Reference No. 67

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:
Further investigations into Indigenous labour supply: What discourages discouraged workers?

Research Publication:
CAEPR Working Paper No. 2/1999

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

Time period:
1994

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

Methodology:
This study is based on a statistical analysis of the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey and labour force surveys undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Aims:
This study aims to describe those factors that lead Indigenous people who want to work not actually looking for work and withdrawing from the workforce. The study also seeks to explore the extent to which social and cultural factors influence work force participation.

Selected findings and insights:
The study found that in the population of 15 years old and over:

- some 16% of unemployed Indigenous males and 29% of unemployed Indigenous females wanted to work but were discouraged from actively seeking work. These proportions were 3–4 times higher than for the non-Indigenous unemployed.

- A higher proportion of young males aged 15–24 years wanted to work but were not seeking work compared to males aged 25–44 years and those males aged 45–64 years. For females there was less difference across ages.

The major reasons given for wanting work but not actively seeking work varied between Indigenous males and females. Reasons given by males for not seeking work were that they were studying (40%). For females, about 50% identified childcare and family commitments as the major reason for not seeking work. For both males and females a lack of jobs was also a major reason.

Studying was the major reason given by 51% of youth (15–24 years) and in regard to students:

- Indigenous secondary students were two and half times as likely to be discouraged workers (33.9%) as compared to Indigenous people not studying (11.6%); and

- Indigenous post-secondary students were about twice as likely to be discouraged workers (23%) as compared to Indigenous persons not studying.
The study also provides an indication of the relative importance of potential influences on mainstream employment, as well as for other labour force states. Using males who were not studying as an example:

- higher levels of educational attainment and living in a capital city increased the likelihood of mainstream employment. Other positive influences were
- family factors such as being married and living in a mixed family
- undertaking voluntary work, and
- household characteristics of others in the household being employed and having attained Year 10 education;
- being in the younger age-group (15-24 years), living in remote areas, poor health, being involved in traditional cultural hunter-gatherer activities, having been previously arrested, being in a family with a large number of children and where others were unemployed or having been arrested all decreased the likelihood of mainstream employment.

Whilst there were some differences for females who were not studying, the overall pattern was quite similar, with differences mainly related to childbearing.

Educational implications:

The significant number of Indigenous secondary school students who would prefer to work and who are however discouraged from seeking it affects their participation in secondary schooling in several ways. Firstly, they are more likely to become alienated from the educational process and value less the purposes of education - unless they can be convinced that in fact it does provide a window of employment opportunity. This presents both career counselling and relevance of curriculum challenges for the school.

The related finding that Indigenous secondary students are much less likely to be in some form of part-time employment and hence gaining some work experience and earning some income compared to non-Indigenous students will exacerbate their sense of alienation. Without part-time employment they may become more dependent on illegitimate sources of income, possibly leading to interaction with the justice system. School-employment links and transition activities seem to be therefore much more necessary for a greater proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous secondary age students.

Relevance:

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

The challenge for pathways to training, employment and higher education

Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling

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