

9. Childhood outcomes

There is a growing body of research around the concept of intergenerational disadvantage. There is strong evidence suggesting that the environment in which a child grows up influences the experience of poverty, inclusiveness and wellbeing of the child (Hérault and Kalb 2009). Statistics paint a picture of Indigenous children experiencing poorer outcomes compared to non-Indigenous children across a range of indicators such as birth weight, rates of hospitalisation, preschool participation, and reading and numeracy results (AIHW 2008). Daly and Smith (2003) looked at the wellbeing of Indigenous children using a social exclusion framework, and outlined a set of indicators as correlating strongly with outcomes of children including household income, absence of a parent, parental employment and education status, health status, and welfare reliance. These factors provide a measure of access to opportunities and investment in early childhood.

The analysis in this chapter begins with single parents themselves and how the probability of being a single parent varies across the lifecourse. The focus and the unit of analysis then turns to children and we examine whether the experience of an Indigenous child in terms of family and household characteristics differs to that of a non-Indigenous child. We look at three dependent variables: whether the child lives in a single-parent family; whether the child lives in a household without anyone employed; and whether the child lives in a household where no-one has completed Year 12. The final section of analysis looks at the interaction and intersection of these three dependent variables.

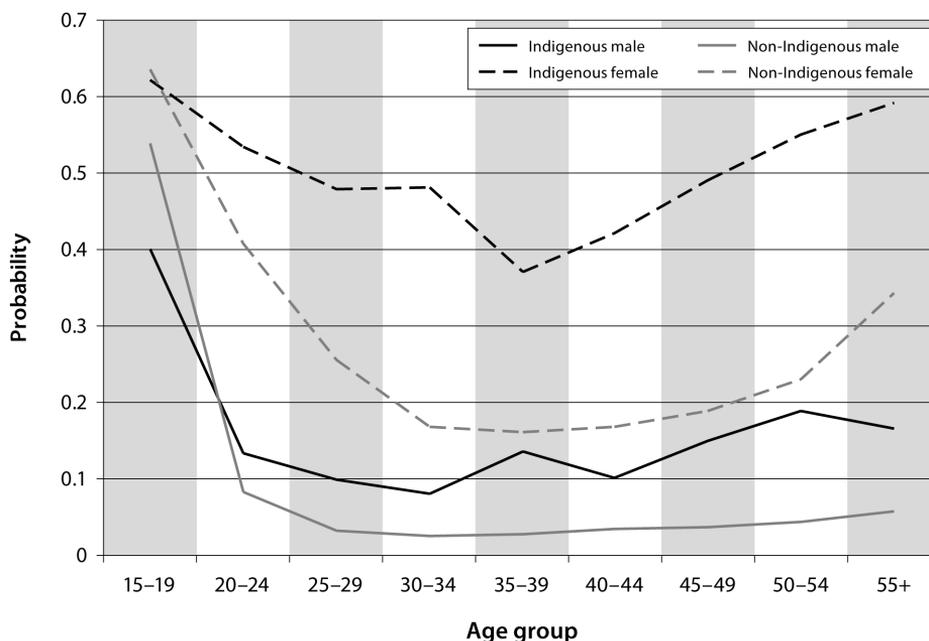
In the absence of measures of wellbeing for children in the Australian census, the range of indicators available for analysis is limited. The approach here is to consider the possible predictors of child outcomes. Understanding the types of households and the characteristics of household members in which Indigenous children live, provides an indication of the type of disadvantage that accumulates from the early stages of childhood and may carry throughout their lifecourse.

Single parenthood

Single parents are amongst the most marginalised in the community. Single parents are more likely to have lower education levels and lower labour force participations rates than the rest of the population (Daly and Smith 1998) and more likely to have lower disposable household income and be receiving

government payments as their principal source of income. Single-parent households are less likely to have immediate support socially and financially (Pech and McCoull 1998) but this is not necessarily the case for Indigenous single parents who are able to draw on resources from extended kin and networks (Daly and Smith 2003). The probability of being a single parent as opposed to a parent in a registered or de facto marriage is plotted in Fig. 9.1.

