

**RADICAL  
STATISTICS  
NEWSLETTER**

**33**

The Radical Statistics Group is a network of individuals based on the distribution of this Newsletter. The small amount of central administrative work is done by a three person committee elected at the Annual General Meeting known as 'The Troika' - names below. The editorship of the Newsletter rotates - next editor listed below. Apart from producing a Newsletter, the work of the Group is done by its subgroups, whose membership is open to all interested parties; simply contact the person below. Use the Newsletter to advertise if you wish to start a new subgroup.

The Troika

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*Russell Ecob*

## Editorial

Once again the newsletter is pretty heavily weighted with social statistical contributions, mainly on lealth and poverty. The lead article is a reprint of the Health Group's latest pamphlet: little Red Riding Hood's answer to the Big Bad Wolf, Norman Fowler's sugary reassurances over the Health Service. Alison Macfarlane assures me that it was a very quick job. Perhaps other groups would like to consider repeating the exercise in other areas. There are also pieces on youth unemployment and poverty: all good topical stuff. But I wonder if there are any radical statisticians in industry or in agricultural labs, and if there are, if they have anything to say?

I apologise for the lateness of the Newsletter; it does seem to take much longer to get together than one ever imagines. I did try to get contributors to send stuff via electronic mail, but neither PSS nor JANET seemd to offer a comprehensive enough link yet to be usable to groups such as ours. Future editors beware: don't waste your time.

Cathie Marsh  
Social & Political Sciences  
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## **Race Group Report**

The Race group had a full, frank and productive meeting in Sheffield in April. Work on the second edition of Britain's Black Population is again progressing under full steam, with a first deadline in September. Any help would be gratefully received, especially on the employment chapter. Anyone interested please contact Roy Carr-Hill, whose address is on the inside cover.

In measuring levels of health, we should measure life expectancy free of disability, broken down according to a variety of socio-demographic characteristics; but we should also assess potential health by, for example, the birthweight distribution.

In measuring the pattern of human activities, five aspects can be distinguished: the use of time, the quality of activities, social aspects of activities, the productiveness of activities, and access to activities. The data presented compares and contrasts the distribution of people between statuses with their patterns of time use.

## Health Group Report

Alan Macfarlane

Over the last few months, the health group has had a somewhat higher profile than has been the case over the last few years, and perhaps this is a sign that our period of dormancy may be finishing.

First the report of our drugs project finally appeared in print in the February issue of the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology, where it was the first paper in the issue. We had abandoned any attempt at getting the group's name as author, so it appeared with six authors' name and work addresses and thanks to 'other members of Radical Statistics Health Group' in the acknowledgements. The article was the subject of a half page report in the New Scientist. Under the headline 'Doctors attack safety tests on drugs for rheumatism' it described us (five statisticians and a GP) as 'Epidemiologists, including doctors from four London medical schools'. Subsequently we had a phone call from DHSS Medicines Division asking what our professional qualifications were and what Radical Statistics Health Group is. A mole tells that our article has excited considerable interest in that part of the DHSS.

Next, we had an approach from Michael Meacher who thought that we might be able to monitor the effects of the cuts in the NHS for him. This could be interpreted as a compliment to ourselves, but is more likely a reflection of the pathetic level of information resources the Labour Party provides for its mouthpieces - this is not intended as a criticism of the tiny band of people engaged in this unequal task. We had in any case abandoned our own attempt to monitor the cuts several years ago. In the event a small group has got together to try again. The group, which is being coordinated by Jennie Popay includes people from Radical Statistics, BSSRS and Women and Work Hazards.

It is not confined to members of the Labour Party and sees itself as serving wider needs for information. To try and work out what information it is possible to collect about the cuts, the group is organising a series of workshop/meetings to which relevant groups of people - trades union research officers, people from voluntary organisations, sympathetic people working in the NHS and local government, and sympathetic academics - are being invited. For further details, contact Jennie Popay (Flat 2, 5 Riverdale Road, East Twickenham, Middlesex. Tel. 01 892 0238).

Our own new initiative was in response to a leaflet, 450,000 copies of which were distributed through the NHS to try to persuade people via a very selective use of statistics that the service is growing rather than contracting. When a bundle arrived at North West Herts CHC, Gavin Ross put together a set of notes to help his fellow members see through the use of statistics and also contributed the notes to the myths project. It seemed a good idea to make a more immediate use of them, particularly as the necessary data had been got together to debunk the myths and write the article for the Nursing Times which appeared in the last newsletter.

The nuclear group's experience in trying to counter the uses of statistics on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's wall chart taught us that it was not sufficient to send out a press release with a different interpretation - we should have to say we were doing something. Colin Thunhurst's comment at the AGM that RAWP deals, which we published as a typescript in 1978, has been photocopied over and over again gave us another idea. As a result, Gavin's notes were expanded to make a report, which we sent to trades unions, health campaigns, voluntary organisations, professional organisations and relevant MPs. Helen Holden, who has helped in the past with publicity and press contacts, chatted up the Guardian to write a report and we got extensive coverage in the left and medical press, including 'Doctor', whose article had the headline 'Doctors lead row on Government's NHS "propaganda"'. Our report 'Unsafe in their hands' is included in this newsletter. As we said to everyone else, please photocopy it and give it to anyone else who may be interested, and ask them to do likewise.

Meanwhile, our project on debunking myths on the national health continues, but is making less than spectacular progress. We hope to meet soon to discuss whether to refocus it in the light of the response to 'Unsafe in their hands'. One thing is clear, people on the left find what we have done useful - what we need now is more people to take it forward from here.

Have you ever wondered why artificial kidney machines are available for a few, yet basic health care is lacking for many workers? How is it that the originators of the 'Green Revolution' got a Nobel Peace Prize when thousands of Asians were forcibly evicted from their land when it was introduced?

Today we live in a technology based society. Science is now an integral part of our culture. It has raised our material standards, extended our life spans and brought about increased understanding of the world in which we live.

Science is also big business: there is massive spending in scientific research and development. Science is not neutral, does not have a logic and life force of its own, it is not objective and it does not exist to improve the well-being of all. The remoteness of science is increased by its hierarchical nature and its mystifying jargon, ensuring that scientific knowledge is accessible only to a minority.

BSSRS is an organisation of people, many of them working in industry, the health service, education and research establishments, committed to demystifying science, to fighting for science and technology to be used responsibly, and to exposing the political nature of existing science. Membership is open to practising scientists and technologists, students and the community at large.

We publish a quarterly magazine Science for People; issue a bimonthly internal bulletin for members; organise conferences and seminar series; establish working groups; advise and co-operate with community organisations and service and co-ordinate activities of local groups. We have a number of local and working groups including Computing, Agricapital, Public Health, Politics of Health and the Work Hazards Groups. Affiliated groups include Radical Statistics, Radical Statistics Health Group, Radical Science Journal and the Campaign Against Plastic Bullets.

Members receive our quarterly magazine, the bi-monthly internal bulletin and reductions on seminars and conferences which BSSRS organises. Enclosed with this newsletter is a BSSRS membership form.

DON'T DELAY! JOIN TODAY!

STOP PRESS: NEW BSSRS ADDRESS: 25 HORSELL PD, N5 1XL  
TEL: 01 607 9615

Colin Thornhurst and Dave Drew

Following the 10th Anniversary get-together of RadStats in York, it occurred to us that the collected work completed by RadStats in the decade of its existence was really quite impressive. Furthermore, as pamphlets go out of print, or as copies of the Newsletter become unobtainable, there was a real danger of much of it being 'lost'.

Returning to Sheffield we were very quickly able to draw up a rough list of a dozen to fifteen areas of work that the RadStats Group or Radical Statisticians have been involved in which might be held to collectively constitute 'Radical Statistics'.

To cut a long story short, it seemed to us that there was great potential for (and a real value in) compiling it into a book. Initial discussion with Pluto Press provoked an extremely enthusiastic response. In fact, they were prepared to issue a contract on the spot!!

Despite the considerable advance that they were prepared to offer, we felt that we ought first to air the idea more generally throughout the Group. Our ideas are that it might be composed of articles, each of which would cover a case study (loosely defined) of Radical Statistics work. This would include the various critiques that we have conducted of official statistics, together with some materialist historical analysis (maybe?), but above all some examples of radical statistical practice. It would thus be less theoretical than 'Demystifying Social Statistics' (though there would be a clear lineage) and would primarily aim to demonstrate what Radical Statistics comprises. The targeted audience would be statistics undergraduates (who we would seem to be needing to get through to) though we would envisage a much wider interest.

