
Social Justice Report 2005

HEALTH FACT SHEET TWO:

The socio-economic status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



Education

In 2002, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were less than half as likely as a non-Indigenous people to have completed a post-secondary qualification of certificate level 3 or above (that is post-graduate degree, graduate diploma or certificate, bachelor degree, advanced diploma, diploma and certificate levels 3 and 4).¹ Nationally in 2004, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were half as likely to continue to year 12 as non-Indigenous students.²

Income

In Census 2001, the average gross household income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was \$364 per/week, or 62% of the rate for non-Indigenous peoples (\$585 per/ week).³ Income levels generally decline with increased geographic remoteness: from 70% of the corresponding income for non-Indigenous persons in major cities to 60% in remote areas, and just 40% in very remote areas.⁴

Employment

At the 2001 Census, 52% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15 years and over reported that they were participating in the labour force. Labour force participation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people declines with remoteness, with a 57% participation rate in major cities compared with 46% in very remote areas.⁵

At the 2001 Census, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 20%; three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.⁶ About one in six of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were classified as employed were engaged in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).⁷

Health risk factors

In 2002, just under one-half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 15 years or over smoked on a daily basis⁸. One in six reported consuming alcohol at risky or high risk levels and just over one-half had not participated in sport or physical recreation activities.⁹

Personal stressors

In 2002, 82.3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported experiencing at least one stressor¹⁰ in the last 12 months. Higher rates of fair or poor health and health risk behaviour were reported among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who had been exposed to these stressors.¹¹ One of the possible stressors survey participants could identify was racism.¹²

¹ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2005*, Productivity Commission, Melbourne, 2005, p3.26.

² *ibid.*, p3.19.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population characteristics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2001*, ABS cat. no. 4713.0, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p81.

⁴ *ibid.*, p82.

⁵ *ibid.*, p65.

⁶ *ibid.*, p66.

⁷ *ibid.*, p67.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *op.cit.*, p135.

⁹ *ibid.*, pp135-137.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, op.cit.*, p39, Table 12.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *op.cit.*, p141.

¹² A life stressor is defined as a serious illness; accident or disability; the death of a family member or close friend; mental illness; divorce or separation; inability to obtain work; involuntary loss of a job; alcohol or drug-related problems; witnessing violence; being the victim of abuse or violent crime; trouble with the police; gambling problems; incarceration of self or a family member; overcrowding; pressure to fulfil cultural responsibilities; and discrimination or racism, *ibid.*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, op.cit.*, p79.