Fig. 9.1 Probability of being a single parent, 2006



Source: Customised calculations using the 2006 5% CSF, ABS Census of Population and Housing

For both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, females are more likely to be single parents compared to males. While the probability of single parenthood for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous females start off quite similar, by the age of 30, an Indigenous female is approximately four times more likely to be a single parent compared to their non-Indigenous counterpart. Young non-Indigenous males have higher probability of being a single parent compared to Indigenous males, but that trend quickly changes as they transition to youth and adulthood with the Indigenous males more likely to be single parents.

An interesting pattern observed here is that the probability of being a single parent for Indigenous females remains quite high over the lifecourse. For young Indigenous females, this is likely to be because of the low rates of marriage discussed earlier and, perhaps, the large proportion of young Indigenous males

who are incarcerated (ABS 2009). For older Indigenous females, this is largely due to the lower life expectancy of Indigenous males which results in widowed women being called upon to look after children of female relatives (Henry and Daly 2001).

Modelling single parenthood across the lifecycle

In Table 9.1 we look at the factors associated with being a lone parent. Model 1 once again includes demographic variables only with Model 2 and 3 including information on geography, education and English proficiency. The results in Model 1 suggest that after controlling for differences across the lifecycle Indigenous Australians are more likely to be single parents. Females also have a higher propensity to be single parents compared to males. An estimated marginal effect of 0.147 relative to the predicted probability of the base case of 0.025 suggests that the differences are quite large. After controlling for demographic, geographic and socioeconomic characteristics, Model 2 shows that Indigenous Australians are still more likely to be a single parent. However, the magnitude of that difference is less than the magnitude of the difference under Model 1. In general, the marginal effects for the Indigenous sample (Model 3) were in the same direction as the marginal effects for the total sample (Model 2). If anything though, the sizes of the marginal effects were slightly larger, in particular for the education variables.

Table 9.1 Factors associated with the probability of being a single parent, 2006

Explanatory variables ^a	Total population		Indigenous population
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Indigenous	0.073	0.025	
Female	0.147	0.089	0.294
Aged 15–19	0.448	0.271	0.273
Aged 20–24	0.049	0.019	n.s.
Aged 25–29	0.006	n.s.	n.s.
Aged 35–39	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Aged 40–44	0.010	0.004	n.s.
Aged 45–49	0.013	0.006	0.040
Aged 50–54	0.019	0.009	0.073
Aged 55+	0.033	0.013	n.s.
Aged 15–19, female	–0.021	–0.009	–0.031
Aged 20–24, female	0.011	0.005	n.s.
Aged 25–29, female	0.013	0.007	n.s.
Aged 35–39, female	–0.004	–0.002	–0.024
Aged 40–44, female	–0.008	–0.003	n.s.
Aged 45–49, female	–0.006	–0.002	–0.020*
Aged 50–54, female	n.s.	n.s.	–0.023*
Aged 55+, female	0.010	0.003	n.s.
Victoria		n.s.	–0.013
Queensland		0.001	n.s.
South Australia		0.001	n.s.
Western Australia		–0.001	n.s.
Tasmania		0.002	–0.020
Northern Territory		–0.002	–0.018
Australian Capital Territory		n.s.	n.s.
Major city		0.001	0.010
Completed Year 9 or less		0.020	0.037
Completed Year 10 or 11		0.007	0.017
Does not have any qualifications		0.010	0.021*
Has a Diploma or Certificate only		0.008	0.034
Speaks another language and English well		–0.003	–0.014
Speaks another language and English not well or not at all		–0.003	n.s.
Probability of the base case ^b	0.025	0.010	0.034
Pseudo R-Squared	0.1106	0.1317	0.1385
Number of observations	180 688	164 513	3 525

^a n.s. = Those variables that were not significant at the 10% level of significance.

* = Those variables that were significant at the 10% level of significance but not the 5% level

^b The base case for the total population is non-Indigenous. For all estimates, the base case is male and aged 30–34 years and in addition, for Model 2 and for the Indigenous estimates, the base case lives in New South Wales, outside a major city, has completed Year 12, has a university degree, and speaks English only.

