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The achievements, experiences and labour market outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with bachelor's degrees or higher

by Paula Arriagada

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The achievements, experiences and labour market outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with bachelor's degrees or higher

by Paula Arriagada

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Overview of the study

Postsecondary education is associated with better labour market outcomes, including higher employment rates and earnings. The educational attainment among Canadians has increased significantly in the last two decades, especially among women.

Notably, Indigenous women have also made significant gains in every level of the educational system. However, the disparities in educational attainment between Indigenous people and the non-Indigenous population persist.

This study examines the educational attainment and labour market outcomes of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women with a bachelor's degree or higher, primarily between the ages of 25 to 64, using data from the 2006 and 2016 Censuses of Population, the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey and the 2018 National Graduates Survey. Comparisons are made across Indigenous identity groups, and between the sexes, as well as to the non-Indigenous population.

- In 2016, half (52%) of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification, including the 14% of Indigenous women with a bachelor's degree or higher. By contrast, 46% of Indigenous men obtained postsecondary qualifications including 8% who graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher. However, the educational attainment at the postsecondary level of non-Indigenous women (67% any postsecondary and 32% bachelor's degree or more) and men (64% and 27%, respectively) remained higher.
- The educational attainment of Indigenous women has increased over time. By 2016, 14% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, which is up from 9% a decade earlier in 2006. The proportion of Indigenous men with at least a bachelor's degree also grew but to a lesser extent (6% in 2006 and 8% in 2016). Furthermore, gains in advanced degrees, particularly those at the master's level, were greater for Indigenous women compared to Indigenous men.
- Among Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, the most common funding source was government student loans (43%). When funding sources were compared across different levels of education, those with lower levels of postsecondary education tended to report having obtained funding from fewer sources than graduates with more advanced degrees.
- Results are consistent with existing research showing that higher education is associated with higher rates of employment, especially for Indigenous women. The majority (92%) of Indigenous women

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with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed in 2018, significantly higher than the corresponding proportion for Indigenous women with postsecondary qualifications below the bachelor's level (78%). As for Indigenous male postsecondary graduates, rates of employment did not differ significantly by level of study.

- About two-thirds (66%) of Indigenous women reported their job or business was closely related to their 2015 program, regardless of whether their post-secondary qualification was at, above or below bachelor's level. For men (Indigenous or not) as well as for non-Indigenous women, degree level was positively associated with finding employment more closely related to their field of study.

Introduction

Educational attainment among Canadians has increased significantly in the last two decades, especially among women. In the case of the Indigenous¹ population, First Nations,² Métis and Inuit women have made significant gains in every level of the educational system. For example, the 2016 Census of Population found that 14% of Indigenous women had a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 8% of Indigenous men. This is an increase from 2006, when 9% of Indigenous women had attained a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 6% of Indigenous men.

Despite the increase in the number of Indigenous women enrolled in and completing postsecondary programs, the disparities in educational attainment between Indigenous people and the non-Indigenous population persist. Moreover, Indigenous people are particularly underrepresented at the highest levels of education. According to the 2016 Census, the proportion of non-Indigenous women with a bachelor's degree or higher was more than double that of Indigenous women (32% compared to 14%). The corresponding estimates for non-Indigenous and Indigenous men are 27% and 8%, respectively.

Indigenous people face many barriers to postsecondary education such as having to relocate, lack of guidance and culturally appropriate curricula, inadequate funding, as well as the impact of intergenerational trauma.³ Understanding some of the factors that affect the educational participation and success of Indigenous people is particularly relevant in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action which emphasize the importance of education in the Reconciliation process.⁴

Furthermore, the fact that the number and proportion of Indigenous women with degrees at the bachelor's level or above continue to be relatively small compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts has important consequences. First, research has repeatedly shown that postsecondary credentials, in particular those from the highest levels of education lead to higher employment rates and better labour market outcomes, including earnings.⁵ Second, Indigenous women represent a larger share of the labour market than previously observed, so it is important to better understand the relationship between their educational attainment and their labour market outcomes. This new information can help inform policymakers who are working to

encourage greater participation and success in postsecondary education among Indigenous women.

This paper uses the most recent data available from three sources: the 2016 and 2006 Censuses of Population, the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, and the 2018 National Graduates Survey (see the "[Data sources, methods and definitions](#)" section) to examine the achievements and experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women with the highest levels of education: bachelor's degrees; university certificates, diplomas or degrees above the bachelor level; degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry; master's degrees; and earned doctorates.

The results are presented for the Indigenous population aged 25 to 64⁶ and by Indigenous identity, whenever possible.⁷ In addition, comparisons are made with First Nations, Métis and Inuit men with a corresponding level of education and across different degree types when applicable. Finally, in some cases, comparisons are also made to the non-Indigenous population.

As Indigenous women and men continue to achieve higher levels of education, it is important to better understand the specific challenges they face in completing postsecondary education as well

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as their labour market outcomes. Policy makers can use this type of analysis to create programs and policies to better meet the needs of Indigenous people and potentially help Indigenous students make decisions about their education and career paths

Half of Indigenous women had a postsecondary qualification in 2016

In 2016, half (52%) of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification (Table 1). Specifically, 8% had an apprenticeship or trades certificate, 28% had a college or CEGEP diploma,⁸ 3% had a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level, and 14% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Among non-Indigenous women, the proportions for apprenticeships or trades certificates (7%) as well as certificates below the bachelor level (4%) were similar to those of Indigenous women. Non-Indigenous women were slightly

less likely than Indigenous women to have had a college or CEGEP diploma (25%) but more likely to have had a bachelor's degree or higher (32%).

