

# Aboriginal Women

Socio-Demographic Profiles  
of Saskatchewan Women

Status of Women Office

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## ABORIGINAL WOMEN

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This statistical profile describes some of the social and economic characteristics of the growing population of Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan.

Reliable statistical information about Aboriginal women is largely from the Statistics Canada Census which is conducted every five years. In the Census, a woman would be considered Aboriginal if she responded “yes” to the identity question “Are you an Aboriginal person, that is, a North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit?”<sup>1</sup>.

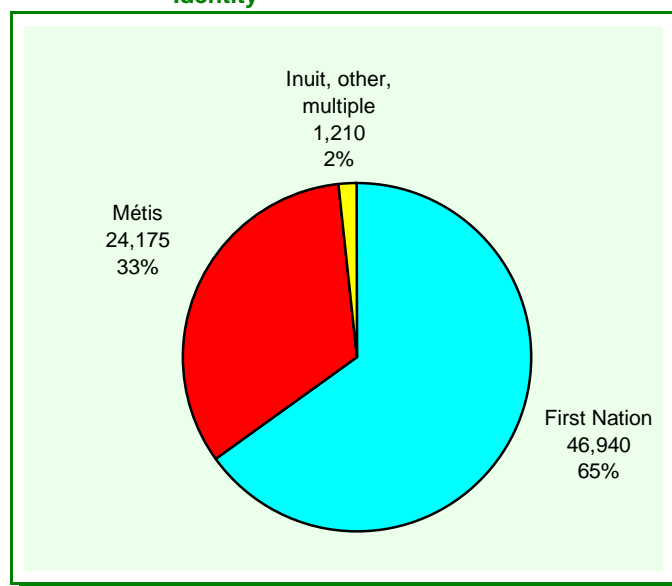
In 2006, there were 72,325 Aboriginal women living in private households in Saskatchewan. This means that Aboriginal women made up 15% of all women in the province. As with the general Saskatchewan population, women slightly outnumber men; in the case of the Aboriginal population the ratio is 104 women to every 100 men.

Figure 1 shows that approximately two-thirds of Aboriginal women reported their identity as First Nations and one third report their identity as Métis. A small number reported multiple identities or one of the other Aboriginal identities such as Inuit. This means that about 10% of women in Saskatchewan are First Nations and 5% are Métis.

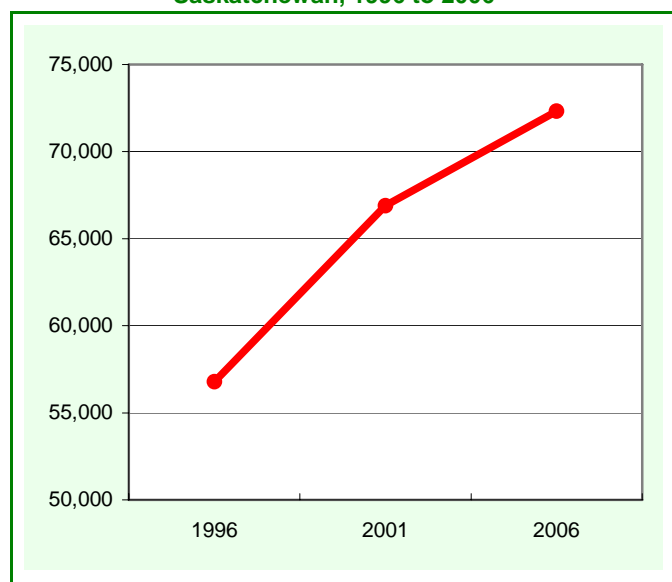
### CHANGES OVER TIME

Compared with the overall population in Saskatchewan, the number of Aboriginal women is increasing rapidly. This is partly because of a higher fertility rate, partly because of the relatively large number of Aboriginal women in the child-bearing age group, and partly because Aboriginal women are less likely than others to move to a different province.

**Figure 1** Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan, by Identity



**Figure 2** The Number of Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan, 1996 to 2006



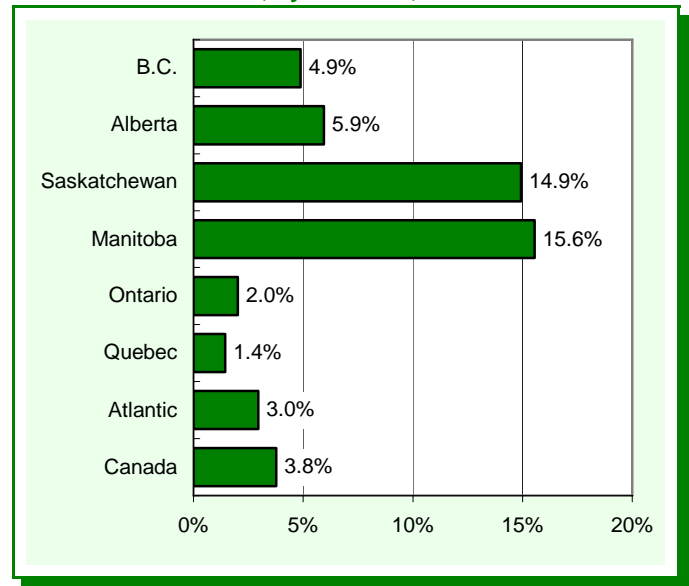
Over the ten years from 1996 to 2006, the number of Aboriginal women increased by an average of just over 1,500 per year, the equivalent of an annual growth rate of 2.4%. Figure 2 shows that the increase was more pronounced from 1996 to 2001 than it was from 2001 to 2006. Aboriginal women now make up 15% of the women in Saskatchewan compared with 11½% in 2001. Most observers expect the size of the Aboriginal population to continue to grow over the short to medium term.

