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Gendered wage gap even more pronounced for aboriginal women

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GENDERED WAGE GAP EVEN MORE PRONOUNCED FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN

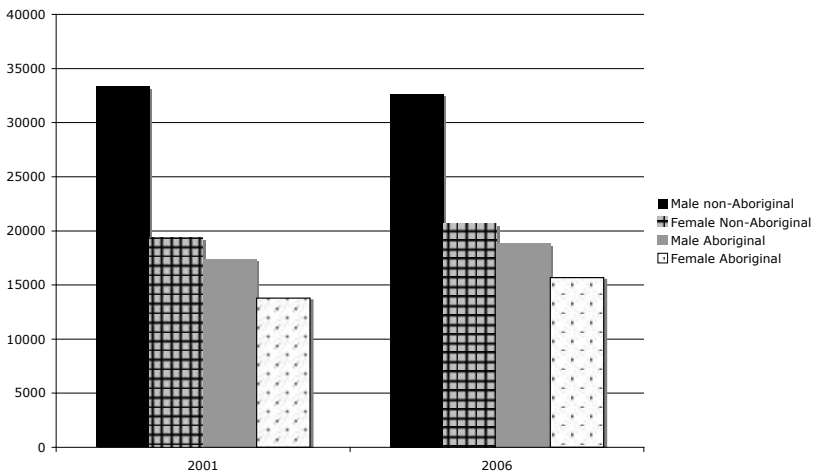
L.A. (Lisa) Lambert

GENDERED WAGE GAP

Women in Canada earn less than men. On average, a female full-time, full-year worker, earns just 74% of the earnings of a male full-time, full-year worker. This gendered wage gap had been well-known for some time but, recently, concern about women's earnings has sharpened as researchers consider sub-groups of women. For women of colour and Aboriginal women in Canada the earnings situation is inexcusable. Inequality, discrimination, and a segmented labour market have left women of colour with earnings at just 64% of men's and Aboriginal women's earnings at just 46% of men's.

Median income levels for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men and women indicate a bleak reality for Aboriginal women. For an Aboriginal woman to earn as much as a non-Aboriginal man she would need to work two days for every one of his (Table 1).

Table 1: Median Income by Sex and Identity, 2001 and 2006 Census data in 2005 Constant

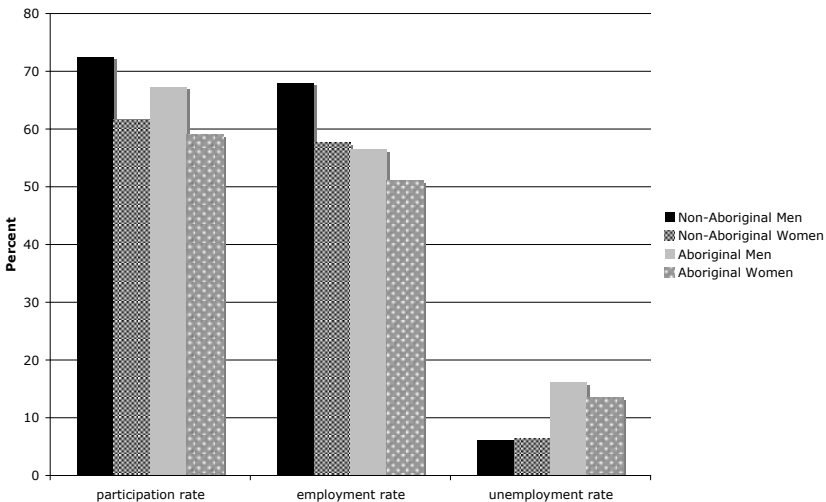


Educational attainment patterns account for some of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal earnings but until Aboriginal women attain university education they will earn far less than their equally educated non-Aboriginal neighbours. Once an Aboriginal woman earns a university degree she will earn more, on average, than a similarly educated non-Aboriginal woman. However, the university attendance rate for Aboriginal people in Canada falls far below that of other groups. While higher education holds some promise for narrowing the gendered, and raced, wage gap for Aboriginal women, it is not yet time to celebrate. Non-Aboriginal women are now more likely to earn a Bachelor’s Degree than non-Aboriginal men but the women continue to earn less. Education alone is not the answer for Aboriginal women.

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Aboriginal people in Canada are much more likely to be unemployed than their non-Aboriginal neighbours (see Table 2). For women, unemployment among Aboriginals is twice that of non-Aboriginals (6.4% for non-Aboriginal women compared to 13.5% for Aboriginal women). For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women the percent who participate in the labour force is lower than men. For both groups of women the higher the education, the more likely the woman is to be in the labour force. In fact, for Aboriginal women without a diploma or certificate labour force participation rates are low (37.4%) compared to Aboriginal men with similar education (51.3%).

Table 2: Labour force activity by sex and identity, 2006



Amongst non-Aboriginal women without a diploma or certificate participation rates are even lower than for Aboriginal women (just 33.8%). Lower labour force participation rates have long-term implications because much of the social safety net available in Canada is tied to a person's labour force participation.

For women of Aboriginal descent in Canada the labour market is segmented (Phillips and Phillips, 2000) and produces significantly less income than for non-Aboriginal women and men. When consideration is made of the gendered wage gap and the gendered patterns of labour force participation, it is crucial that ethnic identity be considered as well. Aboriginal women's labour force participation and income benefit the most from post-secondary education but postsecondary attendance for Aboriginal people in Canada continues to lag behind non-Aboriginals. The growing earnings gap between Aboriginal women and the rest of Canadians needs immediate consideration and government intervention.

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