

**BEYOND BOREDOM:
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN HINTON, ALBERTA**

FINAL REPORT

**Prepared for:
Foothills Model Forest
and the
Town of Hinton**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This study was undertaken by the Canadian Forest Service on behalf of the Foothills Model Forest. The project steering committee included representatives from industry, human service agencies, and the Town of Hinton. As originally defined in the proposal, the study has two objectives:

1. Describe the relationship between alcohol and drug issues and the economic and social structure of a resource-based community.
2. Identify the implications of the emerging non-union and contractor-based employment on health and well-being in the community.

These objectives provided the initial impetus for the study, but they changed in some important ways. First, in describing the relationship between alcohol and drug issues and the economic and social structure of resource-based communities, this focus has expanded in recognition of the boom-type economic conditions under which this study was undertaken. We have also incorporated the analysis of secondary data for Hinton and a number of Alberta communities to explore whether or not resource-based communities are any more vulnerable to substance abuse than agricultural communities.

Second, the objective associated with non-union and contractor-based employment was initially linked to the growth in service sector employment within the community and the lower incomes and lower benefits associated with such jobs. Since the arrival of the energy boom in Hinton 12 to 18 months ago, non-union and contractor-based employment has taken on a dramatically different flavour. More contract work is available within the high-paying energy sector, but at the same time, those who continue to work in the service sector are also enjoying some increase in wages coupled with a crippling increase in the cost of living – especially housing. These changes over the last year and a half have again changed the way in which the study has evolved.

The policy connections between sustainable forest management and community health and well-being provide an important link between the mandate of the Foothills Model Forest and the objectives of this study. Concepts such as community capacity and human and social capital provide a link to some of the issues facing the Town of Hinton at this time and provide an opportunity for the Foothills Model Forest partnership to contribute to our understanding of these issues and to participate in the development of solutions.

Identifying the problem

The published literature on resource-dependent communities provides some insights into challenges associated with community health and well-being. Topics within this literature include: boom and bust cycles of resource-based economies, rational underinvestment in human capital, lack of connections within the community, and social stratification. In addition to these factors, authors have also identified workplace factors associated with substance abuse. These include: aggravating working conditions, drinking subcultures, the clash between health & safety polices and management objectives, and shift work.

These factors suggest that communities like the Town of Hinton, who are closely linked to resource-based industries, face unique challenges in the promotion of community health and well-being.

Data on drug use and alcohol consumption in Alberta also suggests that the Hinton Service Area is inclined towards higher rates of substance abuse. However, it is important to note that because the Hinton Service Area also includes Jasper, a popular tourist destination, the level of liquor sales may be inflated. Statistics available for the Hinton Service Area indicate that in 2001/02 this Area ranked second highest in Alberta for dollar sales and volume of alcoholic beverages sold, just behind Canmore. For illicit drug offences, in 2001, Hinton ranked number two in Alberta, after Fort McMurray. In terms of admissions to AADAC, in 2002/03, the Hinton Service Area ranked third in Alberta, following Lac La Biche and Grande Prairie (AADAC, 2003b). Crystal methamphetamine (crystal meth) use has also been a concern in the community in recent years which precipitated the establishment of the Hinton Drug Action Committee.

The costs of substance abuse are difficult to calculate for individual communities. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission estimates that, overall, alcohol and drug use costs Alberta business and industry more than \$400 million every year in lost productivity. The breakdown of these costs includes risk of injury, depression, stress, reduced morale, increased absenteeism, and higher workers' compensation and insurance costs (AADAC, 2005d).

Given the challenges posed by substance abuse to the health and well-being of Hinton, this study provides an opportunity to examine the roots of substance abuse more closely and to explore opportunities for social change.

Methods and results

The primary mode of research involved 51 face-to-face consultations (with individuals and groups) totaling 123 interviewees. Researchers also completed 9 telephone interviews. Data from these interviews were supplemented with secondary data from 11 local and provincial agencies.

Trends in substance abuse for the Town of Hinton are somewhat difficult to measure. Client numbers for the local AADAC office were only available for three years (2003/04-2005/06), so it is difficult to observe if there is in fact a trend occurring in the number of people seeking addictions treatment. Statistics from Hinton Child and Family Services show an increase in meth-related interventions from 2000 to 2006. Interview data provides some mixed signals, with some residents observing lower rates of substance abuse on the job, and others observing more substance abuse among parents and caregivers in the home.

Based on data from Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, liquor sales in Hinton increased from \$499 per person in 2000/01 to \$694 per person in 2004/05. Yet these rates are much lower than communities such as Drayton Valley and Lloydminster. Drug

offences, on the other hand, are somewhat higher in Hinton than in some comparison communities.

The interview data also suggest that substance abuse is prevalent all over the province. As stated by one individual, “Is there a town in Alberta that’s not full of drugs nowadays?”

According to the interview data, people who abuse substances comprise a wide range of individuals, including teenage girls, young resource workers, older men, and middle-aged women. AADAC client data for Hinton show the majority of people seeking help for their ‘own use’ are single, between the ages of 25 and 34, and have less than a grade 12 education. Substances of the most concern within this population in 2005/06 were: 1) alcohol (37% of clients reported it as a substance of concern), 2) tobacco (36%), 3) cocaine (25%), 4) amphetamines/stimulants (20%), and 5) marijuana or hashish (12%). Crystal methamphetamine ranked 6th with 10% of Hinton AADAC clients reporting it as a substance of concern.

Research participants identified a wide range of impacts from substance abuse, including: deterioration of the user, family dysfunction, costs to employers, strain on community services, and crime and community fear. Participants also said children growing up in homes with addiction are especially vulnerable to the impacts of substance abuse. An addictions counsellor describes one long-term impact for these children, “Children often feel that they’re not valuable, they’re not good enough, they’re not worth a whole lot.”

Factors contributing to substance abuse

One of the main contributions of this study is an understanding of some underlying factors of substance abuse within the Town of Hinton. The results of the study move beyond common and simplistic answers such as “boredom and money” and reveal that substance abuse is a symptom of family dysfunction and a lack of social cohesion within the home and community. These debilitating family and social relationships are a part of the history of resource-based communities (dating back to the Alberta Coal Branch), a culture of coping, and an intergenerational transfer of behaviours associated with the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Moreover, the data underscores five key features of this community that create challenges for healthy family and community relationships. These five key features are: (1) multiple, divergent sectors (characterized by a divide between the higher-paying resource sectors and lower-paying service sector, resulting in a type of class system and rigid social structure); (2) high incomes (with a race to “keep up with the Joneses,” high consumer debt, and a rational underinvestment of human capital); (3) union environment (resulting in a “culture of entitlement,” as well as the belief that there are “no consequences” to substance use/abuse and that others will “fix the problem”), (4) transience (resulting in a lack of social connections for many families and individuals); and (5) shift work (which limits a worker’s ability to be involved in family and community life). Overall, these five features contribute to decreased social cohesion within the community and increase the

opportunity for an individual to become isolated. The feeling of isolation and the need to feel connection may cause an individual to develop an attachment to alcohol or drugs.

Conclusions and recommendations

Given the deeply rooted conditions that lead to substance abuse within society, and the more specific social and economic realities within a resource-based community, it is difficult to identify direct and effective responses to this issue. Issues of substance abuse are an important and perhaps growing component of our interest in promoting the health and well-being of resource-based communities. At a minimum, we need to understand that elevated levels of social dysfunction are a well recognized phenomenon within communities that are experiencing economic boom-type conditions. Research on these issues is well established and these historical trends are consistent with contemporary social issues in the Town of Hinton and beyond.

Our response to the economic benefits from these boom times must also include acknowledging and responding to the negative social consequences of this boom. As one research participant puts it:

Sure it's fine the oil field and all of the jobs, but at what cost though? The next generation is going to be paying big time for this. Everyone forgets, you know when they go on a ride, when we have a good time, everyone forgets that this fun ride comes to a full stop sooner or later.

Although resource-based industries contribute to the incredible wealth of this province, this wealth comes at a cost to families and communities. Given these costs, it may be appropriate to call for a unique set of investments and services for communities that are heavily linked with the resource-based economy.

Responses to this challenge involve adequate resources and a lead role for human service agencies within the community. Key to this response will be recognition from all levels of government that these social costs are very real and that an integrated multi-sector response is required. This includes local industries, community groups, and human service agencies that focus on family- and community-level interventions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken at the request of the Town of Hinton and the Foothills Model Forest.¹ With a research mandate, the Foothills Model Forest approached the leadership of the Town of Hinton with a query about possible topics or areas of concern where the Foothills Model Forest may be able to provide some research support. In response, the Town leadership described several loosely connected areas of concern with regard to: (1) an apparent increase in the levels of substance abuse in the community, and (2) an increase in non-unionized and contractor-based employment.

These conversations took place in early 2004 during an eruption of crystal methamphetamine (meth) use within the town. The community reacted proactively to this event by organizing a high-profile Hinton Drug Action Committee, with interagency support and a marketing campaign to educate the community about the dangers of meth. Law enforcement and other agencies were heavily involved in meth issues during this time and this study was initiated, in part, as a means to understand some of the underlying causes and factors associated with increasing meth use in Hinton and in towns of similar size and character. Although issues of meth were at the forefront during the development of this project and the initial months of fieldwork, a much broader set of substance abuse issues came into focus as the study evolved.

If meth provided the catalyst for initiating this study, the booming energy sector in Alberta caused a major shift in the focus of this study from its inception in 2004 to its completion in 2006. In the 2001 Census of Canada, Hinton residents reported no significant employment income from the oil and gas sector. By 2004, this statistic had changed significantly, and by 2005/06, it would be difficult to overestimate the social and economic impacts from the energy boom in the Hinton region. By some estimates, the shadow population of temporary workers in the Hinton region reaches upwards of 9,000 (nearly a doubling of the Hinton population). Although this study was focused, initially, on the underlying social and economic structure of existing forestry and mining industries and the relationship between these sectors and substance abuse in the community, the study took on an entirely different dimension with the rapidly expanding oil and gas sector in the region. In some important ways, this study documents the changing identity of Hinton from a forestry and mining town to an energy town as a primary economic driver and a major influence on the social and cultural composition of the community. In talking with many residents throughout the course of this study, this changing face of Hinton provided a backdrop to many discussions about the health and well-being of the community.

¹ The Foothills Model Forest is one of eleven Model Forests that make up the Canadian Model Forest Network. The Foothills Model Forest is located in Hinton, Alberta and is a non-profit corporation representing a wide array of industrial, academic, government, and non-government partners. The three principal partners / sponsors representing the agencies with vested management authority for the lands that comprise the Foothills Model Forest include West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd., Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, and Jasper National Park. The principle mandate of the Foothills Model Forest is to provide practical solutions for the stewardship and sustainability of forest lands. This mandate includes research into the sustainability of forest-based communities.

As a response to these rapidly changing social and economic conditions within the community, a wider set of theoretical insights were incorporated into the study. For instance, research into energy boomtowns in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s offered insights into expected social outcomes in Alberta communities.

1.1 Study objectives

The events associated with crystal meth use in the Town of Hinton and surrounding region, along with the energy boom in Hinton during the study period, provide important background to the development of this study. As originally defined in the proposal, the study has two main objectives:

1. Describe the relationship between alcohol and drug issues and the economic and social structure of a resource-based community.
2. Identify the implications of the emerging non-union and contractor-based employment on health and well-being in the community.

These objectives provided the initial impetus for this study, but the research objectives have changed in some important ways. First, in describing the relationship between alcohol and drug issues and the economic and social structure of resource-based communities, this focus has expanded in recognition of the boom-type economic conditions under which this study was undertaken. Out of necessity, this study has evolved to include a description of the relationship between alcohol and drug issues and boomtown conditions, with a focus on the pre-boom conditions that serve to intensify or attenuate substance abuse issues during periods of rapid economic expansion.

Second, the objective associated with non-union and contractor-based employment was initially linked to the growth in service sector employment within the community and the lower incomes and lower benefits associated with such jobs. Since the energy boom, non-union and contractor-based employment has taken on a dramatically different flavour. More contract work is available within the high-paying energy sector, but at the same time, those who continue to work in the service sector are also enjoying some increase in wages coupled with a crippling increase in the cost of living – especially housing. These changes over the last 12 to 18 months have again changed the way in which study objective #2 was understood and investigated. Instead, we explore the impacts the expanding oil and gas sector is having on employment and the overall community.

1.2 Description of research partnerships

This study was undertaken by the Canadian Forest Service, Natural Resources Canada, in financial partnership with the Foothills Model Forest. The Town of Hinton provided additional financial assistance. And, since substance abuse is the primary focus of the study, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) was also contacted. AADAC joined into a formal research partnership with the Canadian Forest Service in early 2006 and has supplied the Canadian Forest Service with funding, as well as secondary data for 16 rural and urban communities in Alberta.

The project was also facilitated by a steering committee in the Town of Hinton. This steering committee was composed of individuals from the following organizations:

Steering Committee Organizations
Town of Hinton
Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)
Aspen Regional Health Authority
Foothills Model Forest
Elk Valley Coal
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)
Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women (YES)
West Fraser Mills Ltd.

The steering committee provided valuable direction during the development of this study. In addition to an initial planning meeting, the steering committee also provided feedback on an Interim Project Report released in January 2006. This relationship with the steering committee will be important as the project nears completion and information is disseminated to various community agencies.

1.3 Structure of the report

The project report is organized as follows:

- Section 2.0: A review of the published literature.
- Section 3.0: An overview of the Town of Hinton and several important aspects of its recent history.
- Section 4.0: Information on the research methods that were employed at various stages of the study. These include a description of interview and secondary data collection.
- Section 5.0: A detailed description of study results based on both interview and secondary data.
- Section 6.0: A discussion which pulls several major themes together from what we have learned from studies in other locales and describes how this particular study has advanced our knowledge of community health and well-being in resource-based communities.
- Section 7.0: A list of references.
- Section 8.0: The interview schedule, an overview of nodes generated through the data analysis process, and population statistics.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores a range of literature pertaining to substance abuse in rural and resource-based communities.

2.1 Resource management and substance abuse

Substance abuse is not a common theme for those who are familiar with the resource and environmental management literature. Although there are several long-standing connections between these two fields of study, the connections are not always clear. Some researchers suggest that issues of substance abuse in rural communities are best left

to experts in the health sciences or in other related fields such as psychology. These disciplines bring a great deal of understanding to issues of substance abuse, with a particular focus on factors that may lead to substance abuse as well as factors that may prevent or limit these abuses from taking place. Within the field of rural sociology, much attention is paid to the social and economic conditions that lead to elevated levels of substance abuse and other social disruptions within rural and resource-based communities. These include the conditions associated with boom and bust cycles within extractive industries, human capital issues in resource-based towns, and the issues of career opportunities for women in these communities. Several of these topics are discussed at length in the section below.

One key connection between the topic of substance abuse and resource management comes from recent national policy initiatives in the natural resource sector. For example, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (2003) identifies ‘forest community well-being and resilience’ as a key component of sustainable forest management and underscores the importance of managing extractive forest industries in ways that maintain ecological integrity and foster healthy forest-based communities. Methods and measures for determining community well-being and resilience continue to evolve (with no universal approach) but a sizeable number of scholars within Canada have adopted a model for community assessment that seeks to identify specific forms of community ‘capital’ (capacities or assets). These capitals provide a foundation for well-being and resilience and include: natural capital (land, air, water); economic capital (income, savings, etc.); physical capital (infrastructure, etc.); social capital (formal and informal networks); and human capital (formal and informal skills and abilities).²

The link between substance abuse and resource management is most strongly identified through the process of human capital development within a community context (Figure 1). If a community suffers from high rates of substance abuse, this abuse tends to place downward pressure on human capital (human assets and capacities) and social capital (social networks and cohesion) in the community. Communities may enjoy a high level of formal education and considerable entrepreneurial spirit, but substance abuse can cause considerable dysfunction and result in diminished capabilities and connections. In this sense, the level of substance abuse has an inverse relationship to the level of human and social capital.

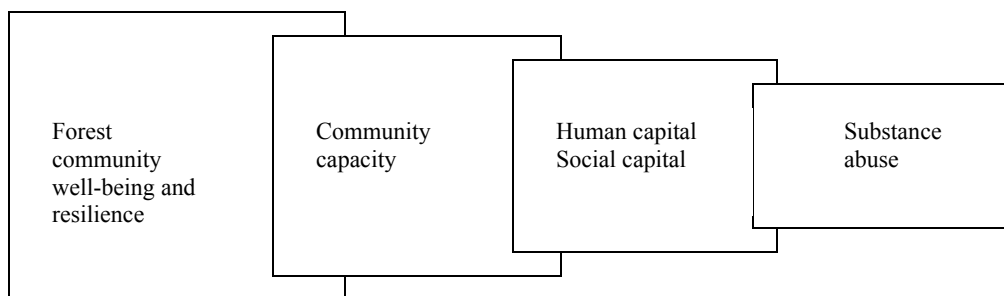


Figure 1. Linkages between community well-being and substance abuse

² For a detailed account of the capacity model, see Beckley et al. (2002).

This research focuses on the underlying social and economic conditions within rural and resource-based communities which lead to elevated levels of substance abuse, and, in turn, decreased levels of human and social capital, community capacity, and community well-being and resilience. In the next section, we discuss the topic of substance abuse within Canada and Alberta, and then explore several theoretical traditions that are linked to this issue within the context of rural and resource-based communities.

2.2 Substance use and abuse in Alberta

Determining the extent of substance abuse in society is difficult because of the great variety of drugs available for abuse (licit and illicit), and the great variety of subpopulations that use and abuse drugs – some obvious and some hidden. Subgroups within the drug-using population include those who: (1) use drugs; (2) abuse or have problems with drugs; (3) have a dependence on drugs; and (4) are undergoing formal treatment for drug use (Wild, 2004).

A recent national study estimates the costs of substance abuse. According to Rehm et al. (2006), the cost of substance abuse in Canada in 2002 was estimated to be almost \$40 billion with tobacco accounting for about \$17 billion or 42.7% of that total estimate, alcohol accounting for about \$14.6 billion (36.6%), and illegal drugs for about \$8.2 billion (20.7%). These costs include the “burden on services such as health care and law enforcement, and the loss of productivity in the workplace or at home resulting from premature death and disability.”

“Alberta does a fairly poor job of routinely collecting information on substance use, abuse, and dependence” (Wild, 2004). Statistics available for the province do reveal the four most widely used drugs are (1) alcohol, (2) cannabis (marijuana), (3) cocaine and heroin, and (4) amphetamines. According to the literature, 12% of adult Albertans are problem drinkers, 1% are dependent on illicit drugs, and 5% experience moderate to severe gambling problems (AADAC, 2005a).

Statistics available for the Hinton Service Area (which includes Jasper) for 2001/02 indicate Hinton ranked second highest in Alberta for dollar sales and volume of alcohol beverages sold, just behind Canmore. For illicit drug offences, in 2001, Hinton ranked number two in Alberta, after Fort McMurray. In terms of admissions to AADAC for 2002/03, the Hinton Service Area ranked third in Alberta, following Lac La Biche and Grande Prairie (AADAC, 2003a).

One particular drug, crystal meth, has received widespread media and government attention, not only in Alberta, but across Canada. In October 2005, AADAC ran a crystal meth awareness campaign (primarily through television commercials) and in December 2005, Alberta joined British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in imposing greater restrictions on the sale of precursors to the production of crystal meth (Alberta Health and Wellness, 2005a and 2005b). Despite this media attention, one source reports that crystal meth appears to be stabilizing in Alberta (AADAC, 2005b). The top four contributing

factors to crystal meth use are believed to be: low cost of crystal meth, peer pressure, easy access to crystal meth, and boredom (Wild, 2004).

Alcohol still remains the most widely abused substance in Alberta, and is the substance of most concern for AADAC clients (AADAC, 2005b). In fact, Albertans are more likely than other Canadians to report heavy alcohol consumption (22.4% vs. 20.7%), hazardous drinking (15.3% vs. 13.6%) and alcohol dependence (3.5% vs. 2.5%) (AADAC, 2005c). A University of Alberta study (2005) conducted with young Albertans (ages 18-29 years) in various communities across the province found 58.9% of respondents agreed that alcohol consumption in their community is the result of young people having little to do. The greatest agreement came from rural (76.7%), followed by small urban (62.1%) respondents. 16.2% of respondents said the general feeling in their community is that drinking and driving is okay. Furthermore, focus group members in the same study said, “Alberta’s non-metropolitan areas are experiencing a boom based on natural resources like oil, natural gas, and mining. They employ large numbers of young workers who earn significant amounts of money, but have little to do in their spare time. Hence, they drink alcohol” (Rothe, 2005).

Results of this nature reinforce a common understanding that substance abuse is caused by the combined forces of boredom and money.

2.3 Risk and protective factors: General

Risk factors of substance abuse are life events or experiences that are associated with an increase in problematic behaviours such as alcohol and other drug use, whereas protective factors of substance abuse are life events or experiences that reduce or moderate the effect of exposure to risk factors (AADAC, 2003a). Risk and protective factors exist at every level at which an individual interacts with others and the surrounding society. Literature suggests the more risk factors an individual is exposed to, the more likely he or she will experience a substance addiction. In addition, researchers have found that the more the risks in an individual’s life can be reduced, and the more protective factors present, the less vulnerable an individual will be to substance abuse (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2005).

The Department of Public Health within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts lists an extensive number of risk and protective factors of substance abuse on their website.³ According to the Department, commonly identified risk factors for individuals include:

- association with drug-using peers
- certain physical, emotional or personality traits (inherited genetic vulnerability, low self esteem, risk taking behaviour, alienation or rebelliousness, and violence/aggression)
- early and persistent problem behaviours (begins using at a young age, early sexual behaviour)
- academic failure

³ See the Department of Health, Commonwealth of Massachusetts website:
<http://www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/prevention/masscall/rp.htm#individual>

- less involved in recreational, social and cultural activities
- lack of information on drug-related topics
- family members with a history of alcohol or other drug abuse
- family members don't spend much time together
- parents have trouble keeping track of teens: where they are and who they're with
- lack of clear rules and consequences regarding alcohol and drug use
- family conflict/abuse
- loss of employment
- alcohol and other drugs readily available, i.e., affordable
- norms are unclear and encourage use
- residents feel little sense of connection to community
- neighborhood disorganization
- rapid changes in neighborhood populations
- high unemployment
- residents at or below poverty level
- lack of monitoring youths' activities
- inadequate media portrayals of substances

And, according to the Department of Public Health within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, commonly identified protective factors include:

- knowledge regarding risks associated with substance abuse
- bonding to a prosocial culture
- positive relationships, sense of well-being and self-confidence
- positive future plans
- has peers who disapprove of alcohol or other drug use
- close family relationships
- copes with stress in a positive way
- opportunities exist for community involvement
- community has a religious composition
- resources, i.e., housing, healthcare, childcare, jobs, recreation, are available
- community has comprehensive risk-focused program on substance abuse

The second part of this literature review will explore a few specific risk factors and protective factors within two areas: a natural resource-based community and the workplace.

2.4 Risk and protective factors: A resource-based community

This section presents some factors which may place residents of a resource-based community at risk for substance abuse. This section also highlights some factors which may protect against substance abuse within the context of a resource-based community.

2.4.1 Boom & bust cycles and rural instability

The problems of instability associated with cyclical growth, stagnation and decline appear to be especially prevalent in communities which are resource-dependent, that is, in communities where "the economic, social and cultural conditions of community life are

intertwined with, and ultimately dependent upon, the production of a natural resource commodity or commodities” (Kraanich and Luloff, 1991). Since the inputs, (i.e., energy), and outputs, (i.e., coal, lumber.), of a resource-dependent community are bought and sold on the global market, changes in demand for the development of a particular resource, or the costs associated with extraction of it, can occur very rapidly due to changing global economic and political conditions. In addition, these communities may face instability as a result of environmental factors (i.e., wildfires, insect outbreaks) which affect the productivity of the natural resource base.

This instability comes with a number of social costs. In fact, residents who have experienced recurrent boom and bust cycles may “see little use in responding to changes, when past experience suggests that such changes are likely to be transitory.” This may cause a widespread sense of powerlessness, or give rise to apathetic local attitudes and pessimism about the community’s ability to solve local problems. Furthermore, boom and bust cycles may produce periods of high unemployment and underemployment (Kraanich and Luloff, 1991).

2.4.2 Boomtowns

As previously mentioned, one risk factor for community is “rapid changes in neighborhood populations” (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2005). A recent news headline, “Drilling demands grow: Need for trained workers tops 1970s boom” (Jaremko, 2005) suggests boomtown conditions have returned to many oil- and gas-rich communities across the province – conditions which often involve rapid population growth. Davenport and Davenport (1980) defined a ‘boomtown’ as “a community experiencing above average economic and population growth, which results in benefits for the community, e.g., increased employment opportunities, but which also places or results in strain on existing community and societal institutions, e.g., familial, educational, political, (and) economic.” The social impacts of boomtown conditions include: super inflation from the demands of large numbers of incoming people; demands for all types of services, including human services; and the Gillette Syndrome⁴ – increases in the incidence of many social problems (i.e., alcoholism, drug use, family violence, suicide, divorce, crime, and depression). In fact, Freudenburg (1981) noted that the size of a population influx into a rural community is one of the best predictors available of the amount of social disruption⁵ likely to be caused.

Davenport and Davenport (1980) also documented that a dramatic influx of workers into a town may lead to “boomtown bifurcation” or a “we-they” split between newcomers and long-time residents. The researchers found a number of contributing factors to this split, including: differences in values between the two groups, the avoidance of close personal contacts by the newcomers as a coping strategy for their nomadic lifestyle and also by the long time residents as a way to retain their community culture; the loss of status of

⁴ The Gillette Syndrome is named after a US boomtown, Gillette, Wyoming. The boomtown period of 1974 to 1978 in Gillette was marked by a 101% increase in admissions to the local health center and a 610% increase in admissions to the state mental hospital from the county, while the county’s population increased by 62% (Kohrs, 1974).

⁵ Early studies of boomtowns led to the formation of a ‘social disruption hypothesis.’ The hypothesis states that “boomtown communities enter a period of generalized crisis and loss of traditional routines and attitudes” (England and Albrecht, 1984).

women which undermines their ability to function as social integrators; and changes in the socioeconomic hierarchy of the community (newcomers may have higher incomes than long time residents and this may result in the long-time residents resenting the newcomers and thus avoiding them).

Michael Broadway, a sociologist who studies the impacts of meat-packing plants on communities, found that a similar ‘boomtown effect’ occurred when Tyson Foods opened its Lakeside Packers plant in Brooks, Alberta. The sudden influx of workers into Brooks contributed to housing shortages, increased crime, domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol related incidents and homelessness. Broadway pointed out that the influx of young (18-24 years of age) single males, the group at highest risk statistically for developing alcohol-related problems, put the community at special risk (Broadway, 1999).

Despite these negative social impacts, one recent longitudinal study (Smith et al., 2001) suggests “when boom-induced declines in well-being occur, they are consistently followed by a sharp rebound, with no evidence of lasting disruption.” Another recent study (Brown et al., 2005) concludes that, “we need to adjust our theories and vocabularies to account for a boom-bust-recovery cycle in place of the traditional notions of a boom-bust cycle.” Based on these two studies, some researchers are not convinced that economic booms have long-term negative impacts, but that communities can readjust after rapid growth in their economies and populations.

2.4.3 Rational underinvestment of human capital⁶

Based on a U.S. study, Slack and Jensen (2004) found that workers in extractive industries, especially those in agriculture and forestry/fishing (as opposed to mining), face higher rates of underemployment which includes discouraged workers, involuntary part-time workers, and the working poor. Freudenburg (1992) also found that high school dropouts working in extractive industries may earn more in the short term than better educated people in the community, so this often leads to the ‘rational underinvestment in human capital.’ Freudenburg and Gramling (1994) hypothesized that this underinvestment will, in turn, “lead to a reduced economic competitiveness in resource-dependent regions.” Alberta statistics suggest this ‘rational underinvestment in human capital’ phenomenon may be occurring in the province. In 2002/03, Alberta had the lowest high school graduation rate (66.5%) of all the provinces.⁷ High school dropout rates were especially high in rural and small town areas (Statistics Canada, 2005). Interestingly, research on workplace factors found that individuals with less education and a higher level of job dissatisfaction are more prone to workplace substance abuse (AADAC, 2003b).

⁶ ‘Human capital’ is the education, training, knowledge, and creativity held by members of the community that can improve the community’s ability to adapt to change and take advantage of opportunities (MacKendrick and Parkins, 2004).

⁷ Ontario is not included due to the province’s different grade structure.

2.4.4 Lack of community connectedness

Another community risk factor that has been identified in the literature is the lack of “connectedness” residents feel toward their community (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2005). In a recent study of Hinton (Kulig et al., 2005), residents generally perceived their community as “fragmented,” citing divisions such as: old-timer/newcomer, transferred to Hinton to work/raised in Hinton, environmentalist/industrialist, and ‘boss’/worker. This lack of community connectedness may be explained in terms of the high population turnover due to the ‘boom and bust’ economic periods, “where families often come and go without developing connections in the community” (Kulig et al., 2005).

