Reference No. 98

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 people in the Alice Springs Town Camps: The 2001 Census data.

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
W.G. Sanders

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
Alice Springs (NT)

Methodology:
An analysis of publicly available data drawn from the Indigenous Community Profile Series of statistics for the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The 2001 Census grouped the 19 town camps into 11 census collection districts, which could then be analysed separately from and in contrast to the rest of Alice Springs.

Aims:
The paper compares the socio-economic status of Indigenous people living in the Alice Springs town camps with that of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs and with Indigenous people living in the surrounding non-urban region, referred to as Apatula.

Selected findings and insights:
In 2001 there were 973 people in the Alice Springs town camps, compared to 3,279 Indigenous people elsewhere in Alice Springs. An additional 8,094 Indigenous people lived in the surrounding Apatula region. Overall:

- town campers were only about 8 per cent of the total Indigenous population of Alice Springs and the surrounding Apatula region.

In the town camps, 26% of Indigenous people were under 15 years of age, a significantly smaller proportion than in the Apatula region or elsewhere in Alice Springs, where about 35% of Indigenous people were under 15 years of age. This difference in age profile between the town camps and the outlying Indigenous communities probably reflected the fact that:

- town camps were highly connected to these outlying communities and children often stayed in those communities while parents and associated adults, for a variety of reasons, moved quite frequently and in circular fashion between the communities and Alice Springs.

The large majority of Indigenous persons in both the town camps and the outlying communities spoke an Indigenous language at home – 85% and 90% respectively. By contrast, only 14 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs reported speaking an Indigenous language at home.
Levels of schooling completed by town campers were also more similar to those completed by Indigenous people in the outlying communities than to those of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, or to those of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs. In the population aged over 15 years:

- 60% of town campers and 76% of Indigenous people in outlying communities had either never attended school or had only attended to Year 8 or below, compared to 20% of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs and 6.3% of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs.

Among those aged 5 to 14 years, about 75% of town campers and those living in surrounding communities in the Apatula region reported attending school. This compared to 89% of Indigenous 5 to 14 year olds and 96% of non-Indigenous 5 to 14 year olds attending school.

Indigenous people in the town camps and outlying communities were even less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed or not in the labor force than Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs:

- only 12 per cent of Indigenous town camp residents aged over 15 were employed and only 21 per cent of those in outlying communities, and in both instances predominantly within CDEP;
- by contrast, 40 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs were in employment, of whom only 3 per cent were in CDEP.

Conversely 87% of town camp residents and 75% of outlying community residents over the age of 15 were either not in the labour force or unemployed, compared to 45% of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs and 24% of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs. Not counting CDEP as ‘employment’ then:

- 97% of town campers and 89% of those living in the surrounding communities were not employed in the mainstream labour market.

Regarding household living conditions, in 36% of town camp households multiple families were living and in the surrounding Apatula region the proportion was even higher at 47%. Only 4% of Indigenous households in the rest of Alice Springs reported having multiple families residing in them.

The paper concludes that:

- Alice Springs town campers are shown in this paper to have quite different socio-economic characteristics from Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, and even more so from non-Indigenous residents of Alice Springs. On the other hand town camp residents have quite similar socio-economic characteristics to Indigenous people in outlying communities in the region surrounding Alice Springs.

Educational implications:

This paper has direct implications for schools and educational institutions with significant numbers of Indigenous school-age young people living in town camps within their catchment area. These schools are required to meet the educational (and social) needs of three quite distinct student populations: Indigenous town/urban students, Indigenous town camp students and non-Indigenous town/urban students. The different socio-economic backgrounds of town camp students suggests the need for the allocation of greater teaching resources and the development of targeted educational programs to address expected educational deficiencies. Low school attendance rates of town camp students may absorb considerable liaison resources (e.g. through Indigenous Education Workers or other school staff) if attendance is to improve. This may be further complicated by different ‘family’ groupings within and between town camps and by high mobility
between town camps and more remote communities, creating liaison difficulties for particular IEWs. Principals may need to develop particular strategies to encourage children living in town camps to attend schooling and be able to adapt educational programs to meet their diversity of socioeconomic, linguistic and familial backgrounds. [resources] [teaching] [programs]

Relevance:

*Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia*

*Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life*

*Domain 5: Pathways to Training, Employment and Higher Education*

The challenge for Pathways to training, employment and higher education