

WORKING PAPERS IN ECONOMICS

THE LABOUR MARKET POSITION OF ABORIGINAL
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

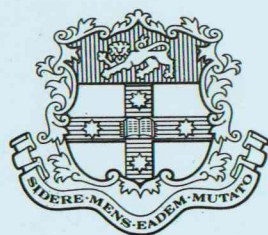
by

Russell T. Ross

No. 99

November, 1987

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS



The University of Sydney
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THE LABOUR MARKET POSITION OF ABORIGINAL
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Acknowledgments

This report analyses original data on 677 working age (i.e. ages 15-64 inclusive) Aborigines collected in a survey of employment and unemployment among Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales between November 1986 and July 1987. The project was borne out of an awareness of the inadequacy of current knowledge of the position of Aboriginal people in the labour markets of New South Wales. In particular, greater knowledge about Aboriginal unemployment, its incidence, causes and effects was sought. The project has been funded by a research grant from the New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

I am particularly appreciative of the assistance of the New South Wales State Aboriginal Land Council, and the Far South Coast, Western, North West, and Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Councils. Without the support and co-operation of these Land Councils this project could not have been successfully undertaken. I would like to express special appreciation to Tombo Winters, Gavin Andrews, William Bates, Danny Chapman, Agnes Coe, Ben Cruse, James Ingram, and Maureen O'Donnell for their individual assistance. John Berwick, formerly of, and Christian Alexander of the New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs have also been of considerable assistance.

Brian O'Toole, Officer-in-Charge, and other staff of the Sample Survey Centre at the University of Sydney provided invaluable assistance during the questionnaire design and sampling stages of the project; although final responsibility for all decisions relating to sample methodology rests with me. Julie Aggar provided competent research assistance throughout most of the project. Margaret Patterson provided invaluable general and editorial assistance at all stages of the project.

Special debts of gratitude are owed to the frontline data collectors all of whom were Aborigines with valuable local knowledge. However, the most important debt is owed to the 677 individual Aborigines who were willing to provide quite detailed information on themselves; without their cooperation this report would have been very short.

None of the above organisations or individuals have had any editorial impact on the report. The views expressed in the report are my own, unless expressly attributed to others.

1. BACKGROUND

It is widely believed that Aborigines are at the very end of the unemployment queue in New South Wales. Official unemployment statistics, although sparse, suggest that the unemployment rate for Aborigines in New South Wales is very high. It is also widely thought that there is substantial hidden unemployment among Aborigines although this has not been documented previously. The causes of Aboriginal unemployment appear to include the following:

- the concentration of Aborigines in rural areas of the state,
- the loss of access to traditional pre-whites land necessitating greater reliance on the formal economic system,
- the loss of access to traditional formal employment with white farmers as a result of the secular decline in agricultural output and the trend to greater mechanisation of farming,
- low levels of inherited economic wealth and a high level of reliance on the social security net,
- low levels of access to higher levels of formal education and a low level of educational achievement, and
- low levels of job related skills.

The interactions between these causes are complex but result in an almost certain guarantee of life long poverty.

Although there has been much uncertainty as to the exact levels of unemployment amongst Aborigines it is widely agreed that it has reached epidemic proportions. The official figures on Aboriginal unemployment are acknowledged to be sparse and unreliable. Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes monthly labour force surveys, information from those surveys does not permit discussion of the labour market position of Aboriginal people. Understanding of Aboriginal unemployment is made more difficult because the two major sources of official information do not produce comparable statistics. The ABS and the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) use different definitions of unemployment and different survey methodologies. The ABS provides information from the quinquennial census based on a voluntary enumeration of the Aboriginal population. The CES provides information as to the numbers of Aborigines who are receiving the Unemployment Benefit. The criteria used by the CES for eligibility for the unemployment benefit does not coincide with the ABS definition of unemployment. In addition, neither measure directly addresses the problems of discouraged workers or hidden unemployment. As a result, the official figures are conservative, up to five years out of date - if the ABS figures are used - and subject to individuals willingness to apply for and remain on government assistance - if the CES figures are used. The work of Stricker and Sheehan [1981] and Ross [1985]¹, among others, has shown that in times of high official unemployment (using

¹ P. Stricker and P. Sheehan, *Hidden Unemployment: The Australian Experience*, Melbourne: Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne 1981; and R. T. Ross, "Improved Labour Market Information: Beyond Unemployment Statistics", *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, September 1985.

the ABS methodology) there is considerable disguised unemployment and hidden unemployment in a society such as Australia.

The survey discussed in this report was undertaken to gain information about the incidence of Aboriginal unemployment throughout

New South Wales and some of its causes and consequences for Aborigines as a people and individually so that suggestions for improving the situation might be made.

The structure of the report is as follows. Chapter Two describes the establishment of the data base. Summary results of the labour force status of the individuals in the survey are presented in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four can be found a detailed analysis of unemployed Aborigines, based on the ABS definition of unemployment.

Chapter Five discusses alternative methods of measuring unemployment and demonstrates how the incidence of unemployment among Aborigines is sensitive to the precise definition of unemployment used. Chapter

Six focusses on the impact of labour market programs on the employment prospects of Aborigines while in the final chapter, Chapter Seven, some policy implications of the survey results are discussed and some concluding remarks are offered.

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data Collection

Data on six hundred and seventy-seven working age Aborigines were collected from a number of localities throughout New South Wales during the period November 1986 to July 1987. The survey method involved the completion of an interviewer-assisted questionnaire - a copy of which is included as Appendix A to this Report - by individuals selected using a clustered sample sampling design. Table 2.1 lists the regions of the state that were surveyed, the exact localities which were surveyed within each region, the sample size for each locality and the timing of the survey.

In choosing the sample to be surveyed several factors were taken into account.

First, participation in the survey was completely voluntary, with no incentives offered to potential participants and no compulsion for them to participate.

Second, the project had a very limited budget and a fairly tight time constraint.

Third, given the generally held belief that more was known about the plight of metropolitan Aborigines the sample was to be concentrated in non-metropolitan localities.

Table 2.1: Localities Surveyed

Region/Locality	Sample Size	Survey Dates
WESTERN		
Broken Hill	61	November 1986
Wilcannia	38	November 1986
Menindee	19	November 1986
Wentworth	45	December 1986
Regional Total	163	
NORTH WEST		
Brewarrina	50	December 1986
Bourke	73	June 1987
Walgett	61	July 1987
Regional Total	184	
WIRADJURI		
See text	115	February-April 1987
FAR SOUTH COAST		
Wallaga Lake Reserve	50	January 1987
Narooma	34	November 1986
Moruya	44	November 1986
Bateman's Bay	39	November 1986
Regional Total	167	
WESTERN METROPOLITAN		
Campbelltown	148	November-December 1986
TOTAL SAMPLE	677	November 1986 - July 1987

NB:

Regions refer to Aboriginal Land Council regions. Localities refer to local government areas.

Fourth, it was felt that the advantages of ensuring that the sample covered individuals living in a wide range of types of localities (i.e. coastal, hinterland, small size town, medium size town, isolated community, near a border with another state) would far outweigh any potential disadvantages of not having a truly random state-wide sample.

In light of these factors, advice was sought from both the NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the NSW State Aboriginal Land Council in order to be in a position to make an informed judgement as to which localities to concentrate on². This process resulted in the decision being made to concentrate the sample in five of the thirteen Aboriginal land council regions and within each region to concentrate on several localities. The regions chosen and the localities surveyed are listed in Table 2.1.

Within each region, assistance was enlisted from the Regional Aboriginal Land Council and at least one local aboriginal person was employed as a front-line data collector. The target sample size for each region was two hundred. The main areas not covered by the survey are the north coast and the hinterland around the Dubbo area. On balance, it is not felt that excluding these regions from the survey has seriously diminished the value of the project. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the north coast has many of the same socio-economic problems as those experienced in the far south coast, while the localities in the Dubbo area are broadly similar to some of those surveyed in the North-West and Wiradjuri regions.

² It must be emphasised that the final decision as to the localities to be sampled was taken by the principal researcher alone and I bear full responsibility for that decision.

Within the regions surveyed, several comments are needed. In the North West region, it had been planned to collect information from Moree as well as the three localities listed. However, the original data collector employed in that region was unable to complete data collection and by the time a suitable replacement was employed it had become impractical to visit the Moree area.

In the Wiradjuri region, data collection was organised slightly differently. There, the data collection was administered directly by the Wiradjuri Aboriginal Land Council and it was agreed that instead of concentrating on three or four localities data would be collected more evenly from throughout the region and was collected from Wagga Wagga, Bathurst, Cowra, Griffith, Hay, Leeton, Narrandera, Peak Hill, Tumut, Yass, Young.

In the Western Metropolitan region, the data collector experienced considerable resistance to the survey. By this stage it had been discovered that the costs of data collection in the rural areas was going to be considerably higher than estimated and the decision was taken³ to re-direct funds from metropolitan data collection to rural data collection.

The resultant sample comprised six hundred and seventy-seven individuals of whom three hundred and fifteen were female and three hundred and fifty-five were male⁴. The number of observations from each region is indicated in Table 2.1.

³ By the principal researcher.

⁴ The sex of seven individuals was not recorded.

3. LABOUR FORCE STATUS

3.1 Labour Force Participation

An individual's labour force status is determined by their employment situation. Four employment situations are considered.

Individuals are said to be

Employed Full-Time if they have a job and worked at least 35 hours in the survey week, or

Employed Part-Time if they have a job and worked less than 35 hours in the survey week, or

Unemployed if they do not have a job but want one and have undertaken certain steps to actively look for a job, or

Not in the Labour Force if they do not have a job and are not classified as unemployed.

These employment situations are mutually exclusive, i.e. an individual is categorised into one and only one situation for the purposes of this survey. The term 'the labour force' covers the first three situations, i.e. the labour force includes all persons who are either in full-time employment, in part-time employment or are unemployed (as defined above). Persons in the labour force will frequently be referred to as 'labour force participants' in this report and the term labour force participation rate (or simply participation rate) indicates the percentage of the population which is in the labour force. In the discussion of unemployment, two phrases need to be clearly understood. The incidence of unemployment is used to indicate the percentage of the population which is unemployed, while the unemployment rate is used to indicate the percentage of the labour force which is unemployed.

The labour force status of the sample is shown in Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6. Figure 3.1 indicates that over fifty-five percent of the sample were labour force participants but that most of labour force participants are unemployed. Figures 3.2A and 3.2B present the same information for females and males separately. The incidence of unemployment is 54.6% for males and 21.3% for females. By contrast, only 18.8% of all males and 14.0% of all females were in paid employment, and a considerable proportion of these had only part-time employment. These figures indicate that the unemployment rates are 74.4% for males, 60.4% for females and 70.4% for the whole sample. A more detailed analysis of the unemployed is in Chapter Four.

3.2 Regional Labour Force Participation Patterns

Figure 3.3 indicates how the labour force participation rates varied across the five regions⁵. Labour force participation rates for males varied from 83.2% (North West region) to 69.7% (Western) while those for females varied from 43.1% (Far South Coast) to 26.6% (Wiradjuri). Generally, these participation rates lend considerable support for the concept of the 'added worker hypothesis'. This hypothesis suggests that when male participation rates fall, female participation rates rise as families seek to minimise the impact on family income of the reduced male income. Putting the Campbelltown data to one side (see footnote 5), the two regions with the lowest

⁵ As they are based on a sample of only forty-eight, the figures for the Western Metropolitan region (i.e. the Campbelltown data) should be read with caution, especially when they relate to males or females separately.

