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- Lone parents (23%), unattached individuals under 40 years of age (25%), and persons with a disability (20%), are also disproportionately low-paid.
- Full-year, full-time Aboriginal workers earn on average 23% less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.
- Education matters, but it's not a cure-all. High school leavers are four times as likely, and those with only a high school diploma are three times as likely, as university graduates (6.5%) to be low-paid.

To compound the problem, Saunders finds that 30% of those who are low-paid also live in families with poverty level incomes, and low-paid jobs are characterized by poor access to non-wage benefits, employer-sponsored training and union coverage. Finally, cut-backs in social support programs during the '90s, have left low-paid workers with few levers to improve their situation.

The result is a persistent under-class of full-time workers with multiple disadvantages, unable to access the economic and social benefits of work that other workers take for granted.

How has this happened?

“In part, it’s a reflection of the competitive pressures in a globalized, free-trade environment, along with the recent erosion of our social support systems,” says Saunders. “But it also reflects our assumption that an employment contract is a reliable source of well-being. For a growing part of our labour force that is simply not the case.”

Saunders calls on employers and governments to revisit their assumptions and to develop new policies to ensure that full-time workers can reasonably look forward to a life free from the threat of poverty.

“Canadians expect no less,” he says.

The next study in this CPRN research series will explore policy options to achieve that end.

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