

# Ethnicity data in Aotearoa: issues and challenges

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# Overview

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- To identify key current and future issues related to the broader context of ethnicity data approaches, policies and practices
- High quality, standardised ethnicity data is essential in the health sector in order to:
  - Measure, monitor and address health inequalities
  - Develop policies and programmes that are responsive to, relevant to, and in line with Maori priorities

# Broader rationale for the project

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- Rights of Maori
  - Rights as indigenous peoples
  - Rights under the Treaty of Waitangi
- Obligations of the Crown
  - Obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi
  - Legislative and policy drivers
  - As signatories to International Conventions

# Current issues and challenges

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- Changes to methods and measures over time
- Changes to completeness and quality of data over time
- Changes in policy context and official statistics
- Shifts in political and social climate

# Defining ethnicity in Aotearoa

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- Ethnicity is a complex and contested term
- It is commonly used in Aotearoa to talk about social identities, social groups, and social relations
- It is used interchangeably with related concepts such as ancestry, nationality, citizenship, culture and 'race'



# 'Commonsense' understandings

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- Used in reference to non-white or non-dominant groups
- Used to mark difference
- Associated with phenotype/physical appearance or ancestry
- Assumed to be natural and immutable
- Associated with racialised language

# Ethnicity as a social construct

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- Understandings of ethnicity as dynamic, 'imagined' collectives
- Constructed, negotiated and contested within particular historical and socio-political environments
- Discursively produced, but has material impacts

# Ethnicity in settler societies

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Racial categories and hierarchies, however, did not simply appear in settler societies like British Columbia. Rather, the European desire for distinct racial classifications meant that whites needed to constantly (re)create their own identities and superiority against the bodies of racialized Others (Mawani 2002: 49)

- Racial categorisations:
  - Reflected ‘settler values’
  - Aided the justification of colonisation and dispossession
  - Delineated rights and access to resources

# Ethnicity in official statistics

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- The Maori population has been enumerated in the census since the 1860s (although counted separately until 1951)
- Official definitions have historically used 'degree of blood' or 'proportion of descent' classifications

# Ethnicity in official statistics

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(b). Race. (If not of European race, write “Maori,” “Chinese,” “Hindu,” “Javanese,” “Negro,” “Polynesian,” &c., or “Maori half-caste,” “Chinese half-caste,” &c., as the case may be.)  
(Statistics Office 1916).

- Interest in ‘mode of living’

# Ethnicity in official statistics

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The importance of racial purity has long been a consideration of immigration legislation. The view has been taken that the coalescence of the white and so-called coloured races is not conducive to improvement in racial types. The presence in a population of considerable groups of alien races who cannot be readily assimilated into that population, or whose assimilation, for reasons dependent on the physical or other characteristics of the respective races, is not attended with advantage, presents administrative difficulties in no mean degree (Department of Statistics, p. 2, cited in Brown 1984)

# Ethnicity in official statistics

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## 1981 Census ethnicity question

### Ethnic origin

Either (a) If only one (full) origin, tick box which applies:

- Full European or full Caucasian
- Full New Zealand Maori
- Full Samoan
- Full Cook Island Maori
- Full Chinese
- Full Indian
- Full Niuean
- Full Tongan
- Other full origin (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Or (b) If of more than one origin, give particulars: \_\_\_\_\_

# Ethnicity in official statistics

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- Self-identification recognised since the 1986 Census
  - Did not require individuals to indicate 'full' origin (or otherwise)
  - Allowed for multiple ethnicities

*What is your ethnic origin? Tick the box or boxes which apply to you.*

# Ethnicity in the Census

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- *Which ethnic group do you belong to? Tick the box or boxes which apply to you (1991)*
- *Tick as many circles as you need to show which ethnic group(s) you belong to (1996)*
- *Which ethnic group do you belong to? Mark the spaces which apply to you (2001)*

## *Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity*

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- Commenced in 2000 and final report released in 2004
- Revised Standard (Ethnic 05) released
- Major developments included:
  - Updated definition of ethnicity
  - Changes to classification system, including introduction of 'New Zealander' and changes to Level 1
  - Recommendation to discontinue prioritised output
  - Commitment to research and further work

# Why is this important in health?

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- Official datasets are commonly used as denominator data in calculating rates
- Official policies and practices influence other sectors and data collections
- Official policies and practices impact on the broader ethnicity data environment

# Technical issues

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- Changes to the Census question
- Changes to the classification
- Changes to the standard output of multiple ethnicities
- Need for methods to produce better estimates (e.g. 'Ever Maori', adjusters)

# New Zealander responses

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- Introduction into the official classification
- Campaign around the Census
- Increase from 2.4% in 2001, to 11.1% in 2006

# What does it mean?

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- Maybe we can get the powers-that-be to sit up and recognise that we are proud of who we are and that we wanted to be recognised as such, not divided into sub-categories and all treated as foreigners in our own country (Excerpt from New Zealander email)
- Ethnic group identification or protest response?
- Is it a response to being the 'unmarked' category in New Zealand?



21 Feb 2006 at 2:20:08 p.m.



NZ Population Clock 4,126,712

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## Communities

Statistics about communities (the distinct, often overlapping groups within our society) include information about Māori, Pacific peoples, Asian people, families and households, children, youth, older people and women.

Detailed information available about the structure and make-up of these communities includes:

- ◆ age
- ◆ sex
- ◆ languages spoken
- ◆ religion
- ◆ families and households
- ◆ education
- ◆ work and income
- ◆ housing
- ◆ access to amenities such as the Internet.

## Reports & articles

- [Census snapshot: cultural diversity](#) - article
- [Making Statistics Available to Enhance Community Capability](#) - article

## Related links

### Related datasets

- [Census of Population & Dwellings](#)
- [Population Estimates](#)
- [Population Projections](#)

### Websites

- [Population and Sustainable Development](#)
- [Te Ara: Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#)

# Ethnicity data in Aotearoa

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- Ethnicity data should facilitate a better understanding of inequalities and provide for more effective interventions
- Ethnicity data policies and practices should not compromise Maori rights or undermine the ability of the Crown to meet its obligations

# Ethnicity data and Maori health

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- Ethnicity is not a neutral category
- We need to acknowledge the history of counting ethnicity in Aotearoa and the particular settler society context
  - Current discourses on miscegenation and genes
- It is important to think critically about the collection, analysis, reporting and interpretation of ethnicity data
- It is vital to be vigilant about the broader client

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