

Editorial

The subtitle, “Making Statistics Relevant”, was initially chosen as we had two articles that related to making the discipline of statistics relevant to students. We also anticipated the 2008 Critical Essay Competition and the books offered for review were appropriate for students studying statistics on non-specialist courses.

In line with the stated aims of the Radical Statistics Group we also wished to attract articles that emphasised the importance of statistics in supporting debate on a wide range of social issues and deplored the lack of relevant statistics for social and political decisions.

Kai-Lit Phua describes how using examples of interest to students provides motivation and helps understanding. Since Fernando De Maio first submitted his article there have been other publications on the Johns Hopkins University studies on mortality in Iraq, including one in the Royal Statistical Society’s “Significance”, however Fernando also uses the subject to illustrate the wider problem of politicians (and their advisers) finding fault with the methodology of studies when they don’t like the results. (This is somewhat reminiscent of the tobacco industry’s attacks on the epidemiological evidence of the dangers of smoking). He also refers to another article on using these studies in the classroom, thus linking back to Kai-Lit’s article.

We apologise to the above authors and thank them for their patience for the long delay in publishing these articles (bequeathed to us by the previous editors). We are glad that they remain as relevant as when they were first written.

The next two articles on population statistics might be thought antithetical. The first, by Gavin Ross, exposes the unreliability of past population projections, the second, by Ray Thomas, deplores the unwillingness of radical statisticians to become involved with population statistics. As always, we welcome any articles responding to those published.

Tony Greenfield has contributed a short piece arising from the news coverage of a study of food additives. He asks more questions than he answers but they need to be asked.

Finally, the claim that proposals to close District General Hospitals are based on clinical evidence is examined by Sally Ruane. We shall return to this at the end of our editorial.

There are three Book Reviews and a list of books available for review (we can provide volunteers with a copy); we also hope to receive unsolicited reviews of other books of interest to the Radical Statistics Group.

The Announcements include the 2008 conference in Edinburgh, the 2008 essay competition (please get your students and colleagues to submit essays, and do submit one yourself), and a call from the NHS Together Campaign to join the march and rally on 3rd November.

This brings us to the topic of Radical Statistics Issue 96, due out in early 2008. We wish to devote this to the delivery of health care in developed and developing countries but with most emphasis on the structure and organisation of the National Health Service.

The final article in this Issue by Sally Ruane would have been ideal for Issue 96, as would the review of Julian Tudor Hart's book, "The political economy of health care". However, we did not wish to delay publication of either, particularly as we hoped that this Issue could have been out before November 3rd, the date of the national demonstration in London called by NHS Together to celebrate sixty years of the NHS in 2008.

Your editors will be there hoping that the demonstration begins a new awareness of (the awakening to) the value of the NHS as a model of social cohesion that Julian Tudor Hart predicts in the last chapter of his book.

Janet Shapiro and Jane Galbraith

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