There were also some differences by Indigenous identity. For example, among Métis women aged 25 to 64, 59% had a postsecondary qualification, compared with almost half (49%) for First Nations women and 38% for Inuit women. The percentage with bachelor's degrees or other advanced degrees was highest for Métis women at 16%, followed by First Nations women at 12% and Inuit women at 7%.

Many factors contribute to differences in the educational attainment of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. One is the geographic distribution of these three Indigenous identity groups, which can affect access to education. This is particularly pertinent to First Nations women living on reserve as well as Inuit women living in Inuit Nunangat, where access to education is much

more limited and many have to leave their communities to attend educational institutions.

Women, in general, have sustained a long-term trend toward higher education with increases in the completion of postsecondary qualifications.⁹ The same trends exist among Indigenous people. In 2016, Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 were more likely than Indigenous men to have postsecondary qualifications (52% compared to 46%). Specifically, Indigenous women were more likely to have a postsecondary qualification than Indigenous men across all levels of education except for apprenticeship or trades certificates and diplomas. In the case of degrees at the bachelor's level or higher, 14% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had such a degree compared to 8% of Indigenous men. These results were similar for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women.

Table 1
Highest level of education, population aged 25 to 64, by Indigenous identity and sex, Canada, 2016

Highest level of education	Indigenous identity and sex									
	Total Indigenous identity population		First Nations single identity		Métis single identity		Inuit single identity		Non-Indigenous population	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
No certificate, diploma or degree	22.7	29.0	26.7	33.8	15.2	21.1	42.9	45.0	9.4	12.3
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency degree	25.1	25.1	24.6	24.4	26.4	26.7	18.0	18.0	23.2	24.2
Postsecondary qualification (including certificate, diploma or degree)	52.2	45.9	48.8	41.8	58.5	52.2	38.2	37.0	67.4	63.5
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	7.5	18.5	6.9	17.3	8.4	20.1	6.8	18.2	6.8	14.7
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	27.8	17.6	26.0	16.1	30.9	19.8	22.3	14.7	25.3	19.3
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	3.4	1.9	3.5	1.9	3.3	1.9	2.1	0.7	3.5	2.6
University, certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	13.6	7.9	12.2	6.5	15.9	10.4	7.0	3.4	31.7	26.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016. Table 98-400-X2016268

The achievements, experiences and labour market outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with bachelor's degrees or higher

The proportion of Indigenous women with a bachelor's degree or higher has increased from 2006 to 2016

The educational attainment of Indigenous women has also been increasing over time. By 2016, 14% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 had a bachelor's degree or higher, up from 9% a decade earlier in 2006. The proportion of Indigenous men with a bachelor's degree or higher also grew over this period but to a lesser extent (6% in 2006 and 8% in 2016) (Chart 1). The general results were similar across the three Indigenous identity groups, with more First Nations,

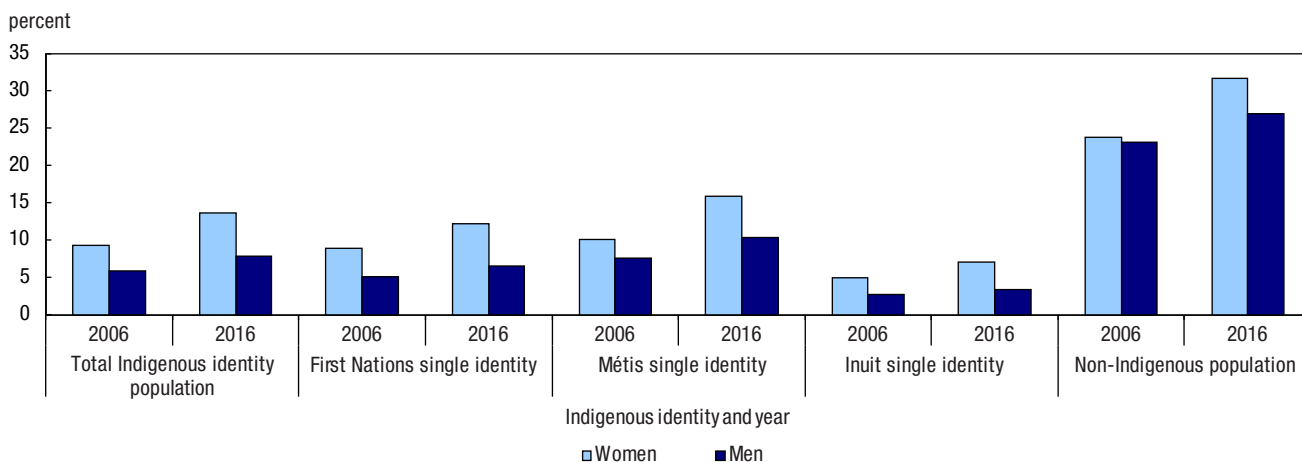
Métis and Inuit women attaining bachelor's degrees or higher compared to men.

Changes in educational attainment by Indigenous groups over time reflect substantial increases in both school enrolment and program completion. However, it is possible that some of the gains are partly due to response mobility, which is a phenomenon whereby people provide different responses to census questions over time about their Indigenous identity.¹⁰ Research has found that response mobility is higher among Métis and First Nations people without registered Indian status and very low among Inuit and First Nations with registered Indian status. Changes in response from

some highly educated respondents who did not previously identify in the Census as Indigenous likely accounts for some (but not all) of the gains in educational attainment.¹¹

There were also increases in selected postsecondary qualifications above the bachelor level, including degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry, master's and earned doctorates for both Indigenous women and men between 2006 and 2016 (Table 2). The results also indicate that the gains in advanced degrees, particularly those at the master's level, were greater for Indigenous women compared to Indigenous men.

