Benefits of Educational Attainment
Civic engagement, tolerance and trust

Higher educational attainment is associated with greater civic engagement, tolerance and trust

Introduction

While education and training supports well-being and prosperity through higher employment, income and wealth, research from around the world has also found that education is a powerful predictor of civic participation or engagement[1] and is associated with higher levels of 'social capital'.[2]

Education and training helps individuals to develop their skills and knowledge and increase self-confidence. Through education, individuals develop their capacity to question and appraise information effectively, communicate ideas, interact with others and see things from different perspectives. The more education systems reflect these capabilities, the more these types of benefits can be observed.[3] Consequently, more educated people are more likely to feel able to participate in the community and this can build trust and tolerance of other people and public institutions.[4] In aggregate, these so-called *non-market social benefits* can lead to increased democratisation, political stability and social cohesion.[5,6]

Civic engagement

The closest measure of civic engagement we have is participation in community, social or political groups. Consistent with Bynner *et al*. (2003),[4] our results show that educational attainment is positively associated with all forms of civic engagement (Figure 1). Compared with lower levels, people with higher levels of educational attainment can be two to three times more likely to be involved in a community, social or political group. These trends hold after controlling for a wide range of potential confounding factors such as age, employment, gender, country of birth, and where people live (see *Data and Methodology*). Higher levels of educational attainment are also positively but weakly associated with more people reporting 'feeling able to have say on important issues within the general community' either *all of the time* or *most of the time.*[7]

[1] Putnam RD (2000) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Simon and Schuster, New York

[2] Social capital is broadly defined as social groups or networks that have productive benefits. Campbell DE (2006) *What is education's impact on civic and social engagement?* In, Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement: Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium, OECD, Paris, pp25-126; Hall P (1999) Social capital in Britain, *British Journal of Politics* **29**: 417-61

[3] Paterson L (2014) Education, social attitudes and social participation among adults in Britain, Sociological Research Online 19(1): 17

[4] Bynner J, Schuller T & Feinstein L (2003) Wider benefits of education: Skills, higher education and civic engagement, *Zeitschrift fur Padagogik* **49** (3)

[5] A more cohesive society is one where citizens actively engage in community and social activities, report feeling able to have a say on important issues, and put trust in other individuals and social institutions; McMahon WW & Oketch M (2013) Education's effects on individual life chances and on development: An overview, *British Journal of Educational Studies* **61**: 79-107

[6] OECD (2013) *Education Indicators in Focus* – 2013/01, OECD Publishing, Paris

[7] 20 to 28 per cent; χ^2=12, *p*=0.04

Trust in people and institutions and tolerance to multi-cultural society

According to Campbell (2006)[2], institutional and interpersonal trust is driven by both individual attainment and exposure to the educational or institutional environment. Education institutions trigger a positive feedback process, leading to a higher level of interpersonal- and institutional-trust. Consistent with other developed countries,[8] our results show evidence of positive relationships between higher levels of educational attainment and trust in society and its institutions (Figure 2). Most people reported high or very high levels of trust in police (data not shown) with a weakly positive relationship with educational attainment.[9] Reported tolerance to multicultural society also improves dramatically with educational attainment increasing from 31 to 70 per cent for *Year 11 and below* to *Postgraduates*, respectively[10].

