Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures

Research Summaries
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Summarising: Hunter & Gray (2004), Patterns of Indigenous Job Search Activity
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:
Patterns of Indigenous Job Search Activity

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 263/2004

Name of Researcher(s):
B.H. Hunter and M.C. Gray

Time period:
1996-1997

Geographic location:
Analyses are presented at the national level only.

Methodology:
Survey data from the Indigenous Job Seeker Survey (IJSS) were analysed. The IJSS tracked the labour market experiences of Indigenous Australians over an 18 month period in 1996 and 1997. The sample consisted of some 2,500 Indigenous Australians who were registered with the former Commonwealth Employment Service (now replaced by the Job Network) in a range of urban, large rural centres and remote centres. Indigenous communities in remote localities were excluded. These jobseekers were interviewed between March and June 1996. Job search behaviour during the four weeks prior to the survey was collected. The survey data were combined with administrative data on labour market participation and case management.

Aims:
This study aims to provide a detailed account of the job search behaviour of Indigenous job seekers and, where possible, compares this behaviour with that of non-Indigenous Australians.

Selected findings and insights:
As this analysis is based upon 1996-1997 data, the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) was still operating and hence the CES provided a formal avenue for job seekers to receive employment information. Taking this into account:

- for Indigenous job seekers the most common job search behaviour was checking job advertisements in newspapers - 79.2% and 84.1% of the employed and unemployed job seekers, respectively, used this method of job search. Asking a friend or relative or checking the CES job boards was also very common.

- in contrast the most common job search behaviour for non-Indigenous job seekers was to contact employers directly, with at least 90% of employed and unemployed job seekers doing so. In comparison about 50% of Indigenous job seekers directly contacted employers. Non-Indigenous job seekers were far less likely to seek help from a friend or a relative when seeking employment.

- job seekers who had spent a greater proportion of their working lives employed were generally more intense in their job search activity, using more active job search methods, including more often directly contacting employers.
Regional differences in job search behaviour were evident. Indigenous job seekers living in regional centres and remote centres were much less likely to answer a job advertisement in the newspaper than those living in urban centres, and generally recorded much less job search behaviour. As the study points out, this may reflect differences in the demand for labour between the areas, a lack of access to facilities, administrative arrangements or greater relaxation of the need to job search in remote areas.

Among the younger job seekers, the major **difficulties in finding work** were associated with:

- lack of work experience and work skills;
- lack of education and training; and
- no jobs being available.

As well as transport and no jobs being available, older job seekers were three times more likely to include health difficulties as inhibitors for finding work.

- A significant proportion - 40% - of unemployed Indigenous job seekers indicated that they would **not be prepared to move** in order to take up employment, with another 20 per cent only giving qualified agreement. Younger unemployed Indigenous job seekers were more inclined to move than older job seekers (25+ years).

Indigenous job seekers were more likely to be searching for full-time jobs and about two-thirds indicated that that would prefer to work in an **Aboriginal organisation** which was consistent with an overall attitude among the large majority of Indigenous job seekers that they wanted work that would help Indigenous people.

**Educational implications:**

Whilst this study may appear more relevant to labour market assistance programs, it does have several important educational implications. Firstly, it provides guidance to career counsellors and those in educational institutions responsible for assisting Indigenous young people in effective job searching strategies. For example, the study stresses the need for guiding Indigenous youth about to enter the workforce on how to check and apply for job vacancies advertised in the newspapers or, as is now becoming common, over the internet. The reliance upon family and friends found in this study has also been found in several other CAEPR studies and is extremely limiting in the types of jobs likely to be sought – Indigenous social networks are more likely themselves to be characterised by either unemployed or employed Indigenous people in low level and vulnerable occupations. Apart from limiting exposure to the full range of possible employment opportunities, reliance upon such sources will more probably reduce job and career aspirations of Indigenous youth. [career counselling]

Secondly, the study raises the issue of the extent to which well-honed job search skills of themselves are an advantage without ensuring the job readiness of the Indigenous job seeker. Job readiness requires not only work-related skills but also the capacity of the person to work within a mainstream work environment. It is not surprising that Indigenous people may prefer to work back in their community or in an Indigenous organisation. But this option may not be possible. Hence the need to include ‘work readiness courses’ as an essential part of training courses so that mainstream work environments can be more ‘comfortable’ for Indigenous workers. At the same time, it is also important for educational and training institutions to work with employer groups in creative ways so that potential employers are able to assist Indigenous jobseekers fit more readily within their work environment, which may involve re-examining the cultural appropriateness
of particular work practices, an overall improved cross-cultural understanding of issues affecting Indigenous employment and the introduction of work mentoring practices. [job readiness] [culture]

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- Student aspirations and key transition points
- Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education

Related papers:

Boyd Hunter, Matthew Gray and Bruce Chapman An analysis of data from the longitudinal survey of ATSI job seekers, Topic 3: Labour market programs and Indigenous Australians

M.C. Gray and B.H. Hunter 'Indigenous Job Search Success' CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 27, 2005