2.4.5 Social stratification

As identified earlier in Section 2.3, “residents at or below poverty level” is one risk factor to substance abuse, thus a community’s social structure may leave residents with low incomes more vulnerable to substance abuse than other higher income residents. The analysis of the household income distribution in Hinton between 1996 and 2001 shows the emergence of two social classes within the town – those with high incomes and those with low incomes. Households earning \$10,000-\$19,999, and those earning over \$70,000 increased between 1996 and 2001, while households earning \$40,000-\$69,999 declined significantly (MacKendrick and Parkins, 2004). As such, income disparity appears to be increasing in Hinton.

Duncan and Lamborghini (1994) studied the impacts of income disparity (and the resulting social stratification which occurs) in a depressed Appalachian coal community. The authors described the community as “a rigidly stratified, two-class system of haves and have-nots.” The haves displayed conspicuous consumption, i.e., new cars, brand name clothes. Conversely, the have-nots experienced both the social side of isolation (live in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, were commonly discriminated against for being poor, have fewer positive role models and more destructive peer influences), and the resource side of isolation (have fewer contacts for obtaining jobs and less money for and influence over public goods).

Communities with greater disparity in wealth often have lower community well-being than communities with more equal distributions of wealth; even though the average income may be the same (Kusel, 1996). Ken Wilkinson (1991) found that income inequality was one deterrent to a community’s ability to find common ground that would enable them to work together to improve their own well-being. And, according to Auerbach and Belous (1998), “inequality is highly correlated with increased mortality rate and poor health among the poor, as well as increased property crime and violence.”

2.4.6 Other risk factors

Other contributors to the growing prevalence of substance abuse in rural communities include a lack of access to treatment programs, the reluctance of substance abusers to seek available treatment due to the stigma associated with it, and an increase in drug trafficking (Hutchison and Blakely, 2003).

2.4.7 Protective factors of substance abuse within a community

Alcohol and drug problems do not occur in isolation, but affect all aspects of Albertans' lives, including family, social relationships, academic performance and public safety. According to AADAC's new drug strategy, "Responding to these (substance abuse) problems involves more than dealing with presenting medical and behavioural symptoms; it also requires attention to issues like housing, employment, child rearing and the development of social supports" (AADAC, 2005c). A recent stakeholder survey suggests other effective ways to address drug abuse in local communities: recreation programs, drug education programs, peer mentoring programs, and a comprehensive drug strategy (Wild, 2004).

2.5 Risk and protective factors: The workplace

As indicated by the earlier listing of risk factors, alcohol and drug abuse among workers can have a multitude of origins, however, second to family, the workplace is a primary social environment and thus has a large potential to "contribute to the development of maladaptive uses of alcohol" (Straus, 1976).

2.5.1 Costs of substance use in the Alberta workplace

Research compiled by Dr. Harold Hoffman on the behalf of AADAC shows that 11.8% of surveyed Alberta workers are current drug users (McCallum, 2005). Alcohol and drug use costs Alberta business and industry more than \$400 million every year in lost productivity. The breakdown of these costs includes: risk of injury, depression, stress, reduced morale, increased absenteeism, and higher workers' compensation and insurance costs (AADAC, 2005d).

2.5.2 Working conditions which may increase alcohol and drug abuse

The International Labour Office (2003) identified a number of working conditions which may promote or increase alcohol and drug abuse: extreme safety risks, shift or night work, work in remote locations, travel away from home, changes in tasks or speed of handling machines, role conflicts, workload (either too much – burnout, or too little – rust out), unequal rewards, job stress, and job insecurity (i.e., frequent layoffs). Lehman and Bennett (2002) identified that "lack of job control" and "low organization bonding" also contribute to increased substance use/abuse. Organizational bonding refers to "the extent that employees feel satisfied with their jobs, committed to the organization and its goals, and perceive support from management."

Some workers may feel low organizational bonding if they work for an 'absentee owner.' The term 'absentee owner' refers to a situation where an outside owner controls resource extraction. Often times, profits frequently leave the community and local development is usually limited to extractive infrastructure. Peluso et al. (1994) explain, "Absentee owners have little incentive to invest in jobs or amenities; the owners prioritize the well-being of the company, not the local community." This may result in workers feeling undervalued. The following is a quote (taken from the study by Peluso et al., 1994) by a frustrated employee who works for an absentee owner: "We're just the pawns in the hands of corporations – they don't care about us – you can be sure they won't lose money. All they care about is their bonus. All they care about is making money."

2.5.3 Theories of workplace substance abuse

A large amount of literature exists on the linkages between substance use and abuse and the workplace. Researchers have discovered substance use is more prevalent in occupations involving risk (e.g., machinery use, toxic chemicals), mobility (truck driving), and shift work (Lehman et al., 2003). In a 2002 study, AADAC found the industries in Alberta with the highest reported rate of alcohol use were Utilities (88%), Forestry/Mining (88%), Public Administration (87%), and Upstream Oil and Gas (85%). Employees were most likely to report drug use in the Construction, and Manufacturing/Processing industries (AADAC, 2003).⁸

What is it about some occupations that predispose workers to at-risk drinking? Based on the research of others, Conrad et al. (1999) have summarized three general theories around this question:

(1) The exposure to occupational hazards in the workplace may cause stress for the worker who may turn to alcohol to relieve this tension. In fact, Crum (1995) found workers engaged in high strain jobs characterized by high physical demands and low control, had more than twice the risk of developing alcohol dependence and abuse than workers in low strain jobs.

(2) Workplace environment may promote drinking due to social norms, freedom from supervision, availability of alcohol, and/or collusion by colleagues. For example, coworkers may actually be supporting workplace substance abuse through “enabling” or “neutralizing deviance.” This process occurs when coworkers “justify, rationalize, support, or tolerate deviant behaviours of coworkers” by “actively covering for them” or by “ignoring problems” (Lehman et al., 2003).

(3) At risk drinking may predate entry into occupations marked by hazardous exposures. For example, it is possible that individuals with risk-taking personalities are drawn to risky jobs characterized by occupational hazard exposures. These same individuals may be predisposed to at-risk drinking.

2.5.4 Drinking subcultures

Drinking subcultures are defined as “naturally occurring groups that share a set of understanding about alcohol use in the workplace, including values and expectations regarding drinking behaviour.” In some workplaces, these subcultures emerge as a result of such factors as group solidarity, job identity, and age group (Ames and Janes, 1992). Cosper (1979) noted, “In certain occupational subcultures, drinking, rather than being viewed as pathological, may be seen as communicative behaviour symbolizing social solidarity in the situation, wealth, masculinity, identity, or superiority over the group.”

⁸ Due to the small number of Alberta employees that were surveyed in Forestry/Mining and Upstream Oil and Gas, and the small number of employees who answered the questions and reported using drugs, AADAC researchers could not be statistically confident that the percentages were representative of the industry overall due to high sampling variability and hence, the percentages were suppressed.

2.5.5 Workplace policy and unions

All workplaces have a set of rules, or norms, related to appropriate behaviour. These rules are often in the form of formal policy and regulations. Although these written rules are used as standards of behaviour, sometimes “cultural factors” within the workplace override them (Ames and Janes, 1992). For example, Ames and Janes’s (1992) study of workers at a large durable goods manufacturing plant found that although the plant had formal regulations on drinking, these regulations were extremely difficult to enforce within the organizational culture of the industry. The union’s protection of workers’ rights through grievance procedures, as well as management’s focus on meeting production targets, were at odds with the enforcement of the alcohol policy which threatened workers’ wages or disrupted the assembly line. Therefore, the “common knowledge” that alcohol policy was seldom enforced resulted in “permissive drinking norms.”

2.5.6 Shift work

“Toxic work schedules,” or shift work, may be another workplace stressor contributing substance use/abuse. Shift work has been linked to mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression and may consequently lead to the adoption or worsening of unhealthy behaviours (i.e., smoking, heavy drinking, and poor eating habits). Furthermore, non-standard work hours may limit a worker’s participation in leisure time and family activities, this, in turn, may cause family strain (Shields, 2003).

2.5.7 Global factors

As discussed earlier, the price of industrial inputs (i.e., natural gas) and outputs (i.e., lumber) within resource dependent communities are largely dictated by both the global economic market and the global political climate. As such, workers within these industries are vulnerable to global fluctuations.

Factors such as the rising Canadian dollar, rising energy costs, declining demand for newsprint, heavy duties on lumber exports to the United States, and increasing competition from emerging pulp and paper producers in Asia and South America (where trees grow quicker and wages are lower) have led to mill closures in New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, and soon, in Saskatchewan. Although no mills have been closed in Alberta as of yet, in March 2006 West Fraser Mills in Hinton announced it will close one of its pulp machines and its wood room at the end of the year. As a result, 100 of the mill’s 470 employees will be laid off (CBC, 2006).

As firms restructure, outsource, and change production processes due to globalization, worker powerlessness may increase and result in new “illnesses of restructuring.” These illnesses may include a company: decreasing the amount of occupational health and safety expenditures; asking its workers to work longer hours under the threat of plant shutdowns or relocation; or a switch from union- to contractor-based employment (Schulman and Slesinger, 2004). One study of the Swedish mining industry found more frequent and severe injuries among contract workers as compared to mining company employees (Blank, 1995). Similarly, at a recent one-day summit in British Columbia, the

union leader of Steelworkers of America claimed the deregulation of the B.C.'s forest industry and the increase in the number of small, independent contractors in the industry over the past few years has contributed to the increase in deaths and injuries (Edmonton Journal, 2005). This may be an interesting area to study since the number of contract-based jobs is on the rise in Alberta. In fact, it is projected that within five years, 25% of the Alberta workforce will consist of "contingent" workers or independent contractors (Sankey, 2005).

2.5.8 Protective factors of substance abuse within the workplace

The focus on protective factors at work is particularly important in situations in which it is not possible to alter risk factors directly. This may especially hold true for work settings where it may be impossible to alter risk factors directly such as outdoor climate conditions (Snow et al., 2003).

Protective factors at work include social integration (workplace social support, job involvement, and the absence of alienation⁹ at work), and organizational wellness (work culture that supports healthy lifestyles, i.e., emphasizes employee involvement, family-friendly policies that promote work-life balance, peer support and a positive flow of communication) (Lehman et al., 2003). Job satisfaction, faith in management, and organizational commitment have also been found to be inversely related to on-the-job substance abuse among employees (Lehman and Bennett, 2002).

Roman and Baker (2002) identified Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) as having "potential for addressing alcohol and drug issues effectively through specific mechanisms of identification, referral, treatment and follow up." The researchers stressed that with any substance abuse treatment program, follow up is of the greatest importance.

Some Alberta companies are implementing pre-hire and random drug testing as a way to address substance abuse among potential and current employees. In 2002, 8% of 755 surveyed employers in Alberta had alcohol or drug testing programs, this compares to only 1% in 1992 (AADAC, 2003c). However, random drug testing in Alberta's oil patch is believed to be contributing to the trend of "harsher" drug use among workers because harsher drugs such as cocaine and crystal methamphetamine dissipate more quickly from the body than marijuana and are therefore less detectable (CBC, 2005).

Although drug testing may deter a worker from abusing substances, Shain and Suurvali (2002) have referred to workplace drug testing as a "quick but ineffective fix." Instead, the researchers suggest "constructive or caring confrontation" as a way to address workplace substance abuse. Constructive confrontation involves a meeting between the supervisor and the employee with a union representative present. The meeting proceeds with presentation to the employee of documented evidence of performance problems, coupled closely with assurances of the employer's willingness to suspend disciplinary steps if the employee will follow prescribed steps to deal with the substance abuse problem (Roman and Baker, 2002).

⁹ Alienation refers to the feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness.

Team-oriented training has also been noted as an effective tool in substance abuse prevention. Team-oriented training is described as “a psychosocial approach that emphasizes team responsibility for alcohol and drug use, including the reduction of tolerance and enabling; team communication; and the benefits of getting help for problems (as opposed to getting caught)” (Lehman et al., 2003).

3.0 STUDY SITE

This section provides context and background to current conditions within the Town of Hinton, and identifies several historical developments that are germane to this study.

3.1 Location

Hinton is located approximately 285 km west of Edmonton on Highway #16. It is situated less than 40 km from the eastern gate of Jasper National Park, at the doorstep of the Rocky Mountains. Thus, Hinton’s soubriquet was for many years “Gateway to the Rockies,” and has recently changed to “Rugged Splendour.”

3.2 Population

Hinton’s population has remained steady for almost 20 years, with a population in 1986 of just under 10,000 residents. The last Census of Canada in 2001 reported the town population to be 9,405, but recent estimates put the population in 2006 at approximately 10,500. This increase of approximately 1,000 new residents in the past five years signifies one of the dramatic social changes resulting from boomtown conditions within the region and throughout Alberta. Figure 2 shows the population of Hinton and Foothills Model Forest Jurisdictions from 1961-2001.

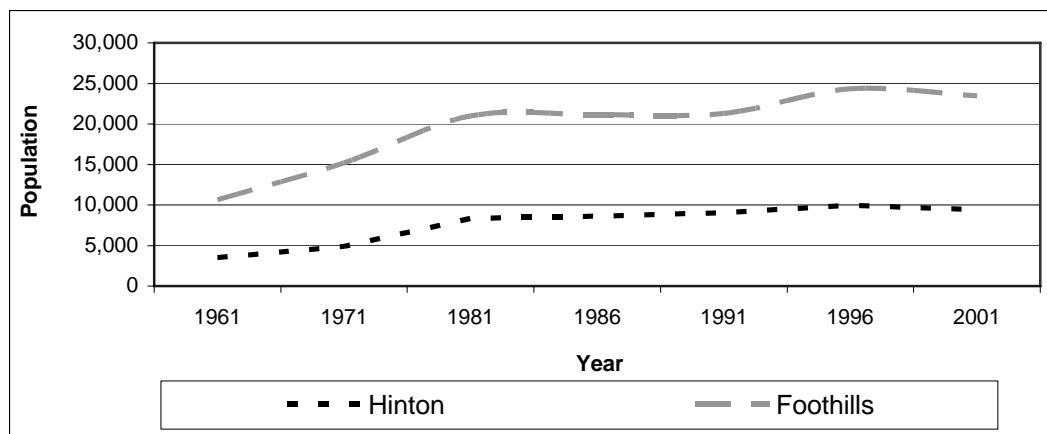


Figure 2. Population, Foothills Model Forest jurisdictions, 1961-2001

3.3 Hinton historically

There are several important aspects of Hinton’s history that are fundamental to understanding its contemporary social and economic conditions. The first aspect relates to Hinton’s history as a migratory destination for the former coal town residents of the Alberta Coal Branch. During the early part of the 20th Century, large coal towns such as Cadomin, Mountain Park, and Pocahontas were host communities to coal companies with mining rights in the area. In the early days of the Coal Branch, the miners lived out their

existence in little more than bunk houses and work camps with scant opportunities for entertainment. Given these conditions, one historian noted that men would sit “around tables in their bunkhouses talking, smoking, drinking, and gambling while others lounged or slept in the bunks which were set against the walls” (den Otter, 1982, p.147). During this time, the greatest problem facing the police was alcohol consumption, followed by theft, robbery, and prostitution. These so-called Bonanza towns later gave way to more stable communities as workers brought families and established local institutions such as schools and churches.

Hinton started to grow more dramatically as a regional host community for the Coal Branch after mechanization within the mines caused massive lay-offs and as the transportation infrastructure allowed for commuting to the mines from Hinton. Many of those employed in the Coal Branch towns chose to live in this growing town on the main highway and rail line. Today, the vast majority of miners are bused in or drive in to the mines from their homes in Hinton.

The dramatic dislocations of family and community resulting from structural adjustments in the mining industry are not only an artifact of early Hinton history; these economic shocks continue to resonate with many of the contemporary challenges facing Hinton today. In the late 1990s, a drop in global coal prices caused the closure of coal mines across the region. This situation persisted for several years until 2003 when coal prices rebounded and the mines came back into operation. This phenomenon is referred to by some analysts as ‘flickering’ (Freudenburg and Wilson, 2002) and it represents a significant challenge for communities that are highly exposed to price fluctuations within the global market economy. The on-again off-again production cycles of modern industrial economies created challenges for the Coal Branch communities of Alberta during the early 1900s as it does for modern resource-based communities such as Hinton. In 2006, Elk Valley Coal has 336 employees with 20 more employees to be added within the next few months (Town of Hinton, 2006).

A second important aspect of Hinton’s history relates to the expansion of forest industry activity in the region. In 1951, North Western Pulp & Power signed the first Forest Management Agreement in Alberta and by 1957, the first pulp mill in Alberta was completed and bales of Hi Brite Pulp were being shipped. This mill provided stable employment for Hinton residents and a second major industrial activity for the small community. By 1993, a state-of-the-art sawmill was added to the forest operations, producing 220 million board feet per year. This second mill provided more stable employment within the community and reinforced the status and culture of Hinton as a forest community.

Not unlike the flickering character of the global coal economy, the forest products industry is also subject to price fluctuations and global competition that has resulted in some recent instability within the local forest industry. Over the last few years, the Canadian forest industry has struggled to survive during a period of difficult economic conditions. The combined effects from the softwood lumber dispute with the United States, the high price of the Canadian dollar, higher energy costs, and increasing global

competition for forest products has resulted in what some analysis have dubbed “the perfect storm” within the industry. Since January 2003, the industry has lost almost 15,000 workers nationally (NRCAN, 2006a). Although the local forest industry has weathered many cycles within the sector and has provided stable employment conditions for almost 50 years, the mills were recently sold to West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd. In March 2006, West Fraser announced they would be closing one of two pulp lines in Hinton and would be trimming 100 jobs from their workforce. Hinton’s pulp and lumber mills currently employ approximately 817 people (Town of Hinton, 2006).

A third development in Hinton’s history is more recent, immediate and dramatic in its effects on the community. This development relates to global demands for energy resources and the expansion of the oil and gas sector within Alberta. According to the 2001 Census, the oil and gas sector in Hinton was nothing more than a small player amongst the larger mining and forestry firms. Using base employment calculations from the census, almost 60% of employment was in the forest sector, 20% was in mining, and remarkably there was no recorded employment in the energy sector (NRCAN, 2006b). As a result of the energy boom, these employment conditions have changed dramatically in the last 5 years.

3.4 Hinton today

In the 5-year period since 2001, the energy industry is now arguably the major economic driver within the region. Many new workers are taking up permanent residence within the community and an even greater number of workers are living in temporary accommodations within and around the town. By one estimate, “there are 50 drilling rigs working in the Hinton Forest Management Area with 2,500-3,000 workers in camps. Additional workers are residing in hotel accommodations, sharing rental properties, sharing company owned houses or have relocated their families to Hinton” (Town of Hinton, 2006). Estimates of the number of temporary workers tend to vary and some have estimated the number to be closer to 9,000, which represents almost a doubling of the local residential population.

This expansion in the energy industry is reflective of booming economic conditions across the province as well. According to Alberta Human Resources and Employment (2005), the mining and oil and gas industry group grew by almost 15% in 2005. This translates into employment gains of approximate 16,000 people in a single year. Similarly, provincial unemployment rates have dropped from a high of 5.3% in 2002 to 3.9% in 2005. Within the Alberta economic region that includes the Hinton area, unemployment rates were 3.6% in January 2004 and more recent numbers from December 2004 and January 2005 were suppressed because the number of people unemployed was below 1,500, signaling a labour shortage in the area. These provincial economic numbers provide a sense of the large economic boom in which Hinton is embedded. Employment opportunities in Hinton are plentiful (see Figure 3) and most people expect this boom cycle within the energy sector to last for approximately 10 years. As a reflection of this growing economic activity, housing prices are also much higher with the average selling price in 2005 at \$210,000. This represents a \$40,000 increase from one year earlier.

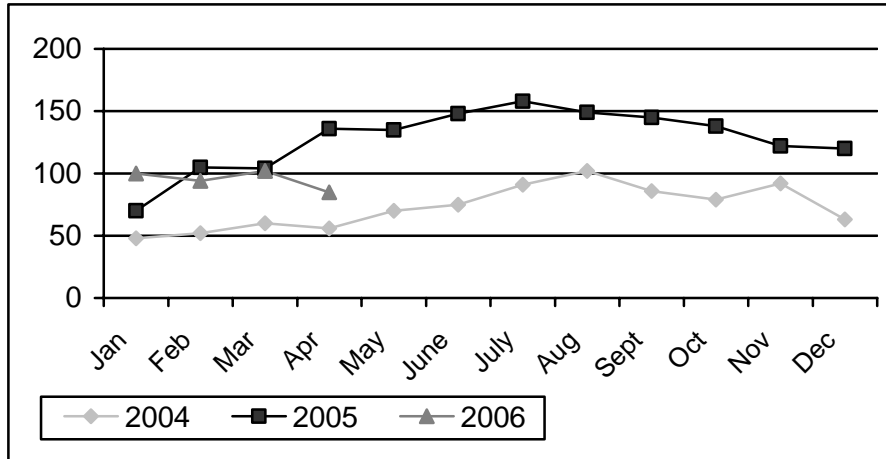


Figure 3. Regional employment postings, Hinton, 2004, 2005, and 2006

In addition to this overview of mining, forestry, and the oil and gas industries within the Hinton region, several other features of the community are important to address within the context of this study.

3.5 Other features of Hinton

To develop a greater understanding of the study site’s context, it is necessary to highlight a number of Hinton’s other features. First, Hinton is an aging community. Figure 4 reports the percent change in age groups from 1981 to 2001 with a large increase of almost 400% in the number of residents within the 65-74 age bracket. Whereas early Hinton history was marked by younger men working in extractive industries, these demographic shifts suggest a movement toward lifelong residence and families that reside within the community for multiple generations.¹⁰

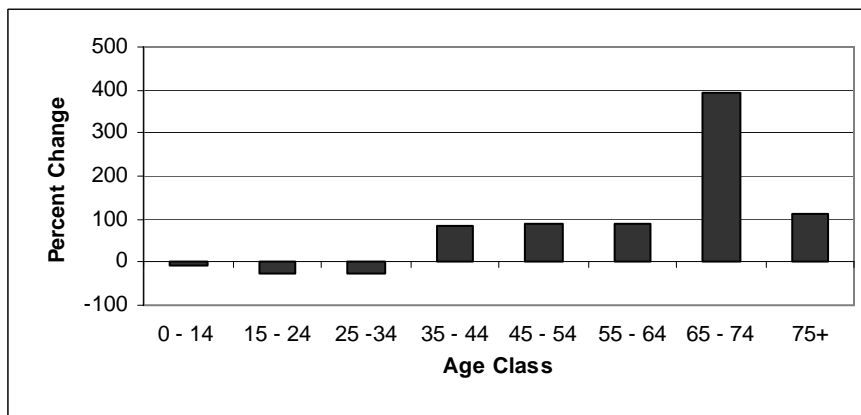


Figure 4. Percent change in age groups, Hinton, 1981-2001

Second, Hinton is a community with some strong and persistent divisions. Other researchers have noted these divisions in some detail (Parkins and Beckley, 2001; Kulig et al., 2005), but a brief review will include some mention of the geographic divisions

¹⁰ Interviews with people in the Health sector indicate that the community is getting younger again, with 100 more births in 2005 than in 2004.

that separate the ‘hill’ and the ‘valley’ as well as the economic divisions that separate the low income earners with high income earners. Figure 5 reports the distribution of household incomes for the 1996 and 2001 census years. One can observe from this figure a kind of hollowing out of the middle class where more families are contained within the tails of the distribution in 2001 than was the case in 1996.

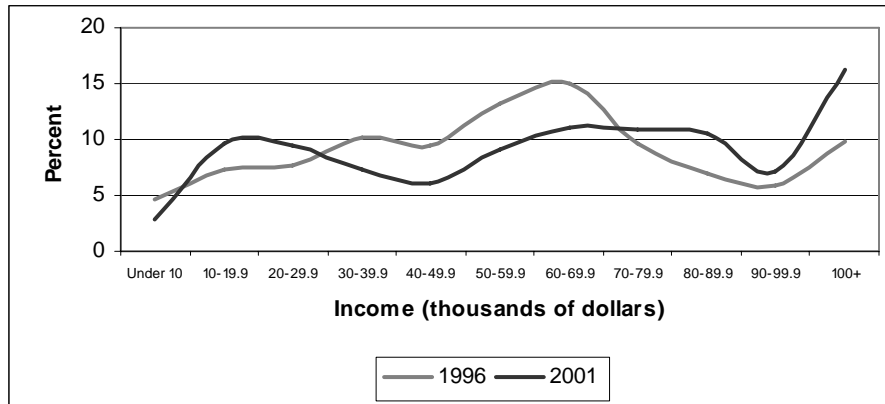


Figure 5. Household income distribution, Hinton, 1996 and 2001

In many ways, Hinton is a classic, resource-based community with features that are common with many other rural and resource-based communities in Canada. These include: (1) Fordist production principles that are associated with large corporations, unionized labour, and capital intensive production; (2) a maturing community with numerous amenities and an aging population; (3) a bimodal income distribution with high-paying resource industry jobs contrasted with lower wage service sector jobs; and (4) a history and a culture of hard work and independence that tends to attract certain types of individuals and lifestyles.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODS

In this section we discuss the research and analysis methods employed in this study. We also provide a description of the research participants, outline the sources of secondary data, and highlight the comparison communities included within this study.

4.1 Qualitative social research methods

Qualitative social research methods are not commonly used within the fields of natural resource management and environmental sciences. When such methods are used (such as personal interviews, observations, or focus groups), they are often thought to result in preliminary information or in data that is in some way inferior to quantitative data. Such views tend to underestimate the value of qualitative research and ignore the potential for such methods to provide robust and critical insights into social phenomena that are often highly complex and contradictory. According to one researcher:

The key objective of qualitative social research is to explore, unravel and explain the complexity of different social worlds... There is a need not only to represent the social world that has been researched, but also to represent it in a way which both remains grounded in the accounts of

research participants and explains its subtleties and its complexities (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 287).

The work in this report comes, in part, from the interpretive field of sociology, where researchers generally acknowledge the contested nature of the objective world and the facts that are gathered to understand social phenomena. This does not mean that facts and evidence are not crucial to our analysis, but this interpretive approach acknowledges that generalizations and the causal ordering of factors and events are not well understood and do not lend themselves well to quantitative research. The issue of substance abuse in rural settings is one such topic that lends itself well to qualitative methods as a way of understanding the interactions and contradictory forces that are contributing to this issue.

4.2 Ethics approval

Ethics approval for research with human subjects was requested from the Community Research Ethics Board of Alberta (CREBA) and approval was granted on June 27, 2005 (Protocol #00506).

4.3 The personal interview

The primary mode of social inquiry in this study was in-depth personal interviews ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. In total, 51 face-to-face interviews and 9 telephone interviews were conducted over a 12-month period from May 2005 to May 2006. Overall, we held discussions with 123 individuals for this study. During the early part of this study, a series of initial interviews was conducted with key informants in the Hinton area (May and June of 2005). After that period, changes in research staff resulted in a delay of fieldwork for approximately 6 months. Fieldwork resumed again in January 2006, with the majority of interviews taking place over a three month period. Table 1 provides the number of interviews and a breakdown by the mode in which they were conducted.

Table 1. Total number of interviews and mode in which they were conducted

Number	Type
37	Face-to-face interviews (one interviewee)
6	Face-to-face group interviews (two interviewees)
4	Face-to-face group interviews (three interviewees)
1	Face-to-face group interview (six interviewees)
1	Face-to-face group interview (seven interviewees)
2	Group discussions with high school students (1 st group: 17students, 2 nd group: 23 students)
7	Telephone interviews
2	Telephone conversations and answers by email

Conducting face-to-face interviews was the most preferred method of data collection (for the Interview Schedule, see Section 8.1). Because we tried to make the interviews as convenient as possible for the interviewees, the number of interviewees for the face-to-face interviews ranged from one to seven. Notes were taken for all face-to-face interviews, but 6 interviews were not tape-recorded due to either an interviewee's refusal or tape-recording malfunction.

Conducting one-on-one interviews with high school students was deemed impractical based on students' timetables and possible sensitivities to the issue. Instead, we decided that the most effective way to collect data from high school students was through group discussion. We met with each class for about 1 hour and 10 minutes. For the first 20 minutes of the class we delivered a Power Point presentation informing the students about the study. To get the students warmed up to the issue, we tried to make the presentation as interactive as possible. Following the presentation, we distributed a two-question handout and asked the students to brainstorm in groups of 2-4 and record their answers. We asked the students the following two questions: 1) Why do you think some people in Hinton abuse alcohol or drugs?, and 2) What do you think people in Hinton can do to help solve the substance abuse issue? After 20-25 minutes of small-group brainstorming, we asked each group to read their answers aloud and a whole class discussion ensued. Although these whole-class discussions were not tape-recorded, the students' written answers were collected. Notes were also taken on the whiteboard during the whole-class discussion. We then took a digital photo of the answers on the whiteboard so that we could later analyze what was said during the whole-class discussion.

