

# Indigenous Women in the U.S. Workforce

A Comprehensive Nationwide Survey



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# Introduction

Data representation of Indigenous women in the workforce has been sparse in both industry and academic labor market research. In industry research over the past decade, McKinsey & Company has released an annual *Women in the Workplace* report examining the experiences of professional women in the United States, including representation and advancement, workplace culture and inclusion, and the role of allies and leadership in driving change. In all the reports, aggregated findings exclude Indigenous women due to small sample sizes (Field, 2023).

As a result, this prominent publication inaccurately suggests that Indigenous women are not engaged in professional employment. In reality, nearly 70% of Indigenous women of prime-working age (25-54 years old) participate in the labor force and work across a wide range of professions (Johnston, 2024). In the private sector, limited efforts to collect and report relevant data contribute to the continued erasure and marginalization of Indigenous women and their communities.

**Nearly 70% of Indigenous women of prime-working age (25-54 years old) participate in the labor force and work across a wide range of professions.**

In academic research, existing studies of Indigenous women in the workplace are limited and often focus on specific industries, such as higher education, social work, or STEM, while examining narrower topics, such as work-family balance, well-being, and leadership (Shield, 2009; Hobson, 2016; McKinley, 2021; Christiansen, 2019; Tippeconnic Fox, 2015; Bubar, 2022). Additional research is needed to examine Indigenous women's workplace experiences across diverse job roles and position levels, and how cultural identity, such as embracing Indigenous womanhood and participating in coming-of-age ceremonies, supports their economic roles within their communities.

Reinforcing cultural identity through nurturing relationships with family and communities promotes resilience (Minthorn, 2019; Burnette, 2017), while participation in coming-of-age ceremonies as young women strengthens identity and instills a sense of responsibility (Risling Baldy, 2018; Anderson, 2016). These practices align with Indigenous womanhood, which emphasizes resisting negativity, reclaiming tradition, and constructing positive identities (Anderson, 2016).

To date, there has been no comprehensive study that integrates cultural and resilience-related factors with the economic outcomes of Indigenous women. By developing and distributing a new nationwide survey of Indigenous women, this study contributes to improved data representation and advances the literature by documenting workforce participation in relation to cultural identity and economic roles.

**About the Author:** Dr. Britnee Nguyen is a Vietnamese/Blackfeet (Amskapi Piikani) descendant. She is the founder and director of the Indigenous Matriarchs Research Initiative and holds a PhD in American Indian Studies from the University of Arizona. The research presented in this report was originally included in her doctoral dissertation.

## Why This Survey Was Needed



### Bridge the Data Gap

Addressing the sparse representation of Indigenous women in labor research.



### Combat Systemic Erasure

Countering the invisibility of Indigenous women in major industry reports.



### Integrate Cultural Resilience

Documenting the link between cultural identity and economic participation.

# Methods

## Sample and Recruitment

Participants in this study were recruited through an online survey titled *Indigenous Women in the Workforce*, which was designed to address research questions related to Indigenous women's work experiences, challenges, motivations, and the role of cultural participation in their economic contributions. This study was reviewed by the University of Arizona's Institutional Review Board (IRB), in consultation with the Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office, and determined to be exempt from IRB oversight.

**Survey Design.** Prior to distribution, a draft of the survey instrument was shared with four reviewers, and their feedback was incorporated into the final version as appropriate. The survey was open for a two-month period from July to August 2025 and was administered online through the Qualtrics platform. It consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions and three open-ended questions at the end that allowed participants to share their accomplishments, workplace experiences, and additional details related to their responses. Participants were able to skip any question.

**Eligibility Criteria.** The survey sought participation from self-identified Indigenous women in the U.S. who were 18 years or older. These included individuals identifying as Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or multiracial Indigenous (e.g., Afro-Indigenous, Indigenous/Hispanic, Indigenous/Asian). Participants were required to be currently working or to have worked in a paid job in the U.S. within the previous 10 years. At the time of survey participation, respondents could reside either within the U.S. or out of the country. Participation was voluntary, and no compensation or incentives were provided.

**Recruitment Approach.** As an exploratory study, the survey recruited participants using as a convenience sample approach, which is commonly used in research involving small and hard-to-reach populations. Recruitment occurred through ResearchMatch.org, a database of volunteer

### By the Numbers

410

Indigenous Women

53

Total Survey Questions

92%

Full Survey Completion

research participants, where an email invitation was sent to individuals who identified as Indigenous women. Additional recruitment occurred through email invitations and social media posts distributed by third-party organizations to their contacts and followers.

These organizations included the Native Nations Institute at the University of Arizona, Tribal government entities, and other Indigenous-serving organizations. Strong interest emerged during the recruitment period through these outreach efforts. For example, the Native Nations Institute's LinkedIn and Instagram posts about the survey were reshared nearly 100 times.

**Eligibility Determination Process.** Submitted responses were included in the study unless the participant completed less than one-third of the survey or did not meet the eligibility criteria. Based on these criteria, 17 responses were removed. Overall, 92% of responses were fully completed and retained in the sample. Duplicate IP addresses were reviewed to assess the possibility of multiple responses from the same participant.

A total of 36 responses shared an IP address with at least one other response; however, these responses were retained because demographic characteristics and survey answers varied, indicating different individuals. In some cases, participants may have shared a workplace or household network using the same IP addresses. Indigenous affiliations were also reviewed for any overrepresentation, especially from larger Tribal Nations, and no overrepresentation was identified.

## Sample and Recruitment - Continued

**Researcher Responsibility.** The privacy of participants was protected, as the survey did not require them to provide identifying information. Participants were given the option to voluntarily provide contact information through a separate form if they wished to receive a copy of the study's report. Providing participants with access to the study's report reflected the Indigenous research methodologies of relational accountability and reciprocity by returning knowledge shared by the participants back to the community. This study also followed the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance by exercising researcher responsibility in the collection, storage, analysis, and sharing of Indigenous data (Carroll et al., 2020).



**253 (62%)**

Survey participants requested to receive the report, indicating a strong interest in the findings.

**Final Sample.** The final analytic sample included 410 participants, which allowed for estimation of proportions with an approximate margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$ . Since participants were not required to answer every question, sample sizes vary across analyses depending on the number of participants who responded to each question. On average, participants were slightly older and had higher levels of education than the general population of employed Indigenous women. Additional demographic characteristics are presented in the Participant Demographics section.

While the use of a convenience sample may limit statistical generalizability, the study provides robust baseline data for an exploratory analysis of professionally working Indigenous women. These findings contribute to addressing the underrepresentation of Indigenous women in workforce research and support future efforts to include them more fully in labor market studies.

## Limitations

### Recruitment Bias

Through targeted recruitment efforts directed toward followers and contacts of Tribal entities, Indigenous-led organizations, and the Native Nations Institute (NNI), the study may overrepresent Indigenous women who are highly engaged with their Tribal Nations. In addition, self-selection bias may have occurred through the recruitment via NNI's LinkedIn post, which could have attracted participants with a stronger interest in their careers than those not on LinkedIn.

### Job-Selection Bias

Job-selection bias may also help explain the higher representation of participants working on Tribal lands, as Indigenous women who are motivated to contribute to their communities may be more likely to seek or remain in employment located on Tribal lands.

### Household Composition

When participants indicated that they worked on Tribal lands, this could refer either to their own affiliated Tribal Nation or one they are not affiliated with. The survey did not directly ask if they resided on Tribal lands, so it is inferred that if their primary job was on Tribal lands, they likely lived in or near them. The survey did not ask about the race or ethnicity of spouses or partners, which limits the analysis of household racial/ethnic composition and the economic roles of Indigenous men.

### Workplace Harassment

While questions about sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace were not included in the survey, some participants referenced these experiences in the open-ended responses. These incidents can influence the workforce experiences and outcomes for Indigenous women and warrant future research to explore this topic further.

***View the Appendix: Survey Measures for more information on the survey measures development of this study.***

# Participant Demographics

410

Indigenous Women Participants

45

Average Age

70%

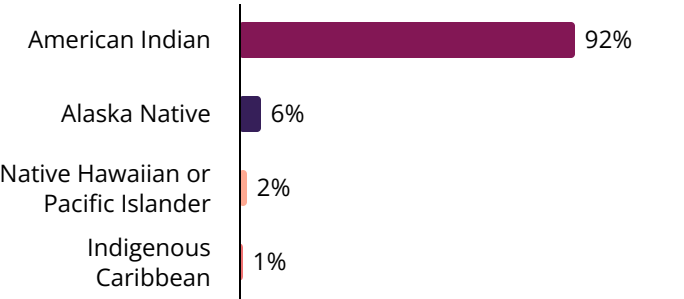
Bachelor's Degree or Higher

\$60k-\$70k

Median Salary Range

The majority of survey participants self-identified as American Indian (92%), followed by Alaska Native (6%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2%), and Indigenous Caribbean (1%). One-third (32%) of participants identified as multiracial, and 40% were multitribal, meaning they were affiliated with more than one Indigenous community.