### INTERPROVINCIAL COMPARISON

In Canada as a whole, 3.8% of women are Aboriginal with the highest proportion in the Northern Territories where more than one half (54%) of women were Aboriginal. Among the provinces, Saskatchewan has the second highest proportion with 14.9% of women who were Aboriginal compared with 15.6% in Manitoba.

Notwithstanding the high proportions in Western Canada, the largest number of Aboriginal women live in Ontario even though they represent only 2% of the women in that province. In 2006, Saskatchewan was home to 12% of the Aboriginal women living in Canada.

**Figure 3 Aboriginal Women as a Percentage of All Women, by Province, 2006**

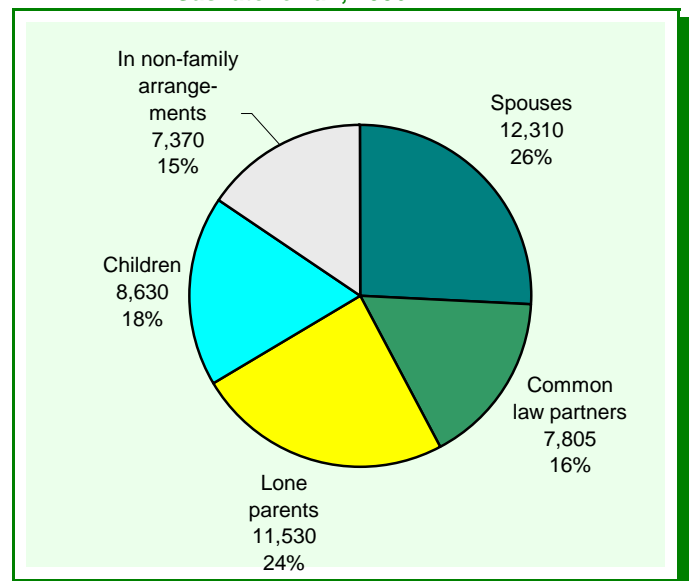


### FAMILY STRUCTURES AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

One of the consequences of the relative youth of the Aboriginal population is the nature of family structures. In 2006, almost one half of the Aboriginal women (46%) were children (that is, never-married daughters) living with their parents.

Restricted to the adult population, that is those fifteen years of age and older, children still make up 18% of Aboriginal women. Figure 4 shows that one quarter of adult Aboriginal women are spouses in a husband-wife relationship and another quarter were lone parents. About one in six were partners in a common-law relationship and about the same proportion were living in a non-family arrangement, that is, living alone or with friends or relatives other than their immediate families.

**Figure 4 Living Arrangements and Family Status, Aboriginal Women Fifteen and Older, Saskatchewan, 2006**



Aboriginal women are much more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be:

- lone parents (24% compared with 7%);
- children fifteen years of age and older (18% compared with 12%); or
- in a common-law relationship (16% compared with 6%).

They were much less likely to be a spouse (26% compared with 53%) or to be living in a non-family arrangement (15% compared with 22%).

### MOBILITY

Aboriginal women are part of a relatively mobile population. In 2006, just over one half of the Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan were living at the same address as they were in 2001 (see Figure 5)<sup>2</sup>. This compares with 63% of the general population of Saskatchewan women so Aboriginal women were somewhat more mobile than non-Aboriginal women.

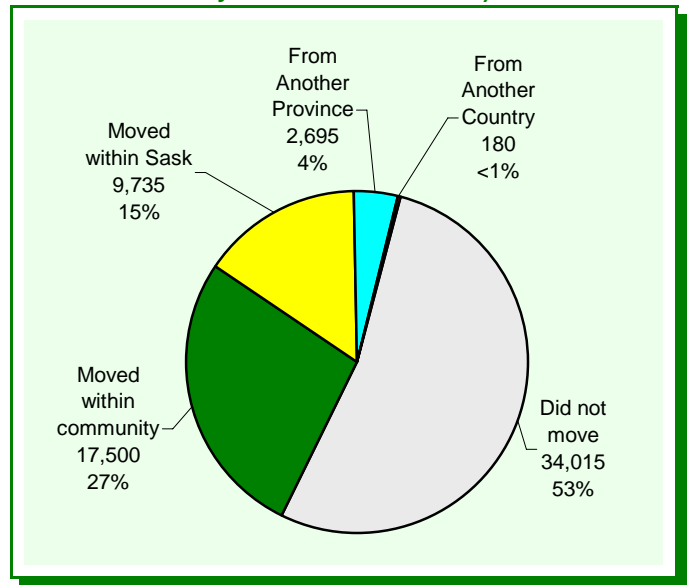
Among those who did move, the majority moved within their community (27% of all Aboriginal women, 58% of movers). Another 15% moved from one part of Saskatchewan to another and the remaining 5% came to Saskatchewan from another province or another country over the five-year period.