Figure 3.1: LABOUR FORCE STATUS
WHOLE SAMPLE

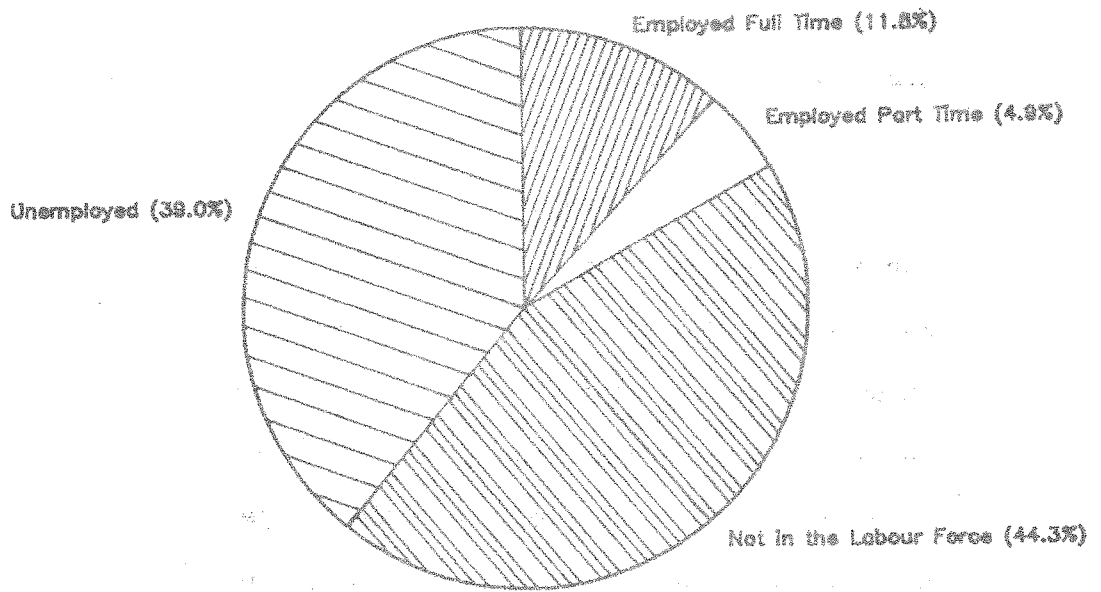
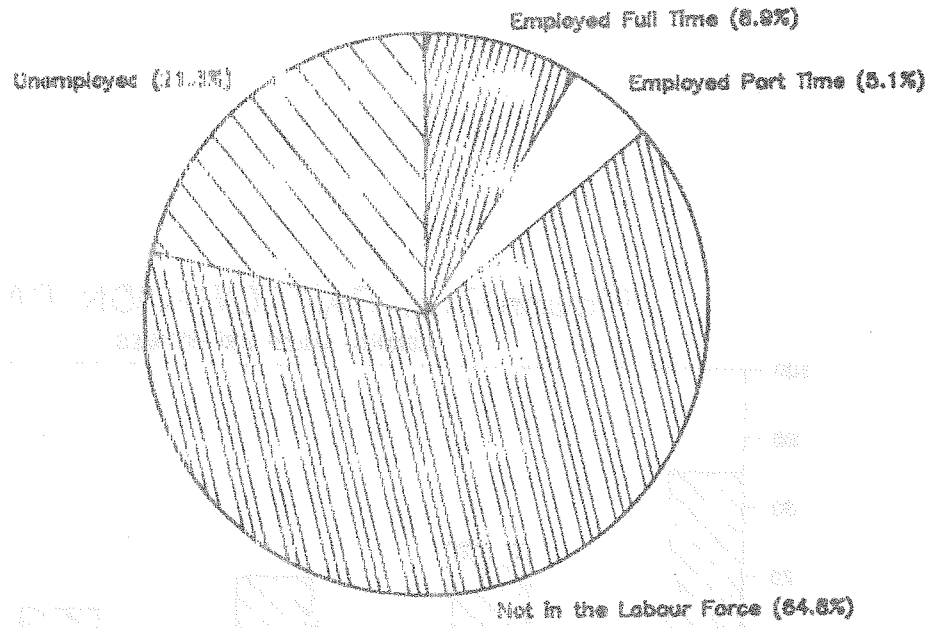


Figure 3.2: LABOUR FORCE STATUS

A. FEMALES



B. MALES

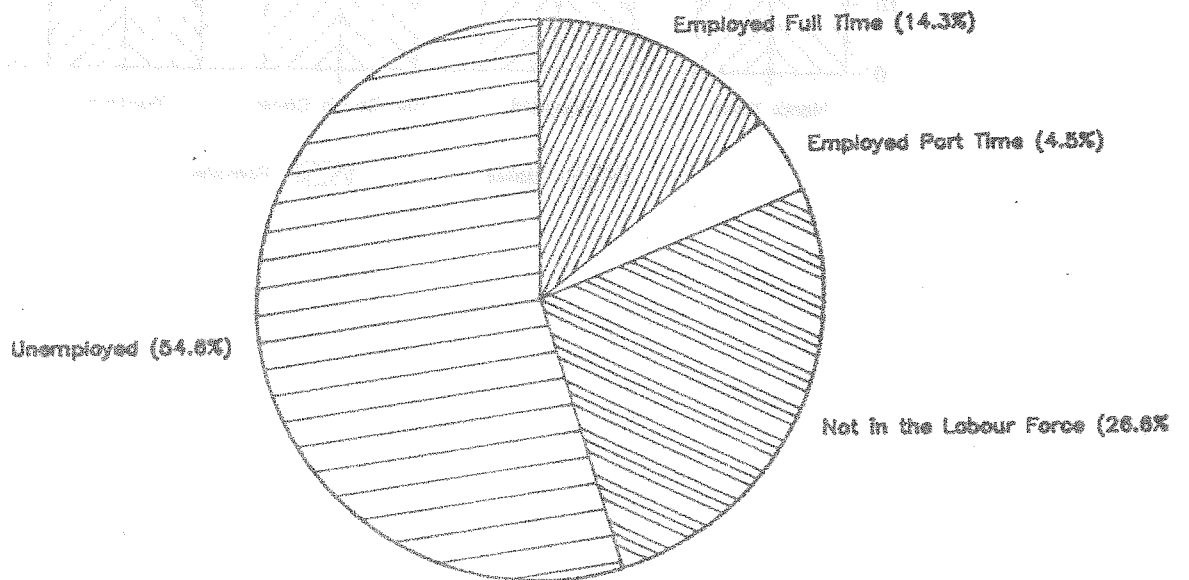
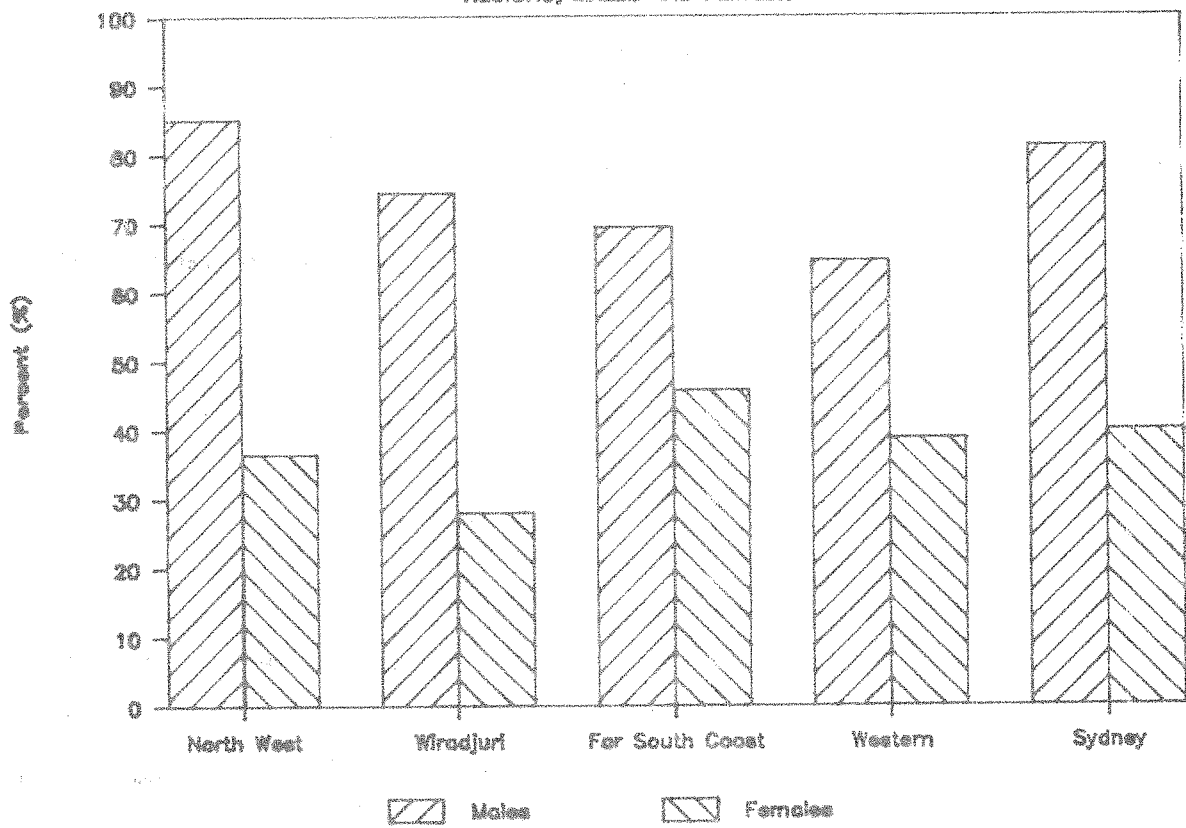


Figure 3.3: PARTICIPATION RATES
REGIONS, MALES AND FEMALES



male participation rates (Far Western and Far South) have the two highest female participation rates, and conversely the two regions with the highest male participation rates (Wiradjuri and North West) have the lowest female participation rates.

3.3 The Age Profile of Labour Force Participation

Another perspective on labour force participation can be seen in Figure 3.4. Participation rates for both males and females indicate that the pattern observed in many western societies is also found among the Aboriginal population.

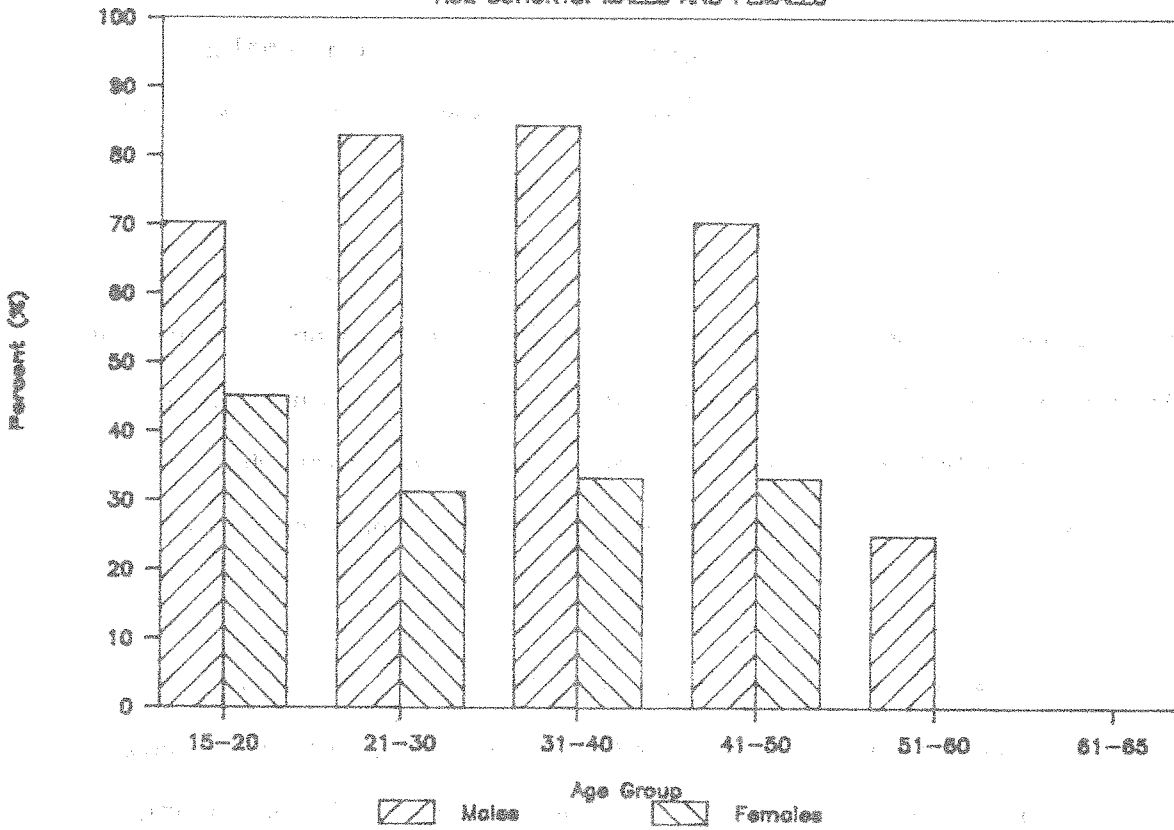
For males there is the 'inverted-U' profile with participation increasing with age up to forty after which there is an accelerating decline in participation. In this sample the decline in participation is reflected in the very high proportion of older males who are on some form of social security benefit other than the unemployment benefit⁶.