**Figure 1.1:** Survey Participants by Indigenous Identity (n = 410)



*Note: Total percentage exceeds 100% because respondents could select more than one Indigenous identity.*

232

Indigenous Affiliations Represented

Participants represented 232 Indigenous affiliations across the U.S. Of these, 165 distinct affiliations were reported as participants' first affiliation, reflecting the widespread reach and diversity of survey participation. As a reference point, there are 575 federally recognized Tribes and over 60 state-recognized Tribes in the U.S. (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2026; National Conference of State Legislature, 2020). Regarding affiliation status, 85% of participants were citizens or enrolled members and 11% identified as descendants. Participants resided in 43 states, with the highest representation from Arizona (15%), Oklahoma (9%), and New Mexico (8%).

The average age of participants was 45 years, 70% held a bachelor's degree or higher, and the median annual salary was in the \$60,001-\$70,000 range. Overall, the sample was older, had higher education levels, and higher earnings than the general population of employed Indigenous women. In the American Community Survey 2020-2024 5-year estimates, the average age of employed Indigenous women is 40 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a), and 31% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024b).

Nearly half (47%) of participants were married or in domestic partnerships, 32% were single and never married, and 17% were divorced. With respect to gender identity, 5% identified as Two-Spirit and 3% as nonbinary. In terms of sexual orientation, 9% identified as bisexual, 7% as queer, and 2% as gay or lesbian. Regarding household composition, 45% had children under the age of 18 living at home, and 40% reported other relatives living with them besides their spouse/partner or children under 18. One-third (31%) of participants identified as primary caregivers to a family member due to age, illness, or disability.

32%

Multiracial

40%

Multitribal

85%

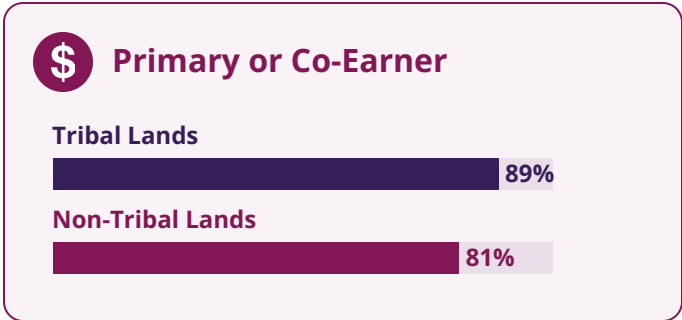
Citizens / Enrolled

43

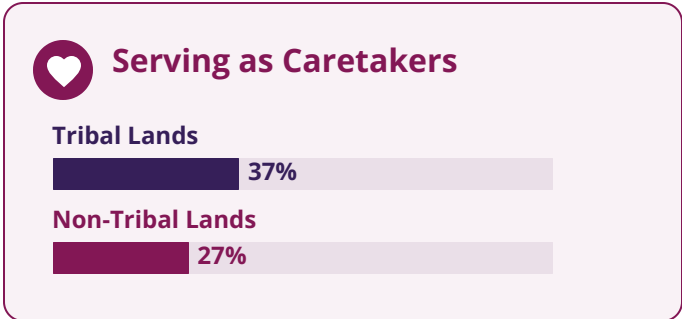
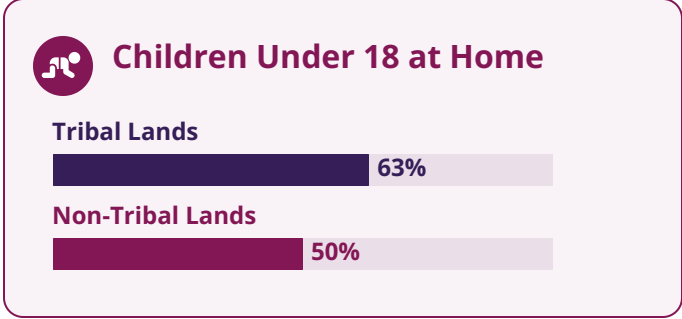
States Represented

# Working On and Off Tribal Lands

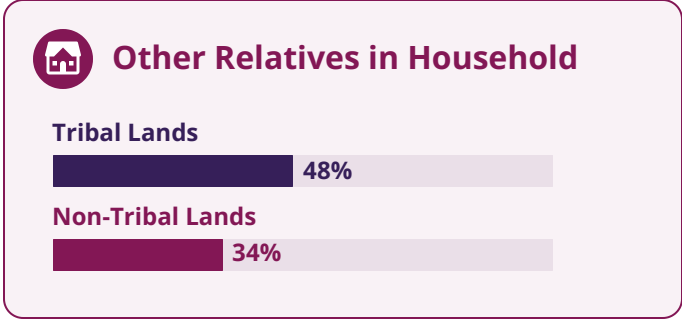
*Family Responsibilities Increase on Tribal Lands, While Reciprocity is Widespread*



Comparisons between Indigenous women who worked on Tribal lands and those who did not revealed little difference in marital or domestic partnership status (45% vs. 48%). There was also no difference in the proportion who reported giving a portion of their earnings to family or friends (46% vs. 46%), indicating that economic ties and relational reciprocity as an Indigenous value remained strong regardless of the geographic distance from Tribal lands.



However, noticeable differences emerged across other household and employment characteristics. Indigenous women working on Tribal lands reported higher rates of being primary earners or co-earners (89% vs. 81%), serving as caretakers (37% vs. 27%), having children under 18 (63% vs. 50%), and having other relatives living in their household (48% vs. 34%), compared to those not working on Tribal lands. These patterns reflect greater family and caregiving responsibilities among Indigenous women working on Tribal lands, alongside increased financial responsibilities for their households.



In addition, Indigenous women working on Tribal lands included higher proportions of those aged 55 and older (25% vs. 14%), were less likely to be multiracial (19% vs. 41%), and reported higher rates of some college and no degree (17% vs. 8%). They also reported a slightly lower median annual salary range compared to Indigenous women who did not work on Tribal lands (\$60,001-\$70,000 vs. \$70,001-\$80,000).

**Table 1.1*****Composition of Participants in the Indigenous Women in the Workforce Survey***

Table 1.1 presents the demographic composition of 410 self-identified Indigenous women who participated in the survey, categorized by whether they worked on Tribal lands or non-Tribal lands. Demographic characteristics include age, race/ethnicity, education level, income range, and household and economic roles.

| Demographics                     | Indigenous Women | Worked on Tribal Lands | Worked on Non-Tribal Lands |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Overall Total*</b>            | <b>N = 410</b>   | <b>n = 145</b>         | <b>n = 223</b>             |
| <b>Age</b>                       |                  |                        |                            |
| Age 18-24                        | 11 (3%)          | 2 (1%)                 | 8 (4%)                     |
| Age 25-39                        | 127 (33%)        | 41 (29%)               | 75 (36%)                   |
| Age 40-54                        | 165 (43%)        | 61 (44%)               | 95 (46%)                   |
| Age 55+                          | 85 (22%)         | 35 (25%)               | 30 (14%)                   |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity**</b>          |                  |                        |                            |
| American Indian                  | 376 (92%)        | 133 (92%)              | 208 (93%)                  |
| Alaska Native                    | 26 (6%)          | 10 (7%)                | 12 (5%)                    |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 9 (2%)           | 2 (1%)                 | 5 (2%)                     |
| Indigenous Caribbean             | 5 (1%)           | 1 (1%)                 | 3 (1%)                     |
| Asian                            | 7 (2%)           | 2 (1%)                 | 5 (2%)                     |
| Black/African American           | 17 (4%)          | 2 (1%)                 | 14 (6%)                    |
| Hispanic                         | 32 (8%)          | 7 (5%)                 | 22 (10%)                   |
| Middle Eastern/North African     | 1 (<1%)          | 0 (0%)                 | 1 (<1%)                    |
| White                            | 91 (22%)         | 16 (11%)               | 65 (29%)                   |
| <b>Education Level</b>           |                  |                        |                            |
| High School Graduate or Less     | 21 (5%)          | 7 (5%)                 | 11 (5%)                    |
| Trade/Vocational Certificate     | 12 (3%)          | 4 (3%)                 | 8 (4%)                     |
| Some College, No Degree          | 48 (12%)         | 25 (17%)               | 17 (8%)                    |
| Associate Degree                 | 37 (9%)          | 16 (11%)               | 16 (7%)                    |
| Bachelor's Degree                | 103 (25%)        | 43 (30%)               | 47 (21%)                   |
| Master's Degree                  | 118 (29%)        | 33 (23%)               | 74 (34%)                   |
| Professional Degree              | 9 (2%)           | 1 (1%)                 | 6 (3%)                     |
| Doctorate Degree                 | 58 (14%)         | 15 (10%)               | 41 (19%)                   |

\*Overall totals represent the number of participants in each group. Percentages are calculated using the number of participants who answered each item. Totals may vary across items due to skipped questions or subgroups.

\*\* Race/ethnicity totals may not sum to the overall total because participants could select more than one category.