### AGE DISTRIBUTION

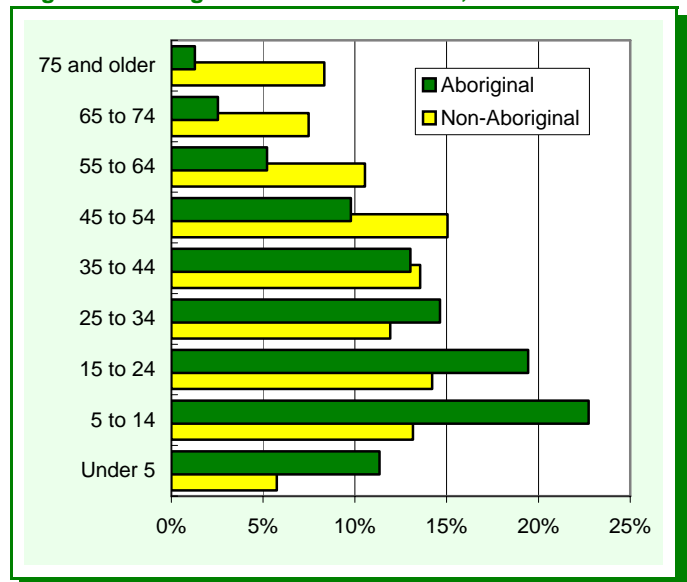
Age may be the defining demographic characteristic of Aboriginal women because they are dramatically younger, on average, than non-Aboriginal women. For example, 54% of Aboriginal women were under the age of twenty-five in 2006 compared with 33% of non-Aboriginal women (see Figure 6). At the other end of the age scale, only 4% of Aboriginal women are sixty-five years of age or older compared with 16% of non-Aboriginal women.

Looked at another way, Aboriginal women make up 15% of the population overall but 27% of children under the age of fifteen and 4% of the seniors.

**Figure 5** Mobility of Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women, 2001 to 2006 (as percentage of population five years and older in 2006)



**Figure 6** Age Distributions in 2006, Saskatchewan



## RESIDENCE IN SASKATCHEWAN

Aboriginal women are not uniformly distributed across the province. Instead, they are concentrated on Reserves and in major urban centres, particularly those in the northern part of the province.

Overall, about one quarter (27%) of Aboriginal women live in the metropolitan areas of Regina and Saskatoon<sup>3</sup>. Another 19% live in one of the other nine larger urban centres in the province. Of the 54% who live outside a major urban area, the majority live on Reserves.

Looked at another way, Aboriginal women make up 15% of Saskatchewan women in but the proportion is much higher:

- on Reserve where 98% of the women are Aboriginal;
- in Prince Albert (34%); and
- in North Battleford (21%).

Approximately 9% of the women in the Regina and Saskatoon metropolitan areas are Aboriginal.

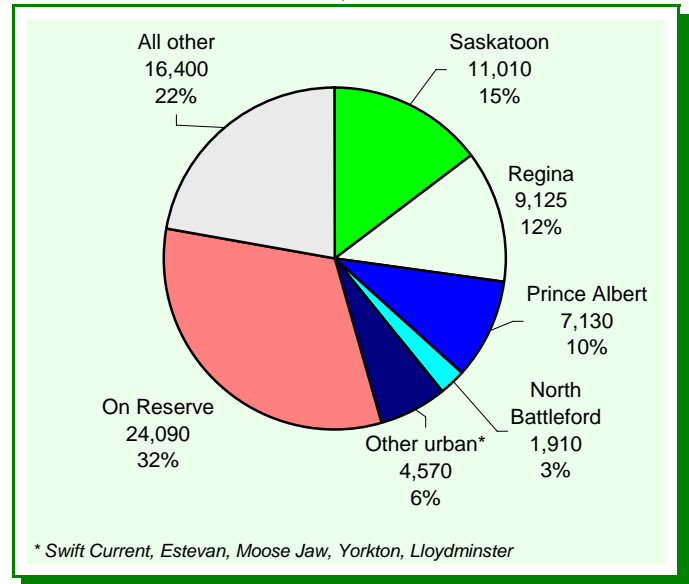
The distribution of Aboriginal men within the province is similar although men are somewhat more likely than women to live on Reserve (36% were doing so in 2006 compared with 32% of women).