Chart 1
Percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, by Indigenous identity, sex and year, Canada 2006 and 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016; Table 98-400-X2016268 and Census of Population 2006; Custom table.

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Table 2

Selected highest level of education, population aged 25 to 64, by Indigenous identity, sex and year, Canada 2006 and 2016

Highest level of education	Indigenous identity, year and sex							
	Indigenous				Non-Indigenous			
	2006		2016		2006		2016	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent							
No certificate, diploma or degree	31.5	37.0	22.7	29.0	13.9	15.6	9.4	12.3
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	22.4	20.3	25.1	25.1	25.1	22.9	23.2	24.2
Certificates or diplomas: apprenticeship / trades or other non-university or university below bachelor level, College, or CEGEP	36.8	36.7	38.7	37.9	37.2	38.4	35.7	36.7
Bachelor's degree	6.8	4.0	10.1	5.7	15.7	14.1	21.5	17.3
University certificate or diploma above bachelor level	1.1	0.7	1.0	0.5	2.7	2.2	2.2	1.7
Medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry degrees	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8
Master's degree	1.1	1.0	2.1	1.3	4.3	4.9	6.3	5.9
Earned doctorate	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	1.1	0.8	1.1

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016; Table 98-400-X2016268 and Census of Population 2006; Custom table.

Education is a common field of study among Indigenous women with a bachelor's degree or higher

In 2016, the most common fields of study for Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree

or higher were education (24%), followed by social and behavioural sciences and law (23%) and business, management and public administration (19%) (Table 3). These three fields accounted for two-thirds of degree holders at the bachelor's level or higher among

Indigenous women. The results are also similar when broken down by Indigenous identity groups and largely consistent regardless of sex. Moreover, non-Indigenous women and men had largely comparable rankings for major fields of study with the exception of education.

Table 3

Top 10 major fields of study among population aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, by Indigenous identity and sex, Canada, 2016

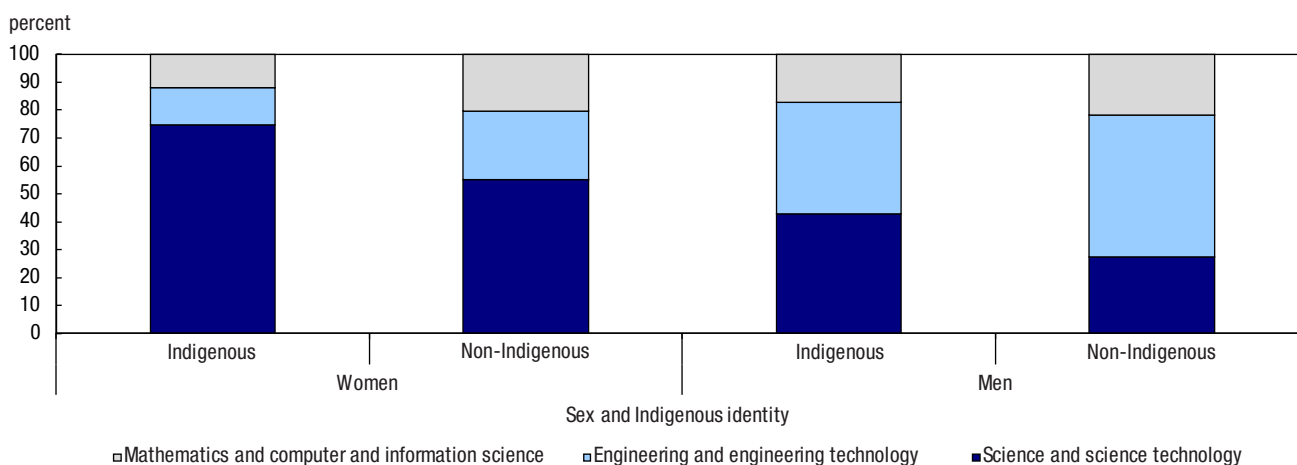
Field of study	Indigenous identity and sex									
	Total Indigenous identity population		First Nations single identity		Métis single identity		Inuit single identity		Non-Indigenous population	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent									
Education	24.3	14.1	25.2	14.7	23.0	13.9	31.9	9.7	15.2	5.6
Social and behavioural sciences and law	22.6	20.2	23.3	21.9	21.7	18.3	23.2	25.8	19.6	15.1
Business, management and public administration	18.6	20.3	20.5	20.6	16.8	20.2	15.9	16.1	19.6	23.5
Health and related fields	14.5	7.8	12.5	6.5	16.9	9.2	9.7	5.4	15.8	8.3
Humanities	8.2	10.1	8.2	10.5	8.2	9.6	8.6	8.6	9.8	7.1
Physical and life sciences and technologies	4.1	6.6	3.5	5.8	4.8	7.4	6.3	10.8	6.5	7.6
Visual and performing arts and communications technologies	3.1	3.7	2.6	4.0	3.8	3.5	1.4	2.2	3.7	2.7
Architecture, engineering and related technologies	1.4	9.5	1.1	8.9	1.8	9.9	1.0	11.8	4.7	19.8
Agriculture, natural resources and conservation	1.4	3.0	1.4	2.9	1.4	3.1	0.0	5.4	1.5	2.2
Mathematics, computer and information sciences	1.1	3.6	1.1	3.1	1.1	4.0	1.4	3.2	3.3	7.6

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016. Custom table.