**Table 1.1 (Continued)*****Composition of Participants in the Indigenous Women in the Workforce Survey***

| Demographics                                  | Indigenous Women | Worked on Tribal Lands | Worked on Non-Tribal Lands |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Overall Total*</b>                         | N = 410          | n = 145                | n = 223                    |
| <b>Income Range</b>                           |                  |                        |                            |
| \$0-\$20,000                                  | 29 (8%)          | 7 (5%)                 | 22 (10%)                   |
| \$20,001-\$40,000                             | 41 (11%)         | 21 (15%)               | 20 (9%)                    |
| \$40,001-\$60,000                             | 77 (21%)         | 41 (29%)               | 35 (16%)                   |
| \$60,001-\$80,000                             | 81 (22%)         | 37 (26%)               | 43 (20%)                   |
| \$80,001-\$100,000                            | 38 (10%)         | 10 (7%)                | 27 (12%)                   |
| \$100,001-\$120,000                           | 37 (10%)         | 10 (7%)                | 27 (12%)                   |
| \$120,001+                                    | 61 (17%)         | 16 (11%)               | 45 (21%)                   |
| <b>Household and Economic Roles</b>           |                  |                        |                            |
| Married / Domestic Partnership                | 192 (47%)        | 65 (45%)               | 106 (48%)                  |
| Have Kids Under 18 at Home                    | 180 (45%)        | 40 (63%)               | 52 (50%)                   |
| Have Other Relatives at Home                  | 160 (40%)        | 70 (48%)               | 76 (34%)                   |
| Caretaker of a Relative†                      | 127 (31%)        | 53 (37%)               | 60 (27%)                   |
| Give Portion of Earnings to Family or Friends | 183 (45%)        | 66 (46%)               | 102 (46%)                  |
| Primary Earner or Co-Earner††                 | 160 (83%)        | 58 (89%)               | 86 (81%)                   |

\*Overall totals represent the number of participants in each group. Percentages are calculated using the number of participants who answered each item. Totals may vary across items due to skipped questions or subgroups.

† Caretaker of a family member due to age, illness, or disability.

†† Primary earner or co-earner is defined as contributing 50% or more of household income. Percentages are calculated only among married or partnered participants. (n = 192, 65, 106).

# Employment Profiles

## Indigenous Women as Working Professionals and Primary Earners

A majority (83%) of Indigenous women who were married or in domestic partnerships reported being primary earners or co-earners in their households. Over half of these women (54%) were primary earners, which was 3.4 times higher than the national average for opposite-sex households in the general population, in which only 16% of women are primary earners (Fry et al., 2023).

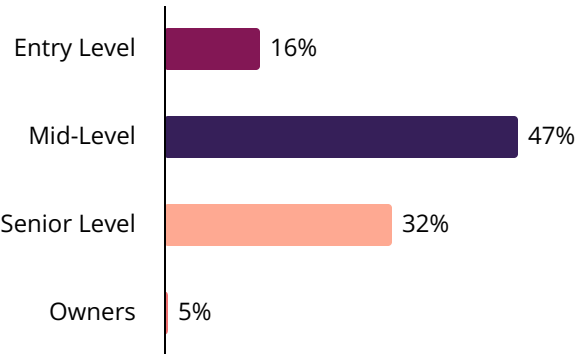
This reflects continuity in Indigenous women's traditional roles as economic providers, caretakers, and respected leaders within their families and communities, which contrasts with patriarchal gender norms that have historically positioned women as economically dependent. These differences in worldviews are also reflected in the Indigenous collective orientation, as 45% of Indigenous women reported sharing a portion of their earnings with family members or friends. A sense of financial responsibility through employment began early for most participants, with 93% reporting working in their first paid job by age 18.

**Over half of Indigenous women (54%) were primary earners, which was 3.4 times higher than the national average (16%) for opposite-sex households in the general population.**

Among all participants, 61% were employed full time, 15% were self-employed, and 14% worked part-time, seasonal, or gig work. Participants could select more than one employment status if they held multiple jobs. Six percent were not currently working or were retired. Just over half (54%) of the participants worked fully in person, one-third (33%) were in hybrid arrangements, and 13% worked fully remote jobs.

As shown in Figure 1.2, nearly half (47%) of the participants held mid-level positions, one-third (32%) held senior-level or C-suite roles, 16% were in entry-level positions, and 5% were business owners.

**Figure 1.2:** Distribution of Position Levels Among Indigenous Women in the Workforce (n = 361)



More than half (52%) of participants managed employees, most commonly overseeing small teams of one to five employees (31%).

Fifty-three percent of participants had been in their current primary job for three years or less. Only 30% had remained in the same job continuously over the previous five years, while the remainder had changed jobs during that period, with most having held two (28%) or three (21%) jobs. In addition, 34% were multiple jobholders, meaning they simultaneously earned income from more than one job.

The most common industries in which participants worked were health care and social assistance (25%), public administration—Tribal government (11%), postsecondary education (11%), other educational services (10%), and professional, scientific, and technical services (9%). Overall, 39% of participants worked on Tribal lands.

Among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, 35% were employed on Tribal lands, demonstrating that employment opportunities for degree holders exist within Tribal Nations and there is interest in working in their communities and that some women return after completing postsecondary education. This proportion is notable considering that only 13% of Indigenous individuals in the overall country's population live on Tribal lands (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

The survey was open to participants from any industry and position level; however, most participants held professional roles. The wide variety of professional positions represented, both on Tribal lands and non-Tribal lands, highlights the economic contributions of Indigenous women across many sectors (see Table 1.2). The variety of job roles represented among participants working on Tribal lands suggests varied interests in the types of employment

available and the presence of professional opportunities for Indigenous women with advanced education. While a range of job roles was represented in both settings, differences were seen with positions in environmental and natural resources and communication that were more frequently reported on Tribal lands, whereas technology roles were reported only in non-Tribal lands. Overall, the broad occupational reach of Indigenous women illustrates their diverse skills and contributions across the workforce.

**Table 1.2**

***Types of Job Roles Held by Indigenous Women on Tribal and Non-Tribal Lands***

| Work Type                                       | Jobs on Tribal Lands                                                                                                                                                                                     | Jobs on Non-Tribal Lands                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Leadership &amp; Governance</b>              | CEO · Councilwoman · Tribal Chairperson · Tribal Administrator · President · Executive Director · Senior Counsel                                                                                         | CEO · President · Senior Vice President · Executive Director · Director of Development · CFO                                                                                                |
| <b>Health &amp; Wellness</b>                    | Nurse Practitioner · Registered Nurse · Licensed Behavioral Health Professional · Indian Child Welfare Caseworker · Health Director · Advanced Clinical Pharmacist · Benefits Specialist                 | Pediatrician · Physician · Pediatric Psychologist · Behavioral Health Clinician · Registered Nurse · Health Equity Strategist · Domestic Violence Prevention Coordinator · Dentist          |
| <b>Education &amp; Research</b>                 | Language Teacher · Adjunct Faculty · Professor · Director of Education · Career Development Specialist · Institutional Research Analyst · Postdoctoral Researcher · Research Director · Data Coordinator | Professor · Graduate Research Associate · Clinical Research Coordinator · Indigenous Education Specialist · Data Analyst · Native American Student Success Director                         |
| <b>Culture, Arts, Recreation, and Community</b> | Culture and Arts Coordinator · Museum Director · Librarian · Community Development Planner · Economic Development Manager · Archives Assistant · Blackjack Dealer                                        | Community Engagement Coordinator · Youth Coordinator · Archivist · Contract Artist · Tribal Engagement Specialist · Events Administrator · News Reporter · Fishing Outfitter                |
| <b>Environmental &amp; Natural Resources</b>    | Environmental Director · Air Quality Manager · Fisheries Technician · Big Game Biologist · Environmental Assistant                                                                                       | Sr. Director, Native Lands Partnership · Sr. Planner, Land Use                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Technology</b>                               | No roles reported on Tribal lands                                                                                                                                                                        | Scientific Operations Manager · Software Engineer Manager · Senior Research Technologist · Engineering Educator · Web Services and Applications Manager · User Experience Designer          |
| <b>Communication</b>                            | Digital Content Coordinator · Marketing Consultant · Outreach Coordinator · Communications Specialist                                                                                                    | No roles reported on non-Tribal lands                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Administration, Programs, &amp; Justice</b>  | Program Director for 477 Programs · TANF Administrator · Tribal Employment Rights Officer · Grant Administrator · WIOA Manager · Regulatory Agent · Enrollment Coordinator · Human Resources Director    | Grant and Financial Analyst · Budget Analyst · Accounting Manager · Investment Analyst · Corrections Officer · Quality Assurance Officer · Grantee Specialist · Controller · Court Reporter |

*Note.* This table presents a partial list of job roles reported by participants (n = 362).

# Career Aspirations & Workplace Belonging

## Motivations to Give Back to Community and Feeling Respected at Work

Most participants reported positive feelings toward their work. Nearly all agreed that their career was important to them (94%), and a majority reported liking what they did at work (88%). Interest in promotion was most prevalent among Indigenous women in entry-level positions (78%), compared to those with mid-level (67%) and senior-level (67%) roles. Although at a lower rate, interest in advancement remained evident among Indigenous women in C-Suite positions (38%).

Beyond paying the bills (90%), the most common motivations for working were contributing to a meaningful cause (64%) and giving back to their communities (64%), demonstrating an Indigenous collective mindset. The most frequent personal challenge affecting their work was financial stress or debt (40%). This may be related to student loan repayment, as one-third (33%) of participants reported working to pay off student loans, along with other financial stressors such as limited childcare options (13%) and lack of reliable transportation (9%).

