

**POPULATION STUDIES
RESEARCH BRIEF**

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**INDIGENOUS DARWIN AND THE REST
OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2006 Indigenous people in Darwin made up around 10 percent of the total population, but in the Rest of the NT one in every two people was Indigenous.
- Both populations are young with very few people aged over 50 years.
- Growth from 2001 to 2006 was dominated by those aged over 40 years for both regions.
- The sex ratio for Indigenous people was significantly lower in 2006 than for non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory (108), both in Darwin (94) and in the Rest of the NT (97).
- Indigenous people in the Rest of the NT have lower levels of educational achievement and lower income levels compared to those residing in Darwin.
- Changing place of residence was less common for Indigenous people in the Rest of the NT compared to Darwin.

RESEARCH AIM

To compare and contrast the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Indigenous Territorians in Darwin and the Rest of the Northern Territory.

The research and analysis is based on data drawn from the Census of Population and Housing for 2006 conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

This Research Brief was prepared by Andrew Taylor and Sally Macdonald

Introduction

Around a third of all Northern Territory residents are Indigenous and 15 percent of these live in Darwin. A previous research brief ([2008020](#)) has found substantial differences between demographic characteristics of the overall population of Darwin and the remainder of the Territory. The analysis in this research brief expands on those findings by investigating some of the differences in the demographic and socio-economic characteristics between Indigenous Territorians who live in Darwin and those in other parts of the Northern Territory. Differences in age structures, growth patterns, and various socio-economic measures provide indications of variations in the service and infrastructure requirements of the two populations and about how the two might grow and change into the future.

Data and Methods

Publicly available data on a usual resident basis for the Darwin Statistical Division (herein 'Darwin') and the Northern Territory Balance Statistical Division (herein 'Rest of NT') from the Australian Bureau of Statistics are the basis of this analysis. The Darwin Statistical Division includes the surrounding areas of Palmerston and the Litchfield Shire. Some comparisons to the non-Indigenous population in each region are made.

Data are derived from the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Census of Population and Housing and are sourced from the Indigenous Community Profile, Basic Community Profile, Census Tables and Expanded Community Profile for the years and regions in question (see <http://abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/census+data>). All results refer to the Indigenous populations of the regions unless otherwise stated. People who did not state their Indigenous status are excluded from this analysis. High rates of indigenous under enumeration in the 2006 Census, particularly in remote areas, may have contributed to variations in the results for individual regions but the extent of this influence cannot be determined.

Results

1. *Population size, growth, and median age*

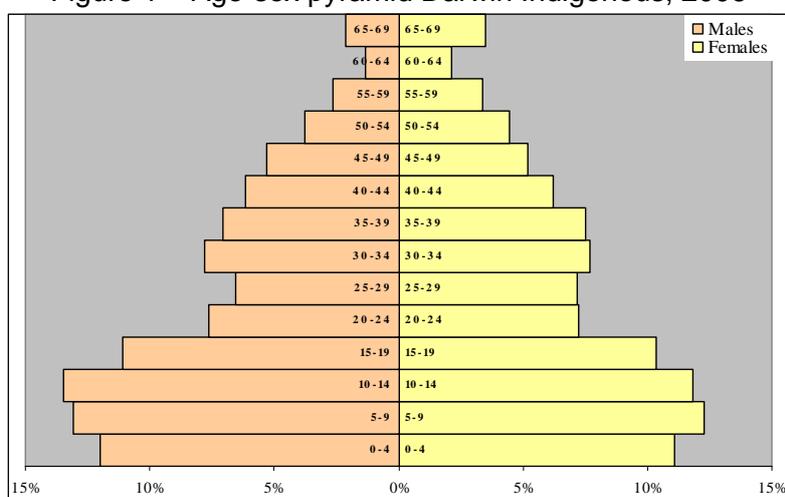
The usual resident population of Darwin in 2006 was 105,990 and around ten percent (10,258) were Indigenous people. By contrast the Indigenous share of the population in the Rest of the NT (total of 84,906) was more than 50 percent at 43,235. From 2001 to 2006 the Indigenous population of Darwin grew by just under eleven percent (at an annual average of 2.01 percent) while the growth rate in the Rest of the NT was substantially lower at just 1.02 percent per annum.

