

Métis Women's
and 2SLGBTQQIA+
Folks' Experiences
on the Right to
Disconnect





Background

For centuries and to this day, Métis women have played pivotal roles in communities, leadership and economic development. Their lived experiences have shaped policies, programs and community responses. They have held esteemed roles in conversations and have sat at tables that have shaped the Métis Nation as a whole. Across the Métis Motherland, women hold 50% of the elected leadership positions.¹

Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks occupy many positions within the labour market, including business administration (24%), sales and services (24%), education and social services (20%) and health (12%).² Many are also beadwork artists, painters, designers, crafters, caregivers and homemakers, either in addition to their main source of income or as their main source of income.

While Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have been politically involved and empowered for centuries, this has not translated into an improved socio-economic status for them. Métis women are less likely to participate in the paid and formal economy and largely occupy vulnerable and low-paying jobs and sectors. They are more likely to work part-time and generally earn less than men for the same jobs and skill levels.³

In many cases, Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have left the labour market or their education to care for dependents or to pursue other ways of knowledge-keeping such as land-based learning. This has meant that many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have difficulties returning to mainstream work later as they are considered to not have enough relevant experience.

Many Métis women have also experienced major barriers in navigating online employment applications and employment supports. During LFMO's engagement session, a participant who has difficulties reading text from online materials noted that additional supports are needed for people with disabilities when applying for jobs or for federal income support. She explained that many applications are only online, difficult to navigate and as a result, decreased her opportunity to access income.

COVID-19 has also impacted Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks' jobs, through reduced hours, reduced pay, job loss and decreased income opportunities for those who are self-employed. These have had ripple effects throughout Métis communities, where food insecurity has been rampant, housing situations have become precarious and those who were forced to stay at home in domestic violence situations were at even further risk.

¹ Women of the Métis Nation (2017). "Women of the Métis Nation Perspectives": 2.

² "Labour Market Experiences of Métis: Key Findings from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey." Statistics Canada. November 26, 2018. Accessed March 17 2021. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2018002-eng.pdf?st=fllG_4OA

³ Ibid.

During the pandemic, many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have also been in frontline positions, such as health and food service delivery, and thus have been at increased risk of spreading and contracting the virus.

The Right to Disconnect

With the increase of technology and its presence in our professional lives and especially with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing many Canadians to work from home, the right to disconnect has ignited a conversation about the balance between work and private life.

For Métis communities, the home is a place of solace, of comfort, of gathering with those closest to you. Many Métis households are multi-generational and so kokoms (grandmothers) may gather every day with the next generations to pass along stories, Métis traditional practices and wisdom. Now, with so many Canadians working from home, this place of comfort and healing has changed.

There have been several difficulties that Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have found in transitioning from an office environment to a home office environment and in looking to “disconnect” from work after working hours. For many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks, and especially those in rural and remote areas, they have found it difficult to remind themselves that self-care and connection to others are important and necessary to prevent burn-out and cognitive and physical fatigue.

For Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks in houses with multiple rooms, they were better able to dedicate space to working, which makes disconnecting from work much easier. However, participants who shared homes with multiple family members or whose homes were much smaller found it much more difficult to do so and noted increased levels of fatigue.

As many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks are caregivers in their homes, they have also been expected to balance working from home with caring for dependents, schooling children as well as running the household in addition to their professional roles.

For Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks working in smaller, community-based organizations with limited funding and capacity, those working from home often have to purchase their own equipment or risk their positions if they are unable to provide their own equipment, such as a laptop, internet connection, printer, etc. However, a participant noted that in British Columbia, the *Employment Standards Act* for the province stipulates that employers must provide all tools that employees need to perform their jobs; once an employee is required or expected to purchase their own tools, they become a sub-contractor and are then unable to apply for Employment Insurance and other benefits.

During the pandemic especially and with the increase of working from home which may overflow into whatever reality or “new normal” follows the pandemic, there has been a very real sense of “Zoom fatigue” felt by Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks, which refers to a type of fatigue that follows multiple virtual meetings, especially in cases where meetings require cameras to be on. This is also heightened when Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks meet from across the Motherland, spanning four different time zones, in lieu of face-to-face meetings. Navigating multiple time zones has also meant that Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have been receiving calls and are responding to emails after hours.

During the pandemic, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) launched a mental health campaign for its employees, which outlined tips and recommendations for bettering employee mental health while working from home, self-care and eligible benefits which employees were encouraged to use. MNA also supplied work-related equipment to its employees so that they were able to work from home and had Mental Health Ambassadors who helped manage mental wellness projects and initiatives.

Throughout the Métis Homeland, the idea of “digital empathy” has taken hold, so that meetings, engagements, webinars and other gatherings that are hosted online are held with the intention of meeting people where they are at. Whether this meant beginning with exercise and stretches together as a group, self-care guidance and tips, colourful visuals that reflect the audience, or implementing interactive pieces (polls, using the “reaction” feature on Zoom, etc.), the goal is to disrupt the otherwise passive way virtual meetings share information.

Recommendations

Métis Women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ Folks and the Economy

- 1) There must be a concerted effort to recognize other professional skills as valid and equal (i.e. land-based knowledge, sewing, etc.).
- 2) There is a need for disaggregated, qualitative and strengths-based data that explores Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ employment experiences in particular.

Right to Disconnect

- 1) The federal government should ensure that employers are providing the required tools that employees need to perform their jobs.
- 2) The federal government should ensure that those who are working from home, especially those working in smaller homes among many family members, have access to employment and culturally appropriate mental wellness funding and supports.