

Link Up program for the Stolen Generations - grounds for continued funding

Wai Fong Yik and Simon Arthur

Wai Fong Yik
wai-fong.yik@finance.gov.au
Department of Finance and Administration
Simon Arthur
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

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Abstract

This evaluation demonstrated the negative impact of enforced separation of Indigenous children from their natural parents due to past government actions (Stolen Generations children) on five indicators of health and social-psychological well-being. The negative impact was also found on two of these indicators for younger Indigenous Australians who have similarly been separated from their natural parents, but from other causes than past government policies/actions. Indigenous children on care and protection orders have also increased markedly in number over the last seven years, and they may form the next generation of Indigenous Australians seeking to reunite with their family in the future. These have important implications for continued funding of the Link Up program that provides family tracing and reunion services to Stolen Generations people.

Background

The Link Up program (formerly administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services but now administered by the Department of Health and Ageing) funds Indigenous organizations (called Link Ups) to provide family tracing and reunion services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have lost contact with their families. In 1997 a national inquiry conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) into the Stolen Generations presented to the Federal Government results of the inquiry which documented the harm caused to Indigenous people by the separation enforcement policies of the past, and made a number of recommendations to address such harm. As a result of this inquiry, the Federal Government allocated \$63 million in a four year funding package to address these recommendations, of which \$11.25 million were provided to the Link Up program to expand the family reunion services of Link Ups. At the end of the four year period in 2002, the Government provided a further \$9.9 million to extend the life of the Link Up program to the year 2006. Continued funding to this program beyond 2006 is an unanswered question as there is a general expectation that demand for Link Up services will decrease with the passing away of the Stolen Generations.

Methodology

Underlying the demand for a government funded service is the rationale for provision of this service in the first place. Anecdotal accounts of the pain and trauma experienced by members of the Stolen Generations have been documented in many publications including the *Bringing Them Home* report (HREOC, 1977) and later publications (Haebich 2000, Read 1999, Manne 1998). With the advent of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1994, it is now possible to examine empirically the impact of this enforced separation on members of the Stolen Generations based on the most comprehensive set of relevant data collected systematically on the Indigenous population. This survey interviewed a representative sample of over 15,700 Indigenous persons across Australia, and collected data on whether the person had been taken away from his/her natural family when young, as well as data on a range of cultural, family, education, employment, health, housing, and law and justice circumstances of the same person. As such, it allows for a statistical modelling of determination of the impact of being taken away from one's natural family on a number of 'outcomes'. There are six variables in the NATSIS that are suitable for use as 'outcome' measures of the impact of being taken away from one's natural family. These are variables in the area of employment, health, trouble with the law, alcohol consumption, experiencing physical and verbal assaults, and family violence.

Each outcome variable was used as a dependent variable in a logistic regression model which has, as one of its predictor variables, whether the person was taken away from his/her family. In the case of whether being taken away from the family has an impact on the person's health, for example, the dependent variable is whether that person has a current medical condition, while the other predictor variables used in the model are the age of the person, his/her gender, family composition, number of persons resident in the household, family income, employment status, disability status, alcohol consumption, fat consumption, sugar consumption, tobacco use, access to medical services and hospitals, and urban/rural location of residence. The logistic regression model allows for a statistical determination of whether persons who were taken away from their natural parents had better or worse health than those who were not taken away, after controlling for other differences between the two groups in age, gender, family structure and incomes, and dietary and life style habits. While such a regression model does not strictly allow for causal effects to be inferred, the controlling of these other predictor variables which could also impact on the health outcome provides a strong indication of the unique impact of Stolen Generations membership on health.

Results and discussion

The results of the regression analysis of the six 'outcome' variables listed above are presented in Tables 1-6 in the Appendix.

The health dependent variable in Table 1 measures whether the person had a specified medical condition or not at the time of the survey. Those who were taken away were 38% more likely to have a specified medical condition than those who were not taken away.