In 2006 the median age for Indigenous people (in households where at least one person was Indigenous) was 21 years for Darwin and 22 years in the Rest of the NT. This was substantially lower than for the non-Indigenous population (at 33 years for Darwin and 35 years in the Rest of the NT).

2. Age and sex composition

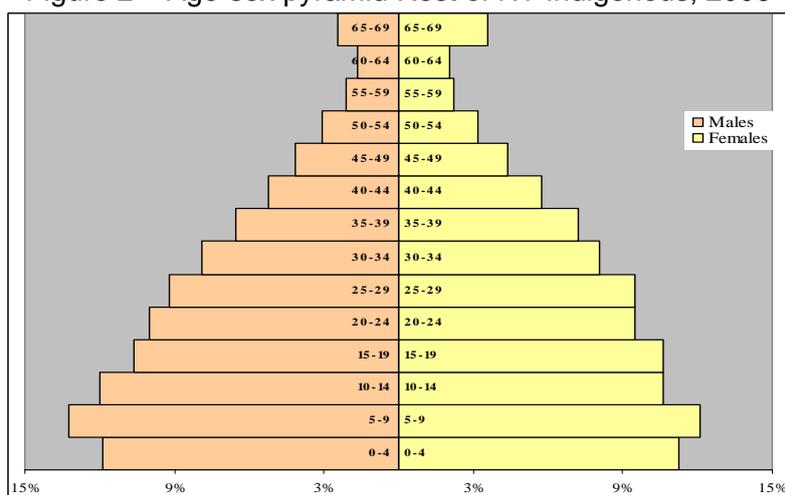
The age and sex composition of the Indigenous population in the Rest of the NT in 2006 was typical of one with high birth rates and death rates, and can be described as a 'young' population (Figure 2). The population pyramid for the region exhibits a wide base which tapers to a narrow peak since only a small proportion of people (eleven percent) live past the age of 50 years. Compared to the pyramid for Darwin (Figure 1), this population visually appears to be the younger of the two. However on closer inspection around three percent more of the Indigenous population of Darwin was aged less than 15 years (at 37 percent compared to 34 percent for the Rest of the NT) while for those aged 15 years to 29 years the reverse was the case. This accounted for 28 percent of the population in the Rest of the NT and 25 percent in Darwin.

Figure 1 – Age-sex pyramid Darwin Indigenous, 2006



Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Figure 2 – Age-sex pyramid Rest of NT Indigenous, 2006



Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

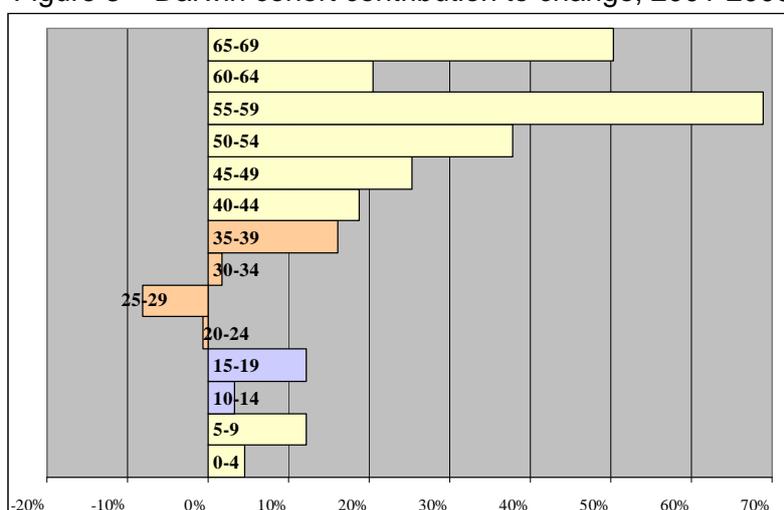
From 2001 to 2006 a high proportion of the growth in the populations of both regions was accounted for by people aged 40 years or more. During this period, 59 percent

POPULATION STUDIES GROUP RESEARCH BRIEF ISSUE 2009026:
INDIGENOUS DARWIN AND THE REST OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

of growth in Darwin and 64 percent in the Rest of the NT was accounted for by people in this age group (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The share of the population aged 40 years and over rose from 19 percent to 23 percent in Darwin and from 20 percent to 22 percent in the Rest of the NT.

