

Report/ Canada**Restructuring and Women's Health:
The Fisheries Crisis in Newfoundland**

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Canadian society is experiencing the effects of extensive restructuring, yet little research has been done to examine the health impacts of restructuring processes. Overharvesting, reduced biodiversity and pollution are examples of environmental restructuring. Industrial restructuring includes work reorganization (de-skilling and re-skilling) and downsizing, and political restructuring processes involve changes to public services and social programmes. In Newfoundland, restructuring followed the northern cod moratorium of 1992. The moratorium terminated all fishing activity related to the northern cod stock along the east coast of the province. Closures and quota reductions for many other groundfish species were applied to other fishing areas, too. As a result employment in the fishing industry declined drastically. Since the moratorium, growth in the shellfish sector has provided jobs for some fisheries workers.

In recent years the government of Newfoundland and Labrador has been looking at nickel mining and smelting as another possible means to create employment. As is common in restructuring, this industry, if developed, will bring with it new occupational health risks. Currently there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that these risks are anticipated and minimized at the construction phase. From Fishplant to Nickel Smelter: Health Determinants and the Health of Newfoundland's Women Fish and Shellfish Processors in an Environment of Restructuring (April 2001) is a case study of the relationship between restructuring and women's health in a fisheries-dependent region of Newfoundland in the wake of the groundfish crisis. In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 women shellfish-processing workers and 15 women fish-processing workers who retrained in an attempt to change sectors.

These interview data were contextualized using key informant interviews with health professionals, an analysis of Workplace Health Safety and Compensation Commission (WHSCC) claims data for fish-processing workers, an analysis of data on training programmes introduced in response to the fisheries crisis, and key informant interviews with educational administrators.

The collapse of the groundfisheries jeopardized women's health through its impact on their employment and incomes and by changing the primary occupational health risks in the industry. Training programmes failed to offset the risks to these women's health. This study suggests that a more in-depth, gender-based analysis and a social-ecological approach to health should be incorporated into planning and negotiations related to all resource-sector initiatives, whether in periods of downsizing or growth. In addition, governments at all levels should take a more proactive role in job creation and in guiding the makeup of the Canadian labour force in an equitable manner.

For a copy of the full report, contact: National Network on Environments and Women's Health, Centre for Health Studies, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Suite 214 York Lanes, Toronto, ON Canada M3J 1P3. Web Site: www.yorku.ca/nnewh E-mail: nnewh@yorku.ca