



The Daily

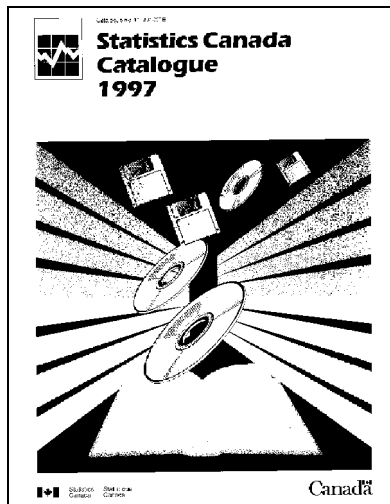
Statistics Canada

Monday, September 8, 1997

For release at 8:30 a.m.

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- **Literacy skills of Canadian youth, 1997** 3
Literacy levels of youth aged 16 to 25 are the highest among all age groups in Canada. There are, however, dramatic variations in average youth literacy scores across provinces.
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Statistics Canada catalogue 1997

The *Statistics Canada catalogue, 1997*, describes all official print publications available from the Agency as of March 31, 1997, and indicates those that are also available in another medium. The 1997 edition features a single title and subject index which lists all of the articles for five of Statistics Canada's flagship publications — from January 1994 to the end of March 1997. Also included is a list of all 1991 Census print products as well as the *1996 Census preview of products and services*, updated to July 1997, which provides an overview of the product line planned for release. The *1996 Census catalogue*, to be released in October 1997, will provide the detailed listing of all census products and services.

The *Statistics Canada catalogue, 1997*, also features: a listing of discontinued titles since the last edition of the catalogue, a section explaining the Statistics Canada numbering system, information on ordering publications, and listings of retail distributors and full depository libraries.

The *Statistics Canada catalogue, 1997* (11-204-XPE, \$16) is now available. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Tony Moren (613-951-0951; fax: 613-951-0939; Internet: moreton@statcan.ca), Statistics Canada Library and Information Centre.

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MAJOR RELEASES

Literacy skills of Canadian youth

1997

Literacy levels of youth aged 16 to 25 are the highest among all age groups in Canada, according to a study of data from the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). There are, however, dramatic variations in average youth literacy scores across provinces.

Socio-economic background is a key factor in inequalities in provincial literacy scores for youth aged 16 to 25. Youth from advantaged backgrounds performed well in all provinces. However, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds had wide variation in their literacy scores.

The study, *Literacy skills of Canadian youth*, examines literacy distributions and provincial variation in youth skills across Canada. The literacy skills of Canada's young people are particularly important to the nation's economic future, as they indicate the ability of the future work force to adapt and learn.

Youth literacy scores vary dramatically among provinces

While literacy levels of Canada's youth are the highest among all age groups in Canada, there are large differences in average literacy scores for youth by province — even after accounting for demographic, employment and educational characteristics.

Average youth literacy scores, that have not been adjusted to account for differences in socio-economic characteristics among provinces, can be clustered into three groups. Youth in Manitoba and Saskatchewan scored more than the equivalent of about one year of additional schooling above the national average. Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island scored about the equivalent of one year of schooling below the national average. The rest of the provinces scored around the national average (the IALS did not collect information for the territories).

Approximately 39% of the variation in youth literacy scores among provinces was attributable to differences in socio-economic background (such as educational attainment, occupational status and parental educational attainment). While important, years of schooling alone cannot account for all of this variation, which suggest that other, indirect factors, influence literacy performance. These indirect influences may range from a school's culture towards academic success to the extent of parental participation in school activities and in supporting learning activities at home.

The International Adult Literacy Survey framework and definitions

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), a seven-country initiative, was conducted in the fall of 1994 to create comparable literacy profiles across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The IALS provides data for three distinct literacy domains:

- *Prose literacy — the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts such as editorials, news stories, poems and fiction.*
- *Document literacy — the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphics.*
- *Quantitative literacy — the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a chequebook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.*

The IALS measured adult literacy skills through tests using materials drawn from life at home, in the community and at work. For instance, the tests used labels from medicine bottles, simple invoices and receipts, materials that provide directions to assemble things, transportation maps, articles from newspapers and magazines, and items requiring simple mathematical calculations. The IALS measured literacy abilities resulting from formal schooling, formal and informal training, and applications of reading practices and behaviours in daily life.

For further information on the international survey, see Literacy, economy and society (89-545-XPE) and for further information on the Canadian component, see Reading the future: A Portrait of literacy in Canada (89-551-XPE).

In the study, Literacy skills of Canadian youth, youths were examined by socio-economic status (a composite measure of the education level of the youth's parents and of the prestige of the occupation of the youth's father). "Disadvantaged" refers to those in the bottom 15% using this composite measure and "advantaged" youth refers to those in the top 15%.

Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds account for most provincial inequalities in literacy scores

Provinces also differ dramatically in the relationship between literacy skills and socio-economic status. After accounting for differences in socio-economic backgrounds, Quebec and the Prairie provinces show both higher average literacy scores and a more equitable distribution of scores by socio-economic status. Youth from advantaged backgrounds performed well in all provinces. However, among all provinces,

youth from disadvantaged backgrounds had wide variation in their literacy scores.

Previous studies from the IALS have documented that strong literacy skills are associated with employment stability, high incomes and access to "knowledge" jobs. Poor literacy skills are associated with higher rates of unemployment and large losses in lifetime earnings. Given the importance of literacy in the emerging knowledge economy, the presence of such inequalities in youth literacy scores may impose social and economic costs on individuals with poor skills.

Literacy skills of older Canadians significantly lower than among youth

The average literacy skills of adults older than 45 are markedly lower than those aged 16 to 45. Canadian women scored higher than men across all age groups on scales that measure their facility in understanding prose. Prose literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including news stories, movie reviews and fiction. Both sexes had similar abilities when using documents such as maps and schedules. Young men aged 16 to 25 and men older than 65 outscored their female counterparts on quantitative literacy tests. Quantitative literacy refers to the ability to use numbers in tasks such as filling out a bank slip, calculating a tip or completing an order form.

Some of the differences in literacy skill between these groups are, however, attributable to differences in respondents' socio-economic background, years of education, and whether their first language was English or French (languages of the tests).

As might be expected, adults whose first language is other than English or French scored substantially lower than individuals whose first language was one of the languages of the test. But the study suggests that the learning curve is long for acquiring English or French skills. Even after 30 years of speaking English or French, those who spoke another language at birth still had a difference in literacy skill representing the equivalent of about two years of formal schooling.

Literacy skills of Canadian youth is authored by J. Douglas Willms of The Atlantic Centre for Policy Research in Education at the University of New Brunswick, and is published jointly by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. This study is the first in the Monograph Series from the International Adult Literacy Survey. The series, funded by Human Resources Development Canada, features research by literacy scholars and experts in Canada and the United States. Future topics include adult training, literacy skill match and mismatch in the workplace, seniors' literacy skills and health, among many others.

For further information, contact Scott Murray (613-951-9476) or Jean Pignal (613-791-9509), Special Surveys Division. The IALS monograph *Literacy skills of Canadian youth* (89-552-MPE, no. 1, \$10) is now available. See *How to order publications*.

You can download the entire report *Literacy skills of Canadian youth*, including tables and charts, from the Statistics Canada website at www.statcan.ca under "downloadable products". ■

OTHER RELEASES

Railway carloadings

Seven-day period ending August 21, 1997

Carloadings of freight (excluding intermodal traffic) during the seven-day period ending August 21, 1997, increased 11.0% to 4.8 million tonnes from the same period of last year. The number of cars loaded increased 10.0%.

Intermodal traffic (piggyback) tonnage totalled 310 000 tonnes, a 6.5% decrease from the same period of last year. The year-to-date figures show an increase of 11.9%.

Total traffic (carloadings of freight and intermodal traffic) increased 9.8% during the period. This brought the year-to-date total to 165 million tonnes, up 7.0% from the previous year.

All year-to-date figures have been revised.

For further information on this release, contact Angus MacLean (613-951-2528; fax: 613-951-0579), Railway Transport Unit, Transportation Division. ■

Industrial chemicals and synthetic resins

July 1997

Chemical firms produced 197 264 tonnes of polyethylene synthetic resins in July, a 3.2% increase from 191 124 tonnes in July 1996.

For January to July 1997, production totalled 1 265 200 metric tonnes, down 0.6% from 1 273 269 metric tonnes a year earlier.

Data are also available on production of 3 other types of synthetic resins and 24 industrial chemicals.

Available on CANSIM: matrix 951.

The July 1997 issue of *Industrial chemicals and synthetic resins* (46-002-XPB, \$7/62) will be available shortly. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact David Roeske (613-951-3528; Internet: roesdav@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

Egg production

1996

An analysis of egg production based on the 1996 Census of Agriculture is now available upon special request.

For further information on this release, contact Conrad Ogrodnik (613-951-2860), Livestock and Animal Product Section, Agriculture Division. ■

PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

Statistics Canada catalogue, 1997
Catalogue number 11-204-XPE
(Canada: \$16; outside Canada: US\$16).

Literacy skills of Canadian youth, no. 1
Catalogue number 89-552-MPE
(Canada: \$10; outside Canada: US\$10).

Cement, July 1997
Catalogue number 44-001-XPB
(Canada: \$7/\$62; outside Canada: US\$7/US\$62).

All prices exclude sales tax.

Average prices of selected farm inputs, July 1997
Catalogue number 62-012-XPB
(Canada: \$11/\$50; outside Canada: US\$11/US\$50).

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