The employment dependent variable in Table 2 measures whether a person had a non-CDEP job, a CDEP job, or was unemployed or not in the labour force (not looking for a job). The odds ratio column obtained for the 'taken away from family' variable shows that those who have been taken away were 32% less likely to be in non-CDEP employment than those who have not been taken away.

The dependent variable on trouble with the law measures whether the person had been arrested by the police in the last five years leading to the survey. Table 3 shows that those who were taken away from their family were two times more likely to have been arrested than those who were not taken away.

The dependent variable on alcohol consumption measures whether the person drank any alcohol at all. Table 4 shows that those who were taken away were 32% more likely to be a drinker than those who were not.

The dependent variable on experiencing physical violence or threats measures whether the person experienced any physical attacks or threats in the last year leading to the survey. Table 5 shows that those who were taken away were 57% more likely to have been attacked than those who were not.

The dependent variable on family violence measures whether the person perceived family violence to be a problem in the community or not. Table 6 shows that those who were taken away were 59% more likely to say family violence is a problem in the community than those who were not.

The above analyses provide empirical evidence that Indigenous persons who have been taken away from their family when young are possibly among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable group of persons in the Indigenous population. Apart from natural justice to address the hurt and pain experienced as a result of their enforced separation from their families, these people are additionally appropriate targets for government assistance because of disadvantages they suffer in the areas of employment, health, alcoholism, trouble with the law, and violence inside and outside of the home.

The above findings apply to all Indigenous persons who were separated from their families, regardless of the cause of separation. Due to the complexity and difficulty in identifying members of the Stolen Generations in an omnibus, comprehensive survey such as the NATSIS, the only question asked of interviewees in the survey was whether they had been taken away from their family when they were young. There were no further questions on the circumstances of the separation which could allow for identification of the respondent specifically as a member of the Stolen Generations (those separated as a result of past government actions). This means that the NATSIS sample of individuals who have been taken away would be likely to include non Stolen Generations members such as those more recently separated from their families, and those removed from their families due to family neglect or child abuse, for example.

There is evidence however that the majority of the NATSIS sample of persons who have been taken away from their families *are* likely to be members of the Stolen Generations. Table 7 shows the markedly different age profiles of respondents in the

survey who said they were or were not taken away from their family. Persons who have been taken away were markedly older than those who have not been taken away: 73% of the former were over 24 years of age, compared to 38% of the latter. Of even greater significance is the sharp drop in the proportion of taken away persons in the under 25 age groups. This proportion dropped from 50% in the 25-44 age group to 19% in the 13-24 age group. The marked decrease in the number of persons taken away from the family among those born after 1969 corresponds to the period between the two milestone years of 1967 and 1972 which saw significant improvements in

Indigenous conditions and empowerment in determination of their own welfare. With the advent of the 1967 referendum, Indigenous Australians were given the right to vote in the Australian elections and access to social security. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs was established, and made grants to the States for Aboriginal welfare programs. In 1972 significant developments were achieved in the area of self determination for Indigenous Australians, and the Aboriginal Legal Services began representing Indigenous children and families in removal applications, leading to significant declines in the number of children being removed from their families.

Table 7. Age profiles of persons who were/were not taken away from their family

	Age (in years)				
	0-12	13-24	25-44	45-64	65 and over
Taken away from family	8%	19%	50%	18%	5%
Not taken away from family	37%	25%	27%	9%	2%

Source: NATSIS, 1994

It is reasonable to conclude therefore that the findings of the above series of regression models on the impact of being taken away from the family do apply in the main to members of the Stolen Generations. It is recognised that there will be a proportion of persons aged below 25 years at the time of the survey in 1994 who would have been taken away from their family for other reasons than past government actions. However, these account for only 27% of the population who have been taken away from their natural family.

Impact of separation on non-Stolen Generations members

Recognising that there are definitive milestones such as the events of 1967 and 1972 which mark a clearer break with the past regarding the practice of enforced separation of Indigenous children from their natural family, it is reasonable to consider that those respondents in the NATSIS in the under 25 age groups are not strictly members of the Stolen Generations. Accordingly, this evaluation carried out the same series of regression analyses on the likely impact of family separation on a separate sample of NATSIS respondents aged 15 to 24 years old. This was done to determine if non-Stolen Generation separations from the family also have similar negative effects on the children so removed.

