't get it when I did report inappropriate behavior, the basic issue was the inability to trust the person I was asked to work with and I was removed from the job.”* (R21)

## NON-RETURN TO MINING WORK

Currently, 68% of respondents reported they no longer work in the mining industry. As reported in Figure 5, some are unemployed and looking for work (23%), aren't working due to disability (9%) or a student (9%). Others were currently working in mining-related jobs: transportation contractor, janitorial, temporary lay off, heavy equipment operator, soils analysis lab, and housekeeping.

Half the respondents refused to return to work at a mining job (50%) due to feeling unsafe, discrimination, being treated poorly and belittled, getting a better job offer, an unfair hierarchy of employees, or concerns for their families at home. *“Sexual comments that really put me on edge because I never, you know, at that time in my life, I never even heard of those things. So that really put me on edge and it scared me. You know, I was thinking, what if one of those guys come into my room, you know, and try something. And I refused to go to a camp situation. I will never do that again and never have. And I never will. Never because of that. I don't like that.”* (R10)

Some decided not to return for family reasons, *“Yeah, it's hard to be away from my kids and having my mom watch them and not having their dad help, but eventually why I didn't go back was because I wanted something so different and to spend more time with my kids. To be gone six months of the year, it was too much for my kids or missing out on too much.”* (R7) *“Oh, that's yeah, that's the hard part, because I had young kids. So thank God I had family to support me with that, but yeah, that was hard. Well, sure, we'll be away from the family, but being a single mother and back then without any education or anything like that. To be able to go to work, take other jobs out, I guess it's hard to.”* (R13)

Others kept their jobs but acknowledged the difficulties for their family life, *“It is tough being away from home, your shift work is an extra family burden because obviously people continue with your life while you're not there. So you come back and you have to relearn behaviours, especially the longer you're gone.”* (R11)



## 4.2.4 Employment Benefits or Career Advancement Opportunities

Asked if they ever qualified for employment insurance after working in the mining industry, 59% reported yes, 32% no, and 9% didn't know. Only 26% of the respondents reported having been offered training, scholarship, mentorship or financial award, some of which was basic on-the-job training.

Many respondents noted the importance of getting additional training to enhance work opportunities, *"I've taken it upon myself to be trained in wilderness first aid, I've taken the military's first aid course many, many times and would usually be the one appointed to be the medic or the first aid attendant in camp situations."* (R22) Respondents stressed that getting official "tickets" would improve their chances for job advancement and pay increase. A few were supported by the company to get training, *"I never see anything negatively and there were good experiences, like the mine is currently paying me to get my supervisor ticket for anywhere in BC."* (R17)

One respondent said she got a ticket for "oil burning mechanic", after challenging the exam, but *"just to get the extra six thousand dollars, I would never fix a furnace."* (R2) This approach hasn't always worked out, as one respondent described, *"On my own, I went and took a culinary arts level one and level two. My whole life I was just looking for that and I thought that it would help me to make more money in the mining industry, but it did not."* (R7)

## 4.2.5 Harassment, Discrimination & Violence

When asked, "Have you ever witnessed or experienced discrimination in the mining workplace based on gender or sexual orientation, and/or race or indigeneity?", almost three-quarters of the respondents had personally experienced one or both of these forms of discrimination; 36% had experienced both, 27% experienced only gender or sexual orientation discrimination, 9% experienced only race or Indigeneity discrimination, and 27% had not experienced race, gender or sexual orientation discrimination personally, though some said they were aware of others who had (Figure 15).



Rainbow at Tu Cho Elders' camp, Frances Lake (Volfova, 2020).

### Discrimination and/or Harassment Within Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race or Indigeneity

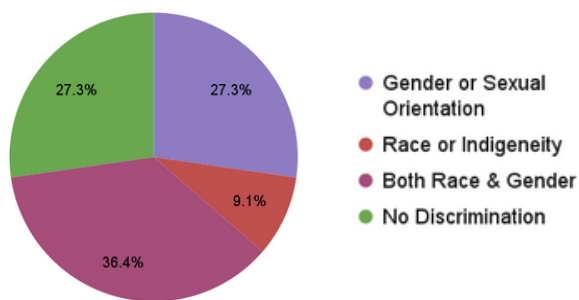


Figure 15. Pie chart of discrimination and/or harassment within gender or sexual orientation, race or Indigeneity, both gender and race, or no discrimination (percent of respondents, n=22).

Accounting for all occurrences of discrimination by type, this means that 68% of respondents experienced discrimination by gender or sexual orientation, and 45% experienced discrimination by race or Indigeneity (Figure 15).

Harassment and discrimination were experienced by all age groups, camp types, education levels, and job status of those participating in the study (Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18). Among the

eight who had work circumstances where they reported no discrimination, comments were, *“Both places that I worked in the mining industry, I felt safe. I felt respected. I think being a cook is part of it, because the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.”* (R14)

Others who witnessed or experienced harassment said they were not bothered by it, *“I’ve seen sexist harassment, but yes, I laugh at dirty jokes too.”* (R6)

### Discrimination and/or Harassment Within Age Group

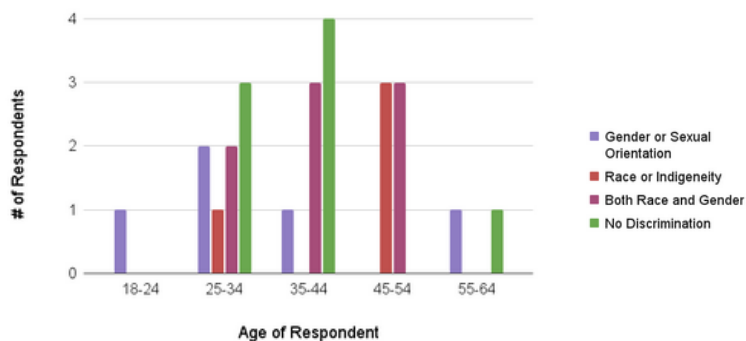


Figure 16. Chart of discrimination and/or harassment within gender or sexual orientation, race or Indigeneity, both gender and race, or no discrimination (number of respondents, n=22).

Some respondents gave more details than others about their workplace discriminatory experiences or how they responded at the time and later, but all were consistent in saying that these situations should not happen.

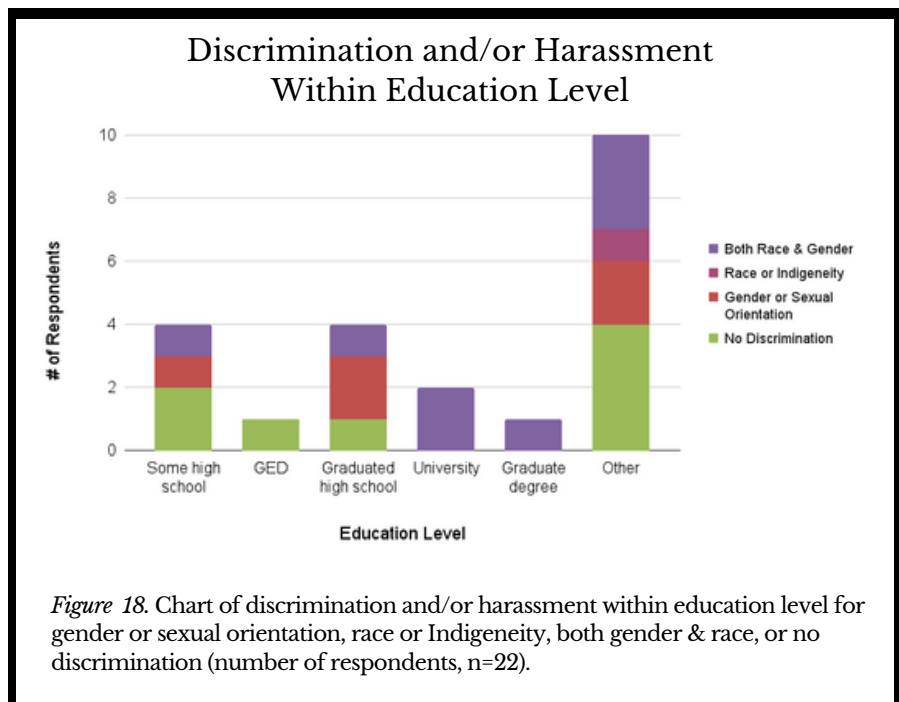
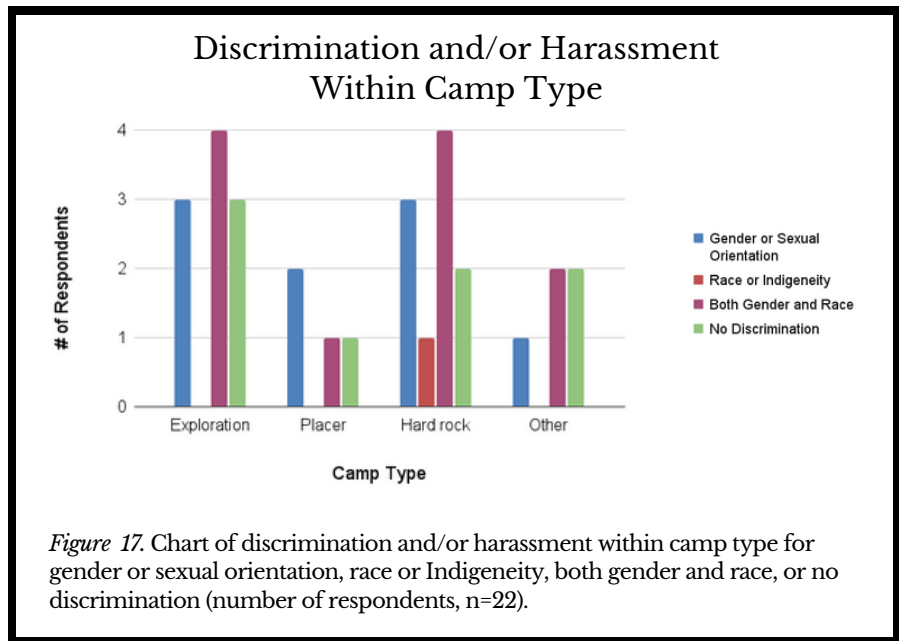
There were some differences by the type of mining camp, 80% of respondents had personally experienced one or both of these forms of discrimination in hard rock mining; 75% in placer mining; and 70% in exploration camps (Figure 17).

One respondent commented:

*“I mean, nobody really wants to either remember or think about, you know, being mistreated simply because you’re a woman. I mean, those are the questions that are loaded with repression.” (R1)*

Many had never disclosed their experiences of harassment or discrimination before being asked about it in this worker interview, *“I don’t know, I just until now,*

*I mean, this is the first time I’ve ever talked about it until now, like nobody’s ever asked: ‘So how was your experience as a woman in camp?’ Right. Yeah, seriously. Never until now.” (R13)* Others said that their experiences of harassment were not acknowledged or considered to be relevant by coworkers or management.



