

Policy Statement

Membership of the Radical Statistics group is open to all those working in or interested in the field of statistics from a politically radical perspective. 'Statistics' is understood as the collection and analysis of data and the process of drawing conclusions or making decisions in situations of uncertainty. In addition, statistics often plays a major role in the formulation of questions and in measuring concepts.

The group was formed in January 1975 by a number of statisticians and research workers drawn together by a common concern about the political assumptions and implications of much of their work and by an awareness of the actual and potential misuse of statistics and its techniques. Members of the group, although holding a variety of political views, are radical in the sense of being committed to helping to build a more free, egalitarian and democratic society.

We see many ways in which statistical work, like the society which it serves, is organised in an authoritarian, constricted and elitist way:-

- the power structures within which statistical workers are employed, and which control the work and the uses to which it is put.
- the destructive fragmentation of problems into separated specialist fields.

- the mystifying use of technical language in order to disguise social problems as purely technical ones. The analysis of economic and social phenomena can be complex, but this does not mean that discussion should be restricted only to experts.

- the lack of control by the community over the aims of statistical investigations, the way these are conducted, and the uses of the information collected.

Although statistics sometimes helps to create the conditions for change, it is usually used to protect the status quo. The group will try to change this situation. In particular, we shall work towards:-

1. Free access to, and free discussion of, the information, political and commercial criteria, and procedures used in decision-making, by all those affected by the decisions.
2. The production and publication of statistics needed by the disadvantaged groups in society, e.g. on wealth, income, prices, housing, social services, education.
3. A critique of the uses of statistics in political and commercial situations.
4. A critique of the way statistics is taught and the development of new curricula, texts, and methods of teaching and assessment.
5. The establishment of links with the radical science movement with the aim of co-ordinating our activities. We intend to affiliate to BSSRS.
6. An analysis of the historical development of statistics, its emergence as a dominant method in the social and behavioural sciences and attempts to evolve and use new approaches.

These points imply the need to clarify the nature, limitations and possibilities of the use of statistics and of statistical "expertise", to articulate and disseminate the basis of statistical methods to the public and to provide statistical assistance to other like-minded groups when requested.