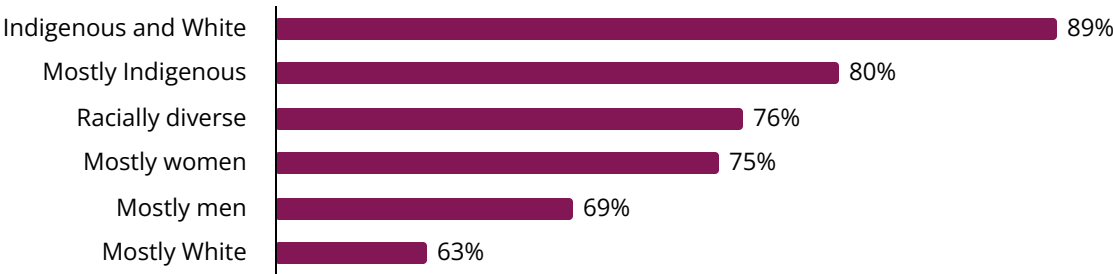
Given that the majority of participants are primary earners in their households, financial responsibilities for themselves and others may contribute to heightened financial stress. Other common challenges included mental health (39%), physical health (31%), and fear of failure (31%). One in five Indigenous women reported no personal challenges in the last 12 months.

**Beyond paying the bills (90%), the most common motivations for working were contributing to a meaningful cause (64%) and giving back to their communities (64%).**

Regarding workplace composition, just over half of the participants (53%) reported that most of their coworkers were women, while one-third (32%) worked with an even distribution of men and women; 11% worked mostly with men. In terms of racial and ethnic composition, the largest share worked primarily with Indigenous coworkers (37%), followed by mostly White coworkers (31%), and a racial/ethnic diversity of coworkers (22%). Overall, three-fourths of Indigenous women agreed they felt a sense of belonging at their workplace (74%) and that they felt respected in their job (71%).

Although levels of workplace belonging and respect were high overall, feeling respected was highest for Indigenous women who worked with racially/ethnically diverse coworkers (80%) and among those whose employers offered company-sponsored social groups for Indigenous colleagues and allies (76%). Feelings of workplace belonging also varied by the racial and ethnic composition of their coworkers, with higher levels reported in “Indigenous and White” and “mostly Indigenous” (see Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3:** Indigenous Women's Agreement With “I Feel Like I Belong at my Workplace” by Coworker Composition (n = 365)



# Mentorship & Allyship

## Strengthening Professional Pathways Through Mentors and Allies

Indigenous women most reported that mentorship supported their career advancement through guidance and support (81%) and encouragement of professional development (71%). Least frequently reported forms of support included being nominated for promotions (32%) and being referred to other job opportunities (38%).

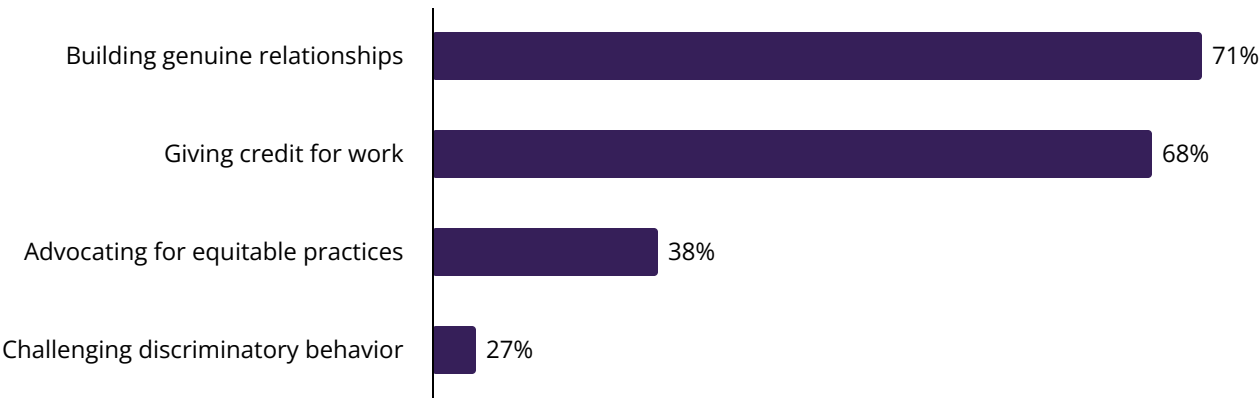
Given that only half of Indigenous women are in managerial roles, increasing opportunities for promotion nominations and job referrals represents an important area where colleagues and supervisors can better support Indigenous women's career advancement and align with their interest in progressing to the next level.

Indigenous women felt a sense of belonging through allyship behaviors such as colleagues building genuine relationships with them (71%) and giving credit for their work (68%). The least frequently experienced forms of allyship involved colleagues challenging discriminatory behavior by others (27%) and advocating for equitable practices within the organization (38%).

Overall, these patterns suggest one-on-one, interpersonal allyship is relatively strong, while greater organizational responsibility for formal interventions could further improve workplace belonging.



**Figure 1.4:** Allyship Behaviors From Colleagues Experienced by Indigenous Women (n = 374)



# Workplace Microaggressions

## The Reality of Discrimination at Work and the Impact on Well-being

### Microaggressions (Discrimination)

Microaggressions can have lasting effects on mental health and confidence in the workplace. Indigenous women left previous jobs for a variety of reasons, including being treated poorly. Their main reasons for leaving a job were receiving a better job elsewhere (44%), being treated poorly by coworkers, supervisors, or leadership (43%), lack of opportunities for growth (39%), and feeling burned out (39%).

Most Indigenous women (93%) have experienced microaggressions in the workplace. These behaviors are subtle forms of discrimination rooted in bias and directed toward individuals based on aspects of their identity (Sue et al., 2007). As shown in Table 1.3, Indigenous women experienced high rates of microaggressions related to challenges to professional competence, including having their judgment questioned in their area of expertise (74%), others getting credit for their ideas (70%), being interrupted or spoken over more than others (65%), and being mistaken for someone more junior (52%). Demeaning and “othering” microaggressions were also common with assumptions made about their culture (73%) as the most frequently experienced.

### Widespread Prevalence

**93%** of participants reported experiencing microaggressions during their work history.\*

*\*Experienced at least one microaggression from Table 1.3.*

### Impact on Well-being

**6x more likely**

to report always **feeling burned out** compared to those with fewer microaggressions.

**45%**

Experienced 3+ Microaggressions & Burned Out

**7%**

Experienced <3 Microaggressions & Burned Out

Table 1.3

Types of Workplace Microaggressions Experienced by Indigenous Women (n = 381)

| Work Microaggressions                             | % Experienced in the Workplace |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Challenges to Professional Competence             |                                |
| My judgment is questioned in my area of expertise | 74%                            |
| Others get credit for my ideas                    | 70%                            |
| I'm interrupted or spoken over more than others   | 65%                            |
| I've been mistaken for someone more junior        | 52%                            |
| Demeaning and "Othering"                          |                                |
| Others make assumptions about my culture          | 73%                            |
| I'm criticized for my demeanor                    | 53%                            |
| Others comment on my emotional state              | 39%                            |

Microaggressions - Continued

Negative impacts on well-being were more common among Indigenous women who reported experiencing microaggressions. Indigenous women who experienced three or more microaggressions in their work history (45%) were over 6 times as likely to report always feeling burned out compared to those who experienced fewer than three microaggressions (7%).

Code-switching (64%) was also reported by participants where they would change their language, behavior, or dress to blend in with their colleagues. Additionally, three-fourths (75%) felt they had to work harder than others to prove themselves in the workplace, which may contribute to burnout and influence decisions to leave a job.

Despite these challenges, most Indigenous women reported neutral or positive levels of comfort speaking up at work and relating to their colleagues. Even so, 34% did not feel comfortable speaking up or sharing their opinions, and 38% had a hard time relating to others at work. Further, a majority (57%) agreed that they experience negative behavior when attempting to move into roles with greater power, highlighting persistent barriers to advancement.