One expressed disbelief about finding herself in a bad situation when she is usually the one who protects others:

*“A lot of people don't understand, you know, I mean, like, when you go into stuff like that and you get that badly harassed, like me of all people, I'm like one of those types of women that protect my girls and stuff like that. So for that to happen to me and not know how to react to it is tough, I was in the bathroom cleaning. And that's what I mean. When you're in a room where you either got the, you got the option of throwing the bugger across the room or else letting them come into you, come on, whatever, that's the shit that sucks.”* (R5)

Some experienced racism because they were Indigenous and also witnessed other people of colour experiencing racism, *“So it was just the looks that we would get and the attitude we would get, you know, when they were talking to us and the little comments and belittling. So it was mostly [directed at] the kitchen staff or the Muslim lady who worked in the concession, and we deal with all that kind of stuff.”* (R7)

Others felt blamed for being sensitive to harassment and suggested it is better to *“just to move on like men, I feel they can do that better. Yeah, like they just let it wash off and women internalize it, try and look at it, and get upset with it. And when it's not at all right, it's like I have to have thicker skin.”* (R11) Others expressed fear of repercussions for reporting harassment or discrimination, *“I was just so young, I thought they were going to send me home if I had complained, right?”* (R3)



Working gold trenches and sluices, Klondike circa 1899 (Yukon Archives, photo 2190)

Many respondents indicated that they were careful of their behaviour in order to keep themselves safe, *“Oh, both sexist and racist - you can't even wink at a guy out there, you can't even invite one to watch a movie with you.”* (R6) Others emphasized the importance of supporting each other, *“When you find somebody that you feel safe with, stick with them and stick by them, and if you feel unsafe, talk to them about it and make sure you talk to somebody in town about it if you have the capacity to. But if not, make sure somebody knows you're not feeling great about a certain situation.”* (R22)

Sexual harassment sometimes came in ways that were in “code messaging” devised by the men in camp:

*“I was cleaning about 100 rooms, and I remember when I was getting trained, this the woman who was training me, she told me to not take the chocolate on the bed and I didn't understand what that meant. The next day I went back and there was money there. And I told her this and she said, yeah it's because they want to sleep with you and if you take the money, then they'll know that you're interested. But like I didn't know this, I would leave that money there and I would leave their treats there and stuff like that. And it made me really uncomfortable because, like they think they're allowed to do that, and I don't know if other women in the camp did it before.” (R18)*

This same woman experienced a physical and attempted sexual assault:

*“I was cleaning the bed and stuff and then I got pushed from the back and I turned around like it was like this big, muddy, disgusting old man, and he was like taking his belt off. I didn't know what was happening. And then I just started screaming. And this guy I was an acquaintance with was sleeping, because he was on night shift. And he woke up to me screaming and he opened the door and he pushed that guy away. And then he grabbed me and brought me to the first aid office to see if anything happened. So I was like about to get raped in camp, like on the job, because I was alone in this long hall, which is why they should have security constantly walking around.” (R18)*

When she reported this incident, “They said that they can't prove anything, there's no security cameras.” (R18) No action was taken in response to this assault, so after that she and all her co-workers pushed for and were able to work in pairs.

## **HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION REPORTING SYSTEMS AND PROTOCOLS**

Of the respondents who reported they experienced harassment or discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, and/or race or indigeneity, most said there was no grievance mechanism available to report it to their employer (42.9%) or that the policy was unclear or they felt unsafe (28.6%). There were different reasons for this, including a lack of personnel in the mine reporting structure available to address harassment, concerns for their job security, lacking confidence they would receive an appropriate response, privacy concerns, or fear that the problem would escalate threatening their personal safety. Another 14% said “not applicable” because they had not experienced reportable incidents (Figure 21). Only a few respondents (14%) knew about ways to report harassment, “There was an HR (Human Resources) officer on duty, so you would go there and you'd put in your complaint and either, depending on how bad it was, they could get fired, warning, dismissed? That's when they can come back if suspended. For most of the time, you'd probably be fired if there was sexual harassment or racist or sexist or something like that.” (R4) None of the mineworkers who had been targeted by harassment said this disciplinary course of action actually happened.

For the majority of respondents, there was no opportunity for harassment concerns to be addressed or to find personal support. There was often a staffing hierarchy involved. For example, *“Well, that's the thing. I've actually gone to higher ups and stuff like that. And I told them, like, this is the situation that made me uncomfortable. I don't like it coming from a supervisor, blah, blah, blah. And they've actually told me, just leave it alone. And that was coming from another supervisor, so.”* (R1) Others reported that their superiors could get away with *“bullying because they can if they wanted to, they could just say one word and you're fired.”* (R5)

Some respondents chose to keep incidents to themselves, *“I didn't talk to anybody really, I just stuck it out and did it. Yeah [laughs].”* (R3) Others felt concern about how they would be perceived and what repercussions they would face, *“I guess I just didn't want to look like a complainer, or I didn't want to be sent home because I had been refusing to work, I guess, so. I talked to the cook about it, and she just laughed it off, right? And she was like, oh, you'll be fine, like she kind of talked to me, took me under her wing and showed me the ropes, you know.”* (R3)

Many described that they didn't know who to report to, or didn't feel comfortable if they didn't have a First Nation's person to report to, *“I didn't report the discrimination, no. How come I didn't know who to talk to about it? Because we know the bosses are mostly European descent, yeah, not many from the First Nations. Who do you go to that you could trust? So you just a lot of times, you just kept that to yourself.”* (R19)

One respondent described a sexual harassment incident, an example of regular occurrences with no support:

*“So if somebody says, for instance, “can I scratch your box?”, like you're not going to go to your boss, you're just whatever. Just do your job, ignore him. Just keep doing your job. Because they don't if anything happens, come to us, so no, there's no potential. You didn't feel safe. So the safety of reporting is, yeah, there's none. And then there's no support. I would say that there's no support that you can go to somebody else and be like, OK, so this is happening and this particular person is making sexual remarks.”* (R13)

One respondent distinguished between physical and mental health, *“I felt generally well supported that way, where health concerns are not defined as emotional health or mental health around racism or sexism. I feel like psychological damage is not, they just don't know how to deal with that.”* (R21)

Daily occurrences such as being hit on were common and unwanted, *“Old men looking, old men acting like dogs, old dudes trying to hit on me.”* (R6)

In another case, *“I remember the boss, there was a younger girl that was working with us at one point and I guess they started having an affair together, but I mean, like even on the job he would slap her ass and for myself, I didn’t like that.”* (R13) Someone described the constant harassment in their working conditions as “minor”, and said it wears people down, *“Conversation or that would encourage the interests of that particular person to continue. And I have to say, well, I’m in a relationship or anything like that, I just conducted myself in a manner to kind of let them know that I’m here to work, that’s enough. Shut it down. No, it wasn’t anything I would have considered reporting, it wasn’t that big a scale, I just know how my innards felt”* (R14) Some cited their inexperience for why they didn’t get support, *“Probably there was a way to grieve that process of harassment, I didn’t know, I mean, I was just so young.”* (R3)

*“I wanted to go home. What’s the point in being a part of a mine that condones this? You know, they actually think that this thing is appropriate, this kind of behaviour is appropriate and I’m, you know, just some lowlife housekeeper. So I just left and a majority of my crew left after that because of this harassment and stuff like that.”* (R5)

*“I was housekeeping. I was 19 years old. I went to clean the common washroom and I walked in and this was disgusting. So I put a mask on, put gloves on, and I was opening up on the stall doors and one of these men had picked up their feces and wrote all over the stalls and they smeared their, yeah, with their feces all over the bathroom stalls, on every single one. And yeah. And it’s like you’re living with these people and eating with them and they do that. And it’s so disrespectful because they know it’s like half the time women are housekeepers. So I dropped what I was doing and told my supervisor and she told me that if I didn’t clean it I was fired because it was part of my work. But at the same time, it was bodily fluid and it was a hazard. So I went to the fire department on site and I explained to them without the approval of my supervisor and they put on hazmat suits and went and then cleaned it. I was believed, I always took photos on my phone to have proof of these things, but I wasn’t supported by my supervisor.”* (R18)

Some respondents described constant daily threats from specific individuals, for example *“You know, and another guy grabbing himself in between his legs. I hear this and you know, and they don’t care. They all laughed about it. And it was just gross to me. And I was the only First Nation person there too.”* (R10) Or in this case of more extreme daily harassment, *“That was what messed me up, but I didn’t, I didn’t know how to deal with it at the time. I was more scared for my life because this guy was like beyond freaking help. And like one of those people, you can’t smile at all. And I never smiled after that.”* (R5)

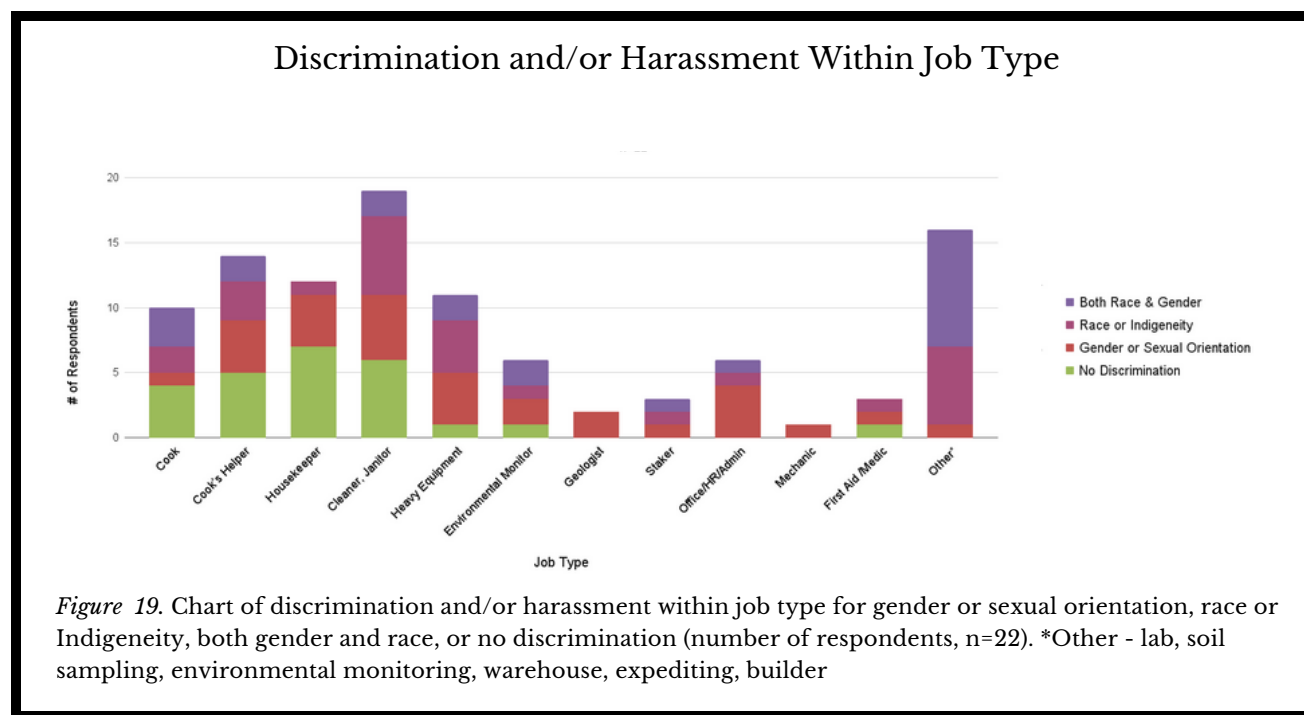


Many respondents mentioned supporting their co-workers coping with harassment or discrimination. *“Supporting other people in camps, not even in camps necessarily, people just come up to me and tell me the craziest things or the wildest things or confidential things and although they will tell me something, it didn't happen to me necessarily.”* (R2)

