

# **The Perfect Storm: Family Violence in the Bakken Oilfields**

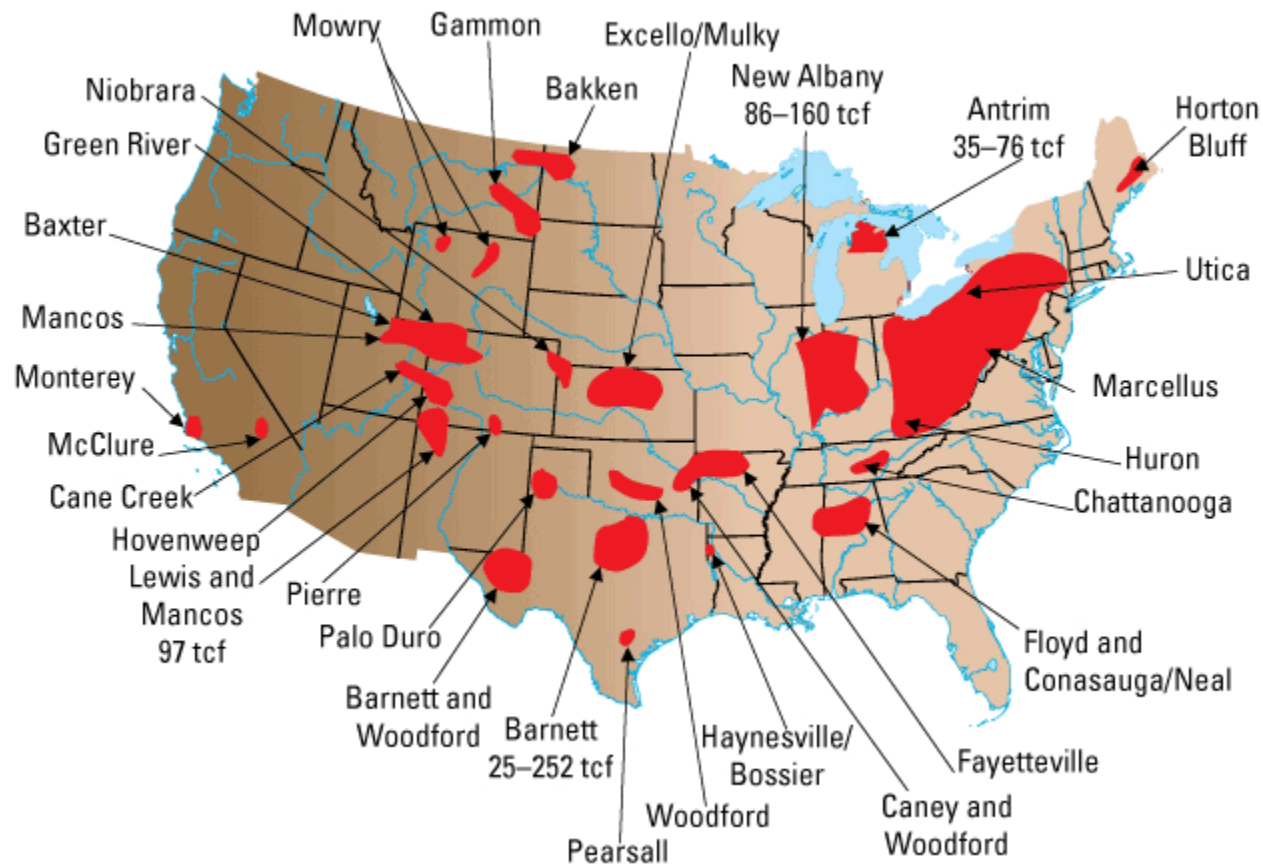
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**Resolve Research Day  
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# Resource Booms

- ❑ In recent years there has been increased oil and gas exploration in out-of-the-way places.
- ❑ Function of global scarcity, rising resource demand and commodity prices.
- ❑ “Booms” in rural North America. Positive impacts:
  - ❑ Increased number of high paying jobs
  - ❑ Increased property values/revenue - landowners
  - ❑ Increased tax revenues for government
  - ❑ Increased corporate profits

# Oil and Gas Exploration in Rural America



# Dark Side to Resource Development

- ❑ Social ills associated with development:
  - ❑ Violent crime, crime, anti-social behavior
  - ❑ Drug/Alcohol abuse
  - ❑ Health impacts: Physical and psychological
  - ❑ Inadequate supply and quality of housing
  - ❑ Increased cost of living
  - ❑ Community dissatisfaction – tension with newcomers
  - ❑ Increased caseloads (Health/Education/Welfare)
  - ❑ Insufficient infrastructure and capacity in public services
  - ❑ Environmental impacts: Reduced quality of life

