

INDIGENOUS INCOME MOBILITY IN CANADA

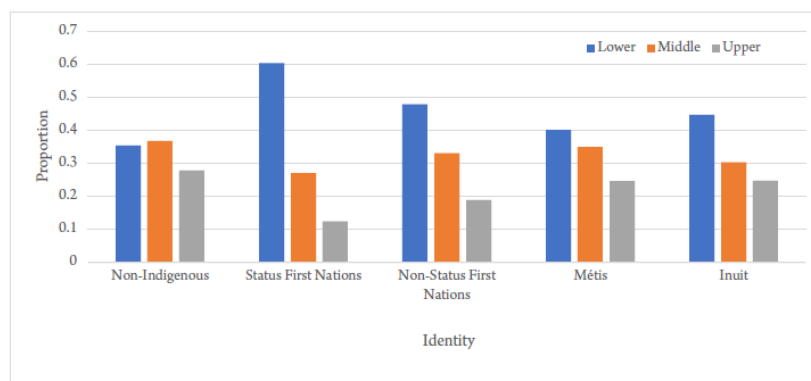
Michael Haan, Georgina Chuatico, and Jules Cornetet study the “impact of identity, education, occupation, and urbanization on income status” for Indigenous Canadians, finding a positive impact of higher education,” although it had a greater impact “on some Indigenous groups than others.”¹ The authors start by noting that previous research documents that “urban Indigenous people had a lower average income compared to non-Indigenous people,” but this previous research also reported “evidence of a growing Indigenous middle class that demographically resembles middle-income non-Indigenous Canadians in many ways.”² Why “the returns on education and training investment are not distributed evenly across Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations” was, however, “not clear.”³ Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet then investigated “factors that are associated with the likelihood of being in the lower, middle-, or upper income group,” relying on the 2016 Census and employing “multinomial logistic regression models,” in an effort to determine whether these factors predict income group.”⁴ Before reporting results, they reference the 1876 Indian Act which, in addition to specifying “who was an ‘Indian’ and therefore entitled to rights under the Act,” including “entitlement to reserve lands,” put in place social and economic barriers on Status First Nations,” in part by “colonial government officials choosing the location of reserves, which were often selected because they had limited economic potential.”⁵

The past is not past, at least not altogether. “Between 1996 and 2011,” Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet report, a “20-percentage point gap existed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in post-secondary education attainment.”⁶ Differences in attainment levels of education were also found between Indigenous identity groups, which, they note, “partially explains why some groups have higher labour market outcomes than others.”⁷ Drawing on 2012 data, the authors report that “among off-reserve Indigenous people aged 18 to 44, 23% of First Nations had completed post-secondary schooling, compared to 47% of Métis and 26% of Inuit,” variations that, they add, “are an important component to understanding their socioeconomic position, as both human capital and identity go hand-in-hand in determining income.”⁸ That said, it is unsurprising to read that “Indigenous people are found in certain occupational sectors more than others, which results in labour market segregation based on skill level and occupational prestige,” the authors adding that “Indigenous people who have a bachelor’s degree tend to choose different career paths than their similarly educated non-Indigenous counterparts, as “Indigenous people who have a university degree are likely to work in health, as well as in parks, recreation, and fitness; while non-Indigenous people with a university degree are more likely to work in fields such as engineering technologies. In turn, Indigenous people are underrepresented in knowledge-sector and high-skill occupations.”⁹ Moreover, “more

Indigenous people are moving into cities, which generally afford greater opportunity for education and employment that contributes to upward income mobility.”¹⁰ Citing 2017 data from Statistics Canada, Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet report that the “number of Indigenous people residing in a Census Metropolitan Area increased by 59.7% from 2006 to 2016,” and Census results show that there are approximately 92,810 Indigenous people in Winnipeg, 76,205 in Edmonton, 61,46 in Vancouver, and 46,315 in Toronto.”¹¹

Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet pose the following questions: (1) “How is Indigenous identity group linked to income? (2) Does this relationship differ by Indigenous identity?” (3) “To what extent does higher education link to middle- and upper income status among Indigenous groups?” (4) “How do these trends differ by occupation?” (5) “To what extent does income differ between urban and rural areas?”¹² They acknowledge that “our study relies on the 2016 Census, which provides data about demographics, employment, educational background, income, and family structure of the population in Canada.”¹³ The authors included “non-Indigenous people for comparison and specif[ied] four Indigenous identity groups based on respondents’ self-identification as Status First Nation, non-Status First Nation, Métis, or Inuit.”¹⁴ Their “final analytical sample contains 4,677,880 respondents.”¹⁵ Their goal? Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet seek “to identify which variables [(identity, education, occupation, population size, gender, retired, self-employed, labor and marital status)] are associated with the attainment of a middle- to upper income status.”¹⁶

Figure 1. Distribution of Income Group by Identity



Note: Source: 2016 Census of Canada

Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet note that a “disproportionate number of Indigenous people fall into lower income groups, especially among Status First Nations,” as the “majority of Status First Nation people (60.5%) are in the lower income category, while 27.1% are in the middle-income and 12.4% are in the upper income group.”¹⁷ Indeed, “Status First Nations have a higher likelihood of falling in

the lower income group (49%), followed by Inuit at 41%”; “Non-Status First Nation people are 34% more likely to be in the lower income group.”¹⁸ Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet report that “Métis and non-Indigenous people have similar likelihoods of being in the lower income group at 30% and 31%, respectively,” adding that “non-Indigenous, Métis and non-Status First Nation people have similar chances of belonging in the middle-income category (48%, 46%, and 46%, respectively)” while “Inuit are 43% and Status First Nations are 39% more likely to be in the middle-income group.”¹⁹

