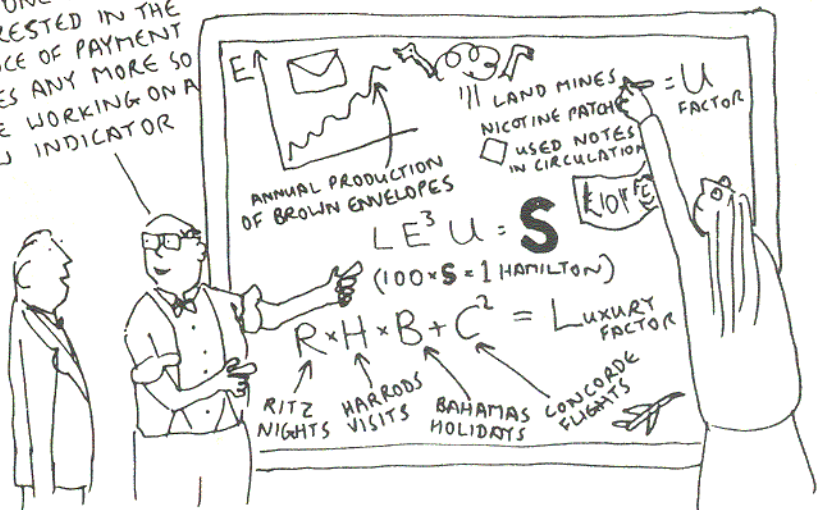


# Radical Statistics 64/65

Spring & Summer 1997

NO ONE SEEMED  
INTERESTED IN THE  
BALANCE OF PAYMENT  
FIGURES ANY MORE SO  
WE'RE WORKING ON A  
NEW INDICATOR



The **Radical Statistics Group** is a group of individuals based on the distribution of this newsletter. The small amount of central administration work is done by a committee known as 'The Troika', and elected at the Annual General Meeting. The editorship of this newsletter rotates; details of how to subscribe are given below and details of how to contribute are given on the inside back cover. Apart from producing this newsletter, the work of the RSG is done by its sub-groups whose membership is open to all interested parties. Please consult the contact people below if you wish to get involved. Use the newsletter to advertise if you wish to start a new group.

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Deadlines for newsletter copy: **30th June 1997, 30th November 1997** (see inside back cover)

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*Radical Statistics* is available by subscription from Radical Statistics Group, c/o 10 Ruskin Avenue, Heaton, Bradford, BD9 6EB. Current rates are £5 per year for low waged (self defined) and £12 for waged and overseas, and £20 for institutions. The cost to the unwaged is £3 for one year.

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# Health Matters Magazine

*Duncan Munro, editor*

If you are interested in health policy and politics, then you may be interested to hear about *Health Matters*, Britain's liveliest health policy magazine.

*Health Matters* is a non-profitmaking quarterly magazine covering current debates in health care and public health from a user and community perspective. It is independent of health authorities, drug companies and political parties, and is produced voluntarily by health service workers and users with help from professional journalists—and frequent contributions from the Radical Statistics Health Group!

Although *Health Matters* is not an academic journal, it is authoritative. For instance, contributors to past issues have included:

- Prof. Margaret Stacey, emeritus professor of sociology, on regulating the medical profession
- Prof. David Hunter, professor of health policy and management, on health service democracy
- Dr John Yates, the government's waiting list ex-guru, on Britain's two-tier health system

*Health Matters* has a national circulation which includes academics, policymakers, politicians, health professionals and health activists. Its only financial support comes from its readers.

To see *Health Matters* for yourself, simply write/email/phone or fax us, quoting ref. C44, and we will send you a free sample issue. Alternatively, if you have world-wide web access, visit our web pages at [www.luna.co.uk/~health](http://www.luna.co.uk/~health), where you will find on-line features and can even download a whole issue. *Health Matters*, PO Box 459, Sheffield S11 8GJ. Tel/fax: 0114-266 6171. Email: [health@luna.co.uk](mailto:health@luna.co.uk)

[Radical Statistics editorial note: we do not usually include free promotional material, but as Duncan says, *Health Matters* has welcomed Radical Statistics material and freely advertised for us in the past]

## Radical Statistics News

### Issue numbering and subscription reminders

*Radical Statistics Troika*

Some of you caring readers will have noticed that we have missed an issue in the last couple of years. Libraries and other institutional subscribers have complained that the issue numbering doesn't match what had been expected. Neither have we reminded those who don't pay by standing order to renew their annual subscription. To cap it all, our fine computerised subscriptions system, just to show it was keeping track, declared nearly a hundred people to be non-payers and in January 1997 sent them a 'final reminder' for 1996 without any newsletter.

