

EM9808: The Globe and Mail, May 13, 1998, page A4

# Minorities don't share in Canada's boom

Whether non-whites are born here or immigrate, they take home less pay

BY BRIAN LAGHI  
Alberta Bureau

EDMONTON – Although she hates to think it, Ruth Bimba sometimes wonders whether her black skin and thick African accent may be the reason she cannot find a decent-paying job.

Given Alberta's booming economy, and her own experience as financial manager in a Liberian hospital, the 35-year-old mother of four believes she is qualified for more than the volunteer work and other part-time jobs she has had to take since coming to Canada 15 months ago.

But hints about her accent and the rude manner of some people she has encountered has left her curious as to whether Canada is the tolerant oasis she always believed it to be.

"Sometimes they see your résumé and they're impressed and they'll call you," Ms. Bimba said. "But then when they see you, maybe they aren't quite so impressed."

Ms. Bimba and her family find themselves within a group that Statistics Canada said yesterday is earning below the national average income.

The agency reported that in 1995, the 1.5 million Canadians who consider themselves visible minorities earned an average employment income of \$22,498 per year, about 15 per cent below the national average.

About 10 per cent of those who reported

employment income were visible minorities. Of that group, four out of five were immigrants, the study said.

The Bimba family, who arrived in Canada in February of 1997, currently survive on the \$24,000 Mrs. Bimba's husband, Nathaniel, earns as a chaplain. The family also takes in \$369 per month in child tax benefit support.

It's just enough, Ms. Bimba says, to pay the rent for an apartment on Edmonton's northeast side.

But she believes the family could be doing much better if she could put her skills to work.

Despite three interviews for various office jobs, and completing a nine-month course in computer processing, last winter she had to take weekend work at a gas bar for \$6.50 hour. She has since gone back to school.

Ms. Bimba said that after a recent interview for an office administrator's job, she was told her accent disqualified her because she would have to deal with people on the phone.

"If it was a problem with grammar I would understand, but it's not," Ms. Bimba said.

Officials say Ms. Bimba's experience is not an isolated one, and that non-white immigrants may have more difficulty finding work.

"Our anecdotal experience is that there still exists a fair bit of racism in this society," said Laurel Borisenko, executive director of the Edmonton-based Mennonite Centre for

Newcomers.

Aside from visible minorities who come from outside Canada, Statscan reports that visible minorities born in the country also earn less, as do aboriginals. Canadian-born visible minorities, a group much younger than other Canadian-born earners, took home an average income of \$18,565 in 1995, about 30 per cent below the level reported by Canadian-born earners.

The aboriginal portion of the study found that the average wage was \$17,382, 34 per cent below the national average. Statscan also found that the aboriginal population has a preponderance of part-time workers.

In 1995, just over one-third of aboriginals in the work force reported working at full-time, year-long jobs, compared with half of the total Canadian population. In addition, they had education levels associated with lower earnings.

Brian Bechtel, head of an agency which studies poverty in Edmonton, said Alberta's economic recovery has not helped a number of Albertans on the low-end of the socio-economic ladder. Government cuts to welfare and other benefits have hurt, he added.

"The recovering economy has been very selective in who it helps," said Mr. Bechtel of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. "The labour market is quite discriminatory."

The article EM9808 reprinted above is the fourth of six articles used in Figure 2.2f of the STAT 332 Course Materials.