

Study: Occupational profile and overqualification of young workers in Canada, 1991 to 2011

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Between 1991 and 2011, young Canadians aged 25 to 34 became more likely to be employed in professional occupations. However, a portion of them were "overqualified" during this period—that is, working in occupations requiring lower levels of education.

Two studies released today in *Insights on Canadian Society* provide some highlights on the evolution of the occupational characteristics of young men and women in Canada between 1991 and 2011, a period during which the educational attainment of young people rose substantially.

The first study examines whether today's young graduates and non-graduates aged 25 to 34 are working in the same occupations as their counterparts were 20 years ago.

The second study examines changes in the proportion of those who are "overqualified" for their job, with a focus on university graduates.

Young workers are more likely to be in higher skilled occupations

Between 1991 and 2011, the proportion of young workers aged 25 to 34 with a university degree rose from 19% to 40% among women and from 17% to 27% among men.

Over the same period, the proportion of young male and female workers in professional occupations—those that require a university education—also rose, growing from 18% to 28% among women and from 13% to 18% among men.

Correspondingly, the proportion of young men and women who worked in occupations requiring a high school education or less was down, declining from 48% to 36% among women and from 42% to 33% among men.

Other workers were in management occupations (8% of women and 11% of men) and in occupations requiring a college degree or an apprenticeship (28% of women and 38% of men). These proportions did not vary substantially over the period.

Top three occupations among female graduates were the same in 1991 and in 2011

In 1991 and 2011, the three most common occupations held by young women with a university degree were registered nurses, elementary school and kindergarten teachers, and secondary school teachers. These occupations accounted for more than 20% of all female university graduates in both years.

Among men with a university degree, the three most common occupations in 2011—computer programmers and interactive media developers, financial auditors and accountants, and secondary school teachers—accounted for 11% of these young working men. Similar occupations topped the list of young male university graduates in 1991.

Among those without a university degree, the top occupation in 2011 was that of retail salesperson and sales clerk, which accounted for 4% and 3% of women and men in this group respectively. The next two most common occupations were carpenters and truck drivers for men, and early childhood educators and assistants and general office clerks for women.

In 1991 and 2011, young men without a university degree were employed in similar occupations, as four of their five most common occupations were the same in both years.



In 1991, the top two occupations among young women without a university degree were secretaries and accounting and related clerks, which accounted for 12% of all women in this group. By 2011, the proportion employed in these two occupations had fallen to 4%.

Rising share of women in many occupations

The proportion of women grew in many occupations between 1991 and 2011. This was especially true among university-educated workers.

For example, among university graduates, the proportion of women rose among health policy researchers, consultants and program officers (up from 47% to 76%); specialists in human resources (up from 57% to 78%); and general practitioners and family physicians (up from 43% to 62%).

Among those without a degree, the share of women rose in some occupations, such as police officers (up from 13% to 24%) but declined in others, such as cooks (down from 50% to 33%).

Over the period, the male-female distribution within occupations remained more disproportionate among workers without a university degree. In comparison, that distribution was more balanced in occupations held by workers with a university degree.

Overqualification remained stable among university graduates

When people have education credentials that exceed the skill level of their job, they may be considered overqualified.

One measure of overqualification is the proportion of individuals with a university degree who work in occupations requiring a high school education. This measure excludes those working in "management" occupations.

According to this measure, 18% of both male and female university graduates aged 25 to 34 were overqualified in 2011. These proportions have changed little since 1991, despite the large increase in the supply of university graduates over the period.

However, significant variations in overqualification rates were found across categories of immigrants and across fields of study.

Among university-educated immigrants who did not have a degree from Canada or the United States, 43% of women and 35% of men were in occupations requiring a high school education in 2011.

In comparison, the rates varied between 15% and 20% among men and women who were born in Canada, and among immigrants who had a university degree from Canada or the United States.

About one-third of working men and women with a university degree in humanities were overqualified in 2011.

In contrast, fewer than 15% of men and women with a university degree in education, in health and related fields, and in architecture, engineering and related fields were overqualified.

Other factors were associated with lower overqualification rates, such as being older (e.g. above age 30), and having a level of university degree beyond a bachelor's (such as a master's or a PhD).

Overqualification also varied across regions. More particularly, young workers who lived in Quebec were less likely to be overqualified than those living in Ontario.

Note to readers

In this study, data from the 1991 and 2006 censuses of population and from the 2011 National Household Survey are used to examine changes in the occupational profiles and overqualification of young workers aged 25 to 34. In all sources, workers are defined as those who had a job in the reference week (that is, during the week preceding the census or the survey). The comparisons over time are based on four-digit National Occupational Classification variables, which can be found in 2011 National Household Survey data and in census data since 1991. Readers should note, however, that comparisons over time cannot always be made for some specific occupational categories because some occupations in 2011 did not exist in 1991.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 3901 and 5178.

The articles "Changes in the occupational profile of young men and women in Canada" and "Overqualification among recent university graduates in Canada" are now available as part of *Insights on Canadian Society* (75-006-X) from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

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