Other Negative Experiences in the Workplace

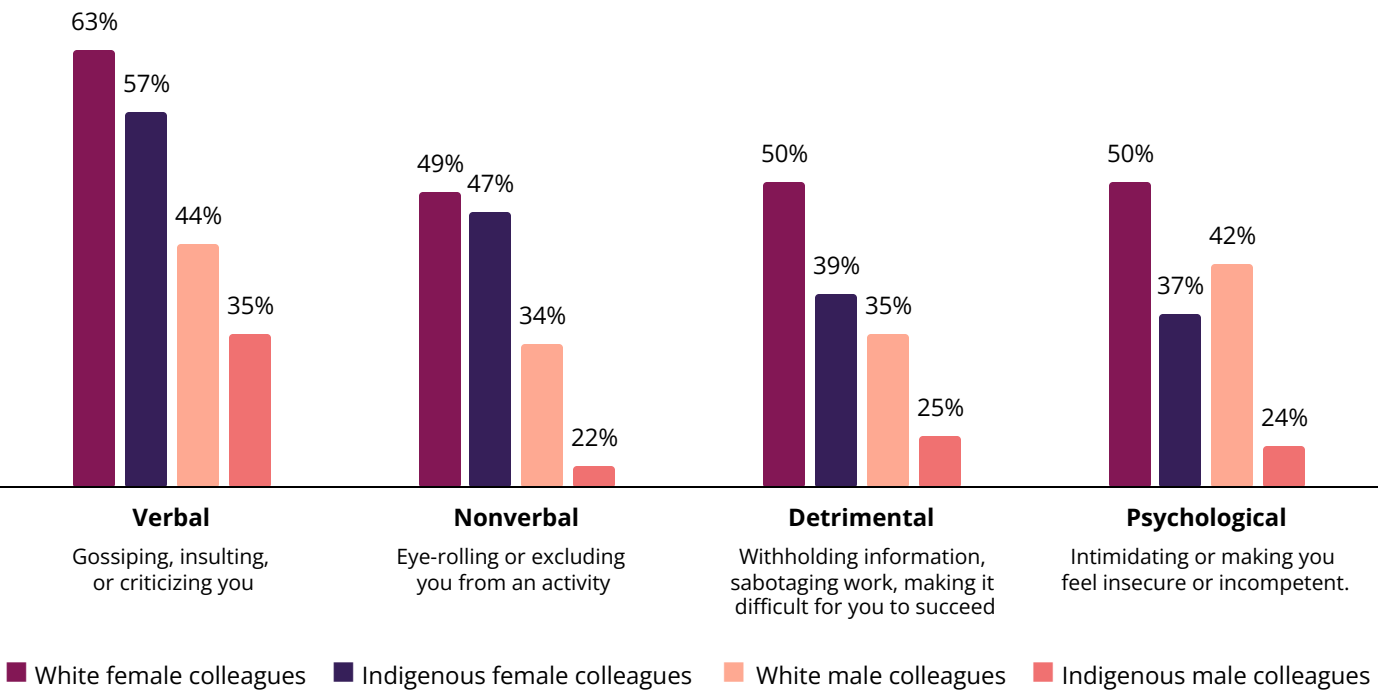


Intersectionality

Indigenous women experienced negative behaviors from White and Indigenous female colleagues at higher rates than from male colleagues (see Figure 1.5). These behaviors included gossiping, eyerolling, withholding information, and making them feel incompetent.

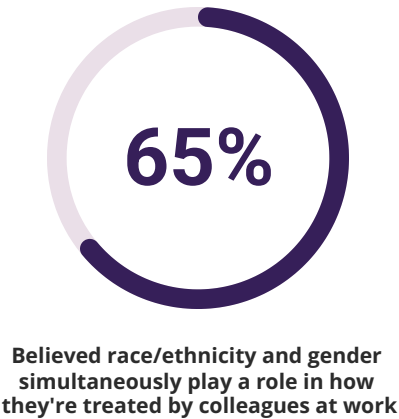
Across all categories of negative behavior, Indigenous women reported the highest rates of negative behaviors coming from White female colleagues compared to all other colleagues.

Figure 1.5: Negative Colleague Behaviors Experienced by Indigenous Women in Their Work History (n = 342)



Intersectionality - Continued

Intersectionality helps explain the workplace experiences of Indigenous women, as they navigate overlapping marginalized identities in race/ethnicity and gender. Most participants (65%) believed that race/ethnicity and gender simultaneously play a role in how they are treated by colleagues at work.



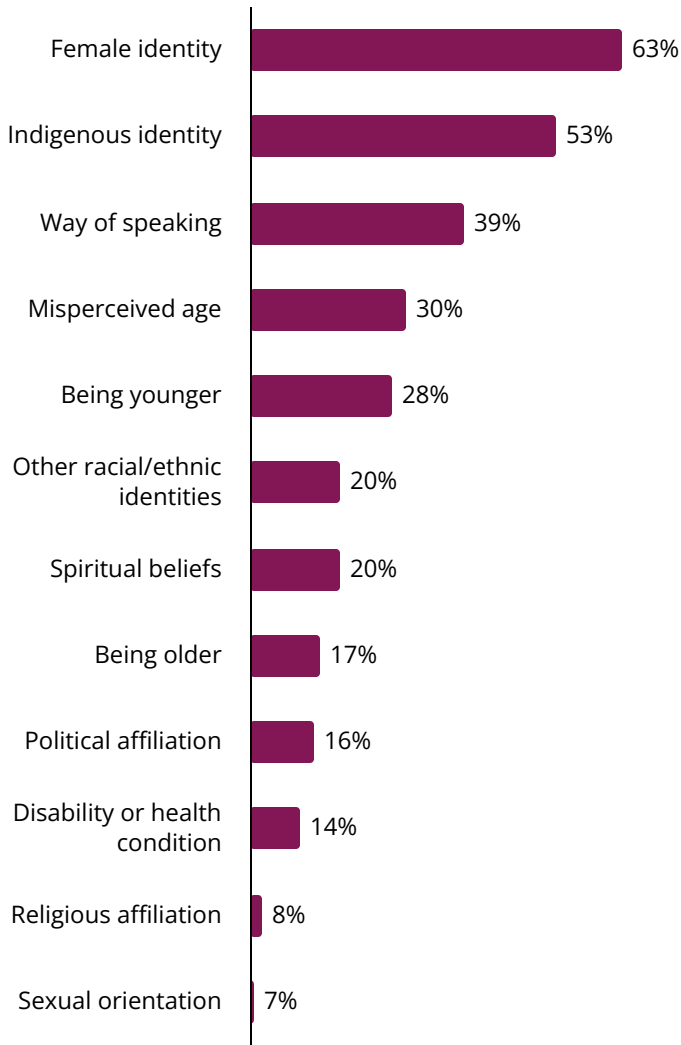
**Queen Bee Syndrome.** The negative behaviors from female colleagues may reflect the Queen Bee Syndrome, in which women in leadership positions seek to protect their status by distancing themselves from other women whom they perceive as rivals and threats, potentially hindering their advancement. Because patriarchal organizational structures limit the number of women who reach senior leadership roles, a scarcity mindset may emerge where they feel pressure to compete for the few opportunities. This dynamic can contribute to reduced support among women in the workplace.

**Lateral Violence.** Indigenous female colleagues were also identified as sources of negative behaviors in the workplace. This may reflect lateral violence, which is a process through which communities internalize the behaviors of their oppressors and reproduce those behaviors within their own groups. Indigenous women and their communities have been subjected to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abuse through settler colonialism for hundreds of years. Rather than directing their anger or frustration toward oppressive systems, this harm may redirect toward peers and colleagues. Similar dynamics may also occur among women of any racial or ethnic background who have internalized patriarchal norms that subordinate women and may reproduce those same relational behaviors with one another.

**Lateral violence may be intensified for Indigenous women because of the intersecting effects of internalized patriarchal norms that subordinate women and settler-colonial behaviors that subordinate Indigenous identities.**

Participants identified the primary reasons they experienced negative behaviors from colleagues as their female identity (63%), Indigenous identity (53%), way of speaking (39%), misperceived age (30%), and being younger (28%).

**Figure 1.6:** Reasons Participants Believe Contributed to Negative Behaviors from Colleagues Toward Them (n = 370)



# Cultural Identity

## *The Importance of Participating in Coming-of-Age and Womanhood Ceremonies*

Coming-of-age and womanhood ceremonies celebrate young women and the sacredness of Indigenous womanhood. These ceremonies can include multi-day activities, such as running and baking for community members during a Kinaaldá, or participating in a year-long fast, such as the Berry Fast. In this study, 17% of Indigenous women had participated in a coming-of-age ceremony for themselves, 24% had participated in a ceremony for another woman, and 67% had never participated.

**Reasons for never participating in a coming-of-age ceremony may be from the impacts of settler colonialism and cultural genocide.**

This led previous generations to withhold or allow ceremonial knowledge to become dormant rather than pass it on. The cultural disconnect may also be from geographic distance to their Tribal lands where ceremonies are held.

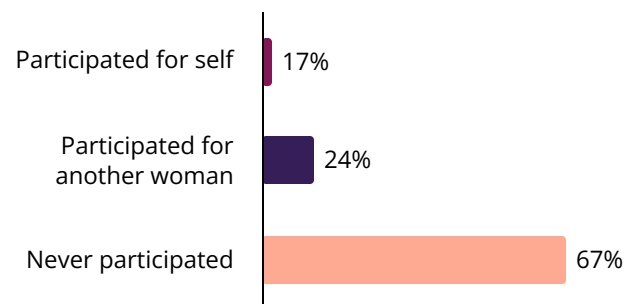
On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicated not familiar at all and 10 indicated extremely familiar, the average level of familiarity with coming-of-age ceremonies was 5. Among participants who rated familiarity above average (scores of 6-10), 91% agreed that coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies could strengthen a woman's identity to help her overcome challenges in life.

### Strengthens Identity

**91%**

of participants with high familiarity agreed that coming-of-age ceremonies strengthen a woman's identity to help overcome life's challenges

**Figure 1.7:** Coming-of-Age Ceremony Participation (n = 392)



More than one-third (36%) of participants indicated that their Indigenous community currently practices coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies, while over half (52%) would like their community to revitalize or adopt these types of ceremonies. A majority (76%) expressed interest in learning more about coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies.



**36%**

of participants' communities currently practice coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies.



**52%**

would like their community to revitalize or adopt these types of ceremonies.



**76%**

expressed interest in learning more about coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies.

