

ABSTRACT

Aim

To determine the extent of the under-reporting of Māori and Pacific mortality among 0-74 year olds for the period 1991-94.

Methods

A subset (n=22,578) of highly probable linked 1991 census and 1991-94 mortality records were selected from the 31,635 census-mortality links in the New Zealand Census Mortality Study. The numbers of decedents assigned as Māori, Pacific, and non-Māori non-Pacific were compared between mortality and census data.

Results

Compared to the death registration form, 29% more 0-74 year old decedents during 1991-94 had self-identified as sole-Māori on the 1991 census (46% for prioritised-Māori). This numerator-denominator bias was greater among the young and those living in central and southern New Zealand. Among 0-14, 15-24, 25-44, 45-64, and 65-74 year old decedents, respectively, 91%, 50%, 41%, 26% and 15% more decedents had self-identified as sole-Māori on the 1991 census. For Northern, Midland, Central and Southern regional health authority areas, respectively, 14%, 17%, 81% and 102% more decedents had self-identified as sole-Māori.

Among Pacific decedents 68% more 0-74 year old decedents had self-identified as sole-Pacific on the 1991 census (78% for prioritised-Pacific group). This bias for Pacific decedents did not notably vary by age and region.

Conclusion

This study confirms substantial underestimation of Māori and Pacific mortality rates for the period 1991-94, even using the recommended sole-ethnic group denominator. The results from this study should be used to adjust ethnic-specific mortality rates for the early 1990s. Population-based funding formulas that included region-specific Māori mortality rates would have particularly disadvantaged central and southern regions.