The age profile of participation for females is also 'conventional' with the familiar distorted-M-shape profile although the profile is much flatter than is observed among the non-Aboriginal population. Participation is highest among teenagers, declines in the so-called prime child-bearing ages, increases only marginally thereafter and drops to zero after age fifty.

⁶ All persons who were aged fifty or older who were not in the labour force were receiving either the Sickness Pension, the Invalid Pension or the Supporting Parent Benefit.

Figure 3.4: PARTICIPATION RATES

AGE COHORTS: MALES AND FEMALES

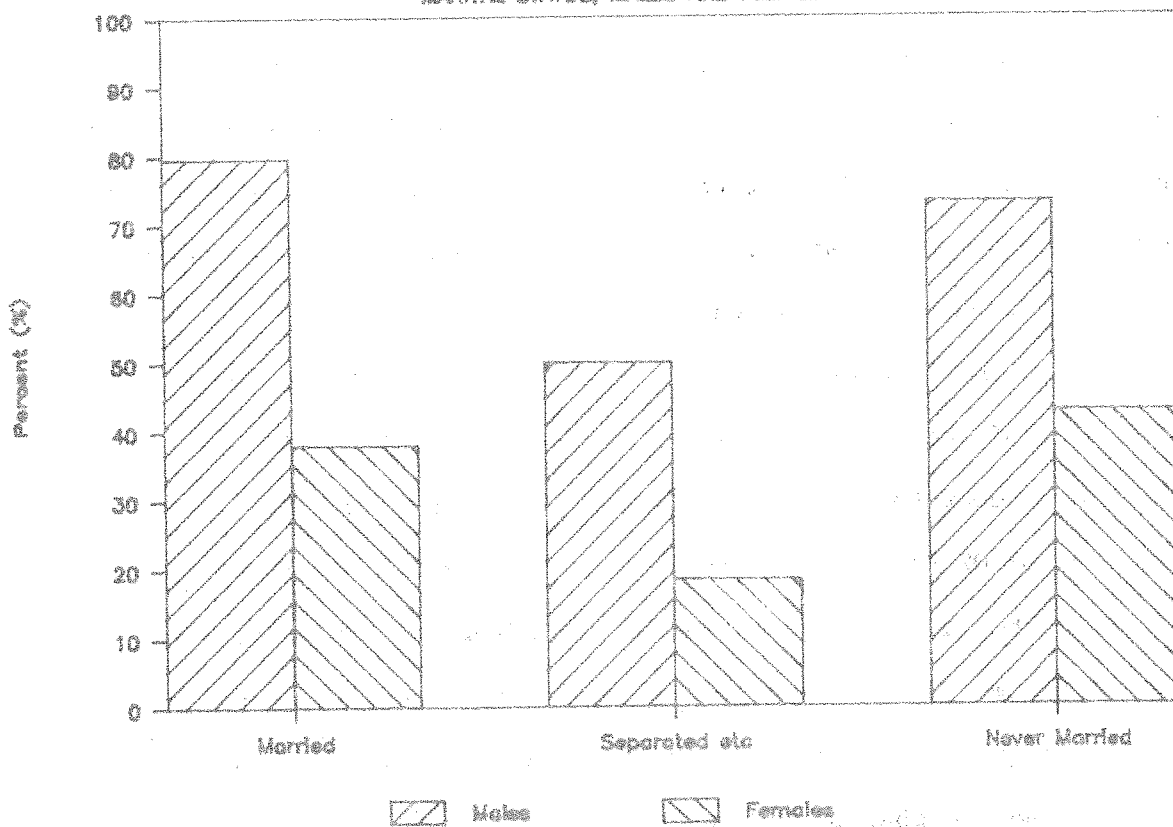


3.4 Labour Force Participation and Marital Status

As is shown in Figure 3.5, married men had the highest participation rate (79.7%), followed by men who had never been married (73.2%). Among women, married women had a lower participation rate than did those women who had never been married although only marginally so (38.1% compared to 42.7%). These figures reflect the age profiles. The never married people were concentrated amongst the younger age groups, while the separated/divorced/widowed people were more concentrated toward the upper end of the age range.

The impact of children on labour force participation is very apparent. Participation rates for women with children were much lower than participation rates for women without children for every kind of marital status. For example, the participation rate for married women with no children was 61.5%, whereas for married women with children living with them the participation rate fell to 35.0% irrespective of the age(s) of the children. Similarly, for all other women (i.e. unmarried, separated, widowed or divorced) the participation rate fell from 63.0% for those without children to 24.5% for those with children. The pattern for men was quite different. Participation rates for unmarried, separated, widowed or divorced men were the same whether or not the man had children living with him. Married men with children had a higher participation rate (at 80.8%) than did married men with no children (at 62.5%); however this difference mainly reflects the fact that the men with no children were concentrated towards the older end of the age range where the participation rates are lower.

Figure 3.5: PARTICIPATION RATES
MARITAL STATUS, MALES AND FEMALES



3.5 Labour Force Participation and Educational Achievement

Figure 3.6 illustrates the link between education and participation. It is very clear that more highly educated Aborigines are more likely to be in the labour force. Labour force participation rates rise with educational achievement up to Year 10, although there is a dip at Year 11. The perceived rise after Year 11 should be regarded cautiously as it is based on a sample of only twenty-one people. In the survey twelve people listed Year 12 as their highest educational class reached or listed the Higher School Certificate as their highest educational qualification obtained while a further nine people indicated that they had obtained some form of post-secondary formal education qualification; of these twenty-one people, fourteen were in the labour force.

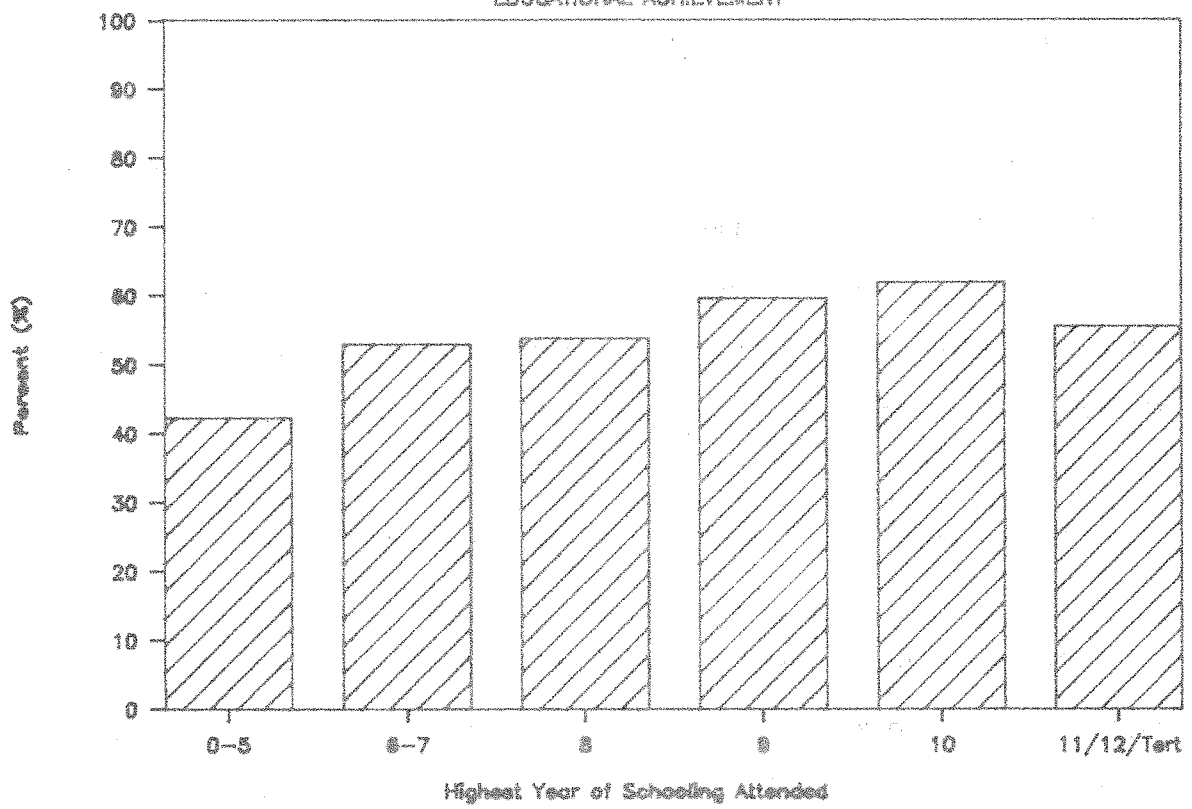
3.6 Labour Force Participation, Employment and Earnings

The situation of employed Aborigines is quite bleak as they are concentrated in jobs which are characterised by poor conditions and low pay.

Of the one hundred and twelve people who were employed, thirty-six percent of the women and twenty-three percent of the men had only part-time employment⁷. Further, the job security of employed Aborigines is quite poor. Only forty-one (i.e. 36.6%) had been employed for all of the last year, while the remaining seventy-one (or 63.4%) had all been unemployed at some time during that period.

⁷ Sixteen of the forty-four women and sixteen of the sixty-seven men who were employed had part-time jobs; see Appendix B, Section A.

Figure 3.6: PARTICIPATION RATES
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT



For the seventy-one who had been unemployed at some time during the last year, the average number weeks employed was only twenty-two while the average number of weeks of unemployment was eighteen.

Employed Aborigines are predominantly in low paid jobs. Gross (i.e. before tax) average weekly earnings for those in full-time employment was only \$246.50 for males and only \$231.70 for females, and for those in part-time employment gross average weekly earnings were \$179.20 for males and \$219.20 for females⁸. The gap between part-time earnings and full-time earnings is very small, especially for females. There are two explanations for this. The distinction between part-time and full-time jobs is somewhat arbitrary. A full-time job is one in which at least thirty-five hours are worked per week; of the eighty people classified as in full-time employment, fifty-eight worked between thirty-five and forty hours in the survey week while of the part-timers, eight worked between thirty and thirty-five hours and another four worked between twenty-five and thirty hours. Such a narrow band of hours suggests that there is likely to be a fairly small gap in average earnings between those in part-time and those in full-time employment. Further, those in full-time employment generally have more secure employment - although in jobs which are low skilled, low paid but with some non-monetary benefits - whereas those in part-time employment have less job security and no non-monetary benefits which is partially compensated for by higher hourly wages. One half of the full-time workers had worked for all of the last year and a further sixth had worked

⁸ These figures are derived from Question 31 of the Questionnaire (see Appendix A) with each person being assigned a value for their earnings equal to the mid-point of the relevant earnings range.

between six and twelve months in the last year; i.e. two-thirds of all those with full-time employment had worked for at least half the year. By contrast for part-timers only a quarter had worked all year and another quarter had worked between six and twelve months in the last year; i.e. only a half of those with part-time employment worked for at least half the year.

3.7 Labour Force Participation, Employment and Underemployment

Eight of those in paid employment were wanting to work longer hours than they worked in the survey week; that is 7.1% of all workers were wanting more work than they currently had. Six of these people were currently in part-time employment while two were in full-time employment. All eight had looked for a full-time job at some stage in the four weeks immediately prior to the survey.

4. WHO ARE THE UNEMPLOYED?

4.1 Official Unemployment Rates

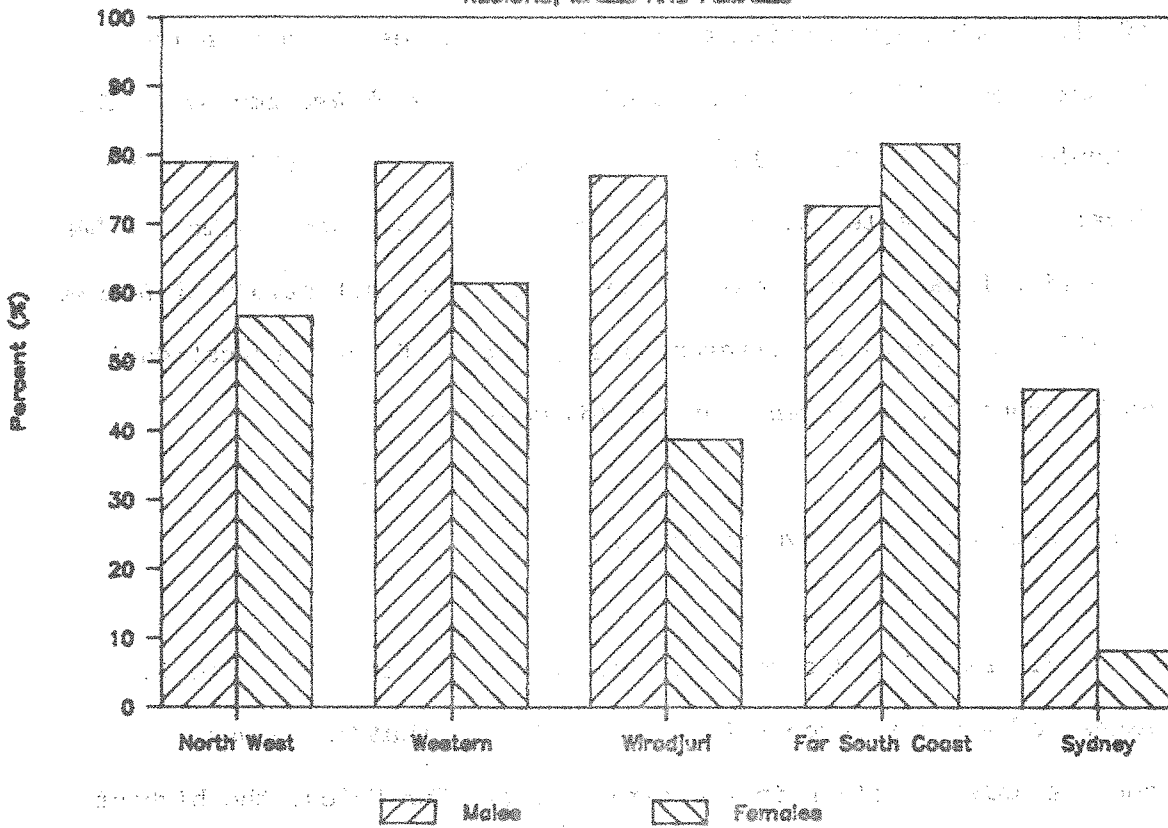
The unemployment rate for Aborigines in New South Wales is estimated from this survey to be 70.4%. This estimate, which is based on the definition of unemployment adopted by the ABS, indicates that of all working age Aborigines in New South Wales who are in the labour force, 70.4% are unemployed and only 29.6% are employed. The unemployment rate for males is estimated to be 74.4% and that for females is estimated to be 60.4%. These aggregate unemployment rates hide significant variations in the unemployment situations of people in different regions, different age groups, different educational backgrounds and different marital situations.

4.2 Regional Unemployment Patterns⁹

Figure 4.1 indicates that male unemployment rates were in excess of seventy percent in all regions and that there was considerable variation in the female rates. For males, the highest rate was in the North-West region (78.6%) and the lowest was in the Western region (73.1%). The female unemployment rates varied from a high of 83.9% (Far South Coast) to a low of 41.2% (Wiradjuri). The

⁹ The Campbelltown data is excluded from this analysis; see footnote 5.

Figure 4.1: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
REGIONS, MALES AND FEMALES



North West and Western regions had almost identical rates; 63.0% and 61.5% respectively. Interestingly, the Far South Coast was the only region in which the female unemployment rate exceeded the male rate.¹⁰ The explanation for this can be seen in the female participation rate. The Far South Coast has the highest female labour force participation rate, suggesting that women in that region remain in the labour force (but unemployed) longer than do women in other regions. Why this is the case is beyond the scope of this report.

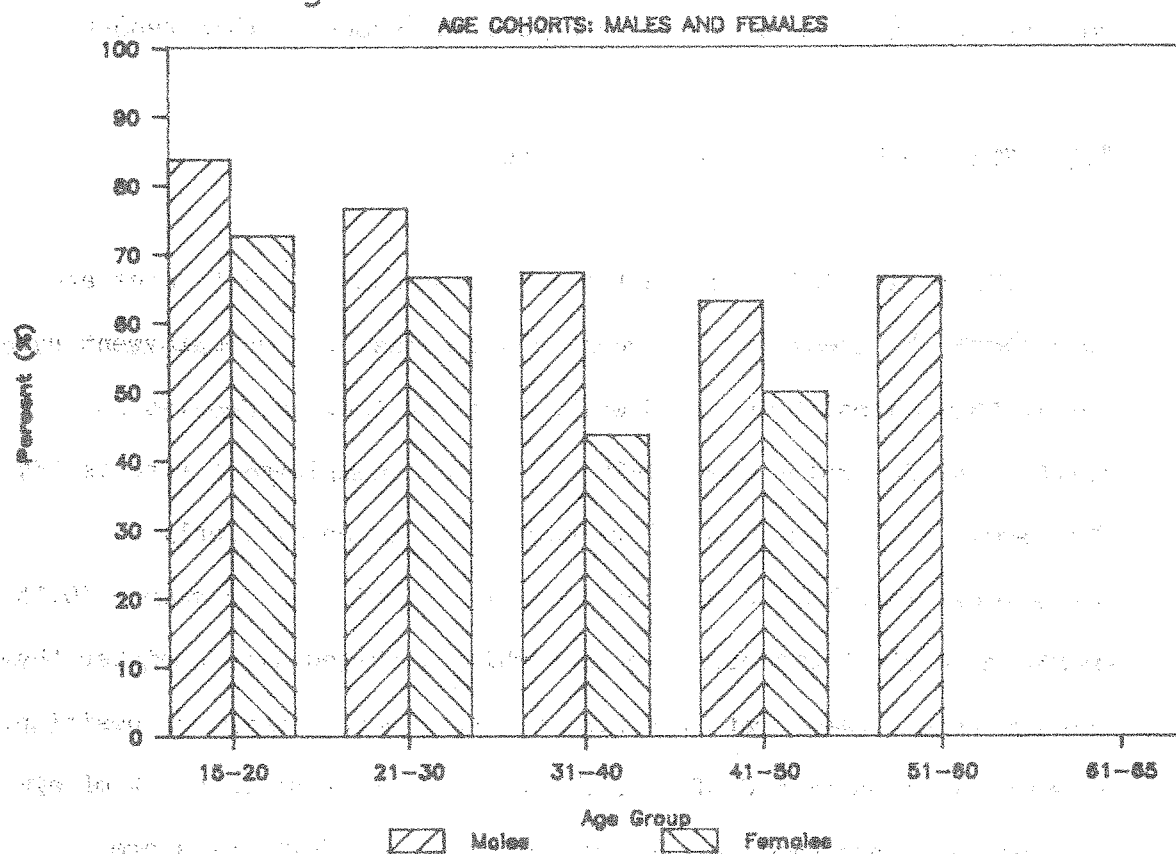
4.3 The Age Profile of the Unemployed

Figure 4.2 indicates that the highest unemployment rates are experienced by teenagers and young adult males. The unemployment rate for teenage males is over 83% while that for teenage females is almost 73%. For males aged 21-30 years, the unemployment rate is 76%. The labour market position of teenage males is particularly precarious; they have a comparatively low participation rate - 70.5% compared to 77.3% for adult males - which combined with a higher than average unemployment rate results in a very poor employment position. Inspection of Section C of Appendix B indicates that only 11% of all teenage males are employed; by contrast 21% of adult males are employed. These figures suggest that in the absence of access to any

¹⁰ The incidence of male unemployment is still higher than that for females in this region as it is based on a much higher labour force participation rate. Forty-seven males and twenty-six females were unemployed in the Far South Coast region; see Appendix B, Section B.

... 10.0 percent in 1990. The unemployment rate for males in the 15-20 age group was 84 percent in 1990, and for females it was 73 percent. In the 21-30 age group, the unemployment rate for males was 77 percent and for females it was 67 percent. In the 31-40 age group, the unemployment rate for males was 68 percent and for females it was 44 percent. In the 41-50 age group, the unemployment rate for males was 64 percent and for females it was 50 percent. In the 51-60 age group, the unemployment rate for males was 67 percent and for females it was 67 percent. In the 61-65 age group, the unemployment rate for males was 67 percent and for females it was 67 percent.

Figure 4.2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



alternative sources of income, teenage males remain in the labour force and undertake active job search in order to be eligible for the unemployment benefit rather than in any real hope of finding employment.

Unemployment rates for both females and males appear to decline with age; although given the small number of individuals in each of the upper age groups this conclusion can only be tentative¹¹.

