

# Live-in caregivers unsung contributors to oilsands economy

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A new study led by a University of Alberta sociologist shows that live-in caregivers are helping to ease work-life stresses for families in northern Alberta's oilsands region—but are facing stressful challenges of their own.

"Residents of Fort McMurray work the longest hours in the country, often on rotational shifts. Given the added factor of expensive and limited child-care services, many families in the region turn to live-in caregivers to meet work-life challenges," said Sara Dorow, associate professor of sociology at the U of A and lead author of the report.

"Live-in caregivers help to make the oilsands work regime sustainable by absorbing some of its stresses. At the same time, they experience stresses of their own, including the uncertainties of both the oilsands economy and the foreign-worker policies coming out of Ottawa."

Researchers conducted a survey as well as interviews and focus groups with foreign nationals living in Canadian homes and employed to provide child or adult care. The study participants were working in and around Fort McMurray under the Live-in Caregiver Program. The project was initiated in collaboration with the Nanny Network in Fort McMurray.

By working long and often irregular hours, live-in caregivers save money for their employers and allow them to earn some of the highest wages in the country. Yet, according to the study, caregivers generally invest more

to come and work in Canada than their employers do to hire them. They must also endure long years without their own spouses and children to care for other people's families. And though the opportunity to immigrate often makes these sacrifices seem worthwhile, the conditions of caregiving work, including weak monitoring and regulation, can make them vulnerable to employer abuses and workplace violations.

The researchers also considered changes to the Live-in Caregiver Program announced by the federal government last November, which removed the long-criticized "live-in" requirement but have also curtailed the promised pathway to permanent residence.

The report was released as part of the [On the Move Partnership](#), a national research project on employment-related geographical mobility in Canada.

## Highlights from the study

Live-in [caregivers](#) worked an average of nearly 54 hours a week.

- The majority (88 per cent) were from the Philippines.
- 88 per cent were female.
- 82 per cent were between the ages of 25 and 44.
- 96 per cent had some kind of post-secondary education.

Caregivers said cold weather, limited social activities, homesickness and cultural adjustment were challenges.

**More information:** The full report is available online:  
[www.onthemovepartnership.ca/wp ... al.-January-2015.pdf](http://www.onthemovepartnership.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/On-the-Move-Partnership-Report-2015-01-20.pdf)

Provided by University of Alberta

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