

Closing the Gap on Indigenous Birth Registrations: Quantifying Indigenous Exclusion

What?

Under international and Australian law birth registration is a fundamental human right. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are unable to obtain a birth certificate because their birth was never registered, or they cannot satisfy the Births, Deaths and Marriages' (BDM) identification requirements. The result is a significant gap between the birth registration rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

This project aims to quantify the number of births never registered from 2000 to 2009 in Victoria, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia. It will also analyse the length of time between a birth and registration of the birth for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal birth registrations.

This project is part of the larger project 'Closing the Gap on Indigenous Birth Registrations' which will investigate the nature and extent of problems faced by Aboriginal Australians trying to obtain a birth certificate. The project will identify possible barriers to completing birth registration and, following extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities and other key stakeholders, recommend appropriate solutions.

How?

The project design involves an analysis of linked birth registrations and birth notifications data in each of the four jurisdictions from 2000 to 2009. The data to be used will include de-identified statutory and administrative information and be sourced from the Midwives Notifications and Births, Deaths and Marriages in each state/territory under consideration.

Population wide data will be used and the results of the analysis will demonstrate the extent of under-registration of Aboriginal births in the four jurisdictions.

Why?

Lack of birth registration and the absence of a birth certificate have negative consequences for the individuals. A birth certificate is the gateway to the full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship. In particular, a birth certificate is a prerequisite to obtaining a passport, getting a driver's license, attaining a tax file number and is also frequently required in order to access social security and open a bank account. Without a birth certificate, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to fully participate in society.

The under registration of Aboriginal births also has negative consequences for governments. Accurate Aboriginal population demographic data is essential for the development and implementation of government policies relating to matters such as housing, health-care and education.

Community involvement

Indigenous NGO partner organisations of the larger 'Closing the Gap on Indigenous Birth Registrations' project have been involved in the development and will continue to be involved in the conduct of the project. They will receive regular oral and written reports on progress, together with copies of research reports and other research output. Relevant communities and professionals writing in this area will be consulted throughout the project, particularly with regards to the interpretation of the findings of the quantitative information.



Start and completion dates

January 2012 to December 2014

Benefits to community

This study will provide state/territory and federal governments with accurate counts of registered and unregistered births in each jurisdiction. This will allow a valuable comparison of rates of birth registration for the Aboriginal population with the non-Aboriginal population within and across jurisdictions.

This project will provide the quantitative data to support strategies and policies aimed at improving birth registration among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The information gathered will determine whether there is a lack of universal registration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births in Australia. It will empower the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and its representative bodies with accurate and complete information about the registrations in each of the jurisdictions.

It will also contribute to the larger project which will provide the justification for developing policies for easier access to birth certificates that support required identification information for a number of critical life events such as school enrolment, drivers licence, passport and membership of sporting teams – that is complete an application form, pay a prescribed fee, and produce three separate documents proving identity. Such information has not been available and this project will provide the necessary empirical evidence to enable the above.

Funders

Australian Research Council (ARC)

Researchers

Associate Professor Jane Freemantle
Ms Tessa Cutler

Partners

Monash University - Dr Paula Gerber, Ms Melissa Castan and Mr Rod Hagen.

So far

- Ethics applications have been submitted for the Western Australia and Northern Territory aspects of the project. Negotiations have also been undertaken and a framework developed in these jurisdictions for the linkage process and transfer of the data. In Queensland and Victoria ethics applications are being prepared and negotiations are underway. Face-to-face meetings have been held in Western Australia and Victoria while regular phone and email communications

Contact

Associate Professor Jane Freemantle,

E: tlcutler@unimelb.edu.au

T: 61 3 9035 8708

