Reference No. 91

Summarising: Musharbash (2001), *Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Yuendumu community case study, Stage Two*
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 Yuendumu community case study, Stage Two

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 217/2001

Name of Researcher(s):
Y. Musharbash

Time period:
1999 - 2000

Geographic location:
Yuendumu, a remote community north west of Alice Springs (NT).

Methodology:
This longitudinal study was undertaken in two stages, the first in 1999 and the second in August-September 2000, which is the subject of this paper. The study combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques through formal structured interviews with key reference persons, discussions with household members, and interviews with people in key positions in Yuendumu.

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

- quality of housing and related issues;
- sources of income for the community;
- patterns of mobility of children and their parents; and
- household and family organisational structures and composition.

Selected findings and insights:
This paper presents an ethnographic and statistical analysis of intra-community mobility available from the consecutive surveys in 1999 and 2000.

- **overcrowding** was slightly reduced (from 10.8 to 9.8 persons per dwelling and from 4.5 to 3.7 persons per bedroom) over the period, however the actual quality of housing deteriorated – with maintenance being cited as an ongoing issue.

Whilst this study does not quantify examples of the extreme over-crowding that occurred in some households for comparative purposes, the 1999 study identified one household where:

- an average of 21.9 persons, comprising 13.7 adults and 6.8 children, stayed each night across a fortnight in the single 'household'; and

- overall 27 different adults and 15 different children slept at the house over the fortnight.
Employment opportunities were extremely limited in the community, with 11% of adults being in mainstream paid employment and 11% in CDEP work in 2000. The remaining adults were in receipt of welfare payments. Living expenses were high with almost all income expended on food and clothes.

Mobility within the community was a regular feature over the survey period, due in part to the construction of 16 new houses, into which 8 of the 27 key reference persons interviewed in both studies moved. Generally these moves resulted in quite complex changes in household composition. Five moved due to changed circumstances, nine were considered ‘continually moving’ and five were in the same residence over the 1999-2000 period.

- High mobility of young people was also noted, but they generally stayed with their mother or primary carer. Some 53% of respondents said that their children always stay with them and 43% indicated that there were other places children sometimes stay, where they are looked after by close relatives. About 50% of children were living in the same household in 1999 and 2000.

The paper argues that high mobility was not only a response to lack of adequate housing but also a necessary way of maintaining social networks. For children mobility was an avenue for being socialised into those networks. A consequence was that government policy development needed to be culturally informed and may be limited in its implementation by such culturally embedded practices.

Educational implications:

The paper’s detailed account of the composition of Indigenous families and households, family mobility, the nature of extended families, parenting responsibilities and shared child care arrangements has direct implications for the effective introduction of educational partnerships between the school and community and the delivery of educational services. These include:

- Determining who might be the most appropriate person to be a ‘signatory’ on an agreement regarding the education of a student will not be straightforward as several people may be responsible for and assist in the development of the student;
- Responsibility of parents or care-givers for monitoring student behaviour such as school attendance and assisting with learning will be made all that more difficult by the high mobility of young people between households; and
- Increased understanding among school staff about the home life of Indigenous students and the impact this may have upon learning.

[culture] [education partnership agreements]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life

Domain 2: School and community educational partnerships

- Complexity and diversity of communities

Related papers:
