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# WOMEN IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERY

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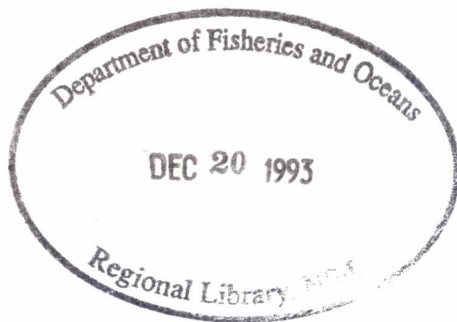


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# Women in the Newfoundland Fishery

by

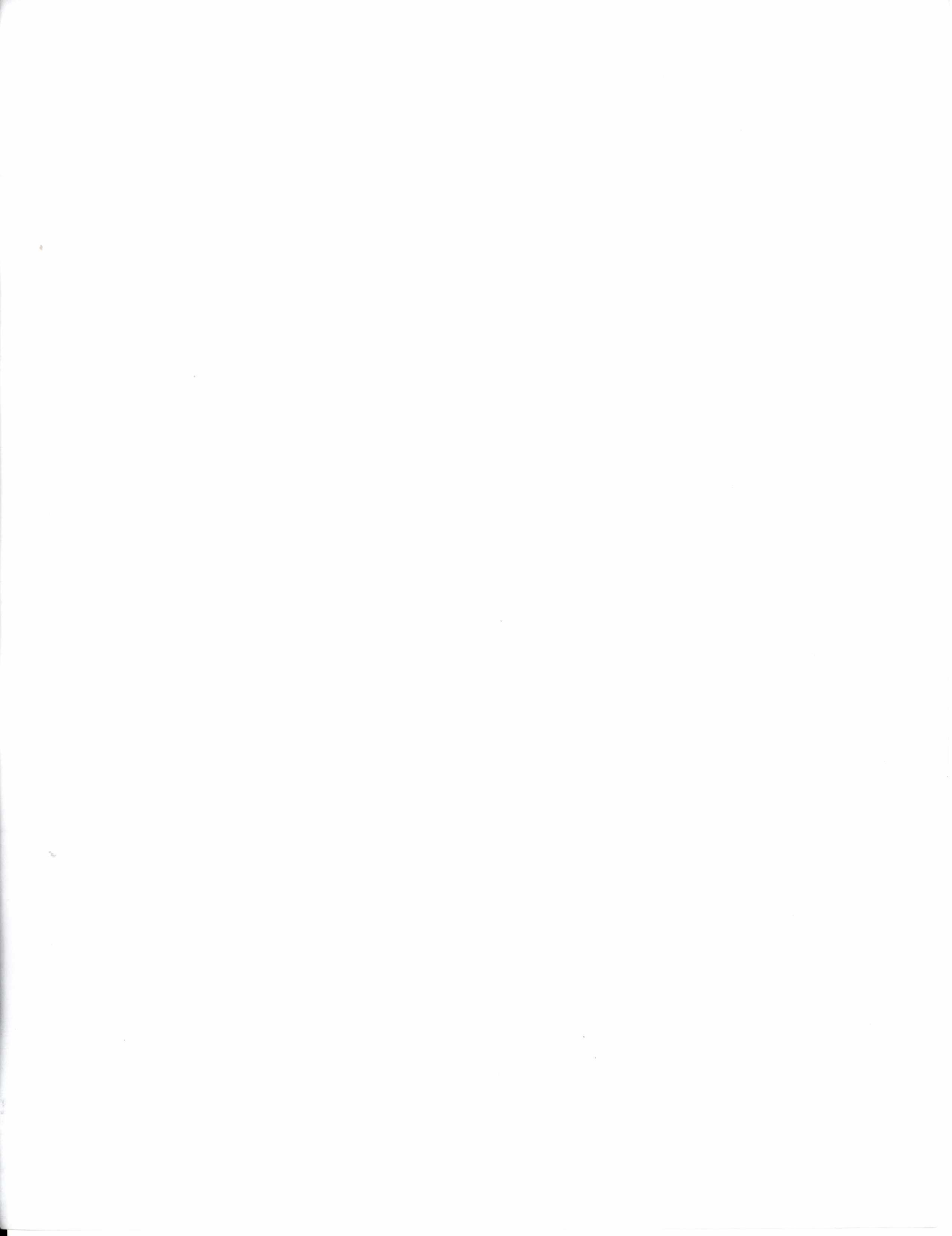
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July, 1993

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The views expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Task Force or the Government of Canada.



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## Résumé

Ce document examine le rôle des femmes dans les pêches de Terre-Neuve et les problèmes d'adaptation spéciaux auxquels elles font face par suite du moratoire de la pêche de la morue.

L'introduction explique l'organisation sociale et la structure des collectivités de pêche, leur évolution et leur adaptation. L'auteure examine ensuite le rôle des femmes dans la pêche en soulignant que ce rôle jadis invisible a considérablement changé : les femmes constituent actuellement environ la moitié de la main-d'œuvre dans la transformation et 15 p. 100 de celle de la capture. Elle étudie également les conditions de travail; ainsi, dans de nombreuses usines, les femmes sont séparées des hommes et sont susceptibles d'avoir des heures plus irrégulières. Le travail et les responsabilités familiales sont des causes de stress.

Le moratoire de la pêche de la morue et l'annonce du Programme d'adaptation et de redressement de la pêche de la morue du nord (PARPEM) ont soulevé une grande incertitude au sujet de l'avenir et des problèmes d'adaptation spéciaux des femmes. L'auteure analyse divers facteurs, y compris les aspects professionnels, familiaux et communautaires de la vie des femmes, pour évaluer les répercussions et l'efficacité du PARPEM. Les observations ont été recueillies au cours de réunions publiques et tirées des expériences personnelles de certaines femmes.

## Introduction

"Small fishing communities remain the focus of significant economic activity throughout the Atlantic region. A majority of these communities have single-sector economies based on fishing and fish processing. Changes in the amounts or patterns of either fish harvesting or fish processing in a community will thus have significant repercussions on the viability of that community." (Kirby, 1981, p. 79)

The repercussions of the devastation of fish stocks off Newfoundland's coast have yet to be determined. The short term financial impacts of Canada's largest layoff have been somewhat ameliorated by the NCARP compensation program, but the long term consequences will depend on decisions made in the political arena of Ottawa. There is no doubt that the fishing effort needs to be reduced; fisheries managers must choose between the centralized, industrial approach and a decentralized, post-industrial system. The first is often heralded as being the more efficient, at least in the short term, but some experts suspect that the technology of this sector makes it unsustainable; no fishing nation has been able to sustain its cod stocks after introducing a dragger fleet (Roy, 1992). The independent small-boat fishery suffers on the marketplace from seasonality but has proven itself to be sustainable over 400 years; up to the mid-1960s, the fixed gear harvesters always landed at least 200,000 tonnes of northern cod annually despite variable weather and environmental conditions (Northern Cod Review Panel, 1990). Because you can't catch the same fish twice, the inshore sector can only thrive if the offshore effort is curtailed.

The federal government, as sole manager of the resource, must decide on a harvesting strategy. Consequently, that choice will determine the geographical location of the processing plants. No matter which choice is made, some communities will lose the economic foundation on which they depend. Economic diversification may alleviate some of the pressure on the resource but tourism, small-scale manufacturing, and cottage industries are not going to provide the sustainable base that the fishery has afforded for 400 years. Without the fishery, most of the outports would have no more reason for their existence.

The fishery has never afforded a life of ease. Those who prosecute the fishery or belong to fishing families must cope with the inherent uncertainty that results from fluctuating markets, variable landings, and the risk of injury or death. Why so many people choose to build their careers in outport communities despite these challenges is an enigma to many who regard the situation from an urban-industrial perspective. Understanding the attachment people feel to their rural homes requires an examination of their lives in a holistic framework of community organization, values, and quality of life.

Rural communities are not miniature versions of urban centres, nor do their residents want them to be. It is not just the dependence on a single resource base that makes them different, but the entire social organization of the settlement. Community structures, which vary somewhat from one place to another, reflect the ongoing attempts of their residents to balance the desire for stability with the necessity of adapting to new circumstances. Those who live in or near the larger trawler ports are mostly wage earners who live and work within the basic industrial structure. Residents of the majority of communities, outports populated by less than 500 residents in most cases, have developed distinct social and economic structures that best meet their specific needs. There are some good explanations for these differences. The small size of these outports means that people know each other through a variety of roles -- work, family, and community -- rather than through the narrower perspective afforded by the formal and specialized organization of urban life. This personal knowledge contributes to the informality in such areas as hiring practices -- a reputation for hard work is earned by family membership or by participation in other activities rather than by credentials. This does not mean there is no structure. Young people can often estimate not only their chances of getting a job as a crew member on a vessel or as a plant worker but also how long they will have to wait (Hill, 1983).

The small population of most outports makes it impractical to provide many of the community's services through full-time, paid work. Tasks that would create regular employment in a city are often accomplished on a voluntary basis or through part-time arrangements. The resulting occupational pluralism is hidden because much of it takes place on an informal labour market, but its importance to a household's standard of living and to the community itself is substantial. In Newfoundland, the value of this informal economy is estimated to be somewhere between 49 and 54 percent of the province's gross domestic product (Jackson, 1992).

The transfer of knowledge and skills that enables young people to take their place in the fishery has mainly been accomplished not through formal education but through informal learning. Formal education does not guarantee employment in the community even for those jobs that require post-secondary degrees. Government offices, school boards, and churches do not give preference to local people but hire on credentials regardless of where they have been living (House, 1989a). Professionals from a community usually have to take positions elsewhere. The inherent uncertainty of the fishery has fostered social values of egalitarianism in contrast to the more competitive attitudes found in Canadian society in general (Davis, 1986). Individual behaviour is strictly regulated by gossip (Davis, 1986) which plays an important role in sustaining community standards of behaviour. On the positive side, this nurtures practices of caring and sharing, which are extended to the realm of paid work, and allows many communities to function without need of a police force. On the negative side, it reinforces the occupational and social segregation between men and women, and hinders the development of assertiveness and entrepreneurship.

Those who want to pursue occupational paths that are unavailable in rural areas and those who feel confined by the community traditions generally move away. In many outports, youth who cannot find work in the fishery are pushed by traditional norms to leave (Hill, 1983). Between 1970 and 1991, net out-migration diminished the population of the province by 60,000 (Dumas & Lavoie, 1992), and within the province, there has been a trend toward urbanization (Biggs & Bollman, 1991). The majority of in-migrants are Newfoundlanders returning from the mainland (House, 1989a), and most of them come back to enrol in educational programs or for family-related reasons (Cahill, 1992).

Geographical attachment is not unique to Newfoundland. It has been shown to be a major factor in the occupational choices of British engineers, scientists and technologists (Lewis & Thomas, 1987). An American study found that worker commitment was highest in small, independent firms outside of the major metropolitan areas and lowest in corporate headquarters in the larger centres (Hodson & Sullivan, 1985). In Canada, more and more people are sacrificing the occupational benefits of the urban centres to achieve what they feel is a better quality of life in the rural areas. As a result, the net migration flow of Canadian residents since 1971 has been urban-to-rural, a shift from the earlier trend toward urbanization. The growing concentration of population in the country's cities is the result of immigration, not migration (Statistics Canada, 1991).

Geographical choice influences people often at a subconscious level, and its relative importance to other goals and values varies with the individual. The strong attachment that many rural people feel toward their community may be due to this choice becoming a more conscious one in the face of perceived and real threats to their culture and to their self-identity (Cohen, 1982). The real threat to outport Newfoundland today is the possible demise of the local fishery at the hands of decision-makers living far from the community. It is within this broader context of culture and identity that the issues facing women as a result of the fisheries crisis need be addressed.

# Women in Fishing Communities

## The Economic Role

Although women have been active in the fishery for more than 400 years, it was the development of fresh-frozen processing sector that enabled them to gain direct financial benefits from their work. During the era of the saltfish trade, women were invisible partners primarily responsible for drying the fish that their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons landed (Neis, 1992). Harvesting remains the preserve of men, although in recent years a growing number of women have entered the small-boat sector. Most of the women in the fishery work at processing plants and they make up almost half of the sector's workforce.

<b>Women's Participation in the Newfoundland and Atlantic Fishery</b>									
	<u>Fishermen/women</u>				<u>Plant workers</u>				
	<u>Nfld</u>		<u>Atlantic</u>		<u>Nfld</u>		<u>Atlantic</u>		
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	
No.	12,670	2,270	29,970	4,440	14,100	12,860	29,490	29,220	
%	85%	15%	87%	13%	52%	48%	50%	50%	

Source: Statistics Canada, 1990

As in Canadian society generally, the incomes that women earn are essential to the financial well-being of the household (Hill, 1983). In his report on the Atlantic fishery, Kirby (1981) notes that "a realistic assessment of the financial condition of fishermen must focus on the distribution of total household incomes" which are derived from family engagement in both harvesting and processing and that, without incomes from non-fishing employment (such as plant work), "it is clear that the majority of east coast fishermen's households would be at, or below, the recognized poverty line" (p. 66-67).

So entrenched is the family engagement in both the harvesting and processing sectors in many communities that a major crisis occurred in the Fogo Island Co-operative when a plant manager tried to get rid of a policy giving preference in hiring to wives of fishermen (McKay, 1988). Women who cannot find work in their own communities often commute to plants as far away as 60 kilometres (Neis, 1992). The offshore plants in Catalina, Fermeuse and Trepassey draw most of their workforces from nearby communities (Kirby, 1981).

In line with the general trend in Canada, there is a growing number of single women who are supporting themselves and sometimes their children on one wage (Anger et al. 1986; Neis, 1992). For these women, whether they are single mothers, divorcees, or widows, getting a licence to fish or maintaining a job at a plant is their best option for avoiding welfare.

The economic contribution of women is not limited to the work they do for cash, and engagement in the informal economy is greater among seasonal workers. Women in both inshore and offshore sectors are expected to take prime responsibility for household work as well as caring for children, the elderly and the disabled because most rural communities do not have the

population base to support formal services in these areas (Neis, 1992; Anger et al, 1986). In inshore communities, there is a distinct shift in effort among those who work in seasonal operations. As hours of work at the plant become more sporadic toward the end of the season and women are eventually laid off, they turn to multiple tasks that are important to the financial well-being of the household -- digging potatoes, putting up vegetables, making gifts, knitting, berry-picking and preserving (Hill, 1983) and to informal exchanges of labour between households (Neis, 1992). In some inshore outports, women may be directly involved in the fishing operations of their husbands, and may take responsibility for such tasks as keeping accounts of their husbands' fishing activities and handling the household finances.

## Working Conditions in the Fishery

Processing Sector: Despite the significant contribution that women make to the fishery, they consistently earn lower wages than their male counterparts (Andy Rowe Consultants, 1991). Processing jobs are highly segregated in many plants, with women working at trimming, packing, shelling and cooking and men engaged in filleting, weighing, maintenance and wharf duties (Neis, 1988). The segregation of work is likely less extreme in the inshore plants where there is sometimes a greater variety of products and greater engagement by men in the harvesting sector (Neis, 1992). In the offices, few women attain managerial or supervisory positions and most are clustered in clerical work. Female processing workers generally have more irregular and uncertain hours than their male counterparts (Neis, 1988).

There has been relatively little research on occupational health and safety issues in the processing sector and even less on gender differences (Neis, 1992). Results from a pilot study by Williams & Neis (1992) suggest that women in the three offshore plants surveyed are more vulnerable than their male counterparts to occupational stress:

Interview and questionnaire data yielded a wide range of symptoms of occupational stress among Newfoundland's year-round groundfish plant workers. These include high absentee rates, insomnia, fatigue, irritability, anxiety, appetite problems, depression, stomach pains, chest pains, rashes, colds and flus, bladder infections, respiratory ailments and job dissatisfaction. (p. 24)

The study attributes many of the health problems to the cold and damp environment of the plants, the highly repetitive nature of the work, physical immobility on the job, social isolation resulting from long hours and shiftwork, the pressure for speed induced by incentive schemes and standards based on time-and-motion studies, increasing demands on individual workers to heighten quality, and the introduction of machine-paced operations. In situations where both the husband and wife work at the plant, the researchers found that many women choose to work night shifts so that they can be home during the day to take care of their children and husband. Those women who had moved into predominantly male jobs such as cutting had difficulties as a consequence of working with tools and machinery designed for men. Due to the lack of child care facilities in rural communities and the segregation of roles between men and women, women working at the plant are more likely to burn out. According to one doctor interviewed for the study:

...the job is one of the stressors: the jobs are lousy, repetitive, boring and the only job here for women. After work, they go home, take care of babies, clean up. Men don't help out here. (p. 49)

Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is also common among female plant workers, not only in Newfoundland but also in other parts of the North America, Europe and Iceland (Williams & Neis, 1992). A study by the Fishermen, Food and Allied Workers found among offshore plant workers a high incidence of symptoms that are correlated with such working conditions as lack of mobility or constrained postures. The following table shows the percentages of women who experienced RSI symptoms while working at the Arnold's Cove plant.

**RSI Symptoms by Job and Years in the Plant (Female Workers)**

Symptoms	Trimmers		Cutters	Packers	Other	Total
	< 1 yr	2 yrs +	2 yrs +	2 yrs +	2 yrs +	
numbness, burning, pain in wrist	15.0%	54.5%	62.5%	43.8%	69.2%	38.1%
pain, redness, swelling, tenderness in hand, wrist, forearm	26.3%	46.2%	71.4%	26.7%	30.8%	40.3%
numbness or loss of control in fingers, hands	31.6%	50.0%	25.0%	26.7%	30.8%	32.8%
pain, tenderness, aching in shoulder, pain on lifting arm	38.9%	84.6%	100%	88.2%	92.9%	80.9%
cramping of neck muscles, pain at base of skull	41.2%	73.1%	28.6%	73.3%	50.0%	53.2%
pain or ache lower back or sciatic nerve back pain while in motion	26.3%	72.0%	50.0%	88.9%	69.2%	61.3%

Source: Williams & Neis, 1992, p. 73

Although no similar studies have been performed using inshore plant workers, Williams & Neis (1992) suggest that seasonal workers may have different health risks from their offshore counterparts. Instability of incomes due to fluctuations in landings, and the uncertainty and irregularity of hours which complicates arranging for child care may be stressful for women working in inshore plants (Hill, 1983). On the other hand, the seasonal shift to informal work may reduce the risks of many chronic problems encountered by year-round plant workers.

