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Summarising: Hunter (2005), *The role of discrimination and the exclusion of Indigenous people from the labour market*
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:
The role of discrimination and the exclusion of Indigenous people from the labour market.

Research Publication:
Article in. Culture, Economy and Governance in Aboriginal Australia (eds. Diane Austin-Broos and Gaynor Macdonald 2005

Name of Researcher(s):
B.H. Hunter

Time period:
1981 - 2001

Geographic location:
Statistical analyses of census counts is presented at three geographic levels: Major Urban, Other Urban and Non-Urban.

Methodology:
This paper presents a statistical analysis of the five census counts between 1981 and 2001 and hence all data is derived from the ABS Census of Population and Household.

Aims:
The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which discrimination against Indigenous people operates in the labour market, especially in regard to employment.

Selected findings and insights:
The level of employment disadvantage (the difference in the percentage of working age Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons unemployed) for Indigenous males and females was significant. However for Indigenous males, employment disadvantage, while remaining significant, actually declined over the period 1981–2001 and this decline occurred in each of the three geographic categories (Major Urban, Other urban and Non-urban); for females the level of employment disadvantage remained fairly similar across the period.

After controlling for factors such as education and age upon employment disadvantage, the level of measured discrimination declined between 1981 and 1996, but nevertheless remained high.

• One of the main reasons for the declines appeared to be the collapse of the unskilled labour market, with uneducated non-Indigenous persons having reduced employment prospects as had been the case for Indigenous persons in the past. In turn this reduced the potential for employment disadvantage and discriminatory effects on employment.

Due to changes in the Census questions, a slightly different set of measurements were undertaken in regard to the 2001 Census. These analyses found that by focusing upon full-time employees and those employed in the private sector:

• for males in full-time work in metropolitan areas, potential discrimination explained about 60% of the employment differential between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons;
• for others, potential discrimination explained more than two-thirds the average employment differential between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons in 2001; and

• in the case of the private sector, discrimination averaged about 90% of the employment differential.

Overall, and taking account of the complexities and associated cautions involved in estimating the degree of discrimination in the labour market:

• there appeared to be considerable discrimination operating for both Indigenous males and females; and

• discrimination applied more to finding employment than in depressing the level of wages received.

Educational implications:

Caution needs to be placed on how best to interpret the above findings of potential discrimination operating in the labour market, a point that the researcher recognises. This is because the study is identifying what amounts to 'unexplained' factors operating when Indigenous adults after seeking work. For example, after controlling for the effects of educational attainment, the quality of the qualification of an Indigenous employee as perceived by the potential employer may be less than that of a non-Indigenous person, which might even be based upon prior experience. That is it may not be always due to direct 'racist' discrimination, but acting in more subtle ways. Other CAEPR research has identified such perceptions as unreliability in the work place being mentioned by employers as a reason of non-employment. Furthermore the school itself may be discriminating in subtle ways such that the confidence and naturally acquired job seeking skills normally acquired by students are not so readily acquired by Indigenous students [staff development].

Schools could develop curricula that address racism and assist Indigenous students to develop strategies for coping with racist behaviour either in the workplace, as well as promoting non-racist attitudes within the school environment. [curriculum]. Perhaps there is an avenue for local educational institutions to actively promote the quality of their Indigenous graduates directly with potential employers. [access to employment]

Other factors such as access to funds for establishing small businesses or in developing clientele are commonly raised. The sense of feeling 'comfortable' within the work environment is another issue identified by CAEPR research. However another piece of CAEPR research did not find racism to be a major reason identified in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey by jobseekers for not gaining employment, indicating more subtle processes operating.

Whilst it is possible to show statistically the impact of potential discrimination, an important area of research is to partial out the various components or factors that together are having a powerful effect on creating such high levels of employment disadvantage after controlling for the most likely factors such as education and socio-economic circumstances.

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education
- Culturally inclusive support strategies, culturally appropriate work readiness strategies, career counsellors and mentors

Related papers:

Boyd Hunter Indigenous Australians in the Contemporary Labour Market

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