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Ethnic Mobility

Is it Important for Research and Policy Analysis?

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Introduction

Public policy discussions involving ethnicity often assume that people remain in fixed ethnic categories over their lifecycles. While New Zealand research carried out a decade ago had already identified ethnic mobility in the census in relation to Māori, the dramatic and somewhat unexpected increase in 'New Zealander'-type responses in the 2006 census provided a very high profile example of people changing their responses to

ethnicity questions. Research into the growth of New Zealander-type responses in the census has focused primarily on whether these are valid responses, how they should be recorded and reported on, and how these decisions might affect the overall usefulness of ethnicity data. One question in this research has been where these responses came from: that is, what these people recorded in the previous census. Asking this question explicitly recognises that people may not always record the same response in similar surveys over time, or even across a range of surveys at any one point in time. People may be ethnically mobile, or at least appear to be mobile.

Internationally, there is much research interest in ethnic mobility. The literature suggests that there are three possible sources of change in responses about ethnic affiliation: unreliability in measurement; changes due to alterations in ethnicity questions; and conscious changes in ethnic affiliation (Carter et al., 2009). Conscious changes in ethnicity can be over a lifetime, or there could

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be intergenerational mobility. When more than one ethnic group can be recorded in surveys, as is the case in New Zealand, conscious changes may involve an alteration of ethnic identification (switching from one ethnicity to another), or the addition of an ethnic group to (complexification) or deletion of a group from (simplification) a previous set of identifications. Hence ethnicity at any point in time is a complex social process that needs more understanding.

Switching groups can be the result of changing incentives, both positive and

negative. Reflecting a range of positive incentives, the growth of American Irish in the United States was far faster than natural population growth would predict (Hout and Goldstein, 1994), as has the growth of Native Americans (Light and Lee, 1997; Eschbach, 1993). In relation to the Irish, Waters (2000) observes that in the 19th century Irish in the US were seen as a separate race from other Europeans. At this time, the stereotype of the Irish population was of the group having high rates of crime, a lack of education and negative family values. Waters suggests that if population predictions had been made in the early 20th century, the anticipated growth in the Irish population would have been very low. Yet such predictions would not have taken into account the rise in education and income amongst Irish, as well as a growth in the popularity of Irish culture helped by dance and music groups such as *Riverdance* gaining international prominence.

In Canada, Guimond (2006) has explored ethnic mobility in relation to the growth of Aboriginal populations. Between 1986 and 1996 the census count of the population with Aboriginal origin went from 711,000 to 1,102,000, with a large part of this growth occurring between 1986 and 1991. Guimond noted that this fast growth could not be explained by natural and migratory increases alone. He also noted that the exceptional growth of populations of Aboriginal origin seen nationally occurred off Indian reserves and was particularly strong in urban areas. Guimond speculates as to why the growth occurred, and points to a number of important legislative and social changes which improved the profile and status of Aboriginal peoples. He goes on to note that understanding the source of ethnic mobility is important. There was a very strong rise in the number of post-secondary-educated graduates of Aboriginal origin, and he shows that this increase is in part explained by the 'arrival', as a result of ethnic mobility, of more educated individuals, rather than by greater school success among individuals already identified as Aboriginal people in 1986. As another example, Simpson and Akinwale (2007) show that in Trinidad the count of young adult Africans grew

rapidly after the successes of the Black Power movement in the 1960s.

Other forms of ethnic mobility can make understanding social change difficult. An example is the effect of intergenerational ethnic mobility on social mobility. In the US, Duncan and Trejo (2005) studied the progress of Mexican Americans. Controlling for other factors, they found that, on average, US-born Mexican Americans who married non-ethnic Mexicans were substantially more educated and proficient in English language than Mexican Americans who married other Mexicans. More importantly, the children of intermarried Mexican Americans were much less likely to be identified as Mexican than were the children of marriages where both partners were Mexican. The researchers concluded that such selective ethnic mobility might bias observed measures of intergenerational progress for Mexican Americans.

Three areas of research show that there is some degree of ethnic mobility in New Zealand. These are the recent census mobility project undertaken by Statistics New Zealand to better understand the growth in the 'New Zealander'-type responses; a University of Otago, Wellington study of three waves of the longitudinal Survey of Family, Income and Employment (SoFIE); and a number of Ministry of Education studies of transitions from school to tertiary education. In this paper we begin by briefly outlining the findings from these three areas of research. On the basis of these findings, as well as the broad international literature, we argue that the mobility taking place in New Zealand is important for both researchers and policy makers. Given this importance, we conclude by considering some emerging ideas for handling ethnic mobility when undertaking policy analysis.

