

## **Editorial**

### **Whose Statistics?**

Welcome to the Radical Statistics Issue 102 presenting the papers given at the 2010 Annual Conference. Harvey Goldstein's paper has already been published in #101 with commentaries on the conference by Christian Hennig and John Urquhart.

This is a packed issue; four of the presenters have produced articles. We also have an article by the Italian Association of Epidemiology (AIE) and a book review by Nissa Finney. Last but not least we have the records of the well-attended AGM that took place in the conference lunch-time interval.

David Miller of 'Spinwatch' was the first speaker. His talk gave a stimulating overview of the murky world of lobbyists. Although 'Spinwatch' is itself a lobby group it backs the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency. His talk was illustrated with examples of misleading reportage confirmed by 'experts' with dubious affiliation; these ranged from counter-terrorism to obesity. His article, written with Idrees Ahmad, urges our support for 'Powerbase', a useful tool to expose proponents of spin and to frustrate the efforts of those seeking to undermine public access to the ear of government.

Eileen Magnello's talk placed Florence Nightingale in her rightful role as pioneer "passionate statistician" promoting the use of statistical data to advise policy decisions. The fully referenced article brings together a complete history of those responsible for initiating the use of statistical methods; they remain influential to this day.

Statistical rigour was used by Paul Marchant to scrutinise the arguments of those claiming that street lighting reduced accident and crime rates. He shows that the evidence cited was flawed and that biased affiliations of authors were not acknowledged; but Paul did not conceal his own concerns about light pollution.

Heather Brooke's talk after lunch was entitled 'Your Right to Know', like her book, now in a new edition with subtitle: 'A Citizen's Guide to the Freedom of Information Act'. She has now published another book – 'The Silent State'. Heather needed no introduction having been the journalist forcing disclosure of records and thus launching the MPs expenses scandal; this had been broadcast as a TV drama a few days before on Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>. Her talk outlined her experiences as a journalist, new to the British ways of fiercely guarding information that would have been made public in the States. Heather explained the struggle to make use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), promised in 1997, passed in 2000 but not implemented for five years. Heather also drew our attention to other powers that are invisible, such as the 'super

injunctions' that can be imposed secretly to halt publication of information.

The next talk by Harvey Goldstein focused upon the ethical responsibility of statisticians to use the latest and most powerful tools. Danny Dorling gave the final presentation that afternoon; his talk centred on his book: 'Injustice, Why Social Inequality Persists'. A fast succession of graphs piled up evidence of how the great majority are being cheated by the elite. One statistic quoted represented the silver lining edging the storm clouds: that five women had been awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2009, a third of those awarded to women since 1993. Glaring examples of an increasingly distorted distribution of wealth and opportunity across the UK are presented in his article. Danny questions whether blinkered application of established analytical procedures may legitimise elitist attitudes, particularly the acceptance of class differences. Some contentious issues are raised; an article countering his arguments has already been submitted and that will be included in #103 together with Danny's response.

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held during the lunch break, are given at the end of this issue and are followed by news from the troika. At the end of the afternoon we broke up into groups to discuss what activities could be conducted between AGMs. This concluded a very successful conference and the organisers are thanked for their hard work.

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In addition to conference papers, an excellent article is included that introduces the work of the Italian Association of Epidemiology (AIE). It is hoped this will stimulate further contributions. The group apply their analytical expertise to the impact of armed conflicts on health and environment and draw attention to how these problems are consciously ignored and avoided by professionals and researchers.

The book review by Nissa Finney should also alert us to the necessity to keep a watching brief on how immigration policies may develop under the coalition government, particularly those affecting social exclusion.

It is hoped that this issue inspires further articles. Please send in your contributions.

All three editors have helped with #102 but I have taken responsibility for the editorial; Jane Galbraith has suspended her co-editorship for #102 and #103 as she disagrees with parts of the article by Danny Dorling. Jane's comments on Danny's article will appear in the issue #103. This issue will be entitled – **'The Cuts'**.

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