Reviewer's report

Title: Indigenous well-being in four countries: An application of the UNDP'S Human Development Index to Indigenous Peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States

Version: 1 Date: 10 June 2007

Reviewer: Tony Blakely

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper is a novel addition to the health inequalities literature. Pooling measures of health, education and income in one measure such as the HDI is a useful analysis.

Determining trends over time is difficult with just three time periods, and inevitable data inaccuracies / changes that may go undetected yet be responsible for apparent trends. If the paper can include data back into the 1980s, hence lengthening the time series, it would be greatly improved in my view.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Educational data for Australia. Based on footnotes to table, I sense that the 1991 and 1996 censuses only included information on qualifications on leaving school, but the 2001 census also included highest qualification? This requires elaboration, especially what data was inputted into the HDI and what impact there is on cross-national HDI comparisons due to the use of non-consistent educational data between countries.

2. The authors point to changing ethnic definitions on census data, and possible census under coverage, impacting trend data. Agreed - especially in Australia where under-enumeration of Aboriginal people is a major issue. However, for life expectancy data inconsistencies in ethnic classification on census and mortality data, resulting in possible/probable numerator-denominator bias that varies over time too, matter more. I can only speak with authority with respect to New Zealand. Here, it has been clearly shown that M?ori mortality rates were grossly underestimated in the early 1990s, and somewhat underestimated in the late 1990s. The 'official' Statistics New Zealand life expectancy estimates for 2000-02 allude to this in the technical documentation. The authors should look, though, at Ministry of Health funded work from the New Zealand Census-Mortality Study that corrects for these undercounts, and attempts to update/correct life expectancy estimates:

   If nothing else, more:
   - information needs to be provided on how the early 1990 estimate of life expectancy for New Zealand was calculated
   - comment is required in the Discussion on numerator-denominator bias impacts on LE estimates for all countries – in particular possible variation over time in numerator denominator bias.

3. What difference would age-standardising the income data make? It is possible that differences between indigenous and non-indigenous, populations in income are in part at least due to age differences between populations. It is also possible that age changes over time impact gaps over time.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.