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Chart 2

Distribution of STEM sub-fields of study among 25 to 64 year olds with a STEM bachelor's degree or higher, by Indigenous identity and sex, Canada 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016263.

To provide a more complete picture of the fields of study for Indigenous women at the highest levels of education, it is also important to examine degree acquisition in STEM programs (science, technology, engineering and mathematics and computer science). Existing research has found that STEM skills are crucial to innovation and productivity¹² and lead to high-quality, high-paying jobs, especially for engineering and computer science graduates.¹³ However, despite increases in educational attainment, women and Indigenous people remained underrepresented in STEM programs in 2016.¹⁴

Overall, Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 were less likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be STEM degree holders. At 8%, STEM degrees were half as common among Indigenous women than among non-Indigenous women (16%). STEM degrees among Indigenous

men were also less common than they were for non-Indigenous men (22% compared to 36%).

The STEM programs can be further divided into three sub-fields: science and science technology; engineering; and mathematics and computer science. Generally, occupations related to science and science technology are lower-paying than those in other areas of STEM.¹⁵

Three-quarters (75%) of Indigenous women who attained a STEM bachelor's degree or higher did so in a science or science technology field and the remainder were split between engineering (13%) and mathematics and computer science fields (12%) (Chart 2). Similar patterns are seen for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women (data not shown). In comparison, non-Indigenous women who are STEM degree holders at the bachelor's level or higher are less likely than Indigenous women to be represented in science and science technology fields (55%)

and more likely to study engineering (24%) and mathematics and computer science (20%).

Among STEM degree holders at the bachelor's level or higher, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men are generally more likely than Indigenous women to have studied engineering, which is often associated with higher-paying occupations.

Postsecondary education experiences among Indigenous women

Existing research has shown that Indigenous students face many barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary education, including the lack of academic preparation and guidance, inadequate financial resources, lack of relevant or Indigenous-specific curricula, and the loss of community, family and cultural support systems often due to the need to relocate to places far from their homes.¹⁶ Furthermore, intergenerational trauma continues

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to greatly affect the educational participation and success of Indigenous people at the secondary and postsecondary levels.¹⁷

To help Indigenous students transition to higher levels of schooling and improve their educational outcomes, many Canadian universities are providing culturally sensitive academic, financial and social services.¹⁸ Furthermore, a number of Indigenous educational institutions across Canada offer programs grounded in Indigenous languages, pedagogies, and cultures, which also helps Indigenous students with the transition to and completion of postsecondary education.¹⁹

Government student loans are the most common source of funding for postsecondary education

Postsecondary education is expensive.²⁰ On average, Canadian undergraduates pay about \$6,500 each year for tuition alone and most programs require several years of study.²¹ Students can also incur expenses associated with relocation costs, housing, transportation, food and child care responsibilities.²² In 2017, the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) included questions about funding sources for postsecondary education. Nine different sources were available and more than one source could be reported.

Among Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 living off reserve with a bachelor's degree or higher, more than 4 in 10 (43%) reported having

received a government student loan as a source of postsecondary funding (Table 4). Other sources of funding included working while going to school (34%), one's own savings (32%), grants, bursaries or scholarships (32%), family (30%), and Band or Inuit Land Claim (23%). By contrast, bank loans or lines of credit and employment insurance were rarely used.²³

Sources of postsecondary funding were generally similar for First Nations women and men living off reserve, Métis and Inuit with one notable difference; among women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, 40% of off-reserve First Nations women reported having received Band funding while 43% of Inuit women reported having received funding from an Inuit Land Claim organization.

Table 4
Sources of postsecondary funding, Indigenous population living off reserve aged 25 to 64, by selected highest level of education and sex, Canada, 2017

Funding sources	Highest level of education and sex			
	Bachelor's degree or higher		Some postsecondary and postsecondary below bachelor level	
	Women	Men (ref.)	Women	Men (ref.)
	percent			
Government loan	43.4	41.4	30.9 [†]	19.6 [‡]
Grants, bursaries or scholarships	31.8 [*]	25.3	13.8 [†]	10.9 [‡]
Band or Inuit Land Claim	23.4 [*]	17.4	21.4 [*]	18.1
Employment Insurance	1.5 ^E	F	7.9 [†]	11.5
Own savings	32.3 [*]	41.3	22.8 [†]	30.0 [‡]
Worked while going to school	33.8	39.2	16.1 [†]	21.9 [‡]
Family	29.7 [*]	23.2	13.7 [†]	11.9 [‡]
Bank loan/line of credit	7.6	6.6 ^E	2.7 [†]	1.7 ^{E†}
Other	5.2 ^E	5.4 ^E	11.5 [†]	14.7 [‡]

^E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) (p<0.05)

[†] significantly different from the corresponding Bachelor's degree or higher category (p<0.05)

Note: Percentages for sources of funding do not add to 100% because respondents could indicate more than one source. Indigenous population living off reserve includes First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit living in Canada. Statistical significance was determined by assessing whether the 95% confidence intervals overlapped. Non-overlapping confidence intervals were deemed to be statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2017.

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The results also show some important differences between Indigenous women and men living off reserve with degrees at the bachelor's level or above. For example, Indigenous women are more likely than Indigenous men to report having received grants, bursaries or scholarships (32% versus 25%). The same is true for Band or Inuit Land claims as a funding source (23% versus 17%), and financial support from family (30% versus 23%). In contrast, Indigenous men were more likely to report having used their own savings to pay for their postsecondary studies (41% versus 32%).