Source: Customised calculations using the 2006 5% CSF, ABS Census of Population and Housing

Family and household characteristics of Indigenous children

Modelling family and household characteristics across the lifecourse

We now return to the child as the focus of our analysis. In particular, we present results from three very simple models with various family and household characteristics as the dependent variables and a limited set of explanatory variables, restricted to age, gender and geography. The first dependent variable is the probability of a child living in a single-parent family. According to the 2006 Census, 45 per cent of Indigenous children aged 15 and under live in a single-parent family, compared to 17 per cent of non-Indigenous children aged 15 and under who live in a single-parent family.

Household employment provides the resources and means for investing in child development. Employment income makes up a large proportion of a household's resources. The extent of joblessness in a household could be considered another proxy for household resources and risk of disadvantage and financial hardship. The second dependent variable in Table 9.2 is therefore the probability of a child living in a household where no-one is employed. According to the 2006 Census, 41 per cent of Indigenous children live in jobless households compared to 13 per cent of non-Indigenous children. The extent and period of joblessness is not known, because the census provides only a snapshot picture of the circumstances. Care should therefore be taken while interpreting the results in Table 9.2.

Education is a critical element of building human capital and social capital. Education provides the pathway to employment. The educational attainment of the parent, in particular that of the mother, has a significant influence on the early development and health outcomes of the child (United Nations Children's Fund 2006). The final dependent variable is therefore the probability of a child

living in a household where no-one has completed Year 12. Indigenous children are more likely to be in living in households where parents have low education levels (65%), compared to non-Indigenous children (32%).

Table 9.2 Factors associated with the probability of being in a single-parent household, a jobless household and a low educational attainment household, population aged 0–14 years, 2006

Explanatory variables ^a	Single-parent household	Jobless household	Low educational attainment household
Female	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Indigenous	0.284	0.281	0.272
Aged 0–4	-0.078	0.013	-0.139
Aged 5–9	-0.038	0.009	-0.067
Aged 0–4, female	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Aged 5–9, female	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Victoria	n.s.	-0.013	-0.038
Queensland	0.016	-0.015	-0.025
South Australia	0.019	n.s.	n.s.
Western Australia	-0.016	-0.015	n.s.
Tasmania	0.023	0.014	0.084
Northern Territory	-0.047	-0.057	-0.061
Australian Capital Territory	-0.025	-0.073	-0.190
Major city	-0.008	-0.019	-0.126
Probability of the base case ^b	0.208	0.156	0.473
Pseudo R-Squared	0.024	0.025	0.038
Number of observations	158 234	161 466	161 466

^a n.s. = Those variables that were not significant at the 10% level of significance.

* = Those variables that were significant at the 10% level of significance but not the 5% level

^b The base case for the total population is non-Indigenous. For all estimates, the base case is male and aged 10–14 years, lives in New South Wales and outside a major city.

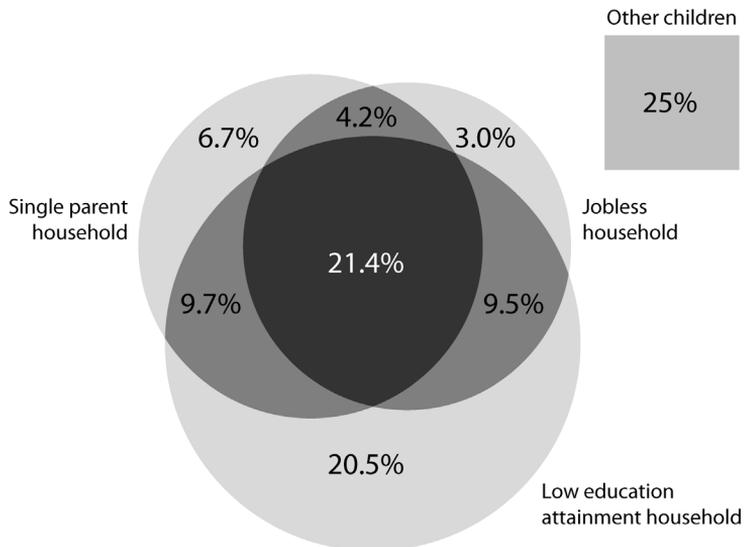
Source: Customised calculations using the 2006 5% CSE, ABS Census of Population and Housing

In Table 9.2, the results are presented at the child level and for children aged 0–14. In essence, the table looks at children living in single-parent households, jobless households and households where the adults have low educational attainment. Overall, younger children are more likely to be in jobless households, whereas the older children are more likely to be in single-parent households and low educational attainment households. Indigenous children are more likely to occupy all three states (single-parent family, jobless family and low educational attainment family) when compared to non-Indigenous children.