**Harvesting Sector:** It is only recently that women began to penetrate the harvesting sector of the industry. Women have been excluded mainly by the traditional patterns of inheritance in which sons take over the vessel and licences held by their fathers (Cohen, 1982). Discrimination against women was reinforced by government policies; for many years, women who worked in the boats with their husbands were ineligible for unemployment insurance. Female harvesters have fought hard to overcome the perception that they are more than just fisherpersons on paper (Burt & Burt, 1983). However, some have restricted their own activity in deference to male fishermen; Betty Burt of New World Island recalls, "I bought the herring nets and never put them in the water... because it was only a small quota and the men wouldn't appreciate the women at the herring when there's only a small quota" (Burt & Burt, 1983, p.39).

Decision-Making & Advisory Bodies: The domination of men in the harvesting sector has effectively excluded women from the decision-making process. Because women are concentrated in the plants, they are generally not represented on administrative bodies that address resource allocations or harvesting regulations even though the recommendations of these bodies may have an impact on their work. Women are also poorly represented on union executives and many of them work in non-unionized plants with the result that many of their concerns are not addressed (Neis, 1992):

For example, their lack of input at these levels reduces the likelihood that plant construction and design will reflect the ergonomic, ventilation, and job design requirements of the growing percentage of female workers. As a result, as in other industries dependent on "imported" technology, the "discovery" of such risks as crab lung disease in one plant may not be communicated to either the designer of subsequent plants or the workers who will be exposed. (p. 19)

The majority of offshore plant workers in the Williams & Neis (1992) study said they would leave their jobs if they could find more suitable work, and almost all said they would not recommend plant work to their children. This dissatisfaction is not universal; women interviewed in an inshore community on the southwest coast of the province gave a more positive appraisal of their work in the plant and specifically valued the opportunity their work gave them to socialize with other women (Davis, 1986). McKay (1988) found women on Fogo Island "eager to work, some positively glowing when they talked of how lucky they were "to be called to the fish plant." Again, the chance to socialize with other adults and especially other women was deemed important. The lack of research makes it impossible to determine if there are significant differences between inshore and offshore workers in job satisfaction.

### Alternatives to the Fishery

Outside of the fishery, women in Newfoundland are concentrated in a narrow range of occupations, most of them in the clerical, sales, and service sectors (Anger et al, 1986). In small communities where the service sector is almost non-existent, the fishery offers most women the only potential for employment (Neis, 1992; Hill, 1983). Women represent less than one third of the total number of people employed in the province but 52% of the official unemployed; they represent 67.9% of discouraged workers who definitively state they want a regular job, and 79.2% of those who are less definitive about wanting a job or put conditions on taking a job (Hill, 1983). Communities of less than 1,000 population have proportionately higher numbers of discouraged workers, and labour force participation rates for women are extremely low in very small communities due to the absence of employment opportunities. Aquaforte, an inshore fishing community on the southern shore of the Avalon Peninsula, provides some insights into the limited labour market in which women are trying to develop their careers. While most work in Aquaforte itself, some have jobs in the neighbouring communities of Fermeuse and Ferryland and some may commute to St. John's or other centres. The table on the next page clearly shows that the range of opportunities open to women is significantly narrower than for males in the community.

**Occupational Distribution of Employment Among Residents of Aquaforte by Gender, 1981**

Occupation	Place of Employment							
	Aquaforte		Fermeuse/ Ferryland		Other		Total	
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
Inshore Fishing	29	-	1	-	1	-	31	0
Fish Processing								
Managerial	2	-	1	-	-	-	3	0
Clerical	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Production	5	8	2	2	1	1	8	11
Maintenance	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	2
Construction								
Self-Employed	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	0
Wage Labour	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	0
Mechanic								
Self-Employed	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	0
Wage Labour	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	0
Labourer	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	0
Oil Rig Worker	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0
Driver	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	0
Cook	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0
Firefighter	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0
Accountant	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0
Retail/Office Clerk (other than fish plant)	-	4	-	1	-	3	1	8
Trucking Contractor	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0
Business Executive	-	-	-	-	-	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>% in Fishing</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>61%</b>

(Source: Hill, 1983, p. 64)

The labour market of Harbour Breton is dominated by a year-round fish plant and an offshore trawler fleet. Larger than Aquaforte, this community offers a broader range of occupational opportunities for women. Only 35 per cent of the 287 women employed in 1981 worked at the plant. Others worked in the retail sector, private services, the hospital, schools, and other public services. The ability to find employment in these other areas did not protect women from job loss after the company tied up its offshore trawler fleet in 1982. Most of the women were employed in retail and private services, and the loss of business caused by the sharp reduction in fishery-related jobs led to layoffs throughout the community. "There is no doubt that a prolonged closure of the plant will bring economic devastation to the town" (Hill, 1983, p. 77).

Some fishing communities such as Aquaforte are within commuting distance of larger centres that, although having double-digit unemployment rates, do offer the possibility of employment other than the fishery. Even in such cases, most married women are unable to work outside of their local area because of their responsibilities within the household:

Since many women with families are restricted in their geographical mobility, it should not be surprising that it is often women who bear the brunt of hidden unemployment in rural Newfoundland... It is a major factor contributing to the lower family incomes received in Newfoundland compared to provinces with lower rates of unemployment and higher rates of female labour force participation. (Hill, 1983, p. 121)

While both single and married men have traditionally left the rural communities for work in other parts of the province or country, that option is less likely available to married women. The career development of married women often depends on the occupational path taken by their husbands and on choices they make in the best interests of their children. In a study of two fishing communities on the Great Northern Peninsula, House (1989a) details the case of one female resident who worked as a store manager in Stephenville but moved with her husband and children to Fort McMurray when he got a job there. The family returned to Newfoundland because Fort McMurray was "not a fit place to raise children" (p. 111). Lack of work prompted the family to return to Fort McMurray and the woman got a position as production manager for Syncrude. However, "Jack decided we should try it back home again" and so she came home and eventually got a job as manager of the fish plant. It is a job she does not really like it but she tells her husband she is satisfied with Anchor Point life because it's "Jack's home".

House (1989a) found that two-thirds of the women who migrate from the communities he studied did so to be with a spouse or mate. Not surprisingly, then, while women want jobs that are secure and well-paying, it is also important for them to find work in their community so that they can remain close to their families (Hill, 1983). Education is often touted as the means to escape marginal employment, but both House (1989b) and Hill (1983) note that post-secondary certification does not enable rural residents to find work in their home communities because government, school boards, and churches do not give preference to local people. As a result, most professionals in rural communities are from other parts of the province, the mainland, or other countries. Local professionals often have to take jobs in other communities. Of more than 8,000 women who qualify for compensation under the NCARP program, 10 per cent have trades certificates or licences and 86 have post-secondary education, five of them having earned a bachelor's degree (O'Neill, 1993).

