



21/12/2022

Tēnā koe

**OIA: 1300854 – Follow up to OIA 1296964 – Equity Index Variables**

Thank you for your email of 23 November 2022 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

*From what I have read below and the attached appendices, it seems the focus was more on hospitalisations and medical treatments as opposed to disabilities, when Ministry of Health was trying to provide data to MOE. Both are valid.*

*1) Was an attempt made to gather data specifically related to disabilities only? And if yes, was an attempt made to gather data specifically related to disabilities related to neuro diversity? These types of disabilities have a profound impact on families but will not necessarily result in hospitalisations and that particular resulting data.*

*2) The statement "Adding a factor related solely to the presence of disability is unlikely to improve the accuracy of the Equity Index to identify low SES and could have a negative impact of suggesting that all disabled persons or those who have learning support needs are therefore of low SES. This would be both potentially stigmatising and inaccurate." is of concern. There are factors in the Equity Index that relate to the Ministry of Justice, specifically care and protection, custodial sentences and also ethnicity, benefit income etc. Please confirm these do not have a stigmatising effect. Why is a disability more stigmatising and inaccurate than these other factors?*

*3) The statement "This is not to suggest that disability causes or is caused by low SES." is evidenced by what? How many households who have members with a disability, do not suffer from lower socio-economic status than they would if there were no disabilities? The nature of a disability means that that person's ability to gain an education and meaningful employment is harder, but so is that of other members within the household. Where is the proof that disability does not cause lower socio-economic status? That seems to be a very profound statement that must have evidence to support it. Can you please advise what that evidence is? A family may not receive benefits, but they are still economically disadvantaged. How are these people accounted for in the MOE equity index please?*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Each of your questions is addressed in turn below.

## Response to Question 1:

The Equity Index is focused specifically on identifying, with available data, the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage on educational achievement. It does this by including information about individual learners, and their family circumstances.

No specific attempts were made to include factors relating exclusively to disability. As you note, these types of disabilities can have profound impacts on families, but do not necessarily result in hospitalisations. There is clear evidence of a link between disability and socio-economic status, for example in analysis from the Disability Survey (most recently carried out in 2013):

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/social-and-economic-outcomes-for-disabled-people-findings-from-the-2013-disability-survey>.

An example of where the socio-economic impact of disability may be identified in the Equity Index is in the variables relating to benefit receipt. These include, for example, receipt of the Child Disability Allowance: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/child-disability-allowance.html>, and the Disability Allowance: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/disability-allowance.html>.

The inclusion of second-tier benefits means that, although we do not include a variable for specific illness, disability, or neurodiversity, the Equity Index does consider illness, disability, and neurodiversity – but *only* where it results in an increase in income as a result of receiving benefits relating to relevant allowances.

The Index also includes a variable for the proportion of a child's lifetime spent supported by benefit. This is one of the most important variables within the model (particularly for younger children). The proportion of lifetime spent supported by benefit has been associated with childhood ill health and disability and increased risk of poor outcomes as adults in New Zealand (see <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/ap/using-integrated-administrative-data-identify-youth-who-are-risk-poor-outcomes-adults-ap-15-02-html>).

Neurodiversity is a broad term, which includes a range of diversities and diagnoses, including autism. One reason for not including neurodiversity explicitly within the model is that some studies suggest that there are lower reported rates of autism for children of parents with a lower educational level (e.g. The Association between socioeconomic status and autism diagnosis in the United Kingdom for children aged 5-8 years of age: Findings from the Born in Bradford cohort – PubMed (nih.gov) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29113453/>). This might be related to under-reporting and under-diagnosis of autism for children of parents with a lower level of education. Including neurodiversity within the model might therefore result in an underestimate of the economic challenges faced by learners with neurodiverse conditions, because households with lower education levels do not report, or do not seek, a diagnosis.

As noted above, our focus with the Equity Index is on identifying, with available data, the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage on educational achievement. We consider that the current factors in the model do, as best as is currently available, identify those socio-economic impacts, including for learners with disabilities.

## Response to Question 2:

Other variables in the Equity Index might have a stigmatising effect, and the Index itself could be stigmatising. This was also a significant issue with the decile system. The previous answer was not intended to suggest that the inclusion of disability would necessarily be more stigmatising than any other variable. We consider, at this time, that the potential stigmatisation of that factor is not outweighed by contribution in terms of identifying socio-economic disadvantage, as outlined above.

### **Response to Question 3:**

The previous answer was not intended to suggest that disability has no impact on SES; it was specifically about the rationale for including or excluding certain factors from the Equity Index calculation. As outlined above, the Equity Index is focused on socio-economic barriers to educational achievement. We include benefit data (including the child's proportion of their life spent supported by benefits) because these indicate the presence of socio-economic disadvantage.

Where disability or illness within the household results in reduced opportunity to work, this might be indicated by lower parental income, increased parental benefit (tier 1 and 2), and increased proportion of a child's lifetime spent on benefit. Work and Income also provide guidance on how the severity of disability or illness relates to benefit eligibility (see <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/health-and-disability-practitioners/guides/guidance-on-the-severity-of-disability-for-child-disability-allowance.html>) and their eligibility policies influence data within the Index. The Child Disability Allowance does not have an income test, which means that this variable would be included even if the relevant family were not receiving other income support.

If a household does not claim a benefit but still has reduced opportunity to earn an income, then this will be detected within the income variables— income differences and changes over time can occur for many reasons. We consider that the range of variables within the Index help us to identify the socio-economic impacts of disability, and that doing so using de-identified individual-level data is a significant improvement over the previous neighbourhood-based decile system.

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes OIA responses on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email.

Nāku noa, nā,

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