To put all this all to right, we have agreed by the following:

1. **This issue is a double issue** representing Spring/Summer 1997 and numbered 64/65. This is designed to put the institutions' computers at rest, rather than to reflect the size of the issue. Future issues are intended to be as follows:

No. 66 Autumn 1997, copy date 30 June, published September 1997.

No.67 Spring 1998, copy date 30 November 1997, published January 1998.

No. 68 Summer 1998, copy date 31 March, published May 1998.

No. 69 Autumn 1998, copy date 30 June, published September 1998.

2. **This issue carries a request for 1997 subscriptions to be paid, and the next will have a first request for 1998 subscriptions, for all those who don't pay by Standing Order, and have not yet paid for 1997.** It is a one and only reminder for 1997. Yes, we are asking for a subscription rather frequently, to

get back to scratch. You can make it easier paying for a couple of years in one go so that you are already credited for 1998, or by filling out a standing order enclosed with the subscription request.

**Recently lapsed members will be encouraged to re-subscribe.** They are now being written to with an apology for the abruptness of the previous request for renewals.

#### 4. New address for Radical Statistics

**Group.** For the last seven or so years we have relied on a succession of different people forwarding post from a London mail box. Most of the post concerns subscriptions; to avoid delays, the address for Radical Statistics has been changed to that of Pete Latarche as suggested by February's conference. Pete has been managing our subscriptions for the last 3 years.

Radical Statistics is on a relatively good footing this year and is expecting three good issues. If you think that you are being asked to pay something you do not owe, please get in touch with Pete Latarche, 10 Ruskin Avenue, Bradford BD9 6EB, 01274-482176, pyotr@bandit.legend.co.uk - and he will be as understanding as possible.

### The mailbase list: a review of the first nine months

*Sue Kerrison*

The Radical Statistics electronic discussion list started in May 1996 with Tony Fielding and myself as list owners and since then there has been a steady stream of announcements, questions and discussions. I was not too sure about what being a list owner involved and wondered whether I could cope with the technology. I now know a lot more but I am still not an expert.

In March 1997, the list had 139 subscribers, 117 with UK addresses and 22 overseas, - mainly from USA, Canada, Italy, and Australia. Initially there was some concern about the way radstats was presented to new members joining the list. Many of the original members chipped into this debate introducing themselves and recalling way radstats was set up. I not sure whether the issue was ever resolved, instead it seemed to have died.

#### Meetings and announcements

Meetings have been advertised on: Priority Groups, Crime Statistics, Positive Health and of course the proposed suspension of the General Household Survey. Announcements were made about the European "Employment precarity, Unemployment and social exclusion network", "The spirit of 1848" (an American based network which attempts to bring people together who are concerned about inequalities and health) and the ONS sale of century when they moved from St Catherine's House. Members were also alerted to an interesting discussion in an education statistics list on race and education.

#### Requests and suggestions

There have been requests for information on statistics about poverty and domestic violence, cost of social care, the influence of health care on health and for further information about a newspaper report on Britain's millionaires. In August Martin

Bland encouraged people to write to the University Superannuation Scheme urging them to avoiding investing in the tobacco industry.

Ray Thomas suggested that a discrepancy in employment figures between Employers surveys and Labour Force Survey was worth further investigation. Alex Scott Samuel questioned the methodological hegemony employed by certain factions of the Evidence Based Practice lobby that nothing but an RCT has any validity.

Ludi Simpson wanted examples of the most outrageous examples of cheating in government statistics and started the ball rolling himself by offering not including the lottery as personal taxation. He also questioned the "neutral" nature of assumptions being used in some government statistics, for example the initial assumption that the missing million in the census were "average" as opposed to the inner city poor.

Alison Macfarlane drew attention to a press release from the Confidential Enquiry into Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy which announced that Sudden Infant Death was related to smoking. Alison noted that statistics really suggested that other factors such as poverty might be more important.

#### Evaluation questionnaires in higher education

The use of evaluation questionnaires in higher education was the hot topic for November with many members chipping their experiences of these and the ways they have been used. Important issues about the validity the methodology and the purpose of the questionnaires were raised. Were they used by individuals to improve their performance or

by others to judge performance? Information about the research that has been done in this area was offered by Ruth Balogh.

### The General Household Survey

In January there was much discussion of the value of the General Household Survey (GHS) following the ONS declaration that it was redundant. List members argued that the GHS uniquely covered a number of important topics such as leisure, contraception and use of health and social services. Others were less enthusiastic and felt that GHS provided little information which explained the processes involved in inequalities.

### Thousands of messages a week...

In the same month, I also had my first experience of that old science fiction nightmare of computer system going out of control. A malfunctioning computer in Australia sent back to the whole list a message from John Bibby and generated a loop involving four other mailbase lists. John got over 1,500 messages - the original ones he sent back magnified, plus many complaints from people who did not realise that it was a machine malfunction not John personally

sending out hundreds of messages. Unfortunately the tried and tested methods I usually use with malfunction technology, pulling the plug, wouldn't work !!!

### How to join

To join the mailbase, you must have access to a computer connected to the Internet, and an email address where you can receive messages sent to the list. Then send the following two-linemessage to [mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk](mailto:mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk):

```
join radstats <your name >
stop
```

what you put as <your name> is what you wish to be known by, not your email address which the mailbase system picks up automatically. You will receive a welcome and instructions, and can then listen in to the discussions as well as send your own contributions.

Happy electronic postings !!

Sue Kerrison  
[sueker@geo2.poptel.org.uk](mailto:sueker@geo2.poptel.org.uk)

## Radical Statistics subscription report -February 1997

*Pete Latarche, Subscriptions manager*

At first glance the figures are not encouraging. The 322 current subscriptions stand at their lowest since 1991. Institutional "losses" may be overstated as there are some Agency block subscriptions still to come. But at 14, these are small compared to the 70 Standing Order subscribers that are *still* paying at the old rate. Three years down the line from the increase in subscription rates and despite reminders!

| Annual total subscribers |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| YEAR                     | No. |
| 1989                     | 176 |
| 1990                     | 250 |
| 1991                     | 259 |
| 1992                     | 342 |
| 1993                     | 403 |
| 1994                     | 376 |
| 1995                     | 361 |
| 1996                     | 393 |
| 1997                     | 322 |

The overall decline looks dramatic but to confirm the point in last year's report, the February 1996 figures were produced before those not paid up were lapsed. So this year's figure reflects the changes over two years. Please keep this in mind when looking at the last table. But less is still less.

There may be a relationship between the irregular pattern of publication and activity in 1996 and the subscription position. Certainly a number of institutional computers that are programmed to issue demands for the current issue automatically were confused. Anyway, 1997 promises greater consistency and renewed levels of activity round the Journal and that should be reflected in the subscription figures.

Of the 322 subscribers, 205 paid by Standing Order and 115 by Cash or Cheque. We also distribute free copies either in exchange for other journals or to journalists.

### Changes in the subscription base: Year on Year

|                    | Feb. 96/<br>97 | Feb 95/<br>96 |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|
| New Subscribers    | +30            | +34           |
| Lapsed Subscribers | -69            | -4            |

To those of you who do not already do so, may we renew the invitation for you to pay by Standing Order?