Persistently high unemployment rates also make it difficult for women to break into non-traditional occupations. Anger et al. (1986) quote a woman who asks "What is the point of telling a girl that she should take Heavy Equipment Operating instead of Beauty Culture, when all her brothers have already taken Heavy Equipment Operating and they can't find work?" The general lack of jobs therefore reinforces the narrow base on which women can find employment. Government programs and policies have recently aimed to generate entrepreneurship in rural areas by providing business information and counselling, access to venture capital, and workforce training. While some residents of rural communities have established companies that are independent of the traditional resource base, the Economic Recovery Commission has identified the lack of historical experience in business as a major barrier to economic diversification (House, 1989b). Only 3 per cent of the women receiving NCARP compensation have expressed an interest in setting up their own business (O'Neill, 1993).

### Career Development and Self-Esteem

Career, although commonly equated with occupation, entails a much broader range of life activities and roles relating to family, leisure, community, and learning. Occupation plays a major role for most people, contributing not only to financial security but also to self-identity. Davis (1986) points out that wives of fishermen in an outport on the southwest coast identify themselves and derive much of their self-esteem from their participation in the fishery; participation may be instrumental such as working in the fish plant or it may be affective as in regulating the balance of traditional values with change on a community level. "Change offers the opportunity to combine the best of today with the resurrection of ideals of the past" (Davis, 1988, p. 226). Community residents are very much a part of the modern middle-class Canadian society and enjoy all the modern conveniences (House, 1989b) but, at the same time, social values such as egalitarianism and social norms regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviour are maintained by women through gossip and ridicule of those who step outside the boundaries. "The self-esteem the maintenance of traditional values generates on the inside is real" (Davis, 1988, p. 226). In this setting, a woman gains prestige in the community by modelling a set of ideal behaviours which Davis personifies as the "grass widow" (p. 220):

She represents the good woman, who keeps the family together and functioning through good times and bad. She depicts strong landbound networks that exist among women ... Women draw on each other for emotional support, companionship, and labor or monetary assistance when it is needed... women exploit the fishery ethos for status enhancement.

Porter (1985) found the same egalitarian ethic and sensitivity to appropriate social behaviour among women living on the southern shore of the Avalon Peninsula. Through voluntary organizations such as the Women's Institute, women gather information about fishing activities in an informal manner and relate news about crews from the various communities to their fishermen husbands. While they talk to other women about the fishery, they rarely get involved directly in fisheries issues. Instead they confine themselves to matters which they feel are within their control; "they act in powerful co-ordination to forward those things they approve of and to discourage those that they oppose" while maintaining a non-hierarchical structure (Porter, 1985, p. 88). Women organize to support youth activities, arrange social functions such as garden parties and dances, co-ordinate activities to care for

the elderly, engage in craft production, and get government funding for new community facilities. "In their voluntary associations women have established a kind of freedom, autonomy and material confidence in which they can make their own politics. They have established control over certain aspects of the shared life of the community which they see as central" (p. 88).

While work at the fish plant may be highly valued by women in fishing communities, family roles and the responsibility for social organization of the community through leisure and voluntary activities give meaning to women's lives and provide them with the opportunities to enhance self-esteem and gain status within the community. These opportunities, however, depend on the sustainability of the fishery (Porter, 1985).

## **The Moratorium**

The entire foundation on which men and women in the fishery have built their livelihoods, their occupational and self-identities, and their communities collapsed when the federal government announced the northern cod moratorium. It was mostly inshore fishermen who spoke at public forums, admonishing federal officials for not acknowledging that over-fishing rather than environment was the principle cause of the collapse (Careen, 1992; Martin, 1993), and warning that current management practices were ravaging other species, including the caplin on which cod feed (Bartlett, 1992). Few believed that the moratorium would be lifted by 1994; "Today's problems took 30-35 years to develop and it's going to take that long to get us back to where we were in the '60s; I don't see a bright future" (Small, 1992).

At a June, 1993, meeting in Portugal Cove organized by the Memorial University of Newfoundland Fisheries Forum (MUNFF), there was general consensus among the 50 participants that:

- The major concern is the need to protect the stocks;
- The reasons put forward for the collapse by scientists are obscure, and the main problem is over-fishing;
- There is not a moratorium, but only a moratorium on small boats; foreigners are still fishing and there is no political will to stop them;
- The union should take a stand that the fleet should primarily be an inshore fleet.
- The concept of zero tolerance needs to be defined more precisely to encompass the principle of no dumping of fish unless those fish will have a good chance of living; however, must also address the question whether zero-tolerance will work or put fishermen/women in position of choosing between dumping or landing small fish;
- The attainment of a reasonable standard of living ties in with the viability of the harvesting sectors, for eg., trawlers need huge quantities of fish to remain viable and that has implications for stock management. The question "what constitutes earning a good living?", ought to be examined in light of assumptions regarding definitions of poverty -- some people do not feel poor, for instance, especially if they are earning incomes of \$25,000-\$30,000 a year.

- Dragging is the main problem and must be either eliminated or strictly controlled; there is a need to regulate more precisely the gear used, for eg., the type of trap and mesh size; the west coast conservation plan is a good model because it places responsibility for working out problems on the fishermen/women themselves under the threat of closure of the fishery.

The focus on resource management underscores the importance of the harvesting sector to the general prosperity of all who live in fishing communities. However, the issues of particular concern to most women have for the most part been lost in the debate over harvesting strategies. At a MUNFF forum in March, 1993 that was dedicated to the discussion of women's issues, some of the topics that women raised differed distinctly from those brought up at other gatherings. Women were anxious about the future of the plants in which they worked, they were worried about the effects of the crisis on their children and youth in general (Snook, 1993), and they were angry about the tensions that were dividing people within their communities (Taylor, 1993). Concern was expressed about the problems some women were having as a result of their husbands' unemployment and frustration.

Future of the Plants: Conventional wisdom is that processing capacity in the province will have to be cut in half. However, the provincial government has adopted a laissez-faire attitude and plans to let market forces determine which plants remain open and which close. As a result, most women are totally in the dark about their future possibilities of re-entering the fishery. The one fisherwoman who attended the forum declared her intention to remain in the harvesting sector.

