



**Queensland
Government**
Queensland Health

Fertility of Indigenous women in Queensland

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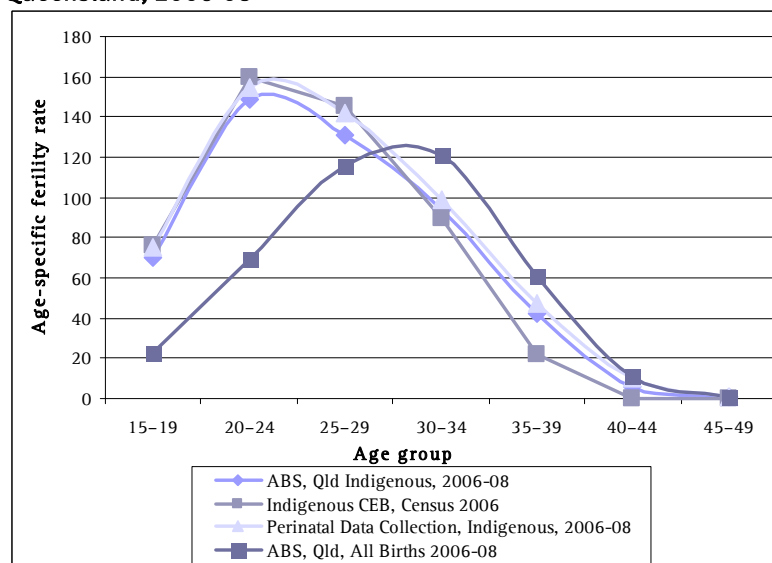
High levels of teenage fertility is a health concern. This paper attempts to compare Indigenous women's fertility to fertility of all women in Queensland including teenage fertility. The level, age pattern and recent trend of fertility rates are examined.

Three sources of data have been examined: (a) Births Australia statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)^a for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008; (b) Perinatal Data Collection (Queensland Health)^b for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008; and (c) Information on Children Ever Born (CEB)^c by age of mothers from the Australian 1996 and 2006 population censuses. In order to reduce the effect of any annual fluctuation of the reported and registered births data, an average of 3 years (2006-08) has been used to calculate fertility rates. The number of reported births in the Perinatal Data Collection (Queensland Health) is slightly higher than the registered births reported by the ABS. This may be due to the delay effect of births registration in the latter data source and non-registration of some of births.

The total number of annual live births to all women in Queensland is around 58000. Of these, around 3000 live births are born to Indigenous women^d. These births occur to women between the ages of 15 and 49 years. The number of births to women younger than 15 and older than 49 were found to be negligible. Fertility rates are calculated by examining number of births with mother's age, and the number of female population by age. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the average number of children a woman would bear during her lifetime if she experienced current fertility regime throughout her reproductive life. Analysis found that the Indigenous TFR is higher than the TFR of all women in Queensland (2.6 births compared to 2.0 births).

Examination of the three sources to determine fertility rates revealed a consistent age-pattern of Indigenous fertility in Queensland. Indigenous fertility in Queensland is characterised by an early fertility peak for women at ages 20 to 24 (Figure 1). For all women, fertility peaks in the age groups 30 to 34 years.

Figure 1: Comparison of Indigenous and all women's fertility rates, Queensland, 2006-08



High teenage fertility is another characteristic of Indigenous fertility with a rate three times that of the all women's teenage fertility (75.0 per 1000 for Indigenous teenage women compared to 22.5 per 1000 for all teenage women)^b.

