

News, comment and reviews

Radical Statistics Group Annual Conference & AGM

Saturday 26 February, 2005

Central Methodist Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester
(close to Manchester Piccadilly)
9:30 to 5 o'clock

Global Poverty and Inequality

As statisticians, we want to advise on how far progress is being made in the eradication of poverty worldwide. The difficulties in making valid interpretation of statistical data from a variety of countries is acknowledged, but the problems in assessing levels of poverty in developing countries is far more problematic.

The conference presents various methods for obtaining valid measures for global poverty, health and mortality. With due regard for reliability, the selected data is used to examine the extent and implications of inequity. The conference also attempts to identify the underlying processes that frustrate efforts to monitor and improve global well-being. The aim is to improve our understanding, an important step for achieving a fairer world.

Our keynote speaker is Professor Dave Gordon, Director of the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research. Dave combined his background in biology and geology with anti-poverty policy, while helping to find safe public water supplies in the South Pacific. He has researched and published in the fields of the scientific measurement of poverty, crime and poverty, childhood disability, area-based anti-poverty measures, the causal effects of poverty on ill health, housing policy and rural poverty.

He has recently been working on a UNICEF and DFID funded project to produce the first scientific measurements on the extent and nature of child poverty for the whole world.

Conference speakers

DAVE GORDON:	Global child poverty.
ROY CARR-HILL:	Measuring the living conditions among the poor: how useful are the available statistics?
KATH MOSER:	Global convergence in mortality 1950-2000?
PETER EDWARD:	The ethical poverty line as a tool to measure global absolute poverty.
JACQUI MACKAY:	Working conditions and poverty in banana production.

A speaker from the World Development Movement is to be confirmed.

To submit items for the AGM agenda, please contact the Troika, troika@radstats.org.uk.

Please also consider joining us for any of the following planned social events:

- Friday night gathering at the Marble Arch Public House, 73 Rochdale Road. Tel: 0161 832 5914 www.marblebeers.co.uk (food served until 8pm, order by 7.30pm)
- Saturday evening meal at a local restaurant (suitable for vegetarians) (Advance booking appreciated)
- Sunday: possibly a canal-side walk finishing at the Lowry Centre.

There is a booking form at the end of this issue, or alternatively see <http://www.radstats.org.uk/conf2005/Confbookingform2005.pdf>

Any enquiries please email to admin@radstats.org.uk

From Ludi Simpson

Social research in Cuba, links with Britain

A while ago I wrote on the organisation of official statistics in Cuba through the lens of Cienfuegos regional statistics office (RS no.54, 1993). Since then Cuba's government has survived ten years of economic crisis worsened by blockade. The government has stimulated tourism to gain foreign currency and in that way and by voluntary effort has continued health education and social policies that make Cuba a continuing example in Latin America, 45 years after the revolution by 'the bearded ones'.

In July 2004 I spent three weeks teaching and discussing concepts of social research, demography and statistics in Cuba. It was exciting not least for seeing so many people getting on with their work, prioritising social research in very difficult economic conditions. Below is a potted report of the structure of Cuban social research and potential for links with Britain.

I am intending to spend some time over the next two years to encourage further research links with Cuba. I am also collating a list of researchers in Britain:

- (a) with Spanish reading ability to consider commenting on Cuban work and/or teaching in Cuba, and
- (b) others wishing to support or be involved in such links through exchanging or funding bibliography, commenting on English language work, or any other suggestions!

No doubt there are other individuals who already have fruitful contacts with Cuba.

So please be in touch: ludi.simpson@manchester.ac.uk

There will be a session on Cuba at the RadStats conference next February 26th in Manchester.

Context

Cuba's combination of a highly educated research community, government health and educational priorities in line with international aspirations, and a need to broaden its international links, provide a fruitful base for links between Britain and Cuba.

For four decades Cuba's social wage, in particular the successful impact of education and health services on life expectancy, culture and sport, have been noted as outstanding in Latin America and surpassing many developed countries. The achievements are in the context of a mode of society quite different from Britain and have been under severe economic restrictions during the past two decades.

Three sectors of social research in Cuba

Most Cuban social research takes place in government departments, in independent research institutes funded by government departments, and in university research centres.

Ministries. The government's own ministries undertake large scale analyses of their own administrative data as well as one-off or continuous population surveys. Statistical studies are led by the Office of National Statistics (*Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas*, ONE). Within ONE, the Centre for Population and Development Studies has a methodology section and undertakes not only the census and its own national surveys, among them income and expenditure and the labour force, but also work commissioned by other ministries. For example it has recently completed surveys on reproductive health and on drug use, and often accepts commissions to design and undertake fieldwork for studies that have gained international funding. Cuban statistics count on a highly developed state infrastructure of health and social services, as well as the registers of addresses based on a personal identity card. Since 1997, ONE has a master sampling list for multi-stage social surveys which identifies local housing blocks for enumeration. The enumeration for the 2002 census was mainly undertaken by students aged 17-18 and their teachers after a nation-wide course in censuses and census taking, supervised by ONE regional and municipal

staff. There is no legislation on reporting and release of statistics. The ONE website is http://www.cubagov.cu/otras_info/estadisticas.htm