## EDUCATION

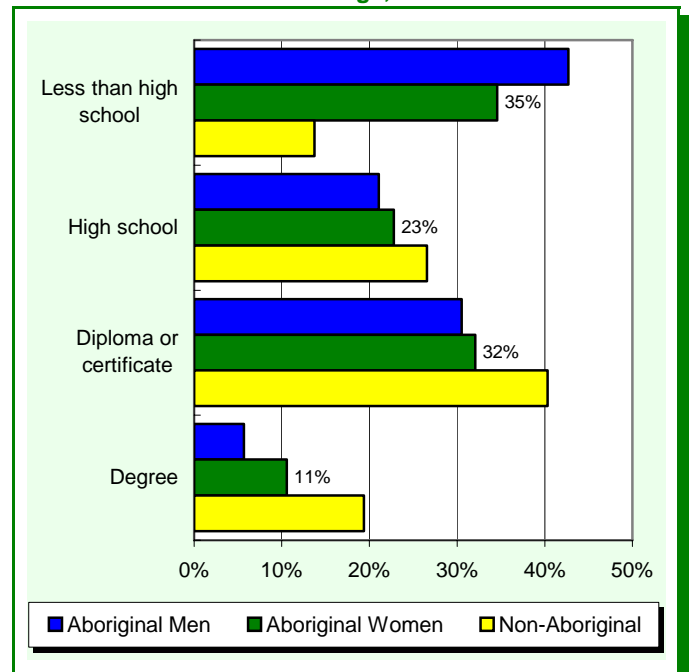
Although the gap is closing, there is still a substantial difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in terms of their formal education levels. As of 2006, just over one half (54%) of Aboriginal women fifteen years of age and older had completed high school compared with three quarters (75%) of non-Aboriginal women and 56% of Aboriginal men<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 8 compares the levels of completed education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in a more restricted age group, namely those 25 to 64 years of age. This removes most of the statistical effects of those who are still in school or who grew up during a time when a high school education was rare.

**Figure 7 Residence for Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan, 2006**



**Figure 8 Completed Education Levels, Population 25 to 64 Years of Age, 2006**



In this age group we find 65% of Aboriginal women with at least a high school diploma and 43% who are post-secondary graduates. These figures are much lower than the equivalent ones for non-Aboriginal women 25 to 64 years of age among whom 86% have completed high school and 60% are post-secondary graduates. In this age group, however, they are higher than the equivalent levels for Aboriginal men among whom 57% have completed high school and 37% are post-secondary graduates.

Among Aboriginal women with a post-secondary degree, diploma, or certificate, Figure 9 shows that the majority have specialized in:

- business, management, or public administration (30%);
- health, parks, recreation, and fitness (20%); or
- education (16%).

Relatively few have specialized in mathematics or computer sciences (3%). Compared with non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women are more likely to have a certificate, diploma, or degree in:

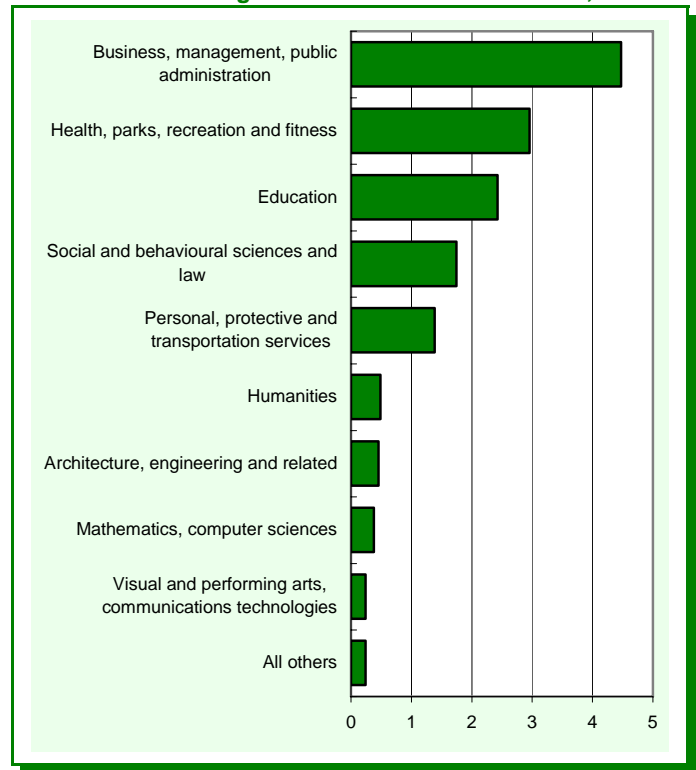
- business, management and public administration;
- law, social and behavioural sciences; and
- personal, protective, and transportation services.

They are less likely to have specialized in the health, parks, recreation, and fitness group.