Youth: If harvesting and processing are cut back, women are wondering not only what options will young people have in their home communities but also how parents, who are left without work, can afford to help their children pay for post-secondary education.

Community: The egalitarianism that characterizes women's networks is breaking down because the moratorium has created two groups of women in the community -- those who qualify personally or whose husbands qualify for compensation under NCARP, and those who do not. The perception by others that fisheries workers are getting special treatment while those outside of the fishery struggle on minimum-wage, part-time jobs or on welfare is divisive. Even within families, daughters are jealous that their mothers can have access to training programs they do not want while they (the daughters) cannot afford post-secondary education.

The latter concerns are not surprising given that women in rural communities derive much of their self-esteem, self-identity, and life satisfaction from family and community roles. The concern over occupation attests to the importance of their incomes to the household and possibly to the social benefits they derive from working at the plant or fishing. On the issue of family problems, women acknowledged that others were having to cope with abuse and alcoholism but they were reluctant to discuss in public what they perceive as a private matter.

# NCARP

In assessing the impact and effectiveness of NCARP to meet the needs of women, it is necessary to consider the occupational, family and community aspects of their lives. This must include not only the material or financial but also the emotional and psychological needs of the women. It is also important to look not only at the content of programs but also the way in which they are being delivered.

Many of the observations and comments about NCARP programs come from statements made by fisheries participants at public meetings such as the CBC Forum in Gander last November and various MUNFF meetings and from personal accounts of individual women's experiences.

## General

Nonspecific words such as adjustment, rationalization, and change do not provide useful information for career decision-making. The reluctance of governments and companies to disclose their plans for the future of the industry has been interpreted by some as concealment of an unpopular agenda. If the governments and companies have no specific plans on this complex issue, they should at least try to inform those whose livelihoods are affected by their decisions about the options they are considering and the rationale behind them. People want "hard facts" and truthfulness about the future of the fishery, "realistic" options outside the fishery, and government's commitment to assist them until it lifts the moratorium.

There is a basic contradiction between what NCARP intends to do and what has been happening since the beginning of the Moratorium. While the program aims to encourage people to think about the long term, confusion about other aspects of the program such as the rules for eligibility, the formula for compensation, support for maintaining vessels, and so on, has been keeping the individual's focus on the immediate problems. Fishery workers will face more stress when they have to find money to pay income tax, because deduction were not taken out of NCARP payments although Revenue Canada deems the income to be taxable. Recent statements by Fisheries Minister Ross Reid that compensation may not be extended beyond the Spring of 1994 even though the fishery will not re-open creates more anxiety. Until people have freedom from immediate worries, they cannot be expected to dedicate the time and energy necessary for career planning (Amundson, 1989).

## The Early Months

The need to implement the program quickly led to considerable confusion about eligibility and level of compensation; some people were getting money they didn't expect and others who knew they should qualify were not getting payments. While it is understandable that corrections would have to be made, the current spot checks on individuals are adding to the already significant stress of fisheries workers. Before people in the fishery had a chance to get over the shock of their loss, they were being asked to choose one of five options without having the information they need to understand the implications of their choice. Fearing that any indication of willingness to train outside the fishery would prevent them from returning to the industry, most initially responded that they wanted to remain. Only when government could assure people that re-training did not mean they could never

work in the fishery again were more people willing to consider alternatives. The use of people untrained in career counselling or even general career counselling to discuss options for the future was unwise. For example, one person who interviewed a husband and wife together is reported to have asked the man rather than the woman about *her* career choice.

## Financial Aspects

The financial package has provided security for people, many of whom were experiencing ever declining incomes as a result of stock depletion. However, public statements about the compensation usually quote the maximum of \$406 as if this amount were awarded to all. People receiving payments feel there is a need to clear up the perception that they are getting that much money. The average payment is \$305 per week and, for women, it is considerably less at \$260. Despite this assistance, fisheries participants say they are still having financial problems; the money allows them to maintain themselves now but does not give them the security they need to, for example, get a bank loan or to pay for the costs of their children's post-secondary education and living expenses while they are away from home. The financial stress is likely greater for single women, particularly those who are raising children.

Because most women who fish are new to this traditionally male activity, they are less likely to get high levels of compensation because they are not considered to have a historical involvement. For example, a widow who left a job at the fish plant to take over her husband's boat is getting less than the average payment although she has been employed in the fishery for several years.

## Emotional Aspects

Counsellors who worked with farm families in the 1980s encountered several emotional responses that might be expected among people displaced from the fishery:

- a) Wishing and hoping - Given the uncertainty over the restoration of the fish stocks and the changes that fisheries managers intend, it is not surprising that some people are not giving serious consideration to their futures. There remains hope in the communities that their particular fish plant will survive.
- b) Salvation - Some people hold onto the belief that something will happen to save them from the crisis. Depending on other people, or God, to rescue them is one way of avoiding the grief that accompanies acknowledged loss.
- c) Cynicism - Inshore fishermen warned fisheries managers more than 10 years ago that the stocks were being depleted. Having been ignored, it is little wonder that many are now cynical about scientists, administrators, and others who they feel do not respect or understand them. Fishermen have stated publicly that they have little faith that those in authority will make the right decisions to establish a sustainable and viable fishery for the future.

d) Frustration - The complexity and the uncertainty of their situation adds to the frustration that people feel. People want to have a say in how their industry is run and they want to know how they can regain control over their livelihoods and their lives.

e) Fear - Because the fishery was the only occupational option for most women in fishing communities, they have had little if any experience in career planning. They knew what they were going to do, and there was no need to look at alternatives. Not knowing what to consider and where to get the appropriate information makes occupational change a frightening prospect.

f) Grieving - Farm families who lost their land went through a very real grieving process, similar to that experienced in the death of a family member. The fishery is more than a resource; it is part of the culture and ethic of rural and even urban Newfoundland. Fish is to Newfoundland what land is to farmers, and the devastation of stocks is like the loss of the farm. Fishing is the source of self-identify for those who harvest the stocks and the basis for community ethos. It is not just the fishermen and fisherwomen that grieve for the fishery but all residents of fishing communities.

Davis (1986) and Porter (1985) stress that women more than men operate in relationship to other people in their families and their communities. Not only do women have to cope with their own feelings of loss and uncertainty, their perceived responsibility to hold the family together through good times and bad and to regulate the balance between tradition and change in the community adds another emotional burden. Women must deal with the emotional and behavioural responses to the moratorium of their spouses and other family members; many may be concerned about maintaining the community networks that have been the source of their self-esteem. The emphasis of the NCARP program has been on the instrumental rather than affective needs of the displaced workers. Until the psychological impacts of the moratorium are addressed, many women may be unable to concentrate on their career options.

