



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. 37

Summarising: Daly & Smith, (2003), *Reproducing exclusion or inclusion? Implications for the wellbeing of Indigenous Australian children*

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>.

Title of Research:

Reproducing exclusion or inclusion? Implications for the wellbeing of Indigenous Australian children.

Research Publication:

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 253/2003

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2003_DP253.pdf>

Name of Researcher(s):

A.E. Daly and D.E. Smith

Time period:

2001-2003

Geographic location:

National

Methodology:

A combination of statistical analysis of the 2001 Census and long-term ethnographic fieldwork and survey research in Indigenous families in different communities.

Aims

This paper focuses upon the socio-economic wellbeing of Indigenous children, within the families and households in which they live. Within this context:

- The paper examines the analytical usefulness and practical implications of the concepts of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' in a cross-cultural context.

Selected findings and insights:

While several CAEPR researchers have identified difficulties of applying Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions of 'family', 'household' and 'parent' to Indigenous families, nevertheless an analysis of 2001 Census information provides a good indication of the living arrangements of Indigenous children. These are generally regarded as indicators of social and economic exclusion and the extent to which Indigenous people (and children) are excluded from mainstream economy and its benefits. In 2001:

- 6.1% of Indigenous households were designated multi-family compared to 1.3% of non-Indigenous households;
- 63.5% of Indigenous households were in rented accommodation compared to 25.1% of non-Indigenous;
- 10% of Indigenous children were living in households containing more than one family compared to 2% of non-Indigenous children;
- 42% of Indigenous children were growing up with a single parent compared to 18% of non-Indigenous children;
- the per person median weekly income for Indigenous persons was 62% that of non-Indigenous persons, and this level of differentiation applied across all categories of locality;

- the proportion of Indigenous families with dependents and with no parents working was 45% compared to 20% of other families (this includes CDEP). The proportion of children in Indigenous families with no employed adult living with them was 42% compared to 16% in other Australian households; and
- whilst over half of non-Indigenous children were living with at least one parent who had completed year 12, the comparable figure was 23% for Indigenous children.

Case study surveys contained in related papers (see below) provide an even more graphic account of the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous living circumstances experienced by children.

The paper argues that whilst the above characteristics can be seen as indicators of Indigenous exclusion, some can also be seen as indicators of **Indigenous inclusion**. For example, the central importance of family and kin in everyday life is a valued form of social and cultural capital in many Indigenous families and communities – hence the importance of the extended family rather than the nuclear family, which provides:

- Child care arrangements and support in raising children;
- Economic support through demand sharing of resources;
- Greater opportunities for cultural transmission.

Even welfare reliance may be considered as enabling participation in ceremonial and other culturally based activities.

The paper concludes that **exclusion from the mainstream economy has significant consequences** for the social wellbeing of Indigenous children and their inclusion in their own culture. Communities are under such pressure from being excluded from the mainstream economy, with high levels of poverty, erratic cash flows and unrestrained demand sharing, poor health and low quality housing, that the social and cultural capital of communities themselves is under threat. That is, mainstream exclusion is leading to exclusion from their own Indigenous culture. Hence greater access to mainstream opportunities may in itself lead to greater opportunities for children to gain access to their own cultural values and practices, rather than the result being perceived simply in terms of an assimilatory endpoint.

Educational implications:

Whilst this paper has no direct implications for the delivery of education it does forewarn of the dangers of placing too much emphasis on the development and role of social capital within Indigenous communities to the detriment of ignoring the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for gaining employment and other aspects of interacting with mainstream Australian life. **[policy]**

Without such opportunities then Indigenous young people will become alienated from their own culture as well as being alienated from western schooling and associated pathways to training and employment. **[at risk students]**

Relevance:

Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships

Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education

Related papers:

B. Hunter, 'Taming the Social capita Hydra? Indigenous Poverty, Social Capital Theory and Measurement', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 261*, 2004.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2004_DP261.pdf>

Y. Musharbash, 'Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Yuendumu community case study, Stage Two', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 217*, 2001.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2001_DP217.pdf>

D.E. Smith (ed.), *Indigenous families and the Welfare System: Two Community Case Studies*, CAEPR Research Monograph No. 17, 2000.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/mono/CAEPR_Mono17.pdf>

R. Henry and A. Daly, 'Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Kuranda community case study, Stage Two', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 216*, 2001.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2001_DP216.pdf>