Independent. Most social research however, takes place in less quantitative environments, in independent research centres funded by government ministries. For example, I taught at the Centre for Research and Development of Cuban Culture (the *Centro Juan Marinello*), which leads a network of cultural studies centres funded by the Ministry of Culture. The *Centro Juan Marinello* and the *Instituto de Historia* have regional equivalents focusing on local developments. The work programme may include commissions from the Ministry that funds them but is mainly decided by their staff's own interests. Additional funding is gained through teaching and research for other organisations, including international links. Although these are not frequent events, during my stay the *Centro Juan Marinello* was teaching Mexican students Cuban history and the life and works of José Martí, hosting and teaching a PhD student from New York University, and preparing for a collaborative project on reading and politics with a research team from England.

Independent research institutes typically do not have strong methodological support from within their own organisation; as in other countries they look to professional associations and other means of updating and exchanging skills. The National Association of Cuban Economists (ANEC) performs this task well for economists but there is weaker support for social research methods.

Universities. University research centres are the third large site of social research. Cuban university departments tend to focus on teaching, but there are some academic centres that focus on research and postgraduate teaching. The University's Centre for Demographic Studies (CEDEM) is one, and has methodological support through its links to other University departments. Some staff manage dual roles, for example working both as a professor of statistics in the University and within ONE.

Other. Social research also takes place in the Communist Party's organisations, Trades Unions, the National Women's Federation and in other social organisations, but I did not get to know these well enough to evaluate the weight of their contribution.

Those I taught and worked with were drawn mainly from the independent research centres, but also from ONE and university departments. Their backgrounds varied, including sociology, psychology, legal studies, cinematography, health studies and geography. To illustrate, the work which course participants brought to the class included the drug use survey

supported by ONE, questionnaires proposed to assess the prevalence of sexual dysfunction, a study of the developing stature of a ballet school's students, statistical analysis of migration and immigration, and the use of a national survey to characterise individuals' concept of the family as nuclear or matrilineal. Such a varied participation speaks not only for the interest in quantitative methods, but also for the networks that exist across disciplines to advertise and co-ordinate methodological support. Most national research centres have their own substantial publication list, but plans are significantly limited by resources.

Cuba-Britain exchanges on social research methods

There is already some variety of collaborative social research involving both Britain and Cuba, usually initiated by personal contacts and interests. The Cuba Research Forum now based at Nottingham University has attempted to put such projects in touch with each other.

There is certainly room for further collaboration. For example I have letters suggesting exchanges between academics and professional researchers, and specific requests for collaboration and correspondence on longitudinal studies of ageing, small area estimation, text analysis, income and expenditure surveys, foetal mortality, estimation of survival at older ages, family structure beyond the household, missing data, and strategic health indicators.

I am happy to share the materials and contacts I have to help make such exchanges as fruitful as possible, and I would welcome any support and suggestions for the development of these initiatives. Please be in touch.

I would like to construct an informative website and active network to help these links, and would welcome any offer of skills or just plain help to get these going. In the mean time I will respond to all who contact me and maintain a list to send relevant information from time to time.

Ludi Simpson
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From Roy Carr-Hill

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

I have just been to the West Bank on a hospital planning project. There is the usual travelogue:

- 1 the situation for the Palestinians is far worse than that for blacks (and to a lesser extent coloureds) in apartheid South Africa that I also visited over 30 years ago now, with check points every few kilometres apparently for the sole purpose of humiliating the local population;
- 2 one time, we were taken the scenic route from East Jerusalem to Ramallah - oh what a lovely Wall – can't be called that in front of an Israeli, of course, it is 'security'- 12 foot high going down the middle of streets, through communities.

But what I thought might specifically interest RadStats readers is that I visited, on an official basis (I was contracted to European Union via the British Council), the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Given concerns that we had a couple of years ago, with the ransacking of PCBS by the Israelis 2 years ago during the 'incursion' (invasion would be a better term), I was delighted to see how well organised and professional they were.

I met with the Acting Director (as the Director has been seconded to the Presidents Office) and the person in charge of health statistics. They carry out the full range of household consumption, expenditure and health surveys often of immediate political interest – for example, they have just completed a survey on the impact of the Wall on the economy and on the mobility of communities. They publish top line results on the web-site www.pchs.org.ps, will do further breakdowns for a small fee and, in most cases, provide full data sets on CDs for somewhere between £100 and £200. The list of their publications is on that web-site.

Given recent remarks on the RadStats list that you cannot expect a functioning statistical organisation to survive in an unstable environment, this was heartening.

After the recent publication in the Lancet of an estimate of the number of civilian deaths in Iraq and the government refusal to accept those figures as reliable, I wrote the following letter, which was unfortunately not published.

