



Driver licensing and health: A social ecological exploration of the impact of licence participation in Australian Aboriginal communities



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Reduced licence participation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contributes to transport disadvantage, higher rates of transport-related morbidity and mortality. This study will incorporate a social ecology framework to better understand the economic, social inclusion and cultural impacts of licensing at all levels of the system from individuals, families, communities and the socio-political environment.

Methods: Qualitative methods underpinned by a social ecology approach triangulates in-depth interviews (n = 17) and community discussion groups (n = 21). Analysis was inductive and deductive.

Results: The impacts of licence participation were evident at multiple levels of the social ecology and it emerged that licensing greatly impacts the mobility of individuals, families and communities. Beyond mobility, the data amalgamated into four main themes: 1) Social and economic opportunity; 2) Access to services; 3) Cultural identity; and 4) Autonomy and the justice system.

Discussion: Reduced driver licensing is impacting individuals, families and communities with an immense cost to multiple levels of the social ecology. This study has highlighted the value of licence participation for cultural identity and community well-being. Further, licence participation interacts with persistent inequity in the licensing and justice system and impacts on the capacity of individuals, families and communities to function autonomously within the parameters of the law. Accordingly, policy should be directed at facilitating equitable access to driver licensing to promote social inclusion. Licensing is not simply a “Transport” problem; addressing this complex issue of health and social justice is a prime example of the need for an intersectoral approach that targets change at the socio-political level to improve the equity, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1. Introduction

Access to safe, reliable and legal transport is central to social inclusion and economic participation. The capacity to access

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transport to maintain employment, education, socialise and access healthcare impacts the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities (Currie and Senbergs, 2007; Rosier and McDonald, 2011). Globally, Indigenous populations are known to be vulnerable to transport injury and transport disadvantage, for example Maori populations in New Zealand experience significant transport disadvantage, which has been described as ethnically mediated transport disadvantage (Pollack et al., 2012; Raerino, Macmillan, and Jones, 2013). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience transport disadvantage and there is an emerging focus on the relationship between transport, social inclusion, health and well-being (Delbosc and Currie, 2011; Rosier and McDonald, 2011; Scrimgeour and Scrimgeour, 2008; Ware, 2013). Despite this progress, there is still a gap in the dialogue around transport disadvantage, which focuses on access to public transport and ownership of private cars, with little consideration of the impact that licence participation has on the mobility of individuals and families. This is particularly salient for Aboriginal communities as Aboriginal people are underrepresented in the licensing system, yet little is known about the direct impacts of licensing-related transport disadvantage on social inclusion and well-being in Aboriginal communities. To address this, the present study will incorporate a social ecology framework to explore the impacts of licence participation at all levels of the system from individuals, families, communities and the socio-political environment.

1.1. Social ecology framework

A social ecological framework used in this study has been previously used to better understand the social and environmental inequalities that underlie health disparities (Kok et al., 2008). The social ecological approach asserts that health is a function of the interrelationship between individual, interpersonal, community, socio-political and environmental influences (Richard et al., 1996). Further, this approach allows for examination of the complexities and connections between each level and is inherently suited to exploring public health issues that require an intersectoral approach.

1.2. Intersectoral approach to licensing participation

In the last decade, an intersectoral approach to public health has been endorsed and implemented globally to improve population health and reduce complex health inequities (Baum et al., 2013; Lawless et al., 2012). This approach recognises that tackling complex health inequities requires a commitment to action across multiple sectors of government and services to generate policies that systematically consider the implications and impact on population health. The South Australian (SA) government applied this approach to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, which was driven by SA Thinker in Residence Professor Ilona Kickbusch (Kickbusch and Buckett, 2010; Kickbusch et al., 2008). Among Kickbusch's (2008) recommendations was the assertion that driver licensing should be prioritised across policy sectors to positively impact mobility, access, opportunities, identity and autonomy within Aboriginal communities; this is reflected in Fig. 1. This model of driver licensing participation echoes calls for research globally with Indigenous peoples to move beyond socioeconomic consequences to also consider the broader impacts of transport disadvantage on health and wellbeing.

1.3. Transport disadvantage and social inclusion

Due to the vastness of Australia, travel frequently involves private transport. For example in 2011 among employed people 15 years and over, almost two thirds travelled by private car as either a driver or passenger to work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). In terms of access to private transport, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) reports that non-Aboriginal households had considerably higher car access (85%) compared with Aboriginal households (51%). Public transport is a viable alternative to private transport, particularly in urban areas, however outside of urban centres public transport is limited and costly;

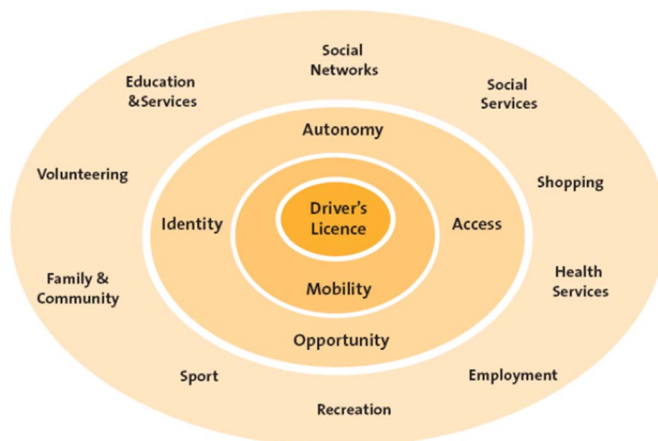


Fig. 1. Benefits of licensing-related mobility. Source Kickbusch (2008, p. 51)

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