

OBSERVATION

TD Economics



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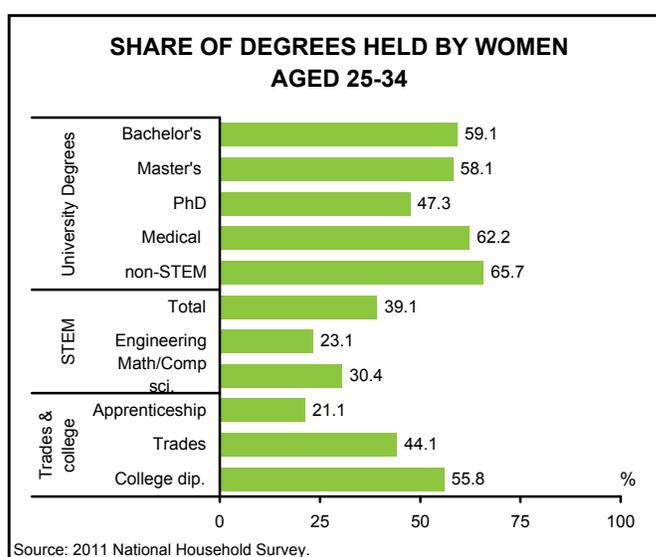
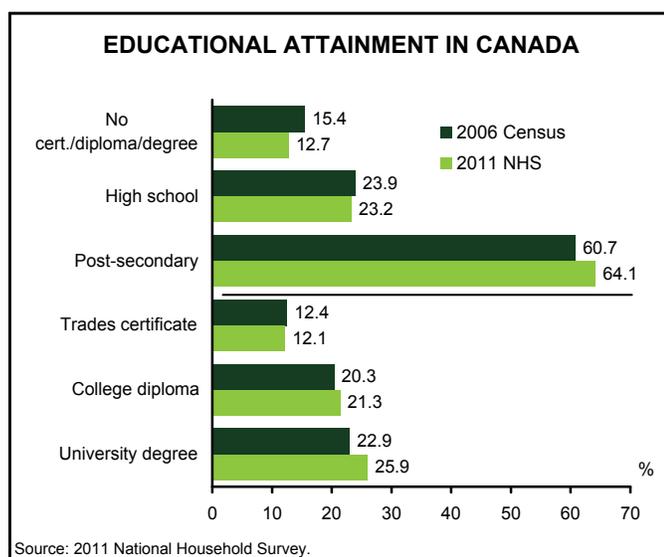
A SNAPSHOT OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN CANADA

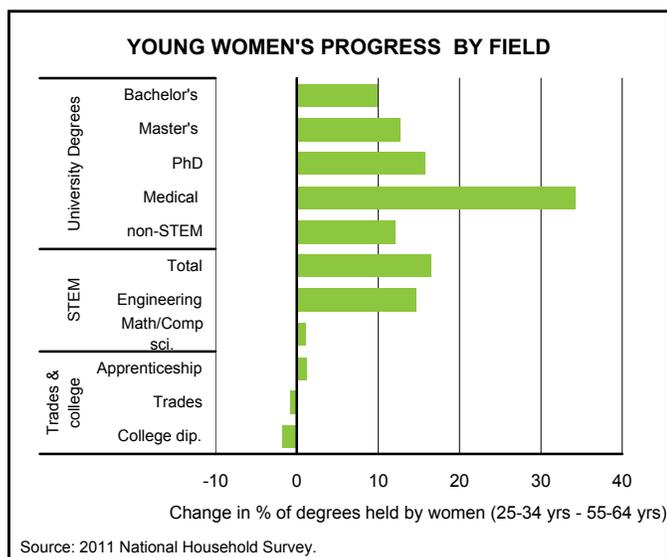
According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), Canadian educational attainment continues to increase; a greater proportion is completing high school and going on to complete post-secondary education. The share of Canadians with a college diploma or university degree continues to rise. However, the share with a trades certificate has continued to decline (see chart). There is a great deal of detail on educational attainment in Canada in the NHS, but this observation will focus on some of the trends hidden in the national average, those among particular demographic groups; women, immigrants and Aboriginal peoples.

Women - doctors, but not doctorates

The 2011 NHS data confirmed the established trend of rising educational attainment among women, and sheds light on where young women have made the greatest strides relative to the first wave of baby-boomer women of their mother's generation. It should come as little surprise that young women today have higher educational attainment than older women. The results of the NHS also show that the inroads made into post-secondary education by the younger generation are not evenly spread across disciplines.

