

Inequality in Post-Secondary Educational Attainment among Traditional and Non-Traditional High School Graduates

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This study analyses the impact that different high school credentials have on inequality of educational attainment. I compare the post-secondary degree attainment of students who graduate from high school through a “traditional” high school diploma with those who graduate by means of a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Using detailed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-2002, I found that the *type* of high school credential, as well as the *age* at which a student receives such a credential are important determinants of whether students complete any post-secondary degree. Compared to regular high school graduates, GED recipients are significantly less likely to attain a post-secondary degree – even after accounting for the disadvantages that GED recipients face in terms of socioeconomic background, cognitive skills, and non-cognitive skills. This research demonstrates that a framework that takes into account the type and timing of educational experiences within students’ careers offers a more complete understanding of inequality in educational attainment.