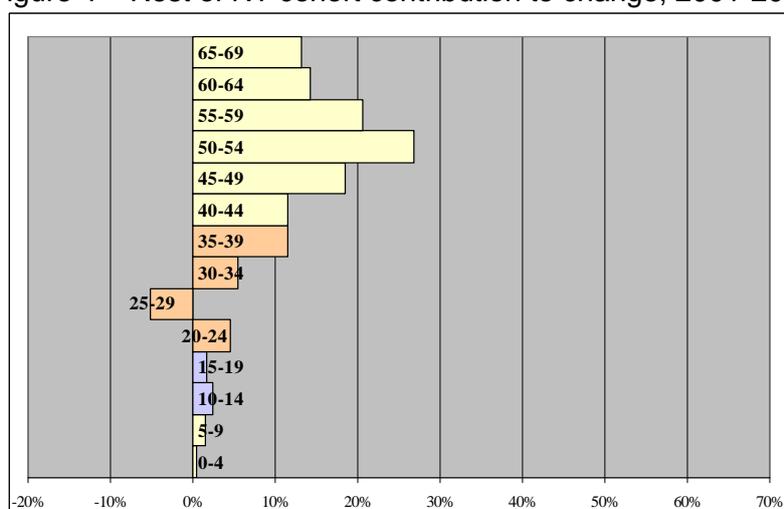
Meanwhile the 25 to 29 year cohort declined in size over the same period by eight percent for Darwin and by five percent for the Rest of the Territory. Noticeably in the Rest of the NT the cohort aged less than 15 years grew only marginally and consequently the share of the population less than 15 years declined from 36 percent to 34 percent. A smaller decline in the share for this group occurred in Darwin (from 38 percent to 37 percent). Dependency ratios for the Indigenous populations of both regions are significantly higher than for the overall population at 66 percent for Darwin and 60 percent for the Rest of the NT, compared to 39 percent and 47 percent for the overall population.

Figure 3 – Darwin cohort contribution to change, 2001-2006



Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2001 and 2006

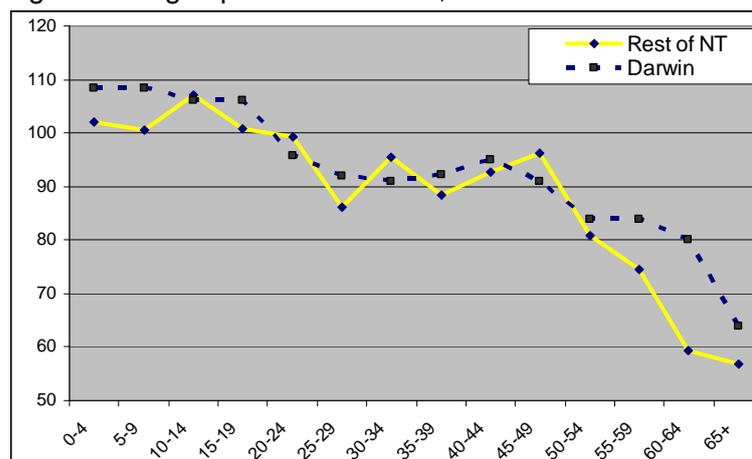
Figure 4 – Rest of NT cohort contribution to change, 2001-2006



Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2001 and 2006

Sex ratios in 2006 were at 94 for Darwin and 97 for the Rest of the NT. These were considerably lower than for the total population at 108 for Darwin and 103 for the Rest of the NT. Age-specific sex ratios show that there were more males per one hundred females in all age groups up to 20 years for both regions but for subsequent ages the ratios were progressively lower (Figure 5). Differences in age-specific sex ratios for Darwin and the Rest of the Territory were greatest in the 0 to 10 year age group and for all ages over 50 years where the ratios for Darwin were considerably higher as a consequence of a shorter life expectancy for males.