Figure 4.3: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY SEX AND MARITAL STATUS

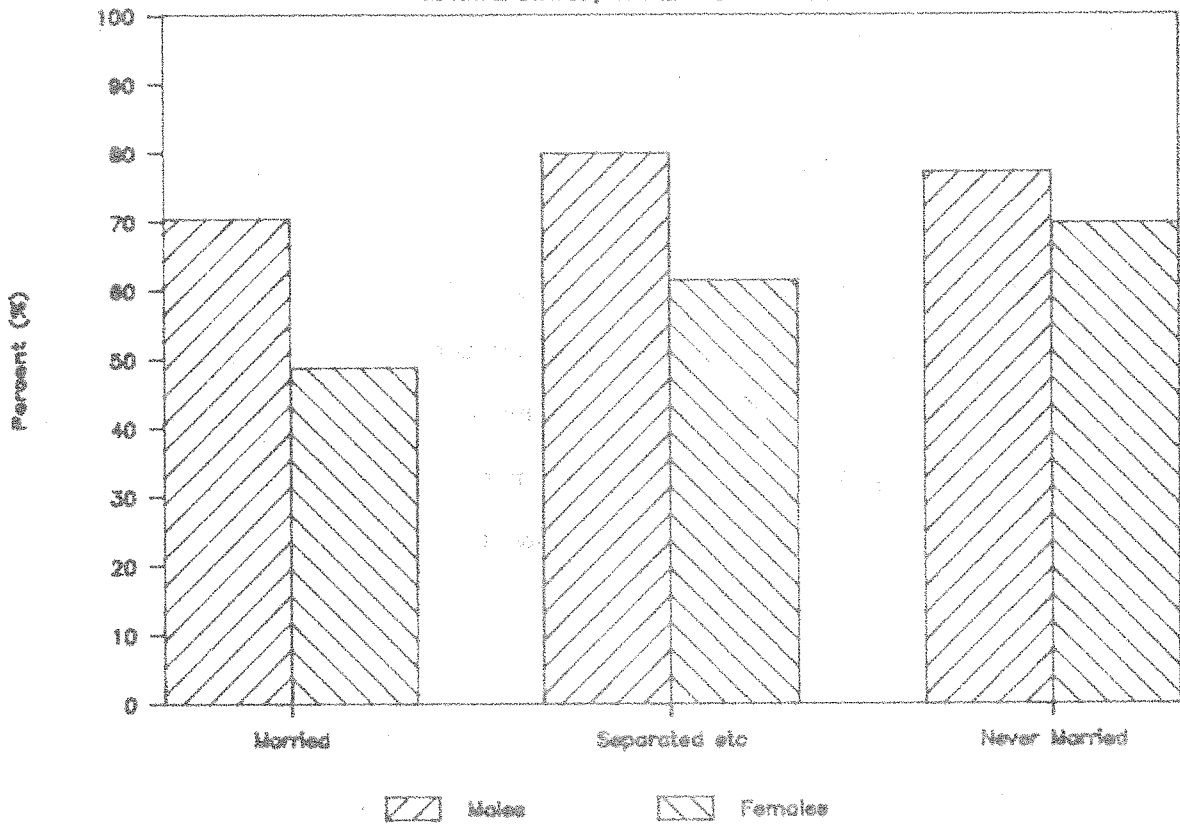
4.4 Unemployment and Marital Status

For both sexes married persons were least likely to be unemployed as is shown in Figure 4.3. Among males, separated individuals had the highest unemployment rates despite having the lowest participation rates. For females the picture is somewhat different. Women who are separated have a very low participation rate - reflecting a greater access to other sources of income support¹² - but also have a slightly above average (for females) unemployment rate.

¹¹ For example there are eighteen females and twelve males aged 51-60, and no females and only four males aged 60-65; see Appendix B, Section C.

¹² Of the fifty-seven separated/divorced/widowed women who were not in the labour force, thirty-seven were receiving the Supporting Parent Benefit, eight were receiving either the Sickness or Invalid Pensions and four were on the Unemployment Benefit.

Figure 4.3: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
MARITAL STATUS, MALES AND FEMALES



The employment position of males indicates that unmarried males fare somewhat worse than do married men¹³. Whereas over 23% of all married men are employed, slightly less than 17% of all unmarried men are employed; this pattern to some extent reflects the age profile of the sample as unmarried men tend to be concentrated at the bottom end of the age range (i.e. up to age 30) while married men are concentrated more in the middle age groups.

4.5 Unemployment and Educational Achievement

Figure 4.4 depicts the relationship between schooling and unemployment. It is quite clear that the most highly educated Aborigines fare much better in the labour force than do less educated Aborigines. Those whose education went no further than Year 9 face unemployment rates in excess of seventy percent¹⁴ and have very poor employment prospects¹⁵. In contrast, the unemployment rate for those who completed Year 10 is slightly lower, at 66%, and for those who completed Years 11 or 12 or went on to tertiary education the unemployment rate dropped to 36%¹⁶.

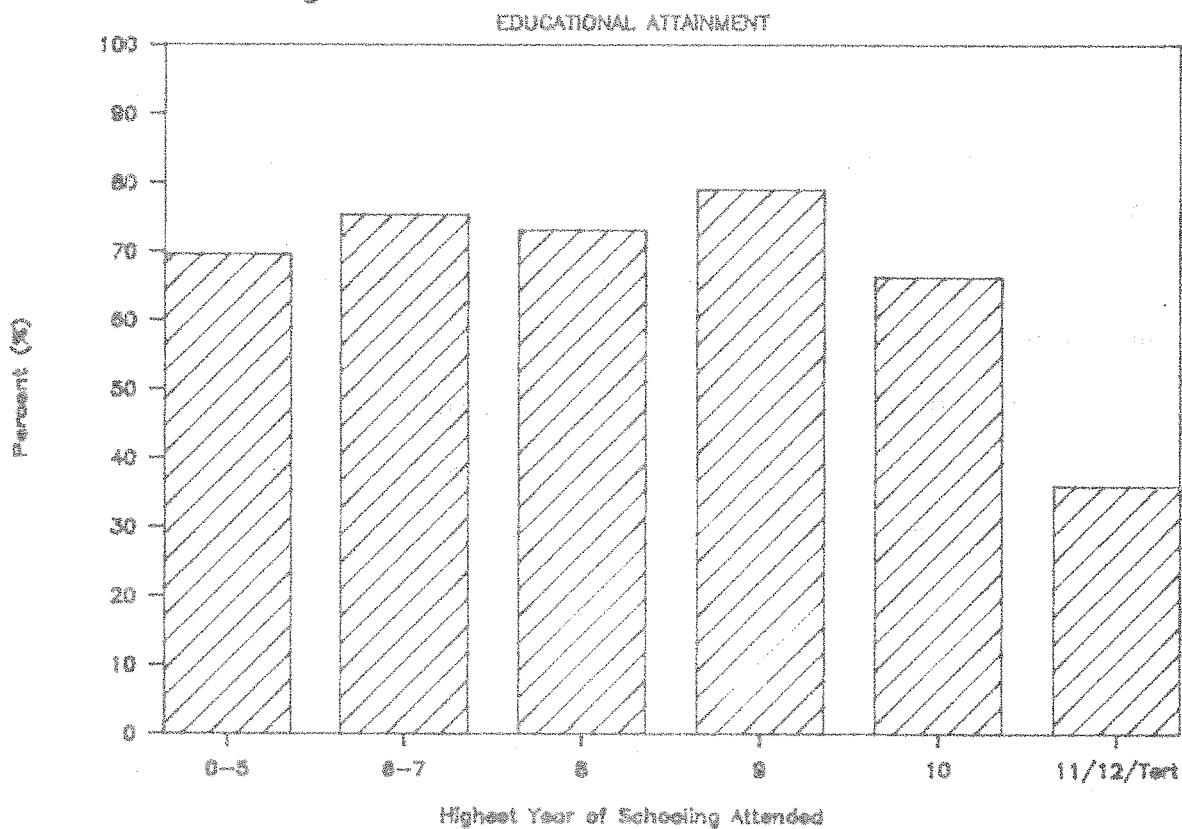
¹³ i.e. unmarried males have a higher unemployment rate despite having a lower participation rate than married males.

¹⁴ to the nearest percentage point.

¹⁵ Again, the combination of a high unemployment rate and a low participation rate indicates that the employment rate is low; 13% of all individuals whose formal education ceased at or before Year 9 were employed whereas 24% of those whose formal education continued to or beyond least Year 10 were employed.

¹⁶ Years 11, 12 and tertiary education are combined in this analysis as there are such small numbers in each of these categories.

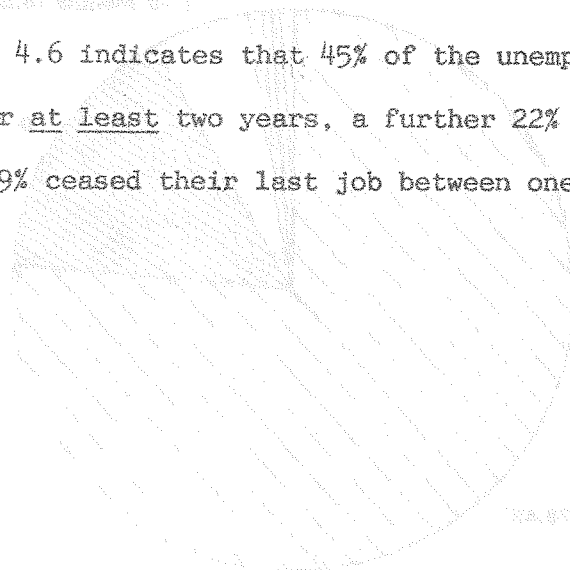
Figure 4.4: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



4.6 Duration of Unemployment

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 indicate that long term unemployment is a severe problem among Aboriginal people. Figure 4.5 indicates the proportion of the past twelve months spent in unemployment by those Aborigines who were unemployed at the time of the survey. Three out of every four unemployed Aborigines had been unemployed for all of the past year. A further 15% had been unemployed for at least nine months while only 8% had been unemployed for less than nine of the last twelve months.

Figure 4.6 indicates that 45% of the unemployed persons had not had a job for at least two years, a further 22% had never had a job and another 9% ceased their last job between one and two years ago.



(15 continued) Twenty-four individuals completed Year 11 (but went no further), a further twelve completed Year 12 (or gained their Higher School Certificate after leaving school) and a further nine individuals had undertaken some form of tertiary education; see Appendix B, Section D.

Figure 4.5: DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT
MONTHS OF LAST YEAR

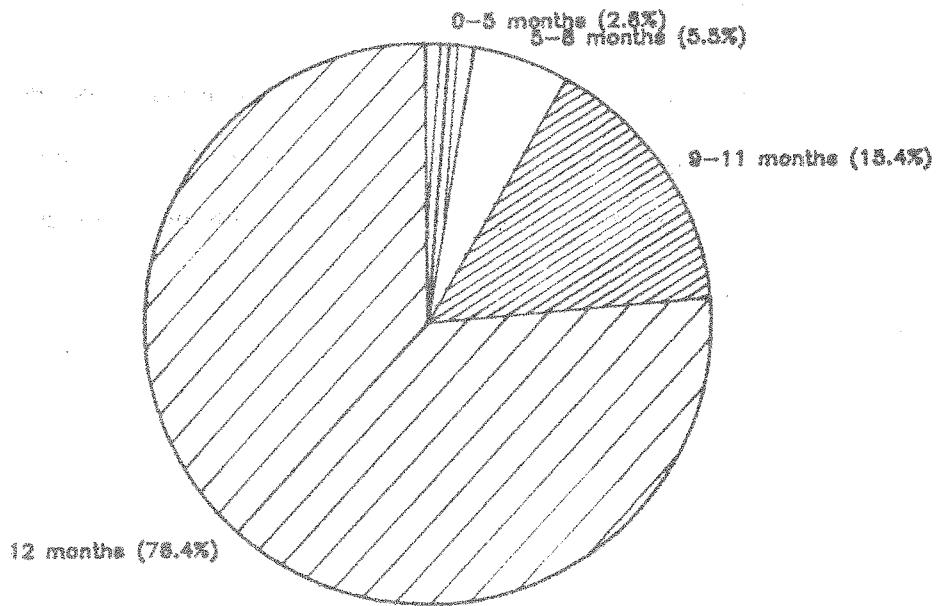
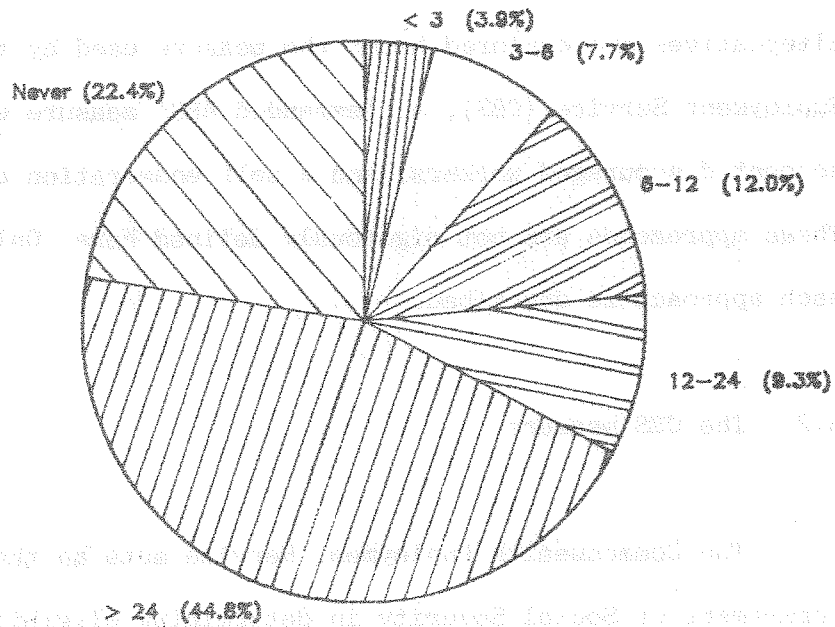


Figure 4.6: MONTHS SINCE LAST JOB

UNEMPLOYED PERSONS



5. ALTERNATIVE MEASURES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

5.1 The Alternative Measures

The discussion in Chapters Three and Four was based on the definition of unemployment used by the ABS. There are a number of alternative ways of measuring unemployment and each is likely to result in a different estimate of the level of unemployment. Three alternatives are explored here; the measure used by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), an 'expanded ABS' measure which takes into account discouraged workers, and a self enumeration of unemployment. These approaches are not rigorously defined here. Only the essence of each approach is described.