The census and the 'New Zealander' response

Statistics New Zealand has monitored inter-ethnic mobility between censuses over the past three decades. Understanding patterns and trends in inter-ethnic mobility has contributed to the development of the models used to produce demographic

estimates and projections of the size and composition of ethnic populations, as well as aiding understanding of the dynamics of ethnic identity. Inter-ethnic mobility monitoring has been based on research studies which have linked questionnaires of individuals between successive censuses in order to compare and analyse the consistency of individual responses to the ethnicity questions. The most recent study, comparing the 2001 and 2006 censuses, also investigated the impact of the increased New Zealander response at the 2006 census on inter-ethnic mobility (Brown and Gray, 2009).

Over the past three decades, gross inter-ethnic mobility between the major ethnic categories has grown from around 4% in 1976–81 to 9% in 1991–96. Then, in 2001–06 it increased markedly to 20%. The growth trend is associated with an increase in the reporting of multiple ethnic identities over this period, which have increased from around 5% to 10%. However, the elevated result for 2001–06 reflects also the increased level of New Zealander responses at the 2006 census. The 2001–06 study showed that 92% of the growth of New Zealander responses at the 2006 census can be attributed to people who at the 2001 census reported themselves as ‘New Zealand European’ and not in any other ethnic group. This confirmed what was the major driver of the apparent increase of the New Zealander population at the 2006 census and the associated apparent decrease of the New Zealand European population.

The 2001–06 study also showed that the increased New Zealander response in the 2006 census also exerted an influence on the Māori, Pacific Island Peoples and Asian groups, with net inter-ethnic mobility rates for these groups ranging between –1.0% and –2.0%. That is to say, there were net losses from these groups to the New Zealander group. In contrast, these groups showed net gains from the New Zealand European group, ranging between +0.5% and +4.2%. The New Zealand European influence on these groups was consistent with the previous 1991–96 study (Coope and Piesse, 2000).

While the impact of the 2006 New Zealander response on Māori, Pacific Island Peoples and Asian was relatively

small, it was nevertheless significant enough to feature in the government statistician’s decision not to change the format of the ethnicity question for the 2011 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p.iii). It should also be noted that the net flows result from considerably larger gross flows, as illustrated in the summary of the four studies reported above.

The strong growth of a ‘New Zealander’-type response created challenges for Statistics New Zealand, as well as for researchers, as to how to present historic census time series as well as how to undertake population projections. In terms of the latter challenge, a decision was made to provide an option to combine European and New Zealander responses in a new category called ‘European or Other’ (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p.3).

SoFIE and ethnic mobility

In 2009, researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington undertook exploratory research aimed at identifying changes in self-identified ethnicity of individuals over three years of a longitudinal survey, and how this varied by certain demographic factors. The researchers used data from 2002 to 2005 from the longitudinal Survey of Family, Income and Employment run by Statistics New Zealand (N = 17,625) (Carter et al., 2009). Self-defined ethnicity was recorded (independently) every year and participants could record multiple ethnicities. Ethnicity was coded to level 1: NZ European/ Pākehā, Māori, Pacific, Asian and Other. Combinations of ethnicity variables were also created from the perspective of each of the level 1 groups. Thus, from the Pacific perspective a respondent could be sole Pacific, Pacific plus at least one other group, or non-Pacific (any other ethnic group(s) excluding Pacific). A change in ethnicity was defined as any change in the reported ethnic group(s) of an individual over the first three waves of SoFIE (i.e. from wave 1 to 2; from wave 2 to 3).

Overall, 8% of respondents changed ethnicity at least once during the three waves of the survey. In logistic regression analyses the strongest predictor of changing self-identified ethnicity was reporting Māori, Pacific and Asian ethnicity at wave 1, as well as identifying with more than one

ethnic group. In multivariable regression analyses it was found that individuals who changed ethnicity were also more likely to be younger, to be born overseas, to live in a family with children, to be in more deprived groups and to have poorer self-rated health.

This exploratory analysis showed some fluidity around the concept of self-identified ethnicity.

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Ministry of Education’s school-to-tertiary transitions data

There is much interest in the outcomes of students after they leave school. This ‘transition period’ is of interest both to government policy makers and to tertiary institutions which might enrol these students in their courses. The Ministry of Education has combined several sources of data to compile a ‘transitions’ data set to study and analyse the outcomes of students before and after this transition period. These sources of data include school achievement data from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), and tertiary enrolment data for students undertaking formal study, industry training and various targeted training schemes, sourced from the ministry’s own data or from the Tertiary

Education Commission. In each of these sources of data, information is recorded about a student's ethnicity.