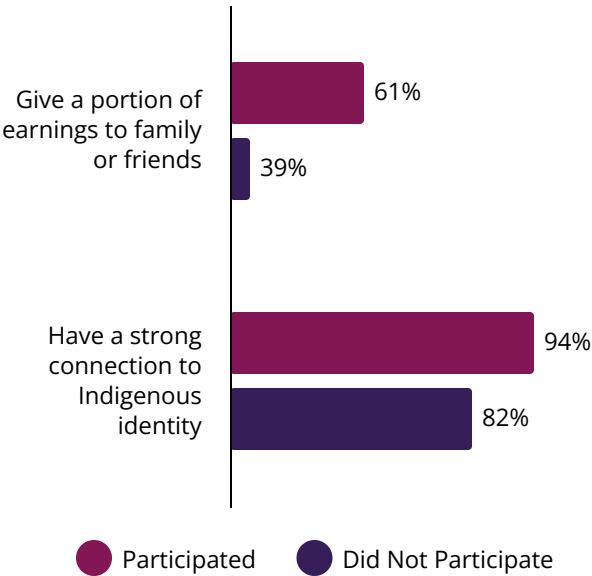
# Community Connection

## Economic Reciprocity Connected with Ceremonial Practices

As shown in Figure 1.8, financial giving to family or friends was more common among Indigenous women who had participated in a coming-of-age ceremony, either for themselves or for another woman (61%) than among those who had not participated (39%).

**This pattern highlights the role of cultural practices in supporting economic reciprocity and reinforcing Indigenous women's responsibility to their communities.**

**Figure 1.8:** Economic Responsibility (n = 392) and Connection to Identity (n = 385) by Coming-of-Age Ceremony Participation



*Note.* Ceremony participation includes whether it was for themselves or for another woman.

Overall, Indigenous women reported high levels of having a strong connection to their Indigenous identity (86%). Those who had participated in a coming-of-age ceremony for themselves or another woman had even higher rates of strong Indigenous identity connection (94%) compared to those who had not participated (82%).

Regardless of ceremony participation, most Indigenous women expressed a desire to remain connected to their communities (93%), and to strengthen their Indigenous identity (89%). Engagement in coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies may represent one pathway through which community connection and Indigenous identity are reinforced.

Participants also reported engagement in other cultural practices that celebrate Indigenous womanhood and honored women's roles in their communities. The most common practices included women's arts and crafts (71%), women's dances (42%), and community ceremonies led by women (41%).



**71%**  
Women's arts and crafts



**42%**  
Women's dances



**41%**  
Community ceremonies led by women

# Knowledge of Historical Policy Impacts

## Boarding School Era and Federal Policy Awareness Connected to Financial Giving

From a list of eight major federal policies that historically affected Indigenous families and limited their access to culture and knowledge, 71% of Indigenous women indicated awareness of the boarding school era, followed by blood quantum membership policies (49%), and the General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) (39%).

Other policies that participants reported knowing about that impacted their families included the Indian Relocation Act (37%), Indian Removal Act (37%), Termination Act (25%), Indian Adoption Act (20%), and the Code of Indian Offenses (15%).

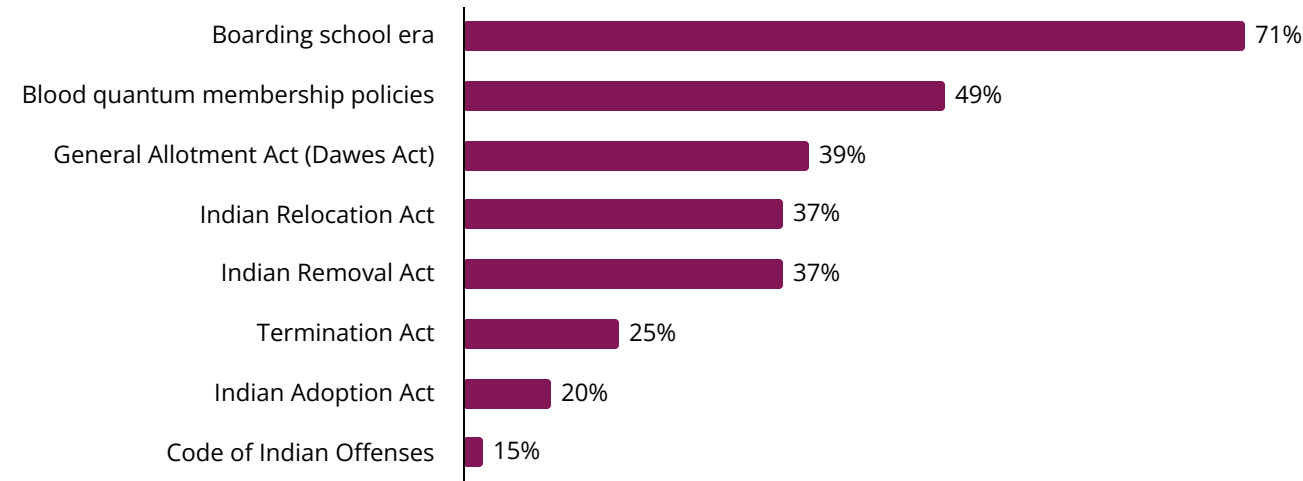
Awareness was concentrated among a few widely recognized policies, while knowledge of other federal policies remained limited. The high level of awareness of the boarding school era, in particular, shows the widespread impact of this policy on many Indigenous families. Future research could examine how this knowledge is acquired, including through family storytelling in childhood, formal school curriculum, or being self-taught in adulthood.

Indigenous women who knew five or more historical policies gave financially to their families and friends at a higher rate (61%) than those who knew at least one (49%).

In comparison, participants who marked "none" or "unsure" reported lower rates of financially giving to family or friends (30%). Participants who wrote in additional policies beyond the provided list also reported a high rate of financial giving (59%).

Written responses included other federal policies such as the Indian Citizenship Act, Indian Reorganization Act, limitations to the Indian Child Welfare Act, and the Flood Control Acts. Some participants mentioned state law, such as the 1924 Racial Integrity Act in Virginia, or Tribal-specific events that occurred as a result of federal actions, such as the Long Walk of the Navajo.

Figure 1.9: Awareness of Historical Federal Policies Impacting Their Families Among Indigenous Women (n = 385)

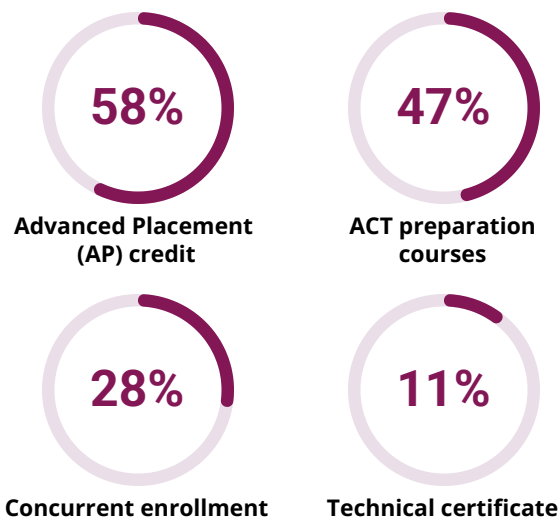


# College Readiness & Tribal Employment Services

## Education and Workforce Preparation Through High School and Tribal Programs

Over half (54%) of Indigenous women participated in academic programs in high school that helped them earn early postsecondary credits or workforce training credentials. The most common activity was earning Advanced Placement (AP) credit (58%), followed by ACT preparation courses (47%), and concurrent enrollment (28%). In addition, 11% of participants earned a technical certificate while in high school. These programs have been shown to reduce time to degree and increase earnings after graduation (Araneo-Yowell, 2018; Buckley et al., 2020).

### High School Programs Supporting College and Workforce Preparation

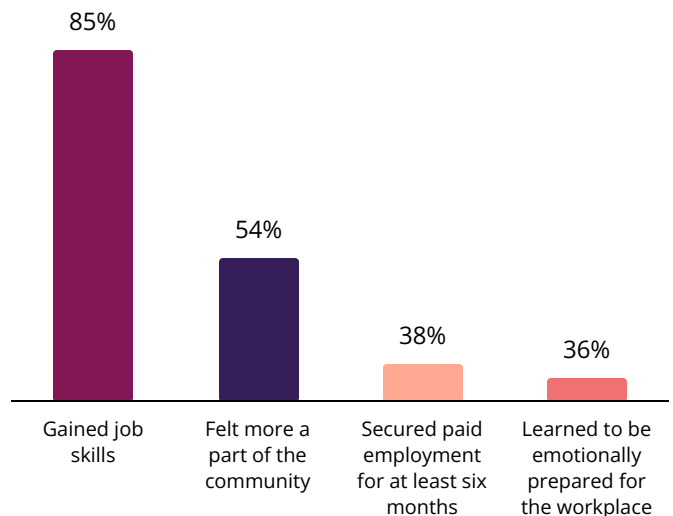


Among participants who held a bachelor's degree, 67% had participated in at least one of these high school programs. These opportunities are known as education-to-workforce pathways that support college readiness and workforce preparation. Given that the overall sample was highly educated, with a majority holding bachelor's degrees or higher, participation in these academic programs during high school may help contextualize their advanced education attainment and presence in professional roles.

This pathway may also contribute to higher earnings over the course of their careers. Future research could examine more directly how participation in high school academic programs relates to earnings in adulthood.