Figure 5 – Age specific sex ratios, 2006



Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

2. Education attendance and achievement

Rates of attendance at educational institutions were significantly lower in 2006 in the Rest of the NT when compared to Darwin (Table 1). The most noticeable differences were in secondary school attendance. In the Rest of the NT only 13 percent of the population aged less than 15 years stated they were attending a secondary school while the proportion for Darwin was close to double this. A relatively high proportion of people (23 percent in Darwin and 25 percent in the Rest of the NT) said they were attending an educational institution but did not specify its type.

Table 1 – Attendance at educational institutions, 2006 (%)

Type of educational institution	Darwin	Rest of NT
Pre-school (aged <15 years)	5.7	4.9
Infant/ primary school (aged <15 years)	45.1	38.2
Secondary school (aged <15 years)	24.2	13.3
TAFE (aged 15+)	1.5	1.1
Tertiary institution (aged 15+)	4.0	0.7
Type of institution not stated	23.3	24.9

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

There were also large differences in the levels of educational achievement (the highest level achieved) between Darwin and the Rest of the NT in 2006. Noticeably, the proportion who had achieved Year 11 or Year 12 was far higher in Darwin (35

percent) than in the Rest of the NT (14 percent). And in the Rest of the NT, Year 8 was the highest level achieved for more than a third (36 percent) of people whereas just eleven percent of Darwin residents stated that Year 8 was the highest level they had achieved. A larger proportion of people in the Rest of the NT (eight percent) had not attended school at all while for Darwin the proportion was much lower (two percent).

3. Incomes, occupations, industries, and labour force participation

Weekly individual incomes for Indigenous people in the Rest of the NT were much lower in 2006 compared to Darwin. The percentage of Indigenous people living in Darwin earning less than \$250 (37 percent), for example, was much lower than for the Rest of the NT (63 percent). Meanwhile only two percent of people in the Rest of the NT earned more than \$1,000 per week compared to eleven percent in Darwin.

There were also clear differences in the most common types of occupations in 2006 between the regions. A far greater proportion of employed people in Darwin (21 percent compared to eight percent) said they worked in clerical and administrative occupations and far less worked as labourers (Table 2).

Table 2 – Indigenous occupations, 2006 (% of employed)

Occupation	Darwin	Rest of the NT
Clerical & administrative workers	21.1	8.3
Community & personal service workers	16.7	17.9
Professionals	15.4	10.1
Labourers	13.0	37.5
Technicians & trades workers	11.5	4.1
Machinery operators & drivers	6.9	3.6
Sales workers	6.2	4.2
Managers	5.8	3.0
Inadequately described/Not stated	3.5	11.3

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Major differences in the Industry of occupation for employed people were also observed. In both regions Public administration and safety was the most common industry but outside of Darwin the proportion employed in it was far greater, particularly for males (Table 3). A greater proportion of Indigenous people outside of Darwin were also employed in the Health care and social assistance industry, while the reverse is the case for Education and training.

POPULATION STUDIES GROUP RESEARCH BRIEF ISSUE 2009026:
INDIGENOUS DARWIN AND THE REST OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Table 3 – Industry of employment, 2006 (% of employed)

Industry	Darwin			Rest of NT		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Public administration & safety	21.7	24.4	23.0	43.2	33.8	39.0
Health care & social assistance	7.2	15.5	11.4	18.0	22.1	19.9
Inadequately described/Not stated	6.1	3.3	4.7	11.6	12.0	11.8
Education & training	6.2	15.8	11.1	3.3	12.4	7.4
Retail trade	5.4	7.7	6.6	2.7	4.5	3.6
Other	53.4	33.3	43.2	21.2	15.2	18.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

The unemployment rate, using the traditional measure of percentage of the labour force which is unemployed, stood at 13.2 percent in Darwin and 14.7 percent for the Rest of the NT in 2006. But if we adjust this measure to exclude those employed in CDEP positions the rate jumps significantly for the Rest of the NT to 64.6 percent, and by a small amount in Darwin to 15.3 percent. This is reflective of the CDEP program operating primarily in remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Participation rates in the labour force varied between the regions with 48 percent of people in Darwin aged 15 years stating they were in the labour force (employed or unemployed and looking for work) compared to 37 percent in the Rest of the NT. The figure for the Rest of the NT may be inflated by the classification of CDEP positions as employed.