5.2 The CES measure

The Commonwealth Employment Service acts as the agent of the Department of Social Security in determining eligibility for the Unemployment Benefit. The CES measure of unemployment simply states the number of persons who are receiving the Unemployment Benefit¹⁷. In this survey, three hundred and forty-four people stated that their

¹⁷ It is generally accepted that this measure is not necessarily an exact measure of unemployment. Not everyone who is eligible for the Benefit receives it as some people do not claim their entitlement. Further, there is often a lag between a person becoming ineligible for the Benefit - either by gaining employment or by no longer being interested in employment - and that person's Benefit being stopped.

main source of income was the Unemployment Benefit. Of these, two hundred and forty were male and one hundred and two were female¹⁸. That is, over half (50.8%) of all people surveyed were receiving the Unemployment Benefit. 67.6%, or two out of every three, males and 32.3%, or one in three, females were receiving the Unemployment Benefit. If all Unemployment Beneficiaries were counted as being in the labour force, the estimated unemployment rate would be 75.4%; 77.9% for males and 70.0% for females.

5.3 The 'Expanded-ABS' measure¹⁹

The expanded ABS measure recognises that when unemployment is relatively high some individuals will be so discouraged about their own job prospects that they will not actively search for a job even though they want one and would be likely to find one during times of relatively low unemployment. Such individuals are known as discouraged workers or discouraged jobseekers. In its twice yearly surveys of people not in the labour force, the ABS elicits information which can be used to measure the number of people considered to be discouraged workers. In the present survey, discouraged workers are predominantly female. Of the fifty persons identified as discouraged workers, thirty-one were female and only nineteen were male. That is, for every two females considered to be unemployed, there is another female who is a discouraged worker²⁰.

¹⁸ The sex of two individuals was unrecorded.

¹⁹ This is not a term used by the ABS. It is used here to indicate that it expands the ABS definition to include discouraged workers.

²⁰ In Chapter Three, sixty-seven women were classified as unemployed.

using this measure of unemployment, the estimated unemployment rate is 73.8%; 76.0% for males and 69.4% for females.

5.4 The Self Enumeration Approach

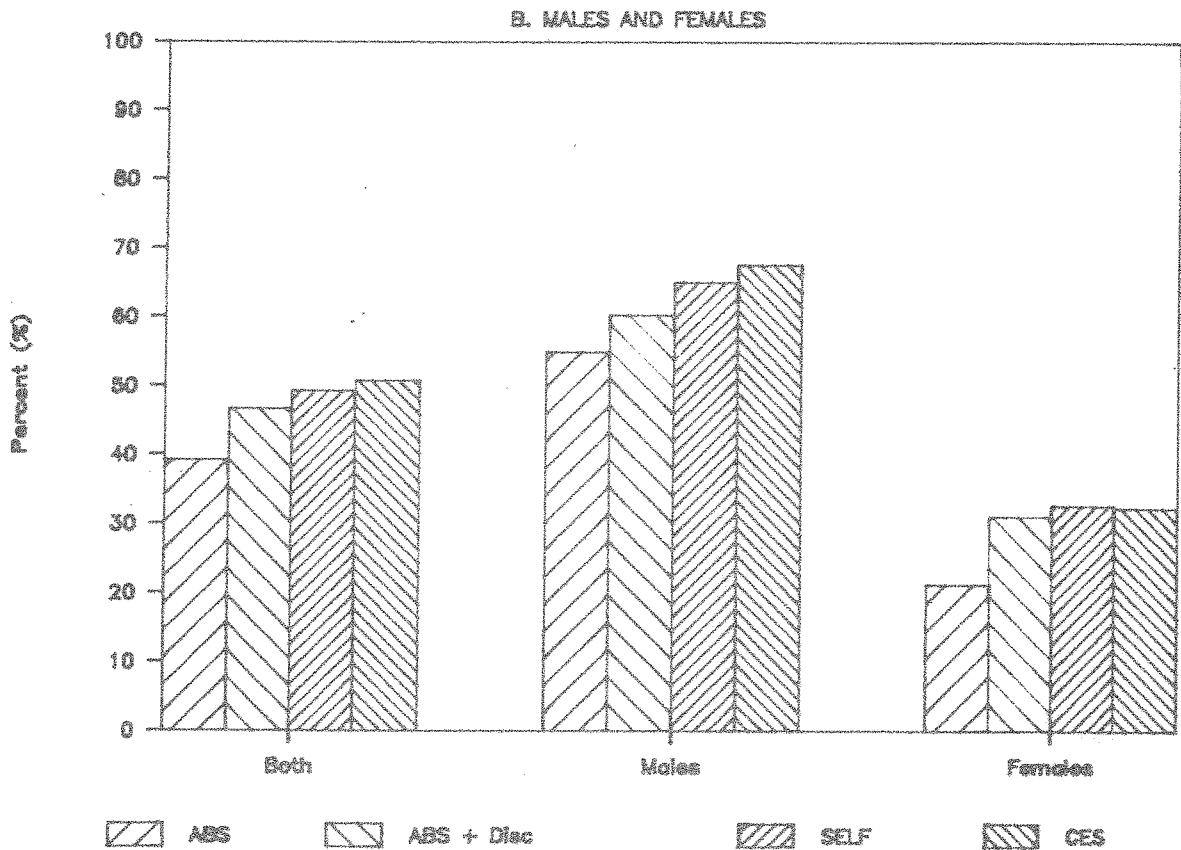
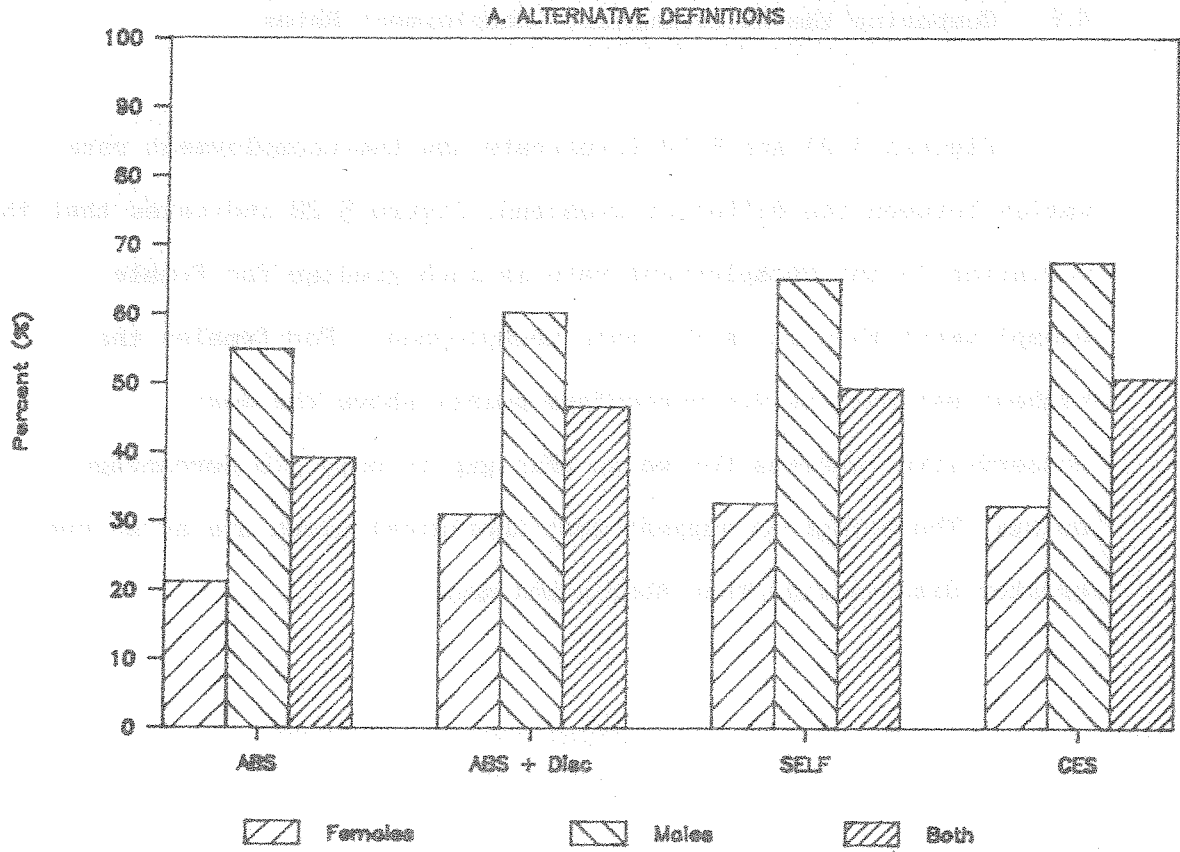
The simplest determination of unemployment is self enumeration. Individuals answering the survey were asked to nominate from a list of mutually exclusive options the labour market status which best described them. Three hundred and thirty-four people, of whom two hundred and thirty-one were male and one hundred and three were female, nominated the 'unemployed and looking for work' option²¹. If all these persons were included in the labour force, the estimated unemployment rate would be 74.9%; 77.5% for males and 70.1% for females.

5.5 Comparing the Alternatives, The Incidence of Unemployment

Figures 5.1A and 5.1B illustrate how the different measures affect the level of unemployment. The difference between the most conservative (i.e the ABS) and the least conservative (i.e. the CES) measures is considerable. The level of unemployment as measured by the CES is 30% higher than the level as measured by the ABS. For females, the CES measure is over 50% (at 52.2%) greater than the ABS measure. For males, the CES measure is 22% higher than the ABS measure.

²¹ These figures almost coincide with the CES figures indicating that people on the Unemployment Benefit regarded themselves as actively looking for work even if they did not meet the ABS criteria for active job search as defined in Appendix D.

