

Does Over-Education Lead To Decreased Life Satisfaction?

 huffingtonpost.ca/allison-carter/overeducation-life-satisfaction_b_16631124.html

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Canada is one of the most highly-educated countries in the world.

Fifty one per cent of 25- to 64-year-olds have a [tertiary \(university or college\) qualification](#), up from 41 per cent in 2001 -- the highest proportion among developed countries. That translates to almost 4 million people with a college diploma and five million with a university degree. The number holding [doctorates](#) has especially soared, doubling to more than 160,000 over the past ten years. Immigrants hold half of these degrees.

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At the same time, [tuition fees](#) have increased by 40 per cent. Completion times remain long: a [PhD](#), for example, takes on average five to six years to earn. Further, crossing that finish line doesn't happen without a lot of hard work -- and stress. Whether buried in books or working late in the lab, [loneliness and isolation](#) are all too common in academia. And the higher you go, the worse it gets. Thirty seven per cent of master's students and 47 per cent of PhD students experience [depression](#).



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So, is higher education a good investment? Do the hoped-for benefits actually outweigh the money, time, and enormous effort (intellectually and emotionally) it takes to finish a degree?

A new report by Statistics Canada provides some answers for students and policymakers.

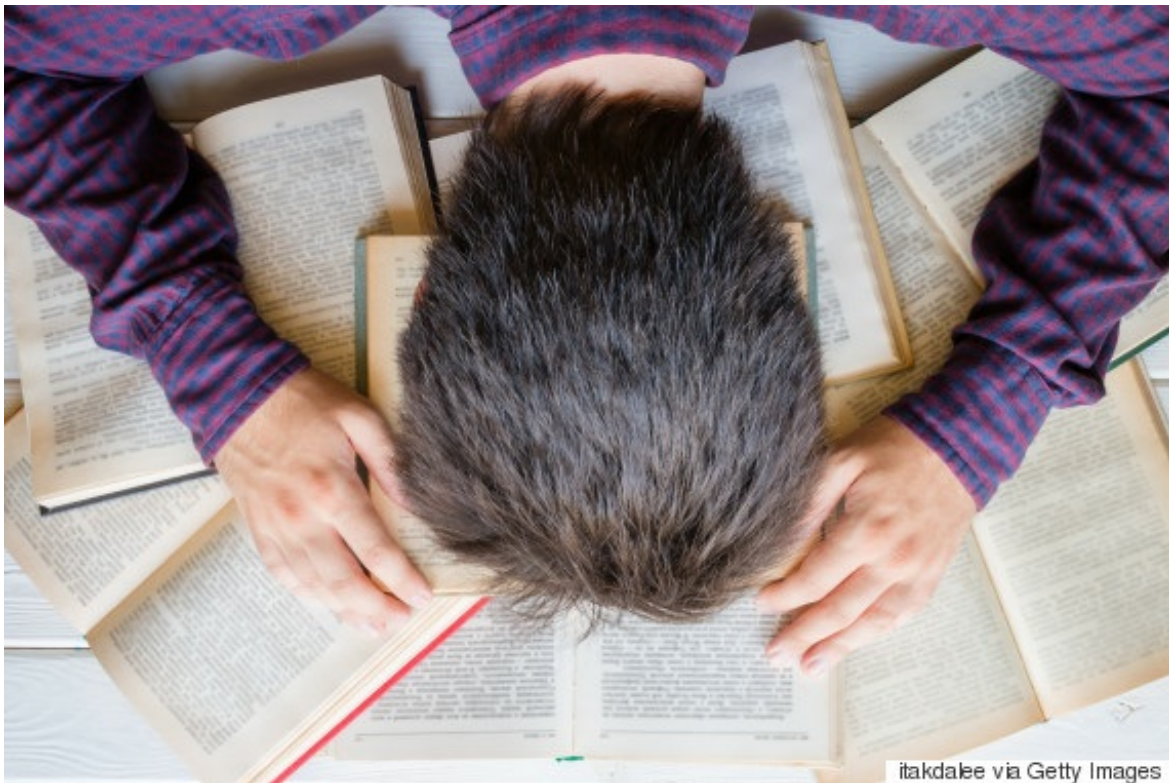
The [study released this month](#) was conducted among more than 30,000 Canadians aged 25 to 64 years who were university graduates and currently employed. Nineteen per cent were immigrants from over 160 countries.

The researchers found that only 64 per cent of Canadian-born university-educated workers had jobs that required a university degree. For immigrants, that figure was even lower (46 per cent).

Moreover, over-education -- defined in the study as working in occupations that required high school education or less -- was more than twice as prevalent in immigrants (30 per cent) than non-immigrants (12 per cent).

Visible minorities were also disproportionately represented among those who were over-educated for their jobs. Compared to their education-occupation matched counterparts, over-educated workers reported lower incomes and a lower sense of community belonging.

"Much of the literature examining over-education concentrates on its economic consequences," the authors wrote in the article. Thus, they instead sought to investigate what effect, if any, over-education had on Canadians' psychological well-being, particularly their overall life satisfaction.



After accounting for differences in age, race, income, and other factors, the study found that over-education was negatively associated with life satisfaction. However, the effects were statistically significant for Canadian-born workers only, while the consequences of over-education for immigrant workers depended on two factors: home country economic status and length of residency in Canada. Those emigrating from developing countries and living in Canada for longer were less likely to experience the negative effects of over-education on life satisfaction.

The role of expectations remained unmeasured in the study, but may underpin the findings. For example, [theories of satisfaction](#) suggest social and political disadvantage can shrink expectations, and, in turn, heighten feelings of satisfaction.

"This study provides policymakers with information about the consequences of an education-occupation mismatch on the subjective well-being of Canadian workers," says Kristyn Frank, senior researcher at Statistics Canada and co-author of the study. "The results indicate that immigrants and non-immigrants experience over-education differently and may have different needs in terms of resources related to employment and health and well-being."

So, neither a job nor happiness is guaranteed upon graduation, which is perhaps not so surprising. Also unsurprising are the ways in which race, class, and immigration status organize the possibilities of life after university.

The question then is how can we create enabling conditions that make both career prospects and life satisfaction possible for all, not just the privileged few?

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