

Stakeholder summary

Research confirms parental education matters most

When it comes to pursuing postsecondary education (PSE), parental education matters more than family income, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). While university participation is greater for youth from higher-income families, those with at least one university-educated parent are 40% more likely to attend university than those whose parents have a high school education or less.

Project description

Building on [previous research](#) that also underscores the impact of parental education, *Postsecondary Education Participation of Under-represented Groups in Ontario: Evidence from the SLID Data* examines the participation rates of under-represented groups including those from low-income families, those living in rural areas, those whose mother tongue is French, those from single-parent or other non-traditional families, immigrants, first generation students and Aboriginal students. By expanding the scope and looking at all of these groups, the study gives a more complete picture of the factors that matter most in accessing PSE among under-represented students.

The study uses the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) because it allows for tracking of youth from high school into their PSE years. The survey has been administered every year since 1993 and collects information from all members of a household. Each member is tracked for six consecutive years. The SLID data is examined both as a longitudinal analysis from 2002 to 2007 to follow students as they leave high school and go on to PSE and as a cross-sectional analysis from 1999 to 2009 to reveal the trends in participation over that period.

Findings

While family income did not have any obvious effect on the college participation rate, the study found that the university participation rate for youth from the highest income quartile is nearly twice that of youth from the two lowest income quartiles. This gap has remained relatively constant, and has increased slightly, from 1999 to 2009. Nonetheless, the effect of family income is greatly reduced when other characteristics are considered such as parental education.

Females were more likely to enrol in university, with the gender gap increasing from 1999 to 2009. Youth who live independently, in a lone-parent household, or in rural areas, who identify as Aboriginal or have disabilities were less likely to attend university. Aboriginal youth and youth with disabilities are more likely to attend college.

Policy implications

Given the reduced impact of family income on decisions about PSE, current student financial assistance policies remove only some of the barriers to PSE. In order to increase the participation of under-represented groups, policies should consider the needs of specific under-represented sub-groups.

Colleges have been successful in increasing the participation of under-represented groups. Improving transfer opportunities for Aboriginals and youth with disabilities from college to university would allow more students to attain a university degree.

About the author

Postsecondary Education Participation of Under-represented Groups in Ontario: Evidence from the SLID Data was written by Huizi Zhao, former senior research analyst at HEQCO and currently institutional research manager in the Corporate Planning & Institutional Research Office at Centennial College.