Since postsecondary certificates or diplomas below the bachelor level tend to be shorter and less expensive than undergraduate and graduate university degrees, individuals who obtained such postsecondary certificates or diplomas were less likely to have received almost all types of funding compared to those with a bachelor's degree or higher (employment insurance is an exception). For example, 31% of Indigenous women living off reserve aged 25 to 64 with some postsecondary or postsecondary below the bachelor level reported having received a government loan, compared to 43% of women with a bachelor's degree and above. The corresponding figures for Indigenous men were 20% for those who obtained postsecondary qualifications below the bachelor level and 41% for those who graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Two-thirds of Indigenous women living off reserve felt the guidance received for postsecondary education was adequate or very adequate

According to data from the 2017 APS, two-thirds (67%) of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 living off reserve who had a bachelor's degree or higher felt the guidance they received to help choose schooling above the high school level was adequate or very adequate. In addition, 7% reported the guidance was neither adequate nor inadequate, and a quarter (26%) felt it was inadequate or very inadequate.

There are no statistically significant differences among Indigenous women and men in terms of opinions about the adequacy of educational guidance received. However, off-reserve First Nations women with a bachelor's degree or higher were less likely to report that their guidance was adequate or very adequate (62%), compared with 71% among both Métis and Inuit women.

APS respondents were also asked, if they were to do their postsecondary education again, whether they would choose the same field of study. Among Indigenous women living off reserve with a bachelor's degree or higher who felt their guidance was adequate or very adequate, the majority (75%) would choose the same field of study. In contrast, among Indigenous women living off reserve aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher who felt their guidance was inadequate,

half (51%) reported they would choose the same field of study. These conclusions were also similar among the three Indigenous groups.

Close to a quarter of Indigenous women living off reserve with a bachelor's degree or higher attended activities to help Indigenous students succeed

In 2017, APS respondents were asked if they took part in any workshops, programs or activities specifically designed to help Indigenous students adjust or succeed in postsecondary education. Among Indigenous women and men living off reserve and aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, about one-fifth reported having attended such activities (23% compared to 20%, respectively) (Table 5).

Results by Indigenous group indicate some differences. Specifically, about one-quarter (24%) of off-reserve First Nations women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher had participated in such activities, compared to 21% for Métis women and 36% for Inuit women.

There are no statistically significant differences among Indigenous women and Indigenous men. In addition, the proportion reporting they participated in these activities is significantly higher among off-reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher than those with lower levels of postsecondary education. The same is true among Indigenous men with the exception of Inuit men.

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Table 5

Attended activities to help Indigenous students succeed, Indigenous people living off reserve aged 25 to 64, by Indigenous identity, selected highest level of education and sex, Canada, 2017

	Indigenous identity and sex							
	Total Indigenous		Off-reserve First Nations		Métis		Inuit	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Highest level of education	percent							
Bachelor's degree or higher	23.0*	20.4*	24.2*	26.8*	21.4*	15.2*	35.7* ^E	24.2 ^E
Some postsecondary and postsecondary below bachelor level (ref.)	12.3	9.5	14.6	12.4	9.6	6.7	15.6	13.6

^E use with caution

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) (p<0.05)

Note: Indigenous population living off reserve includes First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit living in Canada. Statistical significance was determined by assessing whether the 95% confidence intervals overlapped. Non-overlapping confidence intervals were deemed to be statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2017.

Labour market outcomes of Indigenous women with bachelor's degrees or higher

Postsecondary education is associated with better labour market outcomes, including higher employment rates, as well as higher earnings compared to the outcomes experienced by those with lower levels of education.²⁴ The benefit of higher levels of education may even be greater for the Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population.²⁵

Indigenous women tend to graduate at older ages than non-Indigenous women

Youth can take various paths from education to the labour market.²⁶ In the case of Indigenous people, education is not always a linear path, with many leaving school early due to work and family responsibilities but also returning to school at later ages.²⁷

According to data from the 2018 National Graduates Survey (NGS) (Class of 2015), the median age for Indigenous²⁸ women and men who graduated with a bachelor's degree was 25, and for

those who graduated with a master's or doctoral degree it was 34. The median graduation age was lower for the non-Indigenous population: 24 for a bachelor's degree and 31 for a master's or earned doctorate (for both women and men).

One factor that may be associated with Indigenous people tending to graduate at older ages is timely completion. NGS respondents were asked if they completed their 2015 degree in the usual length of time.²⁹ Among Indigenous women with a university degree about three-quarters of bachelor's (73%) and master's or doctoral degree (74%) recipients finished on time. In comparison, 72% of Indigenous men who obtained a bachelor's and 80% of those with a master's or earned doctorate completed their degree in the usual length of time.

Despite a majority of Indigenous men and women completing their 2015 degree in the usual length of time, an even greater proportion of non-Indigenous women and men did so. Specifically, 88% of non-Indigenous women and 84% of non-Indigenous men completed their master's or doctoral degree in a timely manner.