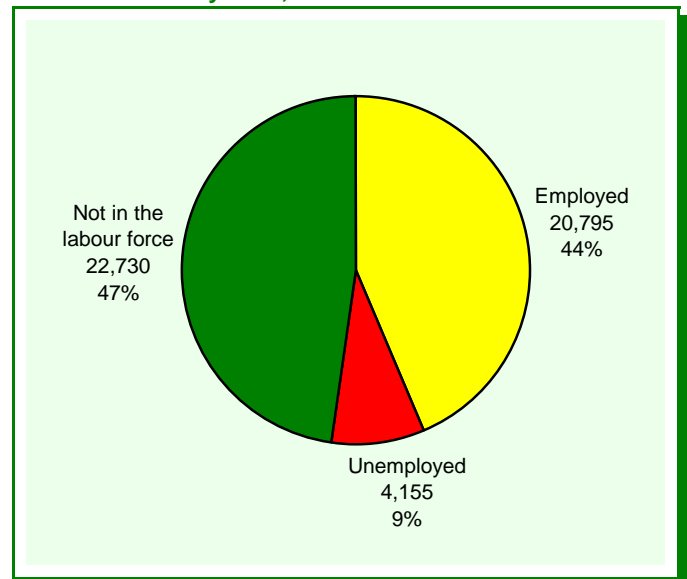
### EMPLOYMENT

In the spring of 2006, just over one-half of the adult Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan were in the labour force, that is, either employed or unemployed (see Figure 10). This is a significantly lower participation rate than among non-Aboriginal women where almost two thirds were in the labour force<sup>5</sup>. As with the non-Aboriginal population, the participation rate for Aboriginal men is higher than for Aboriginal women – 61% compared with 52%.

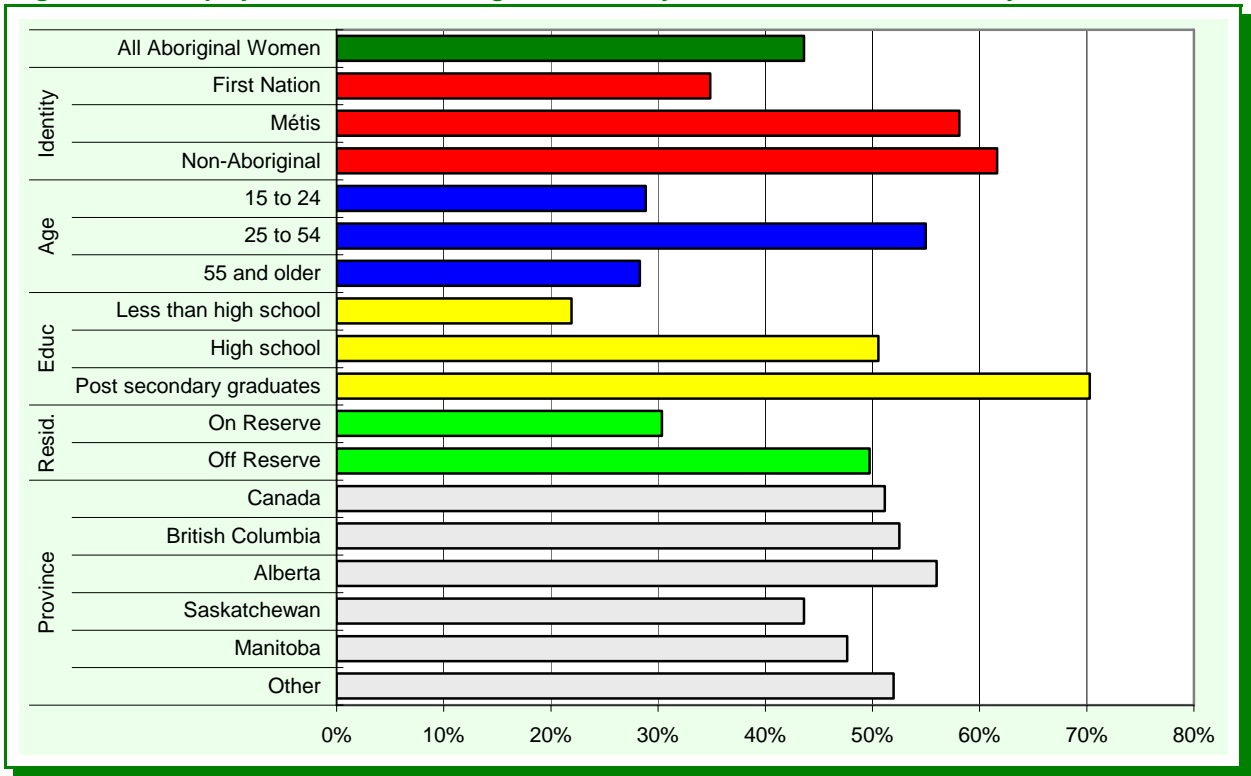
**Figure 9** Field of Study for Post-Secondary Graduates, Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan, 2006