5. Dwellings and overcrowding

Around 90 percent of Indigenous Territorians in the Rest of the NT said they lived houses in 2006 compared to 70 percent for Darwin (Table 4). And in Darwin around three percent of people were living in improvised housing while fewer said they did in the Rest of the NT (around two percent). One of the main differences between Darwin and the Rest of the NT was the proportion of people enumerated in non private dwellings such as goals, hospitals, hotels, motels, and other institutions with around one in ten people in Darwin enumerated in such places compared to one in twenty in the Rest of the NT in 2006.

Table 4 – Dwelling types for Indigenous people, 2006 (%)

Dwelling type	Darwin	Rest of NT
Separate House	69.71	89.84
Improvised Home (tent, park benches etc)	2.68	1.75
Other Private Dwelling (apartments, caravans etc)	16.57	4.60
Non Private Dwelling.	11.04	3.81

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2006

The Canadian National Occupancy Standard is widely used to assess the appropriateness of housing in relation to the size and composition of the household (see, for example, Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2006). The Standard considers that 2 persons per bedroom constitutes overcrowding. In Darwin the average number of people per bedroom in 2006 was 1.3 and this was

significantly lower than for the Rest of the Territory at 2.1 per bedroom. For the non-Indigenous population the equivalent figures were 1.1 and 1.4. While this data does not indicate the number of people living in overcrowded housing it suggests that Indigenous overcrowding is far more widespread in the Rest of the NT. This finding is consistent with other studies which have found overcrowding to be positively related to remoteness (ibid, pg82).

6. Residential mobility

Just over a quarter of Indigenous people in Darwin had changed their residential address from that held one year prior to the 2006 Census and over half (54 percent) had done so from five years prior. But in the Rest of the NT a much lower proportion stated they had changed their address for both time periods (11 percent and 18 percent respectively).

Discussion

While there were some differences between the demographic compositions of the Indigenous populations residing in Darwin and in the Rest of the NT in 2006, similarities outnumbered the differences. Both populations are young which is indicative of high birth rates and high death rates as well as a very small (but rapidly growing) cohort aged over 50 years. It may be that the age structure for Darwin is influenced by the movement of people to attend educational institutions (particularly secondary schools) in the capital city and there are indications of this in the residential mobility data. Taylor and Carson (in press) have identified that young people, and particularly females, have over contributed to the long term trend of urbanisation in the Indigenous population of the Northern Territory during the past 30 years and, while no direct relationship can be inferred, urbanisation be another factor contributing to the relatively more youthful age structure observed for Darwin in 2006.

For both regions, growth from 2001 to 2006 was dominated by those aged over 40 years. Although this cohort remained small in absolute terms, its rapid growth denotes the need for policy makers and others to formulate approaches for providing appropriate and adequate housing, health care, and other services for our more elderly Indigenous people. Indigenous life expectancy has risen dramatically in the Northern Territory during the past three decades (Wilson et al., 2007). Consequently the elderly cohort will continue to make a substantial contribution to population growth in both regions in the foreseeable future and we are likely to see an increase in the proportion of the Indigenous people who are dependent on the workforce.

Where socio-economic indicators are concerned, major differences between the regions were observed for 2006, not unlike the Northern Territory population in general. Indigenous people in the Rest of the NT are less educated, less likely to be employed or participating in the labour force, more likely to be in lower skilled occupations, more likely to be earning very little, and far more likely to be living in overcrowded dwellings. The disparate impact on unemployment rates through the removal of CDEP from the employed category highlights the complex and deep seated relationships between health, housing, education, and employment in remote areas of the Northern Territory.

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