

Race and Gender in the Workplace: A Backgrounder



Indigenous, Black and Racialized women face unique, intersecting, and compounding forms of gender and racial discrimination that impact their employment opportunities and experiences in the workplace. This brief provides an overview of the structural and individual dimensions of gender and racial discrimination and how this intersection impacts the opportunities and experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women in Canadian workplaces. Additionally, it spotlights the intersection of gender-based violence in the workplace.

We intend to improve the knowledge of organizations and raise their awareness as part of the process for creating work environments that are anti-racist and anti-oppressive. In this brief, we provide data and statistics that illustrate the overlapping and compounding effects of racial and gender discrimination. It should be noted that we often found data for non-white and or non-Indigenous groups to be grouped jointly as visible minority or racialized. While there is a value to combined data that promotes joint advocacy and collaboration, simultaneously viewing the experiences of Indigenous, Black and Racialized as a whole or one group can also prevent us from acknowledging distinct needs. This brief does its best to present research and reports that share disaggregated data.

This brief does not thoroughly investigate the experiences of colonization and its impact on Indigenous peoples in Canadian workplaces. We recognize that many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada experience ongoing racial and gender discrimination due to colonial ideologies and practices across Canadian institutions, including public and private workplaces.¹ We also recognize that experiences of colonialism and racism are unique for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Indigenous communities are not homogenous, and nor is the racism they experience.² We also recognize and honour the work of Indigenous-led organizations in Canada and urge you to read Indigenous organizational resources and connect for more information: [Native Women's Association of Canada, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls]

How does gender impact women in the workplace?¹

Gender has been shown to impact various employment outcomes. For example, women face a pay gap in comparison to men's pay. In Canada, women earn .89 cents for every dollar a man earns.³ Gender also impacts the type of job occupation. Women are over-represented in retail and the care economy, which offers less pay than occupations where men dominate, such as STEM industries. Women are generally less represented in the private sector.⁴ For example, in 2019, only 3.5% of TSX-listed Canadian companies had a woman CEO.⁵ In 2022, 64.6% of all management occupations in Canada were occupied by men versus 35.4% of women.⁶ This trend in leadership is present even in professions dominated by women.⁷ Studies further show that when women get to leadership positions, they leave due to a lack of supported workplace cultures and recognition for their leadership.⁸

Societal norms around gendered roles further decrease women's employment outcomes. Women spend less time in the workforce due to care responsibilities and are over-represented in part-time work, leading to fewer career advancement and pay opportunities.⁹ On average, women in Canada spend 50.1 hours a week on care and domestic work versus 24.4 hours for men.¹⁰ Further, the lack of accessible and affordable childcare is directly linked to women's employment outcomes. For example, affordable childcare in the province of Quebec has been estimated to have increased women's employment rates by 7-9% in 2015.¹¹ Conversely, during the height of the pandemic, when women had no access to childcare, the employment of women who had children under six years old fell by 36%.¹²

In addition to these structural forms of discrimination, the lack of women's equal participation in the economy can be attributed to overt discrimination, where women's work is generally seen as less valuable than men's work, even in comparable positions.¹³

1. It should be noted that although the trends discussed in this brief do not include specific statistics of other intersections such as age, disability and sexual orientation, research has shown structural inequalities will be experienced differently for each of these intersections. For an example of some of the different impacts of intersections on pay equity, please see <https://womanact.ca/equal-pay-day-in-canada/>.

SPOTLIGHT

Gender-based violence in the workplace

Sexual Harassment and Employment

52%

More than half of Canadian women (52%) reported being subject to sexual harassment in the workplace.

9/10

Women (89%) have taken steps to avoid sexual advances at work.¹⁴

1/8

Women stated that they had been sexually assaulted in a work-related context at one point in their working lives.¹⁵

Woman identified survivors of sexual harassment reported more than one incident in the past two years.¹⁶

Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace have severe implications for women's mental health and well-being, as well as career progression.¹⁷





Domestic Violence and Employment

Studies estimate that domestic violence is the cause of job loss for 8.5%¹⁹ to 53%²⁰ of survivors of gender-based violence.

Intimate partner violence and employment sabotage impact job performance: 81.9%²¹ of survivors stated negative job performance due to decreased focus, concentration, and poor health.

1/3

Employees in Canada has experienced domestic violence.¹⁸

38%

Stated disruption to the ability to work due to employment sabotage techniques, such as disruption to transportation.²²

How does gender intersect with being an Indigenous woman in the workplace?

The colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada intentionally impacted Indigenous women's economic safety and opportunities in multiple ways that are often gender specific. Colonialism in Canada introduced European values of patriarchy where men's contributions were seen as superior to women's, directly going against Indigenous kinship values where women were head of households and women's contributions were valued.²³ Colonial laws imposed on Indigenous women limited their rights to engage with their community and pass on kinship ties, which in many Indigenous cultures were matrilineal. This further left Indigenous women isolated from the economic protection of kinship. Indigenous peoples further experienced the loss of livelihood and land displacement due to colonialism designed to stop Indigenous people from living on and with the land²⁴, which continues today. For example, mining and resource extraction industries displace Indigenous people and damage land-based food sources. Companies may not train or hire local Indigenous talent, which leads to the lack of access to jobs and services, causing financial hardship.²⁵ Indigenous communities also face ongoing impacts of residential schooling systems that, on top of committing severe forms of abuse on children and trying to eradicate Indigenous language and culture, also did not provide generations of Indigenous children with essential reading and writing skills, which led to lower-paying jobs and standards of living, creating cycles of poverty.²⁶

Colonization intentionally denied Indigenous women the resources and conditions necessary for them or future generations to thrive, resulting in intergenerational trauma, limited economic opportunities, lack of housing, low educational attainment, and high unemployment rates. Indigenous women face a gap in full-time employment rates compared with Canadian-born, non-Indigenous women²⁷ due to a lack of opportunities and racism. This is further exacerbated for Indigenous women in remote and rural areas, where Indigenous communities face underfunding, inadequate housing, and drinking water advisories.²⁸ First Nations and Metis women's employment rates differed by 15% between remote and easily accessible areas due to unequal barriers to education, employment opportunities and services.²⁹ Regarding the gender pay gap, Indigenous women make 65 cents to every dollar men make³⁰. Indigenous women are also over-represented in precarious, part-time and low-income positions, primarily in health and social services, followed by retail.³¹ Indigenous women often work the least paid, most feminized, and temporary positions in the natural resources sector, such as housekeeping, cooking and catering, or as low-skilled labourers.³² These roles offer few opportunities to advance to more skilled or professional roles, such as administrative or higher-paid labour positions.³³

Indigenous women are further under-represented in leadership and senior leadership levels in the economy.³⁴ Indigenous women hold only 0.3% of corporate management roles in 2023 in Canada and make up 19.4% of senior management roles in organizations in general.³⁵

Indigenous people and women face high rates of workplace harassment, violence³⁶, and discrimination.³⁷ Two in five Indigenous employees experience workplace discrimination, with studies showing Indigenous women experience workplace discrimination (45%) at higher rates than Indigenous men.³⁸ A survey conducted by Catalyst Canada found that Indigenous women also reported higher rates of emotional tax (67%), where a person is on guard against bias due to discrimination. Indigenous people also express a lack of psychological safety at work due to discrimination.³⁹

There remains a limited amount of research and information on the experience of Indigenous women in the workplace in Canada.



Gender-Based Violence in the Workplace

Sexual Harassment of Indigenous Women


Research into the natural resources industry's impact on gender-based violence has found that resource extraction projects increase the risk of violence for Indigenous women in their communities and workplaces:

- The hypermasculine culture of the natural resources industry can promote a sexist culture that encourages sexual harassment of Indigenous women.⁴⁰
- A 2021 survey of Inuit female employees in the natural resources sector found that more than half of the respondents experienced sexual harassment. The most common types of workplace sexual violence and harassment were unwanted sexual comments or jokes, unwanted sexual touching, and emotional and psychological abuse.⁴¹

Outside of the natural resources industry, there is limited research into the workplace violence and harassment experiences of Indigenous workers:

- A 2021 survey found that Indigenous employees had high rates of workplace harassment and violence (79%) and sexual harassment and violence (48%). This study did not disaggregate the experiences of Indigenous women and men.⁴²

This evidence should be considered in the broader context of colonialism and systemic oppression that contribute to Indigenous women being more vulnerable to sexualization and gendered violence in general.⁴³ The Final Report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls details the life-long exposure to violence due to intergenerational trauma and colonization.



Domestic Violence & Indigenous Women

Indigenous women and girls are at a disproportionate risk of experiencing all forms of violence. A study from 2018 found that ⁴⁴:

6/10

Indigenous women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

42%

Indigenous women are twice as likely to experience physical abuse in an intimate relationship than non-Indigenous women (42% vs. 22%).


56%

Over half of Indigenous women have experienced physical assault compared to one-third of non-Indigenous women.

1/5

Indigenous women experienced sexual abuse.

No studies were found that specifically investigate the impact of domestic violence on Indigenous women's employment opportunities in Canada. It is well documented that structural racism and poverty restrict Indigenous people's education and employment opportunities, increasing their risk of experiencing violence and creating further barriers to safety.⁴⁵



How does gender intersect with being a Black woman in the workplace?