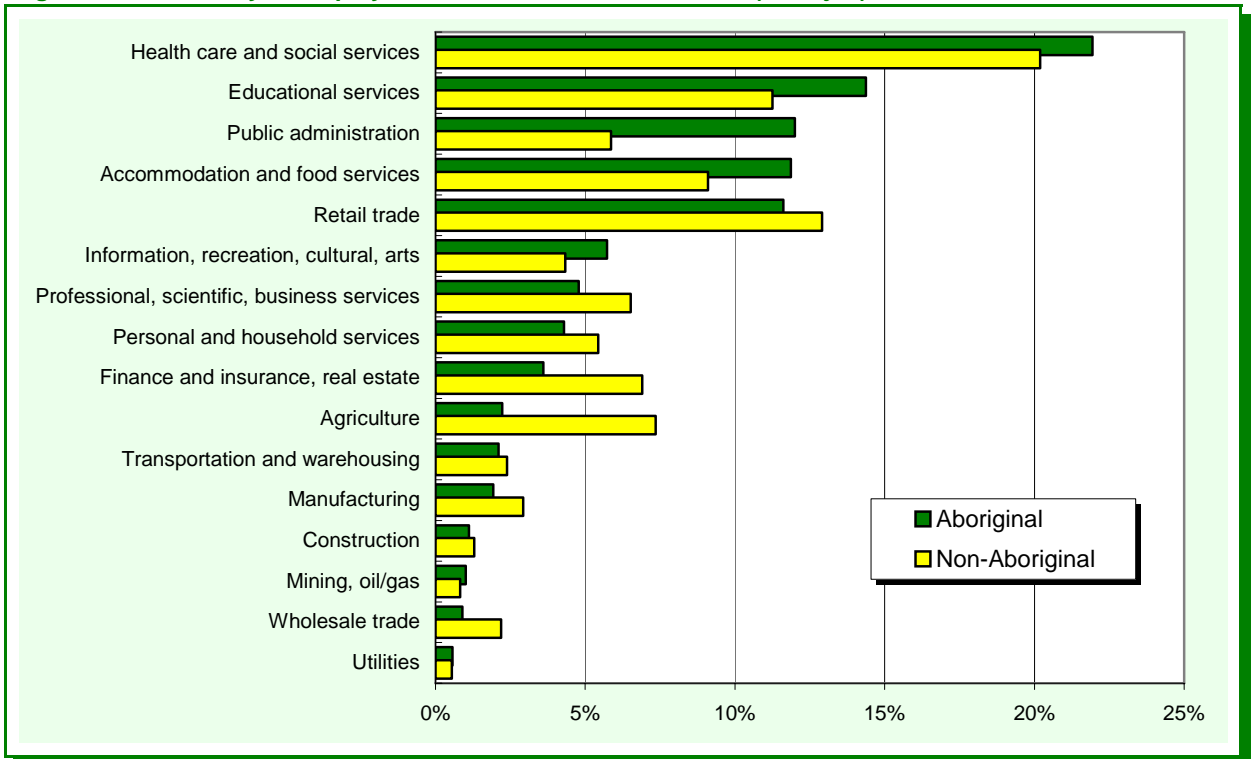
**Figure 10** Labour Force Status of Aboriginal Women, May 2006, Saskatchewan



**Figure 11 Employment Rates for Aboriginal Women by Selected Characteristics, May 2006**



**Figure 12 Industry of Employment for Saskatchewan Women (main job), 2006**



The unemployment rate for Aboriginal women was 17% in 2006, much higher than the 4% rate for non-Aboriginal women<sup>6</sup> but slightly below the 20% rate for Aboriginal men.

Figure 11 shows the employment rate (the percentage of the adult population who are working) for Aboriginal women with different demographic characteristics. The overall employment rate for Aboriginal women was 44% in 2006. It is much lower among First Nations women (35%) than among Métis women (58%) and lower among both younger and older women than it is for those in the middle age group. The level of completed education makes a big difference in the employment rate – only 22% of those with less than high school are employed compared with 70% of those who are post-secondary graduates. Employment rates are much lower on Reserve than off Reserve and lower in Saskatchewan than in other Western provinces or Canada as a whole<sup>7</sup>.

Aboriginal women tend to work in different kinds of industries than non-Aboriginal women. The most common for both, however, is the health and social assistance group. Figure 12 shows other differences. Aboriginal women in the experienced labour force<sup>8</sup>, when compared with other women, are more likely to be in the public sector, broadly defined. Specifically, they are more likely to be employed in:

- public administration (12% compared with 6% for non-Aboriginal women);
- education services (14% compared with 11%); and
- health and social assistance (22% compared with 20%).

They are much less likely to be working in:

- agriculture (2% compared with 7%); and
- finance, insurance, and real estate (4% compared with 7%).

