

Age Distribution in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

GLOSSARY

assimilate: to absorb other people, cultures and ideas into a more dominant culture or society – to be made 'similar'.

census: a government research task that collects population and housing data about every citizen. In Australia, a government agency – the Australian Bureau of Statistics – collects census data every four years.

Frontier Wars: the conflict, including massacres and retaliation, that occurred between invading Europeans and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples defending their Country. 'Frontier' means 'border' or 'edge'.

mission: a place, run by Christian organisations, where many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were required to live during the 'system of Protection'.

Protection: the set of rules brought in to try to end the Frontier Wars. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were under control of the 'Protector' in their area, who had the responsibility for their welfare.

reserve: a place, run by the government, where many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were required to live during the 'system of protection'.



The Wound

Age distribution data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people differs significantly to that of non-Indigenous people. The reasons for this are found in the history of colonisation, which has resulted in ongoing inequality. Statistics help us see this inequality clearly.

When Europeans first colonised Australia in 1788, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died from disease and the violence of the **Frontier Wars**. Later, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were removed from Country and forced to live on **missions** and **reserves**. Under the various state and territory governments' so-called **Protection** policies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were required to live by harsh and demeaning rules, such as having to seek permission from a government official to marry or to visit family outside the district.

The Australian Government tried to **assimilate** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the British culture and language by removing children from their parents. This is known today as the Stolen Generations and affected up to one in three children.

In order to conceal the deliberate attempts to erase Indigenous cultures and population, the Australian Government had a rule that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would not be counted in the **census**. Also, as Indigenous communities were under the control of the state and territory governments, the federal government took no responsibility for collecting data. Only since the 1971 Census have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people been fully included in population statistics.

To be recognised as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage the government requires someone to confirm the following:

- 1: Genealogy – evidence that you are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, such as births, deaths and marriages certificates and oral history stories.
- 2: Self-identification – identifying yourself as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- 3: Community identification – acceptance by the community that you live in, or have lived in.

It is important to note that having to prove identity raises issues around power and control.



Our History

What are box plots?

Box plots, sometimes called 'parallel box plots' or 'box and whisker plots', were invented in the 1970s as a new way of understanding and comparing data.

A box plot is divided into quartiles. The first quartile, Q1, is represented by a line, or the edge, of the beginning of the box and corresponds with the 25th percentile. The second quartile, Q2, is the middle line of the box, and represents the 50th percentile or the median of the data. The third quartile, Q3, is the final line or the end of the box and represents the 75th percentile.

The 'whiskers' or lines that extend out of the box plot show the points of the lowest non-outlier and the highest non-outlier. If the data includes outliers, these are sometimes plotted separately as dots on the chart. They are generally more useful for smaller sizes of data rather than large populations.

How's age distribution data collected?

Age distribution data organises information about a population into age increments. The total number of people who are aged below 1 (written as 0) are recorded in a field, then aged 1, then aged 2, and so on up to 95 or 100. Because not many people live to this age, sometimes the highest age group is represented as 75+ or 100+.

Often age distribution data is divided or segmented into larger increments. The detailed data you'll examine in the second table below is in 5-year increments. Sometimes data is simplified into four or five categories that may encompass different gaps, representing 0–4, 5–14, like the first table.

Understanding age distribution data

Statistics that show the age distribution of a population tell us the proportion of the population who are children, young adults, middle aged and elderly. They are useful because they reveal several factors about a population, particularly when compared with other population groups or when the same group is compared at different times. Quite frequently, male and female age distribution is compared.

For example, age distribution statistics may tell us information about:

- the fertility rate of the population. Are there a lot of babies being born now? Was there a time when a lot of babies were born? Are women increasing or decreasing the number of babies they are having?
- the general health of the population. Are there a lot of elderly people?
- sex ratios and correlations. Are there more males than females? Which sex lives longer, males or females?

They may also raise questions, for example:

- whether a significant event has influenced the data. Was there a war which has impacted on the number of males, or reduced the incidences of children of a certain age?
- how that data can be applied. As there are many more children being born, is there a need for more schools in an area?

Different ways of examining age distribution data

Raw statistical data is represented by numbers in a table. It's only when this data is shown in a statistical report that patterns can clearly be observed. Parallel box plots are useful because they clearly show the location of different medians between two compared population groups. Age distribution pyramids, which show proportions or percentages of the total population within each age group, are a powerful way of showing how different age groups have a fewer or greater number of people than other age groups within the same population.

Comparison of data

There are two tables below, showing different ways of representing age distribution data. Use the first table to create a population pyramid. Use the second table to create parallel box plots. Follow your teacher's instruction on how to create box plots in Microsoft Excel.

AGE DISTRIBUTION DATA BY PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION

Age distribution	Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within age group	Percentage of all Australians within age group
0–4 years	11.3	6.1
5–14 years	22.7	12.2
15–24 years	19.1	12.6
25–44 years	24.8	27.9
45–64 years	17.4	25.3
65+ years	4.8	15.9

AGE DISTRIBUTION DATA BY RAW NUMBERS OF THE POPULATION

Age in five-year groups	Total Australian population	Total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population
0–4 years	1 464 775	93 830
5–9 years	1 502 645	93 858
10–14 years	1 397 192	86 645
15–19 years	1 421 595	81 117
20–24 years	1 566 792	74 062
25–29 years	1 664 603	62 633
30–34 years	1 703 852	51 179
35–39 years	1 561 684	42 891
40–44 years	1 583 259	44 891
45–49 years	1 581 455	43 247
50–54 years	1 523 552	37 215
55–59 years	1 454 334	30 361
60–64 years	1 299 398	22 424
65–69 years	1 188 998	15 416
70–74 years	887 711	8 877
75+	1 600 055	9 719
Total	23 401 881	798 365

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