

News and Views

Letter

Dear editors

I welcome Danny Dorling's article in Rad Stats 102 particularly where he reveals that "people in the USA are paying their debt back and not taking out more debt. They are curtailing their spending, stopping consuming, on an unprecedented scale."

That is one way of putting it. In practice, though, the US banks are discovering that the values of the properties on the security of which they have lent money no longer cover the outstanding mortgages. The banks are demanding that the difference be repaid.

In the UK between 1997 and 2007
Prices went up 30%
Pay went up 50%
House prices went up 210%
(The Economist Pocket World in Figures 2009).

Neither bank depositors nor bank borrowers have enough income to support home prices at this level. The US equivalent was only 104%.

How long before the US situation is replicated in the UK?

Yours sincerely,

Ivor Kenna, London

Statistics Without Borders

*Rebecca Scherzer,
Vice Chair of SWB*

Statistics Without Borders (SWB) is an all-volunteer group of statisticians that falls under the umbrella of the American Statistical Association. We were first established in 2008, and currently consist of over 170 statisticians around the world who provide pro bono consultancy activities involved in international health issues. Note that we define "health" very broadly.

The mission of SWB is to achieve better statistical practice, including statistical analysis and design of experiments and surveys, so that international health projects and initiatives are delivered more effectively and efficiently. We are seeking opportunities to provide statistical assistance in situations where there is adequate statistical support, or where our expertise may exceed what is available to the non-profit group or government agency.

Here is a sampling of our recent projects:

- Following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, SWB partnered with SciMetrika, a North Carolina-based health consultancy company. SciMetrika and a team of SWB volunteers visited Haiti to work on a cell phone survey to assess the economic impact of the earthquake. Our goals were to estimate the

employment status of the Haitian population and the change in that status, and to estimate aspects of the current housing situation. Our work was featured on National Public Radio earlier this year: <http://media.theworld.org/audio/060120109.mp3>.

- SWB is also working with researchers from Columbia University's Earth Institute on the Millennium Villages Project. This project was designed to demonstrate how the eight Millennium Development Goals can be met in rural Africa within five to ten years through community-led development. SWB is currently working with Millennium Villages on a cluster-randomized study of health and development interventions in 14 African countries involving 60,000 households.
- Earlier this year, several SWB volunteers conducted a review of a report on the relationship between U.S. military assistance to Colombia and extra-judicial killings reportedly committed by the Colombian military since 2002.
- SWB helped prepare a proposal for the Inter-American Development Bank to survey households in Mexico about their use of bottled water. SWB was heavily involved in the early planning and helped with the general sample design and questionnaire.
- We are also working on a longer-term project with UNICEF related to poverty in Sierra Leone. This project is for the evaluation of health interventions. SWB helped

with the design of the baseline survey, and is currently working on data cleaning and weighting for the survey. We expect to continue to be involved with data analysis and planning for a post-intervention survey.

We are seeking potential SWB volunteers, as well as organizations and projects in need of assistance with statistical issues on non-profit health-related work. For more information about SWB, if you have a potential project, or if you would like to volunteer, please visit our website:

<http://community.amstat.org/AMSTAT/StatisticsWithoutBorders/Home/Default.aspx>
Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Statistics-without-Borders>

Email: g.shapiro4@verizon.net

Radical Statistics population studies subgroup

Would you be interested in joining a new subgroup of Radical Statistics, addressing demographic issues and population studies? It has started recently with a review of the Optimum Population Trust's policies and evidence which we hope will be ready to appear in *Radical Statistics* before long.

Contact sylvie.dubuc@socres.ox.ac.uk to take part in the group and suggest further activities.

News from the Troika

The Radical Statistics Conference 2011, 'Cuts and Corporations' is in Leeds on 26th February 2011, organised by Paul Marchant. A copy of the booking form and programme is distributed with this issue of Radical Statistics, and is available at www.radstats.org.uk/conf2011

We have changed the distribution of the newsletter so that it is distributed by Royal Mail – in the recent past we had used a service which sub-contracted to TNT. We feel that the postal service should remain publicly accountable and recommend others to influence organisations they are associated with to do likewise.

A Radical Statistics blog has been started at <http://radstats.wordpress.com/>. At present it focuses on cuts in statistics worldwide. Potential contributors, please contact the RadStats Troika.

Lee Williamson and Alan Marshall are preparing for another Essay competition, watch this space.

A population statistics sub-group is in the making. If you wish to join it, contact the Troika initially.

The Radical Statistics Group's organising committee ('the Troika') is David Manley, Eileen Magnello, and Ludi Simpson, who can be contacted by emailing troika@radstats.org.uk.

Radical Statistics conference: 'Cuts and Corporations'

Bookings are now open for the Radical Statistics conference in Leeds on 26th February 2011. Members will receive a separate sheet with programme and booking form with this issue of Radical Statistics. The programme, booking form and further information are also at www.radstats.org.uk/conf2011.

The cost has been kept to a minimum to encourage all interested to attend, whether researchers or campaigners or other interested individuals: £20 members / £30 non-members / £35 non-members including membership. There is a £10 reduction on each of these fees for students/unwaged.

RADICALSTATISTICS

2011 Annual Conference: Cuts and Corporations

Saturday, February 26th 2011, Leeds

The Heart Centre, Bennett Rd, Headingley

9.30am	Registration
10.00am:	Welcome
10.05am	Unkindest Cuts: the impact on older people Jay Ginn, Institute of Gerontology, Kings College London
10.45am	From Witney to Wigan - how national changes to welfare benefit rules have a differential impact on local communities Alan Franco, welfare rights manager
11.25am	The distributional impact of the 2010 Spending Review Howard Reed, Landman Economics
12.05pm	Radical Statistics Group annual general meeting This is an open AGM to encourage collaborative action, all are welcome to participate
1-2	Lunch
2.00pm	The detrimental effects of corporate influence on science and technology Stuart Parkinson, Executive Director Scientists for Global Responsibility
2.40pm	The effects of the libel laws on science Peter Wilmshurst Consultant Cardiologist, Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
3.20pm	Redefining wealth, redefining progress Victoria Johnson, New Economics Foundation
4pm	Activity workshops
5pm	close

Not only a conference

Friday night social gathering at Citrus Café Bar from 7.30pm. Food will be available to order until 9.30pm. Quiz night: bring a multiple choice question, or answer ours. 11 North Lane, Headingley, LS6 2JH
Saturday evening meal 6.30 pm at the Olive Tree Greek restaurant. Meet before at Arcadia, both on Oatley Rd
Sunday morning walk. Meet at 10:15 at The Heart Centre. Walk along the Mearwood Valley Trail to the Hollies return to Headingley Centre Dry alternative if raining (museum and galleries in Leeds centre). Further details available at the conference, depending on weather & interests.

£20 members / £30 non-members / £35 non-members including membership.
£10 reduction students/unwaged

Book at <http://www.radstats.org.uk/conf2011/> or by the form that may be on the reverse of this programme.