# Crime and Booms

- ❑ Rapid growth and the characteristics of the population can be problematic:
  - ❑ Newcomers (young transient males)
  - ❑ Offenders in these transient populations (e.g. registered sex offenders)
  - ❑ Newcomers have little stake in the community. Most live there temporarily (FIFO = Fly-in, Fly-out; DIDO = Drive-in, Drive out)
  - ❑ Living in “man camps,” campgrounds, vehicles, and other makeshift housing

# Crime and Booms - Consistent Findings

- Research consistently finds that the extent and magnitude of crime increases in boom counties beyond what could be expected by a population increase:
  - Freudenburg & Jones (1991) – examined 23 studies published between 1976 and 1986
  - Ruddell (2017) – examined 13 studies published between 1993 and 2017

## Current Study: Examine Family Violence in the Bakken region

- ❑ Bakken – Area underlying North Dakota, Montana, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan – some 200,000 square miles
- ❑ Rich oil reserves: Estimated to be 7.4 billion barrels of oil – Currently producing about 500,000 barrels a day
- ❑ Increased oil and natural gas exploration and extraction started in 2000 – “Boom” started in 2007/2008

# Bakken: Violence Toward Women

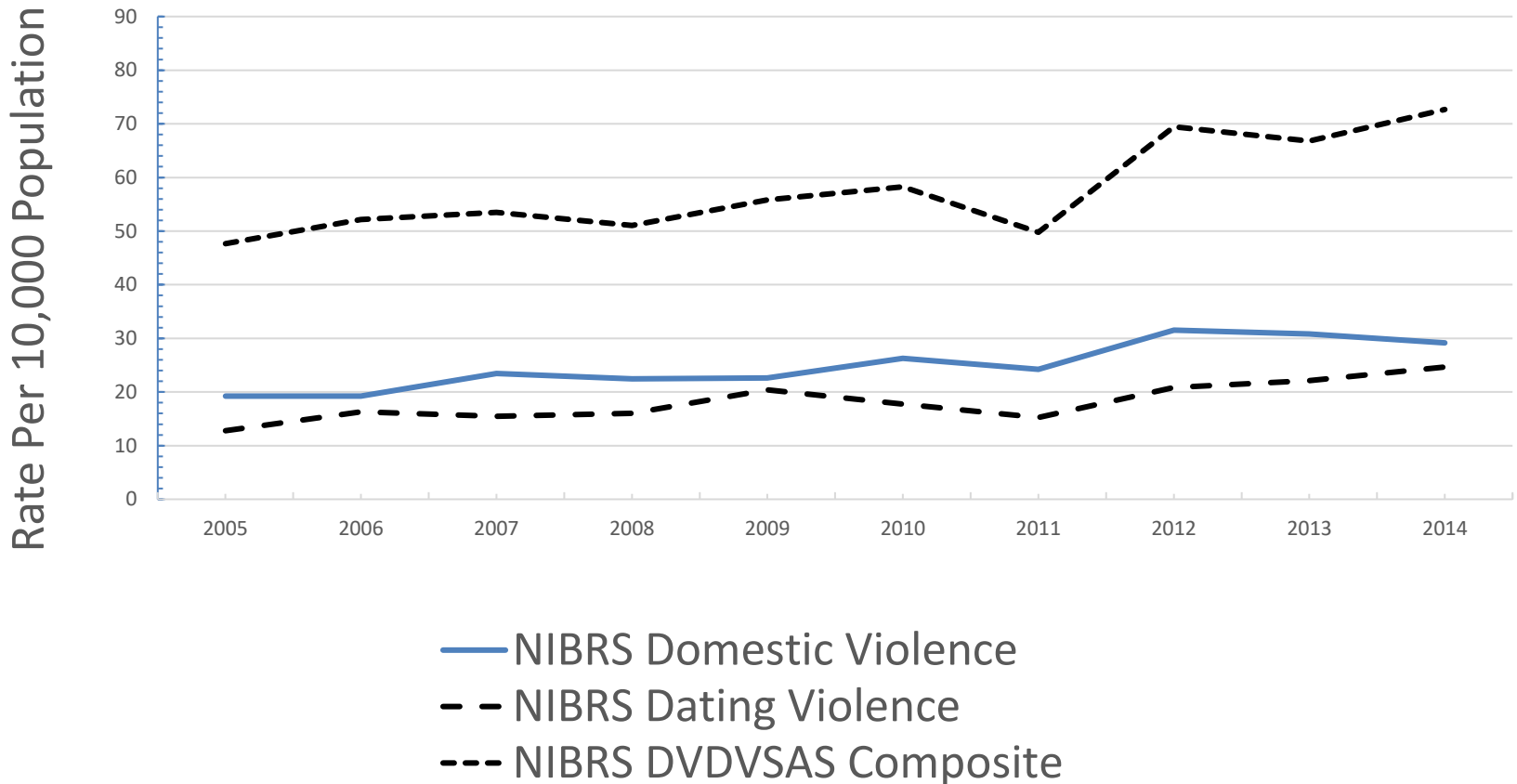
□ Jayasundara et al. (2016) found that the following offences increased in 33 MT and ND counties impacted by the oil boom between 2009 and 2014:

□ Domestic Violence

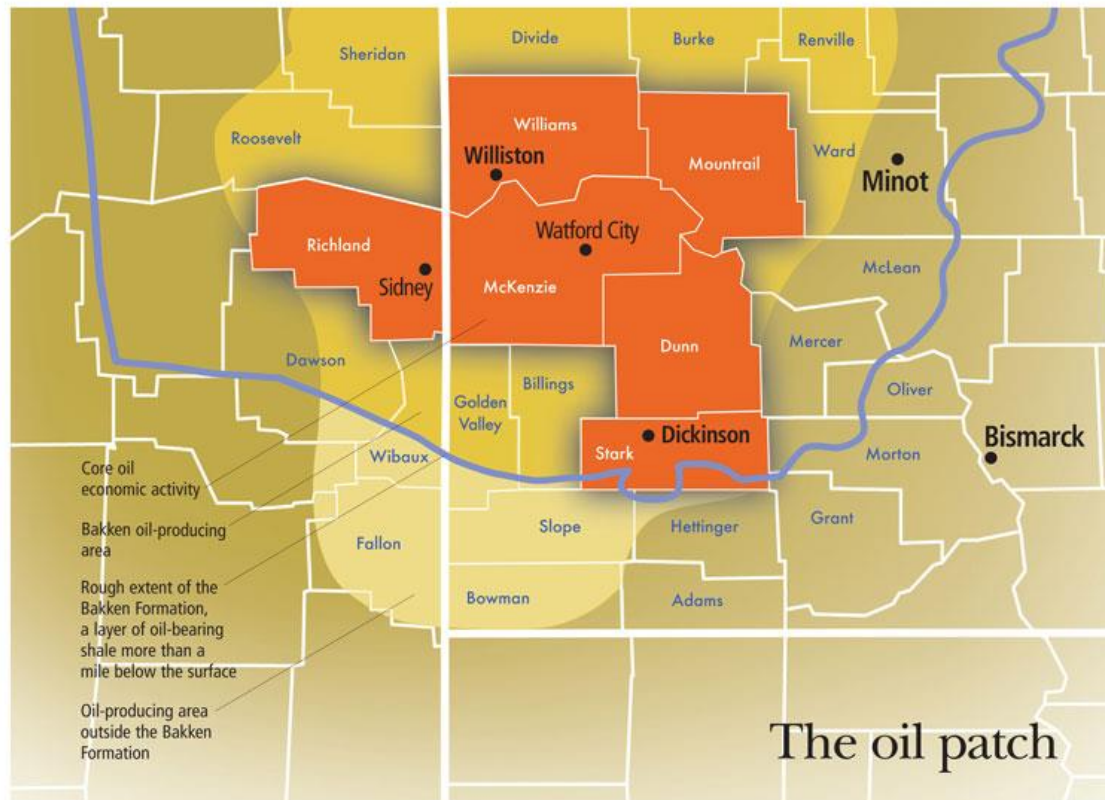
□ Dating Violence

□ Sexual Assaults

# Rise in Violence Toward Women in Bakken Counties, 2005 to 2014



## Epicenters of Violence Toward Women: Dickinson, Minot, Williston and Stanley. ND. (Places of concentrated violence)



**Sidney**  
The center of oil activity and home construction in Montana's portion of the Bakken

**Williston**  
The hub of the region's petroleum industry, home to 200-odd oilfield service firms

**Watford City**  
Community has annexed land and extended sewer lines to accommodate a burgeoning population

**Dickinson**  
A farming, manufacturing and university community developing into an oilfield service center

**Minot**  
A gateway to the oil patch for oil companies, construction firms and other businesses doing business in the oilfields