At the practical level, we could offer advances to authors (or groups of authors where articles are collective) of approximately £75, and to keep to Pluto's publishing procedures, articles would need to be between 6,000 and 8,000 words in length and delivered to whoever of us takes on the editing by the end of this calendar year.

We would stress that all these ideas are totally provisional and conditional upon the responses that we receive from you. So what are they?

Please return the reply slip below to Colin Thunhurst or Dave Drew, Dept. of Applied Statistics and O.R., Sheffield City Polytechnic, Pond Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB and we will call a meeting of interested Radical Statisticians

I think that the idea of a book on Radical Statistics is:

- A super idea
- A bore
- A rip-off by Colin and Dave
- Other (Keep it brief!) .....


I would be prepared/eager to be involved with the editing

I would be interested in writing an article(s) on the following subject(s)

.....  
.....

If the book is to adequately represent the work of Radical Statistics, it must include the following articles:

Title	Author(s)
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

I would be interested in attending a meeting in a geographically central location (Sheffield)

The following are my preferences and restrictions on dates:

.....

I have the following comments/suggestions to add:-

.....

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

Telephone No.: .....

# Radstats Network

4/42

We agreed in 1983 to collect a list of unemployed members. At the AGM we further agreed to set up a network of members and their interests and areas of statistical knowledge. This would be made generally available to sympathetic individuals and groups. We recognised that some of our members, though willing to help, would not wish their names to be circulated, or would wish to appear anonymously. We also agreed at the meeting to attempt to devise a set of geographically based groupings of RadStats members, each with a coordinator. These coordinators would put people in touch with other RadStats members in their area and have a role in recruitment. One option, therefore, that we give you is only to have your name on a list held by your regional coordinator and a list held by the troika. We are therefore asking you to complete the questionnaire below and send it to:-

Radical Statistics  
C/o BSSRS  
9 Poland Street  
London. W1V 3DG

Please mark the envelope: "The RadStats Network".  
Those who do not reply will not be put on the list.

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RADSTATS NETWORK

(Please circle)

Name: ..... Sex M/F  
Address: ..... Age Under 25  
..... 25-29  
..... 30-34  
Telephone No.: ..... 35-39

I do not mind my name being circulated yes / no

I only want my name to appear on a list held by my regional contact and Troika yes / no

I could provide statistical advice in the following areas:

Medicine / Health .....	Teaching of statistics .....
Economics .....	Computing .....
Housing .....	Survey design .....
Education .....	Survey analysis .....
Nuclear .....	Other (please specify) .....
Multivariate analysis .....	.....

I am prepared to help on a workshop for Trade Unionists (see article on AGM). yes / no

My present job situation is:

University .....	Student .....
Local authority .....	Unemployed .....
Central government .....	Full-time child care .....
Private sector .....	Other (please specify) .....
	.....

My employment status is:

Full-time paid work .....

Part-time paid work .....

No paid employment .....

The Radical Statistics Newsletter is available by subscription. Current rates are £3 per year for individuals and £5 for institutions and £1.50 for the unwaged. The newsletter is available from the Radical Statistics Group, C/o BSSRS, 25 Horsell Road, London. N5 1XL. Tel. 01-607-9615.

NEXT EDITOR: Editor Radstats 33,  
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#### Guidelines for Editors and Contributors

The Radical Statistics Newsletter is produced three times a year in February, May and October.

Editors: send the typed newsletter to Bob Peacock, one month before they want the newsletter to reach readers. Copy to be typed on A4 paper.

Contributors: send articles to the Editor by the copydate on A4 paper, typed single-spaced with 1½ inch margins all round. All members of RSG are invited to contribute to the newsletter - articles may vary from very short to quite long. Letters and reviews are also welcome.

Addresses: The Editor's address usually appears in the last newsletter, but articles can also be sent to The Editor, RSG, c/o BSSRS, 25 Horsell Road, London N5 1XL.