Respondents were also asked the main reason they did not complete their 2015 program in the usual length of time. Among those who took longer to finish a bachelor's degree or higher, the most commonly reported reasons, irrespective of Indigenous identity, are academic (28% for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates) and personal (21% for non-Indigenous and 20% among Indigenous respondents). However, among Indigenous graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher, family responsibilities (14%) was the third most commonly reported reason compared to 6% among non-Indigenous graduates.^{30,31}

Self-reported differences in less timely completion among Indigenous people compared to the non-Indigenous population also likely reflect, at least in part, the higher proportion of Indigenous women with parental responsibilities while trying to complete their postsecondary education. Higher fertility rates³² and younger age at first birth³³ are well-documented differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Other data from the 2017 APS

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Table 6
Proportion employed among 2015 graduates, by Indigenous identity, sex and type of degree, Canada, 2018

Type of degree	Indigenous identity and sex			
	Indigenous population		Non-Indigenous population	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent			
Below bachelor's degree ¹ (ref.)	77.9 [§]	78.3 [§]	89.7	91.3
Bachelor's degree or higher	90.9*	85.5	91.6	92.9
Bachelor's degree ²	90.6*	84.9	90.9	92.6
Master's degree or earned doctorate	92.0*	87.9	93.3*	94.0

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

§ significantly different from the corresponding category for non-Indigenous population ($p < 0.05$)

1. Below bachelor's degree includes CEGEP, college and university diploma below bachelor's degree.

2. Bachelor's degree also includes degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and optometry.

Note: Employed includes graduates who reported having a job or business last week. Statistical significance was determined by assessing whether the 95% confidence intervals overlapped. Non-overlapping confidence intervals were deemed to be statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, National Graduates Survey, 2018.

also indicate that nearly a quarter (24%) of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher had their first child before age 25.³⁴

The majority of Indigenous women who graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2015 were employed in 2018

Among Indigenous women who graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree or higher and who had not returned to school,³⁵ 91% were employed three years later (compared with 86% of Indigenous men), 6% were unemployed and 3% were not in the labour force. The proportions employed among the non-Indigenous population with the same level of education were similar for women at 92% and men at 93%.

Table 6 shows the proportion of graduates employed in 2018 by selected type of degree. The results for Indigenous women are consistent

with existing research which shows that higher education is associated with higher rates of employment.³⁶ Specifically, the majority (92%) of Indigenous women who graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed in 2018, significantly higher than the proportion employed among Indigenous women with a degree below the bachelor level (78%). As for Indigenous male graduates, rates of employment did not differ significantly by degree level.

About 7 in 10 Indigenous women who graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher worked in a job or business closely related to their field of study

The majority of Indigenous women who graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree or higher and were employed³⁷ three years after graduation reported that their job or business was closely related to their university program (66%). Another 20% reported their job or business

was somewhat related, while the remaining 14% reported their job or business was not at all related.

For Indigenous women, similar proportions reported their job or business was closely related to their 2015 program, regardless of whether their post-secondary qualification was at, above or below the bachelor level (Table 7). For men (Indigenous or not) as well as for non-Indigenous women, a graduate degree was positively associated with finding employment more closely related to their field of study. For example, among Indigenous men, 68% of those with a degree below the bachelor level reported their job was closely related to their education; while this increased to 88% for those with a master's or doctoral degree.

In general, the results suggest that advanced degrees at the master's level or higher tend to result in employment more closely related to one's studies than lower levels of postsecondary qualification.

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Table 7

Proportion who reported having a job or business that was closely related to their 2015 degree, by Indigenous identity, sex and type of degree, Canada, 2018

Type of degree	Indigenous identity and sex			
	Indigenous population		Non-Indigenous population	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent			
Below bachelor's degree ¹ (ref.)	67.6	68.1	63.8	58.4
Bachelor's degree or higher	66.4	72.2	68.2 †	60.1
Bachelor's degree ²	64.1	68.2	65.1 †	57.0
Master's degree or earned doctorate	75.9	88.3*§	76.2*†	69.8*

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

† significantly different from the corresponding category for men ($p < 0.05$)

§ significantly different from the corresponding category for non-Indigenous population ($p < 0.05$)

1. Below bachelor's degree includes CEGEP, college and university diploma below bachelor's degree.

2. Bachelor's degree also includes degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and optometry.

Note: Employed includes graduates who reported having a job or business last week. Statistical significance was determined by assessing whether the 95% confidence intervals overlapped. Non-overlapping confidence intervals were deemed to be statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, National Graduates Survey, 2018.

Conclusion

Indigenous women are increasingly completing postsecondary qualifications. These findings highlight an increase in the educational attainment of Indigenous women from 2006 to 2016, especially in terms of completing postsecondary degrees. Furthermore, the results are consistent with other research demonstrating that having a degree at the bachelor level or above is positively associated with higher rates of employment, especially for Indigenous women.

Future research could build off of these findings by examining occupations and earnings by more detailed level of qualification, including those below the bachelor's level, to produce a more complete picture of the benefits of postsecondary education and employment among Indigenous women. In light of labour force needs for more people with a scientific background, the underrepresentation of Indigenous women in addition to Indigenous men in STEM fields of study also deserves additional research in

order to identify persistent barriers and offer solutions to help improve access to some of the highest paying and most in-demand occupations.

The study also identifies a number of findings that appear to ease the transition to postsecondary education and further reduce the barriers that many First Nations, Métis and Inuit women face in the pursuit of higher education. For instance, only about a quarter of Indigenous women with a degree at the bachelor's level or higher reported having participated in workshops and activities aimed at helping Indigenous students to succeed in postsecondary education. Future research might explore the mechanisms for enabling a greater proportion First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to benefit from these support programs. Indigenous students also tend to graduate at older ages and are more likely to have parenting responsibilities in addition to their academic responsibilities. It would be beneficial for future research to explore the adequacy

of access to culturally-appropriate, affordable child care as well as other forms of supports for older students.