Phone interviews were employed as a method of data collection when scheduling a face-to-face interview was not possible. For the phone interviews, notes were taken but the interviews were not tape-recorded. Most phone interviews were conducted with people working for oil and gas companies in the Hinton region and were, on average, 20-25 minutes in length.

A combination of a brief phone conversation and email was used to collect data when the research participant was located outside of Hinton (i.e., representatives of oil and gas companies with head offices in Calgary) and had to gather the information requested from a number of representatives within their companies.

4.4 Description of research participants

The following section provides a description of the research participants according to several demographic variables.

Sex

Female: 63

Male: 60

Length of Community Residence

< 5 years: 17

5-9 years: 18

10-19 years: 48

20 years and >: 25

Do not live in community: 15

Position in Community

Health and Human Services: 38
Service sector: 5
Natural Resources (Forestry, Mining, Oil and Gas): 17
Justice: 6
Residents on income support: 6
Residents recovering from a substance addiction: 4
Senior citizens: 3
High school students: 40
Religious: 2
Other: 2

Total number of interviewees: 123

4.5 Coding and analysis of qualitative data

Coding and analysis of qualitative data involves a process of organizing information into categories or themes that allow the researcher to cluster similar ideas together and gain insights from multiple points of view on a particular topic. This study involved a process of coding much like the three stages identified by Strauss (1987): (1) open coding – where researchers read the data and are open to establishing new thematic areas; (2) axial coding – where a second pass through the data provides deeper insights into the themes that were established during the open coding process; and (3) selective coding – where specific cases or illustrations are drawn out of the data for the purpose of representing the insights and complexities of a particular theme in summary fashion. Selective coding often derives the content for project reports such as this one.

To assist in coding and analyzing the data from personal interviews, all electronic files were entered into the qualitative software program NVivo Version 2, where open coding was undertaken and where thematic reports were generated for further analysis. See Section 8.2 for an overview of the nodes.

4.6 Secondary data

In addition to personal interviews, researchers spent considerable time investigating sources of secondary data to establish trend information within the community that might be associated with substance abuse issues. Although many sources of information were identified, collecting meaningful and accurate information proved to be difficult. This experience is consistent with other researchers who have identified a gap in data available with regard to substance abuse in Alberta (Wild, 2004). Agencies who were contacted for information include:

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE)
Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC)
Town of Hinton, Department of Economic Development

Hinton Food Bank
Hinton Regional Employment Centre (HREC)
Elk Valley Coal
West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd.
Child and Family Services, Hinton
West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service (WYARS)
Hinton Ambulance Ltd.
Mental Health Clinic, Aspen Regional Health Authority

4.6.1 Comparison communities

To enhance the analysis of Hinton’s secondary data, secondary data for a number of Alberta communities were collected and analyzed. We also used the secondary data from these ‘comparison communities’ to explore whether or not resource-based communities are any more vulnerable to substance abuse than farming communities. We chose two types of comparison communities for this study: (1) resource-based communities (those dependent on forestry, mining, and oil and gas); and (2) agricultural-based communities (those dependent on agriculture).

Communities with a proportion of employment dependent on Mining, Forestry, Energy; or Energy greater than 50% are referred to as resource-based or resource-dependent communities. Likewise, communities with a proportion of employment dependent on Agriculture greater than 50% are referred to as agriculture-dependent communities. And communities with a proportion of employment dependent on agriculture that is greater than 20% but less than 50% are still, for the purposes of this study, referred to as agricultural communities.

Table 2 presents the comparison communities that were chosen for this study and the proportion of their employment dependent on (1) Mining Forestry, Energy; (2) Energy; and (3) Agriculture (primary). Note: The proportion of employment dependent on agriculture is based on the county each community is located in because farming operations are located in the area outside the town or city.

Table 2. Proportion of employment in Mining, Forestry, Energy and Agriculture, Hinton and comparison communities, 2001

Community	Mining, Forestry, Energy	Energy	Agriculture - primary
Hinton (Yellowhead County)	79.13	n/a	0 (9)*
Athabasca (Athabasca County)	n/a	n/a	0 (20)
Barrhead (Barrhead County)	n/a	n/a	0 (74)
Camrose (Camrose County)	n/a	n/a	3 (72)
Drayton Valley (Brazeau County)	93.61	80.86	0 (14)
Edson (Yellowhead County)	78.9	36.96	0 (9)
Reg. Mun. of Wood Buffalo**	82.4	79.62	0
High River (M.D. of Foothills)	n/a	n/a	2 (23)
Lethbridge (Lethbridge County)	n/a	n/a	1 (89)
Lloydminster, (Vermilion R. County)	77.73	77.73	2
Red Deer (Red Deer County)	n/a	49.74	0 (48)
St. Paul (St. Paul County)	n/a	n/a	0 (41)
Stettler (Stettler County)	n/a	n/a	0 (69)
Wainwright (Wainwright County)	n/a	n/a	6 (40)
Wetaskiwin (Wetaskiwin County)	n/a	n/a	0 (63)
Whitecourt (Woodlands County)	88.86	41.47	0 (7)

*The number in brackets refers to the proportion of employment in primary agriculture for the community's corresponding county.

**This includes the City of Fort McMurray, the rural service area, as well as the shadow population.

Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada

The following comparison communities are resource-dependent: Hinton, Drayton Valley, Edson, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Lloydminster, and Whitecourt. The remaining comparison communities are located in counties which have varying levels of employment dependent on agriculture. The communities whose employment is most strongly associated with agriculture (and who are agriculture-dependent) include: Barrhead, Camrose, Lethbridge, Stettler and Wetaskiwin. Other communities that rely on agriculture (though to a lesser extent), include: Athabasca, High River, St. Paul, and Wainwright. The City of Red Deer and its county rely on both Energy and Agriculture.

Within the secondary data tables of this report (see page x for a list of tables), each community is labeled as either R, which means resource-based; A, which means

agriculture-based; or E, which means energy-based. After the R, A, or E, there is a number. This number represents the proportion of the community's employment dependent on those sectors. For example, Hinton (R79) means that Hinton is a resource-based community and 79% of its employment is dependent on the resource sector.

It is important to note that our selection of comparison communities also was dependent on other specific factors, including: the number of communities each data supplying agency said they could supply data on (due to time constraints); and the location of AADAC offices. We also tried to choose communities with populations similar to Hinton (around 10,000 or less), or communities that are particularly resource-based (e.g., Fort McMurray), or particularly agriculture-based (e.g., Lethbridge). In addition, not all data collected are for the same time period. For example, due to changes in the way AADAC collects its client data, the only comparable data available are for the years 2003/04-2005/06, whereas data from the Employee and Family Assistance Programs at Elk Valley Coal and West Fraser Mill Ltd. are available from 1995-2005.

4.6.2 Population data

The population data for this study is based on two sources: Alberta Municipal Affairs (the official population lists) and AlbertaFirst.com (the community profiles section of the website). See Section 8.3 (Table 26) for the population statistics used in this study.

All secondary data tables, with the exception of Table 25, are based on population statistics for the entire population. Table 25, however, uses population statistics for persons 15 years and older because both data points are from Census 2001. Although using more streamlined population statistics (15 years and older), would be ideal when calculating measures such as the number of liquor licences per thousand population, at the time this study was undertaken, this particular population data (number of persons 15 years and older for each community for the years 2000-2005) was not readily available.

5.0 RESULTS

This section brings together both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the abuse of alcohol and drugs in Hinton and other Alberta communities.

The first part of the results section will focus on the following areas: extent of substance abuse in Hinton, substance abuse trends, profiles of people involved in substance abuse, types of substances abused, impacts of substance abuse, and contributing factors to substance abuse. Although the Town of Hinton identified the rise in contractor-based and non-union employment in Hinton as a community threat, throughout the interviews, research participants placed less focus on this issue. Instead, the current oil and gas boom and its impacts on residents dominated conversation in many of the interviews. As such, the second part of the results section will look at how the current economic boom and the introduction of a new sector – oil and gas – are impacting the community. The last part of the results section will focus on solutions to substance abuse and barriers to solutions.

5.1 Structure of the results section

The results section of the report presents data collected during the 51 face-to-face consultations and 9 telephone interviews. Embedded within these interview data are tables of relevant secondary data. The purpose of including both interview data and data from secondary sources is to provide a rich and more comprehensive picture of substance abuse in Hinton. To enhance the analysis of the secondary data, we have also included secondary data for a number of Alberta communities or comparison communities. By including two types of communities (resource-based and agriculture-based) we aim to explore whether or not resourced-based communities show higher levels of substance use/abuse than agricultural communities. Due to changes in the way data are collected and time constraints, not all tables contain the same comparison communities or time periods. On the whole, interview data drives the composition of the report and the secondary data provide further context and supporting information.

5.2 Defining substance abuse¹¹

The greater part of this study focuses on substance abuse. But what exactly do we mean by the term ‘substance abuse’? And, more importantly, what does the term ‘substance abuse’ mean to research participants? To provide context for the study, this section presents a formal definition of substance abuse, as well as interviewees’ definitions of substance abuse.

A frequently cited definition of substance abuse comes from fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2000) issued by the American Psychiatric Association. This manual describes substance abuse as:

A maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

- Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home (e.g., repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions or expulsions from school; neglect of children or household)
- Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (e.g., driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired by substance use)
- Recurrent substance-related legal problems (e.g., arrests for substance-related disorderly conduct)
- Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance (e.g., arguments with spouse about consequences of intoxication, physical fights)

¹¹ For the scope of this project, the term ‘substances’ encompasses alcohol and drugs – both legal drugs like prescription medicines and illegal drugs such as cocaine. Although a few interviewees said that gambling is also a problem in Hinton, gambling is not discussed in this report.

Because research participants may define the term substance abuse differently than the American Psychiatric Association, we asked the participants to describe substance abuse in their own words. Interviewees' definitions of substance abuse were surprisingly quite similar and captured a lot of what is contained in the formal definition. Numerous interviewees defined it as "something that moves from them being able to control it to it starting to control them." Others described substance abuse as "the inability to function in everyday life without some use of alcohol or drugs." Additional interviewee definitions of substance abuse include:

Once you get to where it becomes a need, not just in social situations, but you need it to function. One thing leads to another. If you can't socialize without smoking a joint, that's a problem.

Any abuse that's going to affect your ability to carry on with your life, to hold down a job, to do what life has intended you to do: have a house, have a relationship, have a good job, and anything that will step in the way of that then that becomes an issue.

All persons interviewed easily identified with the term substance abuse, with each person offering a slightly different shade of meaning. When asked, "Based on your definition, do you think substance abuse is an issue in Hinton?" All interviewees said "yes." According to interviewees, substance abuse is and "always has been" an issue in Hinton.

5.3 Substance abuse trends in Hinton

"Has substance abuse been increasing, decreasing, or staying about the same over the last 50 years? The last decade?" This section provides insight into Hinton's substance abuse trends by exploring the major themes which have emerged from the interview and secondary data.

5.3.1 Substance abuse trends: Interview data

Below describes substance abuse trends in Hinton historically and over the last 10 years.

A historical perspective

Substance abuse in Hinton is a significant issue, though it is not a new issue. A number of residents remember the abuse of alcohol and drugs as early as the 1960s. According to one long time resident, "We're into the second and third generation of that," with 'that' being substance abuse and family dysfunction.

A woman who arrived in Hinton in 1960 recalls an early memory of substance abuse:

Actually alcohol and gambling was the big thing in the 60s. Gambling was pretty bad. But when my kids were going to school in the 60s, the drugs were in there already, not when they went to the Mountain View school, when they went to grade 7 they were with the Grade 12s, there were drugs... marijuana, LSD...

Alcohol, gambling and drugs were part of the community almost fifty years ago and according to other residents, were present in the 70s, 80s, and 90s as well. A man who arrived by train in Hinton in 1980 recalls a significant amount of drinking and partying. He describes the community at that time:

The average age in this town was 27 years old back then – very young. And it didn't matter where you went, there was a party here. Every night of the week – it didn't matter if it was a Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, it didn't matter, whatever, there was a party. The bars were packed.

According to several members of the community, the situation in Hinton today is similar to the situation in the 1980s – “the bars are packed.” In fact, when we asked the same man who got off the train 26 years ago, “Has the level of substance abuse changed throughout time?” he replied:

No, there's still lots of drugs here. Lots of drugs, lots of drugs, lots of partying. I don't know, just, it's a small town, it's just a community right? But you know you gotta drive so far to get somewhere else so everybody just parties here and just and just crazy... lots of money, hey, lots of money. Frig o' mighty, this is probably one of the richest towns per capita in Canada. Like frig, we've got a pulp mill, and we had three coal mines here and now gas and oil is booming. It's just crazy, crazy, crazy...

As illustrated by the quotes above, alcohol and drug abuse has been – and is still today – a concern in Hinton. The following section provides a more recent snapshot of substance abuse trends in Hinton.

A look at the past 10 years

When asked, “Over the last 10 years, has the level of substance abuse in Hinton been increasing, decreasing, or staying the same?” Hinton residents responded with mixed replies. This is not surprising given the various types of substances within the community and their shifting popularity over time. Overall, peoples' perceptions of alcohol and drug abuse trends depend on what position they hold in the community, i.e., where they live and where they work.

Substance abuse is decreasing

A number of community residents believed that substance abuse has decreased in the workplace, particularly at the mill and the mine.

A pulp mill employee says, “I know ten years ago it was pretty bad...but now you don't see much of it or any of it. I mean there's still a few guys that have got problems.” Similarly, a saw mill employee estimates, “Anywhere between 10 and 20 percent of the workforce is struggling with either drugs or, or alcohol... but the number of problem users has come down in the past 4-5 years.”

In addition, a person working at the mine says the abuse of drugs in the workplace has “definitely decreased.” He continues:

It’s not a whole lot, not like it used to be. It used to be, people were stoned there all day long. But now I find that a lot of the guys don’t really like, I personally don’t like working with somebody’s who’s stoned. So I would definitely tell him, I don’t appreciate it, and most people are like that so I don’t think that they do [drugs at work], if they do do it, it’s done a lot more discrete than it ever was.

This apparent decline in substance abuse at the mill and mine may be due to the fact that workers are becoming more aware of the hazards of using alcohol and drugs at work. This new awareness may be attributed to the alcohol and drug policies introduced by Elk Valley Coal in June 2005 and by West Fraser Mills in January 2005¹², and to Hinton Drug Action Committee’s recent social marketing campaign.

A person working in the Health sector suggests that *overall* the level of substance abuse in the community has gone down based on a decline in the number of emergency calls. He says, “In the last year and a half, substance abuse has come down a lot. Like I said I was getting close to 5 a week – overdoses and suicide attempts – to probably about 1 or 2 now.”

This noticeable decline in emergency calls may be linked to the decline in crystal meth use. Numerous residents say that the crystal meth situation overall has improved considerably since 2003 largely because “we got rid of most of the squatters.” Yet despite the apparent success of the *Meth Hurts* campaign, a few residents expressed concern that the campaign did not get rid of the crystal meth dealers entirely but “sent them 50 miles east [to Edson]” or to Drayton Valley. In addition, one woman says, “Because we made it a bit difficult to get meth, people are now going back to cocaine.”

Substance abuse is increasing

Several Hinton residents feel that substance abuse in general (and cocaine specifically) is on the rise in Hinton. One interviewee claims, “There’s probably a higher probability of a greater number of individuals getting involved and who would be using alcohol and drugs than there was before,” while another interviewee says due to the nature of these new drugs, such as crystal meth, “the drug problem has gotten more acute.”

Individuals working in the Human Services sector were most likely to say that substance abuse in Hinton has been increasing. A Human Service worker, for example, says that “substance abuse by parents/caregivers appears to be increasing, particularly with methamphetamine use.” He elaborates further on this trend, “For example, from 2000 to 2004, approximately 40% of all children removed [from their homes] were due to parental substance abuse issues. In 2005, that figure was approximately 80%.”

¹² The drug policy of West Fraser Mills applies to only new hires.

Based on the interviews, it appears that drug use at the mill and the mine is decreasing along with overall crystal meth use in the community. Despite the perceived decrease in crystal meth use, residents say cocaine is becoming the new drug of choice. Adults using drugs in the home appears to be on the rise as well. It may be that people have moved from using drugs at work to using drugs in the home.

The next section provides another look at the substance abuse trends in Hinton by exploring secondary data from a variety of local sources.

5.3.2 Substance abuse trends: Secondary data

To get a more complete picture of the trends of alcohol and drug abuse in Hinton, we collected secondary data from the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), Aspen Mental Health, Hinton Child and Family Services, and from the West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service (WYARS) which serves two major employers in town: West Fraser Mills Ltd. and Elk Valley Coal.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission - Client data

Table 3 shows the total number of clients seeking treatment at Hinton’s AADAC office over three year period: 2003/2004, 2004/2005, and 2005/2006:

Table 3. Total number of clients, AADAC, Hinton, 2003/04-2005/06

Client characteristics	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
# of clients own use (% of total clients)	144 (87%)	124 (74%)	154 (81%)
# of clients for someone else’s use (% of total clients)	22 (13%)	44 (26%)	35 (19%)
Total # of clients	166	168	189
% of clients male (own use)	64%	58%	63%
% of clients female (own use)	36%	42%	37%

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

The number of clients seeking treatment for their own use at Hinton’s AADAC office declined from 144 to 124 between 2003/04 and 2004/05, but increased to 154 in 2005/06. The number of clients seeking treatment for someone else’s use doubled between 2003/04 and 2004/05, but declined in 2005/06. Overall, more males sought treatment than females. Due to the limited number of data points, it is difficult to make a conclusion about substance abuse trends. Furthermore, local AADAC staff said the numbers do not reflect the actual number of people in Hinton with an alcohol and/or drug addiction and that there are a lot of people that are using substances as a coping mechanism and are not reaching out for help.

Aspen Mental Health - Client data

Table 4 shows the client caseload numbers for the Aspen Mental Health Clinic in Hinton for the years 2000-2005. The purpose of including this table is to capture statistics (other than those which are specifically related to substance abuse) which may indicate evidence of social disruption (due to the recent oil and gas boom) among the Hinton population.

Table 4. Total number of clients, Aspen Mental Health Clinic, Hinton, 2000-2005

Year	New enrolments	% clients male	% of clients female
2000	246	48	52
2001	259	47	53
2002	282	39	61
2003	322	36	64
2004	265	13	87
2005	314	32	68

Source: Aspen Mental Health Clinic, Hinton

The number of new enrolments increased steadily from 2000 to 2003 and then dropped off by 18% in 2004. The year 2005 saw the second highest number of enrolments during the six year period. Between 2000 and 2004, the percentage of female clients increased steadily. In 2005, the percentage of female clients declined, but was still more than double the percentage of male clients.

In addition, throughout the period 2000-2005, the top three disorders were (1) ‘Mood disorders’, (2) ‘Other conditions that may be a focus of clinical attention’ (these are usually conditions that are not mental illness, i.e., drug or alcohol problems, marital problems, parenting problems), (3) ‘Adjustment disorders’, ‘Anxiety disorders,’ or ‘First diagnosed in infancy, childhood and adolescence’ (this includes ADHD, mental retardation, reading disorders, motor skills disorders, communication disorders, autism, etc., and these disorders usually appear in childhood and can carry on to adulthood).

Although the year 2005 shows an increase in the number of mental health clients (possibly attributed to the social disruption of the oil and gas boom), it would be necessary to monitor the new enrolments in the future to see if the number of new enrolments is on the rise.

Child and Family Services - Caseload data and trends

Child and Family Services reports from the year 2000 and onward there has been a steady increase of cases where substance abuse was noted as the main concern. Over the past three years there has actually been a decrease in the overall number of situations where Child and Family Services has completed an intervention to assess risk to a child or children living at home. This could be due in part to the establishing of agency

partnerships and funded support services that have evolved at the community level. During the same time period however, a significant number of interventions that have been completed are directly related to substance abuse by the parents or caregiver, primarily methamphetamine use. Many of the crystal meth related situations being reported to Child and Family Services tend to be younger parents under age 25; however, there are also cases where parents in their 30s and 40s are using crystal meth.

Table 5 illustrates the extent to which crystal meth has affected the work of Hinton Child and Family Services for the years 2000-2006.

Table 5. Percentage of interventions that were meth-related, Child and Family Services, Hinton, 2000-2006*

Year	Percentage
2000	4%
2001	11%
2002	18%
2003	21%
2004	19%
2005	38%
2006 (1st quarter)	26%

*Statistics are for the Hinton Child and Family Services office only and are approximate percentages.
Source: Child and Family Services, Hinton

As Table 5 illustrates, since 2000, meth use among some families in Hinton has been on the rise. Between 2000 and 2001, the percentage of interventions that were crystal meth related nearly tripled. And between 2004 and 2005, the percentage of interventions that were crystal meth related doubled. While some community members claim that meth use has decreased in the community, Table 5 illustrates that the number of Child and Family Services interventions related to crystal meth has actually increased – possibly signaling an increase in crystal meth use among some families in the community. It would be necessary to compare the final statistics from 2006 to 2005 to see if the percentage of interventions that were meth-related is continuing to increase.

WYARS, West Fraser Mills Ltd. - Client data

Table 6 shows the total number of new clients seeking counselling services through the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) at West Fraser Mills Ltd. between the years 1995-2005. The data was collected from the West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service, the organization which offers employee and family assistance programs.

Table 6. Total number of new clients, EFAP, West Fraser Mills Ltd., Hinton, 1995-2005

Year	Total # of new clients
1995	105
1996	75
1997	106
1998	77
1999	50
2000	55
2001	40
2002	55
2003	39
2004	51
2005	65

Source: West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service, Hinton

The total number of new clients seeking counselling services through EFAP at West Fraser Mills Ltd. was the greatest between 1995 and 1998. Since 1999, the total number of new clients seeking treatment has fluctuated, reaching an overall low in 2003 with 39 clients and a recent high in 2005 with 65 clients.

When a West Fraser employee seeks counselling through EFAP, the employee must state a presenting issue. Table 7 shows the presenting issues reported by those West Fraser employees seeking counselling through EFAP over the period 1995-2005.

Table 7. Presenting issue in clinical services (% of clients reporting a specific issue), EFAP, West Fraser Mills Ltd., Hinton, 1995-2005

Year	Family/ Marital	Personal/ Emotional	Medical Issues	Job Related	Legal/ Financial	Addictions	Pending/ Inappropriate
1995	57.1	21.9	1.9	4.8	3.8	1.9	8.6
1996	50.0	28.0	1.0	5.0	7.0	1.0	8.0
1997	55.0	25.0	4.0	6.0	0	0	7.0
1998	66.0	19.0	3.0	4.0	1.0	1.0	6.0
1999	60.0	28.0	0	4.0	4.0	4.0	0
2000	67.0	16.0	5.0	8.0	0	4.0	0
2001	43.0	37.0	10.0	10.0	0	0	n/a
2002	51.0	42.0	0	7.0	0	0	n/a
2003	61.0	26.0	0	8.0	0	5.0	n/a
2004	74.0	18.0	0	4.0	0	4.0	n/a
2005	67.0	26.0	1.0	3.0	3.0	0	n/a

Source: West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service, Hinton

Between 1995 and 2005 the most common presenting issue for West Fraser employees (or their family members) was Family/Marital while the second most common issue was Personal/Emotional. The percentage of employees reporting Addictions as their presenting issue has fluctuated between 1995 and 2005. Years 2003 and 2004 (as well as 1999 and 2000) show the highest percentage of employees reporting Addictions as their presenting issue, but this percentage drops off to zero again in 2005. It's important to note that although some employees state their presenting issue as Family/Marital or Personal/Emotional, counselling may reveal that the issue is in fact something else, such as Addictions. Therefore, given the stigma and denial associated with addiction, this presenting issue may go underreported.

WYARS, Elk Valley Coal - Client data

Table 8 shows the total number of new clients seeking counselling services through the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) at Elk Valley Coal between the years 1995-2005. Data was collected from the West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service (WYARS), the organization which offers the employee and family assistance program.

Table 8. Total number of new clients, EFAP, Elk Valley Coal, Hinton, 1995-2005

Year	Total # of new clients
1995	64
1996	39
1997	77
1998	32
1999	25
2000	17
2001	17
2002	14
2003	1
2004	3
2005	26

Source: West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service, Hinton

The total number of new clients seeking counselling services through EFAP at Elk Valley Coal was the greatest between 1995 and 1997. Since 1998, the number of new clients has been steadily decreasing, reaching an overall low in 2003 with 1 client. The low number of clients in 2003 and 2004 are likely attributed to the mine closures and subsequent layoffs. In 2005, 26 employees – the highest number since 1998 – sought counselling.

Table 9 shows the presenting issues reported by Elk Valley Coal employees over the period 1995-2005.

Table 9. Presenting issues in clinical services (% of clients reporting a specific issue), EFAP, Elk Valley Coal, Hinton, 1995-2005

Year	Family/ Marital	Personal/ Emotional	Medical Issues	Job Related	Legal/ Financial	Addictions	Pending/ Inappropriate
1995	56.0	33.0	1.0	0.0	5.0	2.0	3.0
1996	72.0	21.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	5.0
1997	57.0	27.0	0.0	4.0	5.0	3.0	4.0
1998	50.0	28.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	5.8	14.3
1999	60.0	13.5	10.0	3.3	0.0	8.3	5.0
2000	60.5	22.3	0.0	7.3	10.0	0.0	0.0
2001	63.5	18.0	6.0	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
2002	68.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0
2003	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	n/a
2004	100.0	0	0	0	0	0.0	n/a
2005	84.0	12.0	0	0	0	4.0	n/a

Source: West Yellowhead Assessment and Referral Service, Hinton

The most common presenting issue for Elk Valley employees or their family members was Family/Marital. With the exception of Personal/Emotional being reported by 100% of clients in 2003, Personal/Emotional was the second most common presenting issue between 1995 and 2005. The number of employees reporting Addictions as their presenting issue varied over the 11-year period, with the highest number of clients (10.0%) reporting Addictions in 2002. In 2005, 4.0% of EFAP clients stated Addictions as their presenting issue. As stated previously, due to the stigma and denial associated with addiction, it's possible that Addictions as a presenting issue goes underreported.

5.3.3 Substance abuse trends: A comparison of data

Based on the analysis of interview and secondary data, a number of statements can be made. First, both sets of data (interview and secondary) support the idea that crystal meth use among some Hinton families is increasing, especially among young families. In terms of overall substance abuse rates, the limited amount of AADAC data (2003/04 to 2005/06) show that the number of clients has fluctuated over the three year period, but, overall, was higher in 2005/06 than in 2003/04. Data from Aspen Mental Health and WYARS show a very recent increase (2005) in the number of clients seeking treatment, and in 2005 the number of clients seeking treatment at West Fraser and Elk Valley Coal was at its highest level since 1998. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude if the level of substance abuse is increasing or decreasing in Hinton. Collecting data from other

counselling agencies in Hinton would provide further insight into substance abuse trends in the community.

The Aspen Mental Health and WYARS data show the most common presenting issues were Mood disorders and Family and Marital issues. However, as discussed earlier, due to the stigma and denial associated with substance addiction, a client may incorrectly report her presenting issue when she first begins counselling sessions. In addition, some people may choose to seek treatment *outside* of Hinton due to the stigma attached to being an ‘alcoholic’ or a ‘drug addict.’ As a result, the client data reported by local sources may not fully represent the number of *Hinton residents* seeking treatment. Furthermore, it is difficult to say if the increasing number of residents seeking treatment means that the level of substance abuse is increasing or if residents are simply becoming more aware and increasingly open to professional help.

5.4 Extent of substance abuse in Hinton vs. comparison communities

“Do you think substance abuse is any more prevalent in Hinton than it is in other communities across the province?” This section explores the extent of substance abuse in Hinton by presenting data from the interviews and from the secondary data.

Substance abuse: One of the top 3 challenges

When asked, “What do you think are some of the main challenges that Hinton faces today?” a vast majority of research participants ranked substance abuse among the top three. Other competing issues include: a lack of affordable housing and public transportation, the labour shortage, and marital and family breakdown.

5.4.1 Extent of substance abuse: Interview data

Interviewees’ responses regarding the extent of substance abuse in Hinton varied between “substance abuse in Hinton is more prevalent versus other Alberta communities” to “substance abuse in Hinton is pretty comparable to other Alberta communities.”

More prevalent

A few interviewees said they believed the issue was more significant in Hinton versus other communities. One member of the community said because Hinton is quite close to B.C., is located along the Yellowhead Corridor, *and* has a high household income; drug dealers may be more numerous.

Other residents felt that substance abuse was a more serious issue in Hinton because of parents’ permissive attitudes towards alcohol and drugs. One woman who moved to Hinton from a small town in B.C. said she was shocked when she first arrived in Hinton and found out that “parents buy the alcohol here” for their kids.

In addition to permissive parental attitudes towards alcohol and ‘soft’ drugs like marijuana, other residents claim that “drugs are rampant in this town.” One resident, who has lived in Hinton for 15 years, says, “This town has become infested with drug houses, drug dealers, and drugs.” She provides examples of this: youth using alcohol and drugs at the Youth Centre; drug dealers posing as students and going into the high school

to sell drugs; and drug dealers (pretending to be people recovering from substance addictions) attending support group meetings and offering drugs to people after the meeting.