Figure 5.1: INCIDENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

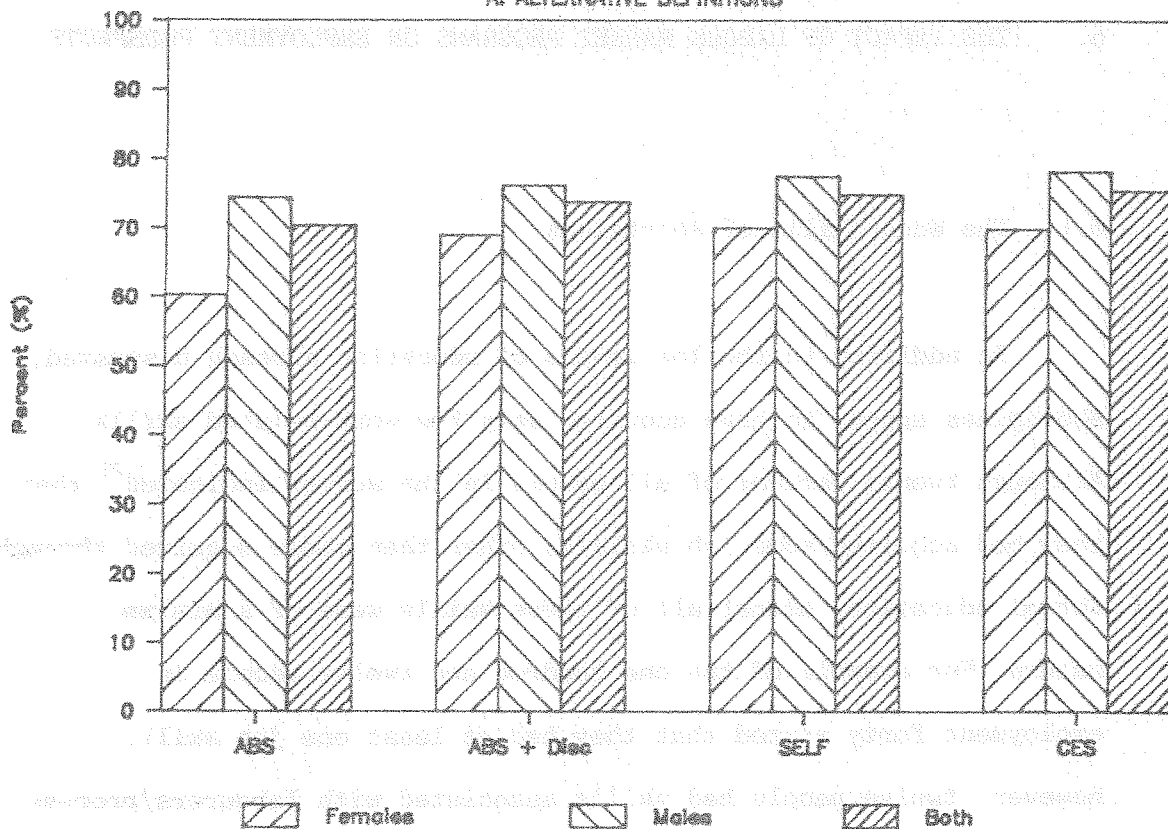


5.6 Comparing the Alternatives, Unemployment Rates

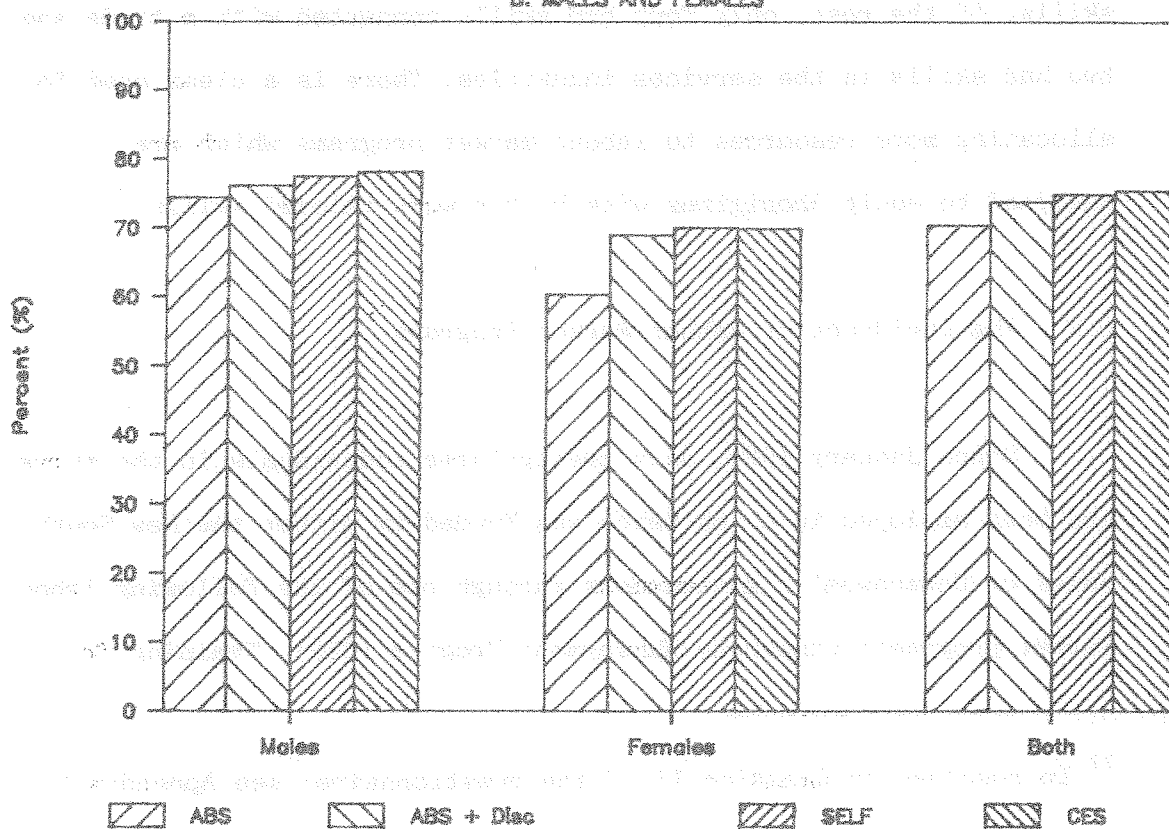
Figures 5.2A and 5.2B illustrate how the unemployment rate varies between the different measures. Figure 5.2B indicates that the variation in the unemployment rate is much greater for female unemployment than it is for male unemployment. For females the highest estimate is 9.5 percentage points above the most conservative, whereas for males this gap is only 3.8 percentage points. These figures suggest that Aboriginal women are at an even greater disadvantage than Aboriginal men.

Figure 5.2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

A. ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS



B. MALES AND FEMALES



6. THE IMPACT OF LABOUR MARKET PROGRAMS ON EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

6.1 The Work Skills of Aborigines

In addition to the low levels of education already discussed, Aborigines appear to have acquired very few work-related skills. Although twenty percent of all people in the survey indicated²² that they had acquired some job skill(s) other than those acquired through formal education, almost all of these skills were of a minimal nature. For example of the one hundred and twelve people in employment forty stated that they had at least one job skill; however, twelve people had skills associated with labourers/process workers, nine were in transport jobs, five were clerical skills, four were associated with farm hands/timber workers, and two had sales skills. Of the rest, only four had skills connected with a trade and two had skills in the services industries. There is a clear need for allocating more resources to labour market programs which are designed to equip Aborigines with better work-related skills.

6.2 The Incidence of Labour Market Programs

Since January 1984, only twenty-three individuals in the survey had been employed in a job which was funded by either the New South Wales or Commonwealth governments through one of the following labour market programs; Community Employment Program (CEP), Training for

²² In response to Question 13 of the questionnaire; see Appendix A.

Aboriginals Program (TAP), National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals (NESA), and Special Works Projects (SWP). This indicates that only a very small proportion of the Aboriginal labour force have had access to such programs²³.

As a group these people were considerably better off compared to the rest of the sample; ten were in full-time employment at the time of the survey, one was in part-time employment, six were unemployed (ABS definition), and six were outside the labour force (although four of these were on the Unemployment Benefit and therefore would be in the labour force using the CES definition of unemployment). Thus their labour force participation rate is 73.9%, their employment rate is 47.8%, their incidence of unemployment is 26.1%, and their unemployment rate is 35.3%.²⁴ The position of these twenty-three people is all the more remarkable when it is realised that seventeen of them are under age 30, i.e. they are in the age groups which have the highest unemployment rates and lowest employment prospects.

Of the six who were currently unemployed, four had had some employment in the last twelve months and one more had last worked between one and two years ago.

²³ These twenty-three people are equivalent to 6.1% of the labour force.

²⁴ From Chapters Three and Four, the corresponding figures for the whole sample are 55.7%, 16.5%, 39.3% and 70.4%.

Of the six who were currently outside the labour force, only one had not had a job in the last year²⁵. The other five had averaged four months employment over the last year.

²⁵ This individual has a pre-school aged child and is on the Supporting Parent Benefit.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

There is no doubt that unemployment among Aborigines is one of the major problems facing New South Wales. It is chronic and even the most conservative estimate indicates that the incidence of unemployment (which indicates the proportion of the population which is unemployed) is such that over fifty percent of all Aboriginal men and over twenty percent of all Aboriginal women are unemployed.

Further, unemployment rates (which indicate the proportion of the labour force who are unemployed) are in excess of sixty percent for Aboriginal women and almost seventy-five percent for Aboriginal men.

The position of Aborigines in the labour market is even worse than these statistics suggest. In addition to the high incidence of unemployment and the high unemployment rates, there is considerable hidden unemployment as many Aborigines who are not considered to be in the labour force are nevertheless interested in gaining meaningful employment but are not actively looking for employment due to the very depressed state of their local labour market. Among these Aborigines who are outside the labour force there is almost total dependence on the public sector for income support. The position of employed Aborigines is not particularly good; many had been unemployed at some time during the last year, a relatively high proportion have only part-time employment, and almost all of those with full-time employment are in low paying jobs.

The reasons for the chronic position of Aborigines in the labour market appear to include

- * residing predominantly in rural areas and small country towns which are in economic decline,
- * inability to derive adequate standards of living from traditional sources,
- * lack of ownership of economic resources such as farms and reliance on owners of those resources for paid employment,
- * lack of adequate access to educational facilities beyond basic education, and
- * very low levels of job skills.

The interactions between these causes are complex and result in a virtual guarantee of life time poverty. For example, the depressed world market for Australia's agricultural products has resulted in reduced farm outputs. This has resulted in both lower farm incomes and less demand for farm workers. Over the same period there has been a trend towards greater mechanisation of agricultural activities and this has further depressed demand for farm labour. Unable to resume their traditional activities outside of the formal economic structure, because of the previous alienation of their land, Aborigines have turned to rural towns for alternative employment but the situation there is similarly bleak. One consequence of the decline in farm incomes is the multiplier effect on the local economies. Lower farm incomes means lower expenditure by farm owners and therefore less income to local shop keepers, freight agents and so on; all of which means that demand for labour is reduced in the rural township as well.

7.2 Policy Implications

The information from this survey indicates very clearly that Aborigines are at a serious disadvantage in the labour market. The survey also indicates clearly that those Aborigines who are the least disadvantaged are those who have completed higher levels of formal education and/or have had access to a labour market program such as CEP, TAP or NESA. Although no detailed policy prescriptions are canvassed in this report, there would seem to be several main directions in which policy discussion ought to proceed as a matter of urgency.

1. a. better access to and participation in higher levels of education with curriculum orientated towards labour market success and maintaining Aboriginal identity, and
b. better access to and participation in the acquisition of useful job-related skills other than through the education system.
2. greater encouragement to the private sector to employ Aboriginal workers in employment other than low pay, low tenure jobs.
3. greater encouragement and support for Aboriginal organisations to set up viable co-operative ventures which enable their members to partially or completely withdraw from the formal labour market without being dependent on the public sector for income support.

Ideas such as these are based on the inescapable fact that Aboriginal unemployment is going to be a major problem until such

time as Aborigines are in a position to be far more independent of the social security system than is currently so. In order to be independent, Aboriginal people will need to be equipped with those skills which enable them to take advantage of whatever job opportunities exist - be they either in paid employment or in self employment.