Enquiries about subscriptions should go to Pete Latarche, 10 Ruskin Avenue, Bradford BD9 6EB. Email: [pyotr@bandit.legend.co.uk](mailto:pyotr@bandit.legend.co.uk)

## Finance report:

*Pat Dugard*

RadStats healthy balance of £6,844.83 at the end of 1996 is up £2,500 in one year. This is partly due to the dormant Education subgroup passing to the main account its surplus that has lain untouched for several years, and partly due to the issue of 2 rather than the intended three issues of Radical Statistics. Income subscription was mainly from standing orders. Pat Dugard did the finance and figures below, the accounts were audited by Ludi Simpson.

| Income                        |         |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Balance 31 Dec 1995           | 4364.49 |
| Subscriptions                 | 2759.00 |
| Conference                    | 187.00  |
| Newsletter                    | 12.36   |
| Other publications            | 13.50   |
| From Education group          | 1354.22 |
| Cheque not presented (note 1) | 5.00    |

### Expenditure

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Administration (including bank charges) | 541.88  |
| Conference                              | 102.00  |
| Newsletter                              | 941.63  |
| Miscellaneous (note 2) subtotal         | 73.00   |
| Cheques presented late (note 3)         | 192.23  |
| Balance 31 Dec 96                       | 6844.83 |

Note 1. For a course that was cancelled.  
Note 2 mainly subscriptions refunded after banks paid more than once in error.  
Note 3. All presented early 96 but written late 95.

## A new Radical Statistics book - calling all writers

Danny Dorling and Ludi Simpson

As part of our year's editing of Radical Statistics, we offered at the AGM (which accepted the offer) to put together a book largely based on a selection of articles written in the last 10 or so issues of Radical Statistics, and any new or revised article submitted by the end of September 1997.

Like Demystifying Social Statistics from 15 years ago, it would cover a varied subject matter and approaches, but be attractive for those wanting examples of:

- alternative uses of statistics.
- alternative approaches to using statistics.
- a critical view of the production of statistics and statistical methods.

We are seeking a commercial publisher. At the time of writing a proposal is with Edward

The book aims to show as many people as possible how statistics about society are created, understood, misunderstood and manipulated, and how more informed use of official statistics can present very different pictures of society. The book will concentrate on British examples but will not be exclusively British. It will achieve its aim by weight of example, including theoretical discussion of the methods by which statistics about society are commissioned, created and used. The book will contain many very short chapters divided into sections by common themes. All authors will be asked to update a short paper that they have written in the last few years with this overall aim in mind.

There is currently a widespread disbelief in many statistics presented about society, both by government agencies, private organizations and by academics. The unemployment rates, electoral polls and many

Arnold who have planned a series of books each titled 'Statistics in ...' of which this could become Statistics in Society.

We are suggesting a book of many short chapters - each around 5,000 words long - to be attractive to those outside academic study. We want to include 100 photo-library black and white images of life in Britain, a price under £12, and a publication date of May 1998. The Troika will act as sounding board and arbiter of how the book develops.

We would very much welcome offers of material from any readers who would like to contribute. Contact us as inside the back cover. A more detailed synopsis of the book proposal follows:

university reports are often not believed when published because of the bad publicity such statistics have received in recent years. This book aims to show when such statistics can be believed, how better statistics can be constructed, how deceptions can be better understood, how people should present their own findings and how the work of the main official statistical agencies may be improved to increase their credibility. The book is needed to do all these things and is needed now because many of these issues are currently coming to the fore of political and academic debates.

The principal market for the book is likely to be restricted to Britain, but it should be of interest to a much wider range of readers than are most academic publications. From students studying A level courses, to undergraduate students of almost all the social sciences, this book should have a large

academic market. It should also be of interest to the general public who wish to be better informed about the figures that are fed to them daily on television and in newspapers. The book will have a broad interest by not focusing exclusively on official statistics.

The draft contents below is illustrative of the kind of contents we hope to achieve, but the final contents would depend on the enthusiasm of individual authors. Here we would envisage 40 chapters divided into three sections. Each chapter would be 5000 words long at the most, leaving 10,000 words for introductions, index and so on.