Even so, a larger number of interviewees believed that the level of substance abuse (particularly alcohol abuse) in Hinton is similar to the levels elsewhere in the province.

Pretty comparable

A majority of the interviewees converged on the theme that when it comes to substance abuse, communities across Alberta are “all pretty comparable.” In fact, a few interviewees asserted that Hinton does not deserve the moniker – ‘meth capital of Alberta’ – just because the community is addressing the crystal meth issue. One frustrated community member says:

I say I was from Hinton and they’d say, “oh meth capital of Alberta.” And you get that reputation and it’s not that Hinton is any worse off than Edson, Whitecourt, or Drayton Valley or Grande Cache...we’re not any worse off than anybody else, but we stood up and said we got a problem and we’re fighting it.

A man who travels extensively throughout the province with his work in the oil and gas sector further supports the claim that alcohol and drug abuse is something occurring at a more provincial level. He says, “I think it’s prevalent all over Alberta. Like we’ve gone to a lot of different communities, whether it’s Fox Creek, Whitecourt, Grande Prairie, like it’s all over. It’s a disease.”

The idea of substance abuse being prevalent across Alberta was echoed by other research participants. One interviewee, who admits her ‘little’ hometown in northern Alberta is now “full of drugs,” asks earnestly, “I mean is there a town in Alberta that’s not full of drugs nowadays?”

Resource-based communities vs. Agricultural communities

The question, “... is there a town in Alberta that’s not full of drugs nowadays?” was explored during the interviews. In addition, we asked interviewees if they thought resource-based communities were any more vulnerable to substance abuse than agricultural communities. While some research participants believed that the level of substance abuse is higher in resource-based towns versus farming communities; other research participants did not agree, citing recent drug issues in the agricultural communities of Taber, Bonnyville, Fairview, and Barrhead. A few interviewees attributed the increasing drug use in Taber and Bonnyville to the introduction of the oil and gas sector into those communities.

Although no clear consensus was reached on whether or not resource-based communities have higher rates of substance abuse than farming communities, the theme that ‘substance abuse is everywhere’ emerged and that the reasons for substance abuse might be different for different communities. Financial stress among farmers due to weather and market conditions was cited as a reason why some farmers abuse substances.

Throughout the following pages of the report, we explore whether or not resource-based communities show evidence of higher levels of substance abuse when compared to agricultural communities.

Hinton residents openly acknowledged that the abuse of alcohol and drugs in the community is an issue. Some residents remarked that because parents are more permissive about substance use in Hinton versus other communities, it's more problematic. At the same time, many interviewees were not convinced that substance abuse in Hinton is any more prevalent than other resource-based and *farming communities* across the province. The next section uses secondary data to further explore the extent of substance abuse in Hinton within the context of other Alberta communities.

5.4.2 Extent of substance abuse: Secondary data

Because substance abuse is a difficult thing to measure, there are limited statistics available. As such, we must use 'indicator statistics' or proxies to gauge the level of substance abuse in a community. These statistics do not directly measure all of the people abusing alcohol and drugs but provide an estimate based on statistics such as liquor sales, drug offences, and the number of people seeking treatment for alcohol and drug addiction. To determine the extent of substance abuse in Hinton we compare the number of liquor licences in effect (2005), liquor sales (2000/01-2004/05), drug offences (2000-2005), and number of AADAC clients as a percentage of the total population (2003/04-2005/06) for a number of Alberta towns and cities.

Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission – Liquor licences in effect and liquor sales

Table 10 presents the number of liquor licences per thousand population in 15 Alberta communities as of March 31, 2005. Note: The population data for Table 10 is based on the entire population and not the number of persons 15 years and older.

Table 10. Number of liquor licences (per thousand population), AGLC, Hinton and comparison communities, March 31, 2005

Community	# of liquor licenses	# of liquor licenses per thousand population	Rank
Hinton (R79)*	42	4.00	#8
Athabasca (A20)	20	8.28	#1
Barrhead (A74)	23	5.40	#5
Camrose (A72)	59	3.72	#12
Drayton Valley (R94)	40	6.44	#2
Edson (R79)	39	4.66	#7
Fort McMurray (R82)**	101	1.66	#15
High River (A23)	37	3.89	#9
Lethbridge (A89)	200	2.59	#13
Lloydminster (R78)	58	3.75	#11
Red Deer (E50, A48)	183	2.31	#14
St. Paul (A41)	30	5.83	#3
Stettler (A69)	29	5.55	#4
Wetaskiwin (A63)	43	3.86	#10
Whitecourt (R89)	47	5.37	#6

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population. Source: Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (number of licences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

In 2005, out of the 15 communities investigated, the following communities had the highest number of liquor licences in effect per thousand population: 1) Athabasca, 2) Drayton Valley, 3) St. Paul, 4) Stettler, and 5) Barrhead. Interestingly, 4 out of the 5 highest-ranking communities are agricultural-based, with Drayton Valley being the exception. Hinton ranked #8 out of the 15 communities, while Fort McMurray, a heavily resource-based community, ranked last. In 2005, Athabasca had more than double the number of liquor licences per thousand population compared to Hinton (8.28 vs. 4.00).

Because some communities may have larger liquor establishments than other communities and thus serve higher volumes of liquor, the number of liquor licences may not accurately capture the level of alcohol availability or consumption within a community. Perhaps a more targeted measure of substance abuse is liquor sales.

Table 11 presents the annual liquor sales per person for Hinton and 15 Alberta communities. Note: The population data for Table 11 is based on the entire population and not the number of people 15 years and older.

Table 11. Annual liquor sales by community (\$/person*), AGLC, Hinton and comparison communities, 2000/01-2004/05

Community	Apr. 2000- Mar. 2001	Apr. 2001- Mar. 2002**	Apr. 2002- Mar. 2003	Apr. 2003- Mar. 2004	Apr. 2004- Mar. 2005
Hinton (R79)***	\$499.09 (#10)	\$589.53 (#12)	\$626.53 (#12)	\$650.21 (#11)	\$694.45 (#11)
Athabasca (A20)	\$1,324.63 (#1)	\$1,389.41 (#1)	\$1,381.71 (#1)	\$1,393.39 (#1)	\$1,439.82 (#1)
Barrhead (A74)	\$716.85 (#5)	\$751.12 (#6)	\$780.70 (#5)	\$829.09 (#5)	\$817.89 (#6)
Camrose (A72)	\$427.76 (#15)	\$509.96 (#14)	\$578.75 (#13)	\$618.70 (#12)	\$607.38 (#12)
Drayton Valley (R94)	\$819.65 (#3)	\$919.84 (#3)	\$916.08 (#3)	\$975.21 (#3)	\$1,044.64 (#3)
Edson (R79)	\$415.49 (#16)	\$875.10 (#4)	\$845.49 (#4)	\$879.58 (#4)	\$871.46 (#4)
Fort McMurray (R82)****	\$574.22 (#9)	\$644.12 (#11)	\$627.89 (#11)	\$613.70 (#13)	\$584.66 (#13)
High River (A23)	\$435.09 (#14)	\$458.87 (#16)	\$477.15 (#15)	\$502.26 (#15)	\$463.54 (#16)
Lethbridge (A89)	\$443.23 (#13)	\$465.52 (#15)	\$476.58 (#16)	\$500.38 (#16)	\$491.76 (#15)
Lloydminster (R78)	\$951.80 (#2)	\$934.35 (#2)	\$985.79 (#2)	\$1,092.28 (#2)	\$1,096.73 (#2)
Red Deer (E50, A48)	\$489.43 (#11)	\$557.42 (#13)	\$574.38 (#14)	\$576.14 (#14)	\$568.26 (#14)
St. Paul (A41)	\$757.30 (#4)	\$804.04 (#5)	\$763.61 (#6)	\$783.45 (#6)	\$788.27 (#7)
Stettler (A69)	\$464.65 (#12)	\$678.28 (#9)	\$723.60 (#7)	\$777.45 (#7)	\$835.32 (#5)
Wainwright (A40)	\$609.98 (#8)	\$661.17 (#10)	\$706.35 (#10)	\$757.54 (#8)	\$727.21 (#10)
Wetaskiwin (A63)	\$677.74 (#7)	\$709.48 (#8)	\$720.53 (#8)	\$698.65 (#10)	\$728.93 (#9)
Whitecourt (R89)	\$689.82 (#6)	\$729.18 (#7)	\$709.63 (#9)	\$732.66 (#9)	\$759.14 (#8)

*To determine the fiscal year populations, we calculated the average of both years.

** The data for the years April 2001 to March 2002 and April 2002 to March 2003 reflects a mark-up increase on April 5, 2002. As a result, sales and volumes during March 2002 were exceptionally high as licensees anticipated this mark-up increase.

***The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

****The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (liquor sales), Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Over the five year period, three communities consistently ranked the highest in terms of alcohol sales: 1) Athabasca, 2) Lloydminster, and 3) Drayton Valley. The communities of Edson, Barrhead, and St. Paul also ranked relatively high. Hinton ranked relatively

low in terms of alcohol sales: 10th, 11th, and 12th out of 16 communities throughout 2000/01 to 2004/05. Alcohol sales in Hinton have steadily increased since April 2000, reaching a high of \$694.45 per person in 2004/05. During the same year, liquor sales in Athabasca were more than double at \$1,439.82 per person.

Based on the liquor licences and sales data, Athabasca, Drayton Valley, Barrhead and St. Paul appear to have higher rates of liquor availability and consumption and thus, possibly higher levels of substance abuse. Hinton's liquor availability, with 4.00 liquor licences per thousand population was in the middle of the pack, whereas Hinton's liquor sales ranked on the low end.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police - Drug offences

Table 12 presents the number of drug offences per thousand population for Hinton and five comparison communities. It is important to note that although crime statistics may be used as an indicator of substance use, factors such as the level of police enforcement in a particular year may also influence the number of offenders recorded for a specific year. Note: The population data for Table 12 is based on the entire population and not the number of people 15 years and older.

Table 12. Number of drug offences (per thousand population), RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2000-2005

Community	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Hinton (R79)*	7.03 (#3)	9.14 (#2)	7.02 (#2)	4.78 (#2)	9.99 (#2)	1.71 (#4)
Drayton Valley (R94)	22.44 (#1)	25.00 (#1)	27.24 (#1)	26.41 (#1)	27.86 (#1)	12.24 (#1)
Barrhead (A74)	0.69 (#5)	0.71 (#5)	0.71 (#5)	3.56 (#3)	3.32 (#4)	3.52 (#3)
Stettler (A69)	8.81 (#2)	7.48 (#3)	6.70 (#3)	4.78 (#2)	6.31 (#3)	5.17 (#2)
Fort McMurray (R82)**	1.57 (#4)	2.09 (#4)	1.55 (#4)	0.97 (#4)	1.39 (#5)	0.07 (#6)
Lethbridge (A63)	0.13 (#6)	0.16 (#6)	0.17 (#6)	0.15 (#5)	0.14 (#6)	0.08 (#5)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

** The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of drug offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Of the six communities above, Drayton Valley had the highest number of drug offences for years 2000-2005. Hinton ranked third in 2000, behind Drayton Valley and Stettler, second in the years 2001-2004, and dropped down to fourth in 2005 (after Drayton

Valley, Stettler, and Barrhead). Overall, the number of drug offences in Hinton was at its lowest in 2003 (4.78 offences per thousand population) and reached its peak in 2004 (9.99).

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission - Client data

Table 13 presents the number of people seeking treatment for their own use, as well as for someone else's use at local AADAC offices as a percentage of the population for 12 Alberta communities. Note: The population data for Table 13 is based on the entire population and not the number of people 15 years and older.

Table 13. Total number of clients* seeking treatment at local treatment office (as a percentage of the population), AADAC, Hinton and comparison communities, 2003/04-2005/06**

Community	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Hinton (R79)***	1.77 (#10)	1.69 (#10)	1.80 (#11)
Athabasca (A20)	7.04 (#2)	7.41 (#1)	6.79 (#2)
Camrose (A72)	1.68 (#11)	2.01 (#9)	2.27 (#9)
Drayton Valley (R94)	3.38 (#4)	3.70 (#3)	3.35 (#6)
Edson (R79)	2.71 (#6)	2.81 (#8)	3.00 (#7)
Fort McMurray (R82)****	1.10 (#12)	0.89 (#11)	1.24 (#12)
Lethbridge (A89)	1.88 (#9)	2.01 (#9)	2.02 (#10)
St. Paul (A41)	8.05 (#1)	7.35 (#2)	7.58 (#1)
Stettler (A69)	4.00 (#3)	3.25 (#5)	4.63 (#3)
Wainwright (A40)	3.01 (#5)	3.69 (#4)	4.36 (#4)
Wetaskiwin (A63)	2.52 (#8)	2.93 (#6)	2.83 (#8)
Whitecourt (R89)	2.61 (#7)	2.89 (#7)	3.41 (#5)

*Total number of clients in treatment includes clients in treatment for own use and for someone else's use.

**To determine the fiscal year populations for the years 2003/04 and 2004/05, we calculated the average of both years. The population for 2005/06 is based only on the 2005 population.

*** The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

****The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (total number of clients); Alberta Municipal Affairs and Alberta.First.com (population statistics)

Of the 12 communities above for the year 2003/04 the following communities had the highest number of clients seeking treatment as a percentage of the population: 1) St. Paul, 2) Athabasca, 3) Stettler, 4) Drayton Valley, and 5) Wainwright. Hinton ranked #10. For

the year 2004-2005 the communities were: 1) Athabasca, 2) St. Paul, 3) Drayton Valley, 4) Wainwright, and 5) Stettler. Hinton again ranked #10. And for the year 2005-2006, the communities were: 1) St. Paul, 2) Athabasca, 3) Stettler, 4) Wainwright, and 5) Whitecourt. Hinton ranked #11.

Based on the 11 comparison communities, the number of clients seeking treatment at a Hinton's AADAC office ranks relatively low (#10 or #11 out of 12), whereas the agricultural communities of St. Paul, Athabasca, Stettler and Wainwright ranked in the top 5 for all three years.

This indicates that Hinton, when compared to 11 Alberta communities, ranks very low in terms of the percentage of its population that is seeking help for substance abuse. This may be influenced by the number of AADAC counsellors at each local office, the willingness of residents to seek help, as well as the number of individuals with addictions/substance use problems or issues within the community.

5.4.3 Extent of substance abuse: A comparison of data

Through analysis of interview and secondary data, the level of liquor sales in Hinton appears to be relatively low when compared to the other 15 communities (Hinton ranks #10, #11 and #12 out of 15). Overall, liquor sales in Hinton have steadily increased since 2000/01, from \$499.09 to an overall high of \$694.45 in 2004/05. In addition, Hinton ranked #8 out of 15 communities in the number of liquor licences per thousand population, again lending support to the claim that the level of alcohol abuse is comparable levels elsewhere in Alberta. On the other hand, the number of drug offences in Hinton appears to be relatively high when compared to 5 other communities (Hinton ranks #2, #3 and #4 out of 6). Thus, based on the data analyzed it appears that alcohol consumption (based on liquor sales) is likely similar if not less than rates in other Alberta communities, while drug offences appears to be more of an issue. We acknowledge that a more accurate conclusion could be drawn if secondary data (i.e., alcohol sales and drug offences) were collected on a greater number of communities and if we had access to more 'streamlined' population data on an annual basis (i.e., the number of persons in a community 15 years and older).

5.5 Substance abusers and substances abused in Hinton

"Who are the people involved in substance abuse in Hinton and what substances are they abusing?" Through exploring interview and secondary data this section attempts to reveal some of the sociodemographic characteristics of a person abusing alcohol and/or drugs in Hinton.

5.5.1 Substance abusers and substances abused: Interview data

The profile of a person caught up in alcohol or drug abuse in Hinton has changed over the years, according to interviewees. One Hinton resident, who has been living in Hinton for over 35 years, describes how today the stereotypical image of a drug user no longer applies. She says, "20 years ago you could characterize people, but you cannot do that now... even parents that are active with their children are still smoking dope. It's everywhere."

Similarly, the profile of a person who abuses alcohol appears to have also changed. Originally, it was mostly men who were the alcoholics in the family, but now it could be any one of the family members. A research participant, who attends a local support group for friends and families of alcoholics, describes:

The people that come to the program, it's their brother, it's their sister [who's abusing], it's their wife, it's their grandma, it's their grandpa, it's really all over the map. It's not any more the husband today. It's noticeable for me that ten years ago the people that sat around the table, it was mostly their husbands or their dads, but today it's really varied.

From the interviews, it appears that substance abuse in Hinton crosses all socioeconomic boundaries. A Hinton resident describes, "I've seen it from young to old, from rich to poor. So I don't think it's only a certain target group, really I don't." Another resident adds, "It hits them all." In terms of abuser profiles, four main themes were pulled from the interviews: predominately young adults, the many faces of a meth user, overdosing older males, and across-the-board alcohol abusers and marijuana users.

Predominately young adults

Interviewees said substance abuse was a big issue with youth in the past, but now young adults (18 to 34 year old range) have become the most predominant substance abusers. This includes men working in the resource sectors, as well as young mothers with preschool age children. This shift from youth to young adults may be simply due to the aging of the youth and the continuation of their substance abuse patterns. The types of substances young adults abuse primarily depends on their income. Young men employed in the resource sectors may choose to binge drink or use cocaine, whereas young mothers may turn to less expensive substances such as crystal meth.

The many faces of a meth user

In terms of crystal meth, the ages of meth users vary; they can be as young as 12-13 years old, but most common group is 18-35 years old. Interviewees said meth users are primarily young males (in their 20s and 30s) who often introduce the drug to their female partners. In many cases, the users also have children. In fact, interviewees said many young mothers (including young single mothers) in the 20-24 year old range, who started to abuse drugs as young as 11 years old, are using meth. Some teenage girls are also heavy into meth, with older men supporting their habit. A resident describes, "The younger girls come into it, and they don't have the strength to pull themselves off of the drug and they're given it free, and then afterwards, they are being abused and used. They call them 'meth whores' and they use sex." Meth use is also starting to appear among middle-aged women (35-40 years old) who use it to lose weight.

The Methamphetamine Timeline

- **1994:** Meth is believed to have entered the community.
- **2003:** Widespread crime associated with the crystal methamphetamine (meth) in Hinton mobilizes the community to take action. In 2003, residents form the Hinton Drug Action Committee (HDAC) and launch the Meth Hurts campaign. Activities include a social marketing and door-to-door campaign.
- **2004:** HDAC receives the Solicitor General Crime Prevention Award for Community Organization. In the fall, HDAC hosts a Community Mobilization Provincial Conference on meth.
- **2005:** Hinton residents form the HOPE Network as a means of addressing the needs of the families and friends of meth users.
- **2006:** HDAC turns its focus to raising drug awareness in the workplace.

Overdosing older males

Interviewees said people aged 35-45 years old are also using drugs: less meth, more marijuana. However, these older men may be more seriously involved with alcohol and drugs than previously thought. A person in the Health sector says that most alcohol and drug overdoses in the community are by men, in the 35 to 45 age range, who work in the resource sectors. These workers tend to overdose on Sundays as it is the last day before they have to go back to work and cumulatively all of the alcohol and/or drugs they have ingested into their bodies begins to cause them harm.

Across-the-board alcohol abusers and marijuana users

Research participants said people with alcohol addictions are “all over the map” – from teenagers to seniors. Binge drinking was noted as common among teenagers (at house and bush parties) and shift workers (during their four days off). In addition, interviewees noted that because the wives and girlfriends of shift workers spend a lot of time alone, they frequent the bars to drink and socialize. Other interviewees said Hinton residents are so desensitized to alcohol that “it’s almost like a cultural past time.” High school students in particular remarked that drinking alcohol is “acceptable in families – it’s not a bad thing anymore, it’s passed down” and that “it’s tradition to go to the bar with your parents.”

Marijuana was also said to be another widely used substance in the community. And with the rise of meth and meth-related impacts in the community, research participants said alcohol and marijuana are becoming more and more acceptable because they are viewed as less harmful than meth.

A wide range of people abuse alcohol and drugs in Hinton: from teenage girls and young resource workers to older men and middle-aged women. The types of substances people choose are dictated largely by their income. However, due to the inexpensiveness of

meth, it has become accessible to people of all income levels. In addition, due to the recent fallout from meth, residents are viewing ‘softer substances’ such as alcohol and marijuana – and even cocaine – as increasingly “okay.”

The next section explores types of users and substances abused in Hinton by presenting secondary data from AADAC.

5.5.2 Substance abusers and substances abused: Secondary data

Table 14 presents AADAC client data for the years 2003/2004, 2004/2005, and 2005/2006. Although AADAC is only one of a number of organizations offering counselling for substance abuse in the community, the table provides a partial snapshot of people who are seeking treatment in Hinton for their own use.

Table 14. Client characteristics, # of clients (% of total clients), AADAC, Hinton, 2003/04-2005/06

Characteristics	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
<u># of clients in treatment</u>			
Own use	144 (87%)	124 (74%)	154 (81%)
Someone else’s use	22 (13%)	44 (26%)	35 (19%)
<u>Gender**</u>			
Male	92 (64%)	71 (58%)	97 (63%)
Female	52 (36%)	52 (42%)	57 (37%)
<u>Age</u>			
Under 18	21 (15%)	15 (12%)	13 (8%)
18-24	23 (16%)	26 (21%)	31 (20%)
25-34	41 (28%)	34 (27%)	49 (32%)
35-44	37 (26%)	25 (20%)	31 (20%)
45-54	18 (13%)	21 (17%)	24 (16%)
55 and older	4 (3%)	3 (2%)	6 (4%)
Total over 18	123 (85%)	109 (88%)	141 (92%)
<u>Marital status</u>			
Single (never married)	72 (53%)	59 (51%)	69 (49%)
Married/common law	45 (33%)	32 (28%)	47 (33%)
Widowed	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)
Divorced or separated	19 (14%)	23 (20%)	24 (17%)
<u>Education</u>			
Less than grade 12	70 (51%)	69 (60%)	75 (54%)
Grade 12/13	42 (31%)	24 (21%)	43 (31%)
Diploma/degree	24 (18%)	22 (19%)	22 (16%)
<u>Top 4 usual occupations</u>			
Sales/Service	#1* (30%)	#1 (27%)	#1 (24%)
No occupation	#2 (16%)	#2 (19%)	#4 (12%)
Forestry, Mining, Oil and Gas	#3 (12%)	#3 (13%)	#2 (17%)
Construction	#3 (12%)	#4 (9%)	#3 (14%)
Management	#4 (7%)		

*For ‘Top 4 usual occupations,’ the numbers denote rank.

**All data for Gender, Age, Marital status, Education, and Top 4 usual occupations refer to own use.

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

Overall, in 2005/06, the percentage of clients seeking treatment for own use is greater than the percentage of clients seeking treatment for someone else's use (81% vs. 19%). Also in 2005/06, approximately half of the number of clients seeking treatment for their own use (49%) were single and approximately one-third (32%) were between the ages 25 and 34. In addition, a little over half (54%) of these clients had less than a grade 12 education and a greater number of clients were male versus female (63% vs. 37%). And again in 2005/06, clients seeking treatment for their own use were most commonly employed in 1) Sales/Service (24%); 2) Forestry, Mining, Oil and Gas (17%); 3) Construction (14%); and 4) No occupation (12%).

Next, Table 15 explores what sectors the majority of AADAC clients seeking treatment for their own use are employed in and how two sectors – Agriculture and Forestry/Mining/Oil – compare.

Table 15. Top 3 sectors from which clients* are seeking substance abuse treatment and rank of Agriculture and Forestry/Mining/Oil (as a % of total AADAC clients), AADAC, Hinton and comparison communities, 2005/06

Community	#1	#2	#3	Rank of Agriculture	Rank of For/Min/Oil
Hinton (R79)**	Sales/Serv. (24%)	For/Min/Oil (17%)	Construction (14%)	No rank. (0%)	#2 (17%)
Athabasca (A20)	Professional (27%)	Transport. (23%)	Construction (8%) For/Min/Oil (8%)	#5 (6%)	#3 (8%)
Camrose (A72)	Professional (27%) Transport. (27%)	Construction (15%)	Manufact. (7%)	#5 (3%)	#4 (6%)
Drayton Valley (R94)	For/Min/Oil (31%)	Sales/Serv. (23%)	Construction (14%)	#6 (3%)	#1 (31%)
Edson (R79)	Sales/Serv. (28%)	For/Min/Oil (21%)	No occup. (13%)	No rank. (0%)	#2 (21%)
Ft. McMurray (R82)***	Construction (30%)	No occup. (23%)	Sales/Serv. (18%)	#9 (1%)	#4 (8%)
Lethbridge (A89)	No occup. (26%)	Sales/Serv. (22%)	Construction (17%)	#6 (4%)	#6 (4%)
St. Paul (A41)	No occup. (36%)	Sales/Serv. (17%)	Construction (11%)	#9 (2%)	#4 (9%)
Stettler (A69)	Transport. (24%)	Construction (16%)	For/Min/Oil (14%)	#5 (9%)	#3 (14%)
Wainwright (A40)	Professional (27%)	For/Min/Oil (23%)	Transport. (16%)	#5 (9%)	#2 (23%)
Wetaskiwin (A63)	Professional (46%)	Transport. (18%)	Construction (13%)	No rank. (0%)	#5 (4%)
Whitecourt (R89)	Sales/Serv. (23%)	For/Min/Oil (22%)	No occup. (20%)	#7 (2%)	#2 (22%)

*Clients refers to AADAC clients seeking treatment for their own use.

**The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

***The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

Table 15 provides some 'occupational' insight into the types of people seeking treatment for substance abuse for their own use at a local AADAC offices. The most common

sectors from which people are seeking treatment are Professional and Sales/Service. The second most common sector from which individuals are seeking treatment for their own use is Forestry/Mining/Oil and the third is Construction. The communities which have the highest percentage of people seeking treatment for their own use from the Agriculture sector are: 1) Stettler (9%) and Wainwright (9%), and 2) Athabasca (6%). However, even within agriculture-based communities, such as Athabasca, Camrose, Stettler, Wainwright and Wetaskiwin, the number of people seeking treatment for their own use from the Forestry/Mining/Oil sector (as well as other sectors) is greater than the number of people seeking treatment from the Agriculture sector. This could be due to the fact that the oil and gas sector is now active in numerous areas of the province, and, as such, is changing the nature of many Alberta communities. Next, we look at what types of substances people are abusing, first in Hinton, and second, in communities across Alberta.

Table 16 presents the substances of concern (in the past 12 months) for clients seeking treatment for their own use at the AADAC office in Hinton for the years 2003/2004 to 2005/2006.

Table 16. Substance of concern in the past 12 months*, number of clients (% of total clients), AADAC, Hinton, 2003/04-2005/06**

Substance of concern	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
Drank beer, wine or liquor	51 (40%)	39 (41%)	48 (37%)
Used marijuana or hashish	24 (19%)	10 (11%)	15 (12%)
Used cocaine	14 (11%)	17 (18%)	33 (25%)
Used opiates	13 (10%)	3 (3%)	8 (6%)
Used psychedelics	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Used tranquilizers	6 (5%)	1 (1%)	4 (3%)
Used anti-depressants	5 (4%)	5 (5%)	6 (5%)
Used barbiturates/sedatives	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
Used amphetamines/stimulants	25 (20%)	23 (24%)	26 (20%)
Used crystal methamphetamine	n/a	n/a	13 (10%)
Used inhalants/solvents	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Used Talwin & Ritalin	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Used androgens	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Used tobacco	14 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Used tobacco-chew	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Used tobacco-smoke	33 (26%)	26 (28%)	47 (36%)
Used other drugs	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

*Each client can report more than one substance therefore percentages may total larger than 100%.

**Clients refers to AADAC clients seeking treatment for their own use.

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

A number of trends emerged across the three-year period. The percentage of AADAC clients in Hinton reporting Drank beer, wine or liquor has decreased slightly (by 3%) while Used tobacco-smoke increased by 10%. Interestingly, the percentage of clients reporting Used marijuana or hashish declined 7% (from 19% in 2003/04 to 12% in 2005/06), while the percentage of clients reporting Used cocaine increased by 14% (from 11% in 2003/04 to 25% in 2005/06). The percentage of clients who reported Used amphetamines/stimulants has been fairly steady. It will be important to monitor data in the years ahead for Used crystal methamphetamine. Already crystal methamphetamine almost ranks as popular a drug as marijuana or hashish among AADAC clients (10% vs. 12%).

In 2005/06, the 5 highest reported substances of concern among AADAC clients receiving treatment for their own use in Hinton were: 1) Drank beer, wine or liquor (37%), 2) Used tobacco-smoke (36%), and 3) Used cocaine (25%), 4) Used amphetamines/stimulants (20%), and 5) Used marijuana or hashish (12%). Used crystal methamphetamine was first tracked in 2005/06 and ranks as the 6th highest reported substance of concern at 10%.