The results showed that non Stolen Generations children were 2.39 times more likely to be arrested by the police in the last five years and 2.27 times more likely to say family violence is a problem in the community than the similar others who have not

been separated from their family. There were no significant differences between the two groups on the other four outcome variables.

The lesser impact of being taken away from the family for the younger respondents in the NATSIS does not necessarily indicate a qualitative difference between the strictly Stolen Generations members and people who have been separated from their families due to other causes. Stable indicators of health, alcohol consumption, and employment are less likely to emerge in the earlier years than in the later years of one's life. In other words, it is possible that given time, the younger group of Indigenous people separated from their families may show the same deleterious effects of lower employment, worse health, and higher alcohol consumption with age. In any case, the significantly higher incidence of police arrests and reports of family violence being a problem in the community among separated persons even in the younger age groups confirm the negative impacts of separation of children from their natural families, regardless of the cause of separation.

This is an important finding in view of the fact that it is often impossible for Link Ups to definitively identify the true Stolen Generations status of their clients when they first present themselves at the Link Up for help. This is because information about the circumstances of the clients' separation from family sometimes often do not emerge until after the reunion itself. The only practical eligibility criteria that Link Ups could use in deciding who is eligible for assistance are that the client is above eighteen years of age, and has been fostered, adopted, or been a ward of the State/Territory. As a result, it is a certainty that Link Ups are already assisting clients who are not strictly members of the Stolen Generations or who are seeking a reunion with family members who are not Stolen Generations members. The finding that non Stolen Generations separated people are also suffering the negative impact of enforced separation justifies to some extent the present provision of Link Up services to these people.

Already there are signs that demand for family tracing and reunion services may be increasing among the Indigenous population who are being removed from their natural families for reasons other than that of past government actions. Table 8 gives the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care over six years from 1995 to 2000. The former are children still staying with their family but who are at risk of being taken away for their own protection and welfare. The latter are children who have already been taken away from their family and placed in care outside of their home and family. The main reasons for children being put on care and protection orders or in out-of-home care are related to child neglect/abuse or to the child being uncontrollable.

Table 8. Children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care

	Child care and protection orders		Out-of-home care	
	Indigenous	Other	Indigenous	Other
1994-95	2,048	11,020	n.a.	n.a.
1995-96	1,951	11,290	2,711	11,268
1996-97	2,548	13,170	2,785	11,293
1997-98	2,868	13,581	2,634	11,836
1998-99	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1999-2000	3,861	15,401	3,496	13,427

2000-01	4,146	15,637	4,073	14,168
2001-02	4,264	16,293	4,199	14,681

Source: AIHW, "Australia's Welfare 2001", "Child Protection Australia 2000-2001", "Child Protection Australia 2001-2002".

Starting from 1996-97 when there was a major change in data collection on children on care and protection orders, there have been progressively higher increases among the Indigenous population than among the non-Indigenous population in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care. The number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders increased by 67% to 2001-02, compared to only 24% for non-Indigenous children. Corresponding numbers for children in out-of-home care are 51% for Indigenous children and 30% for non-Indigenous children. These differences are likely to be larger than they should be, due to New South Wales and Western Australia changing the system used to record the Indigenous status of children in their States respectively in 1998-99 and 2001-02 which gave rise to bigger increases in the number of Indigenous children in the child protection system in those States. However, even taking the less 'contaminated' years of 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, the increase in children on care and protection orders is 7% among the Indigenous population, compared to 2% among the non-Indigenous population. Corresponding increases for children in out-of-home care are 17% among the Indigenous population and 6% among the non-Indigenous population. These children removed from their home may form the next generations of Indigenous people seeking to be reunited with their natural family in the future.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the risk profile of Indigenous Australians who have been separated from their families regardless of their origins from the era of the Stolen Generations. This indicates there is a need for continued government funding of the Link Up program that provides family reunion and other support to this segment of the Indigenous population.