## The Options

Of the 8,802 females on NCARP as of Feb, 1993, almost half are 40 years of age and over, and almost all are at least 25 years old. While no data was collected on marital status, it is likely that the majority of these women are married and own homes in the community. Many of these women will have children, and those women over the age of 40 are likely to have teenagers who are attending or expect to attend a post-secondary institution. Most of these women are likely to feel they cannot make career choices without taking into account the plans and needs of other family members. For those women whose husbands leave the community in order to pursue one of the options, the additional responsibilities at home may hinder their own career development.

Very few women expressed a willingness to relocate (589 as compared to 2,252 men). Those who do intend to leave may need counselling to prepare them for the transition; on the other hand, some may be moving to areas where other family members have relocated and thus have adequate support in their new environments. Over a quarter of the women said they are undecided about moving; in many cases, this indecision might reflect the dependence of the women's career decisions

on their husband's choices rather than a desire to leave. The majority of respondents, 5,595 in total, told NCARP interviewers they were not willing to leave their communities. The major challenge facing agencies involved in the adjustment program is providing these women with realistic information about their prospects within or outside of the fishery.

Literacy/ Adult Basic Education -- Only a small percentage of women have a grade 12 or post-secondary education. These figures, however, are somewhat deceiving in that many of the women would have graduated from high school before grade 12 was introduced. Including the 2,151 who have passed grade 11, close to one-third of the women completed high school. Five have bachelors degrees and another 81 have attended post-secondary institutions. Those living in and around St. John's and those under the age of 25 are more likely to have higher levels of education.

The majority of women who do not have a high school diploma expressed an interest in upgrading. Response to the programs appears to be favourable; women say they are enjoying it and appreciate that there is flexibility in scheduling and that programs are offered close to home. The programs afford them a welcomed opportunity to socialize.

Retraining -- The question often asked by women is "retrain for what?" which is understandable given the restricted labour market that they face. There is a clear need for information on options outside of the fishery but within the community. Retraining is seen by many as the first step to resettlement, a means of preparing people to go out of province because there are no alternatives to the fishery in rural areas. The perception that there are *no* alternatives needs to be addressed within the context of community development; some women may benefit from efforts that are being made to diversify rural economies and they need to find out what is happening in this regard.

The resistance to retraining probably reflects a deeper concern of many women, that without the fishery their communities will eventually die. There is some justification to this; tourism and cottage industries are not going to fill the gap left in more than 600 communities by cutbacks in the fishing industry, and while those dependent on the northern cod stocks are the first to be affected, depletion of other stocks threaten to increase the number of displaced workers. Even if the fishery is reduced by half in the long run, that will mean the loss of 7,500 jobs for women and another 13,000 for men. People frequently refer to the retraining process as an attempt at "forced resettlement". The word resettlement has a particularly strong negative connotation in this province as a result of past attempts by government to move rural residents to larger communities as part of a failed industrialization scheme.

Women have also expressed concern that the young people in fishing communities are not getting the opportunity to gain access to the fishery; at the same time, some parents are discouraging their children from fisheries occupations because of the uncertainty and risk.

Self-employment -- While most small-boat fishermen/women are self-employed, the notion of establishing any other kind of business is foreign to most people in rural communities. It is not part of their history and risk-taking is not compatible with the desire for financial security. The absence of an entrepreneurial culture means that there are few role models or mentors who can provide long term support and advice to potential entrepreneurs. It is therefore not surprising that only 3 per cent of the women said they were considering self-employment. On the other hand, more than a third were undecided on this option and this suggests that there may be some potential to help women enter business. Over half of the respondents, however, were not considering self-employment as an option, and so there is a definite need for the identification or development of wage-earning alternatives in rural areas.

Retirement -- Only 685 women in the NCARP program are eligible for retirement and most of them have sought information on that option. Interestingly, more than 1,000 women who are not old enough to qualify for the retirement option also made inquiries. This may indicate that it is the financial security rather than employment that is most important to these women.

Staying in the Fishery -- More than a third of the women stated they are not willing to work outside of the fishery -- this compares with 10 percent who said they were. However, the indecision of 50% of the female respondents suggests that many would take alternative employment if opportunities existed, but again it is important to remember that most are committed to stay in their communities. The large number of undecided might also suggest that some women are taking the time to discuss the future of the family with their husbands.

For the more than 3,000 women who want to remain in the fishery, there are several concerns that need to be addressed. Plant workers want to know what changes will result from the automation of processing sector, what skills they will need, what hours they will work and what incomes they can expect. Harvesters want to be part of the process of stock management; they also want to learn more about the basis on which fisheries managers make decisions and how they can contribute to the decisions being made. They want to know how fishermen/women in other countries have coped with stock depletion and how their governments handled the crisis. They want answers on strategies to stop foreign fishing within the 200-mile limit and on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks. They want to solve the problems of income stability and stocks sustainability.

Criticism of the professionalization program for fishermen/women focuses on the feeling that the courses are teaching them nothing new. Most small-boat fishermen/women learned such skills as repairing motors from their parents or other people in the community and find little benefit in the formal training of these skills.

## Recommendations & Conclusion

The fishery has shaped the settlement patterns, the social organization of communities, and the values of Newfoundland residents for 400 years. Even though the province is less dependent on the resource than in the past, the fishery remains important to Newfoundland's self-identity. Rural communities are not quaint relics of the past; they have constantly adapted to changes in the industry and in society in general. While maintaining traditions and activities that are important to their quality of life, coastal residents have absorbed and embraced many of the modern trends that have swept Canada as a whole. Communities have many problems and weaknesses, but they also have a lot of strengths that are seldom acknowledged by those whose values are rooted in urban society. Adjustment programs must not only address the weaknesses of fisheries workers such as literacy but they must also take advantage of the knowledge and skills that those people do possess to help shape a viable fishery for the future.