One respondent had a co-worker and *“she said that she dealt with that for the first year. And then, like, after being there for a while, the guys just got used to her being there and being one of the guys. But it's almost like they were trying to intimidate me or her to, like, give up.”* (R18) Another described others looking out for her, *“they were OK with me because, you know, they treated me like I was a kid, and then the biologist I was working with was very protective. And that was good.”* (R10)

One respondent who worked as a manager said, *“I supported women if they reported things that happened, just needed to talk or something like that, I listened to the best of my ability. I was not ever penalized for any time that way either, though it was never formally reported on any document, or informally actually.”* (R21)

One respondent indicated, *“So workplace harassment policies, yes, there were always those in place and a lot of those were developed at its senior management levels within the industry, so a lot of them went from one mine to the other to the other. They just changed their name. And if they worked well, then it went all throughout Canada.”* (R2) Another said, *“Mine operators and managers, or our project managers are often completely unequipped to respond to women's concerns or to risks posed specifically to women.”* (R21)

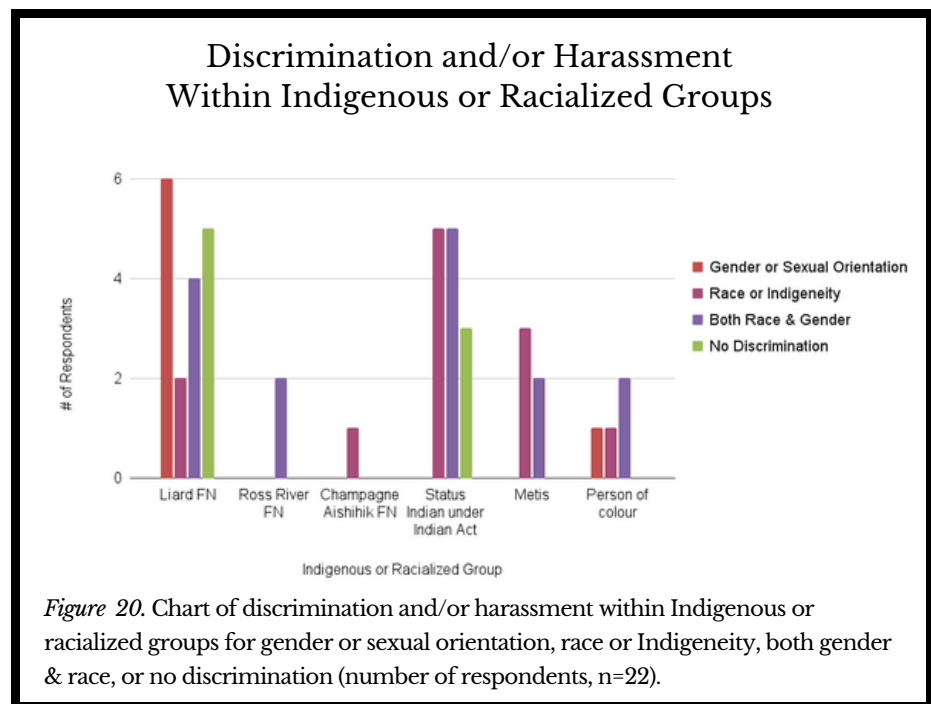


Discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, and/or race or indigeneity, was experienced by respondents in every category of employment and within every Indigenous and racialized group (Figures 19 and 20).

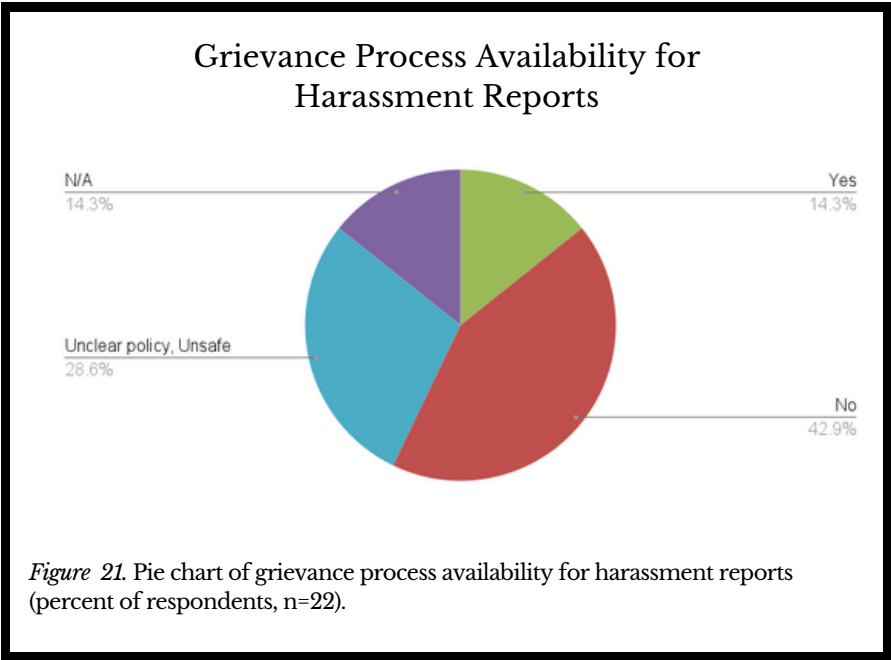
There was some feeling that incidents of racism had improved, however, distrust remained, *“Well, really, I guess the first I time I went to camp they still had a little bit of racism more than they do now, so I think things have gotten better around that area, but I think there are people that, people are good at acting, right?”* (R3) One respondent described that a Muslim co-worker decided to quit the job because he was being racially harassed. When leaving he had a warning for her as a mixed race individual that people were talking behind her back and making racist comments, *“He told me, ‘you should be aware’, and he was really emphatic about it, but I didn't ask him for details and he didn't go into details. I was just kind of alarmed.”* (R21)

When respondents were asked if there was a grievance mechanism available if harassment occurred, and whether they would get a clear response, 14.3% responded yes, 42.9% responded no, 14.3% said it was not applicable, either because they had not experienced harassment or discrimination that they felt a need to report or

their camp was too small to have a process to address concerns, and 28.6% said the process was unclear or they did not feel safe to access a managerial response, or didn't know if there were options available to report harassment (Figure 21).



*“You just can't talk about them. A lot of men do make an effort to be respectful, but I just, I see my managers just talking to like women constantly trying to be warm and friendly, talking to people, referring to you as girls, like, kind of caring in a way. But it's not, there's not a respect for your skill level and knowledge. Not everybody's like that, there were some people who were really great to work with and many were good to work with, but it just very difficult to know how to address issues of discrimination when they are observed or reported to me.” (R21)*



### 4.2.6 Dignity, Violence & Personal Safety

The study asked respondents about their access to communications, personal safety, and health (Table 3, Figure 22). The vast majority of respondents identified concerns about dignity, violence, and their personal safety. The study did not define the term safety, so there is a wide interpretation from physical safety on the work site, to harassment and assaults that were or were not reported, to their personal safety in accommodations at the camp living situation.

<p><b>Table 3</b></p> <p><i>Questions of Personal Safety</i></p> <p>Did you have access to communications while in camp?</p> <p>Did you feel safe and free to access communication devices? i.e. Sat phone, radiophone, beacon etc.</p> <p>Was there any point at which you felt like you wanted access to outside support or resources but were not comfortable using available technology due to the proximity of your work mates?</p> <p>Was there an exit route out of the camp? (e.g. was it easy for you to leave if you wanted or needed to?)</p> <p>Did you feel safe with the bathing facilities on site?</p> <p>Have you ever felt unsafe working in the mining sector?</p> <p>If you had health concerns or emergencies, did you feel safe addressing them with the company you work for? Did you feel respected?</p> <p><i>Note.</i> Table listing the questions of personal safety for access to communications and communication devices, outside support, exit route availability, safe bathing facility, safety working in the mining sector, and addressing health concerns or emergencies.</p>
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### Mine Camp Communications Access, Health & Safety Concerns

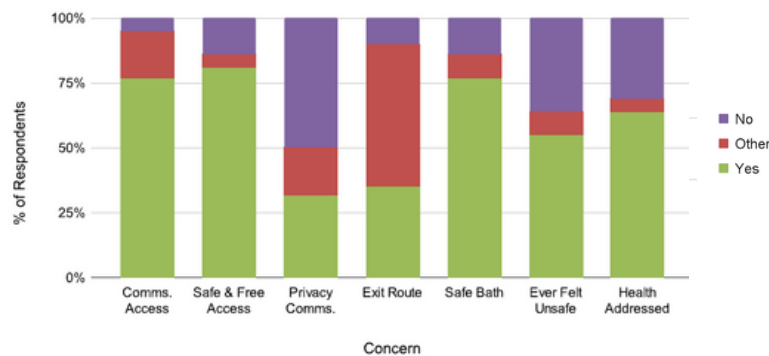


Figure 22. Chart of mine camp communications access, health & safety concerns (percent of respondents, n=22).

Respondents encountered harassment and violence on the job and in their personal living conditions as part of camp life, such as sleeping quarters, bathing facilities, and common areas.

Communications access may or not have felt safe. When asked if they felt unsafe in camp, 55% responded that they did not feel safe, 10% preferred not to say and 35% responded that they felt safe (Figure 22).