References

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Appendix

Table 1. Logistic Regression modelling of having a specified medical condition

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-0.6799	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	0.3240**	1.38: 1
Male (reference: female)	-0.4049**	1: 1.50
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	0.4433**	1.56: 1
45 years old and above	1.0267**	2.79: 1
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	-0.1030	
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	0.1205	
Mixed family (reference: Indigenous family only)	0.3139**	1.37: 1
\$25,001 to \$45,000 family income (reference: \$25,000 or less)	-0.1054	
\$45,001 and above	-0.2071*	1: 1.23
Employed in CDEP job (reference: employed in non-CDEP job)	-0.0992	
Unemployed	0.0268	
Not in labour force	0.1437	
Year 7 to year 9 (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	-0.2331*	1: 1.26
Year 10 to year 12	-0.3929**	1: 1.48
Drank alcohol (reference: never drank alcohol)	0.1135	
Smoker (reference: non smoker)	-0.0499	
Moderate to high fat consumption (reference: low to moderate)	0.0580	
Moderate to high sugar consumption (reference: low to moderate)	-0.0568	
Less than 6 persons in household (reference: 6 or more persons)	-0.0371	
Medical service > 50 kms away (reference: < 50 kms)	0.0423	
Hospital less than 100 kms away (reference: less than 100 kms)	-0.2630*	1: 1.30
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	0.5486**	1.73: 1
Other urban	0.1202	
Substance abuse is a problem (reference: not a problem)	0.2709**	1.31: 1
Has a physical or mental disability (reference: no disability)	0.8297**	2.29: 1

N=5161 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=7054.48, df=25, p<0.0001

** significant at p<0.01, two tailed

* significant at p<0.05, two tailed.

Source: NATSIS

Table 2. Logistic Regression modelling of being employed in non-CDEP job

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-2.8832	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	-0.2763**	1: 1.32
Male (reference: female)	0.5582**	1.75: 1
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	0.6845**	1.98: 1
45 years old and above	0.6539**	1.92: 1
Year 7 to year 9 (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	0.6845**	1.98: 1
Year 10 to year 12	1.4282**	4.17: 1
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	0.8432**	2.32: 1
Other urban	0.5542**	1.74: 1
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	-0.5490**	1: 1.73
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	-0.1210	
Has a medical condition (reference: no medical condition)	-0.1479*	1: 1.16
Has a physical or mental disability (reference: no disability)	-0.5125**	1: 1.67
N=7705 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=692, df=13, p<0.0001		
** significant at p<0.01, two tailed * significant at p<0.05, two tailed.		
Source: NATSIS		

Table 3. Regression modelling of being arrested in last five years

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-4.1354	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	0.7385**	2.09: 1
Male (reference: female)	1.2977**	3.67: 1
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	-0.5760**	1: 1.78
45 years old and above	-0.9301**	1: 6.90
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	0.1605	
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	0.2658*	1.31: 1
Non-family individual/Other	0.2752	
\$25,001 to \$45,000 family income (reference: \$25,000 or less)	-0.0509	
\$45,001 and above	-0.3861**	1: 1.47
Employed in CDEP job (reference: employed in non-CDEP job)	0.8176**	2.27: 1
Unemployed	1.0740**	2.93: 1
Not in labour force	0.7785**	2.18: 1
Year 7 to year 9 schooling (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	0.0211	
Year 10	-0.2220	
Year 11 to year 12	-0.7020**	1: 2.02
Drank alcohol less than a week ago (reference: never drank alcohol)	2.3907**	10.9: 1
Drank more a week ago or more	1.8174**	6.16: 1
Indigenous police present in community (reference: absent)	-0.0062	
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	0.2572*	1.29: 1
Other urban	0.0972	
N=5395 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=1116.63, df=20, p<0.0001		
** significant at p<0.01, two tailed * significant at p<0.05, two tailed.		
Source: NATSIS		

