

Between Two Worlds: Culture and Gender Differences in Educational Attainment among the Children of Immigrants

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The educational attainment of the children of immigrants has become an increasingly important research focus in immigration studies. Adding to this layer of inquiry is the rapid increase in female educational attainment and notably the advantage of women over men in degree completion for all racial groups. This is particularly telling for some of the children of immigrants, as their parents would have come from societies where women have lower educational levels than men and may hold more traditional values pertaining to work and family. Recent scholarship has focused on the relationship between source country characteristics such as female labour force participation, fertility, level of economic development, gender role attitudes, male/female university enrollment ratios and immigrants' labour market assimilation. These studies refer to these national level factors as proxies for culture when accounting for the vast differences in home country groups in labour market variables. The question is to what extent do these source country and cultural characteristics remain salient among immigrant children. Does culture remain intact despite having been educated in Canada and being exposed to Canadian norms and values? What role does it play in accounting for the gender differences in educational attainment among immigrants and their children?

Canada provides a unique opportunity to explore whether cultural factors still matter for the economic integration of the children of immigrants. In 1971, it was the first country in the

world to implement an official multiculturalism policy. Under this policy, citizens can keep their identities and take pride in their ancestry, hence encouraging openness towards diverse cultures, while also taking part in Canada's social, cultural, economic and political affairs (Canada Citizenship and Immigration). There is a strong possibility therefore that source country characteristics will continue to play an integral role in the labour market assimilation of immigrants. This paper explores the correlates of gender differences in educational attainment among children of immigrants. The focus is on the extent to which gender differences in educational attainment among the 1.5 generation is associated with national level factors such as female/men ratio in labour force participation rate, female/male ration in tertiary education access, gender role attitudes and GDP per capita. These source country characteristics have the advantage over using country of ancestry alone because we can be explicit as to why culture matters more for some groups than others.

This study uses Canadian 2006 census 20% sample micro-data file as the source of individual-level variables on educational attainment and other socio-demographic characteristics. 1.5 generation immigrants are defined as those who immigrated to Canada before age 18. The outcome variable is university completion defined as obtaining a university degree by age 34. At the group level, the outcome of interest is the gender difference in university completion rates. The focal independent variables include three indicators that have been used to capture the degree of traditional gender roles in immigrants' source countries: (1) the female-to-male labour activity ratio in the source country, (2) the female-to-male ratio in tertiary education enrolment, and (3) an explicit measure of gender-role attitudes derived from the World Value Survey. The analysis starts with a detailed look of gender differences in university completion rates for 1.5 generation youth and their parents' generation by source country. Multi-level logistic regression

analysis is conducted to examine whether source-country gender role variables are significantly associated with the gender differences in university completion among the 1.5 generation when source-country economic development, basic demographic factors, and the gender difference in university completion among their parents' generation are controlled for. The results show that the gender difference in university completion varies significantly among the 1.5 generation youth by source-country group. The multi-level model results suggest that female-to-male labour activity ratio in the source country tend to increase women's advantage in university completion, while the female-to-male ratio in tertiary education enrolment and gender role attitudes are not significantly associated with the gender differences in university completion across 1.5 generation groups.