Unintended consequences of regulating drinking water in rural Canadian communities: Examples from Atlantic Canada

Objective:
Studies that explore social capital and political will in the context of safe drinking water provision in rural Canada are limited. Findings from a study that examined the capacity of rural Canadian communities for attaining regulatory compliance for drinking water will be presented.

Methods:
In-person interviews were conducted with water operators and managers in ten rural communities across Atlantic Canada. A semi-structured interview guide was used to understand the burden of compliance arising from the implementation of, and adherence to, drinking water regulations.

Results:
This research identifies the operator as being particularly burdened by regulatory compliance, often resulting in negative consequences, including job stress and a strained relationship with the community they serve.

Conclusions:
Findings indicate that while regulations are vital to ensuring safe drinking water, not all communities have the resources in place to rise to the challenge of compliance. As a result, some communities are negatively impacted by these regulations, rather than benefiting from their intended positive effect.