

Case Study

Chapter 6

Kristen is a typical 15-year-old girl. A lot of her time is spent on social media taking pictures of herself and posting on her private story for her close friends to see. She lives in a close and supportive community, but her house and that of her neighbours are in need of major repairs. She hopes to go to university, to fulfill the dreams and goals of parents, grandparents, and the extended community. She is good at math and science and loves reading, but her school is not equipped with a library, science and technology lab, or athletic facility. Her teacher assures her it is a good idea to dream big. But she is not sure she can overcome all the challenges that lie ahead. When she is on Instagram she sees the posts of other girls her age, who wear stunning clothing and extravagant jewellery. Will it be easy to make friends? She wonders to what extent peers on campus will be accepting of her and her Indigenous identity.

Many of Kristen's peers do not finish high school, but she focuses on her studies, gets good grades, and wins awards in academics and sports. She is a role model in her community. She leaves home to attend university but find that being away from her friends and family is difficult. She has not made friends at school, and she overheard some students making derogatory comments about Indigenous people and how they get a "free ride" to university.

Kristen comes back to her home town the summer after her first year and gets a job at a convenience store in her hometown. She finds the work exhausting, and she is treated badly by some customers and her manager, a man her age who became manager right out of high school. The pay is also not good, and there are no benefits. She stays at the job despite the hardship because she is contributing to her family. She works long hours to make more money when she can. She debates whether or not to go back to university for her second year.

1. **What does this worker illustrate about social class and the opportunities for social mobility within Canada?**
2. **What are the factors that have limited Kristen's social mobility?**
3. **What are the challenges faced by Kristen in her job?**
4. **According to the statistics in the text, what wage can Kristen expect to make compared to her male counterparts? Or compared to white women performing the same job?**
5. **What support and resources should be available to Kristen when at university to encourage her to stay and finish her studies?**

Sample Answers:

1. In Canada, post-secondary education is readily available to students from middle and upper class families in urban areas. It is less accessible to those with limited financial resources and who live in rural areas and have to move away from home, thus increasing the cost and stress related to being a student.
2. As an Indigenous woman, Kristen felt out of place in university and lacked a social support system that she had at home. She felt socially and culturally isolated, and was discouraged to hear racist comments about Indigenous people. As a result, she returned to her hometown where job opportunities were limited.
3. Service jobs, such as the one Kristen has, have low pay and few if any benefits. Employees often work long hours in order to earn enough money. They are often mistreated by customers and managers, as illustrated in Kristen's situation. The challenge for Kristen will be to find a better job or try to go back to school.

4. According to the text, “Women in 2018 earned on average \$26.92 hourly and men earned \$31.05 hourly, a gap of \$4.13 or 13.3 per cent.” Therefore, Kristen is making far less than her male counterparts, and likely significantly less than her male manager. The text also mentions that “according to the UN Human Rights Report (2015), what is most concerning about the pay wage gap in Canada is its disproportionate effect on vulnerable social groups that include low-income women, racialized minority, and Indigenous women.” We can see that Kristen likely makes less than white women in the same job. To be a more equitable society, Canada must focus on both equal pay and equal treatment of employees regardless of their gender or race.

5. An Indigenous Resource Centre that provides cultural activities, social activities and counselling would be beneficial to Kristen so that she can get the support she needs even though she is far from home. Kristen should also have access to funding information about scholarships and grants so that she can afford to stay at school.