

SDC 2018 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: Sustainable Development in Canada's North: Understanding Educational Achievement in Inuit Nunangat



Despite that Canada is a prosperous nation, its Arctic region is characterized by food insecurity, poverty and the world's highest suicide rate. Improved educational attainment is viewed as a key factor in reducing these problems. This project investigates the factors associated with low educational attainment in the Inuit regions of Canada (known as Inuit Nunangat). This presentation therefore relates to two themes of the Sustainability and Development Conference: first, Sustainable Development and Indigenous Peoples and second, Education.

Educational attainment in Canada's Inuit regions is significantly lower than that in the rest of Canada. For example, in 2012, 58% of Inuit aged 18-44 had not completed high school, compared to 11% of the non-Indigenous population in the same age group. This indicates a need for research on factors that are supporting Inuit students to stay in and excel in school.

This paper identifies factors associated with Inuit educational attainment in Canada using 5 case studies and analysis of three waves of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey to identify correlates of truancy and dropout among Inuit youth. Our study finds that initiatives that engage a child's relationships – with their parents, peers and teachers – are highly associated with missing days of school, arriving late for school and graduation. Parental engagement, anti-bullying initiatives and hiring local teachers are therefore important reforms for improving educational attainment in Inuit Nunangat.

The existing literature on Indigenous education in Canada is largely qualitative. Our study is the first to take a quantitative approach which allows us to identify factors that are significant in improving educational outcomes amid scarce financial resources. This is essential for policy makers in Canada's north, including Department of Education staff, school principals and local education authorities.

Ensuring that Inuit youth excel in and graduate from school in higher numbers is essential for Inuit self-determination and well-being. If solutions to poverty, high rates of suicide and food insecurity are to be found, it will be through the leadership of Inuit themselves. This presentation points to development interventions/innovations that will improve access to quality education which will in turn lead to sustainable development in Inuit Nunangat.