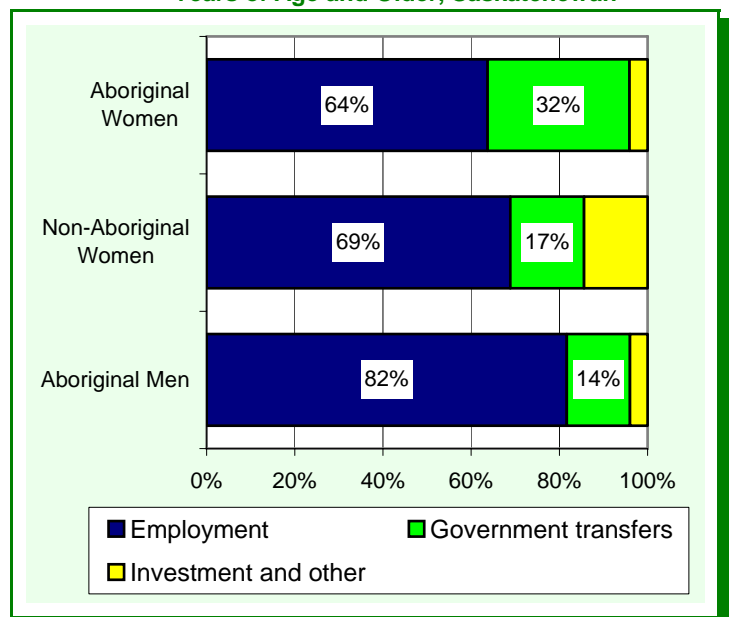
In the other eleven industry groups, the proportions are similar.

## INCOME

There are distinct differences in sources of income for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan. Compared with non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women are more likely to receive money from government transfers such as social assistance and employment insurance and less likely to receive income from employment or “other” sources<sup>9</sup> (see Figure 13).

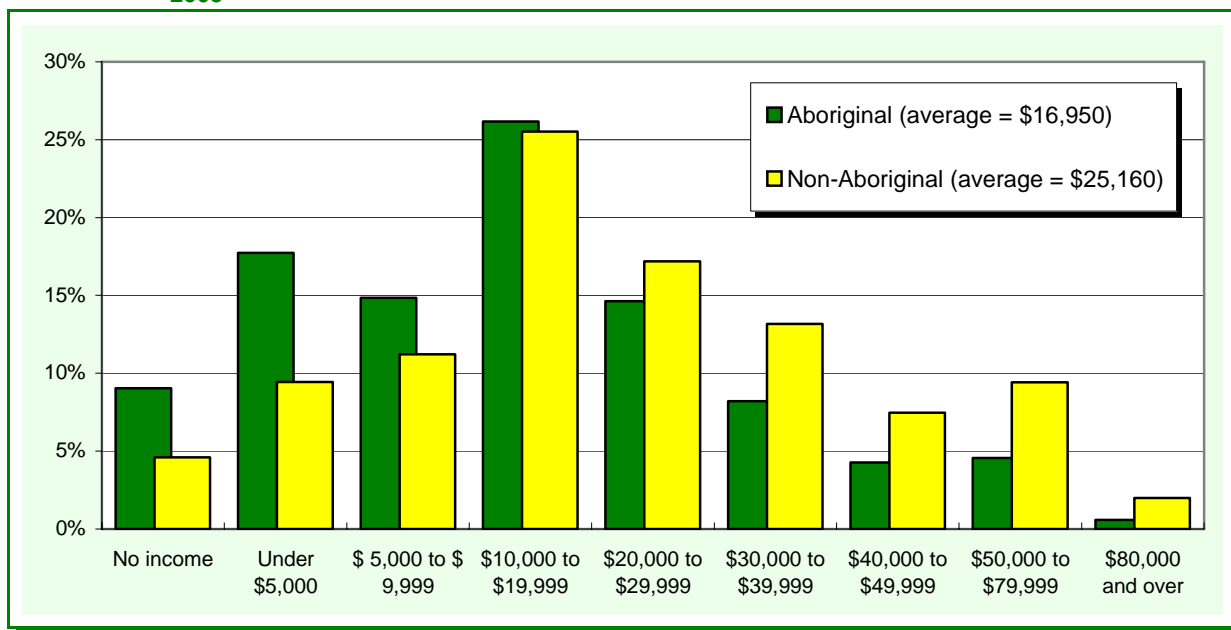
Aboriginal women depend on government transfer payments for almost one-third of their income (32%) compared with 17% for non-Aboriginal women. This reliance on government transfers occurs in spite of the fact that relatively few Aboriginal women are seniors and therefore eligible for Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan.