“In terms of the likelihood of being in the upper income category,” Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet continue, “Métis are 24% more likely, followed by non-Indigenous people at 21%,” adding: “Non-Status First Nations are 20%, while Inuit are 17% more likely to be part of the upper income group, respectively.”²⁰ They report that “Status First Nations appear to be the most disadvantaged—with a lower likelihood of being in the upper income group at 12%.”²¹ Answer their first and second research questions, Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet “see that there are disparities between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous identity groups, with Status First Nation people being more likely to be lower income,” with “the results also show[ing] that Métis people have a similar likelihood of being in the middle- and upper income groups as non-Indigenous people.”²² They interpret these “results” as “demonstrat[ing] the importance of several factors for exiting lower income status, but none looks at Indigenous populations explicitly,” so the authors “turn to this issue more directly, focusing explicitly on how educational attainment shapes income distribution among Indigenous identity groups relative to the non-Indigenous population,” finding “that some groups indeed benefit more from higher education than others.”²³

“Status First Nation people without a high school diploma are 65% more likely to be in the lower income group,” Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet continue. This “likelihood of being in the lower income group decreases with higher education,” they add, “but even with an apprenticeship or trades certificate, a college diploma, or a university degree below the bachelor’s level, Status First Nation people are almost 50% more likely to be in the lower economic status group.”²⁴ Even “those who have at least a bachelor’s degree are still about 30% more likely to fall in the lower income group,” and “the likelihood of falling in the middle-income group is lower among Status First Nations.”²⁵ Status First Nation people’s chances of joining the middle class “increases only slightly” with a bachelor’s degree, and Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet found that “Status First Nation people are found to have lower chances of being in the upper income group across education levels compared to non-Indigenous people.”²⁶ Those Status First Nations persons who earn an “apprenticeship or trades certificate, college diploma, or university degree below a bachelor’s level have an 11% probability of being in the upper income group,” and “those who have a bachelor’s degree or higher have only a 23% chance of having an income at the upper level.”²⁷ The statistics continue, but now numb, I’ll stop here.

Perhaps Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet are numb too, as their conclusions reiterate the obvious, namely that “income disparities persist not only between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, but also between Indigenous identity groups,” and that “these inequalities suggest factors that are specific to or more prevalent among Indigenous identity groups, which influence income attainment,” concluding that “the relative economic disadvantage among Status First Nations warrants attention to systematic barriers,” these located in the “larger social context, including the history of colonization and State control.”²⁸ They suggest that “knowledge sectors, such as the natural and applied sciences, health services, and management, seem to facilitate higher income standing,” and that “finally, those who reside in small population centres are better able to reach the middle- to upper income levels, whereas living in a medium to large population centre lowers the chances,” noting that while “larger urban areas may provide more opportunities, there are also higher rates of poverty and homelessness among Indigenous people.”²⁹ Apparently personal factors play no role whatsoever. But then Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet uncritically employ “the basic human capital model,” one that reduces persons and the personal to commodification, one they need not invoke, as they report the long-held, statistically-supported conclusion that “higher education and some occupational sectors place people in better positions in the social hierarchy,” and that “education is indeed one of several ways that individuals reach and maintain middle- and upper-class status.”³⁰ Dropping the distinctions they emphasized earlier, they add: “For Indigenous Peoples, this statement is especially true.”³¹

Well, besides the mind-numbing recitation of statistics, the common-sense conclusions (requiring no calculation), the neglect of personal factors, the differences university specialization makes (arts and humanities graduates tend to trail STEM and business graduates in income³²), and pointless and uncritical endorsement of the “human capital model,” this article inadvertently (I’m guessing it’s inadvertent) ignores the crushing conclusion that income mobility means the end of Indigenous culture, as income mobility (as measured by Canadian dollars earned) is, if not a “Western” preoccupation surely a non-Indigenous one. Certainly the “human capital model” – an incorporation of humanity into a resource/investment model of “resources,” a characterization of nature Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) scholars critique over and over again – is no expression of Indigenous culture. Finally, in blaming a “larger social context,” Haan, Chuatico, and Cornetet inadvertently ignore the agency and determination of individual Indigenous students exhibit in attaining academic goals.

Reference

- Haan, Michael, Chuatico, Georgina, & Cornetet, Jules. 2021. The Centrality of Education for Indigenous Income Mobility in Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 12 (1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2021.12.1.8388>
- Moghtader, Bruce. 2023. *Schooling, Human Capital, and Civilization: A Brief History from Antiquity to the Digital Era*. Routledge.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ 2021, 1.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ 2021, 2.
⁶ 2021, 3.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid. For a history of human capital theory, see Moghtader 2023.
⁹ 2021, 3-4.
¹⁰ 2021, 4.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² 2021, 5.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ 2021, 7.
¹⁷ 2021, 11.
¹⁸ 2021, 18.
¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid.
²³ 2021, 21.
²⁴ 2021, 23.
²⁵ Ibid.
²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ 2021, 25-26.
²⁹ 2021, 26.
³⁰ 2021, 27.
³¹ Ibid.

³²¹<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/careers/2023/05/04/measuring-outcomes-income> See also:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jinchow/2023/10/26/myth-or-fact-stem-majors-are-inherently-more-valuable-than-humanities-majors/?sh=55f7bcb73606>