Overall, Hinton residents felt that levels of alcohol abuse in Hinton are similar to the levels across Alberta, while drug use, particularly meth use, is likely higher in Hinton than other Alberta communities. Below, Table 17 highlights the top 4 substances of concern and the rank of crystal meth as a substance of concern for AADAC clients seeking treatment for their own use in 12 Alberta towns and cities for the year 2005/06.

Table 17. Top 4 substances of concern in the past 12 months* and rank of crystal meth as a substance of concern* (as a % of total clients), AADAC, Hinton and comparison communities, 2005/06**

Community	#1	#2	#3	#4	Rank Crystal meth
Hinton (R79)***	Alcohol (37%)	Tobacco (36%)	Cocaine (25%)	Amphet./stim (20%)	#6 (10%)
Athabasca (A20)	Alcohol (44%)	Tobacco (30%)	Marij./hash (15%)	Cocaine (11%)	#6 (3%)
Camrose (A72)	Alcohol (48%)	Tobacco (25%)	Marij./hash (20%)	Cocaine (18%)	#8 (1%)
Drayton Valley (R94)	Alcohol (29%)	Marij./hash (20%)	Cocaine (18%)	Amphet./stim (16%)	#6 (6%)
Edson (R79)	Tobacco (35%)	Alcohol (26%)	Amphet./stim (22%)	Cocaine (12%)	#6 (8%)
Fort McMurray (R82)****	Alcohol (38%)	Cocaine (34%)	Tobacco (31%)	Marij./hash (20%)	#10 (1%)
Lethbridge (A89)	Alcohol (50%)	Tobacco (30%)	Cocaine (29%)	Marij./hash (19%)	#9 (2%)
St. Paul (A41)	Alcohol (48%)	Tobacco (36%)	Marij./hash (22%)	Cocaine (15%)	#8 (4%)
Stettler (A69)	Alcohol (57%)	Tobacco (22%)	Cocaine (16%)	Marij./hash (14%)	No rank. (0%)
Wainwright (A40)	Alcohol (34%)	Cocaine (15%)	Tobacco (13%)	Marij./hash (12%)	#7 (1%)
Wetaskiwin (A63)	Alcohol (50%)	Marij./hash (25%)	Cocaine (16%)	Amphet./stim (5%)	No rank. (0%)
			Tobacco (16%)		
Whitecourt (R89)	Alcohol (38%)	Tobacco (33%)	Cocaine (28%)	Marij./hash (11%)	#5 (7%)
			Amphet./stim (11%)		

*Each client can report more than one substance; therefore, percentages may total more than 100%.

**Clients refers to AADAC clients seeking treatment for their Own use.

*** The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

****The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

Based on the Table 17, some interesting trends emerge. Alcohol ranked as the #1 substance of concern among AADAC clients seeking treatment for their own use for all 12 communities except for Edson in which the #1 substance was Tobacco. Clients in

Stettler (57%) were most likely to report Alcohol as a substance of concern. Hinton ranked #6 at 37%. In terms of Cocaine, the communities most likely to report it as a substance of concern were: 1) Fort McMurray (35%), 2) Lethbridge (29%), and 3) Whitecourt (28%). Hinton ranked #4 at 25%. As for Amphetamines/stimulants, the communities most likely to report it as a substance of concern were: 1) Edson (22%), 2) Hinton (20%), and 3) Drayton Valley (16%). Whitecourt ranked #4 at 11%. Interestingly, the communities with the highest percentage of clients reporting Amphetamines/stimulants as a substance of concern were also the communities with the highest percentage of clients reporting Crystal methamphetamine as a substance of concern. The following communities have the highest number of AADAC clients reporting Crystal methamphetamine as a substance of concern: 1) Hinton (with 10% of clients reporting it as a substance of concern), 2) Edson (8%), 3) Whitecourt (7%), and 4) Drayton Valley (6%). Crystal meth did not appear as a substance of concern for either Stettler or Wetaskiwin.

5.5.3 Substance abusers and substances abused: A comparison of data

Through the analysis of the interview and secondary data, a number of inferences can be made. Residents aged 25-34 are the most likely group to be seeking substance abuse treatment for their own use. Residents 24 years and younger and residents 35-44 tied as the second most likely group to be seeking treatment for their own use (each with 20% of AADAC's client base). Substance abuse treatment among males appears to be higher than among females, and over half of those people seeking treatment had less than a grade 12 education. Interestingly, the AADAC data showed that people seeking treatment for their own use in Hinton were most likely to be employed in the Sales/Service sector, even though the majority of the interviewees thought that resource workers were most likely to have substance use/addiction issues. It is possible that people in the Sales/Service sector do not actually have a higher prevalence of substance use/addiction issues, but instead are more likely to seek treatment than people in the resource sectors perhaps due to more flexible work schedules. Investigation of the occupational profiles of AADAC clients seeking treatment reveals that most individuals are employed in the following sectors: 1) Professional and Sales/Service, 2) Forestry/Mining/Oil, and 3) Construction. In every community (with the exception of Lethbridge), the number of individuals seeking treatment from Forestry/Mining/Oil was greater than individuals from Agriculture. Based on this data alone, it appears that those employed in Forestry/Mining/Oil have a higher prevalence of substance use/addiction issues than those employed in Agriculture.

It appears that alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, amphetamines/stimulants, and marijuana or hashish are the substances of most concern in Hinton. Cocaine and Tobacco use seems to be on the rise. In 2005/06, 10% of AADAC clients reported Crystal methamphetamine as a substance of concern; similarly, 12% reported marijuana or hashish as a substance of concern.

Overall, based on the percentage of clients reporting substances of concern for Hinton and 11 comparison communities, alcohol appears to be the most commonly reported substance of concern. When compared to the other communities, Hinton ranks in the

middle of the pack with respect to alcohol, providing some evidence that Hinton is “pretty comparable” to other communities in the province. However, Hinton had the highest percentage of AADAC clients reporting Crystal methamphetamine as a substance of concern, lending some support to numerous interviewees’ claims that the meth issue is greater in Hinton than in other Alberta communities. The resource-based communities of Edson, Whitecourt, and Drayton Valley (communities which are also located along the Yellowhead Corridor) had a relatively high percentage of clients reporting Crystal methamphetamine as a substance of concern. For the year 2005/06, it appears that resource-based communities are most likely to report Crystal methamphetamine (and Amphetamine/stimulant) as substances of concern, potentially indicating that residents in these types of communities are seeking those substances (and becoming addicted to them) which provide increased energy and a higher level of well-being.

5.6 Impacts of substance abuse in Hinton

“What kind of impact is substance abuse having on the community?” This section focuses on the community implications of substance abuse by exploring interview and secondary data.

5.6.1 Impacts of substance abuse: Interview data

The abuse of alcohol and drugs has negatively impacted individuals, families, employers and human service workers in Hinton. Although the abuse of alcohol and drugs (such as marijuana and cocaine) has been a fixture in the community for a long time, it was the punctuated arrival of meth and its trail of familial destruction and crime that brought the substance abuse issue to the forefront. Still, several interviewees stressed that other substances such as alcohol and prescription drugs contribute to a lot of social problems in the community and should not go unnoticed. One interviewee expresses her concern:

In my experience, we’ve taken drugs to the forefront, but we’ve forgotten all of those other things, we’ve forgotten prescription drugs and we forgot the alcohol. Alcohol is still out there. It’s only because it’s legal. We’ve totally forgot that Angela and that’s my opinion because I watch that. I watch that because with all of the family violence files, both partners are usually drinking.

While most of the recent, more pronounced impacts of substance abuse have been meth-related, the impacts identified below are associated with both alcohol and other drugs.

Five main types of impacts were identified by interviewees: Deterioration of the user, Family dysfunction, Costs to employers, Strain on community services, and Crime and community fear.

Deterioration of the user

The excessive use of alcohol and drugs over time can negatively impact a user in numerous ways (e.g., physically, mentally and financially) and if a person’s addiction is severe, can eventually lead to suicide. When asked to describe the impacts of substance abuse at an individual level, interviewees talked most often about meth users. A lot of Hinton residents stressed the rapid deterioration of a neighbour, a family member, or a

coworker who was addicted to meth. One resident, who has witnessed the ‘downward spiral’ of a number of his coworkers, describes:

In the mill I know guys that had everything, with their job making 60 or \$70,000 bucks a year, full benefits, wife, kids, house, you know living the Canadian dream and the next thing you know the wife’s gone, the kid’s gone, the house is gone, all the money’s gone, and they’re left at the end of the day with nothing, hanging out at the flop houses.

An addiction to alcohol and other drugs, such as cocaine, may also cause an individual to lose his/her job, family, and house, though it may be more gradual than with meth. The deterioration of a person addicted to alcohol or drugs, in turn, takes a significant toll on a person’s family.

Family dysfunction

Having an individual addicted to alcohol or drugs in the family was described by interviewees as emotionally straining. Family members may experience a tremendous amount of emotional pain from the individual’s lying, cheating, and stealing and even a greater amount of pain “as they lose those people and any sense of how to help them.” Attempting to help a family member with a substance addiction can place a lot of financial strain on families as well due to the amount of debt that family member may have incurred and treatment costs.

Interviewees said that in families where either one or both parents are addicted to alcohol and/or drugs, children (especially younger children) are in immediate harm due to physical exposure to alcohol or drugs as well as to exposure to other people addicted to alcohol and/or drugs that may be friends of the parents. Parents who are abusing substances also may not be able to look after their children properly, often neglecting their children’s basic needs. One member of the community provides an example, “That’s one of the impacts that I see, they can buy some alcohol but they don’t necessarily buy a loaf of bread, or they don’t pay their school fees.” Research participants described children coming from these families as having poor attendance at school, a lack of food in their lunches, and unfinished homework. In fact, a few interviewees noted that the number of special needs children requiring extra attention at school has been increasing and they directly attribute it to a poor home environment which may include substance abuse. In many cases, interviewees said grandparents have taken over the role of raising their grandchildren because their own children, who are mostly in the 17 to 24 year old age range, “have gotten into alcohol and drugs.”

Research participants said alcohol and drug abuse in families may also lead to family violence and consequently, separation or divorce. In fact, a person working in the Human Services sector reports that family violence has been increasing over the last 2-3 years. An interviewee says that exposure to family violence impacts children and, in turn, “they take that violence down to their own peer group and so you end up with more violence on the playground.”

In addition to being more prone to violence, an addiction counsellor says that children who are raised in a home with addiction may suffer long term effects. She explains how these children may end up feeling inadequate all of their lives:

These children often feel that they're not valuable, they're not good enough, they're not worth a whole lot. It's their fault. And then as adults they continue to believe that they're never good enough. So, if they're always feeling like they need to achieve, to prove themselves to people, it becomes too much [and these children may say], "Well if I use a drug, those feelings go away for awhile and I can escape those feelings."

Consequently, children whose parents are addicted to alcohol and/or drugs may develop behaviour problems or addictions later in life. Still, a few interviewees pointed out that not all children who come from homes with addiction turn out that way and that "it doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to have a dysfunctional kid because they come from a dysfunctional home." In fact, some interviewees asserted that many of these children are quite healthy, resilient individuals.

Costs to employers

Interviewees said that substance abuse in the workplace is costly to employers due to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism and turnover, and increased accidents among employees. Sending an employee for treatment was also noted as an added expense for employers.

Strain on community services

Research participants said substance abuse is placing strain on people who provide vital services to the community such as social workers, nurses, RCMP officers and teachers. For example, one interviewee said when social workers enter a home with drugs they often require a police accompaniment which takes away from police resources to fight crime. Similarly, a teacher's extra effort to help a student who comes from a home with addiction takes resources away from regular teaching.

Crime and community fear

The abuse of alcohol and drugs alters an individual's state of mind, and as a result, an individual is more likely to commit a crime. In fact, one the most widespread impacts from meth use identified by the interviewees was crime, including break and enters, motor vehicle thefts, vandalism and assault. The following quote from an interviewee highlights how prevalent meth-related crime was in Hinton in 2003: "I had the Crown Prosecutor tell me that he didn't know what he did in court in Hinton until meth showed up because 90% of his dockets were meth-related."

A number of research participants talked about how the increase in crime has also led to community fear. One woman describes, "People are in fear of their neighbours because they're acting strange and they're threatening." Other residents said that having their truck stolen or house broken into made them feel "violated" and that they had "lost their sense of security." Numerous research participants said there is also a fear associated

with sharing the road with impaired drivers. One resident expresses, “I get kind of freaked at the people who are on the roads now, the people who are drinking late at night or doing drugs at night, I think that’s a big concern.” In addition, many interviewees noted that they no longer walk alone at night and lock their doors even when they are at home.

The nature of meth

When the meth crisis struck the community in 2003, the issue of substance abuse came to the forefront for Town Council, as well as for many families suffering from the fallout of drug addiction. For a town that’s witnessed substance abuse consistently since the 1960s, what was it about meth that brought the community into such turmoil?

A young person describes how meth is different from other drugs:

But just using the drug, it’s a totally different thing. For myself, it changed how I thought. I’d do another drug all of the time before, but it was never, drew an instantly, I want it everyday sort of thing. It was just the weekends, days you get off. But once I got into the meth thing, it was totally different. It changed who I was.

Due to meth’s ability to alter the way people think and act, a demand reduction specialist points out that “you don’t need a large group of meth users to turn a place on its head.” In fact, he says:

If you look at the impact the one user has for the average addiction, they probably affect 7 people. I would say with methamphetamines, one user affects 25 people because of the crime, the home labs and the contamination issues, then the absence of obstruction, criminal activity and psychotic behaviour.

As discussed at length above, substance abuse has had a number of impacts at an individual, family, and community level and these impacts are both financially and emotionally taxing. Though meth in particular has caused a ‘jolt’ to the community, several interviewees expressed concern that other problematic substances, such as alcohol, are not getting the community attention that they deserve.

The next section provides a second look at the impacts of substance abuse in Hinton and other Alberta communities.

5.6.2 Impacts of substance abuse: Secondary data

This section presents secondary data on criminal offences and divorce and separation statistics to further explore the impacts of substance abuse.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police - Criminal offences

Substance abuse is often associated with various crimes such as impaired driving and assault. With meth users in particular, criminal offences such as break and enters and theft are very common. Table 18 provides a look at some of the impacts of substance abuse in Hinton over the years 2000-2005. It is important to note that although crime

statistics may be used as an indicator of substance use, factors such as the level of police enforcement in a particular year may also influence the number of offenders recorded for a specific year. Note: The population data for Table 18 is based on the entire population and not the number of people 15 years and older.

Table 18. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton, 2000-2005

Criminal offence	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Impaired driving	5.02	11.70	10.10	9.78	8.40	1.81
Assault	15.66	14.89	17.97	15.20	17.12	4.67
Break and enter	17.07	17.54	15.84	10.95	20.84	3.05
Theft motor vehicle	8.23	9.14	11.16	6.49	5.32	1.33
Theft over \$5000	1.31	1.06	2.13	1.91	1.59	0.38
Theft under \$5000	47.38	42.42	48.27	59.12	52.21	8.29

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Data on criminal offences in Hinton has varied over the years. Hinton saw its highest rates of impaired driving in 2001, and highest rates of assault, motor vehicle thefts and thefts over \$5000 in 2002. The number of offences related to theft under \$5000 was the highest in 2003, while the number of break and enters was the greatest in 2004.

To set Hinton's level of criminal activity into perspective, Tables 19-24 compare some of Hinton's criminal statistics to criminal statistics of five Alberta communities for the years 2000-2005. Note: The population data for Tables 19-24 are based on the entire population and not the number of people 15 years and older.

Table 19. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2000

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	5.02 (#3)	21.59 (#1)	3.23 (#5)	14.94 (#2)	3.51 (#4)	0.52 (#6)
Assault	15.66 (#3)	27.03 (#1)	4.38 (#5)	16.48 (#2)	5.95 (#4)	0.74 (#6)
Break and enter	17.07 (#3)	23.12 (#2)	7.84 (#4)	31.22 (#1)	2.59 (#5)	0.48 (#6)
Theft motor vehicle	8.23 (#2)	15.13 (#1)	3.00 (#4)	4.79 (#3)	1.52 (#5)	0.16 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	1.31 (#4)	4.42 (#1)	1.38 (#3)	3.07 (#2)	0.17 (#5)	0.01 (#6)
Theft under \$5000	47.38 (#2)	80.23 (#1)	12.45 (#4)	38.51 (#3)	2.82 (#5)	0.70 (#6)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, the Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Table 20. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2001

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	11.70 (#3)	25.17 (#1)	3.56 (#5)	17.83 (#2)	5.88 (#4)	0.37 (#6)
Assault	14.89 (#3)	28.97 (#1)	7.12 (#4)	18.22 (#2)	6.81 (#5)	1.05 (#6)
Break and enter	17.54 (#2)	32.07 (#1)	4.27 (#4)	10.93 (#3)	1.97 (#5)	0.36 (#6)
Theft motor vehicle	9.14 (#3)	16.03 (#1)	1.19 (#5)	9.40 (#2)	2.09 (#4)	0.25 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	1.06 (#2)	2.93 (#1)	0.71 (#3)	0.19 (#5)	0.21 (#4)	0.04 (#6)
Theft under \$5000	42.42 (#2)	74.66 (#1)	9.73 (#4)	40.08 (#3)	4.10 (#5)	1.23 (#6)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Table 21. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2002

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	10.10 (#3)	31.03 (#1)	3.09 (#5)	15.50 (#2)	4.45 (#4)	1.07 (#6)
Assault	17.97 (#2)	29.99 (#1)	5.46 (#4)	12.25 (#3)	5.04 (#5)	0.84 (#6)
Break and enter	15.84 (#3)	20.17 (#1)	7.60 (#4)	17.60 (#2)	1.69 (#5)	0.37 (#6)
Theft motor vehicle	11.16 (#2)	13.79 (#1)	2.37 (#4)	9.95 (#3)	1.55 (#5)	0.14 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	2.13 (#2)	3.10 (#1)	0 (#6)	0.96 (#3)	0.21 (#4)	0.10 (#5)
Theft under \$5000	48.27 (#2)	57.40 (#1)	12.34 (#4)	39.42 (#3)	2.65 (#5)	0.96 (#6)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Table 22. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2003

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	9.78 (#3)	21.58 (#1)	1.66 (#5)	16.46 (#2)	3.26 (#4)	0.80 (#6)
Assault	15.20 (#3)	30.92 (#1)	6.88 (#4)	15.69 (#2)	4.47 (#5)	0.74 (#6)
Break and enter	10.95 (#3)	24.15 (#1)	7.83 (#4)	17.41 (#2)	2.48 (#5)	0.47 (#6)
Theft motor vehicle	6.49 (#3)	14.98 (#1)	2.37 (#4)	8.04 (#2)	1.74 (#5)	0.52 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	1.91 (#3)	2.58 (#2)	1.66 (#4)	3.44 (#1)	0.08 (#5)	0.06 (#6)
Theft under \$5000	59.12 (#1)	55.88 (#2)	10.44 (#4)	43.44 (#3)	2.84 (#5)	1.27 (#6)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population.

Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Table 23. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2004

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	8.40 (#3)	125.93 (#1)	5.46 (#4)	16.46 (#2)	2.66 (#5)	0.88 (#6)
Assault	17.12 (#3)	28.34 (#1)	11.63 (#4)	18.94 (#2)	4.30 (#5)	1.43 (#6)
Break and enter	20.84 (#2)	21.10 (#1)	5.46 (#4)	15.88 (#3)	2.00 (#5)	0.80 (#6)
Theft motor vehicle	5.32 (#3)	15.78 (#1)	1.42 (#5)	9.38 (#2)	1.69 (#4)	0.47 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	1.59 (#3)	2.58 (#1)	0.95 (#4)	1.72 (#2)	0.18 (#5)	0.12 (#6)
Theft under \$5000	52.21 (#2)	61.03 (#1)	9.49 (#4)	39.42 (#3)	2.85 (#5)	1.38 (#6)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population. Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Table 24. Number of criminal offences per thousand population, RCMP, Hinton and comparison communities, 2005

Criminal offence	Hinton (R79)*	Drayton Valley (R94)	Barrhead (A74)	Stettler (A69)	Fort McMurray (R82)**	Lethbridge (A89)
Impaired driving	1.81 (#4)	11.11 (#2)	5.64 (#3)	13.39 (#1)	0.28 (#6)	0.34 (#5)
Assault	4.67 (#4)	10.14 (#3)	19.03 (#1)	11.29 (#2)	0.38 (#6)	0.40 (#5)
Break and enter	3.05 (#4)	10.47 (#3)	12.92 (#2)	13.01 (#1)	0.13 (#6)	0.30 (#5)
Theft motor vehicle	1.33 (#4)	7.25 (#1)	6.81 (#2)	5.74 (#3)	0.16 (#5)	0.08 (#6)
Theft over \$5000	0.38 (#4)	1.61 (#1)	0.70 (#3)	0.96 (#2)	0.02 (#6)	0.04 (#5)
Theft under \$5000	8.29 (#4)	30.27 (#1)	25.13 (#3)	28.89 (#2)	0.30 (#6)	0.38 (#5)

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population. Source: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (number of criminal offences); Alberta Municipal Affairs, Town of Hinton and AlbertaFirst.com (population statistics)

Overall, based on Tables 19-24, Drayton Valley ranks #1 in the number of various criminal offences from 2000-2005. Out of the six communities, Hinton ranks in the middle to the top of the pack in most years, with the exception of theft under \$5000 for

the year 2003 (Hinton ranked #1). In fact, Hinton and Stettler ranked quite similarly throughout the six-year period, with Stettler ranking a bit higher than Hinton depending on offence and year. It's worth mentioning that Stettler, largely an agricultural community, ranked #1 in terms of break and enters in year 2000, theft over \$5000 in 2003, and impaired driving and break and enters in 2005. Barrhead and Fort McMurray ranked similarly over the six-year period, with Barrhead ranking #1 for assault in 2005. Overall, Lethbridge ranked the lowest in terms of the number of criminal offences for the period 2000-2005, though competed quite closely with Fort McMurray for this 'last spot' in 2005.

The next section looks at another possible impact of substance abuse – divorce and separation.

Statistics Canada - Divorce and separation statistics

Substance abuse may cause marital problems and family breakdown – though it is not the only cause – and as pointed out by some research participants, divorce and separation can actually lead to substance abuse issues. Interviewees attributed a lot of the divorce and separation in Hinton to substance abuse and financial issues. Table 25 presents divorce and separation statistics for Hinton and 15 comparison communities. Note: The population data for Table 25 is based on persons 15 years and older.

Table 25. Divorce and separation statistics (% of population divorced or separated), Statistics Canada, Hinton and comparison communities, 2001

Community	% of pop. divorced or separated	Rank
Hinton (R79)*	9.94	#13
Athabasca (A20)	11.28	#4
Barrhead (A74)	10.65	#9
Camrose (A72)	11.04	#5
Drayton Valley (R94)	9.30	#15
Edson (R79)	12.18	#2
High River (A23)	10.87	#6
Lethbridge (A89)	10.84	#7
Lloydminster (R78)	8.78	#16
Red Deer (E50, A48)	12.05	#3
RMWB (R82)**	10.61	#10
St. Paul (A41)	9.53	#14
Stettler (A69)	10.14	#12
Wainwright (A40)	10.46	#11
Wetaskiwin (A63)	13.00	#1
Whitecourt (R89)	10.74	#8

*The letter and number in brackets after each community name indicates the proportion of that community's employment in a particular sector: the Resource sector (R = Mining, Forestry, Energy); the Agriculture sector (A = Agriculture - primary); and the Energy sector only (E = Energy). For example, 79% of Hinton's workforce is employed in Mining, Forestry, Energy. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada.

**The proportion of employment in the Resource sector is for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray, the surrounding rural area, and the shadow population. Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada

Out of the 16 communities analyzed, the five communities with the highest divorce and separation rates in 2001 were: 1) Wetaskiwin, 2) Edson, 3) Red Deer, 4) Athabasca, and 5) Camrose. The five communities with the lowest divorce and separations rates were: #16) Lloydminster, #15) Drayton Valley, #14) St. Paul, #13) Hinton, and #12) Stettler. Although residents believe that Hinton's divorce and separation rate is higher than the rate in other Alberta communities, Table 25 shows that Hinton actually has one of the lower divorce and separation rates out of a sample of 16 Alberta communities. Interestingly, Edson and Drayton Valley are both heavily dependent on resources (and were referred to by one interviewee as *cookie-cutter* communities) and yet Edson's divorce and separation rate is the second highest out of 16 communities, while Drayton

Valley's rate is the second lowest. Based on Table 25, there appears to be no conclusive evidence that resource-based communities have higher rates of divorce and separation.

5.6.3 Impacts of substance abuse: A comparison of data

The analysis of the impacts of substance abuse in Hinton is largely based on the interview data because of the limited secondary data available. The secondary data showed varying rates of criminal offences, with theft under \$5000 reaching a high in 2003, while impaired driving has been on the decline since 2001. One discrepancy between the interview and secondary data was the perceived amount of divorce and separation versus the actual amount. While residents said they believed divorce and separation is likely higher in Hinton than in other communities, Statistics Canada data (2001) shows that Hinton actually ranks relatively low when compared with the 15 comparison communities. We acknowledge that the divorce and separation rates may have changed since 2001; however 2001 data was the most recent data available.

5.7 Contributing factors to substance abuse in Hinton

Addiction researchers have identified a myriad of factors which could contribute to a person's substance addiction, so within the context of a community it becomes increasingly complex to identify all of the factors.

5.7.1 Contributing factors: Beyond the boredom factor

Boredom is one commonly identified factor. Several research participants said small town boredom was in part responsible for people turning to alcohol and drugs in Hinton. One man who agrees that there's nothing to do in Hinton says, "What are you going to do here in Hinton right? You can go bowling, or you can go to the bar. Like it's pretty limited." Other research participants argued that there are a lot of things to do in Hinton and that boredom is just an excuse. A high school student says, "It's not a fact that there's nothing to do, people just choose to use drugs and alcohol."

In any case, our investigation into the contributing factors to substance abuse in Hinton aims to dig deeper to uncover some of the more rudimentary factors of substance abuse. To find these factors we looked to the economic structure and corresponding social structure of Hinton.

5.7.2 Contributing factors: Uncovering the link between substance abuse and Hinton's economic structure

Hinton's economic structure is largely based on its natural resources and resource sectors, i.e., forestry, mining, and oil and gas. Over the years, Hinton's economic structure has shaped its social structure. Interestingly, it emerged from the interviews that within Hinton's social structure there exists a lot of family and community dysfunction such as a lack family connectedness and community cohesion. This lack of social connection in turn puts an individual at risk for developing a substance addiction. So what features of Hinton's economic structure have caused its social structure to evolve in such a way that it decreases the number of social connections within the community and makes individuals more susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse?

Through the interviews we have identified five main characteristics of Hinton's economic structure which indirectly make people vulnerable to substance abuse: 1) multiple, divergent sectors, 2) high income, 3) union environment, 4) shift work, and 5) transience.

These characteristics do not directly cause a person to abuse alcohol or drugs; rather it depends on the interaction between members of the community and these five characteristics.

5.7.3 Contributing factors: Features of a resource-based community

This section explains how five key features of Hinton's economic structure indirectly contribute to substance abuse.

Multiple, divergent sectors

Being situated in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Hinton boast an attractive location and an abundant supply of natural resources, leading one interviewee to characterize Hinton as "maybe a little bit of Whitecourt and a little bit of Jasper mixed together." These natural amenities and resources have enabled Hinton to build a strong and diverse economy due to forestry, mining, tourism, and now oil and gas activities. However, Hinton's multiple, divergent sectors have also contributed to a gap between high income earners (those who work at the mill and mine) and low income earners (those who work primarily in the service sector). And this gap has created a rigid social structure in Hinton. In fact, a person who's lived in Hinton for 39 years said that people in Hinton are more likely to be discriminated against based on their income than on their nationality. Below illustrates how differently a high income person and a low income person perceive the community:

I would say that people in this community expect to always do well, they always have. You know, you don't see a lot of poverty in Hinton.

I don't know how to describe it in words. But I've never experienced a place that makes a pool for [low income] people to sit in so they can stay repressed. Like I think it's hard to raise yourself up in Hinton for a number of reasons: [lack of] child care, lack of transportation, lack of recreation for people who have affordable housing...

Based on these divergent views it was not surprising to learn from the interviewees that within Hinton there exists social exclusion. Interviewees said social exclusion was particularly visible in the schools. Low income children who could not afford to play hockey, attend dance lessons, etc., had few recreational opportunities available to them and were isolated from these social groups. This social exclusion may be partly based on the fact that higher income residents, who are not necessarily exposed poverty in Hinton, feel that poverty does not exist within the community. A long time resident offers another example of social exclusion in Hinton:

The big one is the grade 12 graduation. That's the big one for students – at the Jasper Park Lodge. We don't seem to have a large enough building to

accommodate graduation – that’s their story. So it costs quite a bit, they do go around and have fundraisers and stuff, but I know my niece’s son couldn’t go. He would have had to go by himself because no one could afford it, so he didn’t go. “Oh, everyone can afford it,” say these people that organized it. Everybody can afford it. But who am I talking to? I am talking to a doctor’s or lawyer’s wife.