Overall, respondents felt the “bigger time” employers that they've worked for were more likely to work in safety conscious ways. However, it was noted that *“for the smaller shows that I've worked, I feel like I've had to be very self-reliant for workplace safety measures and have had to organize all of those details myself.”* (R22)

Some camps are more isolated with controlled access. *“It's like Alcatraz actually, that's what we called it because you got to go get across the river and get back in order to get out, and then we have shut off all the lights at like eleven o'clock, and there's no barbed wire just how cold the river is.”* (R13)

Communication access could be limited, *“We felt safe because we were always like with each other, ok, but we didn't have access to satellite phones and the radios, even just to call the shuttle”* (R4) Many said they had limited access or privacy, for example, *“We're able to call but the sat phones are busy, shared, it was crowded when you were talking on the phone, not contacting with as much privacy.”* (R7)

Without access to private communications services, respondents who wanted to protect co-workers felt constrained when trying to speak confidentially about ongoing harassment, *“There are times that I felt uncomfortable because, for example, I've known of situations with other women and then when they're off site, I want to know how they're doing and if I use a site email like satellite communications, I'm wondering who's getting them. So it's like I want to support other women and I'm not sometimes, I know that any communication I do through the mine site is going to be visible to the mine.”* (R21)

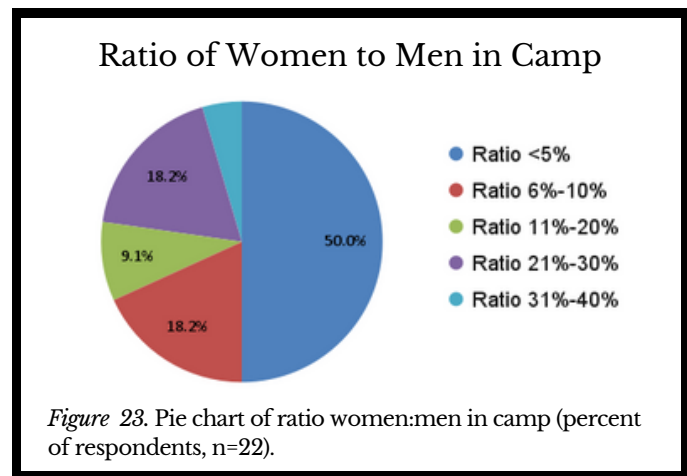
Many reported they were the only woman in the camp. In 50% of the camps, the ratio of women:men was less than 5%. In 77% of the camps, the ratio of women:men was less than 20%. The highest ratio of women:men was 40% or less (4.5%) (Figure 23).

Respondents were concerned about being vulnerable when they are alone in certain circumstances, like cleaning rooms alone on a floor, being out in the pits, or getting to and from the site, for example, *“You have to walk half a kilometer to work or whatever from wherever you're staying, and you're the only woman walking in, and there's 50 men standing outside, like you never know, so you feel vulnerable.”* (R13)

The dominant male presence in the mining camps made many

respondents feel unsafe in their living quarters when off duty from work. They described their need to assure safety for themselves, for example, *“And so part of my self-protection ritual was I would I would empty, I would load and unload my shotgun in front of all the boys and be like, yeah, I know how to use my gun. Like, don't fuck with me. And I would sleep with it right next to my bed, sometimes right in the bed next to me, and I'd have my bear spray right there, too.”* (R22)

Asked whether they felt safe with the bathing facilities on site, respondents gave different answers (Figure 22). Most felt safe because they could lock the door, there were separate male and female facilities, they had their own bathrooms or one in close proximity to their room and designated only for females.



Employees of Stanley & Worden, Klondike circa. 1901 (Yukon Archives photo 9149).

Others reported feeling uncomfortable, even though they could lock doors they did not feel safe because the camp was mostly men (50% of camps had less than 5% women workers, Figure 23), *“It was creepy”* (R15). Many described that *“as a woman in camps, there's definitely always a kind of awareness about when it's safe for time to bathe. Might be just to not even in, to not invite or to not promote any overlap situations that could feel unsafe or potentially lead to situations that are unwanted.”* (R22) Others said they would not go and shower alone, *“there were times, and some of my coworkers wouldn't even shower or, you know, me and some of my coworkers were like, oh, make a time to shower together at the same time for safety.”* (R18)

Another situation is that:

*“Being in a secluded camp, if there's not enough women, then they would in reality have no reason to have a women's washroom or you don't have a women's hall because there is more men who need more restrooms or something. So they were doing just a gender neutral washroom, which is still uncomfortable because you're showering in them.”* (R18)

For some it was a matter of having to change their own behaviour, for example, *“Needing to avoid certain individuals in order to feel safe. That's been fairly frequent and common. Mostly in bigger camps where there's less personal accountability between the team members.”* (R22) For others, their economic security was infringed when they were faced with harassment. An example of sexual harassment that was not addressed was, *“One of the male workers made a clay doll and put the breasts on it, and a penis, and left it where I work in the morning, when I went to work it was there. And I took it to the foreman. And they didn't do anything about it, so I just said, ‘I'm not going to tolerate that and I end up quitting’.”* (R19) Some chose not to take offers of work, *“I had a chance to go to camp last year somewhere, out in the mountains somewhere, but I didn't go because I would be the only woman in a 15 man camp and I wasn't comfortable with that.”* (R13)

Co-worker interactions were described as *“always different and hardly ever I was treated with respect, but then some guys would come off shift and they'd be like, thank you so much, I would not be able to come to a clean bedroom and to clean the room without you working here.”* (R18)

One respondent indicated that she was often in situations that were *“a threat to my personal space and livelihood.”* (R22)



One respondent was told that her presence as a woman on site was to please the men, her boss said, *“We’re doing this because you’re motivating these guys to be here.”* (R9) This was a concern that *“she kept me on that job because she wanted me there as a woman sexually was actually that all a key motivator to motivate the men that were there working, or some shit like that.”* (R9)

*“My mom was always calling me to make sure I was OK, to make sure I was safe, and send some little care packages just to make sure that I had what I needed because I was so young and working away from home. But she was really concerned because she used to work in camp and she always had sexual harassment and things like that, so.”* (R18)

#### **4.2.7 Coronavirus Precautions**

For those working during COVID-19 conditions (41% of respondents), 44% had shift changes as a result while 56% did not have shift changes. Although incoming workers were quarantined, 73% of the respondents raised concerns about COVID exposure by workers from outside the Yukon bringing in the virus, citing concern for safety in both the workplace and community exposure. Many said that although procedures were in place, the camp and work conditions prevented being able to adequately follow them.

*“With COVID it’s pretty intense, everything, like we have to walk down the same hallways that are like super small. The mess hall is only so big for us to eat so a lot of us have to eat in our rooms. We have to work on the same job together, you know, like sometimes you have to work side by side. I don’t understand how they expect a social distance with that in place. We have to ride in vehicles to certain areas around site together. And it’s just they ask for a little bit too much when it comes down to work.”* (R1)

This concern was echoed by others, for example, the camp was *“Dirty, dirty and not safe.”* (R3)

#### **4.3 Cultural, Environmental & Social Safety**

The study asked respondents whether their employer acknowledged at their workplace whose First Nations traditional territory they were on, the traditional owners of the land, and cultural practices to be aware of and respect while being on Indigenous lands (Table 4).



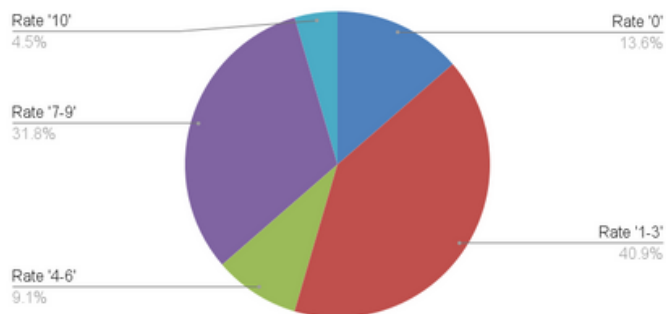
**Table 4**

*Questions of Cultural, Environmental and Social Significance*

QUESTION	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Were any training programs or materials on the Indigenous context offered as part of your orientation?	50%	45%	5%
Was any training provided by an Indigenous person?	14%	86%	N/A
Were there any discussions or policies about caribou, moose and fish habitat, hunting protocols, or environmental protection?	50%	50%	N/A
Have you seen any racist or offensive slogans, posters or materials at the workplace?	14%	77%	9%

*Note.* Table of questions of cultural, environmental and social significance (percent of respondents, n=22).

**Mine Addressed Environmental Impacts**



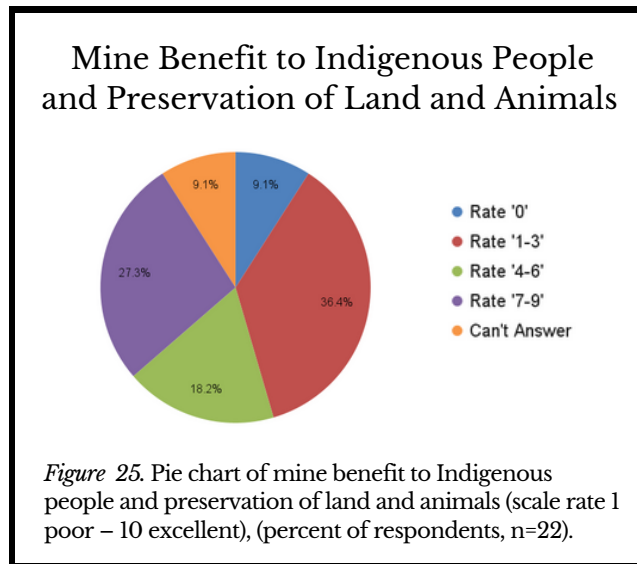
*Figure 24.* Pie chart of mine addressed environmental impacts (scale rate 1 poor – 10 excellent) (percent of respondents, n=22).

A few respondents were involved in helping the mining company develop culturally sensitive materials to train other workers, and found this fulfilling work, *“I helped create 101 for [First Nation name], that they could learn, which is pretty cool. I think it's a pretty cool job.”* (R6)

Respondents were asked to rate how well they thought the mining company was addressing the

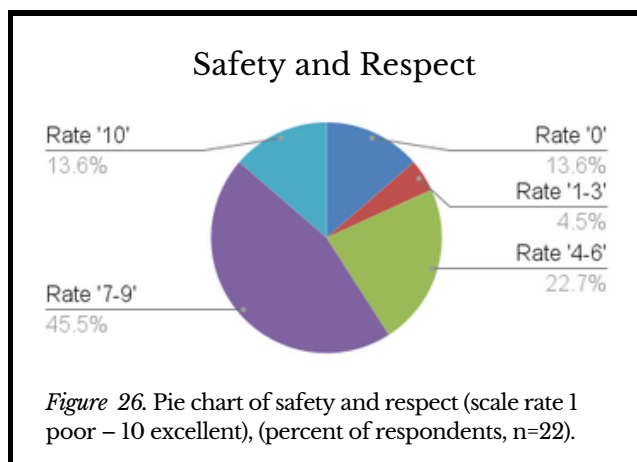
environmental impacts of their mining practices. Over half of the respondents (54.5%) rated the mine company practices as very poor (13.6% rated ‘0’, 40.9% rated ‘1-3’), mid range (‘4-6’ rate) accounted for 9.1%, and upper range was 36.3% (31.8%) rated ‘7-9’, 4.5% rated excellent ‘10’ (Figure 24). *“In my experience, the few mines that I have worked at, there's complete disregard for the environment and a lot of rule breaking going on. It's all about the filthy lucre and the gold.”* (R22)

Respondents were asked to rate to what extent mining activities benefit Indigenous people and preserve the land and animals – with work and income, and by preserving the natural habitat, food sources and migration routes of animals (Figure 25). Some found the question important but too difficult to answer because they couldn't quantify those benefits, or because they were not Indigenous.



