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Parents and Friends Make a Difference in the Education of Children of Immigrants

Racial minorities, except for Blacks, have higher educational attainments than their White counterparts, according to Teresa Abada and Eric Tenkorang in a study published in the *Journal of Youth Studies*.

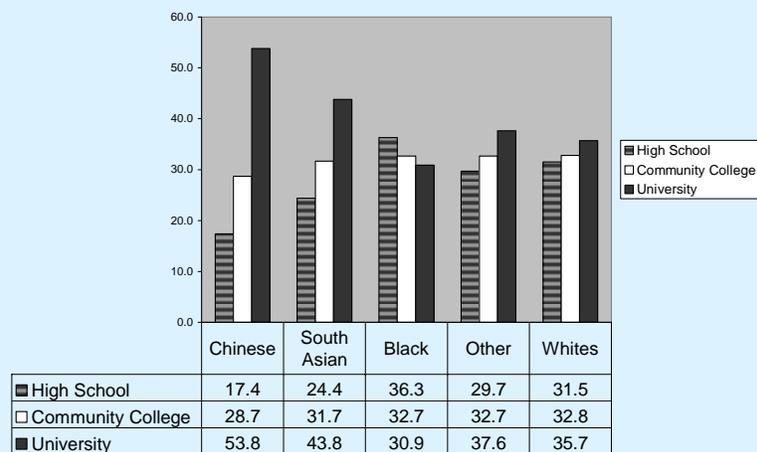
The study found large differences among racial minority groups with the Chinese having the highest percentage attaining university education (53%), followed by South Asians (44%). Thirty-six percent of Whites attain university education and Blacks show the lowest percentage at 31%.

Abada and Tenkorang examined the data gathered through the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) conducted in 2002 for 10,900 respondents aged 18-34. At age 18 most of these young Canadians would have completed high school with many preparing to pursue post-secondary education. By age 35, post-secondary education would have been completed.

What accounts for the large differences in education among racial groups? The study explored a variety of reasons ranging from those associated with immigrant youth's parental background and their immediate family environment to the language that young people use at home and with their friends.

Abada and Tenkorang found that immigrant youth with highly educated parents are more likely to pursue university education, compared to those whose parents do not have university education. This, in effect, is an outcome of 'human capital' invested on the education of the young.

Figure 1. Estimated percentage of university attainment



For Blacks in particular, the study finds that trustful relations with family members, neighbors, and people at work or schools are important for the pursuit of post secondary education. Use of one's own language that is neither English nor French at home while growing up is also associated with attaining higher education. Networks of family and friends provide social support and information, which are 'social capital' resulting in positive outcome for the youth's education.

However, Abada and Tenkorang caution that 'social capital' has its downside. Young people who mainly speak with their friends in language other than English or French have low chance of pursuing university education. This could be an indication that strong bonds confined to one's own ethnic group limit information and opportunities for pursuing higher education.

Do results from this study have implications for policies about immigrants? Does Canada's multicultural policy contribute to the successful integration of recent immigrants, especially those coming from non-European countries? These questions are important as the success of Canada's multicultural policy is often determined by the extent to which young immigrants and their children partake fully and equally in the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the country. Come and discuss with the authors these questions and the findings from the study at the Brown Bag on Wednesday, April 8.

Note: Summary written by Eric Tenkorang and edited by Zenaida Ravanera based on Teresa Abada and Eric Tenkorang, Pursuit of University Education among the Children of Immigrants in Canada: The Roles of Parental Human Capital and Social Capital, forthcoming in 2009 in *Journal of Youth Studies*. For more information or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality in this study please contact Teresa Abada (tabada@uwo.ca).

Analysis was carried out at the University of Western Ontario Research Data Centre. The Research Data Centre program is part of an initiative by Statistics Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and university consortia to strengthen Canada's social research capacity.