

Paper delivered at the 10th Biennial Conference of the
Australian Population Association
POPULATION AND GLOBALISATION:
AUSTRALIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Melbourne 28th November to 1st December 2000
Melbourne Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mortality: Major issues in calculating life tables

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Abstract

The standard approach to calculating death rates is based on applying the number of deaths in a give period to the 'exposed risk' population during that period. Without accurate and consistent data in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) births and deaths and the size and structure of the Indigenous population, the standard method for calculating Indigenous death rates cannot be used.

A demographic technique outlined by Preston and Hill has been used to estimate the completeness of Indigenous death registration in the 991-96 intercensal period. The estimate was then applied across all age groups to obtain an adjusted number of Indigenous deaths which occurred during 1995-97. These estimated death numbers were then used in the construction of experimental Indigenous life tables.

The paper draws on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Demography Working Paper 2000/2 – *Draft Experimental Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Abridged Life Tables, Australia and States/Territories, 1995-97*, available on the ABS website. It discusses:

- the major data quality issues relating to Indigenous population;
- how the completeness of Indigenous death registration is estimated;
- how the estimate is used to obtain adjusted number of Indigenous deaths; and
- how the life table is constructed.

The Preston-Hill method used to estimate the completeness of Indigenous death registration based on a number of assumptions. Results from a sensitivity analysis are discussed in the paper to examine the effects of some of these assumptions on life expectancy estimates.