Black women face unique structural forms of racism due to Anti-Black Racism. Anti-Black Racism is rooted in the violent history of colonialism and enslavement, which is structurally embedded and reproduced to “deny, negate, and devalue Black life, Black body experience, black history, identity, culture, knowledge” and humanity.⁴⁶

For example, in housing, Black women face forms of discrimination in the private housing market because of racial stereotypes about criminality and parenting.⁴⁷ Further, 14% of Black women rent social or affordable housing in Canada; this could be linked to Black women’s lower wages and structural inequality in the labour market. Black women have increased experiences of chronic health issues such as diabetes, and hypertension due to economic and health disparities,⁴⁸ are at an increased risk of stroke,⁴⁹ and face barriers to accessing equal health care, which can impact multiple domains of their lives, including employment.⁵⁰ Increased blood pressure has been linked explicitly with experiences of workplace discrimination⁵¹ and is a workplace health and safety issue for Black women.

Participation in the labour force is also connected to criminalization, which drives racial disparity by over-policing specific populations over others. For example, Black Canadians report higher levels of discrimination during police interactions and are over-represented in the criminal justice system.⁵² The impact of criminalization for survivors of gender-based violence can severely impact employment

and economic stability. This tendency for criminalization is especially acute for survivors of gender-based violence. One Toronto-based study showed that among Black women where police were called for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), although 93% had experienced physical abuse from their partner, 86% were charged as the main aggressor and 13% were dually charged.⁵³ Criminalization for survivors of gender-based violence can lead to compounded trauma from going through the criminal justice system, leading to further discrimination in securing or maintaining employment.⁵⁴ This reality impacts Black survivors’ resources and ability to keep themselves safe.⁵⁵

Regarding wages, Black women in Canada earn 58.5% of what white men earn on average.⁵⁶ The impact on Black women’s employment continues to be seen in the opportunities they can access and the types of jobs they can occupy. 80% of Black women and men with post-secondary degrees are in jobs that do not require a university degree, even when they have high educational attainment levels.⁵⁷ Black Canadians are the most over-qualified group in the Canadian labour market with a Canadian degree.⁵⁸ Almost 81% of immigrant Black women and a third of Black Canadian-born and non-Canadian-born women work in health care and social assistance, compared with 23% of white people.⁵⁹ Black women (66.1%) have a higher rate of labour force participation than white women, and yet, Black women are still unemployed at twice the rate of white women in Canada.⁶⁰

Black women are also underrepresented as leaders in corporate Canada; only 14% of organizations have at least one Black woman holding a Board role, and only 6.4% have at least one Black woman holding an executive position.⁶¹

Black women face specific forms of microaggressions and stereotypes that impact them in the workplace. For example, the “angry Black woman” trope has been particularly damaging. Research shows that when Black women express frustration, coworkers are more likely to attribute these reactions to personality characteristics and provide poor performance and leadership evaluations rather than seeing their responses in the context of expressing unfair circumstances such as racial discrimination.⁶² Black women are more likely to be stereotyped as assertive and physically or sexually objectified, such as

coworkers touching their hair without consent or remarking on their skin tone.⁶³ The physical and sexual objectification of Black women in the workplace is linked to white settlers and colonizers’ historical and contemporary hyper-sexualization of Black female bodies.⁶⁴

Research has shown that the combination of a lack of diversity in leadership, peer mentorship in workplaces, microaggressions, and experiences of racial violence occurring in Black communities has significant implications for Black women’s workplace performance.⁶⁵ Black women may feel the need to change their behaviour to fit in the workplace and appear invisible so as not to draw unwanted attention.⁶⁶ Racism in the workplace can decrease self-esteem and lead to a decrease in performance at work. Further, internalizing racism can prevent Black women from advancing at work.⁶⁷





SPOTLIGHT

Gender-Based Violence Against Black Women in Workplaces

Domestic Violence & Black Women

The experiences and impacts of gender-based violence for Black women's employment is a research gap. Research tends to group the experiences of Black and Racialized women together.

While WomanACT's study on the intersections of Racialized women and employment does provide some insight, not all the data is disaggregated by specific racial identities.

Sexual Harassment of Black Women

Unfortunately, data specific to the prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by Black Women in Canadian workplaces is a research gap.

In the US, analyses of national data sets find that Black women are disproportionately more likely to file sexual harassment charges (nearly three times the rate of white women) in all industries.⁶⁸

A Canadian study found that Black women who faced racial harassment in their day-to-day lives "found it difficult to separate sexual harassment in the workplace from sexual and racial harassment in society at large."⁶⁹ For these women, sexual harassment at work or school was connected to racial discrimination in their day-to-day lives.⁷⁰

How does gender intersect with being a Racialized² woman in the workplace?