In rating the mine company's benefit to Indigenous people 45.5% of respondents said it was rated very poor (9.1% rated '0', 36.4% rated '1-3'), mid range ('4-6' rate) accounted for 18.2%, and 36.4% rated benefits to Indigenous people in the upper range (27.3% rated '7-9', 9.1% rated excellent '10') (Figure 25).

In rating their mining industry workplace's level of safety and respect, the majority of respondents scaled their company above average (45.5% rated '7-9', 13.6% rated excellent '10'), mid range ('4-6' rate) accounted for 22.7%, and 18.1% rated very poor (13.6% rated '0', 4.5% rated '1-3') (Figure 26).



Respondents noted that the cost of resources for gas, boats, snowmobiles etc. makes it expensive to get out on the land, having a job helps with these costs and improves their personal access, *"I think it's important for*

*people to have an income so that someone who is missing [being] out on the land and looking to do so, you had an income to take families back to the land to take care of water."* (R7)

Respondents described the Indigenous connections between land, people and place that are not respected or acknowledged by workers from outside. *"It's your traditional territory and they hire you after they come in and destroy it, then they hire the First People to go clean it up because we take care of the land."* (R8) *"Because I don't think we're very financially compensated, like they're not giving us what they're taking from us."* (R9)

*"You know, I think about what a mine does to the landscape and I don't know if there's anything in place that says, well, before we were here, it used to look like this, or now it looks like this. And also would be nice to see where the people who come in and say, well, you know, the history or their appreciation for who it belongs to and what it's like, what part it played in the lifestyle of the Nation that they're on. Because I don't know that really a lot of workers that come in from other places understand about, you know, who's like being on someone else's land and what it means to them. That was their livelihood. It was where their children were raised or their family. Yeah, absolutely. We come from a concrete jungle."* (R14)

*"I would say they're not respectful, they just are not! They are there for one reason, that's to extract resources, treat us like dirt and this is what they always do."* (R10)



Faro cross-valley tailings dam and ponds, showing ongoing land and water impacts for reclamation and long-term maintenance (Yukon Conservation Society, LightHawk, Whitley, 2017)



Fireweed on the shore of Frances Lake (Volfova, 2020).

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The research was commissioned by the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) to offer training and work experience for Kaska advocates and to investigate workplace economic, health and safety conditions for Indigenous and racialized women with jobs in the mining sector. Interviewers and the participants they interviewed have deep family connections and respect for the land. Land lies at the heart of social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic life for Indigenous women (Bond & Quinlan, 2018). The interviewers brought cultural knowledge and an Indigenous perspective to the research, and were supported by Elders and community. They had personal knowledge of the racism, discrimination and violence experienced by Indigenous and racialized women working in the mining sector, which was substantiated in the study results.

### 5.1 Economic Insecurity

Our findings demonstrate the economic insecurity and precarity of women working in Yukon's mining sector. "Economic precarity" is described as persons labouring under non-standard employment conditions including temporary or seasonal work, low pay (often lower than living wage), low status and poor working conditions including a lack of labour and human rights protections (Benach et al., 2014). The findings from this study support previous observations that extractive economic policies that favour the rapid expansion of the capitalized mining industry use women as a cheap labour source - a commodity - and may create a cycle of exploitation (Lahiri-Dutt, 2019). Mine development and abandonment patterns remain largely unchanged, jobs are short lived while social and environmental impacts are long term. Examples of this are uncertainty and changes in traditional food and water sources, people cannot rely on the health of fish and wildlife populations in remote locations where mines are built and left untended, causing an increased burden of food preparation and health care which usually falls upon women (Moodie et al., 2001).

The Yukon Chamber of Mines upholds that Yukon's mining industry is modern, safe and responsible and contributes to the social and economic development of communities (Yukon Chamber of Mines, 2021). However, such a description conceals the gendered inequalities of Yukon's mining sector. The economic precarity of women working in Yukon's mining sector

is consistent with findings from other jurisdictions: “the woman who labours as an economic citizen within the mining industry [is] usually at the very bottom of its structural hierarchy” (Lahiri-Dutt, 2019). As a result, women have less power and therefore encounter structural problems such as widespread sexual exploitation, harassment, and infantilization. Women employed in the mining sector are likely to be doing menial labour for low pay, with little opportunity for advancement (Lahiri-Dutt, 2019).

In this study, more than half (55%) of the Indigenous and racialized women participants were concentrated in the typically “feminine” gendered work of cooking and cleaning jobs, whether at mine exploration, hard rock or placer mining, or remediation work camps. Others worked as heavy equipment operator, rock truck driver, environmental monitor, geologist, staker, office, human resources or administration, first aid attendant and builder (Figure 8). Nationally, MMIWG (2019) reported that when women do find employment in extractive industries, it is often in low paying jobs such as housekeeping, cleaning, and food services.

The findings indicate that Indigenous and racialized women seek jobs in the resource extraction industry for economic opportunity and to provide for their families. *“The best part was being able to provide for my family, gaining new work experiences and then meeting people too.”* (R13)

When asked if they were financially secure and able to provide for their family when working in the mining industry, 68% responded that having the job improved their family’s financial security. However, getting a job didn’t always mean the worker was free from worries about money – 32% said they were not financially secure while working at a mine camp in part due to having family and home expenses to maintain while they were in camp, but mainly due to work conditions of low pay for long hours.

Most respondents were under the age of 30 when they first worked in mining. Generally, there was limited opportunity for promotion, training or skills development. The average rates of pay were \$187/day for their first job and \$278/day for their highest. Most respondents did not receive substantial pay raises during their employment in the mining industry, either getting the same pay rate as in their first job, and some made less wages in subsequent jobs. Over 1/2 reported never receiving a promotion. The highest daily rate of pay reported was \$580.00 over all categories of employment (Figure 11).





Getting compass bearings in Wernecke mountains during exploration (Crawford, 2006)

Almost all of the respondents (95.5%) reported working 60 hours a week or more, of whom 27% got overtime pay, another 27% sometimes got overtime pay, and 46% received no overtime (Figure 13). For 46% their daily rate was not fixed to specific work hours so no overtime was paid. Half the respondents reported that their pay rate did not reflect the hours they worked, meaning they worked for longer hours at diminishing hourly pay rates.

Fourteen percent reported they

were sometimes paid for all the hours they worked, as compared to 36% who felt their pay rate was appropriate for the hours they worked (Figure 14). The ethic of exploitation described in Gaining Ground (Moodie et al., 2001) seems still relevant in today's mining industry:

*"Mining is exploitative. And so I found when I was working there - that when you start with your sole employer - your sole role model - the leader in the community is that exploitative, it goes right on down the line"* (Gaining Ground, health worker in a mining community).

When asked about pay equity, 64% didn't know if they were paid equally to men, and 18% knew they were paid less. Workers reported that higher expectations were placed on them because they were women, and said they had to work harder to prove they were as capable as the men. Some commented that women paid more attention to details, had fewer accidents or missed work days, and safer and higher production than their male workers.

*"There is some gender diversity problems in positions, especially when it comes to the equipment, because they always say the guys can do better but I think the women are actually more safer and we do what we call 'more loads'."* (R13)

The transient nature of the mining sector was reflected in the findings, notably 68% of participants no longer work in the mining sector and almost one-quarter only worked for

one or two seasons. Over one-quarter, some of whom were employed in higher paying fields or with better working conditions, worked for eight or more seasons (Figure 6). This is important because the high levels of transience for women working in Yukon's mining sector indicate that the work is precarious and therefore less sustainable.

Participants reported poor working conditions, such as women's concentration in overworked, underpaid job ghettos, high rates of harassment and discrimination, and fear or experience of rape. These conditions are factors that have contributed to some respondents leaving the industry, for example, *"That's probably why I quit. You don't feel safe, like, am I going to get raped today? It's literally a thought in probably everyone's head."* (R18)

Women workers who are single mothers need to figure out how to care for children. While personal confidence can be raised up by work, budget financial concerns still need to be managed while they work (Moodie et al., 2020). MMIWG (2019) found that the nature of the work, particularly shift work in and out of isolated locations, also deters women from participating in the extractive industries, since it is not compatible with raising a family and meaningful participation in family and community life. One respondent quit to be with her kids, and another eventually decided not to return to mining work because although her mother was caring for them, it was too hard on her kids for her to be away from home. *"Oh, that's yeah, that's the hard part, because I had young kids. So thank God I had family to support me with that, but yeah, that was hard."* (R13)

In the traditional economies of Indigenous people, which continue to be practiced today to the extent possible, cultural relationships with waters and lands, plants and animals, provide food and medicine that sustain human health and well-being. Although protecting a way of life based on the economic and spiritual relationships between Yukon Indian people and the land is a foundational principle of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, the mining industry has damaged large tracts of Indigenous lands and destroyed waterways, fish and animal habitat, and food sources vital to sustaining traditional economies and ways of life.

## **5.2 Working Conditions, Workplace Safety, Violence and Discrimination**

Yukon's mining sector is a masculine working environment, and one where 71.5% of the respondents experienced sexualized and/or racial harassment, discrimination and violence



and only 27% reported they had not (Figure 15). Almost 3/4 of those surveyed said there was either no grievance mechanism available if harassment or discrimination occurred (42.9%) or that the process was unclear, unknown or they did not feel safe to report (28.6%) for fear of being fired or further targeted. They were not confident that their employer would support them or resolve the problem if or when they reported violence or discrimination (Figure 21). Although some alleged assaults and harassment were reported to employers, police were never called. *“No, they don't. They don't call police about the harassment. And, you know, a female can bring forth this complaint and basically nothing gets done about it and that female gets shamed and she has to leave her employment.”* (R10)

In half of the mine camps respondents worked in, women were less than 5% of the workers and over 3/4 of the respondents worked in camps where less than 20% of the workers were women (Figure 23). Several participants said that they were the only woman in a camp. In isolated working conditions at remote camps, most respondents had access to communications systems, although they might have to ask for permission to use a satellite phone and there was rarely privacy for personal calls. These findings are important because the gender imbalance sets an unequal structure of safety and establishes a male-dominated workplace hierarchy detrimental to women's safety in mine camps.

The term “safety” is used in occupational health legislation and is more often likely to be associated with physical injury from workplace accidents than with conditions of harassment, violence or discrimination. Overall, 72% of respondents said the mine operated in a safety conscious manner, 23% didn't know and 5% noted poor safety conditions. This is in contrast to the overwhelming 73% of respondents who had personally experienced discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation and race, Indigeneity, or both (Figure 15). Sixty-eight percent had not participated in safety committees, while 32% had. Others had been asked and declined to attend the committee meetings because they had no confidence in the process or outcomes and so chose not to participate beyond mandatory daily safety check-ins. One respondent said the committee would usually get together and pick a topic, or brainstorm on making something troubling better, but there was no indication from respondents that harassment and violence was ever discussed by safety committees.

