

Radical statistics conference 3 to 5 March 2006

Early information: details of sessions

Ray Thomas: GOVERNMENT SPIN AND STATISTICS

Ray Thomas is a research Fellow in official statistics in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University. He was external expert member of the government's Labour Market Statistics Framework Review made in 2001 and Royal Statistical Society Champion Fellow 2003-2005. He has worked with Professor John Adams of Napier University on a study of unemployment in Scotland supported by the Scottish Parliament and has been a regular contributor to Radical Statistics over the past ten years.

Britain's economic success has blinded us to the ways in which statistics are produced in order to support Government policies. There is no independent statistical service as promised by the Labour Party in 1997.

Labour market statistics provide an example, illustrating how the imposition of International Labour Office categorizations and the ignoring of administrative statistics give a distorted picture. The governmental picture has disguised growth of inequality in the geographical distribution of unemployment and has failed to contribute to the development of statistics relevant to the causes of unemployment. Statistics for claimant unemployment indicate the growth of 'inner city' problems in urban concentration of every size – a geographical manifestation of the growth of economic and social inequalities under the Labour Government.

The paper calls for the Office for National Statistics to be made responsible to Parliament as proposed by Jack Straw in 1995. An independent ONS would be better able to deal with problem areas such as economic statistics, migration statistics, and the monitoring of government performance as well as labour market statistics.

Paul Marchant: DO THE CLAIMS FOR SPENDING BILLIONS ON CRIME REDUCTION INITIATIVES STAND UP?

Paul joined Radstats in the 1980s when he was doing an MSc in statistics. He took some statistics books to Nicaragua when I went there about that time.

How do we know what works in reducing crime? Claims are made that a particular crime reduction method works. However on examination of studies, it is seen that the statistical claims and methods are unfounded. Essentially the problem stems from the fact that standard methods of statistics rely on assumptions, such as that of independent random sampling. Things go horribly wrong if the implicit assumptions are not appropriate for the situation. The talk will discuss the problems in a simple way and will address general matters to be considered in the design and execution of

evaluations so that any conclusions made are 'properly scientific' and therefore sound.

The talk will also discuss resistance encountered when powerful, large interests are challenged, by statistical reasoning, and give contextual insights, beyond simple pure enquiry!

Jay Ginn: MUST POVERTY BE POLITICISED?

Abstract

Dr Jay Ginn was employed as a Senior Research Fellow, Sociology Department, University of Surrey and was a co-director of the Centre for Research on Ageing and Gender until her retirement in November 2004. She is now a Visiting Professor of the university. Research interests include gender, class and ethnic differences in the economic resources of older people and the impact on women of pension system reforms, cross-nationally, especially the shift from state to private pensions. Recent books include Women, Work and Pensions 2001 (co-edited with D. Street and S. Arber) and Gender, Pensions and the Lifecourse, 2003.

Poverty rates are a sensitive topic for governments and it is perhaps not surprising that there are many ways of measuring poverty, producing different rates and identifying different groups of people as poor.

This talk will consider some of the sources of variation and potential disinformation in reported poverty rates in Britain and abroad, taking examples mainly from statistics on older people's income.

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Jamie Goodwin-White and Ludi Simpson: RADICAL DEMOGRAPHY

This session will ask you to challenge demographers to come clean with their models of the way the world works. It will ask you to do no less.

Jamie Goodwin-White and Ludi Simpson will each describe examples of the ideological basis of demographic work which they have reviewed or been involved in, from the UK and the USA, particularly relating to 'race', poverty and population change. The aim will not be to undermine demographic work but to better understand it, and to better understand social change.

They will then suggest some principles of 'radical demography'. As with radical statistics, these involve democratic ideals, demystifying technical methods and their assumptions, and clarifying the non-technical pressures that affect the processes of research and its dissemination.

Finally, you will be asked to participate in a case study, the evaluation of statistics used by the immigration campaign group Migration Watch. This is not only to examine what has become a particularly timely topic in terms of defining national inclusion, but also an opportunity to further consider the role of radical demography in engaging with public debate.