

Indigenous Peoples and Poverty in Canada

Though poverty in Canada and globally affects people of every race, ethnic group or age, ample evidence shows that it burdens racialized groups to a greater extent.

For this article, I would like to focus on the impact poverty has on Canada's Indigenous Peoples. The statistics provided come mostly from the 2016 Canada census, and I've broken them down into the following categories:

1. Education and learning
2. Health and child welfare
3. Income and social assistance
4. Justice and policing
5. Housing and homelessness
6. Food and water security

Education and learning

In 2011, 27% of First Nations people in Canada aged 25-64, 17% of Metis and 27% of Inuit did not have a certificate, diploma or degree, versus 11% for the non-Indigenous population. One quarter of off-reserve First Nations and Metis women in Canada and 38% of Inuit women said pregnancy and childcare were why they had not completed high school.

Eleven percent of Indigenous Peoples in Canada had a university degree versus 29% among the non-Indigenous population. In 2016, 78.4% of Indigenous Peoples in Canada with a postsecondary education were employed, compared with 86% of non-Indigenous Peoples.

Health and child welfare

Indigenous Peoples experience the worst health outcomes of any group in Canada. Indigenous women, for instance, have higher rates of hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, cervical and gallbladder cancer, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, mental illness and suicide. In addition, federal-provincial jurisdictional disputes deprive Indigenous children of funding for health services, and suicide rates among Indigenous youth are up to seven times higher than among non-Indigenous youth.

Studies suggest that a number of factors undermine the health of Indigenous Peoples, including the stress of living with economic inequality, poor housing, food insecurity, inequitable access to education and other social resources, as well as mistrust of the health care system.

Income and social assistance

The 2016 census reveals an average income gap of 33% between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in 2012; what's more, 33.6% of on-reserve First Nations people received social income assistance compared with just over 5% of the Canadian population. In some Indigenous communities, more than 80% of residents are on social assistance, with income levels being linked to educational levels.

Justice and policing

In a 2014 report, the RCMP acknowledged there were nearly 1,200 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across Canada between 1980 and 2012; however, Indigenous women's groups place this figure at over 4,000. Indigenous women 15 years and older were 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women, according to the *2004 General Social Survey*. In 2016, the homicide rate for Indigenous women was five times that of non-Indigenous women.

As for human trafficking in Canada, the RCMP estimate that 92 % of victims are used for sexual exploitation, with many of those victims being young Indigenous women.

In 2016, 25% of federal prisoners and 35% of federally sentenced women were Indigenous, despite accounting for only 4.3% of the total population. Between 2005 and 2015 the number of incarcerated Indigenous Peoples increased by more than 50%, while that of incarcerated Indigenous women almost doubled.

Housing and homelessness

In 2011, a federal evaluation of First Nations housing stated that 41.5% of on-reserve dwellings required major renovations, compared with only 7 % of non-Indigenous homes. Mould, bug infestations, inadequate heating and contaminated water are just some of the issues. As an example, the *Toronto Star* reported in 2016 that the Attawapiskat First Nations in Ontario has about 2,100 residents but only 340 homes, with as many as 13 people living in some houses.

In urban centres, Indigenous Peoples are part of the racialized groups living in inadequate housing, which in many cases leads to homelessness.

Indeed, a 2017 report from Canada without Poverty states that between 28% and 34% of shelter users are Indigenous.

Food and water security

Between 2004 and 2014, two-thirds of First Nations peoples in Canada lived under at least one advisory for contaminated water. In 2018, Ontario had 46 long-term drinking-water advisories in 25 First Nations communities.

This type of water and food insecurity can undermine the health of the Indigenous Peoples in its grip.

In summary, the figures in this article are but small examples of the link between poverty and systemic racism, and similar stats apply to all racialized groups in Canada. While it would be incorrect to blame racism for **all** poverty, its role as a major contributing factor for many Canadians is obvious.

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