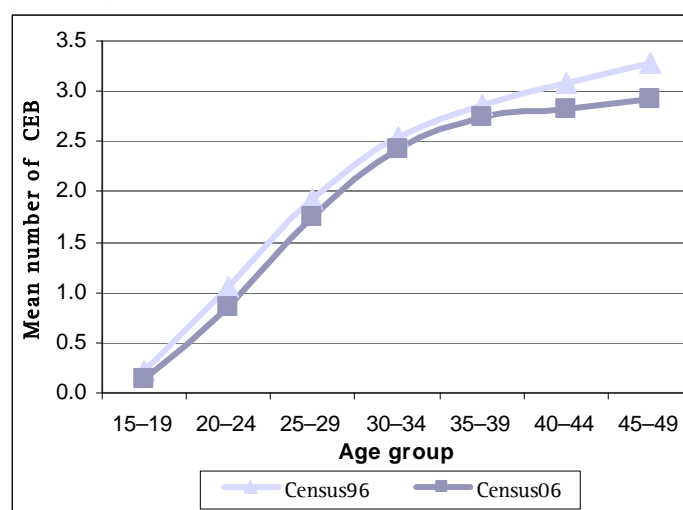
The mean child bearing age for Indigenous women is three to five years younger than the mean child bearing age for all women (25–27 years compared to 30.0 years).

Due to lack of reliable historical Indigenous birth registration data, Indigenous fertility trends have been examined indirectly by comparing Children Ever Born data in 1996 and 2006. In the 1996 and 2006 Censuses women were asked for the total number of children they ever gave birth to. This information is recorded against the ages of women at the time of census.

As evident in Figure 2, Indigenous fertility in Queensland is declining. Using indirect techniques of fertility estimation^e, it was found that while the mean age of child bearing remained unchanged from 1996 to 2006, the Indigenous total fertility rate declined during this period, from 2.8 to 2.5. As Figure 3 shows, this decline is mostly as a result of a considerable decline in the Indigenous teenage fertility, from 108 births per 1000 to 76 births per 1000 women aged 15 to 19. In comparison, it is interesting to note that the fertility of all women in Queensland is on the rise, from a TFR of 1.83 in 2006 to a TFR of 2.09 in 2007 and TFR 2.10 in 2008.

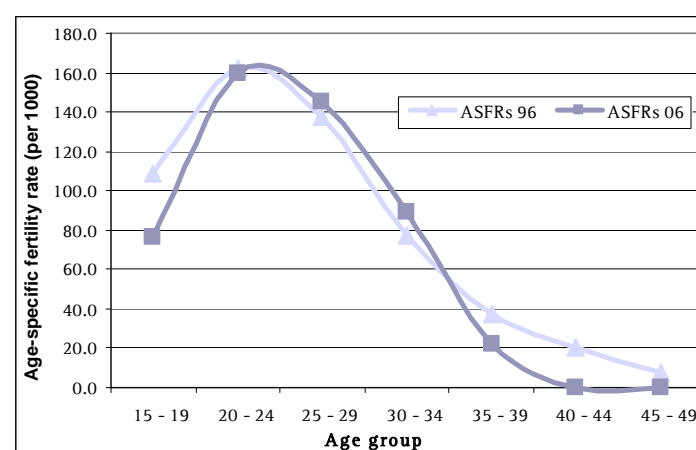
In summary, this paper has shown that Indigenous women's fertility rate is higher than all women's fertility rate in Queensland with fertility peaking at a younger age for Indigenous. Indigenous teenage fertility is 3 times that of all women's teenage fertility. While Indigenous fertility appears to be declining, the decline may be due to the decrease in teenage fertility. Fertility of all women in Queensland is on the rise.

Figure 2: Comparison of mean number of children ever born (CEB) by age group of Indigenous women, Queensland, 1996 and 2006



Source: Derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 and 2006 Censuses, customised tables

Figure 3: Estimation of Indigenous age-specific fertility rate (ASFR), Queensland, 1996 and 2006



Source: Derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 and 2006 Censuses, customised tables

^a Australian Bureau of Statistics, Births, Australia 2006, Cat. 33010. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Births, Australia 2007, Cat. 33010. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Births, Australia 2008, Cat. 33010.

^b Queensland Health, Perinatal Data Collection, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

^c Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 Census, Customised Table, Count of Indigenous women aged 15 years or more by number of children ever born. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census, Customised Table, Count of Indigenous women aged 15 years or more by number of children ever born.

^d In addition, on average 1050 live births occur annually to non-Indigenous mothers where fathers are Indigenous. These births are excluded from the analysis.

^e Arriaga, E, 1983 *Estimating Fertility from Data on Children Ever Born by Age of Mother*, International Research Document No. 11 U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington D C.