Analysis of the 2021 Census of population is also underway and will allow for additional monitoring of the educational and employment experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. It should be noted that two new questions were added to the 2021 Census, which will allow Métis and Inuit to identify themselves further, opening up possibilities for more detailed analyses of these populations in the future. For example, it will be possible to examine characteristics by membership in a Métis organization or settlement, and by enrolment under an Inuit land claims agreement.

More generally, the 2021 Census can be used to examine how the pandemic has been profoundly altering population growth, sources of income, commuting patterns and many other aspects of our lives.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

Data in the first part of this article are from the 2016 Census of Population as well as the 2006 Census. More information on each is available.³⁸ Additional information on Census data quality, comparability for Indigenous peoples³⁹ and Census data related to education⁴⁰ is also available.

The second part of the article uses data from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), which is a voluntary, national survey of First Nations people living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit aged 15 and over, living in private dwellings. It excluded people living on Indian reserves and settlements and in certain First Nations communities in Yukon and the Northwest Territories. More information about the survey design, target population, survey concepts and response rates is available.⁴¹

The final section uses the 2018 National Graduates Survey (NGS)—a voluntary survey of graduates of public postsecondary educational institutions across Canada (all ten provinces and territories) in the calendar year 2015, who were living in Canada at the time of survey data collection in 2018. The target population of the survey excludes graduates from private post-secondary institutions, graduates who completed “continuing education” at universities and colleges (unless they led to a degree or diploma), and graduates in apprenticeship programs. The survey collects information on academic paths, funding for postsecondary education, and the transition into the labour market, as well as demographics and income. Additional information on the 2018 National Graduates Survey is available elsewhere.⁴²

Methodology

Census comparisons between 2006 and 2016 were conducted using an adjusted base to control for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves from one cycle to another.

However, point estimates—unless otherwise specified—were compared without adjusting for incomplete enumeration. In the 2016 Census of Population there were 14 Indian reserves and Indian settlements that were incompletely enumerated,⁴³ down from 22 in the 2006 Census of Population.⁴⁴

To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%. Because of random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products such as analytical documents, highlight tables and data tables.

All estimates in this report using data from the 2017 APS and 2018 NGS, are based on survey weights that account for sample design, non-response and known population totals. A bootstrapping technique was applied when calculating all estimates of variance.

Definitions

Indigenous identity refers to whether a person reported being First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit), and/or being a Registered or Treaty Indian (that is, registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada), and/or being a member of a First Nation or Indian Band. Census data for specific Indigenous groups (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) refer to those who reported a single identity. The APS data represent a combination of single and multiple responses for First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit.

Appendix

In 2016, there were more than 977,000 First Nations people living in Canada. Of those, just over three-quarters (76%) were First Nations people with registered or treaty Indian status—that is, they are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada. The other 24% did not have registered or treaty Indian status.

Given the obligations that governments have towards First Nations people, and the specific programs and funding available for those with registered or treaty Indian status, it is important to consider some of the educational experiences of the First Nations population by status, including highest level of educational attainment, increases in educational attainment over time, as well as sources of postsecondary funding.

In 2016, 47% of First Nations women aged 25 to 64 with registered or treaty Indian status had a postsecondary qualification (Table A1). In comparison, more than half (56%) of First Nations women aged 25 to 64 without registered or treaty Indian status had postsecondary qualifications in 2016. Among non-Indigenous women, the corresponding proportion was 67%.

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Table A1
Highest level of educational attainment, First Nations people aged 25 to 64, by Registered or Treaty Indian Status and sex, 2016

Highest level of educational attainment	Registered or Treaty Indian		Not a Registered or Treaty Indian	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent			
No certificate, diploma or degree	29.6	36.9	16.7	23.1
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency degree	23.8	23.1	27.1	28.8
Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree	46.6	40.0	56.2	48.0
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	6.5	17.0	8.4	18.4
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	24.7	15.3	30.5	18.9
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	3.7	2.0	2.9	1.7
University, certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	11.6	5.7	14.4	9.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016; Custom table.

First Nations women, regardless of registered Indian status, were more likely than their male counterparts to have postsecondary qualifications. Furthermore, educational attainment at the postsecondary level was also higher for First Nations men aged 25 to 64 without registered Indian status than for those with registered Indian status.

The educational attainment of First Nations women with and without registered Indian status has increased over time. However, the increase has been greater among First Nations without status. For example, the proportion with a degree at the bachelor level or above increased from 9% in 2006 for First Nations women aged 25

to 64 with registered Indian status to 12% in 2016. In comparison the proportion increased from 9% to 14% for First Nations women without registered Indian status. Among First Nations men without registered Indian status, the increase was from 6% to 9% in the same ten-year period (5% to 6% for First Nations men with registered status).

Table A2
Sources of postsecondary funding, First Nations people living off reserve aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher, by Registered or Treaty Indian Status and sex, 2017

Funding sources	Registered or Treaty Indian		Not a Registered or Treaty Indian	
	Men (ref.)	Women	Men (ref.)	Women
	percent			
Government loan	31.9	20.5*	34.0	61.5**
Grants, bursaries or scholarships	24.2	20.3	26.5 ^E	34.1
Band or Inuit Land Claim	57.7	70.5*	F	F
Employment Insurance	F	F	F	F
Own savings	30.9	24.3	53.4 [†]	34.8*
Worked while going to school	32.5	21.8*	47.3	35.6
Family	17.2 ^E	15.5 ^E	21.1 ^E	37.3**
Bank loan/line of credit	F	F	F	12.3 ^E
Other	F	4.9 ^E	F	F

^E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$).