**Bismarck**  
State capital becoming a bedroom community for oil and construction industry managers and their families

# Seriousness of Violence Toward Women Cases Increased

- ❑ Strangulation related domestic violence cases increased, as did the use of weapons in assaults:

*“Well, we had never, ever, ever used to hear of a shooting [related to domestic violence] and now... even the sheriff had a gun pointed in his face just the other day.”*

*“Now law enforcement, they won’t go single to anything now. They need double (two officers per call) because of the increased volatility.”*

ND Focus Group Respondents

# Research Question: Why did violence toward women increase?

- We consider five explanations:
  - Precarious housing arrangements
  - Social isolation of women and families
  - Lack of domestic violence shelters and other social supports
  - Workplace culture is supportive of substance abuse and hyper-masculinity
  - Inability of the justice system to respond effectively to these crimes

## Data Sources

- ❑ Information from 13 focus groups of human service workers from the Bakken in 2014-2015 (includes workers from the justice system and those involved in violence prevention and services for women)
- ❑ Individual interviews of human service workers in 2014-2015 (n=119)
- ❑ Individual interviews of human service workers in 2012 (n=40)
- ❑ Analysis of Montana and North Dakota crime statistics – from 2000 to 2017

# 1. Precarious Housing Arrangements

- ❑ There was a lack of safe and affordable housing after the oil boom:
  - ❑ Rapid influx of workers reduced housing
  - ❑ Some housing was provided by employers
  - ❑ People lived in makeshift arrangements
  - ❑ Parks emerged for campers/trailers
  - ❑ Walmart parking lots
  - ❑ Man camps – housing up to 1,000 workers emerged

# Camper Compound in the N.D. Oil Patch



# Women in Precarious Living Arrangements

- ❑ Many women lived in precarious living arrangements, and “were just one argument with their spouse from being on the streets”
- ❑ In cases of domestic violence, men are often removed from the home, but in employer-supplied housing, the women who called the police were often required to leave
- ❑ There were no alternative living options

# Employer Supplied Housing



## 2. Social Isolation of Women and Families

- ❑ Many “newcomers” were from out of state, and did not have support networks, or nearby family supports
- ❑ Often these women were living in rural areas and lacked access to child care or transportation
- ❑ The social isolation was compounded when they lacked financial resources and were dependent upon their partners/spouses
- ❑ Some rural residents do not acknowledge the seriousness of family violence
- ❑ Respondents say that the harsh winters would further reinforce the isolation of women unaccustomed to those conditions

## Social Isolation

*“They are very isolated. That is what I have learned. Is that you have these, the ones that bring their families up here, they don’t have daycare so the women aren’t working outside the home, so they are not meeting anyone outside the home, and so now it is them and the kids in this house.”*

ND respondent.

# Vulnerability

*“It is a different quality of life living in a camper because when you are that confined, like in a house, these kids can go to their room, people can defuse, and these families don’t have that option, and they can’t afford to be in a house and I think that has increased. Domestic violence in all, are a lot of the things that you see increasing. You look at that confined space.”*

ND Respondent

### 3. Lack of Domestic Violence Services

- ❑ Workers in some agencies reported their services were rationed and they prioritized support for women with families and did not always have resources for single women
- ❑ Some women had to travel to nearby communities to seek help
- ❑ Many women simply returned to their home states (if they could afford a bus ticket)

## Persons seeking help were suffering from more serious problems

- ❑ Participants in the focus groups and interviews reported that the seriousness and complexity of the cases they confronted was greater after the boom, and included:
  - ❑ Higher prevalence of substance abuse
  - ❑ Women were receiving more serious injuries
  - ❑ More persons were suffering from mental health problems
- ❑ Some women were challenged by all three of these factors
- ❑ Some women found it difficult to access services in rural communities (e.g., lacked transportation)

## Lack of Human Services

*“We just don’t have the services to help these people.”*

*“We have right now seven high needs kids with mental health trauma...That might not seem like a lot but for our rural county, I mean they are all intense...We just don’t have the services to help these people.”*

ND Respondents

## Service Delivery in Rural Areas

*“It's three hours of drive time just to get you to the next county and then that is a 2-3 hour group. I mean that's a full day.”*

*“And if you have their kids in care and the parents have no driver's license or transportation, you are transporting them both for visitations. It's like you feel like you are a taxi driver, and then they wonder why you don't get your paperwork done. The amount of windshield time is ridiculous.”*

