



CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL
ECONOMIC POLICY RESEARCH

RESEARCH SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ANU COLLEGE OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Measures of Indigenous
wellbeing and their
determinants across
the lifecourse

2011 LECTURE SERIES

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Series overview

<<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/population/lectures2011.php>>

Overview of the Lecture Series

ABS:

Australian Bureau
of Statistics

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines wellbeing as a 'state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life'. While a person's socioeconomic status (income, employment and education) is likely to be a component of their wellbeing, a person's interaction with the natural, man-made and social environment as well as their physical, mental and emotional health are also vital components.

Because of unique cultural and historical factors, Indigenous notions of wellbeing can be somewhat different to those of the rest of the Australian population. Language and cultural maintenance in the face of pressures from the dominant culture are important aspects of wellbeing for many Indigenous Australians. Kinship obligations and attachment to country also tend to be much stronger. Ultimately, an Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian with given levels of material standard of living and socioeconomic status may report quite different levels of wellbeing.

NATSISS:

National Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander Social
Survey

In 2010, the ABS released information from the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). Information was collected from 13,300 Indigenous Australians across a range of topics including personal and household characteristics; geography; language and cultural activities; social networks and support; health and disability; education; employment; financial stress; income; transport; personal safety; and housing. When combined with information from previous versions of the survey, censuses, other large scale surveys and qualitative/ethnographic research, a rich picture of the distribution and determinants of Indigenous wellbeing is emerging.

Beginning in October 2010, Commonwealth and State governments funded CAEPR to undertake a detailed analysis of the NATSISS. The aim of this lecture series is to summarise the evidence on Indigenous wellbeing produced for this with a particular focus being an examination of the variation in measures of wellbeing across the lifecourse.

There will be fourteen lectures in the series broken into four parts:

Part A: Introduction and overview;

Part B: Individual measures of wellbeing;

Part C: Household and community measures of wellbeing; and

Part D: Summary and conclusions.

Each lecture will last for 50 minutes and be accompanied by a short written paper of 6,000 to 8,000 words that summarises the available literature, presents new empirical findings and provides key references for further reading. These papers will be freely available online, along with video and audio from each of the lectures.

The audience for the lecture series is students and policy makers working or researching on Indigenous issues. Other academics with an interest in Indigenous wellbeing may also find the lectures useful. While structured in a similar way, this is not a university course per se and hence there is no assessment component.

Structure of the Lecture Series and proposed dates

PART A: Introduction and overview

Lecture 1	03/02/11	Definitions of wellbeing
Lecture 2	03/02/11	Measuring and analysing wellbeing

PART B: Individual measures of wellbeing—Healthy people

Lecture 3	17/02/11	Physical and mental health
Lecture 4	10/03/11	Skills and learning
Lecture 5	10/03/11	Income, work and Indigenous livelihoods
Lecture 6	31/03/11	Crime and feelings of safety
Lecture 7	31/03/11	Gender and Indigenous wellbeing { <i>Guest Lecturer—Mandy Yap</i> }

PART C: Household and community measures of wellbeing—Healthy community

Lecture 8	21/04/11	Housing and households
Lecture 9	21/04/11	Community infrastructure
Lecture 10	05/05/11	Sustainability—Land, language and culture
Lecture 11	05/05/11	Indigenous social capital
Lecture 12	19/05/11	Measures of wellbeing for Indigenous children

PART D: Summary and conclusions

Lecture 13	09/06/11	Data gaps and data needs
Lecture 14	09/06/11	Indigenous wellbeing and government policy

Abstracts for individual lectures

PART A Introduction and overview

LECTURE 1 Definitions of wellbeing

The ABS defines wellbeing as a ‘state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life’. This is an attractive concept on which to base policy as it recognises the importance in people’s lives of domains beyond standard income, poverty or socioeconomic status. However, unlike these more narrow concepts, wellbeing is somewhat more difficult to define precisely enough to measure either at the individual, family/ household, community or national level. This lecture outlines some of the definitions of wellbeing and their applicability to Indigenous policy in Australia. Discussion will focus on wellbeing versus misery (anti-wellbeing); Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous notions; single versus composite measures; subjective versus objective measures; and emotional wellbeing versus life evaluation.