Dear Sir

Civilian Deaths in Iraq

We carried out a survey just before the start of the Iraq War aimed mostly at finding out the concerns of different communities in England about the violence of the Iraqi War (1). This was a follow up to a similar survey at the time of the Gulf War (2). Of specific interest, in the context of the estimate of 100,000 civilian Iraqi deaths recently published in this journal, are the

answers we obtained about concern over casualties to different groups.

In the first survey, in 1990, there was a marked difference between the high levels of concern for British and US service personnel (82% and 56% respectively) compared to very low levels of concern for Iraqi civilians, let alone for Iraqi soldiers (34% and 22%, respectively).

The results are very different in this survey. Whilst the proportions very concerned about loss of life among British and American service personnel have dropped to 71% and 50% respectively, the proportion who are very concerned about loss of life among Iraqi soldiers has risen by nearly half to 32%; similarly, whilst 29% reported being *not* concerned about loss of life among Iraqi soldiers in this survey, this is a substantial drop from the 42% recorded last time and it is noticeable that 10% were also *not* concerned about loss of life among American service personnel (compared to only 4% for British service personnel). In fact, the second highest reported level of being 'very concerned' was for Iraqi civilians (66%), whilst only 49% were very concerned with loss of life among Israeli civilians.

Is the increased concern registered for Iraqi civilians, compared to 1991, a cause or a consequence of the anti-war environment? Does it reflect this particular conjuncture, or a secular trend towards greater sensitivity towards civilian victims, the product of a decade of 'new' wars and human rights and NGO campaigning? We don't know, but it is clear that the English population is very concerned about deaths to Iraqi civilians.

*Roy Carr-Hill**

Footnotes

1) Carr-Hill R. Concerns about the Violence of the Iraq War Radical Statistics Newsletter No. 83, pp.3-49

2) Shaw and Carr-Hill (1991) *Public Opinion, Media and Violence: Attitudes to the Gulf War in a Local Population*. Hull: Hull University Gulf War Project.

*. Roy Carr-Hill is Professor in Health & Social Statistics at University of York and at University of London Institute of Education.

Radical Statistics Critical Essay Competition 2004

The second Radical Statistics Essay Competition took place in 2004. A departure from the first competition was that this time there were two categories of submission. The first (student) category was for those who had not yet graduated with a first degree – we wished to encourage undergraduates and especially those still at school, to enter. The second was an open category. There were two prizes within each category.

As before, the entries were screened and then allocated to three judges (this time Mary Shaw, Allan Reese, Neil Spencer) who ranked each entry in order of priority, giving reasons for their ranking. Account was taken of age and experience in judging. The final choice was made, subject to eligibility, by an average of the rankings given.

We were unfortunately not able to award any prizes in the student competition this time. However, we have awarded three prizes in the open competition: first prize to Vinod Bhatia and second (equal) to Petra Boynton and Ray Thomas. Each prize winner was given a one-year subscription to Radical Statistics and free entry to the 2005 conference

These competitions appear to need a large amount of publicity in order to get good entries (or are there simply not that many people interested?). We probably gave less publicity this year than before, relying on electronic means only, and we were not that successful in getting the message into schools in particular. We would like to thank all the judges involved in this process.

The Troika would welcome any suggestions of means of publicising the essay competition in future years, comments on eligibility criteria and of any (even provisional) offers to act as judges.

The prizewinning essays are as follows. They are included in this issue of the journal.

Open Category:

1st Vinod Bhatia (£300) Poverty: as an issue
2nd= Petra Boynton (£100) Teaching Statistics
2nd= Ray Thomas (£100) Whose statistics?

Student Category: No prize awarded

Biographies the prize winners follow;

Vinod Bhatia graduated from the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy in Electronics (B Tech), followed by a course in Public Administration (receiving Gold Medal) and currently works in Punjab Pin, India as a public servant in transportation. He was on a Hindu Hitachi Scholarship in Japan until December 2003.

Patra Boynton works as a non-clinical lecturer in health services research at the open learning unit, department of primary care and population studies, UCL. Her research interests are on issues related to primary care, gender differences and in teaching research methods.

Ray Thomas worked from 1970 to 1996 as Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Social Science, Open University. He was chair of an Open University course on official statistics that was presented between 1974 and 1982 and a member of the course team on social science research methods. He was honorary secretary of the Official Statistics Committee of the Royal Statistical Society between 2000 and 2003. He has interests in the societal functions of statistics, unemployment and national income statistics.

We hope to run this competition again in two years time and welcome any suggestions of means of publicising it in future years, comments on eligibility criteria and of any (provisional) offers to act as judges (offers please to Janet Shapiro [janet.rmshapiro@btopenworld.com])

I would like to thank the judges for giving their time and expertise and, of course, all entrants without whom we would of course have no competition!

Russell Ecob, for Troika. (Russell@ecob-consulting.com)

PS We have been unable to contact Vinod Bhatia. If anyone knows of his whereabouts the Troika would be very pleased to hear from you (alternatively perhaps you could draw to his attention that he has won first prize!)