Overall in the working age population (25-64), women accounted for more than half of university degree holders at 53.7%, and that proportion is even higher among the youngest cohort (25-34) at just under 60%. That is up almost 12-percentage points from the older generation. Among university degrees, young women have made the greatest progress in medicine, holding almost two-thirds of medical degrees (up 34 percentage points from the older cohort) (see chart). In fact, among young women, the only level of university degree where they are not the majority is at the doctorate level. Although even there, equality is getting very close.





Among other post-secondary pursuits, fewer women than men still chose trades certificates or diplomas or registered apprenticeships, little changed from the older generation. Women are the majority among those with a college diploma, and this too is relatively constant between the generations.

The 2011 NHS also chose to highlight attainment in the STEM sector, and overall, younger women have made inroads, but still account for the minority of graduates in these fields. Young women still earn less than a quarter of engineering degrees, although that is a far cry better than the 8.5% in the older generation (see chart).

Immigrants continue to have high educational attainment

Not surprisingly, given Canada’s immigration points system – where immigrants are scored on their level of education – immigrant adults continue to be overrepresented among university degree holders. While immigrants are roughly one quarter of Canada’s adult population, they hold roughly one third of all university degrees. And that disproportionality is even higher for STEM fields. Immigrants hold roughly 60% of engineering degrees, 56% of math and computer science degrees and 40% of science and technology degrees. In total, about one third of these STEM degrees were completed in Canada.

Aboriginal educational attainment headed in the right direction

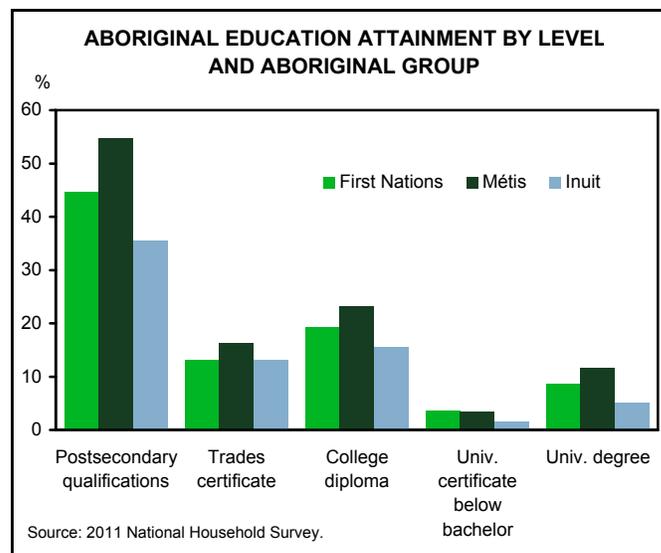
Educational attainment among Aboriginal peoples in Canada has increased since the 2006 Census, although the gap versus non-Aboriginals is stark. Aboriginal peoples