LECTURE 2 Measuring and analysing wellbeing

Having discussed definitions of wellbeing in the previous lecture, in this lecture we turn to how it can be measured and analysed. The lecture will begin with innovative approaches from the national and international literature and then turn to how research on wellbeing has been incorporated into public policy design and evaluation. The discussion will then focus on sources of data on Indigenous wellbeing in Australia and internationally with the final part of the lecture considering the various measures of wellbeing that can be drawn from this data. A key feature of this lecture will be a discussion of newly available data sources.

PART B Individual measures of wellbeing—Healthy people

LECTURE 3 Physical and mental health

The headline target of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG's) Closing the Gap agenda is the elimination of the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy in Australia. While this in and of itself is a worthwhile (if difficult to achieve) aim, life expectancy or even Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALY) represents just one aspect of physical and mental health. Instead, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as 'not only the absence of infirmity and disease but also a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing'. This lecture begins with a discussion of Indigenous notions of health. We will then turn our attention to the literature on the social determinants of health and conclude with new research based on the 2008 NATSISS.

COAG:

Council of Australian
Governments

QALY:

quality-adjusted
life years

WHO:

World Health
Organisation

LECTURE 4 Skills and learning

Education is both a measure of wellbeing and a determinant of many of the other important aspects. Those with higher levels of education tend to have better health, higher incomes and stronger social relationships. However, many people obtain intrinsic value from studying and learning. While formal studies at school, university or other tertiary institutions is an important aspect of education, opportunities for informal learning can also have a positive impact on subjective and objective measures of wellbeing. Recognising the dual role of education, this lecture is separated into two parts—the economic and social benefits (or returns) to education for the Indigenous population and the determinants of education participation. A particular focus of this lecture will be on the development of skills and learning across the Indigenous lifecourse.

LECTURE 5 Income, work and Indigenous livelihoods

At a national level, a focus on gross domestic product (GDP) has been rightly criticised as being too narrow an approach for designing policy. What is true at the national level is also true for individuals and families with regards to income. Having said that, most careful studies show a positive (though non-linear) relationship between income and most measures of wellbeing. Furthermore, stable, well-paid employment remains one of the key protective factors against poverty and social exclusion. The first part of this lecture will consider the relationship between employment, income and wellbeing at the individual and household level. While the generally positive relationship between employment and wellbeing is true on average, many Indigenous Australians obtain significant resources from other livelihood

GDP:

gross domestic
product

CDEP:

Community
Development
Employment Projects

activities. These activities and their relationship with wellbeing will be the focus of the second part of the lecture. Given the changes and forthcoming demise of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, a particular focus of this lecture will be on the differences in various measures of wellbeing between those involved in the CDEP scheme and those in other employment and the likely associated effect of the removal of the scheme on Indigenous wellbeing nationally and by geography. A further aspect of this lecture will be the way in which income and other resources are shared within households and within communities.

LECTURE 6 Crime and feelings of safety

Crime can have substantial and long lasting effects on the perpetrator, their family, victims and the broader community. Those who have been arrested or incarcerated have been shown to have worse employment outcomes, lower levels of education and lower levels of wellbeing in general. The first part of this lecture will discuss different theories used to explain participation in criminal activities, followed by an analysis of the factors associated with arrest and incarceration. The second part of the lecture will discuss the effect being a victim of crime can have on a range of measures of wellbeing and also some of the factors that explain it. The final part of the lecture will turn to a more broad measure of safety and consider the relationship between feeling safe at home, feeling safe in one's community and wellbeing.

LECTURE 7 Gender and Indigenous wellbeing

Guest Lecturer—Mandy Yap

International literature clearly demonstrates the potential for gender-based inequalities to

constrain development processes. Not only does an unequal distribution of resources negatively impact on those with relatively low socioeconomic outcomes, but it can also adversely affect child growth and development. Empirical analysis in Australia has shown a complex picture with regards to gender based inequality with Indigenous females tending to have higher levels of education participation and attainment but Indigenous males having greater access to economic resources. However, this analysis has been restricted to data lacking in robust measures of subjective and objective wellbeing. In the first part of this lecture, we review the literature on gender based inequality both in an international context and also as it relates to Indigenous Australians. Based on this literature, the second part of the lecture considers different ways in which Indigenous males and females rate the various measures of wellbeing in terms of importance. In the final part of the lecture new results looking at variation by gender in different aspects of wellbeing will be presented and discussed.