A significant finding is that almost 3/4 of participants had experienced discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation and race or Indigeneity. Forty-five percent experienced

discrimination by race or Indigeneity and 63% experienced discrimination by gender or sexual orientation (Figure 15). Discrimination was encountered across all age groups, occupations, and type of camp (Figures 16-20).

Also significant are the findings about limited safety training on harassment, discrimination and violence and barriers to reporting; respondents reported that workplace policies were inadequate, unknown, or not observed. Respondents said either there was no grievance mechanism available if harassment or discrimination occurred (42.9%) or that the process was unclear, unknown or they did not feel safe to report (28.6%) for fear of being fired or further targeted (Figure 21). Some of the respondents who did report harassment were not supported as their employers didn't resolve the problem, and 9% were fired for reporting. Others quit their jobs when managers did not protect them from harassment or violence, or because there were no meaningful consequences for the offender. The RCMP were not involved although the harassment or assaults could be of a criminal nature. When women do report sexism, racism, harassment, discrimination or violence they don't know whether reporting will make them any safer or get them fired.

These findings demonstrate that Indigenous and racialized women encounter hostile work environments in the mining industry where they don't feel safe to report harassment, violence and discrimination.

Some respondents knew how to report violence and expected there would be a clear response from the Human Resources officer or other responsible camp authority. Others suggested the camp was too small to require a policy, or that a grievance mechanism wasn't applicable because they did not experience harassment or discrimination. Establishing women's support groups at mine camps might create a safe space to discuss and problem-solve concerns specific to women, and identify improved management responses with clear timelines and procedures to report, investigate and respond to complaints of harassment, discrimination, and violence.

One respondent summed up how poorly understood and dangerous mine camp working conditions are:

*“A lot of people don't understand, you know, I mean, like, when you go into stuff like that and you get that badly harassed, like me of all people, I'm like one of those types of women that protect my girls and stuff like that. So for that to happen to me and not know how to react to it is tough, I was in the bathroom cleaning. And that's what I mean. When you're in a room where you either got the, you got the option of throwing the bugger across the room or else letting them come into you, come on, whatever, that's the shit that sucks.” (R5)*

### 5.2.1 Applicable Legislation & Policies

The study finding that some women felt forced to quit their jobs or were fired because of harassment, discrimination and/or violence is important because all Yukon-based mining operators with employees must comply with *Yukon's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OH&S Act)*. *OH&S Act* standards make employers responsible for ensuring the workplace is safe and without risk to health, and for adopting techniques and procedures that prevent or reduce the risk of occupational injury (S. 3). Employers and regulators must put in place and enforce mechanisms to protect women from workplace harassment and violence and ensure they don't lose their livelihood if they report.

The *OH&S Act* was recently amended to include psychological considerations in its definition of worker harassment, and mandates that employers must create violence and harassment prevention policy statements and procedures. The amendments to the *OH&S Act* also state “...that workers have the right to bring complaints of violence or harassment to the employer or, if the employer is the person alleged to have committed the violence or harassment, to persons other than the employer” (2020).

These efforts to modernize Yukon's occupational health and safety legislation require employers to create policies on harassment and violence, and support a worker's right to report. Over a quarter of respondents in the study reported that they did not feel safe to report harassment to their employer (Figure 21). Some quit because they reported and the employer failed to take action, placing the onus on victims to complain if the employer failed to prevent or adequately respond to reports of workplace harassment and violence. Taken together, when workplace harassment and violence does occur at mining sites, a significant portion of women will likely not report it to their employer. This must be considered in relation to the low reporting rates for sexual harassment and violence in general.

## Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board

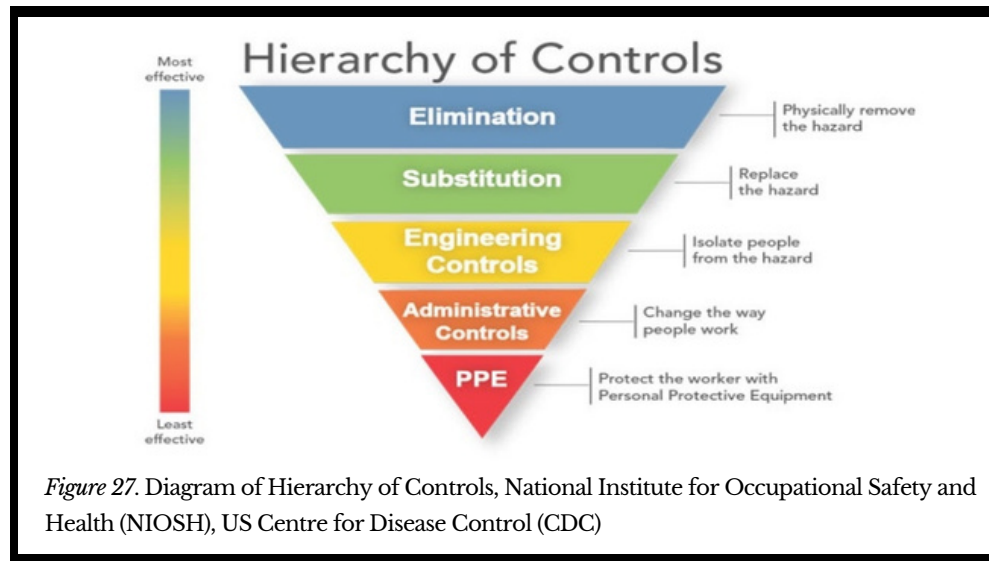
The Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board (YWCHSB) has set Sept 4, 2021 as the compliance date for the new *Violence and Harassment Prevention Regulation* and has prepared an Employer's Guide (2021). While the Regulation acknowledges that the effects of violence and harassment can be harmful to the victims, bystanders and witnesses, as well as to the organization itself in both immediate and long term, it fails to address the fundamental difference between a physical injury sustained at work and the harms that are perpetrated by a co-worker in the form of sexualized or racialized harassment or violence. Further, the psychological or mental health impacts listed seem to be based in relation to a physical injury, for example, "the effects can include minor or serious physical injuries, temporary or permanent physical disability, shock, anxiety and psychological trauma" (YWCHSB, 2021). This perception and interpretation of workplace safety is reflected in the responses that workers predominantly felt their mining company worked in a "safe way" while at the same time not naming the harassment, assaults and discrimination as "unsafe" conditions to be attributed to the mine's responsibility.

The *Violence and Harassment Prevention Regulation* defines harassment and violence as potentially hazards in any workplace, so all employers need a written policy and procedures that say what everyone in the workplace must do to prevent these hazards from causing harm. However, this will do little to address the types of experiences respondents in this study describe for two reasons, the Regulation:

1. only applies to camps of 20 persons or more, where many exploration and placer mining camps are fewer than 20 workers; and
2. treats harassment and violence in a standard risk assessment model as a "hazard" of the workplace, as it would a chemical exposure or physical obstruction hazard risking physical injury.

The *Regulation* proposes using a standard risk assessment approach, by conducting a workplace hazard assessment in order to address violence and harassment. This approach involves: Identifying hazards; Assessing the risks; Controlling the risks; Ensuring recognition and prevention measures are put in place; and Reassessing hazards regularly. The Hierarchy of Controls (HOC) is used in a linear way ranking most effective and reliable to least effective and unreliable means of preventing hazard exposures: Elimination, Substitution, Engineering Controls, Administrative Controls, and Personal Protective Equipment. This is designed to address physical or chemical threats that are accidental, or could be better prevented. The HOC fails to acknowledge the deliberate intention of a perpetrator in the

case of harassment, violence, assaults and discrimination which is experienced by women in mine camps, because the action for change in the workplace must stop at 'Elimination' as the only viable response.



This will not address the concerns raised by workers who don't feel safe reporting or trust what the outcomes will be, because of the risk of being fired or targeted for more abuse. In dealing with reports of workplace harassment and violence, the law should require employers to assess their workplace culture and investigate whether it condones misogyny and behaviours like the actions of perpetrators that are described by respondents in this study.

A focus on psychological harm suggests there's a need for a psychiatrist or a psychologist to diagnose harms to the victim, an approach that risks blaming the victim instead of solving the reported problem of unacceptably high levels of sexualized and racial harassment and violence in Yukon mining workplaces. An Occupational Health and Safety Officer can order an investigation by an impartial person with knowledge, experience and qualifications; the *Regulation* doesn't address who would gauge psychological harm and how. The problem to address is not the psychology of victims of harassment, but that the mining sector has tolerated violent, sexist, racist, or discriminatory behaviours in its workplaces. In the mining industry, the workplace is also the mineworkers living space. The *OH&S Act* requires an employer to ensure all worker health and safety standards are met everywhere, including in camp accommodations where the risk of abuse is prevalent.

In the absence of good employer responses to violence or harassment, workers develop their own strategies to keep themselves safe, building relationships with other workers, having a cell phone to photograph workplace hazards, using bathing facilities in pairs. *“They don’t police the harassments, nothing ever gets done and it’s the woman’s fault.”* (R10) At previous Kaska community meetings there was a suggestion to have an independent person working at the mine to act as security for the workers’ safety (Moodie et al., 2020). One respondent suggested *“It needs to be addressed by having a women native advocate onsite.”* (R12) There was also a suggestion that Employee Assistance Programs could give support to workers with life challenges, for example, drug or alcohol use, training, mental health or family concerns (Moodie et al., 2020). These findings indicate a need for Indigenous and racialized women’s participation in identifying promising policies, practices and strategies to keep mine workers safe.

### **Yukon Human Rights Commission - “Spot”**

Respondents in this study overwhelmingly indicated that reporting harassment to their employer was not a safe option, or there was no clear option for reporting. However, as noted above, Yukon’s new Occupational Health and Safety legislation places the onus on the victim to report harassment to their employer. As a result, initiatives like the Yukon Human Rights Commission’s (YHRC) anonymous online documentation tool (Spot) has particular relevance. Spot gives workers the opportunity to “...record events to assist the memory of the person impacted, communicate and explain the incident to other people, including when filing a complaint, [and] support a witness statement in an investigation of an allegation of discrimination” (Yukon Human Rights Commission, 2020). While Spot is not an actual reporting mechanism, it is nevertheless a tool that can help victims to immediately document an incident of harassment or discrimination and thereby increase the likelihood of an appropriate systemic response (human rights complaint, workers’ compensation board claim, prosecution etc).

However, access to Spot is contingent on access to an internet connection. Many respondents in this study indicated that they did not have access to the internet while in camp and many indicated that the communication tools available in camp were not private. Taken together, the study findings have implications for impact assessments within the YESAB framework as well as the decision bodies that determine what terms and conditions apply to a given mining project. For example, if proponents were required to provide internet access to all mine workers in camp, women could use their smartphones to generate a record of a



harassment-related or discriminatory incident using the Spot app. Immediate documentation of harassment is helpful because YHRC investigations of discrimination on the basis of sex, including pregnancy, harassment, including sexual harassment, race, Indigeneity, and other prohibited grounds are complaint-driven, and are only initiated after all other redress mechanisms are complete.