Table 4. Regression modelling of alcohol consumption

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-0.5377	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	0.2741*	1.32: 1
Male (reference: female)	1.6731**	5.33: 1
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	-0.0198	
45 years old and above	-0.7806**	1: 2.18
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	0.5088**	1.66: 1
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	0.4972**	1.64: 1
Mixed family (reference: Indigenous family only)	0.9490**	2.58: 1
\$12,001 or more personal income (reference: \$12,000 or less)	-0.1155	
Employed in CDEP job (reference: employed in non-CDEP job)	0.2107	
Unemployed or not in labour force	0.1463	
Year 7 to year 9 schooling (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	0.6823**	1.98: 1
Year 10 to year 12	0.7215**	2.06:1
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	1.1242**	3.08: 1
Other urban	0.8679**	2.38: 1
N=7435 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=7774.12, df=14, p<0.0001		
** significant at p<0.01, two tailed * significant at p<0.05, two tailed.		
Source: NATSIS		

Table 5. Regression modelling of being attacked or verbally threatened

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-0.6799	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	0.4508**	1.57: 1
Male (reference: female)	0.0689	
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	-0.1068	
45 years old and above	-0.12214**	1: 3.39
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	0.3699**	1.45: 1
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	0.0228	
Mixed family (reference: Indigenous family only)	-0.0081	
\$25,001 to \$45,000 family income (reference: \$25,000 or less)	-0.1159	
\$45,001 and above	-0.0501	
Employed in CDEP job (reference: employed in non-CDEP job)	-0.2019	
Unemployed	0.2325	
Not in labour force	-0.2228	
Year 7 to year 9 schooling (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	-0.0080	
Year 10 to year 12	-0.1679	0.68: 1
Drank alcohol (reference: never drank alcohol)	0.9479**	2.58: 1
Less than 6 persons in household (reference: 6 or more persons)	0.2880**	1.33: 1
Has a physical or mental disability (reference: does not have disability)	0.5158**	1.68: 1
Has a specified medical condition (reference: no medical condition)	0.6483**	1.91: 1
Substance abuse is a problem (reference: not a problem)	0.8545**	2.35: 1
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	0.0897	
Other urban	-0.1609	
N=5401 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=300.98, df=21, p<0.0001		
** significant at p<0.01, two tailed * significant at p<0.05, two tailed.		
Source: NATSIS		

Table 6. Regression modelling of perception that family violence is a problem

Variables	Parameter estimate	Odds ratio
Intercept	-2.4410	
Taken away from family (reference: not taken away)	0.4612**	1.59: 1
Male (reference: female)	-0.4417**	1: 1.56
30 to 44 years old (reference: 18 to 29 years old)	0.1058	
45 years old and above	-0.0277	
Sole parent family (reference: two parent family)	-0.0814	
Couple with/without relatives, non-family, Other	-0.1439	
Mixed family (reference: Indigenous family only)	-0.7406**	1: 2.10
\$25,001 to \$45,000 family income (reference: \$25,000 or less)	0.1210	
\$45,001 and above	0.2421**	1.27: 1
Employed in CDEP job (reference: employed in non-CDEP job)	0.4954**	1.64: 1
Unemployed	0.1350	
Not in labour force	-0.2111*	1: 1.23
Year 7 to year 9 schooling (reference: no schooling or up to year 6)	-0.0857	
Year 10 to year 12	0.0092	
Drank alcohol (reference: never drank alcohol)	0.1878*	1.21: 1
Substance abuse is a problem (reference: not a problem)	2.9016**	18.20: 1
Has a specified medical condition (reference: no medical condition)	0.2239**	1.25: 1
Has a physical or mental disability (reference: no disability)	0.0123	2.29:1
Capital city (reference: rural or remote)	-0.3759**	1: 1.46
Other urban	0.0871	
N=5383 Goodness of fit: chi-square of likelihood ratio=1142.35, df=25, p<0.0001		

** significant at p<0.01, two tailed * significant at p<0.05, two tailed.

Source: NATSIS