Figure 1: Proportion of 30-64 year olds involved in community (A), social (B), civic or political (C) groups, by educational attainment, 2014
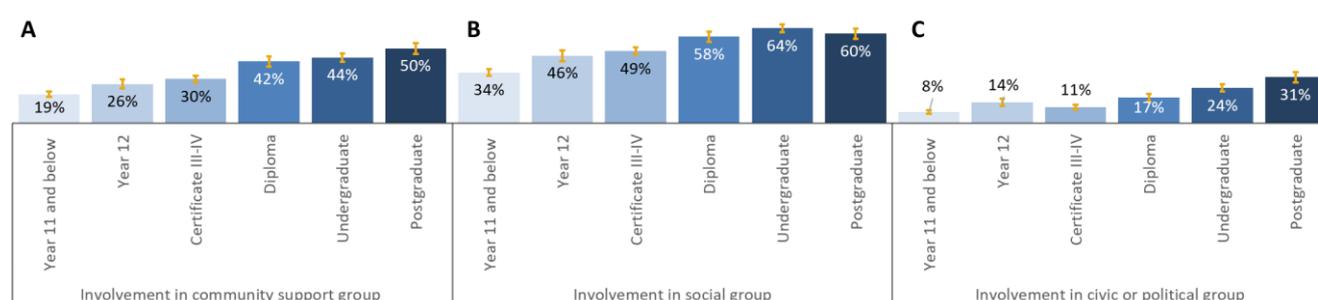
Source: General Social Survey 2014 (Cat. No. 1459.0, Microdata: General Social Survey, Australia, 2014)

Notes: Data filtered by age (30-64), not currently studying. Survey weights applied. Error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. Post-matching logit regression and Tukey pairwise comparison results show education is positively associated with each of the above survey responses (A: χ^2=79, p<0.001; B: χ^2=102, p<0.001; C: χ^2=56, p<0.001).

Figure 2: Proportion of 30-64 year olds that reported high or very high levels of trust in most people (A), health care (B) and justice (C) systems, by educational attainment, 2014
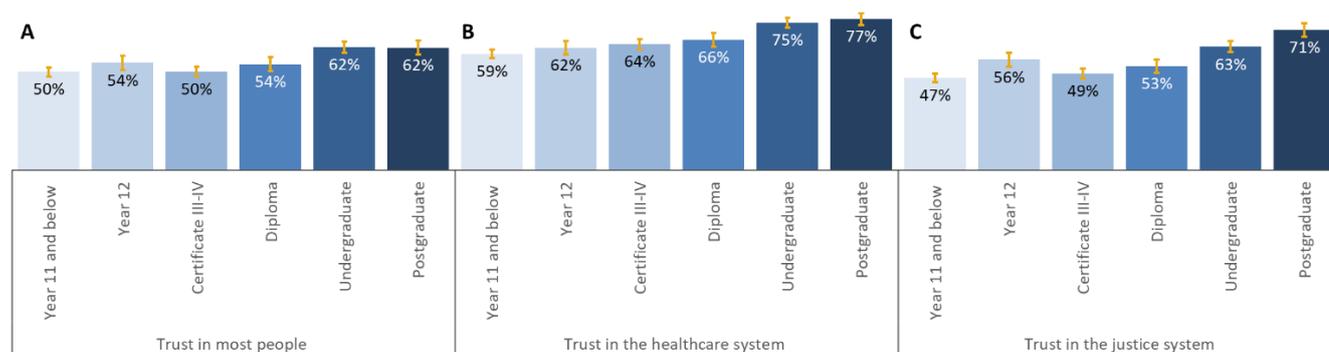
Source: General Social Survey 2014 (Cat. No. 1459.0, Microdata: General Social Survey, Australia, 2014)

Notes: Data filtered by age (30-64), not currently studying. Survey weights applied. Error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. Post-matching logit regression and Tukey pairwise comparison results show education is positively associated with each of the above survey responses (A: χ^2=63, p<0.001; B: χ^2=49, p<0.001; C: χ^2=62, p<0.001).

Data and metholodology

This paper uses data from the ABS General Social Survey, 2014 (Cat. No. 4159.0) where persons were aged 30 to 64 years (inclusive), resided in Australia and were not currently studying (*n*=6,769). Propensity score matching (PSM) using age, gender, labour force status, occupation, personal income, country of birth, family type with marital status, and number of dependent child was used to simulate a randomised control trial in the sample. The relationship between educational attainment and survey questions on civic engagement, tolerance, having a say in the community and trust were assessed by applying logit generalised linear models performed on the PSM sub-populations. This method provides the strongest possible evidence of cause and effect in cross-sectional data.

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[8] OECD (2015) *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en*
[9] 74 to 83 per cent; χ^2=29, *p*<0.001
[10] χ^2=188, *p*<0.001