**Figure 13 Sources of Personal Income, Population Fifteen Years of Age and Older, Saskatchewan**





**Figure 14 Distributions of Income Before Taxes, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Women, Saskatchewan, 2005**



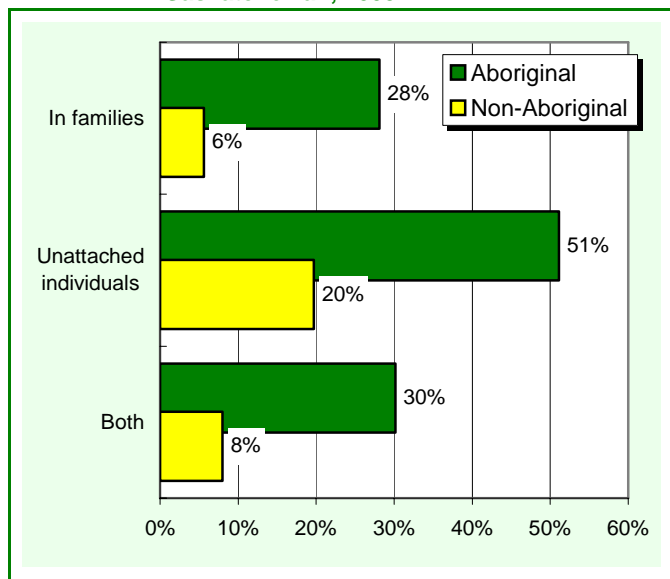
Among non-Aboriginal women, 17% of personal income comes from government transfers. For Aboriginal men, the proportion is 14%.

Individuals whose major source of income is employment typically have higher incomes than those who rely on government transfer payments. This is one reason why the average income for Aboriginal women is only two thirds of the average for non-Aboriginal women (see Figure 14). The other reason is that even when Aboriginal women have employment income, it tends to be low. Among those with any employment income in 2005, for example, Aboriginal women had employment incomes that were 22% lower, on average, than the equivalent employment income for non-Aboriginal women.

Figure 14 also shows that the lower averages among Aboriginal women are a consequence of the large proportion (27% in 2005) with very small incomes, namely annual gross incomes below \$5,000. At the other end of the income scale, only 9% of Aboriginal women have gross incomes above \$40,000 compared with 19% of non-Aboriginal women.

The calculation of low incomes is problematic for Aboriginal women. This is because Statistics Canada's Low Income

**Figure 15 Percentage of Women with After Tax Incomes Below the LICO, Off Reserve Only, Saskatchewan, 2005**



Cutoff (LICO)<sup>10</sup>, the standard measure of low income in Canada, is not calculated on Reserve because of the difficulty comparing housing costs with those living off Reserve. Consequently, the statistics about low income in Figure 15 exclude the population living on Reserve and therefore probably understate the proportion of Aboriginal women with very low incomes.

In 2005, almost one in three Aboriginal women living off Reserve had after-tax incomes below the LICO. This compares with 8% of non-Aboriginal women (see Figure 15). The incidence of low income is particularly high for those living alone (unattached individuals in the chart) where more than one half of Aboriginal women living off Reserve have after-tax incomes below the LICO.



## Notes

Source: These data are derived from the 2006 Statistics Canada Census. Questions about Aboriginal identity are on the "long form" of the Census so they are, in effect, based on a 20% sample of households (100% on Reserve). Only persons living in private dwellings receive the long form so these statistics exclude those living in so-called "collective" dwellings including, for example, prisons, special care homes, hotels, Hutterite colonies, homes for the disabled, and group homes.

1. The definition also includes a small number of women who did not self-identify as "Aboriginal" but who reported that they were registered under The Indian Act or who reported that they were members of a First Nation.
2. Note that short-term moves to and from the same address, perhaps on a seasonal basis, won't be captured in this measure of mobility.
3. The metropolitan areas around major urban centres are included in the population in the urban centres. These areas include the "bedroom communities" such as Martinsville and Warman near Saskatoon,, Lumsden and White City near Regina, Battleford near North Battleford, etc.
4. Statistics Canada uses a hierarchy for completed education so those who have both a university degree and a diploma or certificate will be considered as having a degree. Those who have received a post-secondary education without graduating from high school are still considered as post-secondary graduates.
5. The "participation rate" is the percentage of the adult population (15 & older) that is in the labour force, that is, either employed or unemployed.
6. The "unemployment rate" is the percentage of the labour force that is unemployed.
7. Starting in 2005, Statistics Canada began asking the Aboriginal identity question in the monthly Labour Force Survey which is conducted only among the population off Reserve. As of 2007, the employment rate of Aboriginal women 15 to 64 years of age and living off Reserve averaged 60.5% compared with 79.0% for non-Aboriginal women in the same age group.
8. Employment by industry and occupation is based on the number of women in the "experienced labour force". The industry and occupation are recorded for the current job or, if not employed, the most recent job in the past 18 months.
9. Government transfers include, for example, social assistance, employment insurance, disability benefits, the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, and Workers' Compensation benefits. "Other" income includes, for example, investment income, private pension income, income from rental properties, inheritances, and alimony payments.
10. The LICO is a measure of income inequality rather than absolute poverty. It is the income after taxes below which a family would be expected to spend a disproportionately large share of their income on necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. The LICO in 2005 for those living a city the size of Regina or Saskatoon, for example, was \$14,562 for a person living alone and \$22,069 for a family of three. In a rural area the LICO for a person living alone was \$11,264 and \$17,071 for a family of three.

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