However, the greatest caveat is that greater job opportunities must become available. If this does not occur then all that will happen is a re-ordering of the unemployment 'queue' with some Aborigines displacing other Aborigines from positions higher up the queue. In order to prevent this re-ordering from occurring, in the short-medium term substantial government resources will need to be committed to some imaginative and radical policies designed to assist Aborigines to a more independent labour market position.

Appendix A: The Questionnaire

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

SURVEY OF EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG
ABORIGINES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CONFIDENTIAL

Instructions: Please answer ALL questions. For each question please circle the number next to the answer which best fits your situation or write your answer in the space provided. Ignore the numbers in brackets.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (6)	B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING (22)
1. SEX: Female.....1 Male.....2	8.(a) Are you still at school? Yes.....1 No.....2
2. AGE: _____ years	(b) If NO, how old were you when you left? Left school at _____ years old
3. MARITAL STATUS: Married or de facto.....1 Separated.....2 Divorced.....3 Widowed.....4 Never married.....5	9. What was the highest class you were in at school? Highest class _____
4. In your household, NOT counting you - How many adults are there?..... How many children aged 0-4 are there?..... How many children aged 5-9 are there?..... How many children aged 10-14 are there?..... How many children aged 15 or more are there?.....	10. What is the highest educational qualification you have? Qualification _____ School/Institution _____
5. Which of the following BEST describes you this week? Employed full time.....1 Employed part-time.....2 Self employed.....3 Working without pay in family business.....4 Unemployed and looking for work.....5 Unemployed but not looking for work.....6 Volunteer or community worker.....7 None of the above.....8	11. Are you currently attending an educational institution other than school? Yes.....1 No.....2 If YES, what is the name of the institution, and what course are you doing? Institution _____ Course of study _____
6. What is your MAIN source of income this week? **DO NOT TELL ME HOW MUCH INCOME YOU GET** Wages or salary.....01 Self employment.....02 Family business, paid in money.....03 Family business, not paid in money.....04 Workers compensation.....05 Unemployment benefit.....06 Sickness or invalid pension.....07 Supporting parent benefit.....08 Other social security pension.....09 Interest on savings or investments.....10 Rental income from property.....11 Other source of income.....12 Don't have any income at all.....13	12.(a) Since leaving high school, have you gained any JOB RELATED qualifications (for example, nurse's certificate, teacher's certificate, secretarial diploma, trade certificate in plumbing, etc)? Yes.....1 No.....2 (b) If YES, what are they? _____
7.(a) Are you living in the same district as you were five years ago? Yes.....1 No.....2 (b) If NO, what district were you living in then? _____ (c) and what was your main reason for moving? _____	(c) What institution did you go to? _____ (d) How long did it take to obtain this qualification? Time taken..... months
	(e) Did you study part-time or full-time to obtain this qualification? Full-time.....1 Part-time.....2
	13. Please list any other job skills that you have acquired which have not been covered in the previous questions? _____ _____ _____

If you are **NOT** currently looking for a job or a different job, which of the following reasons apply? (You may circle more than one reason) (6)

- Already have a job.....1
- Don't want a job.....1
- Ill health.....1
- Studying.....1
- On holiday.....1
- Looking after someone who is ill/disabled.....1
- No-one to look after my children.....1
- Employers think I'm too young or too old.....1
- Employers don't want Aborigines.....1
- Language problems.....1
- Lack job skills or experience.....1
- No suitable jobs available.....1
- No jobs available in district.....1
- No jobs available at all.....1

Of the reasons you have indicated in the previous question, which one is the **MAIN** reason why you are not looking for work?

Main reason _____

(a) How many hours have you spent in unpaid community work in the last **TWO** weeks? _____ hours

(b) What was the nature of this community work? (for example, youth centre, school canteen, church activities)

Are you a member of any trade unions or professional groups?

- Yes.....1
- No.....2

If **YES**, please state their name(s)

Of the **OTHER** people you live with who are aged between fifteen and sixty-five, that is who are of working age, how many are best described as: (please count each person only once)

- In a part-time job?.....
- In a full-time job?.....
- Unemployed, receiving the unemployment benefit?.....
- Unemployed, not receiving the unemployment benefit?.....
- Receiving some other form of benefit or pension?.....
- Not interested in employment?.....
- Still at school?.....

D. INCOME

(Reminder: This information is strictly **CONFIDENTIAL**. Because your name is not on this form, it will be **IMPOSSIBLE** for any government department, or anyone else, to identify you from the answers you give)

(34)

31. Earnings: (ie from jobs)

(a) How much income did you receive from **ALL** jobs in the last **two** weeks? (Please specify the gross amount or put a tick next to the relevant income range.)

Income Range

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| \$1 - \$50... _____ | \$751 - \$800... _____ |
| \$51 - \$100... _____ | \$801 - \$850... _____ |
| \$101 - \$150... _____ | \$851 - \$900... _____ |
| \$151 - \$200... _____ | \$901 - \$950... _____ |
| \$201 - \$250... _____ | \$951 - \$1000... _____ |
| \$251 - \$300... _____ | \$1001 - \$1100... _____ |
| \$301 - \$350... _____ | \$1101 - \$1200... _____ |
| \$351 - \$400... _____ | \$1201 - \$1300... _____ |
| \$401 - \$450... _____ | \$1301 - \$1400... _____ |
| \$451 - \$500... _____ | \$1401 - \$1500... _____ |
| \$501 - \$550... _____ | \$1501 - \$1600... _____ |
| \$551 - \$600... _____ | \$1601 - \$1800... _____ |
| \$601 - \$650... _____ | \$1801 - \$2000... _____ |
| \$651 - \$700... _____ | \$2001 and over... _____ |

Gross amount.....\$ _____

(b) Do you know how much tax was taken off this pay?

- Yes.....1
- No.....2

If **YES**, please indicate the amount....\$ _____ tax

32. Other Income: (ie not from jobs)

In the last **TWELVE MONTHS** how much income have you received from each of the following sources?

- Unemployment Benefits.....\$ _____
- Sickness or Invalid Pension.....\$ _____
- Supporting Parent Benefit.....\$ _____
- Other Social Security Benefits or Pensions.....\$ _____
- Interest from Banks/Building Societies.....\$ _____
- Rent from properties owned.....\$ _____
- All other sources of income.....\$ _____

E. TWO FINAL QUESTIONS

33. Your Regional and District Aboriginal Land Council will both receive a copy of the summary results of this survey. Would you be interested in receiving a copy for yourself? If so, please include on a separate piece of paper your name and postal address.

34. Finally, if you have any comments you wish to add which you feel will clarify or amplify your answers, please do so below, or on the back of this page.

Appendix B: Statistics Used in Chapters 3 and 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Employed Full Time	Part Time	Unem- ployed	Not in Labour Force	Partici- pation Rate (%)	Unemploy- ment Rate (%)
<u>A. SEX</u>						
Males	51	16	195	93	73.8	74.4
Females	28	16	67	204	35.2	60.4
Total	80	32	266	295	55.7	70.4
<u>B. REGIONS</u>						
Western						
Males	13	5	49	29	69.8	73.1
Females	4	6	16	41	38.8	61.5
Total	17	11	65	70	57.1	69.9
North West						
Males	13	5	66	17	83.2	78.6
Females	6	4	17	55	32.9	63.0
Total	19	9	83	73	60.3	74.8
Wiradjuri						
Males	7	1	27	12	74.5	77.1
Females	6	4	7	47	26.6	41.2
Total	14	6	36	59	48.7	64.3
Far South Coast						
Males	13	3	47	32	66.3	74.6
Females	3	2	26	41	43.1	83.9
Total	16	5	73	73	56.3	77.7
Campbelltown						
Males	5	2	6	3	81.2	46.1
Females	9	0	1	20	32.3	10.0
Total	14	2	7	25	47.9	30.4
<u>C. AGE</u>						
Males						
15-20	8	2	52	26	70.5	83.9
21-30	19	5	79	21	83.1	76.7
31-40	12	4	33	9	84.5	67.3
41-50	5	2	12	8	70.4	63.2
51-60	1	0	2	9	25.0	66.7
61-65	0	0	0	4	0.0	0.0
Females						
15-20	6	3	24	40	45.2	72.7
21-30	8	4	24	79	31.3	66.7
31-40	6	3	7	32	33.3	43.8
41-50	1	2	3	12	33.3	50.0
51-60	0	0	0	9	0.0	0.0
61-65	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Employed Full Time	Part Time	Unem- ployed	Not in Labour Force	Partici- pation Rate (%)	Unemploy- ment Rate (%)

D. EDUCATION

0-5 Years	5	5	23	45	42.3	69.7
6-7 "	10	3	40	47	53.0	75.5
8 "	13	2	41	48	53.8	73.2
9 "	14	8	83	71	59.6	79.0
10 "	23	11	67	62	62.0	66.5
11 "	5	0	6	13		
12/HSC "	5	1	1	5	55.6	36.0
Post-Sec	3	2	2	2		

E. MARITAL STATUS

Males						
Married	30	6	86	31	79.7	70.5
Separated	3	0	12	15	50.0	80.0
Unmarried	18	10	95	45	73.2	77.2
Females						
Married	15	7	21	70	38.1	48.8
Separated	3	2	8	57	18.6	61.5
Unmarried	9	7	37	71	42.7	69.8

NB:

All figures are from the survey. The figures in columns 1 to 4 indicate numbers of individuals. Within each section, totals may exceed the sum of the component parts due to missing values. All terms are defined in Appendix D.

Appendix C: Statistics Used in Chapter Five

	Males	Females	All Persons
Definition of Unemployment			
<u>A: Number of Persons</u>			
ABS	195	67	266
ABS + disc	214	98	316
Self	236	104	343
CES	240	102	344
<u>B: Incidence of Unemployment (%)</u>			
ABS	54.9	21.3	39.3
ABS + disc	60.3	31.1	46.7
Self	66.5	33.0	50.7
CES	67.6	32.4	50.8
<u>C: Unemployment Rates (%)</u>			
ABS	74.4	60.4	70.4
ABS + disc	76.2	69.0	73.8
Self	77.9	70.3	75.4
CES	78.2	69.9	75.4

NB:

All figures are from the survey. All terms are defined in Appendix D.

Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Labour Force Status:

- Employed Full-time: worked at least 35 hours in the survey week
 Employed Part-time: worked between 1 and 34 hours inclusive in the survey week
- Unemployed
 ABS definition: not in employment but wanting employment and at some time during the four weeks prior to the survey undertaken at least one of the following forms of active job search; written, phoned or applied in person; answered a newspaper advertisement; checked CES noticeboards; or checked factory noticeboards.
 CES definition: Receiving the Unemployment Benefit
 Self defined: Response to Question 5 of the survey (see Appendix A) was "unemployed and looking for work"
 ABS + disc: ABS definition plus discouraged workers (see below)
- Labour Force: includes everyone who is either employed or unemployed
- Discouraged Worker: Any one who does not have a job but is not undertaking active job search and gave, in response to Question 26, as a reason why they are not undertaking active job search any of the following; no suitable jobs available; no jobs available in the district; no jobs available at all.
- Participation Rate: labour force as a percentage of the population
 Unemployment Rate: Unemployment as a percentage of the labour force
 Incidence of Unemployment: Unemployment as a percentage of the population

Education:

- Years: The highest year of schooling completed or the year in which the highest qualification attained is normally awarded
- SC: School Certificate
 HSC: Higher School Certificate
 Post-Sec: Covers all educational qualifications awarded by tertiary institutions

Marital Status:

- Married: Living with a spouse, including de facto relationships
- Separated: Legally married but living apart from the spouse.
 *NB includes persons who are divorced or widowed due to the very small numbers in these categories
- Unmarried: Never been married

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- * 2. I.G. Sharpe Asset Revaluation and Stock Market Prices; June 1975
- R.G. Walker
- * 3. N.V. Lam Incidence and Stabilization Impact of Tin Export Taxation in West Malaysia; June 1975
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