The interaction and intersection of family and household characteristics

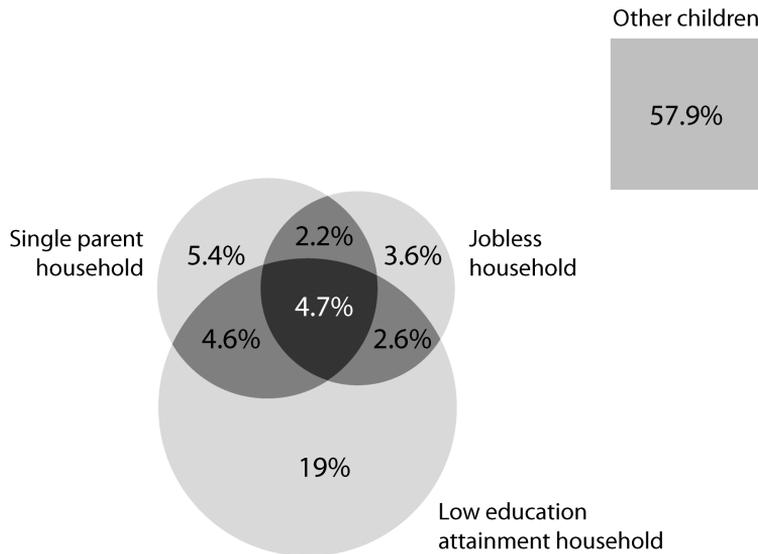
While the previous sections considered the role of sole parenthood, unemployment and education separately, the combination of the various characteristics may also have lifelong impacts on the child. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 illustrate the overlapping characteristics for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children respectively. The zone which represents an overlap of all three characteristics (being in a sole-parent family, with low education attainment and jobless) is the critical point in the diagrams. From the figures, it is evident that the majority of Indigenous children experience more than one form of disadvantage. While about 5 per cent of non-Indigenous children live in single-parent families with low education attainment and unemployed, the proportion of Indigenous children in these circumstances is four times that of the non-Indigenous children. More than half of non-Indigenous children do not exhibit any of the three characteristics, but only a quarter of Indigenous children do not have any of the characteristics.

Fig. 9.2 Percentage of Indigenous child population aged 0–14 years by three characteristics of their family or household, 2006



Source: Customised calculations using the 2006 5% CSE, ABS Census of Population and Housing

Fig. 9.3 Percentage of non-Indigenous child population aged 0–14 years by three characteristics of their family or household, 2006



Source: Customised calculations using the 2006 5% CSF, ABS Census of Population and Housing

Childhood outcomes across the Indigenous lifecourse

This chapter has attempted to look at some aspects of child outcomes using the available information from the census. While the census provides very limited information at the child level, the characteristics examined here provides a little insight into the types of households in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous children live.

Indigenous women in general and young Indigenous females in particular, have the highest probability of being single parents. While they often have lower educational levels, lower labour force participation, and therefore lower household incomes, they are often living in communities where they can draw upon resources and care from kin and networks. This makes the experience of single parenthood quite different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. The analysis has not looked into whether the single parent lives with their parents (that is, the child's grandparents), extended family or with other non-

relations. Policies or programs targeted at single parents may need to consider the overall social and economic situation of the single parent, and this may include the extended family and community for Indigenous families.

Indigenous children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to live in single-parent households, jobless households, and households where the adults have low educational attainment. Unfortunately, despite these measures being quite relevant for policy formulation, the factors available on the census are not well suited to explaining the variation in them. The experience of multiple disadvantage has implications for the child and the parent. Although this chapter does not attempt to address the associations between the three dimensions and how this might impact on the child's wellbeing, what is shown is the extent to which children, and in particular Indigenous children, experience all three dimensions.

The multidimensional aspect of disadvantage has implications for policy. If a single parent also has low educational attainment, and is looking to enter the workforce, policies aimed at re-skilling or job readiness might have to go hand-in-hand with the provision of child support. On the other hand, policies aimed at single parents with a job might be geared towards supportive work-life practices.