Structural discrimination can have far-reaching and long-term employment impacts for Racialized women. WomanACT's

study [Intersections between employment and safety among racialized women](#), found that for Black and Racialized women:

46%

Had their employment impacted by the lack of educational opportunities or job advancement due to societal racial inequality.

44%

Had their employment impacted by the effects of racism and racial inequality on self-belief and belief in their abilities.

37%

Had their employment impacted by a lack of housing.

63%

Had their employment impacted because Canadian employers did not recognize their certificates and qualifications.

27%

Had their employment impacted by a lack of culturally sensitive employment services.

27%

Had their employment impacted by a bias in hiring processes for Canadian-born, non-Racialized women.

2. In this brief statistics on Racialized women can include non-Canadian born women, or Canadian born women that identify as non-Caucasian based on the individual sources scope.

20%

Had their employment impacted by the lack of affordable childcare.

The intersection of race, gender, and immigration has costly impacts. Racialized women earn 59 cents to every dollar a man earns,⁷² and newcomer women make 71 cents to every dollar a man makes.⁷³ In Canada, Racialized women make up 13.8% of the top 1% of earners⁷⁴ despite being more likely to be a part of the labour force and attain higher levels of education.⁷⁵

The impact of race continues to be seen in the levels of advancements and opportunities for Racialized women. Although Racialized women have high post-secondary education rates, they have low-income levels immediately after graduation compared to men.⁷⁶ Additionally, 80% of Canadian-born women with a post-secondary degree are employed full-time versus 73% of long-term immigrants and 62% of recent immigrants.⁷⁷ Racialized women remain an underrepresented group at management and leadership levels. As of September 2022, no corporations in Canada have Indigenous, Black, or Racialized women in all four levels of senior leadership (e.g., board, executive, senior management, or pipeline management).⁷⁸

Racialized women are over-represented in precarious, part-time, and lower-paying jobs⁷⁹, often in service, retail, and the care economy.⁸⁰ These professions are significantly undervalued and can be unprotected.⁸¹ For example, employment is offered on contract-only with little or no benefits. The devaluation of these care professions, despite the essential and emotionally heavy work they entail, harks back to racist immigration policies and programs that viewed Racialized immigrants as forms of “cheap labour” and Racialized

20%

Had their employment impacted by criminalization due to racial or ethnic identities.⁷¹

immigrant women as providing “cheap domestic labour.”⁸²

Further, the Childcare system does not address the impact of systemic racism on children and child-care workers or cater to the employment patterns that Racialized women experience, such as shift work or night shifts.⁸³

Racialized women also face overt forms of racism in the workplace. WomanACT’s study showed that 51% of Racialized women experienced racism at the interview stage because of their appearance, language, or way of speaking.⁸⁴ 63% stated that not having Canadian experience or certificates impacted their employment.⁸⁵ Racialized women also experience microaggressions that target their race, gender, or both. For example, comments or judgments like “I bet she slept her way to the top” or disbelief that a Racialized woman could hold a position of power within a white male-dominated sector.⁸⁶ It is important to note that workplace microaggressions reflect racial stereotypes, and Racialized women may experience microaggressions specific to their identity.⁸⁷ For example, East Asian and South Asian women are stereotyped as submissive and more likely to experience erasure and homogenization in the workplace.⁸⁸ These microaggressions, unintended or not, perpetuate stereotypes or biases that Racialized women are not skilled, educated, competent, or professional and harm advancement in the workplace.⁸⁹ In addition, the invisibility and homogeneity experienced by Racialized women in the workplace can lead them to “whiten” their racial and cultural identities to navigate workplace microaggressions.⁹⁰



SPOTLIGHT

Gender-Based Violence Against Racialized Women in Workplaces

Sexual Harassment of Racialized Women

Research shows that women in lower-paying or less secure jobs are more vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment and violence.⁹¹

They are more likely to be working in precarious or part-time employment. This precarity can prevent Racialized workers from reporting sexual harassment for fear of impacting or losing their jobs.

Domestic Violence & Racialized Women

WomanACT's study showed⁹²:

IPV caused job loss for Racialized survivors.

53%

Reported that racism impacted their experience of being a survivor at work.

29%

Stated that race or immigration status was used by their abusive partner in employment sabotage.

49%

Reported workplace discrimination further exacerbated the trauma from IPV.



Conclusion

This brief highlights literature specific to the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women in Canada and expresses how employment opportunities and workplace experiences are disproportionately affected by structural discrimination rooted in settler colonialism and gender inequality. Structural racism manifests, reinforces, and compounds gender inequality. As a result, the economic

disadvantages also compound for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women, as do the risks and impacts of gender-based violence.

The information contained in this brief can support employers in acknowledging and understanding the impact historical, systematic, and structural racism has in the employment or workplace experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized women.

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