ND Respondents

## Unlimited Demand: Finite Resources

*“We have 15 to 20 kids in care now. [We] used to have five. We are doing all our daycare and foster licensing now...Foster care workers are traveling more. We are seeing more drugs, alcohol, and creating awareness through extension office for the community. We are seeing kids from states that have different standards and neglect versus truancy.”*

ND Human Service Agency Administrator

## Many Survivors Want to Leave

*“When domestic violence happens they want to go back home. They don’t want any services—basically just give me a train ticket or a bus ticket—something to get me home. If they stay here, they end up going back to that. Whether it’s that particular abuser or they go on to that same type of lifestyle, or they just hookup with somebody else. We see a lot of addiction issues.”*

ND Respondent

## Lack of Help for Survivors

*“There's not services here. There is really poor mental health services here. I attempted suicide after my rape. I was sent to [a place one hour away]. They discharged me a day and a half after the mental health facility. They really didn't do anything except observe me. And the doctor came and visited with me once...And she's like....I don't know what I'm going to do for you.” And so that's when I'm like, ‘This place just needs a better system.’*

ND Respondent

## 4. Workplace Culture Supports Substance Abuse and Hyper-masculinity

- ❑ Work hard – play hard (substance abuse) in a lavish lifestyle (e.g., emphasizes “toys”)
- ❑ Drugs easily accessible: “Cocaine is easier to obtain than pizza”
- ❑ Sex ratio distorted – women on the street are harassed
- ❑ Substance abuse is very prevalent in the oil patch, although has decreased significantly in recent years
- ❑ Workplace drug testing may increase the consumption of more dangerous drugs (e.g., substitution of marijuana with methamphetamine)

## Oil Patch Culture

*“How hard you work, how much you party, and how many toys you have—that’s oil patch culture” [she said] “I don’t get hit, though I get a lot of emotional abuse. But some women get hit because their men hit the bar first. They come home, they come through the door, and they explode.”*

BC Respondent (Amnesty International, 2016)

## Blowing Off Steam

- ❑ Oilfield personnel are often scheduled to work 2 weeks on, and one week off. After returning home they want to “blow off steam” after working in a “pressure cooker environment”
- ❑ But their partners (who have been “cooped up” in a camper trailer with the kids for two weeks), want their help with child care and to engage in family activities

## Lavish Spending

*“Working in the oil field, I can see a lot of people, most of them that I know, and I can count only the ones that have done good with their money. Everybody else, all they do is drinking, gambling, and just waste their money. That’s why we couldn’t even buy our own place, because...like going out, it was at least \$500. And I was like, ‘We can’t do this.’”*

ND respondent

## 5. Inability of the justice system to respond effectively to family violence

- ❑ Local criminal justice systems are “hit hard” by the boom as demand for services increases, and their ability to respond is limited due to staffing shortages
- ❑ Impacts the police, courts, and corrections.
- ❑ How does this impact on the investigation of family violence and violence against women?

## Survivor's Perspectives

- ❑ Overburdened criminal justice systems placed low priorities on cases of family violence, and respondents were critical when the police did not follow through on delivering protective and custody orders, as well as not prosecuting alleged offenders

# Police Perspectives on Boomtown Crime

- ❑ Threshold for arrests increases as they must prioritize the most serious cases when resources are limited
- ❑ Many offenders and victims are transient. As few temporary residences (such as the campers) or man camps have formal addresses – there is no easy way to locate and investigate some offences: As one worker asked, “How do we find them?”

# Justice Delayed is Justice Denied

- ❑ Backlogs were evident in every aspect of the system, as it took a long time to investigate and prosecute cases of family violence and sometimes both offenders and survivors left the jurisdiction:
- ❑ Out-of-state survivors often “went home” so were not available when the police investigated a crime, or when they were required to appear in court
- ❑ Some offenders were also likely to leave the state if they were being investigated – transient nature of oil field work
- ❑ Backlogs in the court system resulted in some accused persons not appearing for their court dates for crimes that had happened a year or two in the past

## Conclusions

- Although the conditions reported in this study were from the U.S., they are relevant to us as they all occurred within a few hundred miles of Regina
- Similar booms have occurred in Southeast Saskatchewan (e.g., Estevan and Yorkton), and throughout Canada – from Kitimat, British Columbia to St. John's Newfoundland

# Prevention

- ❑ If a social problem (such as violence toward women) can be predicted, it can be prevented
- ❑ The impacts of rapid growth in rural communities experiencing natural resource booms are well documented, and we can mitigate the worst of the boomtown effects by taking proactive action to bolster community resources in the first stages of a boom