### **YESAB**

The *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA)* establishes processes in accordance with principles enshrined in the *UFA*, provides for public participation, and certainty to the extent practicable (S. 2) with respect to procedures for assessing environmental and socio-economic effects of certain activities. The value of women's personal safety in the workplace and nearby communities was recently assessed by YESAB (2020), and could potentially be regularly considered at the initial project assessment level when a proponent submits a mine proposal. The participation of Indigenous women in socioeconomic impact assessments (Stienstra et al., 2020; Bond & Quinlan, 2018; LAWS, 2021) increases the potential for better understanding and addressing the systemic barriers of racism, misogyny, homophobia, and violence that may occur in mining camps and nearby communities.

To assess proposed project activities, YESAB documents describe likely adverse project effects using Effects Characterization Criteria (ECC), and then recommends mitigation measures to eliminate, reduce, or control adverse effects (YESAB, n.d.). To fulfill its *YESAA*-mandated project assessment role, YESAB considers various criteria to make a "reasoned judgment" in determining the significance of a project's adverse effects, such as economic disruption, cultural dislocation, environmental degradation, or habitat loss. YESAB's procedural framework assesses five technical factors: magnitude; likelihood; geographic extent; duration, frequency and timing; and reversibility; and "integrates context by using contextual factors" (YESAB, n.d.). YESAB considers Valued Environmental and Socio-economic Components (VESEC's), which are identified as components of the physical and socioeconomic environment that are important for environmental, scientific, social, traditional or cultural reasons, and that are "predicted to be adversely affected by project activities" (YESAB, n.d.). Typically, YESAB considers VESECs such as heritage resources, wildlife and wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, environmental resources, land users, and community wellbeing.

YESAB (2020) recently considered “personal safety” as a VESEC for the first time, in an assessment of an open pit and underground mine project proposal near two Kaska communities. Conditions associated with man camps and resource extractive industrial projects (YESAB, 2020) include increases in sexually transmitted infections, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, rapes, and other criminal activity (Transparency Canada, 2020; Native Youth Sexual Health Alliance and Women's Earth Alliance, 2016). The long-term consequences of these violent crimes ripple throughout the entire community and have negative consequences for all children and adults (LAWS, 2021). This YESAB initiative means that assessing proposals for worker health and safety plans that ensure the protection of women from harassment, discrimination or violence in the workplace and work camp living conditions could become a regular component of YESAB assessments of the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of proposed resource extraction projects.

The project proposal assessed for personal safety contained “no notable provisions to prevent the pattern of violence against women and gender and sexual minorities that occurs consistently with other resource extraction projects in Canada’s north” (YESAB, 2020, p. 218). Nevertheless, YESAB concluded that “effects can be reduced, controlled or eliminated through application of recommended mitigation measures”; these measures included harassment prevention policies and human resources training, employee assistance programs, workplace behavioural standards and codes of conduct (2020) for a project that “was likely to result in significant adverse effects to personal safety with respect to workplace harassment and community violence” (p. 235). Proposed mitigation measures for mining projects should explicitly attend to the harassment and violence encountered in the male-dominated workplace culture of the resource industry. The recommended terms and conditions proposed by YESAB do not adequately respond to the likelihood, magnitude, extent, duration, and irreversible nature of the workplace harassment and community violence problems the Board identified, nor address the severity of the violence against women reported in criminal justice publications from Statistics Canada (2014), LAWS (2021), YSWC (Bopp et al., 2007) and MMIWG (2019). The mitigation measures YESAB proposed are unlikely to enable a proponent to eliminate, reduce or control violence against Indigenous and racialized women.

YESAB also recommended that First Nations governments, LAWS and YSWC inform a Yukon Government monitoring program to address the contextual factors of violence against women (2020). Everyone has the right to a safe workplace and freedom from

violence; there can be no acceptable threshold of tolerance for harassment, discrimination, or violence against women in a mine camp. A monitoring program is a mechanism to see if socio-economic impact mitigation protocols are working to inform changes that may be required, or to confirm how proposed mitigations are resolving an “adverse impact”. The capacity to monitor rates of reported GBV in Yukon communities is limited by the underreporting of incidents of GBV and a lack of data-sharing agreements with RCMP. Monitoring an impact (in this case the potential for harassment, discrimination or violence towards women in mine camps and nearby Indigenous communities) to determine when and what adverse impacts are occurring, would suggest that some amount of harassment, discrimination or sexualized violence would be allowable, as long as monitoring could inform changes to mitigation protocols. This survey’s data and the literature associated with toxic sexist culture in mining man camps (YESAB, 2020) suggest that without the participation of Indigenous women (Stienstra et al., 2020; MMIWG, 2019; Bond & Quinlan, 2018; LAWS, 2021), a monitoring program and other socioeconomic impact recommended terms and conditions will not reduce, control or eliminate predatory, violent and discriminatory behaviours towards women that are associated with mine camps.

### **5.2.2 Reporting Violence, Harassment and Discrimination**

The failure to report sexual harassment or violence is not unique to the mining industry. Most sexual assault offenses are not reported to the police (Justice Canada, 2019); police investigations, arrests and convictions of sexual assault are inconsistent and discriminatory towards women (Benoit et al., 2015). Statistics Canada found self-reported sexual assaults dropped from about 9% in 2009 to 5% in 2014 (Rotenberg, 2017). Women don’t report because of shame, guilt and the stigma of sexual victimization (Johnson 2012), the normalization of inappropriate or unwanted sexual behaviour (Conroy & Cotter, 2017), the abuser being in a position of authority in their workplace, school, family, or community, or fear that the voices of men with status will be believed over theirs and that speaking up will jeopardize their goals, career or reputation (Canadian Women’s Foundation, n.d.).

A 2014 Angus Reid Poll found that it was mostly women who experienced sexual harassment at work, and that 4 in 5 people did not report workplace harassment to their employers, preferring to deal with it themselves. Other reasons given for not reporting were feeling the issue was too minor, didn’t think the employer would respond well, embarrassed by what happened, not sure it was harassment, afraid to lose their job or hurt their career, thought no one would believe them, didn’t want to talk about it or being scared to come forward.

The rate of violent crime, including sexualized violence, is much higher in northern territories than in the provinces. Recently, *Gender-based violence: Unwanted sexual behaviours in Canada's territories, 2018* reported that over one-third (35%) of women and 16% of men experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public. In addition, 31% of women and 16% of men experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace (Perrault 2020). Yet victims do not report incidents of sexual assault to the police for many reasons: the incident was dealt with another way (61%), it was not deemed to be important enough (50%), it was considered to be a personal matter (50%), or they did not want the police involved (47%). One third (33%) of victims who did not report felt that the police could not do anything about it, and approximately one fifth (18%) believed that the police would not help them. Another fifth (19%) of the victims of sexual assault did not report the incident to police because they feared revenge by the offender and 14% sought to avoid publicity regarding the incident (McDonald et al., 2006). Indigenous women report they do not feel safe with the RCMP (Moorcroft, 2011; LAWS, 2020), which has a toxic culture and entrenched systemic misogyny and racism (Bastarache, 2020). LAWS Together for Justice and subsequent research finds Indigenous communities often don't trust the RCMP, contributing to the failure to report sexual assault and violent crime (LAWS, 2020, 2021).

The study asked respondents for their views about any relationship between extractive industries, policing, and violence against Indigenous or racialized women. Several did not respond or said the question wasn't applicable; two reported the relationship with police was "good" (R3) or "getting better" (R19). Seven responded negatively that the police were violent and racist, saying there's "*not a good relationship between cops and natives, and not enough being done. So much of it [violence] happening*" (R7), "*patriarchy is very much alive, until those walls get broken down, women will always be recipients of violence*" (R22) and "*very negative comments about police because police are just violent offenders, and mining industries, they have no respect for the people that they have here, because even now we have mining industry in our communities, or near our community, and they're totally racist towards us.*" (R6) Others credited the MMIWG inquiry and final report with giving Indigenous women confidence to speak out against violence, and felt hopeful about improvement because women's voices are getting louder, resulting in more protection.

Being away from home to work at the mine affects family dynamics. While most respondents (72.7%) were single, a majority of them had dependent or adult children. Almost three-quarters of the respondents who had reported being married, common-law or "other"

had children (Figure 2) ranging in age from 4 to 38 years (Figure 3). Family relationships, separation, and a lack of child care can contribute to women leaving the industry (Pauktuutit, 2021). Many respondents said shift work (eg. 2 weeks in, 2 weeks out, or longer rotations, especially under COVID restrictions) had negative impacts on their families. One mother took a job at the mine to provide financial stability for her children who were in care, then felt forced to quit because a social worker judged her absence and wouldn't support her time away in camp in a way that would facilitate her regaining custody of her children.

If either parent or partner in a relationship is working at the mine, marital breakdown can occur because of separation, or jealousies that build with camp compared to home living styles (Archibald et al., 1999; Moodie et al., 2020; Kudloo et al., 2016; Kudloo et al., 2014). One respondent described this, *“It is tough being away from home, your shift work is an extra family burden because obviously people continue with your life while you're not there. So you come back and you have to relearn behaviours, especially the longer you're gone.”* (R11)

### 5.3 Indigenous Lands, Environmental & Cultural Safety & Respect

Indigenous peoples have a profound attachment to place, which encompass social, spiritual, legal, and governance systems that flow from territory (Maxwell, 2017; Bond & Quinlan, 2018). Indigenous women are caregivers who protect ancestral lands and waters for the generations to come (LAWS, 2021). Survey respondents worked in the traditional territories of every First Nation in the Yukon and expressed a sense of wonder at seeing the beautiful landscapes. Being on the land brought Indigenous workers closer to their culture and appreciative of the Elders and their ancestors' ways.



Forty-thousand stampederers flocked to the Klondike Goldfields setting up wall tent camps across the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in traditional territory (University of Washington Libraries, circa 1898)

Traditional knowledge means the accumulated body of knowledge, observations and understandings about the environment, and about the relationship of living beings with one



Beadwork by Leda Jules, Kaska Elder (Volfova, 2021)

another and the environment, that is rooted in the traditional way of life of First Nations (YESAB, n.d.). *"I think honestly, the best experience was the traditional knowledge. I was privy to working with [First Nation name], just being a part of it for them, allowing me and having an understanding of how the Elders feel the land versus what the band or through the self-determination. I love listening to Elders."* (R20) *"For some of the Elders who were working to show you the work and what they do in their spare time."* (R16)

Half of the respondents had workplace training on Indigenous content and discussion of policies on caribou, moose and fish habitat, hunting protocols or environmental protection; 14% said an Indigenous person had offered the training (Table 4).

Over half of the respondents rated the mining companies environmental practices as very poor. As described by one respondent, *"In my experience, the few mines that I have worked at, there's complete disregard for the environment and a lot of rule breaking going on. It's all about the filthy lucre and the gold."* (R22)

Many appreciated gaining access to remote locations. One described a link between connection with the land and personal growth, *"Seeing lots of beautiful country, I've had really great interactions with wildlife. I've developed self-reliance and a lot of muscles and really good at swinging an axe. A lot of yeah, I've developed a really solid skill set and an understanding of the industry and a deep respect for the country in the land that we live in and a sense of the lay of the land."* (R22)

Others found a disconnect to be working in a mine or an exploration camp that was contributing to land destruction. *"Being on the land as part of their family and practicing traditional cultural activities creates a sense of belonging, whereas being out on the land with a masculine work camp crew creates a sense of fear, you're remote and isolated and don't know if you will be safe"* (Kaska Elder, 2021).