Social exclusion for low income earners can leave a person feeling isolated and hopeless. An interviewee on income support explains why being in the lower income bracket puts a person at risk for substance abuse:

If you don’t have that inside drive when everything seems opposing to you, you’re going to want to repress it somehow. So it would make sense to me, that, I don’t use methamphetamine, but it’s my understanding, it’s really cheap.

In addition to the division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots,’ there also seems to be divisions within the ‘haves’ of the community based on which resource sector you’re employed in. A long time resident further describes these tightly knit social groups or cliques:

The mill folks hang out with the mill folks and the mine folks hang out with the mine folks and you don’t see a whole lot of integration with the circles... And when you’re within that circle, very friendly, great people, give you their shirts off their backs, and when you’re outside of that circle looking through, it’s not that friendly of a circle to look at.

Hinton’s multiple, divergent sectors have created a social structure which is characterized by tightly knit social groups. These social groups are based on income (high or low), as well as sector employed (mill or mine). This type of social structure may limit the number of social connections among residents. A religious leader in the community highlights the importance of social connections: “Humans are born with need for relationships. When relations are broken, their lives are missing something.” As a result, some residents may feel isolated and unfulfilled, and thus be more susceptible to substance abuse.

High income

The high income earned by people who work at the mill and at the mine has been a defining feature of Hinton. When asked what Hinton was like, almost all Hinton residents characterized Hinton as “rich”, “wealthy”, and “prosperous.” One interviewee describes how this wealth over the years has put Hinton in a unique position:

There’s something about this industry-based environment that the norm of two or three generations working in the mill or the mine. They haven’t had to worry about unemployment until that one bump in the road here a couple of years ago.

But umm... so like money just was there and, you know, it was like Hinton is in this bubble of materialism.

Despite this prosperity, life in a “money town” can be problematic for a number of reasons. First, the lure of earning a high income causes many young people in Hinton to forgo post-secondary education for jobs at the mill or mine. These individuals never leave Hinton and as a result, may lead “very confining lives and don’t seem to have a sense that life can be different.” A research participant describes how this small town view can cause a person to fall into a substance-abusing lifestyle:

It’s easy for an individual in this community at 18 years old to go and get a high paying job and not bother to go to college or university. So I think what happens in that case is that you, we have a lot of people in the field who don’t have a worldly view. And they’re not stupid by any means, [just] naïve as to what’s out there. And, you know, it starts out... you’re at a party and there’s lots of drinks and somebody’s got some drugs and they might start with a few joints. And you might start off with a line of coke or crystal meth, you know. And it just becomes a lifestyle.

This lifestyle seems well-entrenched in Hinton and is easily afforded due to the high income of Hinton’s resource sectors. A person working in the Health sector said that the high income earned by workers at the mill and mine is a key factor in Hinton’s substance abuse issue. To support his claim, he describes how the most severe emergency calls occur on payday:

We used to always say that Thursday was trauma night in Hinton for the ambulance because it was payday, every Thursday. The mill was one Thursday, and the mine was the other Thursday. And the majority of the bar calls are Thursday, Friday, Saturday – but the bad ones are usually Thursday.

Income in Hinton definitely plays a role in substance abuse as evidenced above. But not all people in Hinton who earn a high income necessarily have alcohol or drug addictions. *Why is this?* An addiction counsellor says that “how people choose to invest their money depends on their belief system.” He describes:

If you give money to two different families, one healthy family and one unhealthy family you will see different effects. For families with the unhealthy belief system, money just adds to the problems they have. This is because they may feel unworthy to have money and this unworthiness is manifested.

So, a person with an unhealthy belief system and a lot of money will invest in his/her addiction.

Another reason why earning a lot of money can be problematic is because of the very competitive material culture in Hinton. Interviewees said some high income earners in Hinton have a ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ mentality, buy expensive ‘toys’, incur a high

amount of debt, and consequently, feel stressed. One interviewee describes this competitiveness (and resultant stress) among some Hintonites:

And this town has always been a money town... and that's the problem. There's a lot of competition in this town, compared to any other town I've noticed. I've lived in Edson and a few other small towns, Grande Cache – but this town is really cliquy. And everybody will tell you that about the people here. And then so it's very competitive, let's put it that way, because everybody's making a lot of money. It's a competitive thing, and it's, it's crazy. Some people that can't keep up, they can't do it, they're stressed.

This financial stress can make an individual more vulnerable to substance abuse. In addition, to order to 'keep up' many Hinton residents work more hours so they can earn more money. A research participant describes this phenomenon:

Some people give up their vacation time, which employers should not allow for money – instead of taking their families for vacation. It's very common, it's very common. They trade in, they're allowed, they have a policy where they can trade in so many of their annual holidays and get paid out for them.

And as people become increasingly focused on making money an addictions counsellor points out “the pot slowly leaks from family and emotional support” and soon it becomes a case of “you've got money, but you've got nothing else.” The push to earn more and more money then can cause emotional stress on the family and again make individuals more vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse.

More time spent at work and less time spent interacting socially plays out on the community level as well. When we asked a research participant, “Have you noticed any recent changes in community life or community structure?” He described how people in Hinton nowadays are too busy working to socialize:

Well, I've noticed everything is busy now. Twenty years ago we had more time. It seemed like social programs were a little more occupied, people had the time to do curling or whatever, they had time to go camping. Today's it's almost like that's all diminished. The curling games are a quarter of what they used to be and the town's bigger. Why is that? It doesn't make sense. It's just that people aren't doing that kind of stuff anymore, they're not working together anymore, they're not playing together. They're just living, just existing. This existence, I imagine it creates stress also.

The above quote illustrates how socialization in the community has decreased and how people have shifted from working and playing together to just existing. Another interviewee highlighted the lack of *spiritual* connection in the community through providing the example that only 11% of Hintonites attend church. This lack of connection among members of the community can lead to isolation, loneliness and predispose residents to substance abuse.

Through the interviews we learned that a high income doesn't necessarily equate community health and well-being. Many young people give up educational opportunities and worldly experience to earn a high income right out of high school which can make them susceptible to adopting a substance-abusing lifestyle. As well, the high income enjoyed by some Hinton residents has given rise to a "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality which has, in turn, caused financial stress for those who can't keep up. One research participant also pointed out that "the more money you make, the more you want" which has led some residents to give up their vacation time for money. The financial and emotional stress of high debt and low family connection can then lead a person to alcohol and drugs as a means of coping.

Union environment

A large portion of Hinton's workforce is unionized: nurses, mill and mine workers, and even employees at Safeway. According to an interviewee, a strong union environment, in combination with other factors, can lead to a so-called 'culture of entitlement.' A culture of entitlement is when people expect certain things (i.e., services, benefits) instead of thinking of these things as a privilege. 'Culture of entitlement' refers to the predominant philosophy of people working at the mill and mine.

A person working at the mill says a union environment can foster a culture of entitlement because:

A lot of workers in the workplace use the word entitlement and they know exactly what their rights are, they know what they can get away with, what they can't get away with and everything is black and white, right or wrong, and yes and no, or us and them, it's very much so.

In addition to a union environment giving rise to a culture of entitlement, an interviewee says that Hinton's fortunate situation – with a high amount wealth and close proximity to both the mountains and to a major urban centre – may be influencing this feeling of entitlement. The interviewee describes:

You just look around and everybody drives big vehicles, new vehicles. You don't see too many rust buckets... that's a direct result of the prosperity in the community. And then you know we're in a unique situation too. We're 45 minutes from one of the most beautiful places in the world, right? And we're two and a half hours from a major centre in Edmonton. So we're in a pretty unique situation here compared to a lot of the province. And we've got everything right here. I mean we don't want for very much. So yeah, I guess you would say that people feel that they're entitled because, you know, they think it's their right.

So how is the culture of entitlement related to substance abuse? According to a Hinton resident, this feeling of entitlement could put people at risk when it comes to alcohol and drug abuse because if people feel entitled to things then they may feel that there are no

consequences to their actions. This can be particularly dangerous if individuals are experimenting with drugs. The Hinton resident further describes:

If you feel you're entitled then think you're impervious to the silver bullet. It's not going to happen to you, you can handle it, right... I see people; they think they can try things. It's very seductive with substance abuse. It's very seductive and if you've grown up with the feeling of entitlement all your life then you think you can beat it, you think it's not going to happen to you.

In addition to feeling "impervious" to the harms of substance use/abuse, other residents felt that a union culture may also foster the attitude that 'others' will solve issues within the community, such as alcohol and drug abuse.

Through the interviews we learned that a union environment, in combination with Hinton's high income and unique location, has created a feeling of entitlement among some Hinton residents. Because of this sense of entitlement people may feel they can use alcohol and drugs and not have to worry about becoming addicted. Interviewees said that workers in a union environment may also be used to other parties solving issues or problems that may arise, thus the workers may not feel responsible for addressing alcohol and drug issues within the community.

Transience

Numerous interviewees talked about how Hinton is a transient community with an ever-shifting population, especially now with the reopening of the mines and the increased oil and gas activity. Hinton's transient nature is partly due to its location on the Yellowhead Corridor, close proximity to Edmonton and Jasper, and abundant job opportunities. A Hinton resident explains why Hinton is (and has been) a hot spot for transients:

What happens with Hinton is that Edmonton is very close to us and it's an International airport. So people will be flying in from the east, they'll hit Edmonton and they'll begin traveling west. So it's a natural progression of stops we're seeing. Umm, people in the hospitality and tourism sector want to be in Banff, Jasper, they want to be in those park locations. We're very close to Jasper so they'll make their stop here. Umm, people traveling up to Fort McMurray, will stop in this area and they may never leave. You know, what happens with individuals we're finding is that they are looking for work at every point along their journey. And if they find it in Hinton, that's where they'll stay. They have had aspirations of Fort McMurray, but they may never get there.

Transience was said to be negatively impacting Hinton's social structure. Several research participants said that recently Hinton's close-knit nature has been disrupted by influx of new people moving into the community from larger cities. One Hinton resident of 30 years describes how Hinton has changed:

It used to be a close-knit community. The last few years, it's not. I think because we have a lot of new people coming in, so many of the old timers have left and the sense of family isn't instilled in the young people that are coming in... A lot of the young people that are coming in, they're coming in from bigger centres and it's very impersonal. It's just not the same. It's like you walk down the street in Edmonton and say, "Hi, how are you?" and they look at you like you're crazy. Here, it used to be if you didn't do that they'd look at you and now it's getting more impersonal. You walk by people and nothing.

On top of the community becoming more impersonal, other members of the community felt that Hinton was becoming less and less family-oriented. A woman who's lived in Hinton all her life says:

I can compare it to when I was a teenager, because I grew up in Hinton. It's definitely different now. Back then, to me it seemed like a more family oriented community, people were here for long term jobs, settling down. It's different now with the transient people.

Although transience creates social disruption among the locals, being a transient individual or family can also be stressful. Several interviewees said that a lot of Hinton residents – the recent and even the more established – do not have parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts or uncles living in the community and as such, have a very limited support network available to them in times of need. A research participant describes how Hinton's lack of extended family evolved over the last few decades:

People have moved here – tradespeople, and labourers – they moved here from all over the place, they moved here from Newfoundland, they moved here from the States, they moved here from Ontario, you know, we've moved here from all over the place, we've left our families behind which has had a huge impact in what's happened out here. The support systems aren't here for some of us. I say some of us because I was one of the people who moved here from somewhere else. But children have been raised without grandparent influence, which makes a huge difference.

Transience and the lack of extended family in Hinton further erode the level of social connection among members of the community and put people at greater risk of abusing alcohol and drugs in difficult times because "there's no one to help them, to support them, to turn their lives around." And not only does a community full of strangers make a person lonely and vulnerable to substance abuse, but it also becomes an optimal place for organized criminal groups to traffic drugs.

A research participant describes how Hinton's transient nature and location on a major thoroughfare makes it vulnerable to drug trafficking:

In a small community that's remote, everyone would notice a newcomer coming in... somebody might even be writing down the license plate number. But like

here, on the Yellowhead, people are just going back and forth and no one would be noticed if they came in for the purpose of trafficking or selling drugs.

In fact, some residents report that they can readily identify drug traffickers in Hinton by their license plates and physical disposition. One woman says:

When I am driving around town and I see BC plates with a single driver I automatically take a second look at that driver because you can tell, you can tell if they're whacked out on drugs and 90% of them would be the drug traffickers.

We learned through the interviews that Hinton's transient nature – in addition to being a hotspot for drug traffickers – limits the number of social connections among the population for a number of reasons. One reason identified by the interviewees is because transient people may feel a low level of attachment to the community due to their limited stay and thus do not actively seek out friends and social connections. Research participants also said that the newcomers to Hinton are from larger centres and are used to the anonymity of larger cities and so they bring that 'impersonal' nature with them. Finally, the low level of social connection in a transient community may be a result of families migrating here as 'nuclear' families and leaving their extended family behind. Overall, residents have noticed that the influx of strangers into the community has changed the values of the community, with these values being as simple as a "hello" on the street corner.

Location: An additional contributing factor

How did meth get into Hinton? One of the major contributing factors to the meth crisis in Hinton is Hinton's location. A demand reduction specialist for the province explains how the first 'meth cook' in Alberta coincidentally lived not too far from Hinton:

There are hotspots for different things. When I started by research into methamphetamines 3 and a half years ago the area was the West Yellowhead Corridor: Edson, Hinton, Drayton Valley, Evansburg. And everyone says, "Why?" Well, the guy that was making [meth] for the organized criminal group that controls it, lived out there and that's where it started.

As it turns out the meth cook then used the Yellowhead Corridor to market the drug. In fact, one interviewee from Drayton Valley said that some people refer to Highway 16 as the "Crystal Meth Highway."

Shift work

A lot of interviewees characterize Hinton not only as a high income town but also as a “shift work town.” Shift work may make a person vulnerable to substance abuse for a number of reasons.

First, a majority of people said shift work takes a significant toll on a worker’s physical and social well-being and may cause them to turn to alcohol or drugs to relieve his/her stress. A person who worked shift work for over 15 years describes how fatigue may lead to the use or abuse of substances:

I think it’s the demand – demand on that person. Because if you look at people, they work 12 hours a day. The thing about working 12 hours is you work your 12 hours and you’re stressed out right?...And then you get home and you just want to relax. You get a little stress at home and then boom – you go to the booze, right? I would think that has a lot to do with it. Guys are tired.

Another research participant adds, “For the amount of time that people work, they are trying to maintain a balance, but it is extreme – work hard, play hard.” In fact, workers may not only use substances to relax but also to give them energy. As such, substances become a means to help shift workers achieve this “work hard, play hard” mentality with some substances “offered as making you superman and pumping you up so that you can continue to perform and do the job” and other substances used as “a way of relaxation.”

Second, due the four-on and four-off schedule, shift workers have a lot of “unstructured time.” Some shift workers may take up a second job, which again increases their workload and stress level and may predispose them to substance abuse (ironically, a Hinton resident said that the four-on, four-off schedule was originally designed “so people could have more time off and a better lifestyle”). Interviewees said other shift workers may see four days off as an extended opportunity to party (and recuperate). In fact, one research participant who was once involved in a substance-abusing lifestyle said shift work is one of the reasons that Hinton is such a “party town.” He says, “Definitely every night you can go and party...you know somebody off on days off depending on what shift they’re on, and there’s just always somebody’s house to party at.”

Third, due to the four-on and four-off rotating schedule, social connections between a shift worker and his or her family and friends can be disrupted. Interviewees said shift work can be difficult for families because often times not only do the spouse and children at home have to do things alone, such as eat dinner, but so does the shift-working spouse. A couple of research participants said that some spouses at home get lonely and bored while his/her partner is working 12-14 hours a day so they spend a lot of time in the bar, drinking and trying to socialize. And, if the shift worker has family and friends working an opposite shift, he or she cannot socialize with those people either; in this way, shift work can limit the number of social connections among community members. An interviewee who works shift work illustrates how this type of schedule can impact friendships:

There's people you don't see for years just because you're on an opposite shift and when they're on days off, you're out at the mine working. I've got guys I went to high school with that I haven't seen for 10, 12 years and we live in the same small town.

Fourth, numerous interviewees also talked about how shift work negatively affects parenting in the community and consequently makes children more susceptible to use alcohol and drugs. A lot of families in Hinton today are double income families. Within these families many parents work opposite shifts which leave kids with low parental supervision and little to no discipline. A research participant explains that if kids are not disciplined and boundaries are not set, "they're going to push and push on whatever it is, whether its dope, alcohol or just vandalism, until you say that's enough." A long time resident of Hinton agrees that the lack of discipline among some of Hinton's youth is causing them to abuse alcohol and drugs and she adds, "Because parents feel guilty because they're out of the house all of the time – they give their children more money. And then the children end up getting hooked on this stuff."

And when some parents do get time off, they do not necessarily spend it with their children. In fact, one research participant said it's common for parents to drop the kids off at the daycare when it's "dad's day off." Other interviewees commented on the scant number of parents that come to watch their children's sporting events. One interviewee describes:

You go to a sporting event here where the kids are playing soccer or something, and how many parents do you see? You see everybody driving by and dropping kids off, sure, but how many parents do you actually see at the game? Probably 25% of the kids there have a parent with them.

Interviewees said this low parental involvement with their kids was due to shift work schedules, but also due to parents' choices.

As discussed above, shift work can contribute to substance abuse in a number of ways. Shift work has given rise to the 'work hard/play hard' mentality in which workers use substances to give them energy or to help them relax. Shift work also interrupts family routines and can limit the role parents play in their children's lives making children more susceptible to substance abuse.

Still, shift work does not impact all people in the same way. In fact, one former shift worker doesn't think that shift work significantly impacts an individual. He describes his own experience:

You know I worked 16 years of shift work, but I also had a family and a wife and kids. For 16 years of my life every second week, I worked nights and I got used to it. I mean you do. So, you know, I think that anybody who claims that that's

why they're abusing substances, I think that's an excuse, something to fall back on. I really can't tell you. At the end of the day, it really didn't have any effect on me at all.

This contrasts to another individual's experience at the same workplace:

No, I don't think you ever get used to it. I've been doing it for 17 years now. No, you're tired all of the time, you got no energy, you're beat down... winters are particularly tough especially for guys at the pulp mill; you don't see the sun for four days.

Based on the quotes above it is important to note that while shift work may be a contributing factor for some people, it is not for others. In fact, a person's physical and mental disposition may be the most significant contributing factor of substance abuse.

In summary, residents' interaction with five key features of Hinton's economic structure (multiple, divergent sectors; high income; union environment; transience; and shift work) seems to decrease the overall level social cohesion of the community.

As we've seen, multiple, divergent sectors and high income create a class system within the community between the high income earners (i.e., those working in the forestry or mining sectors) and low income earners (i.e., those working in the service sector). Within these two classes, money creates additional stress: high income residents may incur a lot of debt as they try to 'keep up with the Joneses,' and low income residents may feel frustrated and hopeless due to not being able to afford the high cost of living in Hinton. Having a lot of money may also create a desire to earn more money. This, in turn, drives people to work more and more hours, which consequently means less and less time with family and friends, and an erosion of social ties. Transience and shift work reinforce these social divisions and weaken wider social ties. In a highly transient community, people do not make the social connections in the first place because they know they will only be in the community for a short time. And, in shift work, people working opposite shifts live parallel lives and, as a result, are unable to develop a wider set of relationships with people in the community, including family members. Finally, a union environment creates an expectation that the social agencies within the community will solve the community's social problems. Overall, these five key features decrease social cohesion within the community and increase the opportunity for an individual to become isolated. The feeling of isolation and the need to feel connection may cause an individual to develop a strong attachment to alcohol or drugs, or to participate in a social group whose main feature is the consumption of alcohol or drugs.

Not all factors which contribute to substance abuse in Hinton are inherent to the community and its economic and social structure; there exists external factors as well. The next section discusses three external factors to substance abuse in Hinton.

5.7.4 Contributing factors: External

Interviewees have identified three contributing factors which are external to the community: the media and the ‘me’ culture, and the changing drug culture, and the changing face of industry.

The media and the ‘me’ culture

A number of interviewees said that increasing rates of substance abuse is a *societal thing* and is not unique to Hinton, but is part of a North American phenomenon fueled largely by television – its programs and advertising.

One way television can contribute to addictions is by portraying life in an unrealistic way. A high school student shares why he thinks TV contributes to substance abuse: “On TV there are programs of how teenage life should be, and when the show is over you feel less satisfied with your own life.” This dissatisfaction with one’s life can make a person feel like they’re missing something and can fuel addictions.

Television can also create a ‘me’ culture where individuals, lured by advertising, have a difficult time saying “no.” In fact, one research participant sees substance abuse as only one type of addiction and says, “I think addiction is rampant in our culture, the obesity, the alcoholism, the shopping, the consumerism – these are all addictions.” She attributes this cultural shift of addiction to people not being able to say ‘no’ and cautions:

Sometimes you just have to say no and shut the door – not do it. And a lot of people in our society are not used to that. They’re used to in over their heads in debt but they still go out and buy, buy, buy. What kinds of symptom is that in society? It means that’s basically ego gratification run wild.

As the above quotes point out, alcohol and drug addiction are only two types of addiction and may be part of a larger societal trend of addiction sweeping North America. Thus although some contributing factors of substance abuse in Hinton are specific to the community, there are also broader factors at play.

In addition to the influence of the media, some interviewees also talked about how the changing drug culture is contributing to substance abuse in Hinton.

The changing drug culture

Interviewees said that although people ultimately *choose* whether or not to use drugs, the fact that drugs are becoming increasingly available, cheaper, and more addictive may have an impact on peoples’ choices. In this way, substance abuse becomes, in part, “a supplier driven problem.”

A number of residents said that the Hell’s Angels are firmly established in Hinton now. In addition to being intimidating, the organized criminal group also runs a very sophisticated drug operation. One resident describes, “They have scanners, they know before the police know where the action is.”

Due to the presence of organized crime, a few Hinton residents said that the drug culture in Hinton is changing from a hobby-based operation to a business enterprise. The following conversation reveals how the drug culture is changing:

Interviewee: What I find now is like they're available all of the time, right? Anywhere, there's somebody at the party or the bar that has it available to you, right? You don't have to go looking for it; you don't have to wait till somebody gets off work. It used to be a hassle to get some, so you didn't do it much, but now it's just available anytime, you do it when you feel like it, right?

Researcher: So why is it so available? Is there any reason for that?

Interviewee: It's a business now; people are living off it now. It's not a hobby; it's more of somebody's livelihood.

In addition to drugs being more available, one Hinton resident describes how the variety of drugs has increased, making drugs more appealing to some people:

When I went to university, they had two kinds of pot – one from Mexico and the other one was from California. Now they have designer stuff that comes out from wherever and it's cut with this and cut with that. And the kids tell me that, you know, there's just such a variety of stuff available, from all over the world if you will.

And along with the increased availability (and the ease at which a 'meth recipe' can be downloaded from the Internet), a number of research participants said that the price of drugs has decreased. Twenty five years ago, an interviewee says, "Coke was \$225 per gram, and I don't know what it's going for right now, but it's probably under 100 bucks." Other interviewees said meth is very inexpensive: "\$5- \$10 a hit."

But perhaps the most significant change in today's drug culture is that drugs are more addictive than ever before. One interviewee describes, "The pot of today is not the pot of Woodstock, let's put it that way." Hinton residents said that drug dealers are now lacing 'softer' drugs like marijuana with meth, and selling meth as ecstasy.

Today, the changing drug culture is making drugs increasingly available, cheaper, and more addictive. As a result, those Hinton residents experimenting with, or using drugs recreationally are at a greater risk of developing a drug addiction.

The changing face of industry

With the convergence of global markets, competition between resource-based firms, e.g., forestry and mining companies, has increased. A person working in the forest sector says pulp and paper mills have been in decline since the mid 90s due to a variety of factors. He describes these factors below:

...Primarily from competition from mills that are being built in South America and Asia... and the erosion of our competitive advantage that we enjoyed as a result of the Canadian dollar and cheap energy. Overall, he says, the lumber business, it's okay, it's not wonderful. The pulp business is terrible.

Due to these new global market pressures, an interviewee said that some companies are merging to form larger companies to benefit from economies of scale. As previously mentioned, two major employers in Hinton – the mill and the mine – have come under new ownership due to these global pressures. Several interviewees said that the new companies, West Fraser and Elk Valley Coal are “bottom line companies.” Consequently, a number of benefits offered by the former companies, Weldwood and Luscar, have been cut. These benefits include hot ‘restaurant’ dinners during overtime and fitness rebates. Interviewees even talked about how regular meeting times between workers and management (where workers were given the opportunity to discuss issues) were discontinued and replaced with a “blanket policy.” These changes have upset many mill and mine workers and have created an uneasiness in the work environment. As a result, a number of interviewees said, some workers (and even those that have been there for 20-25 years) are leaving the mill and the mine and moving into more lucrative positions in the oil and gas sector. A mill employee describes the situation: “We’re losing experienced engineers, we’re losing experienced operations maintenance coordinators, pipefitters, human resources training people... you name it, we’re losing it.”

The changing face of industry thus places stress on workers due to increasing job uncertainty and decreasing benefits. The inability to provide input into management decisions and the increasing divide between workers and management also adds to this stress as does the strain of entering a new workplace, e.g., the oil and gas sector, after 20 years working at the mill. Workers may then turn to alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with this increasing workplace stress.

Some contributing factors to substance abuse in Hinton are occurring at provincial, national and even global level and are affecting communities all over the country. The next section investigates a provincial phenomenon that’s created both opportunities and challenges for Hintonites, other Albertans, and people right across the country – the oil and gas boom.

5.8 The boom

When we began the second round of interviews in January 2006, it was evident that the community had been going through some significant changes since the first round of interviews in May of 2005. In 2006, the oil and gas boom was on the top of everyone’s mind.

The next section provides a brief overview of the oil and gas sector: its operations, workers, wages, and alcohol and drug policies.

5.8.1 The boom: Introducing the oil and gas sector

The oil and gas workers, who have moved into Hinton over the last couple of years, are primarily involved in the extraction of natural gas and, to a lesser extent, oil.

Representatives from oil and gas companies said that due to advancing technology and the high price of natural gas, companies have now begun to explore the Foothills area. These representatives predict the boom could last anywhere from 5 to 15 years.

As Hinton residents have noticed, most people employed in the oil and gas sector in the Hinton area are not from Hinton. One interviewee explains that because there has been such a lull between oil and gas booms, there are very few Hintonites who are trained in the sector, thus many of the workers in the area are from outside the community. In terms of qualifications, many of the larger oil and gas companies require that new hires have a high school diploma or equivalent. Although, one interviewee admits, “A high school diploma is nice, but nowadays with the labour shortage, it doesn’t matter.”

Oil and gas workers are generally well-paid. The wage for entry level workers, or ‘green operators’ ranges from \$20.00-\$30.00 per hour and, in many cases, includes double time for overtime and triple time for statutory holidays. Oil and gas workers typically work ‘condensed’ work weeks: 10 hours per day; 8 days on and 6 days off. Some workers work as long as 15 days on with 6 days off. And because the vast majority of workers are working away from home, companies provide them with ample living allowances.

All of the larger companies interviewed had an alcohol and drug policy in place and many of the smaller companies or contractors also had active policies. The alcohol and drug policies of oil and gas companies typically consist of pre-hire testing and post-incident testing if the incident seems suspicious. All of the larger companies interviewed also have Employee Family and Assistance Programs for those employees needing treatment for substance use/addiction issues.

One oil and gas contractor said that nowadays, it is important for a contractor to have an alcohol and drug policy in place and to enforce it because often times when contractors bid on contracts with a large oil and gas company, that company requires contractors to submit their safety records, and alcohol and drug policies. The contractor admits that because of this, “It’s getting harder and harder to win contracts.” In fact, a research participant from the oil and gas sector claimed that alcohol and drug acceptance has changed dramatically in the last 6 years within the oil and gas sector. He says, “Before it was accepted; now, it’s no longer.”

Despite this ‘turnaround,’ some of the smaller contractors still do not have policies in place. And, as an interviewee explains, because “a contractor could work for four different companies in one week, it’s hard for companies to keep on top of drug testing.” One smaller contractor expressed his frustration regarding drug testing saying although he would like to implement drug testing, he doesn’t have knowledge or time to do it. The contractor felt the responsibility of drug testing should reside with the government. He explains:

I'd like to see it go through some kind of an occupational health and safety... maybe you'd have to go there first or to an employment office, like they [employees] could go there to the office for clearance and they could give us clearance and then they [the government] can deal with them all. Like I don't want to deal with them all, I got enough problems with just dealing with our industry, with our jobs and that... I'd like to see them deal with it; they're the ones that make the laws, and they should define them. We should be more informed, and we never get anything in the mail...

As evidenced above, the issue of drug testing puts smaller companies, who have fewer resources, in a difficult situation.

The following section highlights a number of impacts that the oil and gas boom is having on the Town of Hinton.

