

Black, minority women in Canada left behind in COVID-19 job recovery ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

OTTAWA -- Nine months into the COVID-19 pandemic, women of colour in Canada still face far higher unemployment than white women, official data shows, in part because they tend to work jobs in hard-hit sectors and often care for children or relatives.

The unemployment rate for minority women was 10.5% in November, compared with 6.2% for white women, according to Statistics Canada data provided to Reuters. Women of colour also had a slightly higher unemployment rate than their male counterparts, who had a jobless rate of 10.0%.

Canada has recouped more than 80% of the jobs lost at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, but many minority women have not returned to work.

"What we're seeing ... is the unequal impact of this pandemic on diverse groups of Canadians," said Lynn Barr-Telford, an assistant chief statistician at Statcan, in an interview before the latest data was released.

"These inequities pre-date COVID... but they've been further exasperated by COVID," Barr-Telford said.

Statcan added a question on race to its monthly job survey in July. The first survey found South Asian women had among the highest unemployment rates in Canada at 20.4% and Black women at 18.6%.

Four months later, the unemployment rate for Black women remains one of the highest at 13.4%.

Chinese Canadian women, meanwhile, are the furthest from their pre-pandemic employment levels with a jobless rate of 10.2% in November.

Indigenous women in Canada also face disproportionate negative impacts on employment from the pandemic, with the unemployment rate for Indigenous women averaging 16.8% from June to August, Statcan said in a separate report released in November.

"We have diversity within diversity, of course. So not all groups are experiencing the labour market shutdown the same," said Barr-Telford.

Systemic Disadvantages

White women have fared better as "they tend to be in better paid jobs that are less precarious and they have more resources at their disposal," said Wendy Cukier, founder of the Diversity Institute at the Ted Rogers School of Management.

Women of colour, meanwhile, face systematic disadvantages from fewer opportunities for career advancement to less access to basic services like high-speed internet and flexible daycare.

Child care is one of the issues that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government has promised to tackle as part of a major stimulus package pledged to come in next spring's budget.

But with women in racial minorities bearing the brunt of the pandemic slump, more needs to be done to ensure that stimulus is tailored to their needs, with a focus on career and entrepreneurial supports, say advocates. "We have an opportunity to really rethink what we value," said Cukier.

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