Illustrative Draft Contents of "Statistics in Society": Sections and Chapters:

1. Statistics in Everyday Life
  - a) How the press comment on numbers;
  - b) How people become statistically numerate;
  - c) Where do numbers come from?
2. The History of Social Statistics
  - a) When did counting begin?
  - b) What's so significant about significance?
  - c) The struggle for independent statistics.
3. Government Statistical Agencies
  - a) The minister and the General Household Survey;
  - b) The DoE indexes of poverty - do they work?
  - c) THE privatization of government statistics;
  - d) Social exclusion and statistical exclusion.
4. Statistics on Health
  - a) The disappearing NHS priority groups;
  - b) A short guide to health statistics;
  - c) Changing the coding of death;
  - d) The statistics of NHS privatisation.
5. Statistics in Education and Housing
  - a) League tables - the debate today
  - b) How to count the homeless
- c) How many homes do we need?
  - d) Special statistics for special needs?
6. Poverty and Wealth
  - a) Poverty and disabled children;
  - b) Measuring inequality and exclusion;
  - c) Counting health, wealth and happiness
  - d) Who are the workers - what is work?
7. Employment and Unemployment
  - a) Permanent sickness, unemployment disguised
  - b) Politicians, ministries and dole queues
  - c) Part-time/full-time - labour market statistics
8. Sexism, Racism and Xenophobia in numbers
  - a) Should we collect statistics on 'race'?
  - b) What counts in the wealth of nations?
  - c) How many immigrants are illegal?
9. Polls, Marketing and Forecasting
  - a) How election results could be better collected;
  - b) 'C2/D2' what does socioeconomic class mean?
  - c) How often do economic forecasts fail?
10. Crime, control and fear
  - a) Do the poor experience more crime?
  - b) Are men discriminated against by the courts?
  - c) The presentation of military statistics
11. Alternative Official Statistics
  - a) How do other countries do it better?
  - b) Who else is producing findings on society?
  - c) Doing it without numbers
12. Visualizing Official Statistics
  - a) Government graphs that have lied the most;
  - b) Pretty pictures and video graphics;
  - c) What would a true national atlas show?

*Radical Statistics* is usually produced three times per year.

### **Data Protection Act**

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, any member of the Radical Statistics Group is entitled to ask:

- a) For a printout of his/her personal details and name and address as kept on the Radical Statistics Group computer.
- b) That his/her personal details do not be so stored. Anyone wishing to avail themselves of this right, please contact the Troika (address on inside front cover) with requests in triplicate.

### **Contributions to Radical Statistics**

All readers of Radical Statistics are invited to contribute to the newsletter. Articles may vary from brief notices to detailed articles. Letters and reviews are also welcome. Contributions should be sent to the next editor using the address and guidelines below.

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**Deadline for copy: 30th June 1997 and 30th November 1997**

For those with access to computers the next editor will take contributions preferably on 3.5" DOS discs, using Wordperfect, Microsoft Word, or ASCII text mentioning the hardware the discs were prepared on. Please also include a hard copy of the contribution. Ideally use 2 cm margins, Bookman (or alternative) 13 pt for text, 18 pt bold for subheadings, 18 pt italics for your name, and 24 pt bold for the title. If you haven't got access to a computer, paper is quite acceptable, but a lot of extra work for the editor. Graphs, charts and diagrams should be on paper, in clear print ready to copy.

#### **Refereed articles: an attempt to improve quality**

If you wish comments on your article before publication, please state this and send three copies (but no disc) to one of the editors. Two readers will review your article for clarity and relevance to the concerns of Radical Statistics - see back cover - and may suggest improvements. The editors may then require you to make alterations before publication. Articles not refereed will receive minimal editorial change and are likely to appear in the next issue of the newsletter.



## Radical Statistics - who are we?

The Radical Statistics Group was formed in January 1975 by statisticians and research workers with a common concern about the political assumptions and implications of much of their work, and an awareness of the actual and potential misuse of statistics and its techniques. The group is independent from any other organisation, but members are radical in the sense of committed to helping to build a more free, egalitarian and democratic society.

***Our concerns***      Among our particular concerns are:

- The mystifying use of technical language in order to disguise social problems as technical ones
- The lack of control by the community over the aims of statistical investigations, the way these are conducted and the use of information produced
- The power structures within which statistical workers are employed, and which control the work and the uses to which it is put

The fragmentation of problems into separate specialist fields to the detriment of common problems