

ABS releases on methods for developing Indigenous life tables and life expectancy estimates, and Census Data Enhancement Indigenous Mortality Quality Study

Two ABS publications were released today, 17 November 2008. Each publication can be accessed via the following links to the ABS website.

Discussion Paper: Assessment of Methods for Developing Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 (cat. no. 3302.0.55.002)

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3302.0.55.002?OpenDocument>

Information Paper: Census Data Enhancement - Indigenous Mortality Quality Study, 2006-07 (cat. no. 4723.0)

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4723.0?OpenDocument>

The Discussion Paper presents an assessment of various methods for adjusting incomplete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) death registration data for use with the latest available estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population so as to compile Indigenous life tables and life expectancy estimates. The paper describes the methods considered and the results of the analysis. Most importantly the paper presents the resulting life expectancy estimates for 2006 under the various methods.

The key findings of the Discussion Paper are:

- a. the indirect methods previously used by ABS are no longer considered appropriate in the Australian context;
- b. the ABS CDE Indigenous Mortality Quality Study (see the Information Paper for details) presents the best option for adjusting undercoverage of Indigenous deaths in death registration data;
- c. using these adjusted deaths data enables compilation of Indigenous life tables using the direct method, preliminary estimates using this method result in Indigenous life expectancies of 66.9 years for males and 72.6 years for females;
- d. the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy at the Australia level using this method is 11.8 years for males and 10.0 years for females, however, the difference between NT Indigenous and Australia level non-Indigenous is 17.2 years for males and 13.4 years for females;
- e. it is not possible to compile comparable data for 2001, however, the paper suggests that the previous estimates may have understated life expectancy;
- f. it is not possible to compare the estimates over time.

It is important to recognise that the first release is a Discussion Paper. It is a complex issue and ABS is seeking feedback on the findings presented in the paper. The numbers presented from the ABS preferred approach are preliminary in nature, i.e. they may change before ABS finalises the estimates in early 2009.

Based on the CDE findings it is now clear that the coverage of Indigenous deaths in the death registration data is higher than previously estimated. Having said that, there is a high level of off-setting reporting i.e. persons identified as Indigenous in either the Census or death registration but non-Indigenous in the other collection. So there is still plenty of work to do on improvement and quality assurance of Indigenous death registrations.

Estimates of life expectancy are only published for Australia, three states (Qld, WA and NSW) and the NT. This is due to there being insufficient deaths by age group and sex so as to compile reliable Indigenous life tables for SA, Vic., Tas. and the ACT. Further, for the first time, the actual difference in Indigenous and National level non-Indigenous life expectancy has been published by the ABS. Previous estimates of the "gap" in life expectancy have been derived from published estimates for the Indigenous and Total Australian population.

Should you have any questions on the Indigenous life expectancy methods, life tables and methods, please contact Patrick Corr on telephone 02 6252 6411, mobile 0419 513 569 or email patrick.corr@abs.gov.au. For questions on the CDE Indigenous Mortality Quality Study Information paper, please contact Kirrilie Horswill on (02) 6252 7222 or email kirrilie.horswill@abs.gov.au

Patrick Corr
Director, Demography
Australian Bureau of Statistics