Regarding employment resources, 27% of Indigenous women reported participating in Tribal employment services. As shown in Figure 1.10, the most common self-reported outcomes of participating were gaining job skills (85%) and feeling more connected to the community (54%). Less common outcomes included securing paid employment for at least six months (38%) and learning strategies to be emotionally prepared for workplace challenges (36%). This suggests an opportunity for Tribal employment services to focus on emotional preparedness as part of education-to-workforce pathway programs that support employment persistence and economic mobility.

**Figure 1.10:** Self-Reported Outcomes of Tribal Employment Services Participation Among Indigenous Women (n = 96)



# Work Accomplishments

## Professional Contributions to Their Communities and Workplaces

In an open-ended question, many participants described their work accomplishments in a wide range of sectors and job responsibilities, reflecting the breadth of professional work and engagement of Indigenous women. Individual accomplishments included formal recognition through awards, completion of degrees and other credentials, being the first to hold particular roles, and leading major projects to completion. Notably, many of their accomplishments were framed not just as individual achievements, but as work that

benefited their communities, organizations, or the public (see Table 1.4). This is not an exhaustive list. Many additional accomplishments were shared but cannot be fully represented here due to space constraints. Collectively, these examples demonstrate the expansive scope of Indigenous women's contributions and the importance of their participation in the workforce for improving lives, sustaining their Indigenous institutions, and supporting community well-being.

**Table 1.4**  
*Examples of Indigenous Women's Contributions and Accomplishments in the Workforce*

| Area of Impact                     | Accomplishment Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Systems, Policy & Infrastructure   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Advocated for funding Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) in a discussion with a U.S. Vice President</li><li>- Installed a supercomputer at a national laboratory</li><li>- Participated in decision-making for funding millions in Tribal Nations' agricultural projects</li><li>- Secured gaming for their Tribal Nation</li><li>- Created a policy precluding oil wells being built near waterways</li><li>- Managed remediation projects for abandoned gold mines</li><li>- Secured U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants to build new homes</li><li>- Improved billing practices at the Indian Health Service (IHS)</li><li>- Initiated Tribal court collection protocols</li></ul>        |
| Community, Health & Human Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Led an Indigenous organization providing transitional housing for domestic violence survivors and veterans, and court advocacy for Indigenous children</li><li>- Built a technical tool to help a nonprofit provide free housing for people displaced by national disasters</li><li>- Stood up a clinic focused on eradicating infectious diseases</li><li>- Implemented a FoodShare program for seniors and disabled tenants</li><li>- Coordinated a series of trauma-informed community healing events</li><li>- Helped Indigenous individuals receive substance misuse treatment</li><li>- Served as a role model for inmates as a corrections officer</li></ul>                                                                             |
| Education, Culture & Service       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Served in the military for 29 years</li><li>- Conducted roundtables in Tribal Nations to solicit feedback on Indigenous food / agricultural systems</li><li>- Developed a Tribal language curriculum for language teachers</li><li>- Built programs to improve Tribal college/university matriculation</li><li>- Managed science/engineering scholarships for Indigenous students</li><li>- Helped teachers include Native American culture in the curriculum</li><li>- Sustained a Tribal library with new technology and resources</li><li>- Secured buffalo for their Tribal Nation's herd</li><li>- Supported Indigenous women in building their own businesses</li><li>- Coached an athletic team to win a national championship</li></ul> |

*Note.* This is a partial list of responses to an open-ended question asking about work accomplishments (n = 285).

# Personal Reflections

## Reflections on Leadership, Identity, and Community Responsibility

Some respondents used the open-ended section to share advice with other Indigenous women navigating the workforce. One respondent offered the following guidance:

*"First, know this: You are enough exactly as you are. You don't need to have all the answers, a perfect business plan, or a fancy title to step into your power. Leadership doesn't start when someone gives you permission, it starts the moment you trust your voice and act on your vision."*

*Especially for Indigenous women, who often carry generational trauma alongside generational brilliance, it's vital to remember that your lived experience is one of your greatest assets... Surround yourself with people who believe in you, not just when you succeed, but when you're struggling. Mentors, colleagues, community members, people who will speak your name in rooms you haven't entered yet. And remember to be that person for others, too."*

*As Indigenous people, our strength is in our relationships. Lift as you climb. Lastly, don't be afraid to take up space. Whether it's in leadership, media, fashion, or policy, your presence matters."*

*Our communities need your voice, your story, your vision. You are not just stepping into leadership, you are the leadership our ancestors dreamed of."*

Other respondents used the open-ended section as an opportunity to reflect on identity and their accomplishments within their cultural values as Indigenous women. Another respondent shared the following reflection:

*"I am most proud of finding ways to honor my heritage through my career choices. I have been able to blend my personal and professional life goals to enrich my own learning of Indigenous ways while also giving back to the Indigenous communities that have supported me."*

Taken together, these reflections on accomplishments, advice, and cultural identity illustrate that many Indigenous women frame individual achievements as collective successes, with relational accountability and responsibility integrated into their professional lives. As a few respondents put it:

*"Whatever I do, and every place I go, I carry myself as a woman of my Tribe, with love from my womenfolk to hold me up and keep my voice from shaking. I am proud to know I am everything the women in my life prayed for me to have the opportunity to become."*

*"My proudest accomplishment is staying grounded in culture and story while fighting systems that try to erase us."*

## DISCUSSION

# Workforce Participation

## *Interpreting Indigenous Women's Workforce Experiences*

**Modern-day Economic Contributors.** Indigenous women are working in many different sectors and job roles and care deeply about their careers. These findings show that **Indigenous women are modern-day workers who contribute economically in diverse ways.** This challenges misconceptions that Indigenous women no longer exist and dismantles stereotypes that portray them as historical rather than as living and working members of today's society. Future research and policy briefs can draw on these findings to more accurately include Indigenous women in their reporting.

**There is a Desire to Work on Tribal Lands.** Engagement among Indigenous women working on Tribal lands was higher than would be expected based on the general population of Indigenous individuals who live away from Tribal lands. **This suggests both a desire to work within their communities and the presence of employment opportunities for Indigenous women after completing their postsecondary education.** Tribal governments and Indigenous-serving organizations should continue investing in Tribal economies and workforce development, as there is a clear interest among highly educated Indigenous women to work on Tribal lands and remain connected to their Indigenous communities.

**Promotions and Job Referrals are Needed.** As more than half of Indigenous women expressed interest in being promoted to the next level, organizations should consider how to better support this aspiration. While Indigenous women receive guidance and professional development from their mentors, they received far less support in nominations for promotion or referrals to other jobs. This suggests that **Indigenous women may be overlooked for higher-level positions for which they are qualified.** Employers could outline clear benchmarks and pathways for advancement, which would increase transparency in the promotion process.

**Racial Battle Fatigue in the Workplace.** With respect to negative workplace experiences, Indigenous women reported high levels of microaggressions. These discriminatory behaviors are shaped by structural conditions that produce intersecting power dynamics related to race/ethnicity and gender, including assumptions made about Indigenous cultures by colleagues. For many Indigenous women, **these experiences represent ongoing racialized stressors in the workplace,** aligning with the concept of racial battle fatigue, which describes the cumulative emotional and cognitive strain caused by repeated, systematic racial injuries (Smith, 2023). This sustained strain may help explain the cause of higher rates of burnout among Indigenous women who experienced multiple microaggressions in the workplace.

**Encourage the Shine Theory.** In examining gender dynamics, **Indigenous women reported that negative behaviors most often originated from fellow female colleagues,** both White and Indigenous. This may reflect dynamics such as Queen Bee Syndrome (few positions of power for women leads to rivalry and competition) and lateral violence (internalizing the colonizer's behaviors toward each other). To help alleviate behaviors of gossiping, eyerolling, withholding information, and feeling incompetent, employers could implement initiatives that raise awareness about these unhealthy dynamics and encourage women to support one another in the workplace. Shine Theory suggests that women will achieve more when they celebrate and support one another's successes rather than compete (Friedman, 2013). By taking this approach, when one woman shines, the others shine as well. This perspective aligns with the Indigenous way of living as a collective, in which any successes are regarded as good for the whole.

**Future research** could further examine how living by Indigenous core values, such as respect, relationships, reciprocity, and responsibility, influence workplace experiences and economic roles. Additional studies could also examine in more detail how definitions of success and accomplishment differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees. In addition, greater emphasis is needed on collecting data from Indigenous women in Oceania and the Caribbean. Although this survey was open to Indigenous women from U.S. territories in these regions, participation was minimal. More research is needed to fully capture their distinct experiences in the workforce and their community roles.

## DISCUSSION

# Economic Roles & Cultural Identity

## *Economic Leadership, Cultural Connection, and Financial Reciprocity*

### **Indigenous Women as Economic Leaders is a Tradition.**

While the rate of Indigenous women as primary earners is substantially higher than the national average for women overall, this should not necessarily be interpreted as a cause for concern. Rather, **it may reflect long-standing cultural traditions of Indigenous women serving as economic providers and leaders in their communities, especially in matrilineal societies.** At the same time, this may also indicate opportunities for greater co-earning contributions from spouses and partners. When Indigenous women's partners are Indigenous men, this raises questions about how Indigenous men fulfill complementary provider roles within their families. Future research could examine the economic roles of Indigenous men as contributors to their families and communities, recognizing that they may have experienced historical oppression in ways distinct from Indigenous women. They may also have different workforce experiences and cultural practices that influence them.

**Coming-of-Age Ceremonies Strengthen Identity and Collective Responsibility.** This study examined whether participation in coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies contributed to greater inner strength, leading to success in the workplace, as measured by incomes, job positions, education, and experiences of microaggressions. When analyzing these measures, minimal differences were observed between Indigenous women who participated in a coming-of-age ceremony for themselves or other women and those who did not. However, notable differences emerged in relation to economic roles within their communities and connection to their Indigenous identity. Women who had participated in coming-of-age ceremonies had higher rates of strong connection to their Indigenous identity and higher rates of giving a portion of their earnings to family and friends. **Overall, their economic responsibilities appeared to be more closely tied to community obligation than to individualistic priorities.**

### **Access to Coming-of-Age Ceremonies May Support**

**Economic Resilience.** These findings further suggest that coming-of-age ceremonies may bring inner strength to Indigenous women for greater collective well-being, rather than personal advancement. Therefore, **Tribal Nations that want to strengthen their future economic resilience could focus on continuing, revitalizing, or adopting coming-of-age ceremonies for young women.** For Indigenous women living away from Tribal lands, urban Indian centers may play an important role in providing access to coming-of-age ceremonies and related programming to help young women strengthen their identity and contribute to their community.

### **Knowledge of Federal Policies May Shape Financial**

**Giving.** Finally, **Indigenous women with greater knowledge of federal policies that affected their families reported higher levels of financial giving to family and friends** than those with little to no knowledge of these policies. This may indicate a stronger understanding of how externally imposed policies disrupted culture transmission and family systems, rather than attributing these disruptions to family choices, thereby strengthening a sense of moral responsibility to support their families. Tribal governments, urban Indian centers, and Indigenous-serving organizations could create resources for Indigenous individuals to learn about the historical oppression and explain how it affected Indigenous families then and still today. **This information may help strengthen the economic support Indigenous women provide to their communities as they build understanding and empathy for what happened to their cultures and families.**

# Conclusion

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Indigenous women are active participants in the contemporary labor market in various job roles, position levels, and industries. Their motivations include paying their bills, working for a meaningful cause, and giving back to their communities. **Indigenous women report a strong commitment to their careers and interest in advancement.** At the same time, they experience high rates of workplace microaggressions, especially those involving assumptions about their culture, challenges to their professional judgment, and others receiving credit for their ideas. Negative workplace behaviors mostly come from White female colleagues, followed by Indigenous female colleagues.

In their households, the majority of Indigenous women are primary earners or co-earners, reflecting continuity with their traditional economic roles as providers and caretakers. Indigenous women working on Tribal lands reported higher rates of being primary earners, having children and other relatives in their households, and serving as caretakers. Regardless of employment location, **Indigenous women reported the same rates of giving a portion of their earnings to family and friends, suggesting that economic responsibility to community remains consistent whether working on Tribal lands or away from them.** However, those working on Tribal lands appear to carry greater overall caretaking and financial responsibilities.

**Participation in coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies coincides with higher rates of strong connection to Indigenous identity and greater financial giving to family and friends,** indicators of economic roles that extend beyond the immediate household. These findings suggest that Tribal Nations may strengthen their future economic resilience by increasing engagement in cultural practices that build identity, inner strength, and community responsibility of young Indigenous women.

Postsecondary education programs and workforce training during high school appear to coincide with higher levels of educational attainment among Indigenous women, which may expand workforce opportunities. Additional research is needed to explore these pathways. **Participation in Tribal employment services showed strengths in skill development and community connection, while also indicating opportunities to improve emotional preparedness** for workplace challenges and long-term job retention.

To support continual workforce participation of Indigenous women, employers could establish employee benchmarks for clear and transparent paths of advancement and implement initiatives that encourage supportive relationships among female colleagues. To strengthen cultural identity and contributions to the community, Tribal governments, urban Indian centers, and Indigenous-serving organizations could expand access to coming-of-age ceremonies and create resources for Indigenous individuals to learn about how historical policies affected their families. **Increasing awareness of these histories may strengthen understanding, empathy, and economic reciprocity within their Indigenous communities.**

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## APPENDIX

# Survey Measures

The analysis reports descriptive data categorized by measures for participant profiles and workforce experiences, along with measures within intersectionality and Indigenous womanhood. Item-level responses and cross-tabulations were tabulated to provide a robust summary of patterns across measures. For questions using Likert-scale responses, agree and strongly agree were recoded as a combined "agree," while disagree and strongly disagree were recoded as a combined "disagree" in the reported results. The reasoning and sources that informed the development of each measure are described below.

## Participant Profile and Workforce Measures



**Participant Demographics.** Measures on participant demographics included age, race/ethnicity, Indigenous affiliations, state of residence, education level, marital status, children and other relatives living at home, caretaker status, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Participants were asked to write-in their Indigenous affiliations to allow the use of either endonyms or exonyms to reflect their preferred self-identification.

Participants could indicate more than one affiliation to acknowledge multiracial identities. Indigenous affiliation was collected to assess potential overrepresentation from larger Tribal Nations and to report the total count of distinct Indigenous affiliations to represent the diverse reach of participation. Data were not reported at the Tribal Nation level, as this was not the purpose of the study. The *RISE Indigenous Voices Survey* and the *Indigenous Futures Survey* informed the wording of these measures.



**Employment Profiles.** Participants were asked about their current employment situation, including job role, full-time status, industry, years worked, position level, annual salary, managerial status, work settings, and age at first paid job. These measures drew on standard employment reporting practices, including those used by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Indigenous-specific employment measures included whether participants worked on Tribal lands and whether their workplace offered company-sponsored social groups for Indigenous employees and allies. Primary earner was included to represent participants' economic roles in their households, while giving a portion of their earnings to family and friends was used to reflect economic contributions to their communities. These measures were used in cross-tabulated analyses to assess patterns of economic reciprocity.



**Career Aspirations, Workplace Belonging, Mentorship, and Allyship.** Participants responded to statements assessing career aspirations and workplace belonging, including whether their career was important to them, their interest in promotion, enjoyment of their work, feelings of respect, and sense of belonging in their workplace. Participants also selected from lists of work motivations and personal challenges that affected their employment. To add further context to workplace belonging, participants were asked about the gender and racial/ethnic composition of colleagues at their primary job. Mentorship and allyship were measured by asking participants to select ways in which mentors supported their career success and how allies contributed to their sense of belonging at work. These were informed by the *Workforce in America Survey* and McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace* report.

## Survey Measures - Continued



**Education and Employment Resources.** Participants were asked to indicate whether they participated in various educational and workforce opportunities in high school, including ACT prep courses, concurrent enrollment credits, Advanced Placement (AP) credits, and technical certificates. These measures were informed by literature indicating that such programs may reduce time-to-degree completion and increase earnings sooner (Araneo-Yowell, 2018; Buckley et al., 2020). Additional questions assessed participation in Tribal employment services, which were informed by a Medicine Wheel framework used by the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation in an employment program scenario (ACIA, 2008).



**Work Accomplishments and Personal Reflections.** Participants were invited to respond to three open-ended questions about their work accomplishments, workplace experiences, and additional context to earlier responses. These questions were included to better understand how Indigenous women contribute to and are recognized within their workplaces. They also provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences and share their stories, which is consistent with Indigenous research methodologies that emphasizes storytelling.



**Cultural Identity and Ceremonial Practices.** Questions related to participation in coming-of-age or womanhood ceremonies, either for oneself or for other women, were developed based on literature examining the role of ceremonies in influencing women's responsibilities and relationships with their communities. To assess the current prevalence of these practices, participants were asked whether their Indigenous community currently holds such ceremonies. Participants were also asked whether they would like their community to revitalize or adopt a coming-of-age ceremony and whether they were interested in learning more about these practices, to assess interest and the potential value of educational outreach.

To measure levels of cultural identity, participants were asked about their level of knowledge about the ceremonies, perceptions of their influence on Indigenous women's identity, and sense of connection to community. Participants could also indicate other cultural activities they engage in as additional ways of practicing their Indigenous identity. Ceremony participation was linked to employment profile measures to determine whether differences existed in workforce experiences or economic roles within households and communities.

## Indigenous Womanhood and Intersectionality Measures



**Microaggressions (Discrimination) in the Workplace.** Participants were presented with a list of seven workplace microaggressions related to professional competence and experiences of "othering" and were asked to select all that they had experienced throughout their work history. These measures were informed by similar items used in McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace* report. Additional questions examined negative behaviors from colleagues and the aspects of participants' identities that influenced these experiences, drawing on Crenshaw's (1991) framework of intersectionality alongside the concept of lateral violence.



**Historical Policy Impacts.** Participants' knowledge of settler colonialism and historical oppression was assessed through questions examining awareness of how federal policies disrupted cultural transmission across generations. This measure recognizes that an Indigenous woman may have limited knowledge of her cultural background or history due to the intergenerational impacts of boarding schools and other federal policies, rather than family choices. The intent was to explore whether historical knowledge contributes to self-understanding and if it relates to Indigenous women's level of economic responsibility to their families and communities. Eight federal policies commonly cited in historical literature as contributing to cultural disruption were included in this section.