PART C Household and community measures of wellbeing—Healthy community

LECTURE 8 Housing and households

One of the most disruptive influences on a person being able to lead the lives that they desire is a lack of access to adequate shelter and housing. Dwellings that are overcrowded are likely to contribute to poor health and also make it difficult for children living there to undertake education. However, the ability of individuals to take control of their own housing situation is determined by their current tenure situation. Once again housing circumstance is both an aspect of wellbeing and a determinant of many other measures and in the first two parts of the lecture we will consider both. While an ‘Indigenous house’ is reasonably easy to define (that is, a dwelling that contains at least one Indigenous usual resident), an ‘Indigenous household’ is more difficult. In the third part of the lecture, we will discuss the ways by which Indigenous household and family formation differ from that of the non-Indigenous population. In the final part of the lecture we will use this discussion to inform a critical discussion of Indigenous household wellbeing measures.

LECTURE 9 Community infrastructure

The areas in which Indigenous Australians live are quite different to those of the non-Indigenous population. A much higher proportion of the population live in remote and regional Australia where infrastructure and the availability of services can be quite variable. However, even in urban areas, Indigenous Australians tend to live in suburbs and neighbourhoods that are relatively disadvantaged. In this lecture, we will discuss the relationship between community infrastructure (broadly defined) and wellbeing. The lecture will begin with an overview of the types of infrastructure available in the areas in which Indigenous Australians live and then move on to the facilities and services that Indigenous Australians themselves identify as being lacking. In the final part of the lecture, we will turn to the relationship between this infrastructure (or lack thereof) and measures of wellbeing at the individual or household level.

LECTURE 10 Sustainability—Land, language and culture

One of the consistent findings on the literature related to Indigenous wellbeing is the importance of sustainability—sustainability of Indigenous land, sustainability of Indigenous language and sustainability of Indigenous culture. All three of these areas of sustainability are related with the maintenance of one helping to protect the others. Furthermore, other aspects of wellbeing are intimately related to Indigenous sustainability. For example, in an interesting finding from the most recent NATSISS, Indigenous Australians with high levels of formal education are more likely to speak, understand or be learning an Indigenous language. This lecture deals explicitly with sustainability and the important relationship it has with wellbeing. We look at the sustainability of Indigenous land, language and culture separately and then turn to the empirical evidence for the relationship they have with each other and other aspects of wellbeing.

LECTURE 11 Indigenous social capital

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OECD:

Organisation
of Economic
Cooperation and
Development
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The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines social capital as ‘networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups’. The concept of social capital was developed in the US and, like the concept of wellbeing, its applicability to Indigenous Australians is a matter of ongoing debate. For example, an analysis of the standard measures of social capital may show that Indigenous Australians have lower levels than non-Indigenous Australians. However, the obvious question is whether the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are real or whether social capital means different things for the different populations and hence should be measured in different ways? In this lecture, we consider the applicability of the concept of social capital for Indigenous Australians and how it could (and should) be measured. We will also consider the relationship between social capital and wellbeing in an Indigenous context.

LECTURE 12 Measures of wellbeing for Indigenous children

As with adults, there are a range of measures of child wellbeing available on the NATSISS. Some of these are particularly relevant to Indigenous children—for example, language and cultural participation. Other measures on the NATSISS are of relevance to all children—for example, education participation, health and housing conditions. Rather than choosing a single measure of wellbeing, the analysis presented in this lecture focuses on measures of child wellbeing across a number of domains. The lecture will begin with a discussion of the difficulties involved with measuring and analysing measures of wellbeing for Indigenous children. We will then present analysis on a number of new variables from the NATSISS, making comparisons where appropriate between outcomes for Indigenous adults and Indigenous children. In the final part of the lecture, we will discuss the inter-generational transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage and the relationship to Indigenous wellbeing.

PART D Summary and conclusions

LECTURE 13 Data gaps and data needs

In the final two lectures of the series we attempt to draw some useful policy lessons from the preceding analysis and discussion. We begin the penultimate lecture in the series with a consideration of the data gaps that currently preclude a proper, robust understanding of the distribution and determinants of Indigenous wellbeing. We then consider possible future data sources that may fill some of these gaps including qualitative, cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental.

LECTURE 14 Indigenous wellbeing and government policy

In the final lecture of the series we will focus on the policy implications of the analysis presented in previous lectures. We will use the empirical results to motivate a discussion of why previous policies in Indigenous affairs may not have been as successful as intended and also consider the implications for future policy development. Given the current focus of COAG on Closing the Gap, we will pay particular attention to the relationship between Indigenous wellbeing and the setting and achievement of socioeconomic targets at the national and State or Territory level.