The majority of workers didn't think mining companies addressed environmental impacts well, preserved the land and animals (54% ranked under 4, 19% ranked 4-6, total almost 3/4 under 6 ranking, Figure 24), or provided significant benefit to Indigenous people (53% ranked under 6, Figure 25).

Respondents felt mining companies have more clout than other interests, and that Indigenous peoples are not financially compensated for what is lost to them. Resource extraction corporations *"hire First Peoples to go and clean up the land after mines have destroyed our traditional territories, because we take care of the land."* (R8)

And, *"mining companies come into the territory, make a lot of empty promises about jobs, prospects, money which people want. When they leave, our communities are still living in poverty, and our land is destroyed. It's a huge price."* (R8)



Grum pit at Faro mine reclamation site, located on Kaska traditional territory (Yukon Conservation Society, LightHawk, Whitley, 2017)

## 5.4 Advice to a Niece

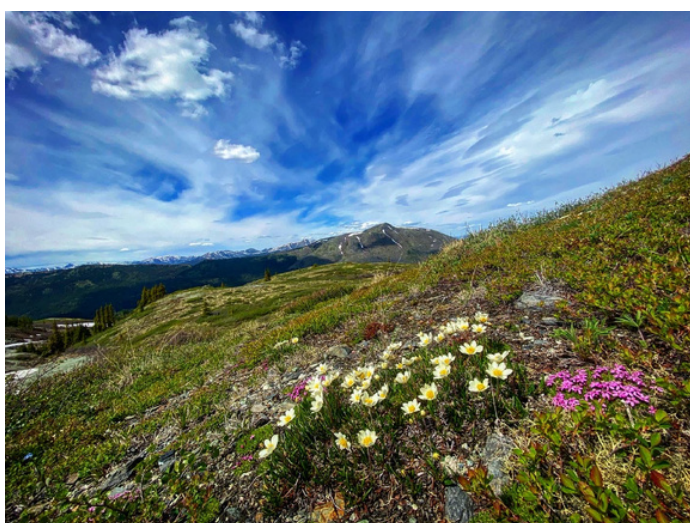
When asked what they would say to a niece or a friend's daughter if they were considering work in mining and asked for advice, there was a wide range of responses from: *"I'd say go for it, it's an awesome experience, and get the proper training to be safe on the work site."* (R12); to *"I would probably tell them to pursue other lines of work, find other work, you know, find other work because they'll be hired as a housekeeper or cook's helper. They will never be hired for anything else, right?"* (R10)

There was direct advice about how to carry yourself in a mine camp, to do the job and keep to yourself, work hard, and respect others. *"Work hard and pay attention."* (R17) *"You can pretty much keep to yourself and just get the job done now so you're not there to make friends."* (R4) This went along with advice to get training, knowledge, tickets, First Aid to try for advancement and earn respect, saying it's *"just another job, of course, walk in with your head held high and be the most qualified."* (R3)

Another emphasized that the work is temporary so since there is *“No indication [how long the work will be there] and go as far as we can go, so get your education.”* (R7)

Participants had words of caution on how to keep safe, speak up if someone bothers you, and know who to talk to about harassment or abuse. They gave advice about what to be aware of, persistent tactics to avoid, and assumptions that are made, for example, *“Just do your job and don't go watch movies with other dudes. That's a way of sexualizing an invitation in some sort of a way. I have my own movies.”* (R5)

Respondents spoke about constant pressure from other mine workers to have sex and advised against having sex with co-workers citing reasons related to harmful social



Mountain flowers, including Mountain Avens and Moss  
Campion, at Jade Mountain near Frances Lake (Volfova, 2021)

outcomes. The persistent pervasiveness of harassment was acknowledged by most respondents, many saying you need to develop a "thick skin", but *“That's one thing that is hard, and I think that in the industry, just because women are hypercritical themselves for anything that is small can be perceived as an attack on themselves. And that's just something that we're taught in school and taught in life that, you know, it's society's versus it's just part of the job.”* (R20)

They emphasized it's necessary to be prepared, to be self-sufficient, and to find allies to trust and look out for each other. Research the mine before you go, try to know ahead what the camp culture is, what to expect and be prepared. *“And I would say, make sure you have a way out, make sure that the people you're close to always know where you are at all times and that there's some kind of calm.”* (R22)

The advice from women who know the working conditions from their own personal experience indicates a high degree of concern about the safety of women in the mining camps. In summary: Find other work, get a trade, pursue further education. Keep your head down. Get safety training. Make sure you have an exit plan and somebody looking out for you.

## 6.0 KEY FINDINGS & CONSIDERATIONS

Indigenous knowledge is frequently dismissed, subverted and overlooked by extractive industries, impact assessments, governments and decision bodies. Overall, Indigenous and racialized women study participants want “*truth and justice*”. They thought it would be useful to talk about their experiences working in mining camps if, as a result, women were respected and safe at work, had equal pay and status, opportunity for training and promotions, and their legal rights protected at their workplaces and accommodations.

The preservation of the northern environment and traditional Indigenous cultural values was important to the study respondents. A majority of the workers surveyed didn’t think mining companies operating in the north adequately took care of the harmful environmental impacts caused by resource extraction, made substantial efforts to preserve the land, or provide significant economic benefit to Indigenous peoples. “*Our land is destroyed, it’s a huge price.*”

The study confirms that Indigenous and racialized women mine workers experience high levels of harassment, discrimination, and violence in work camps. Workers are not being informed about legal standards that apply and how to report unequal pay, unsafe working conditions, discriminatory behaviours, harassment and violence. Many respondents said they did not feel safe to report incidents of harassment, discrimination or violence, implicating employers, the industry, government, regulatory authorities, and police in the failure to recognize and adequately address unsafe or illegal working conditions and violence in the mining industry.

Indigenous and racialized women isolated in a masculine working environment are undervalued, and have limited opportunity for advancement, scholarship and training. This, along with the threat of racial and sexualized harassment, violence, and discrimination results in precarious economic security and poor job retention. Therefore, it is critical that Indigenous and racialized women be invited to provide leadership and oversight in developing future gender and racial equality policies, legislation, and training initiatives in order to fulfill Indigenous and racialized women’s economic and social rights.

The key findings from the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society's *Never Until Now* study are that women's jobs, across all age groups, education levels, racial background, experience in mining seasons, job type categories and camp type, are concentrated in typically low-paying and gendered roles, and that working conditions often compromise their personal safety.

The study findings reveal:

- Limited job opportunity (55% cook or cleaning as compared to higher paying jobs) and pay equity (18% men paid more than women, 64% did not know if there was a difference);
- Limited longevity of employment (1/4 worked 1-2 seasons, 1/5 worked 8 or more seasons), desirable employment (68% no longer working in mining), and financial security (32% were not financially secure while working in mine camp);
- Inadequate pay scale for hours worked (2/3 daily pay did not reflect hours worked) and overtime wages (1/4 paid overtime, 3/4 flat daily rate for long hours worked - 18.2% worked 60-70 hours/week and over 3/4 worked more than 70 hours/week);
- Unequal work expectations for women and men (3/4 higher expectations for women);
- Limited opportunities to advance in training, job status (55% had not received promotions) and increased pay (41% gained somewhat higher paying jobs, 18% had jobs paying substantially lower than their first job, the majority received little or no change in pay scale);
- Ineffective prevention of harm from harassment, discrimination, and assault based on race, Indigeneity, gender and/or sexual orientation in workplace and living conditions of mine camp (36% experienced both gender & race discrimination or harassment, 63% by gender or sexual orientation, 45% by race or Indigeneity, and 27% had experienced no harassment or discrimination);
- One or both forms of gender or race harassment or discrimination were experienced by 80% of those in hard rock mining, 75% in placer mining, and 70% in exploration camps;
- Absence of clear or available grievance mechanisms to report incidents of harassment, discrimination, and violence (43% had no way to report, 29% said the policy was unclear or they felt unsafe, of whom 9% were fired and many quit in response); 14% reported that clear mechanisms were available and 14% that it was not applicable for their experiences;
- Poor environmental record of mine practices, over half of the respondents (54.5%) rated the mine company environmental practices poor (13.6% rated as none, 40.9% in scale range '1-3'), 9.1% mid range, 31.8% upper range '7-9', and 4.5% rated excellent '10');
- Limited economic benefit to Indigenous people (45.5% rated scale range '0-3', mid range '4-6' rate by 18.2%, and 36.4% upper range (27.3% rated '7-9', 9.1% rated excellent '10'); and
- A predominantly masculine culture in the work environment (half the camps had less than 5% women, and over 3/4 of the camps had less than 20% women).

This study has identified the need for regulatory agencies and the criminal justice system to better protect workers' safety and human rights. Despite the jurisdictional overlap from the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, *Workers Compensation Act*, *Employment Standards Act*, *Yukon Human Rights Act*, and *Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act*, gaps still exist in protecting workers' health, safety, and human rights in remote mine camps. The Criminal Code of Canada and criminal justice system are reportedly not effective as mechanisms for preventing or responding to the sexualized violence experienced by Indigenous and racialized women.

Remote northern mine camps are difficult and expensive to access for inspections or investigations, the remoteness also increases the dangers to women who are isolated at these work locations. Policy makers and legislators must address all these factors that contribute to the difficulty of protecting workers and holding employers accountable for women's health and safety.

*Never Until Now* documents Indigenous and racialized women experiences of harassment, discrimination, abuse of authority, and violence in mine camps. This is relevant to the contemporary policy and legislative initiatives of updating Yukon's mining legislation, *YESAA* assessments, and enacting the Yukon Government MMIWG2S+ Implementation Strategy and Yukon's new *OH&S Violence and Harassment Prevention Regulation*.

Mineral resource extraction is founded on colonial practices that entitle the free entry mining claim staking system rights of ownership to whoever finds the deposits, generally superseding Indigenous rights to their traditional territories. This sets the groundwork for the exploitation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and lands for the priority of mining.

The study demonstrates the mining industry's colonial ethic of exploitation by revealing the degrading ways that Indigenous and racialized women mine workers are treated, both in the workplace and in their camp living conditions. This discrimination thwarts dignified working conditions, and jeopardizes women's personal safety and longevity of work security. The impunity for perpetrators of gender and race-based harassment, discrimination and violence as reported in this study is deeply rooted in systemic structures of oppression, misogyny, and male privilege that harm women in their daily lives in mine camps. *Never Until Now* amplifies Indigenous and racialized women's voices, acknowledging that their strength and resistance can lead the way to improving the safety, health and working conditions for all women working in the northern mining sector.



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