5.8.2 The boom: Impacts on the community

Throughout the interviews, the theme that the boom was unexpected and that Hinton was unprepared emerged. One research participant says, "The community wasn't ready for the boom and it's just a sudden influx of money, sudden influx of people and it just took everybody by surprise." Similarly, another participant adds, "I think as citizens we took for granted that we were kind of a sleepy town – now we woke up."

All interviewees were surprised at the 'busyness' of the community, and said this was the busiest that they have ever seen Hinton. However, interviewees' opinions on the boom and its impacts were mixed. Business owners and entrepreneurs were more likely to view the boom positively, while people in the Human Services sector and people with low incomes were more likely to view the boom in negative light. Other interviewees stayed neutral on the issue, realizing the pros, the cons, and the inevitability of growth. One man describes:

A lot of negative from people you know with extra traffic, with the hotels being booked, but there's negative and positive. I mean these guys need to work as well, whether it's our town, whether it's Grande Cache or Edmonton... it's not their fault they're coming to our town. The increased transportation going back and forth down East River Road and creating all the dust – and what do you do? It's growth.

Interviewees identified a number of impacts of the boom. Residents talked about the increasing traffic and dirt on the streets, increased bar fights, longer line-ups at restaurants, grocery stores and car washes, and overall, poorer service due to staff shortages. Female residents, specifically, said that with the influx of oil and gas workers into the community they were more cautious on the streets and increasingly hesitant about going into the bars at night. However, residents said one of the most significant impacts of the boom is the housing issue: escalating rents and the absence of affordable housing. A research participant provides an example of how the boom has artificially inflated rents, threatening longtime residents on fixed incomes:

It's a very dirty business. People are greedy. A lot of people, I hear their rents are going up by double. [Landlords] are trying to kick people out of their apartments. We have one man who comes in here, he's a senior, he's been living in his apartment for 23 years and the landlord is trying to kick him out, so when they have new tenants move in, they can jack up the rent.

The rising rent has even spurred on the trend of some low-income residents moving in together. One woman describes how for some residents, this is their only option:

A lot of people are moving in together. You just got to – all three or four of you in an apartment in order to make ends meet, otherwise you can't do it. It's either that or go down to the campground and live out of a tent.

An interviewee describes how this type of situation – with the crowding and stress – makes people vulnerable to substance abuse. He furthers, “And if people get evicted from their home or their apartments and they can't afford to stay there, we find that when that happens, people usually turn to drugs or alcohol.”

The rising cost of living in Hinton is, in turn, widening the gap between the rich and poor. Numerous residents talked about how a gas company bought an apartment in the valley and evicted the tenants so that the company could move their employees into town. One resident highlights the differential impact of the boom in a simple quote: “In Hinton the idea of spreading the wealth means someone's getting a Cadillac while someone else gets an eviction notice.”

The lack of affordable housing in the community is having a range of impacts on the community from kids going to school from tent trailers to victims of domestic violence having nowhere to stay when they leave their abusive partners. Residents also said with ‘no vacancy’ at hotels and motels, the boom is taking away from tourism and has even caused some local sports teams to cancel tournaments and competitions. In addition, residents said that the housing issue has made it difficult to recruit people for a wide-range of jobs – from service sector jobs to professional positions.

The oil and gas boom has had both positive and negative impacts on Hinton residents. Lower income residents are struggling to pay their rent and afford groceries, while people who have moved into the oil and gas sector are enjoying even higher wages than before. In discussions with people from Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, it appears that this situation is not unique to Hinton, but is taking place in many Alberta communities where oil and gas activity is thriving. In fact, interviewees said a lot of the skilled tradesmen who were working at the mill or the mine are now going up to Fort McMurray to work. This, in turn, creates stress on the family structure and may lead to marriage failure. A local counsellor says, “If the marriage is good, chances are they can handle it for a period of time; if the marriage isn't good, then they won't.”

The next section further expands on how the boom has affected Hinton, and specifically its employment situation.

5.8.3 The boom: Impacts on employment

The boom is having both positive and negative impacts on employees, depending on skill set and sector employed.

Positive impacts on employment

The oil and gas boom in Hinton is having a number of positive impacts on employment. Interviewees said with the increased job opportunities, young people do not necessarily have to leave the community to find jobs. In addition, the vast amount of job opportunities in the service sector has allowed some marginally employed people, who could not get a job before the boom, to now find work. In fact, May 2006 statistics for the Hinton Food Bank show that demand for food has actually decreased compared to Food Bank statistics from May of 2005 and 2004. Other Hintonites are benefiting from the boom by starting up new businesses which provide services to the oil and gas sector. These new businesses include: hotshot services (delivering food and supplies to the remote oil and gas operations), emergency medical services, and work camps that house transient oil and gas workers. And of course the shadow population (which interviewees have estimated to be anywhere from 5,000-9,000 workers) has increased the profits for many restaurant, store, and property owners.

Negative impacts on employment

The increased oil and gas activity in the Hinton area (as well as in Fort McMurray) has contributed to a number of challenges for Hinton employers and employees alike. One local businessman says despite the growth in business due to increasing demand from the shadow population, service sector employers cannot find enough workers. He describes how the changing demographic of Hinton (an increase in young to middle-aged men) is increasing his customer base, but not adding to his staffing base:

We've experienced all of this growth in the last couple of years where Hinton has grown by quite a bit, and at the end of the day, it's the oil workers coming to town that's boosting the economy. But what they aren't doing is that they're not bringing their wives, they're not bringing their kids. And that's who I need in my store.

The introduction of a new sector – the oil and gas sector – is not only skewing Hinton's demographics, but it's also causing many employees to 'jump' sectors. Because the wages in the oil and gas sector are higher than those of the mill, mine, and service sector, a lot of people have moved into the oil and gas sector for more money, leaving their former employers desperate for employees. One research participant describes the new attitude among employers, "We've been told by a lot of employers that, 'As long as they have two feet and a heartbeat, I'll take them.'"

The service sector, due to its relatively low wages, is especially feeling the labour crunch. In fact, among service sector employers there is a wage war, with some employers

offering wages as high as \$12-\$14 per hour. A research participant said that increased wages in the service sector, in turn, has taken away people from non-profit sector.

Interviewees also said that the mill and mine are experiencing a significant amount of turnover with many 20-25 year employees leaving their unionized positions for work in the oil and gas sector. A person working in the Human Services sector says because things are going so well in the economy, people do not really care whether or not a position is union-based or contractor-based. She describes how employees currently view contractor-based opportunities versus union-based jobs:

I mean there may be less security of course, they're contracts, they don't offer the benefits necessarily that maybe a unionized environment would. You don't have the umbrella working over you in terms of protection and those types of things. So definitely, I mean just in terms of the differences between the contractor and the unionized environment, but do people care about that right now? No. Not really.

As evidenced above, workers in Hinton are becoming less discriminate when it comes to union versus non-union employment and some workers are migrating into contractor-based jobs. As a result, turnover is increasing at Hinton's traditional employers – the mill, mine, and service sector.

This high turnover puts added strain on former coworkers who are often left to pick up the extra work during times of transition. On the other hand, the people who enter the oil and gas sector also experience stress as they move from perhaps a unionized position to a position where you're expected to work 12-14 hours per day, 8 days per week or more. In both cases this added stress may cause people to use alcohol and drugs to cope.

The next section describes how the oil and gas sector is importing some new contributing factors to substance abuse into the community and further negatively affecting the community.

5.8.4 The boom: Contributing factors to substance abuse – oil and gas

Interviewees identified a number of contributing factors to substance abuse in the oil and gas sector. One of the most significant factors discussed by interviewees was the intense work schedules of oil and gas workers. One interviewee says, "From what I see, the oil and gas is so busy. They basically work you to death!" Two research participants, who have worked in the oil and gas sector, said they left the sector in order to lead more balanced lives. They describe the toll the oil and gas sector took on their lives:

The oil and gas, I really liked the oil and gas but the hours were just like crazy eh, like I'm married too and I got kids and I'm involved with my kids coaching and I just wouldn't do it, I just wouldn't do it, you know you're on call 24-7. So you come home at 5:00 o'clock at night and then you get called out at 2:00 o'clock in the morning. And then god knows what time you're going to get back.

You know you take a job where you're suppose to work two weeks on and a week off but they still want you to work your week off right so it's just kind of consuming. It just kind of consumes your life, like you don't have much, your hobbies and family and stuff like that just get left out.

From the above quotes, we see that the oil and gas sector requires workers to work all hours of the day and for weeks on end. In addition to this sector's intense work schedule, oil and gas workers are often working away from home, and away from their families. Interviewees said this poses a number of challenges for workers such as boredom, loneliness, and lack of social support. These factors – in addition to being extremely exhausted – may compel individuals to get involved in a certain kind of lifestyle. As one research participant pointed out, if you combine limited recreational opportunities with worker fatigue, the easiest form of recreation – but not necessarily the only form – becomes drinking alcohol or doing drugs. The research participant adds, “If you've just worked 12 days straight, what's easier: drinking beer or playing sports?” As a result, a research participant likens this experience of working out of town to ‘the boys going on a road trip.’ He describes:

Well you get guys coming in without their anchors right, and by their anchors I mean their families. So it's kind of like the boys going to a hockey tournament, it's a road trip. When you're out of town, the boys will play. That's how it works. Nothing to do, let's go to the bar for a beer, well pretty soon one turns into four, turns into six, turns into a whole set of days off getting liquored up and being a bad ass. It gets worse and worse and worse. It's unfortunate.

This seemingly innocent bout of drinking and partying may turn into a serious addiction issue especially since, as one addiction counsellor points out, “...because of the money people make, whatever you're doing tends to get escalated, more booze, more everything. No fear of losing job – so what? I'll just get another.” And depending on how ‘worse’ an addiction gets, the counsellor describes that these ‘isolated’ workers may fall into a trap where they are trying to move their families into the community, but cannot afford to because they have become hooked on an expensive addiction. He describes:

They make a lot of money and try to move family in, but there's a lack of affordable homes... The men might be thinking about family, but if you're using \$200 per day to buy drugs, there's a lot of guilt and shame, and they drive the cycle.

This type of living situation – with a worker being separated from his or her family – naturally creates a lot of marriage problems. An employer in the oil and gas sector describes the high rate of divorce among his workers and how a worker's lack of social connection may lead to substance abuse:

90% of our people are divorced. Money problems usually... the women don't want to seem to put up with the being away from home type of thing and then they come up and visit for a day or two and that's not enough to maintain a marriage. So we've got a lot of problems here, I think that's where a lot of that –

they become lonely, and then they start getting into trouble... drug abuse, alcohol...

Interviewees said maintaining a marriage is also difficult – even when a worker’s family lives in the local community. This is because of the amount of time a worker spends away from home and the lack of social connection the spouse may be receiving. A research participant describes this socially isolating situation:

The man’s away from 5 in the morning to 7 or 8 at night, and the women is left with the kids. And she’s talking to the kids. She’s not getting any social interaction, she can’t get out, she doesn’t know anybody, so there’s a lot of issues in that regard.

From the quote above we see that not only does the oil and gas sector make workers susceptible to substance abuse, but also a worker’s spouse and perhaps other family members as well.

Substance use also serves another function in the oil and gas sector – a means to get a job, or move up in one’s current position. A woman whose husband works in the oil and gas sector describes how going to the bar after work is almost a ritual for her husband – and could also possibly improve his chances of being promoted. She says:

A lot of the guys will get together after work and go for a drink, well they do that after each shift – that’s a lot of time that they’re gone out of the house. And sometimes it’s a way of moving up that ladder. “The boss is in town, we got to go out for a drink with him, so we can move up a bit.”

As the above quote illustrates, drinking alcohol (and as other interviewees described – doing drugs) seems to be entrenched in the oil and gas work culture. An oil and gas contractor says, “It seems like everybody, seems like they have to do it or you’re not in the ‘in crowd’ or whatever – not saying that’s everybody, but we see it a lot.” Another research participant says this peer pressure and need for belonging causes workers to adopt a “we-do-what-they-do” mentality. Other interviewees said some substances, particularly drugs like cocaine, are almost a status symbol. Workers may reason, “Cocaine is a rich man’s drug – well I make lots of money, so...,” and then these workers may end up using cocaine.

Another belief which appears to be ingrained in the resource industry work culture is the “big boys don’t cry mentality.” An Alberta addictions counsellor describes how this is problematic, “Men believe they can handle it by themselves. You stuff everything in, then when you come home, the wife gets it, the kid gets it, and the dog gets it.”

As the quote above points out, workers who repress feelings may vent them in other ways such as aggression or through the mood-altering experience of drinking alcohol or doing drugs.

In addition to this ‘big boys don’t cry’ mentality, an interviewee from Drayton Valley – an oil and gas town – says the oil and gas sector also has a “culture of superficiality.” He adds, “It’s a quick fix, tech fix industry.” In the same way, some oil and gas workers, he says, “use drugs as a technical fix to stay awake.” Working long periods of time and artificially keeping alert leads some oil and gas workers to “poor self care and poor self image.”

A research participant provides an example illustrating this ‘quick fix’ culture:

The dentist said that rig workers do not exercise any prevention in their health, it’s like when they have a toothache, they end up at the dentist to have it pulled. It’s never for cleaning, it’s never for a check up, that’s just the way those who work industry and long hours, that’s the way they do things. There’s not enough prevention and caring for themselves.

This poor self care and poor self image may lead individuals to artificially improve their moods and dispositions through alcohol or drugs.

Overall, the oil and gas sector brings with it a unique work culture in which workers may be more prone to substance abuse. Due to the vast amount of hours spent out in the field, workers become socially isolated and physically exhausted. Isolation and exhaustion may make individuals more vulnerable to abuse substances as they seek it as a way to entertain themselves (without exerting too much additional energy) and to fit into the work group. The oil and gas sector is also a ‘quick fix,’ ‘big boys don’t cry’ kind of culture where it is easier for an individual to alter their mood with a substance than to address an underlying issue.

5.9 Solutions to substance abuse

During the interviews we asked interviewees how they thought substance abuse could be best addressed in the community. This section presents some ideas on what can be done to solve the issue of alcohol and drug abuse in Hinton.

5.9.1 Solutions: Reinforce protective factors

Interviewees stressed the importance of protective factors in addressing the issue of substance abuse in Hinton. The theme that protective factors need to start early and be continually reinforced (especially among a transient population) emerged from the interviews. Research participants said that being proactive and focusing on protective factors could potentially save communities money down the road. One interviewee describes:

If you think you’re going to protect children by waving a wand over their head at grade 5, you’re sadly mistaken. It starts at birth and it goes all the way from birth until it’s time to plant them in the ground. We continually have to have those types of protective factors reinforced and developed in an age appropriate way.

And if we're waiting until those kids are in Grade 5, we've lost a good portion of them. Yes, we can inoculate them, a good number of them, who have those protective factors developed, but we do a much better job if we go back and look at prenatal care, early childhood development type programs... And you can see where they come up with figures like for every dollar you spend on prevention, you save \$27 at the other end of the pipe.

Research participants continually discussed the importance of prevention and the need to be proactive in educating and raising awareness about the harms associated with alcohol and drug abuse.

In addition, interviewees identified the following protective factors which need to be in place to protect children in the community against alcohol and drug abuse:

- Give children “love, respect and balance.” Otherwise, children may be susceptible to being ‘used’ by drug dealers. One man describes:

 ...children go out into the community and society and some people pick them up. “I get him or her on dope then I get more income to keep myself doped.” It’s business thing. They’re not picking these teenagers for friends; they’re picking them up to profit from them.
- Positive role modeling by parents and people in the community
- Establish a social support system for children; someone they can go to talk with if no one in the family is appropriate or available
- Encourage children academically and recreationally; provide them with healthy social activities
- Discipline children appropriately so that they develop “respect for parents, respect for elders, and public and private property.”
- Eat at least one meal a day together
- Teach good communications skills and foster openness

The next section explores other important solutions to substance abuse as identified by research participants.

5.9.2 Solutions: Other

In addition to reinforcing protective factors, interviewees identified the following solutions:

A local or regional detoxification centre

Many interviewees said despite the work of the Hinton Drug Action Committee and the awareness it has brought to the town, awareness alone is not sufficient in solving the substance abuse issue – “there needs to be someplace for residents to go.”

Although substance abuse is a major issue for many rural communities in the province, most of the detoxification and treatment centres are located in urban centres such as Edmonton, Calgary, and Grande Prairie. As such, rural residents may have a difficult time accessing these urban centres and “sending people on a bus to Edmonton is not always successful.” Furthermore, interviewees said the wait time has been anywhere from 3-6 weeks (for individual treatment centres) and up to 6-8 months (for family treatment centres). To better meet the needs of people living in Hinton and surrounding communities, interviewees said the province needs to open a detoxification/treatment centre in the area.

Research participants had differing opinions on where such a centre should be located and what it should look like. A lot of residents said that a Hinton-based detox centre would “keep people in town” and allow for family involvement in the recovery process. However, other residents believed that a regional detox centre (located outside of the town, but within close proximity) would be more effective as it would protect peoples’ privacy and allow people to escape the ‘triggers’ of addiction, such as drug-using friends. As for what the centre should look like, one particularly informed resident said a practical and cost effective centre would both “act as a recovery house for families and house some detox.”

More early intervention and support for troubled families

People working in the Human Services sector said to break the intergenerational cycle of substance abuse, the community needs to start intervening more into families where parents are abusing alcohol and drugs. They suggested providing a safe place for troubled children to go if one or both of the children’s parents are abusing substances, as well as offering more community support programs for young parents who may be abusing alcohol and/or drugs. One program suggestion was a foster care system for parents coming back from substance abuse treatment. This system would offer a safe and caring home for recovering parents to help reintegrate them back into the community.

Better tailored community programs and support groups

A number of research participants felt that Hinton offered a wide variety of community programs and support groups; however, others identified gaps in services for very specific segments of the population. One such gap is support groups available for young people involved in substance abuse. Although the Town has some very active Alcoholics Anonymous groups and a Narcotics Anonymous group, interviewees said young people do not always feel comfortable attending these groups out of fear that their parents’ friends or neighbours will see them at the meetings and potentially tell their parents. Individuals recovering from a crystal meth addiction also talked about sometimes feeling uncomfortable in support groups because of the very different nature of meth versus other drugs and because of the potentially different approach to recovery. Another research

participant identified a lack of programming for adults who have become recently divorced or separated.

Local businesses need to be more supportive of employees

Interviewees said that although the mill and mine help employees get treatment for addictions, other employees do not offer such programs, putting these individuals at a disadvantage, especially if they cannot afford to take the time off work to get help. As a result, smaller, non-unionized employers may need to think of creative ways to support their employees, such as offering flexible work hours.

Other interviewees said that overall “Industry needs to play a more supportive role in knowing more about their employees... and promoting healthy lifestyles at work.” This includes offering targeted incentives such as time off to spend with family members versus traditional bonuses such as extra pay. It may be as simple as treating workers “really good because then that reflects when they go home to their spouses and children.”

Stop ‘enabling’ in the workplace

Enabling occurs when people try to cover up for an individual with a substance abuse problem. People may think they are helping that individual, but, in fact, they are allowing the individual to continue his/her destructive substance abuse patterns. A few research participants identified enabling in the workplace. One person describes:

Certainly people on their shift, they don’t want to believe it, they don’t think its impacting them, and they’ll cover until the point where it’s really dangerous, or when management is starting to see it too, and there’s a real group mentality of here to protect. Protect the position, protect the person, we can handle it. And they can’t.

To help employers address the issue of substance abuse in the workplace, interviewees said that employees (and in some cases employers) need to stop enabling their coworkers who have substance abuse issues. This will require that employers and employees be educated about the harm associated with enabling. Workplaces also need to create an open and supportive environment where employees feel they can approach the union and/or management if they or their coworkers have a substance abuse issue. This type of environment will help employers to identify employees with alcohol and/or drug problems earlier – long before the employee hits ‘rock-bottom.’

Some research participants also talked about the enabling that goes on with the provincial government and some individuals receiving income support where these individuals use their family’s income support cheques to finance their alcohol and/or drug addiction.

One resident describes:

That really pisses me off too. Because I see it all around me and people are getting their cheque from social services every month and you see them at the bar,

you see them at the gambling machines and you see them with the drugs, and their kids are running outside with no clothes on.

Stopping this type of enabling requires the provincial government to focus their support efforts more strategically and to monitor income support clients more closely so that individuals' needs are accurately addressed.

A men's shelter

A few research participants said that because of the large influx of transient people into town (the vast majority of them men), there needs to be appropriate services available to them such as a men's shelter. One woman predicts that the community will see an increase in the number of homeless males if a men's shelter is not opened.

New and affordable recreational opportunities

Although interviewees' views on the number of recreational opportunities available to Hinton residents were mixed, a majority of people, especially high school students, said the community would benefit by offering new recreational opportunities. A lot of residents said that Hinton's leisure opportunities mostly centered on sports and that once kids get passed a certain age (16 or 17), the amount of things to do drops off. High school students suggested that the community offer the following recreational opportunities: a go-cart track, an arcade, indoor paintball/skateboard/bike parks, a waterpark, and a roller-disco. Adult residents suggested setting up a pool hall, and having more dances. A couple of interviewees suggested having a safe space for youth to express themselves; a space where youth could come to just 'hang out.'" One adult from the community describes:

The rec centre is an individual thing and it's certain sports. What we need is an old building, you put some tables in there and whatever, and the kids can just go hang out there, they don't have to do anything, they can just hang out and talk. We don't have any place like that. They did when I was growing up there. Yes, they had a big room and they had pop vending machines, a sofa, some tables, nobody bothered us.

A number of low income residents also said that recreational opportunities (e.g., hockey, dancing, skiing) in Hinton are too expensive or inaccessible. These residents said that because there is no public transportation it is difficult for some kids to access these opportunities. The community may want to look at providing some form of public transportation to children and adults without a car so that they are not excluded from these recreational opportunities.

Increase parental responsibility

Increasing parental responsibility was surprisingly one of the key solutions offered by high school students. Adults within the community also agreed. One high school student says parents negatively influence their children due to their permissive attitudes around alcohol and drugs. She describes:

Parents really don't care. They buy their kids booze and a lot of them don't care if their kids get high. If anyone needs education programs, it's the parents to make them realize that it's a problem.

Another Hinton resident stresses that first and foremost it's the parents who are responsible for their children and that parents can no longer keep 'passing the buck.' The Hinton resident describes:

We really have to make the parents aware of the fact that umm... they are the biggest sole influence in the, in their kids' lives. I don't know whether some of them really don't get that or whether they, they basically know that they are (and) they're denying it. I don't know. I mean we all want to slough it off on the teachers, or for some, society, forgetting that we are society you know what I mean?

Many interviewees echoed this theme of the need for increased parental responsibility instead of "expecting everybody else to do something for their children."

Another theme that emerged is the need for parents to become better role models for their children. A research participant suggests:

Somebody needs to teach the people around here how to be responsible parents. And how to be a positive role model, that is probably one of the biggest weaknesses that I've observed.

A number of interviewees pointed out a major challenge faced by some parents to becoming positive role models is that these parents themselves may not have had positive role models growing up and thus do not know how to parent any differently. Solving this challenge then becomes task for the entire community – to provide positive, accessible role models in the community and to adequately address the needs of dysfunctional families and break the behavioural mindsets that may lead alcohol and drug abuse. This may include offering more community-run programs such as parenting classes, community kitchens, etc. Human Service workers said these programs need to be *targeted* to those parents who actually need it. To ensure the targeted parents are able to attend these programs, the community needs to offer child care services and transportation options to these families.

A parent simply spending more time with his or her children was also noted as an important way to increase parental responsibility.

More engaging alcohol and drug awareness programs and more 'life skills' education

When we talked to high school students, they said that they were "sick about hearing about meth" and recommended "more inspiring drug and alcohol awareness programs." High school students all agreed that the P.A.R.T.Y. program is particularly effective, but the educational videos offered during class "don't work or make enough of an impact."

One high school student says, “Speakers have to keep coming back and teaching students how drug and alcohol abuse can impact your life in a devastating way.”

Focusing more time on other educational areas was also deemed important by research participants. Interviewees said educators need to teach students more about money management as well as spend more time on career planning so that when young people graduate high school they have both direction and practical life skills.

Addiction counsellors also talked about in today’s world, kids get taught through modeling that they’re not supposed to feel ‘human.’ Instead counsellors said kids need to be allowed to express themselves appropriately and know that “It’s okay to feel like you hate someone.” By being free to express themselves, kids no longer have to repress their emotions and can be honest and open with themselves and other individuals.

Increase police resources, increase penalties

All residents interviewed said they are concerned about the insufficient amount of police officers and resources, especially in light of Hinton’s increasing population. One person says:

The shortage is absurd. The province has the lowest police per capita ratio west of Prince Edward Island. Now we’re looking at an increase here of 4,000-6,000 vehicles on the road in the morning associated with oil and gas. How do we cope with that?

Residents also said that there needs to be stricter and more immediate penalties for young offenders; otherwise young offenders will continue break the law as adults. One person, who works near the courthouse, feels there is no deterrent for young people committing crimes. She explains:

I look at these kids going to court, and they think it’s a joke. I would be terrified if I had to go to court. But they go there; they get a slap on the wrists, and so what? What’s the deterrent? What’s going to stop them from doing whatever it is their doing?

Another interviewee, who was once caught up in the drug world, said he would like to see police focus more on the ‘smaller guys’ because the feeling among the smaller guys is that *there are no consequences* and that “it’s like a game.” He goes on to say:

RCMP always focus on the big guys. There will always be somebody to step into that place because it’s such a gold mine – gold mine and kind of status and everything. But I think if they focused on the smaller guys who are getting into it, that would deter the other people from getting into it. I think that would be more effective.

Overall interviewees said that stricter penalties and a greater focus on the smaller scale drug dealers would help deter other people from using or dealing drugs.

Increase the availability of affordable housing

Throughout the interviews, the lack of affordable and adequate housing came up again and again. One woman suggests that “the trailer parks have not been a great place for people to live and that the Town needs to look at that and develop better facilities.” The lack of affordable and adequate housing is linked to substance abuse in a number of ways. Families and individuals who do not have adequate housing may turn to substances as a means of coping. Crowding issues also lead to increased tension between individuals, possible violence, and increased vulnerability to alcohol and drug abuse. In addition, if workers cannot move their families into the community, they become socially isolated and more prone to substance abuse.

Research participants suggested many very practical solutions to substance abuse that involve parents, employers and the community as a whole. In addition to the number of solutions above, interviewees said that there are a number of complicating factors in addressing the substance abuse issues. The next section will discuss these barriers.

5.10 Barriers to solutions

Interviewees identified a number of barriers to solving the substance abuse issue within the community. These barriers include the nature of addiction, the labour shortage, fear of organized crime, community attitudes towards substance abusers, and challenges within the justice system.

The nature of addiction

One of the biggest barriers to helping address the substance abuse issue in Hinton is the denial associated with alcohol and drug addiction. Many residents felt that there are ample resources available in the community for people with addiction, but the person struggling with a substance addiction has to *want* help. A research participant describes how important it is for a person addicted to alcohol and/or drugs to first want help:

Until the worker does hit rock bottom and says, I need help, I don't care who you are, union, company, god himself, you're not going to help this person, they got to want help, and they got to help themselves.

Due to the denial of a person with a substance addiction and the denial of his or her coworkers, the substance abuse issue may not get addressed in a timely manner. This is a difficult barrier to overcome, but perhaps continued efforts in increasing alcohol and drug awareness and education will make residents feel increasingly open to seeking help for substance use/addiction issues, in addition to knowing where to get help.

Labour shortage

In the context of Alberta's booming economy, many employers are so desperate for workers that an employee can exhibit unreliable behaviour (such as abusing substances) and still retain their jobs, or if fired, be hired immediately by another employer. A Hinton resident describes the situation faced by some employers in the community:

So at a hotel with a chambermaid with a drug problem. They're showing up for 75% of their shifts, that's 75% of something that you won't have to do yourself. And I know that goes on. You lower your standards and you have no choice because the labour market is just so strong. You've got to lower your labour standards right to the bottom.

In addition to employers not wanting to *find the problem*, other residents talked about how for a lot of employers, meth-using workers can be quite productive in the short-term. An interviewee describes:

Meth is a great drug for employers, right? You've got guys who can work for days and days and all kinds of energy and good to go and never want a day off and go, go, go until they fall and get in the next one.

Due to employer desperation, the substance abuse issues among employees do not get addressed, or are tolerated until employees reach the point where they can no longer function. In fact, in conversations with people around the province, some employers in the oil and gas sector actually inform their workers when they will be conducting drug tests so that these workers can prepare their bodies for a clean test – by either abstaining from drugs, using herbal supplements to flush their systems, or purchasing urine kits.

Fear of reporting; fear of getting out

Another barrier to addressing the substance abuse issue is the fear associated with organized crime. Community members may feel scared to report suspicious activity, or testify against a person dealing drugs in the community. As one research participant says, “You're literally putting your life on the line.” Another participant said that if you “rat out a meth lab” you're at risk of having your tires slashed or car vandalized. On the other hand, people who are involved in the drug world may face a similar fear when they try to get out of the drug culture. Drug lords, out of worry that a person may divulge information to the police, may threaten that person and keep a watch on them. As a result, residents' fear of organized criminal groups weakens the community's power to address the supplier-side of the drug issue.