In the school achievement data and in formal tertiary enrolments, up to three ethnic responses are recorded. The data sources are linked using a unique student identification number, referred to as the National Student Number (NSN). Using the NSN, the transitions data set provides student-level information about a student's ethnicity at school and in their tertiary

More investigation of ethnic mobility may be carried out with more waves of SoFIE data, as well as from future data collection and results from the Growing Up in New Zealand study and qualitative research asking people about their ethnic identification.

studies. Research reported on in 2008 indicated that students' ethnicity recorded in tertiary education can differ from that recorded at school (Baldwin, 2008). In some exploratory research, Baldwin found that 15% of students changed their ethnicity overall, but this figure was 18% for students who were identified as Māori in school but who identified as Māori/European in the tertiary data. While Baldwin did not speculate on why this was, it was widely assumed that these changes constituted some kind of error in the data or collection process. As this paper makes clear, however, it is just as likely that these changes in ethnic identification represent

real changes in people, all the more so considering the time of transition from school to tertiary education.

Other data sources

Any longitudinal study has the potential to record ethnicity at more than one point in time. The long-running Christchurch Health and Development Study has enquired about respondents' ethnic group affiliations more than once and discovered some mobility. However, they do not consider this to be of importance, attributing it more to measurement error than real change (Fergusson, 2009). More recently initiated surveys, particularly the Growing Up in New Zealand study which aims to track a birth cohort to age 20, have the potential to ask about ethnic identification of the parents and child more than once over the life course.

In addition to the Ministry of Education data, there are other administrative data sets which have more than one recording of ethnic responses. One is in the health sector, where, while those engaging with the health system will in theory have a unique National Health Index number (NHI), basic demographic details, including ethnicity, can change as people have various contacts with health providers.

Some possible ways to use ethnicity when there is ethnic mobility

As discussed, ethnic mobility can be inherent in longitudinal data if ethnicity questions are asked at more than one point in the survey, even when asked the same way. One pragmatic response to the 'problem' of changing ethnicity is to ignore any change, choosing instead a single point in time in the data capture series – perhaps the first response – and assuming that this is the 'correct' one. But this seems arbitrary and avoids social explanation. However, there are methods by which ethnic mobility can be reported and used in analysis. Some recent education studies have used a method of reporting ethnicity that is able to incorporate the ethnic mobility seen in longitudinal data. The method, using never, ever and sole ethnic group categories, is described more fully in Engler (2010a). However, using Māori as an example, with this method the 'never'

group never has a Māori ethnic response (either as a sole response or as part of dual or multiple ethnicity). The 'ever' group has a Māori response in one or more of the surveys. For the 'sole' Māori, this is the only response in each survey. Like the 'total counts' ethnic measure for cross-sectional ethnic data, there is some overlap between the 'ever' and 'never' groups between different ethnic groups. The never, ever and sole ethnic has previously been used only for the Māori ethnic group, and predominately in health research. While this method enables the reporting and analysis of changing ethnicity, it also allows for the analysis of within-ethnic-group variation.

Education data shows the effect of using such categories. When data on the transition from school to tertiary education is analysed using this method of reporting ethnicity, insights are provided that are not seen with methods that assume ethnic group homogeneity. For example, students with average or above-average academic school results – who achieved NCEA level 3 and met the University Entrance (UE) requirement – and who attended decile 1 or 2 schools are significantly less likely to go on to bachelor-level study than similar students from high- or mid-decile schools; but only if they are students from the sole-Pasifika and Māori ethnic groups (the effect is stronger for sole-Māori) (Engler 2010a). These same students, once they enrol in bachelor-level qualifications at university, show lower likelihood of passing most of their first-year courses if they are sole-Pacific students (Engler, 2010b). In 2008 the overall proportion of Māori school leavers who met the UE requirement was 43%. This, however, is comprised of 54% of ever-Māori students who met this standard, versus 29% of sole-Māori. Also in 2008, 27% of Māori students studied at tertiary level 4 or above within two years of leaving school, compared with 43% of students overall. The figure is 40% for ever-Māori, while for sole-Māori it is 16%.

These findings suggest particular disadvantage faced by a 'core' group of Māori and Pacific people. This supports cross-sectional data that has consistently shown a gradient of disadvantage,

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By Judith Smith, Nicholas Mays, Crispin Ovenden, Jacqueline Cumming, Janet McDonald and Jonathan Boston

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produces a service that meets public goals. These criteria are then drawn together in an assessment framework that policy makers can use when deciding on their approach to mixed financing. The framework assesses mixed financing from the perspectives of the state, providers, and users.

