



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research  
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures  
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

## Research Summaries

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## Reference No. 13

Summarising: Arthur & David-Petero (2000),  
*Career aspirations and orientation to work: Young  
Torres Strait Islanders, 1999*

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

The MCEETYA report and associated research summaries are available at <[www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php)>.

**Title of Research:**

Career aspirations and orientation to work: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999

**Research Publication:**

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 206/2000

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000\\_DP206.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000_DP206.pdf)>

**Name of Researcher(s):**

W.S. Arthur and J. David-Petero

**Time period:**

1999

**Geographic location:**

Torres Strait islands

**Methodology:**

In 1999, 105 Indigenous people aged between 15 and 24 years and with equal numbers of males and females were surveyed about their career aspirations and generally using open-ended survey questions. The sample was also split equally between Thursday Island (representing the Inner Islands) and Badu Island (representing the Outer Islands). Overall the sample represented about 10 per cent of the Torres Strait islander population of 15-24 year olds. Due to the nature of the sampling, the study suggests some caution in the interpretation of results. However the survey is sufficiently robust to identify trends and insights into the career aspirations of Torres Strait islanders.

**Aims:**

The purpose of this research was to determine what views young Torres Strait Islanders hold about their careers and to assess their orientation or approach to work. Specifically the paper analyses:

- The work and career aspirations of young Torres Strait Islanders, both for the short- and the long-term;
- Reasons for choosing particular career goals; and
- The nature of work and preferred qualities of a good job.

**Selected findings and insights:**

Young Torres Strait islanders tended to set short-term goals rather than longer-term career goals and associated planning.

- About half the respondents (45%) desired to be in a better job in the next year, especially a **full-time job**. This desire for full-time employment was more pronounced among those from Badu Island on part-time CDEP. Only those who were in full-time employment indicated they wanted to be in the same job in the next year (11% of respondents);

- Almost half of people (44%) wanted to either be continuing or taking up new **study or training** in the following year, with males wanting to take up trade training and females some form of study;
- Beyond the following year, most respondents tended to have **less definite career goals** and generally viewed their future much more generally in terms of achieving career goals and enjoying work. They also tended to place increasing emphasis upon family and friends when asked about their long-term future.
- For males, **career destinations** were generally trade-oriented, especially motor mechanics and to a lesser extent carpenters, plumbers, butchers and coxswains. Landscaping was also an area of substantial interest. Females more often wanted administrative or clerically-based jobs or jobs in nursing or child-care. Teaching was a desired profession for both males and females. Interestingly, there was little interest in commercial fishing despite that industry being the dominant industry in the Torres Strait.
- **Subsistence activities** such as fishing, hunting or gardening did not displace the importance of employment for Torres Strait Islanders.
- **Choice of job** was largely influenced by a desire to do something that was enjoyable and of interest and/or gave the respondents experience to help them achieve a full-time job. When considering the future, more emphasis was placed upon family or community influences upon choice of job.
- The most **valued aspects of a job** related to job security, prospects of promotion and financial rewards, each ensuring an adequate standard of living. Also worth noting was the importance of working in an environment which was culturally compatible, whether it be with friends, an Indigenous organisation or with non-Islanders who were readily approachable and culturally sensitive.
- **CDEP** as a means of employment was valued more if it provided opportunities for full-time employment.

#### Educational implications:

The development of appropriate **career counselling services** is critical yet is extremely complex as it needs to address a variety of quite different training and employment scenarios. While the primary concern will be focused upon careers within the Torres Strait the reality is that many young people will seek employment on the mainland. The notion of careers within the local economy itself will need to address the balance in the competing demands placed upon young people of mainstream employment, family commitments and involvement in cultural and customary activities. It will also need to address the limited employment opportunities currently available through developing varied and flexible career paths for young people.

#### [career counselling]

Career counselling for those intending to seek employment on the **mainland** is difficult as it may promote further migration, yet it cannot be ignored. Accurate information about job and training opportunities, particularly in mainland Queensland, is vital if these young people are to be successful in entering that labour market, which in turn will be of benefit to family networks.

A second aspect of career counselling will be in regard to **cultural sensitivities** in the workplace so that Islander young people can adjust more readily to a variety of workplaces that are inclusive of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers and supervisors. At the same time, there would appear to be a need for a concerted effort by Community Councils to take a lead role in promoting cultural sensitivity among non-Indigenous employers of Islander people. These employers have the potential to play significant mentoring and training roles for Islander young people, although the transient nature of many of these employers is a limitation. **[cultural appropriateness] [mentoring]**

**Relevance:**

*Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education*

Student aspirations and key transition points

Culturally inclusive support strategies, culturally appropriate work readiness strategies, career counsellors and mentors

Influence of CDEP on young people

**Related papers:**

W.S. Arthur, 'Careers, aspirations and the meaning of work in remote Torres Strait', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 190*, 1999.

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/1999\\_DP190.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/1999_DP190.pdf)>

W.S. Arthur and J. David-Petero, 'Job-searching and careers: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 205*, 2000.

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000\\_DP205.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000_DP205.pdf)>

W.S. Arthur and J. David-Petero, 'Education, training and careers: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 207*, 2000.

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000\\_DP207.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000_DP207.pdf)>

W.S. Arthur and J. David-Petero, 'Careers and Aspirations: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999-2003', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 259*, 2004.

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2004\\_DP259.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2004_DP259.pdf)>