

Unemployment in Native American Communities



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Purpose of Research

In 2011 the Native American unemployment rate in the United States was 14.6%. The purpose of this research was to determine the factors that cause the high unemployment rates in Native American communities.

Unemployment rate by race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2011 annual average. Race or ethnicity	Unemployment rate
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	15.9
American Indian and Alaska Native	14.6
Two or more races	13.6
Hispanic or Latino	11.5
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	10.4
White, non-Hispanic	7.2
Asian, non-Hispanic	7.0

These data are featured in the TED article, [Racial and ethnic characteristics of the U.S. labor force, 2011](#).

Unemployment has potential to lead to extreme poverty, health concerns, depression, alcoholism, and suicide and understanding the factors which cause high unemployment rates in Native American communities could lead to resolutions to those causation factors



Research Questions

1. What are the causation factors for the high unemployment rates in Native American communities?
2. Is there a correlation between the population size and unemployment rates of reservations?

Methodology

A mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data was used for this research

Quantitative Data

Looking for a correlation between the 10 highest populated Native American reservations and the reservations with the highest unemployment rates

Qualitative Data

Looking at online articles and scholarly articles that have been written about unemployment in Native American communities

Quantitative Data



Qualitative Data

4 major causation factors found

Lack of Property Rights

In 1887, the Dawes Act split Native American land into allotments with the purpose of trying to assimilate Native Americans into the Euro-American civilization. It was thought that Native Americans who were given the task of owning their own chunk of land would get one step closer to assimilating. The Dawes Act did not have the effect it was supposed to and was overturned in 1934 by John Collier with the Indian Reorganization Act after it was decided that the Dawes Act created nothing but disarray in the lives of Native Americans.

After the Dawes Act was overturned, Native American land was never returned to its original state before the allotment process; the land that Native Americans lived on became a communal land. It was not for individual use and when a resident of a reservation wants to build on their land they are forced to live by BIA laws and have to get special permission.

Seclusion

The majority of reservations were purposely created to be secluded from other reservations and non-native communities. The purpose of secluding reservations was to create a feeling of loneliness with the intention of making Native Americans feel as though they have no choice but to assimilate into the mainstream Euro-American society. Whether the Euro-Americans expected it or not; however, the geographical location has also stifled viable economic activity in Native American communities.

Lack of Labor Market

The idea that casinos provide Native American communities with vast amounts of money is false. Many casinos do not bring in a lot of money because they are too secluded and do not get enough business. If reservation is not rich in resources (timber, coal, agriculture, etc...) and is too far secluded from other communities there is no opportunity for a labor market.

Government Dependency

Because of the treaty rights, the United States government created reservations and provided everything that the residents needed: food, clothing, shelter, and land for the Native Americans to live on. Native Americans became wards of the United States government. However, as the treaty rights of Native Americans eventually faded away so did the resources that were being provided to the reservations. As populations on Native American reservations increased, so did the demand for these resources but the United States government was unwilling to provide proper resources for the reservations as they believe that Native Americans should be equal to non-Native Americans in engaging in a capitalist society.

Suggestions

Self – Determination

"Indigenous communities are their own strongest asset. Ultimately, indigenous peoples must look inward to themselves for leaders, institutions, innovation, and community consensus for taking on the task of developing healthy, sustainable, culturally grounded, indigenous communities that will be satisfying and sustainable into the indefinite future" (Duane Champagne 2011)

Less Government Influence

"When Indian tribes make money selling cigarettes, a suit is filed (Moe v. Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of Flathead Indian Reservation, 425 U.S. 463 (1976), 96 S. Ct 1634, 48 L.Ed.2d 96 (1976)). If bingo prospers, Congressmen write new laws and limit such initiatives. If tribal coal, gas, oil is developed, the surrounding states move quickly to impose taxes on resources they do not own" (Morris, 1988).

Correlations/Findings

No clear correlation between high population and high unemployment rates.

More correlations between poverty rights and land seclusion with high unemployment rates than any others.

Future Research

Further research will be to compare and contrast economies on reservations with highest and lowest unemployment rates

Conclusion

The idea of self-determination among enrolled tribal members can only work if the federal and state governments discontinue their interference in tribal matters.

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