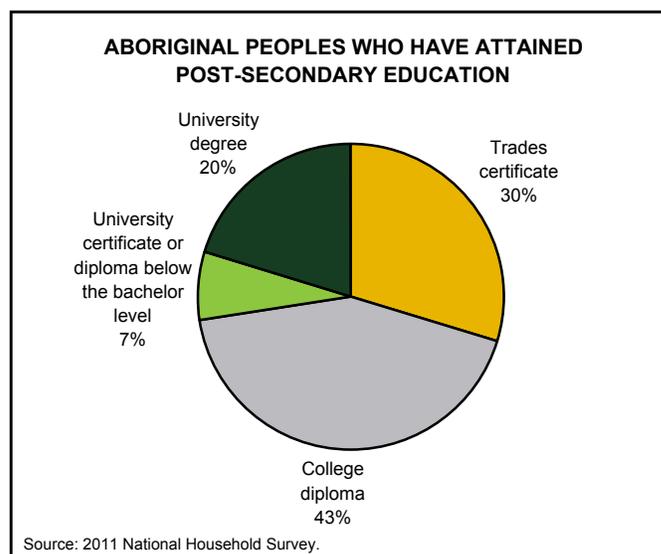
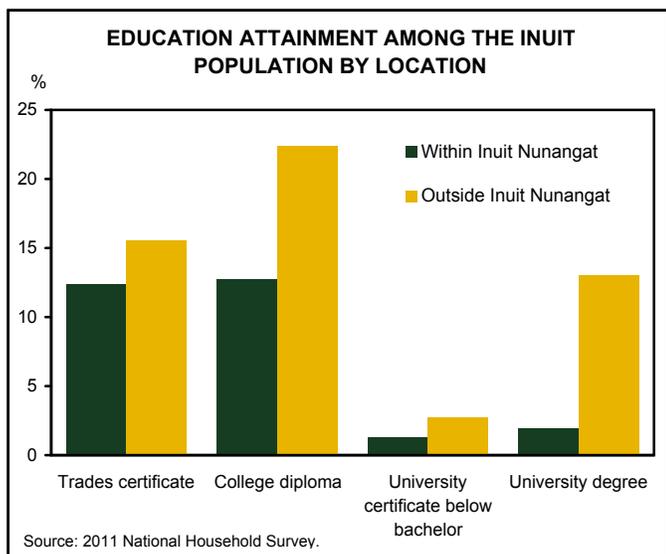
represented 4.3% of the Canadian population in 2011, and close to one-half of Aboriginal peoples had a post-secondary qualification (48.4%), well up from the 44% recorded in 2006. While this is a promising development, the post-secondary educational attainment rate is fifteen percentage points below that in the non-Aboriginal population.

For Aboriginal peoples, a college diploma is most frequently the go-to option for post-secondary education (see chart). Trade certificates, university degrees, and a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level round out the list. In recent years, a disproportionate share of Aboriginal peoples has been tied to construction and resource sectors. These industries tend to require more on-the-job training and/or skills derived in applied learning settings. The education figures support the overall economic trend.

University degrees are the most widely held education level recorded by non-Aboriginal Canadians. That being said, university degree attainment by Aboriginal peoples is headed in the right direction. In 2006, 8% of Aboriginal peoples had a university degree; now close to 10% are in this category. Furthermore, Inuit university degree attainment has more than doubled over the past decade (2% of the Inuit held university degrees in 2001 versus 5% in 2011). This outcome is particularly promising given that most Inuit reside in rural and remote communities, far away from education programs and services. However, post-secondary education attainment among the Inuit population is twice as high outside Inuit Nunangat (Northern coastal Labrador, Northern Québec, Nunavut and parts of the Northwest Territories) versus inside the region.

Similar to the general trend in Canada, younger Aboriginal Canadians tend to be, on average, more educated





than older cohorts. More Aboriginal peoples in the 35-44³ category had at least a high school education versus the older age cohort of 55-64. Two factors explain this finding: (1) education attainment has increased over time making it more likely that younger people are more educated versus older Canadians; (2) older Aboriginal peoples experienced (and continue to experience) the impacts of residential school and other assimilation policies of the past. For more detail on some of the challenges facing Aboriginal peoples in the context of literacy and education, please see our recent report available [here](#).

The gender breakdown, however, shows that improved educational attainment of Aboriginal Canadians has been driven by women. The proportion of Aboriginal women aged 35-44 who had a university degree in 2011 was 13.6%, compared with 10.2% of those aged 55-64. There was no discernible difference in male university degree attainment

across age categories. The gender differences are not altogether surprising given the economic and family context. In some communities, Aboriginal men tend to be tied to traditional economies (e.g., hunting, fishing) whereas Aboriginal women are more likely to be attached to occupations where returns to education are higher.

Bottom Line

Results from the 2011 NHS confirmed many established trends in educational attainment among Canadians. Younger Canadians continue to have higher education levels than their parents, with the largest increase being in university degrees, while trades certificates continue to stagnate. Underneath the national picture, women and Aboriginal peoples are making further inroads into higher education, but on different paths. Meanwhile, immigrants continue to have higher levels of education than Canadians on average.

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End Notes

1. In this paper young women refers to women aged 25-34, while their mothers or the older age cohort is 55-64.
2. STEM fields of study include ‘science and technology’, engineering and engineering technology’ and ‘mathematics and computer science.’
3. Statistics Canada research indicates that First Nations women defer their post-secondary studies until later in life compared with women in the total Canadian population. As a consequence, the younger cohort for Aboriginal peoples is defined to be 35-44 versus 25-34 for the total Canadian population.

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