[†] significantly different from the corresponding Registered or Treaty Indian category ($p < 0.05$)

Note: Percentages for sources of funding do not add to 100% because respondents could indicate more than once source. Statistical significance was determined by assessing whether the 95% confidence intervals overlapped. Non-overlapping confidence intervals were deemed to be statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2017.

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There were also differences between First Nations women with and without status in the sources of postsecondary funding. For example, among First Nations

women with registered Indian status and who had a degree at the bachelor's level or higher, seven-in-ten reported receiving funding from Band or Inuit Land Claim

(Table A2). In contrast, among those without registered status, six-in-ten reported receiving funding from government loans.

Notes

1. Respondents self-identified as belonging to an Aboriginal group in the 2016 and 2006 Census, 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey and 2018 National Graduates Survey questionnaires; however, the term Indigenous is used in place of Aboriginal throughout this report. See the "[Data sources, methods and definitions](#)" section for more information on how Indigenous identity is defined.
2. In this paper, First Nations people refers to both First Nations people with registered Indian status (Status Indians) and First Nations people without registered Indian status (non-Status Indians). See the [Appendix](#) section for additional information on the educational attainment and experiences of First Nations people with and without registered Indian status.
3. See Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2020), Gaywish and Mordoch (2018), and Bougie et al. (2013).
4. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).
5. Reid et al. (2020), Anderson (2019), Hahmann et al. (2019), Statistics Canada (2017a), Arriagada (2016) and Frank et al. (2015).
6. This age restriction is applied to both the Census and Aboriginal Peoples Survey data analyses because of the need to focus on respondents with the highest levels of education, including those with master's and doctoral degrees. In addition, the use of the 25 to 64 age range allows for a larger sample of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. Finally, there is no age restriction applied to the National Graduates Survey data because this a cohort of postsecondary 2015 graduates surveyed in 2018. The median age for graduates in this survey at the time of the interview was 29 years.
7. Because of sample size, it is not possible to present all analyses in this study separately for First Nations people, Métis and Inuit.
8. This level of qualification also included other non-university certificates and diplomas.
9. Ferguson (2016).
10. O'Donnell and LaPointe (2019).
11. Several factors may contribute to response mobility, such as legislative changes, court decisions, newly discovered Indigenous ancestry as well as changes to question wording or instructions on the Census questionnaire. Future research on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents who "move" both into and out of the Indigenous identity population compared to those who provide consistent responses would assist in the interpretation of the effect of response mobility on observed differences in various socio-economic outcomes measured between census periods. See O'Donnell and LaPointe (2019) for a more detailed examination of response mobility and the growth of the Indigenous population over time.
12. Canadian Council of Academics (2015).
13. Wall (2019), Canadian Council of Academics (2015) and Conference Board of Canada (2013).
14. Wall (2019) and Ferguson (2016).
15. See Wall (2019) for more information on the representation of women in STEM programs. For further information on the occupational pathways of STEM graduates, see Frank (2019).
16. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2020), Bougie et al. (2013), Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004) and Holmes (2005).
17. O'Donnell and Arriagada (2019) and Gaywish and Mordoch (2018).
18. Universities Canada (2019) and Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2013).
19. Indigenous institutions offer a broad spectrum of programs such as adult basic education, as well as college and university level courses. For additional information, see Conference Board of Canada (2020 and 2021).

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20. One reason people are willing to pursue postsecondary education relates to the financial security it offers after graduation. According to data from the 2016 Census, both women and men with bachelor's degrees earned considerably more than their peers with college, high school or trades education. For more information, please see: Zhao et al. (2017).
21. Statistics Canada a.
22. Indspire (2018) and Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004).
23. Due to the small sample size, results are not presented separately for the three Indigenous groups.
24. Reid et al. (2020), Statistics Canada (2017) and Frank et al. (2015).
25. Arriagada (2016) and Ciceri and Scott (2006).
26. For a detailed examination of pathways from education to the labour market for Canadian youth, see Hango and de Broucker (2007).
27. O'Donnell and Arriagada (2019) and Bougie et al. (2013).
28. The more limited sample size of the NGS does not support disaggregation of results by Indigenous identity. As a result, this section uses a pan-Indigenous approach.
29. This refers to the usual length of the program when taken full time.
30. Due to small sample size of Indigenous respondents, results cannot be disaggregated by sex or type of program.
31. 9% of Indigenous respondents and 17% of non-Indigenous graduates reported they had a job as the main reason for not completing their program on time. Additional reasons reported include: academic, financial, disability-related, health-related, personal choice and other; however, these cannot be released due to the small sample for the Indigenous population.
32. Morency et al. (2015).
33. Boulet and Badets (2017).
34. Please note that the 2018 NGS does not have a question on whether respondents had children while enrolled in postsecondary education.
35. The reason for excluding those who pursued further education is the possible impact that additional education could have on a graduate's entry into the labour market. See Reid et al. (2020) for work that uses such an exclusion.
36. Reid et al. (2020), Anderson (2019), Hahmann et al. (2019), Statistics Canada (2017), Arriagada (2016) and Frank et al. (2015).
37. Employment was defined as having a job or business last week.
38. Statistics Canada (2017b) and Statistics Canada (2006a).
39. Statistics Canada (2017c).
40. Statistics Canada (2017d).
41. Vongdara et al. (2017).
42. Statistics Canada b.
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