Reference No. 54

Summarising: Henry & Daly (2001), *Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Kuranda community case study, Stage 2*
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.

Title of Research:
Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Kuranda community case study, Stage 2

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
R. Henry and A.E. Daly

Time period:
1999–2000

Geographic location:
Kuranda (Qld), considered a 'settled' area, close to Cairns (Qld) and with a high level of tourism.

Methodology:
This longitudinal study was undertaken in two stages, the first in June-July 1999 and the second in November 2000, which is the subject of this paper. The study combines qualitative research techniques through interviews with staff of community organisations and regional agencies, participant observation and informal focus groups with more quantitative household surveys using structured interviews. The total number of structured interviews for the 2000 survey was 29, representing 28 households with a total of 179 members (105 adults and 74 children). Of these 108 members were the same individuals as in the 1999 survey. The study is also informed by more detailed anthropological research in Kuranda over several previous years.

Aims:
The overall aim of the study is to identify factors influencing the delivery of welfare income by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children. The paper deals with issues such as:

- the household and family organisational structures and composition;
- the key cultural parameters of child care;
- the patterns of mobility of children and their parents; and
- community aspirations and concerns for youth.

Selected findings and insights:
Of the 28 households studied, 15 contained three or more generations in 1999; this number had reduced slightly to 12 households in 2000. In one household with three generations, there were 20 individuals, 10 adults and 10 children, and all were of close kin.

- However the concept of 'family' was a more socially, culturally and politically based concept for Indigenous people in Kuranda than that of 'household'. This research showed that in the case of child-care, the extended family was the basis of care for children and that such extended families did not live together within the one household. Furthermore the family could be spread across a wide area – in this case Kuranda, Mareeba and Cairns.
• Usually ‘grandmothers’, but sometimes ‘grandfathers’, were significant in terms of assuming responsibility for the care of children and youth. About 40% of children under the age of 16 were living, with or without their biological mothers, in a household with a grandparent or someone of the grandparent’s generation. The paper suggests that this was typical of Indigenous families elsewhere in Australia. Furthermore, in 10 of the 28 households, there were children under 16 years without a biological mother in residence.

Mobility rates were high between the 1999 survey and the 2000 survey.
• 47% of the survey participants moved their place of residence between 1999 and 2000, either as individuals or as part of a family group. However they generally moved within the ‘family’ network and often a key reference person remained in the one household for a much longer time (on average 7.8 years for this study).

• Children tended to move as part of a family group with their primary carers to other households within the family network – if they moved by themselves they moved between households of specific kin. However the study identified a group of children who ‘did the rounds’ which may reflect marginal status and vulnerability.

Aspirations for the youth were not high.
• About 75% of respondents felt that over the intervening period since the 1999 survey, things had got worse for young people in Kuranda, especially in regard to lack of work or youth activities.

• The need for training in preparation for mainstream jobs was highlighted. Training provided under CDEP was seen as too limiting, with needs in driving skills and literacy and numeracy identified.

• A frustration noted was that although many Indigenous people had done training courses, and some had recognised qualifications for tertiary institutions, they still had lack of access to mainstream jobs and were reliant upon CDEP. Reasons given were lack of available jobs and racial discrimination.

Over half the key reference people indicated that they participated in voluntary work, caring for children, helping out at the local school or doing voluntary work for a community organisation.

Educational implications:
The concept of ‘family’ and the high degree of mobility have direct implications for many aspects of schooling. Firstly, the extent to which the notion of an extended family involving a significant number of potential parents/carers for a child leads to difficulties for schools in increasing levels of parental engagement as the concept of ‘parent’ is so diffuse. Developing school and community partnership agreements with individual carers on behalf of a student will not be straightforward. At a more practical level, and when there is such a high degree of mobility between households, contacting parents/carers regarding a particular student will again not be straightforward – for example in cases of unexplained student absences. [parent engagement]

The study suggests that there will be students who are particularly vulnerable and therefore may require counselling support. For schools this not only involves additional specialist resources (school counsellors) but also the allocation of staffing resources to work with other agencies such as family support services and the police in assisting such students. [support services]

The reduced aspirations of youth are especially of concern in a locality such as Kuranda which has a substantial tourist industry and is close to the major urban areas of Cairns. This suggests priorities being
directed to partnerships between secondary schools, training providers and employment agencies so that realistic pathways to mainstream jobs can be created. [pathways].

The finding about racial discrimination has been found in other CAEPR research and highlights the need for career counselling to assist Indigenous young people with strategies to deal with such situations where or when they arise. [career counselling]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life

Domain 2: School and Community Partnerships

School and community education partnership agreements

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

Student aspirations and key transition points

Related papers: