

Announcements & Reports

Fourth Radical Statistics Critical Essay Competition 2008

As statisticians we have a responsibility to speak up when we see distorted presentations of numerical data, particularly if these appear to be designed to deceive. As *Radical Statisticians* we should shout loudly! At last year's RadStats Conference, Petra Boynton showed how surveys were being misused in Public Relations campaigns. This was a light-hearted presentation and the crazy conclusions were presumably regarded as entertainment by the general public. But more serious and flagrant abuse of market research has recently been observed in the use of badly formulated questionnaires in public consultations. Conclusions from these are intended to be believed.

The Fourth Radical Statistics Critical Essay Competition gives you the opportunity to speak your mind and make good use of your statistical skills. This issue of *Radical Statistics* has highlighted just a few topics that could be a subject of your essay, but you are sure to find more. Our judges - Professor Danny Dorling, Dr Eileen Magnello and Dr Ben Goldacre look forward to reading some interesting essays.



Take up your pen!

A flyer to publicise the competition is now available at the website www.radstats.org.uk. Please use it and help to spread the word.

We want to encourage students to feel the power of their newly learned skills so please tell them about the competition; note - they can submit coursework under certain conditions. However, those of us who are more mature are likely to be angry and critical, so don't hesitate to let us have your thoughts backed up with data.

Note that there are prizes for two categories of candidate, student or non-student: first prize £300, second prize £200.

The deadline is July 1st, so make haste!
Contact Janet Shapiro if you want further information.
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The Health Statistics User Group (HSUG) conference for new Health Information Specialists

30th November 2008

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS)

This conference succeeded in its three aims: to disseminate information about sources of health statistics; to enable mainly new health information specialists to network; and to uncover areas where adequate statistical information is not available.

The initial ice-breaker session required participants to find and exchange contact details with others who had data or information that might be useful to them. I arrived in the middle of this and I have never seen or heard so much animation in the basement of the RSS. Communication was further enhanced by the group session which allowed participants to say what statistical sources they had found or might find useful and what areas did not appear to be adequately covered.

The eleven speakers covered the major sources of health statistics in the UK and its component countries, how statistics are used to support and monitor health policies, how they are collected and how they can be accessed.

Some of the areas identified by the group session as inadequate were GP records, A&E records, statistics on dental health, and, more generally linkage and compatibility between data sources. Two groups suggested establishing a central directory of data sources.

About 120 new or established information specialists attended (mainly young and employed within the public sector, especially Primary Care Trusts and other parts of the National Health Service). I would strongly recommend any health statistics users who missed this day to book for a proposed re-run that HSUG hopes to organise in the near future.

The HSUG website at <http://www.rss.org.uk/hsug> will include information on the conference including the programme, the speakers' slides, and, most usefully, the reports of the five or six rapporteurs who reviewed the presentations and summarised the group discussions.

Jane Galbraith

SOCIAL EXCLUSION COUNTED

Radical Statistics #98

Statistics on social exclusion change along with the changing discourses of our times. The driving agents in this process of change include government ministers (e.g. Blair, Brown), civil society activists and lobbyists (e.g. the Child Poverty Action Group), and local / regional / national experts. However where is the voice of radical statistics in this process of managed, negotiated, dialogic change? What is the Office for National Statistics now doing in this broad area?

Papers on this topic are invited for a special issue of Radical Statistics.

Papers will be fairly short, perhaps 2,500 to 3,000 words each. We need coverage of the social inclusion debate and how social inclusion is measured; deprivation indicators and how they are changing; indicators of well-being and happiness for localities in Britain; policy actors and stakeholders in the multiple-deprivation debate; a theoretical paper on social exclusion; at least one short study using factor analysis please; a geography of UK social exclusion; an international comparison; and finally a study of children's social exclusion from change processes.

I might provide a study of gender as a form of social exclusion (co-authored with my colleagues Kingsley Purdam and Reza Afkhami). This would cover operationalisation issues i.e. how do we know what forms of harm or suffering are experienced by the socially excluded people? We have a summary of all the relevant survey data in one table. Can you beat that? Do try.

We hope to gather these in 2008 for publication in 2009. However make your plans now! Please send a short abstract or an indicative summary of your work to editors@radstats.org.uk or directly to me.

PS Student essays can be considered.

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