### Recommendations:

- 1) The moratorium affords the opportunity to address the health and safety issues raised by the study of Williams and Neis (1992). Employees of both inshore and offshore plants should be encouraged to discuss the working conditions in the processing sector and develop some possible solutions to problems they have experienced. These discussions and information about health and safety issues in processing plants in other countries should be incorporated into educational programs. Women might also participate in research that contributes to improved designing of processing facilities.
- 2) Although few are involved in harvesting, women should be encouraged to give their views on the future of resource management. How the allocations are made will have a direct impact on the opportunities they will have in the processing sector. Harvesters should have the opportunity to discuss and develop strategies to ensure resource sustainability, economic viability, and administrative efficiency. Their knowledge of local marine ecology should be incorporated into the information base on which future resource management decisions will be made.
- 3) Group counselling sessions should address the occupational and non-occupational aspects of women's career development. Particular attention must be given to the concerns that many women have about the future of their children and their communities.
- 4) Individual counselling by a professional counsellor or social worker should be offered to women who have personal concerns such as family relationships, abuse, alcoholism, depression, or stress.
- 5) Career exploration should be tied to community development initiatives. Resource people from community organizations and the appropriate government agencies should become involved in this aspect of the adjustment program. Women should have the opportunity to discuss ideas

for new industries from which they could benefit. The organization skills that women have demonstrated in their voluntary efforts should be recognized as potential strengths for the establishment of worker co-operatives.

- 6) To overcome the divisions that have been created among women in communities by the perceived special status of fisheries workers, adjustment programs should include some workshops and seminars on community development initiatives that are open to all women in the locality. This will help re-establish the principles of equality and fairness within women's informal networks.
- 7) Women who express an interest in self-employment and those who are undecided about that option should have the opportunity to learn from other women who have experience in this area. Rural businesswomen should be invited to participate in programs as role models and, for those who decide to establish their own companies, these entrepreneurs should be asked to serve as mentors. Funding should be available for a mentorship program.

At the CBC Forum in Gander (1992), the executive assistant to then Fisheries Minister John Crosbie stressed that nobody was being forced to leave the fishery and that retraining and retirement were "voluntary" (Andrews, 1992). However, the downsizing of the industry will make clusters of workers in some communities redundant. Their move out of the fishery will not be voluntary. Until female plant workers know whether or not their particular plant will survive and until women in both the harvesting and processing sectors see that there are viable options for them outside the fishery, most are unlikely to explore other options. Those who are depending on regaining their previous employment will be devastated if that hope is dashed only after the assistance program for career exploration has expired.

The crucial decisions facing the industry in general must be made. Federal managers must decide on a harvesting policy that is acceptable to people who work in that sector, because unless they gain support from the fishermen/women, they will encounter formidable costs to enforce their decisions. The provincial government and the companies must disclose their intentions for the processing sector so that plant workers can prepare for the future.

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## Appendix

This Appendix is intended to provide some insights into some fisherwomen's lives. In writing this paper, I undertook an "exploratory" investigation of sorts, eliciting some individual accounts and/or narratives from woman affected by the moratorium. I also sought observations and concerns from people who were involved as educators or "helpers" with the fisherwomen. (Since this was an exploratory investigation, and the number of contacts were relatively low, about 40 women, I caution the reader as to the generalizability of the observations presented.)

Women were eager to relate their life stories. It is impossible to fully cover all points made. For the sake of brevity, their accounts have been edited and following are the themes and/or primary thrusts which emerged:

- Uncertainty, uneasiness and fear are prevalent. Statements like "I don't know what will happen after May 1994 ...," "We fear for our families, our communities ..." attest to these feelings.
- There appear to be lack of clarity about the future of the fishery, in general, and the life of the fish plants, in particular. This lack of clarity translates into confusion and anticipation.
- The perceived lack of control over their future is contributing to a feeling of powerlessness and to generalized anxiety.
- Some women voiced a concern that they feel they're "out of the center of what's happening." They feel peripherally attached to the decision-making process at the moment.
- Many women talked about their children and their future. Since women view themselves in relation to their families, their decision-making plans become more complicated.
- Concerns over future of communities were voiced and interwoven with notions of the need for co-operative strategies for groups/communities.
- The strong need for interaction was apparent -- i.e. statements like "I miss the chats and talks we had at the plant," "I don't see my friends any more," were frequent.
- Women were passionate and very emotional as they raised "the tough questions" as they described "a longer moratorium" or a "fish plant closure."
- Conflict over individual needs (i.e. wanting to go back to school) versus the needs of their partner or a child was evident. This disequilibrium muddled abilities to envision alternatives.

- Self-doubts were verbalized over and over. Self-esteem and self-confidence are affected by lack of clear individual directions which, of course, are compounded by lack of the collective (community) direction.
- Decision-making styles could be described as more compliant and dependent. Frequently statements were made to the effect: "I have been waiting for answers...; I have filled in the form but haven't heard back..."
- Pockets of resistance were evident as long term planning issues were raised.
- Lack of information and/or presence of misinformation was apparent. Chaotic fragmentation of information about subsidies, regulations governing payments and training/retraining options abound.
- "Will our plant survive?" This question was a preoccupation in many of their anecdotes.
- Need to channel negative energies and worries into action plans was articulated by some women. An adjunct to this idea was the need to "get together" to help one another "in a cooperative view."
- Roles in the family and the community seemed gender-specific. Many of the women who entered retraining and/or upgrading, for example, were cooking the meals, doing laundry, and most, if not all of the child caring responsibilities. These women are "exhausted and ready to collapse" as one educator told me. The entrenchment of women and their duties/responsibilities in the home is a cultural issue.
- A few women raised concern over their partner's resistance to retraining. The ambiguity of role redefinition or the possibility of same crept into the women's stories. Fear of change and/or the risk to observe the status quo was an issue for some women.
- Many women openly discussed their alternatives but expressed a concern over their partner's unwillingness or fear to do the same. Relationships and interactions/communication were raised as potential problem areas.
- There were many positive stories about relationships within the family and within the community. Women were studying with their children -- doing homework together, etc. Women talked about learning in a positive manner, reflecting on this opportunity they had. There were stories of supportive children and partners. Many narratives were told with pride and joy at accomplishments.

In conclusion, women have invested hard work into the fishery of this Province. Many of the issues for the future affect men and women equally. There are, however, many barriers to women's success for the future. Many of these barriers are entrenched in the history of women and the culture of this Province. There is much work to be done. This effort to present concerns of women in the fishery is a modest one. Nevertheless, patterns have emerged with apparent implications for the focus and type of work which ought to happen.

The issues are too obtuse and convoluted to deal with as promissory and contingent plans. The women in the fishery ought to become central agents of change, equal partners, and not peripheral contributors.