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Summarising: Taylor & Bell (2003), Options for benchmarking ABS population estimates for Indigenous communities in Queensland
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:
Options for benchmarking ABS population estimates for Indigenous communities in Queensland.

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No 243/2003

Name of Researcher(s):
J. Taylor and M. Bell

Time period:
1991 - 2001

Geographic location:
15 remote communities of Queensland, including the Torres Strait Islands

Methodology:
Analyses ABS census data, constructs Estimated Resident Population (ERP) counts and develops alternative composite population counts derived from government administrative data.

Aims
This paper examines the ABS methodology for estimating these populations, and benchmarks these against demographic information available from a range of administrative data. Potential deficiencies in ABS methodology are highlighted and a case is made for the use of administrative data in developing estimates for small populations.

Selected findings and insights:
Earlier CAEPR work on census enumeration had highlighted the possibility that the enumeration strategy adopted by the ABS for use in remote Indigenous communities was structured in such a way as to increase the likelihood of omitting young people, the more mobile and the more socially marginal.

- Estimated Resident Populations of each remote community, derived from Census data, are used for the purposes of local government financial distributions, in the calculation of population weightings by the Commonwealth Grants Commission and for planning and policy purposes.

Given concerns about the accuracy of population counts in these remote communities, developing more accurate population estimates is an important Indigenous community council and government issue so that equitable service and program delivery can be achieved.

A high degree of change in population counts over the last three censuses
Whilst the overall change in population counts did not vary greatly between 1991-1996 and between 1996-2001 censuses for the 15 remote communities in Queensland and the Torres Strait, there were large changes in population counts at the community level, and often in opposite directions. For example,

- Aurukun population changed -1.3% between 1991-1996 and +29.9% between 1996-2001; and
Underestimating remote community populations

The paper suggests that undercount rates in remote communities could be much higher than in the more settled areas covered by the ABS Post Enumeration Survey. That survey estimated an 8% undercount, yet other CAEPR research suggests that it may be as high as 17%. Furthermore residents in remote communities visiting urban areas may indicate the urban locality as their place of usual residence, thus leading to an undercount.

Alternative population estimates

The paper derived an alternative set of population estimates for each community based upon administrative data that included Queensland Hospital Admitted Patients Collection, school enrolment data, health clinic registers, Centrelink data and Medicare data. These data were available for 14 of the 15 remote communities:

- Compared to a total ERP of 23,281 this alternative population estimate totaled 27,381 - an increase of 17.6%.

Note: in comparison with the Census of Housing and Infrastructure Survey (CHINS), this composite population estimate fell halfway between the ERP and the CHINS estimate, but that latter estimate is more likely to reflect a service population rather than usual residents.

The paper concludes that:

- the benchmarking of community ERPs against previous population counts and estimates, and against usual residence data from administrative sources, points to the possibility that ERPs are too low in many communities.
- The composite estimates also suggest that their age profiles might be somewhat biased towards older ages and that younger children and youth may be under-represented in ERP counts.

The paper however warns about replacing the ERP estimates with the alternative composite estimates in that both have their limitations and calls for possible integration of both methodologies to develop sound estimates of remote community populations.

Educational implications:

For educational authorities the potential underestimation of numbers of school-age children in the communities or projected in the future has significant planning implications for provision of schooling for those communities. [planning]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia