**Tribes and the Census**

**Native Workers in Metro Areas Unemployed At Nearly Twice the Rate of US Workers Nationally**

Even though American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people\(^1\) are considered to have advantages from living, working and competing for work in large active metropolitan labor markets, they are nonetheless seriously disadvantaged when compared to the US population nationally. The Native population currently living in metro areas includes a substantial portion of the AI/AN tribally enrolled population.

An analysis of recently released data on various socio-economic characteristics from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) illustrates the extent of the disadvantage -- in employment, income and education. The data comes from the ACS estimates covering the five-year period from 2012 to 2016.

The analysis in this newsletter focuses on 30 counties that are the central counties of various Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Each of the selected metro counties had an AI/AN only population of at least 10,000 as counted in the 2010 Census. The AI/AN only population in these 30 metro counties included nearly one-quarter of the total US AI/AN only population.

The selected counties range from three of the boroughs in New York City to King County, Washington (Seattle) and from Anchorage, Alaska to Bexar County, Texas (San Antonio).

**The Labor Force Status of Native Workers in Metro Areas**

Although Native workers\(^2\) in the selected metro counties participated as actively in the labor market as did workers of all races nationally, their unemployment rate was nearly twice as high. For AI/AN workers the unemployment rate in the ACS data was 12.8%. For workers of all races nationally, the unemployment rate was 7.4%.

The degree to which workers participate actively in the labor market is called the labor force participation rate. It includes all those who are employed, on active duty in the armed forces and those who are considered to be unemployed (without a job, available for work and have "actively" sought work in the previous four weeks). This rate for all

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1 Native American people in Census publications are referred to as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN). Those who identify only as AI/AN in response to the race question on a Census form are referred to in this newsletter as "AI/AN only." The Census Bureau refers to them as "AI/AN alone."

2 All references to AI/AN persons in this newsletter are to AI/AN only persons.
workers nationally was 63.5%; for AI/AN workers in the selected metro counties it was nearly identical at 62.7%

The unemployment rate for AI/AN workers in the 30 metro area counties was lower and the labor force participation rate higher in the selected metro counties than for the total AI/AN population at the national level. The national rates include data for AI/AN persons in reservation areas that face even more serious labor market issues.

The picture with respect to unemployment looks like this:

![Diagram of Unemployment Rates by Area]

The same pattern is evident in the ACS income data.

The poverty rate for AI/AN people in the selected metro counties is well over one-and-a-half times that of the total population nationally. The AI/AN rate is 24.9% versus the general population rate of 15.1%. A somewhat similar difference exists for poverty among youth. The AI/AN rate is 32.2% -- nearly one out of every three AI/AN persons below the age of 18. For the total population it is 21.2%, about one out of every four youth.

There is a similar difference the per capita income data, another key indicator of economic well-being. The AI/AN median per capita income amount in the selected
metro counties is $20,535, while the level for the total population nationally is significantly higher at $29,829.

Income and employment status have long been known to be related to educational attainment. Now, more than ever, education at the post-secondary level is critical to personal and family prosperity. There is a wide gap between the percentage of the population age 25 and over with a bachelor's or higher degree between the AI/AN population in the selected metro counties and that of the general population nationally. Among the AI/AN metro population just 15.5% of persons age 25 and over have a bachelor's degree or higher; among the total population nationally the percentage is twice as high at 30.3%.

As is the case with the AI/AN reservation population, the bright spot in the picture is the increasing percentage of those with at least some post-secondary education. In both the metro counties and reservation areas, about one-third of the AI/AN population age 25 and over have some post-secondary education up to and including an associate's degree.

**ACS Data Are Subject to Sampling Error**

As is true of all American Community Survey data, the figures cited in this newsletter are estimates from a survey and contain some level of sampling error, as well as potential non-sampling error. For smaller areas, even metropolitan counties, and for smaller populations, the level of sampling error can make the estimates questionable or even unreliable. Data users should keep these considerations in mind in reviewing the numbers.

Data on all four measures mentioned above are available for each of the 3,142 county or county equivalent areas in the US in the ACS five-year estimates covering 2012 through 2016. Contact the author of this newsletter at the e-mail address below if you would like to request the data for the counties in your state.

Please be aware that all the county level data includes the figures for any reservation land, former reservation land in Oklahoma or Alaska Native village land within the county or county equivalent area.

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