Community attitudes towards substance abusers

A major barrier to addressing the substance abuse issue is the prevailing community attitude towards substance abusers which is generally negative and detached. As a result, some local residents refer to individuals who have substance abuse issues within the community as objects rather than viewing them as real living and breathing human beings. Throughout the interviews, comments like “get rid of the crackheads”, and applying labels such as “local meth heads”, “tweakers” and “rig pigs” to people who abuse alcohol and drugs in the community have served to objectify these individuals, further distancing residents who do not have substance abuse problems from those that do. To overcome this barrier, Hinton residents need to re-develop a sense of empathy for people who are abusing substances – moving away from phrases of “Thank god I am not a druggie, thank god I don't have an addiction, thank god none of my family members are

– well those people over there, they can deal with it” – towards recognizing alcohol and drug abuse as a community issue which requires community support. A research participant explains that with meth, “You need buy in from the community as a whole because you get meth addicts from our premier subdivisions all the way down to the trailer park.” And because alcohol and drug abuse is so widespread (as evidenced in Section 5.5), support must also be widespread.

Meth Hurts: A former meth user’s perspective

The negative community attitude towards drug users does not go unnoticed. One individual recovering from a meth addiction said that people addicted to meth incur a lot of pain due to discrimination by people who do not have substance use/addiction issues. The person describes:

Like people that are on meth are like they got typhoid, or they’re totally, like if you get close, like they’re contagious. But nobody gives them a chance, a second chance. Okay, they’re trying, they’re trying to get off of meth, but nobody’s doing anything to help...

The person further went on to talk about how people who do not have substance use/addiction issues need to understand the state of mind of a person addicted to meth, as well as the internal struggle which characterizes addiction. The individual recovering from a meth addiction explains:

Meth hurts – high or straight. Because the people that are straight that aren’t addicts are hurting the meth users. Like you got to think that they have feelings too and people come down and like your parents and your family and your friends say something to you and when you come down and you’re straight, that sticks into your head and then you don’t want to think about it because you’re hurting – get high and it doesn’t hurt no more. You’re drowning it, but you’re hurting yourself more.

As frustrating as it is to deal with a family member who has completely turned away from friends and family, it is critical to not let go, not to dismiss that individual, for (as the above quote outlines) the rejection of that individual within himself or herself is even greater than the rejection by family members and the community. From this study, we learned that people with a meth addiction do not know where to turn (besides hanging out in flop houses). A few people mentioned that people addicted to meth often live in tents or boxes by the river; others said they have not seen their meth-using friends or family members and that “no one knows what happens to them.” Addiction counselors at the Business and Industry Clinic in Grande Prairie also said that the number of individuals seeking treatment for meth addiction has been nominal, and yet they know the problem is out there. Clearly, somewhere along the lines, people addicted to meth are not getting the support they need and have ‘mysteriously’ fallen through the cracks.

One of the first tasks in helping people with alcohol and/or drug abuse problems reach the road to recovery is for Hinton residents to re-develop a sense of empathy for people addicted to alcohol and drugs. Ignoring or casting these individuals off socially only further isolates them and makes them spiral deeper into their addiction. One person recovering from a crystal meth addiction claims, “Tough love didn’t work with meth, tough love drove me more into the drug than taking me out.”

Some research participants said members of the community need to change their attitudes towards populations vulnerable to substance abuse otherwise “It’s sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy” with these stereotypes perpetuating the problem. A research participant says, “If you believe this group of guys in a camp, they’re going to party, that will happen and that’s normal, then that’s going to continue.” However, the participant said if you take the attitude that “it’s not acceptable” and “work at providing some other opportunities for individuals to release some tension or try something new... then that becomes your attitude or your belief and I think it goes a long way with them and the agency can start filtering that down.”

Changing people’s perceptions of substance abusers is a formidable task. This task requires increased education about the addictive process and a renewed sense of empathy towards substance abusers to foster new and creative community solutions to the long-standing issue.

Challenges within the justice system

Frustration with the justice system is a theme which surfaced throughout the interviews – among Hinton residents and people working in the justice system. Some people criticized the police for knowing exactly who the drug dealers are and where they live, and yet, “Why don’t they just go and do something?” Other people said the justice system was flawed because they believe: young offenders get a mere “slap on the hand” as punishment; serious offenders often have their cases thrown out of court “because of a technicality”; and if you got money and a good lawyer “you can do whatever you want.” A community leader provides an additional example of why he thinks the justice system is flawed citing that, in a recent year, the Town lost \$100,000 in income for policing because police refocused on issues that were “paramount” – meth trafficking and spin-off crime – instead of “traffic tickets and stuff that generates money.”

Another major barrier in the justice system identified by a research participant is the increasing amount of time police officers must spend, and the increasing amount of paperwork officers are required to submit, during routine investigations. For example, the number of procedural steps required to handle a drug trafficking case has increased from 9 to 65 over the last 30 years. This becomes particularly problematic when police are undertaking a meth-related investigation because “meth labs can be put in place in three days; produce enough crystal meth to supply the whole town, and leave.” Similarly, over the last three decades, the number of steps in a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) case has increased from 29 to 42, and the amount of time required to do a DUI investigation has increased from 1 hour to 5 hours (Malm et al., 2005).

This increasing ‘red-tape’, coupled with population growth and increasing demand for police resources, is leaving police in a very difficult position. A person working in the justice system explains:

We’re constantly dealing with all these petty investigations, responding to all these other types of instances that you don’t get a chance to really get to the root

of the problem. It's more, it's more of managing the spin-off rather than actually addressing the cause.

Challenges within the justice system cannot be directly solved by Hinton residents, and are part of a broader provincial issue. In fact, a person working in the justice system said that the province is currently in need of about 700 police officers just to be on par with national policing levels. To help Hinton and other communities across Alberta address the supplier side of the substance abuse issue, the provincial government needs to ensure communities have adequate policing resources.

As the interviews have revealed, substance abuse is a very complex issue with no simple solution. In fact, some of the complicating factors extend well beyond the borders of Hinton. Denial associated with addiction, the province's current labour shortage, fear of organized crime, negative attitudes towards substance abusers, and challenges within the justice system can all stand in the way of trying to address the substance abuse issue in Hinton. However, being aware of these and other complexities will help the community design and implement effective solutions.

6.0 DISCUSSION

This section expands on some of the major issues that were raised in the Hinton case study and how these issues relate to previous research in this area. This section also contains a discussion regarding solutions and recommendations for improving community health and well-being.

6.1 Beyond boredom

In recent studies of substance abuse in Alberta, researchers have identified issues associated with boredom, especially in rural locales, and how this phenomenon contributes to the abuse of substances such as alcohol and crystal meth. For instance, Wild (2004) identifies boredom as one of the four key contributing factors to crystal meth use. Also, a University of Alberta study in 2005 identified a high prevalence of respondents who agreed that alcohol consumption was the result of young people having little to do. These associations are also pervasive within the data that has emerged from this study. Yet one of the clear outcomes of this study appears to be a deeper understanding of substance abuse within the context of several contributing factors that are unique to a natural resource-based community.

As expected, some research participants believed that with more investment in programming for young people, these individuals may find less time to engage in dysfunctional behaviours. This logic is satisfying to a degree, but upon closer examination, there appears to be several inconsistencies in the argument. First, by most estimations, places like Hinton (and society in general), have more organized activities for young people than at any time in recent history. A recreation centre with many amenities (swimming pool and skating rink), skateboard park, Boys and Girls Club, soccer teams, and many other activities are available to youth within the community.

Although there were some concerns expressed about fewer opportunities for the non-sports and non-outdoor minded individual, it would be difficult to argue that youth don't have things to do in Hinton. Second, youth who were interviewed for this study suggested that such organized recreational (or alternative) activities are not a real deterrent. "If you're doing drugs or alcohol in Hinton, it's by choice..." This sentiment was expressed by many people who suggested that the boredom factor was more deeply connected to issues of family life and youth culture, issues of self worth, and the challenges associated with broadening the world views of people within the community.

The study points to the challenges of maintaining a high quality of family life, especially within a community where so many factors are placing downward pressure on family time and the opportunity for positive family and community events and activities. Boredom appears to be clearly linked to family-related issues within the community and substance abuse is a likely symptom of these family-related issues for the younger generation within the community.

6.2 Substance abuse and connections to resource sector economies

Within the natural resources literature, there is much discussion of general social and economic factors associated with extractive industries. There is less information, however, on issues of substance abuse. This study makes a contribution to this gap by focusing on this connection between extractive industries and substance abuse. A substantial amount of time was given to exploring this issue with research participants and in examining rates of substance abuse in resource-based communities across the province. Since data on substance abuse is limited and difficult to access, most of our insights come from discussions with people who are involved in or affected by substance abuse within the Town of Hinton.

As noted in the literature review, many factors are known to be associated with substance abuse. These include drug-using peers, emotional or personality traits, academic failure and so on. Much less attention is given, however, to the salient societal factors that contribute to substance abuse. According to one author, addictions in general are caused by societal expectations such as: needing to be in control at all times, living for outcomes, beliefs in perfection, lack of genuine relationships, and worshiping objects (Nakken, 1988). These factors represent some powerful trends within society that characterize the socio-cultural milieu of western societies.

Although this information is instructive in general terms, it does not provide specific insights into the inner workings of different types of communities and the ways in which social and economic conditions are related to substance abuse. In order to achieve a more fine-grained analysis of the social and economic factors within resource based towns that may contribute to substance abuse, we draw on previous research from natural resource-based communities, as well as specific insights from this study that can add to our understanding of contributing factors within the Town of Hinton.

6.3 Conditions, traditions and culture

As noted in Bowles (1988), there has always been a sense of fatalism in resource-based towns, where the major owners and employers within the local economy are largely absent from the community and decisions about the future of the community are not within community control. With the globalized nature of modern economies, this sense of exposure and fatalism is likely as acute today as it was during the Coal Branch days after the turn of the Century. Krannich and Luloff (1991) also note the chronic instability within resource-based towns as a factor that contributes to a widespread sense of powerlessness and apathy. Coupled with these economic conditions and ownership structures in the extractive industries, one of the early features of community life has been the heavy use of substances such as tobacco and alcohol.

Currently, several of the major employers within the mining and forestry sectors are forced to take much more of a bottom-line approach to their business than in previous years. Sensing the instability within these sectors, research participants discussed the uneasiness and worry that people felt. This sense of uneasiness, coupled with a long-standing apathy and fatalism within the working class, represent some key underlying factors that lead to substance abuse and other social dysfunctions (i.e., divorce, child abuse).

These features of resource-based towns continue to be a component of the Hinton context as well. The comparative data with other communities in Hinton suggests that substance use and related impacts are not greater in Hinton than in other communities, yet there remains a high level of substance abuse and associated concern within the leadership of the community. There is also a strong sense that contemporary economic boom conditions in Hinton may be driving rates of substance abuse even higher than what the data may be showing at this point in time. Also, non-reporting and changes in the level of service provision within some agencies (i.e., changes in the number of AADAC counselors) make it difficult to interpret trends within the secondary data.

6.4 Working conditions

Another feature of extractive industry towns that appears to have a direct connection to substance abuse is the working conditions of employees within these sectors. As noted in the literature review, workplace factors include jobs characterized by: safety risk, shift and night work, remote locations, travel away from home, and other related factors that have a strong connection to employment conditions within extractive industries (ILO, 2003). Drinking subcultures are also a well documented phenomenon that contributes to elevated levels of substance abuse.

In discussions with Hinton residents and those working in resource-based jobs, there were numerous observations about the impacts of shift work and working conditions and issues of substance abuse in the community. In spite of some expressed concerns about impacts from shift work and the use of illicit substances in the workplace, a number of residents observed that working conditions were quite good (“everything’s paid for”) and one interviewee noted that shift work may be a challenge for some, but not for all.

The concerns expressed here appear to be oriented less so around substance abuse in the workplace (although this was expressed), and more so around the impact of shift work on opportunities for community life and the proper functioning of families. Statements like: “you tend to stay confined within your own shift,” and “wives at home get bored...” and “it’s easy to just header to the bar” reflect the ways in which the shift work conditions and the absent family members tends to disrupt the flow of regular family and community life.

6.5 Social fragmentation

One of the more contemporary features of resource-based town, especially those that are undergoing economic boom conditions, is a general sense of social fragmentation. By this we mean certain kinds of divisions that emerge within the community as a result of, for example, the gaps between old timers and newcomers, environmentalists versus industrialists, workers versus bosses. This sense of fragmentation within Hinton was noted recently by Kulig (2005) as well as MacKendrick and Parkins (2004) who show a growing gap between wealthy families and poorer families within the community.

Recent changes in the economy and the booming energy sector may also serve to exacerbate this social fragmentation in several ways. The increasingly transient nature of employment opportunities is a clear contributor, but the change in social hierarchy within the community may also play a role. In a town where forestry and mining were once on top of the social and economic ladder, their role within the town appears to be somewhat diminished by the onslaught of oil and gas activity and the introduction of an oil and gas culture within the town (economic activity that was largely absent only two years earlier). This changing identity may serve to extend the fragmentation that already exists within the community.

Much like the discussion of cyclical economic conditions and working conditions in the extractive industries, this concern about social fragmentation has a connection to issues of substance abuse in several ways. Since the fragmentation of community limits the ability of individuals to make meaningful connections to people within the community, there is a tendency for these people to become isolated and connected only to smaller groups of co-workers or other individuals within the community. This aspect of community life is also reflected in many of the statements about the cliques that have formed within the community.

According to addictions experts (Nakken, 1988), addictions become more common in communities where social connections are low or limited. With social conditions that are marked by this social fragmentation, it is not surprising to observe concerns within the community regarding rates of addiction and substance abuse. These trends in substance abuse appear to be consistent with the current social and economic milieu of Hinton and consistent with research findings from other communities.

6.6 Conceptual framework

Within the fields of health and social psychology, a considerable amount of work has focused on risk and protective factors of substance abuse. Coupled with the knowledge

and experience of many front line workers who deal with issues of substance abuse on a daily basis, there is a general sense that many of the underlying causes of substance abuse come back to several basic issues. These issues include family dysfunctions or a lack of meaningful and constructive connections within community and family life. These basic factors are reflected in many aspects of this study that involve the intergenerational transfer of behaviors associated with the consumption of alcohol and drugs, issues around parenting (due to double income families), and the social fragmentation that has been noted in several recent studies in Hinton.

One of the primary contributions of this study is an enhanced understand (or at least a reinforcement of people’s understanding) of the factors that contribute to substance abuse within a resource-based town. We concur with previous research that family and community connection (social cohesion) are at the heart of this issue. But the factors that place unique pressures on these family and community connections within a resource-based town appear to be particularly acute, especially within a period of economic boom. Figure 6 provides a graphic of the primary contributing factors of substance abuse that are described in this report (Section 5.7). In describing these factors, the interview data provides substantial evidence that family and community relations continue to be an important intervening variable when examining these linkages. In other words, the issues around transience or shift work are not necessarily direct contributors to substance abuse, but these factors may place individuals at risk if family and community relations are relatively weak. Conversely, if an individual is a part of strong family and community relations then the contributing factors that are identified within this study are likely to have less impact and the risk of substance abuse will be lower.

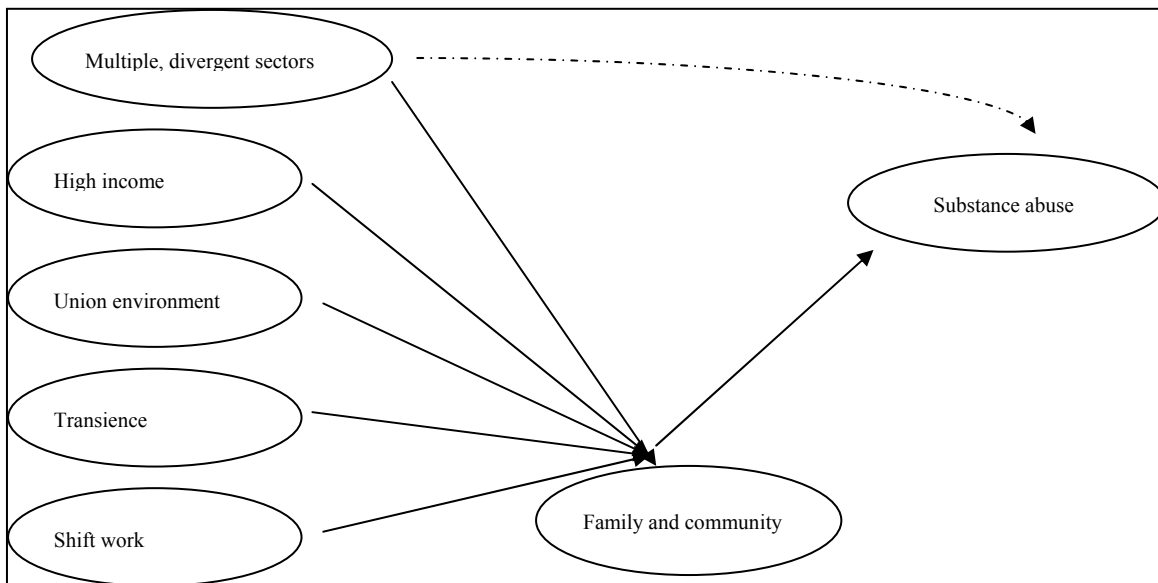


Figure 6. Conceptual framework of contributing factors to substance abuse within the Town of Hinton

The dotted line within the figure signifies the potential for direct relationships between substance abuse and all of the contributing factors. For instance, the fact that individuals

are living a transient lifestyle may place some people at risk of substance abuse regardless of the strength or weakness of their family and community connections.

To understand the relationships between substance abuse and contributing factors in this way has several implications for responding to this challenge within the Town of Hinton. The next section will address these responses and responsibilities in some detail.

6.7 Responses and responsibilities

One of the key messages in this report involves an understanding of the connections between social and economic conditions within the community, how this impacts family and community life, and the tendency for these conditions to lead to social dysfunction such as addiction and substance abuse. In this research, we have found that substance abuse may be more prevalent in Hinton (and many other resource-based communities) because social connections tend to be limited. These limited social connections, in turn, lead to the formation of dependencies on objects and substances rather than people and community.

Given the deeply-rooted conditions that lead to substance abuse within society, and the more specific social and economic factors within a resource-based community, it is difficult to identify direct and effective responses to this issue. Issues of substance abuse are an important and perhaps growing component of our interest in promoting the health and well-being of resource-based communities. At a minimum, we need to understand that elevated levels of social dysfunction are a well established phenomenon within communities that are experiencing economic boom-type conditions. Research on these issues is well established and these historical trends are consistent with contemporary social issues in the Town of Hinton and beyond. Our response to these positive economic benefits from these boom times must also include acknowledging and responding to the negative social consequences of this economic boom. Resource-based industries provide incredible wealth to the province, but this wealth comes at a cost to families and communities.

A visiting Fulbright Scholar at the University of Alberta, Dr. Broadway, gave a talk in March 2006 on his work in Brooks, Alberta. This community is experiencing economic prosperity and growth resulting from a large meat packing facility. Coupled with this prosperity are major social problems associated with large immigrant and refugee populations with unique needs and challenges. In his talk, Dr. Broadway called the provincial and government agencies to recognize these unique needs and to properly fund and resource the agencies who are responding to these needs within the community. To do nothing for this community is to ignore the challenges associated with this particular type of economic expansion (immigrant workers and meat packing facilities) and to limit the potential for a community to thrive and prosper.

Similarly, a recent news article (Drake, 2006) called for greater attention to be paid to the “social infrastructure” of booming Alberta communities as “social resources in Alberta are strained to the limit as families flock to the province in search of economic fortune.” The president of the Family and Community Support Services Association, Joe Ceci,

stated, “We're lacking the financial support to address the social needs in the capacity Albertans want.” The article cited child abandonment and major housing issues as areas that need to be dealt with. In order to address these issues, Ceci suggested, “I think the province could do something right away with its tremendous surplus and bump up the FCSS program funding tremendously to \$100 million and not even notice it.” A Hinton resident echoed the same sentiment, but with respect to Hinton’s thriving oil and gas industry, “If money is not going to come from industry now, when is it going to come?”

It may be appropriate then to call for a unique set of investments and services for communities that are heavily linked with the resource-based economy. This mode of economic development holds certain benefits, but along side these benefits are some clearly defined social costs – costs which place limits on the quality of life in these locales. This study provides some insights into these unique social costs and the ways in which employment conditions within extractive industries tend to limit the possibility for community health and well-being.

For human service agencies, much of the current effort with agencies such as Family and Community Support Services and Child and Family Services is focused on dealing with family-related issues and providing constructive and meaningful ways for individuals to participate in the life of the community. These agencies are at the front lines with regard to reinforcing protective factors. Adequately staffed human service agencies are a key starting issue. Along with the school system, these agencies can provide supports that will foster healthier families and communities.

Also, human service agencies in the Town of Hinton will need to start thinking about programming for the large number of transient workers that may be in the community for many years to come. Thousands of transient workers in the oil and gas industry are otherwise disconnected from family and community and are at risk of substance abuse.

For local industries, there are opportunities to encourage healthy lifestyles within their workforce. There are also opportunities to work with other agencies within the community and to invest strategically in *proactive* community development initiatives. Programs that focus on safety in the workforce and the dangers of substance abuse are an important component, but this study points to the important role of family and community relationships that can protect against these same dangers. Programs that are targeted at early intervention, positive parenting, and social development are all important opportunities for strategic investment. Industry also needs to pay particularly close attention to employee health and well-being in this economic boom period, because as the study shows, boom times tend to escalate social ills such as alcohol and drug abuse. To ease the fierce competition for workers and to prevent employers from “turning a blind eye to substance abuse,” companies may need to engage a third-party organization to recruit workers for them.

For residents, this challenge cuts to the heart of community and family life. Long standing family traditions, the intergenerational transfer of certain behaviors, and what some call a “culture of substance abuse” will not be easy to break. A first step involves

recognizing the costs of substance abuse and the important role that parents and role models play in changing behavior.

Community residents, then, need to recognize themselves as part of the solution. An interviewee asserts that all residents need to take responsibility for the community's substance abuse issue or else it will simply be transferred to the next generation. She says:

I don't know how to make a resilient community except with intact families because it is citizens who are willing to step forward – and some people are just too busy to do that – so they just let it ride and then the next generation inherits the problem.

Being “willing to step forward” may mean different things to different people within the community. It could mean having a parent change the way she copes with stress – developing a new model for her children to follow. It could mean having a parent play a greater role in his children's lives. It could mean a group of friends and neighbours developing a new attitude towards populations vulnerable to substance abuse, an attitude which moves them towards understanding the individual's situation versus criticizing it. In addition, interviewees asserted that a much broader range of residents need to become more actively involved in volunteering within the community so that it's not “always the same people around the same table.”

As this project draws to a close, research staff will continue to work with the Town of Hinton and the Foothills Model Forest to develop extension materials. These efforts will include the development of brief documents that are designed for target audiences, presentations to human service agencies, and other efforts to extend results from this project to agencies that can then hopefully use this information in various meaningful ways.

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8.0 APPENDICIES

8.1 Interview schedule

Comments to interviewer in square brackets [].

[Explain to respondent that we are interested in her/his perspective from working and/or living in the community of Hinton.]

1. First I'd like to learn more about what you do with this organization. Please tell me about your organization and your position with them.
2. What is your experience working with issues related to substance abuse in Hinton? In your answer, please describe how you define substance abuse.
3. Now, I'd like to discuss the extent of substance abuse issues in the community. From your experience working and/or living in the community, are there issues with substance abuse in Hinton? Please explain.

[Clarification/probe: Is substance abuse a problem in the community?]

[→ If respondent indicates that it is not at all an issue, go to question 15]

4. From what you've observed in the community, in general terms, who do you think is involved in substance abuse across the community? That is, does it vary depending on gender, age, income, time spent living in the community or cultural heritage? Other characteristics of importance?
5. I'd like to talk more about some of the underlying causes or influences on substance abuse. First of all, from your experience and knowledge in your professional area, are there personal characteristics that make an individual more vulnerable to substance abuse? [Skip if respondent feels that they have addressed this in the previous question]
6. Do you think there are social factors that could be contributing to substance abuse issues in the Hinton? [To clarify: social refers to how the community is organized, how people inter-relate, the culture of the community, influences from factors outside the community]
7. Do you think that substance abuse is related to the type of sector (e.g. service, forestry, mining) in which people work? [Probe for three sectors: service, mining, forestry]
8. Do you think factors associated with working life in Hinton influence substance abuse in the community? [Probe: shift work, income levels, education levels]
9. It's also important that we discuss protective factors associated with substance abuse. That is, what are some factors (social, economic or personal) that might protect a person from misusing substances? [Probe: why are some people not using substances?]
10. Now I'd like to talk about the impact of substance abuse on the community. Tell me about the kind of impact it is having on the community [If necessary, explain that we are interested in negative or positive impacts, whether impacts are widespread or localized]
11. Are there impacts at the family level from substance abuse? Please elaborate.
12. Are there impacts on the community as a whole? Please elaborate.
13. Are there economic impacts from substance abuse [such as decreased economic productivity, lack of morale in the workplace, or others]? Please elaborate.
14. To conclude the interview, I'd like to discuss how you think substance abuse issues can best be addressed in the community. Considering what you've discussed in the interview up until now, how do you think substance abuse can be addressed in Hinton?
[Probe for:]
 - What can industry do?
 - What can local agencies do?
 - What can various levels of government do?
 - What can individuals themselves do? Either those experiencing substance abuse or observing it?

[Conclude interview here. Thank respondent for their time.]

15. [If respondent doesn't think substance abuse is an issue in the community]
In your opinion, why is there concern over substance abuse from certain organizations and individuals in the community? [If examples are needed, cite Hinton Drug Action Committee, Town of Hinton Community Services organization, and note that it is a concern for those who are on the study steering committee]

Let's discuss some of the protective factors associated with substance abuse. Why is it that Hinton does not have issues with substance abuse? That is, what are some factors within the community (social, economic or personal) that protect against substance abuse? [Probe: why are some people not using substances?]

[Conclude interview here. Thank respondent for their time.]

8.2 Nodes

According to a handbook on NVivo 2.0 software (QSR International, 2002), “Nodes are places where you store ideas you know you are asking about, the types of people you will interview, the sites you will study or the theoretical concepts you hope to develop.”

Sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 present the main nodes (those nodes which are based on the interview schedule) and free nodes (those nodes which emerged through the interviews). Interview data was coded into one or more of these nodes. Node documents were read and re-read and reoccurring themes were noted. The final project report was then based on these major themes.

8.2.1 Main nodes

Recent Developments in Hinton

Community perceptions of substance abuse/extent of substance abuse in Hinton

Substances abused

Types of abusers

Contributing factors

Protective factors

Solutions – Implemented and in progress

Solutions – Needed

Impacts of substance abuse

8.2.2 Free nodes

Barriers to solutions

Boom! Shadow pop. Contractor-based employment

Bust times

Characteristics of Hinton

Definition of substance abuse

Drug dealer culture

Enforcement/RCMP

HDAC/HOPE

Important points (contradicting points)

Industry drug testing

Kids these days, no respect!

Mine environment

Mill environment

Oil and gas environment

Need better stats on substance abuse

NR vs. AG community

Services available and utilization

Substance abuse not most pressing issue

The haves and the have-nots

8.3 Population statistics

Table 26 presents the population statistics used in this study.

Table 26. Population of Hinton and comparison communities, 2000-2005

Community	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Hinton	9,961	9,405	9,405	9,405	9,405	10,500*
Athabasca	2,313	2,415	2,415	2,415	2,415	2,415
Barrhead	4,239	4,215	4,213	4,210	4,213	4,257
Camrose	14,290	15,253	15,253	15,669	15,669	15,850
Drayton Valley	5,883	5,800	5,801	6,210	6,210	6,210
Edson	7,399	7,815	7,815	7,815	7,815	8,365
Fort McMurray (city only)	42,156	42,156	47,240	47,240	56,111	60,983
RMWB**	51,406	58,481	58,317	57,099	67,105	73,176
High River	8,554	9,345	9,345	9,345	9,522	9,522
Lethbridge	68,712	67,375	72,717	72,717	72,717	77,202
Lloydminster	11,317	13,145	13,148	13,148	13,148	15,487
Red Deer	65,701	68,308	70,593	72,691	75,923	79,082
St. Paul	4,970	5,060	5,061	5,061	5,144	5,144
Stettler	5,220	5,215	5,226	5,226	5,226	5,226
Wainwright	5,219	5,115	5,117	5,183	5,183	5,365
Wetaskiwin	10,959	11,155	11,154	11,154	11,154	11,154
Whitecourt	8,008	8,330	8,334	8,334	8,747	8,747

*A population estimate by the Town of Hinton.

**Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo includes the rural service area and the urban service area (Fort McMurray) as well as the shadow population.

Source: All population statistics are from Alberta Municipal Affairs (Official Population Lists, 2000-2005), or, if a more recent figure was available, from the AlbertaFirst.com website (Community Profiles section).