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Managing Mixed Financing of Privately Owned Providers in the Public Interest



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CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION

Edited by Bruce Burson

Many South Pacific island states are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Indeed, some are already experiencing population movement due to environmental events and processes likely to be exacerbated by future climate change. Yet others are at risk of disappearing altogether over the coming century and beyond. The potential for climate change to generate population movement over the coming decades, therefore, raises substantial domestic and international policy challenges. This edited volume is the result of a conference held in Wellington in July 2009 that examined these and related issues. Drawing on a range of perspectives, this volume

identifies concepts, frameworks, and possible policy responses to deal effectively with what may become one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of the 21st century.

Bruce Burson is a human rights lawyer specialising in refugee and migration law and policy. He was the principal conference organiser on behalf of the Institute of Policy Studies.

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Climate Change and Migration

South Pacific Perspectives

edited by
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Institute of Policy Studies

While we still consider current ethnic measures used in official statistics to be sufficiently robust for most of the policy uses made of them in New Zealand, the dynamic nature of ethnic identity poses some problems for consistent statistical measurement of ethnicity.

from sole Māori and Pacific, through combinations of Māori and Pacific, lessening for those who record Māori and/or Pacific and European responses, through to those being, on average, the most advantaged in the sole European group (Gould, 2000; Chapple, 1999, 2000; Chapple and Rea, 1998). However, the reasons for this gradient are not clear and Kukutai (2003) suggests that social policy makers should not put too much weight on such cross-sectional gradients. In terms of Māori outcomes, Kukutai argues that the key differences within the wider Māori ethnic group are between those who identify primarily as non-Māori,

when pushed into choosing one group, and all others. This is in contrast to the Chapple (2000) focus on sole Māori as the outlier in social and economic outcomes. While still not telling us the cause of disadvantage, a benefit the longitudinal data have over cross-sectional data is that we have more than one recording of people noting a 'sole' response, suggesting that this may indicate a stronger primary affiliation.

Further research

We are only now beginning to understand the level of ethnic mobility taking place in New Zealand. More longitudinal research is needed to further clarify the fluidity of ethnicity over time. More investigation of ethnic mobility may be carried out with more waves of SoFIE data, as well as from future data collection and results from the Growing Up in New Zealand study and qualitative research asking people about their ethnic identification. Such research is needed to explore a wide range of questions pertaining to how, why and where people change their ethnic identification.

As yet, we remain uncertain as to what types of ethnic mobility are important and why ethnic mobility occurs. We need to know more about what might be considered a major versus a minor ethnic category change. For example, is a shift from a European and Samoan response to just a Samoan response of the same importance as a shift from Samoan only to European only?

We also need to be cautious about adopting new ways of dealing with inconsistent ethnic responses across time. While the 'never', 'ever' and 'sole' categorisation is one potential method, we need to better understand its strengths and weaknesses. As an example, in health data we may have a situation where there are six recordings of ethnicity for a person, with five being 'sole' Māori and one Māori and European. This person would be reported as being 'ever' Māori. But would this 'ever' Māori be similar to a person who had five recordings of European only and one of Māori and European? Is there some potential to weight responses; or is this a throwback to thinking around being 'fractions' of Māori, with imposed

notions of 'blood' and 'dilution' by racial/ethnic intermixing and negative or positive connotations depending on who is making the judgment? Or does such a change simply indicate errors in the data? Further research would help clarify some of these issues. This could include research into the benefits and drawbacks of methods of self-prioritisation: that is, ways of allowing respondents themselves to determine a potentially enduring 'main' ethnicity.

With some shifts we also need to be clearer as to whether we are seeing mobility or instead what could be considered a relabelling. The 'New Zealander' response may be an example of this, where the old labels no longer seem appropriate to some respondents. In all this research, it is especially important to understand how young adults develop their own self-identified ethnicity. Therefore, we need to do more research in the younger generations (those aged 15–25). Some overseas research suggests there may be less interest in national or ethnic identity among this age group, especially the so-called majority (Fenton, 2007).

Conclusion

While some within the research community have long been aware of ethnic mobility, the growth of the New Zealander response in the 2006 census demonstrated to the wider public that ethnic responses can change over time. Subsequent New Zealand studies of ethnic mobility highlight that it is important especially for Māori and Pacific people. While we still consider current ethnic measures used in official statistics to be sufficiently robust for most of the policy uses made of them in New Zealand, the dynamic nature of ethnic identity poses some problems for consistent statistical measurement of ethnicity. As such, there needs to be ongoing monitoring, investigation and discussion by researchers to progress understanding of ethnic identity dynamics over lifecycles and over time. This is required not only to ensure measurement quality, but to broadly map the changing cultural fabric of New Zealand society, and in particular to identify more clearly where disadvantage lies.

Acknowledgements

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1 Using census data, Coope and Piesse (2000) found examples of ethnic mobility with, as an example, a 23% inflow and 6% outflow for the Māori ethnic group in 1996 compared to the 1991 group.

2 <http://www.growingup.co.nz/>.