

A RADICAL STATISTICS LEAFLET Ian Miles.

I was asked by the Steering Group to produce a leaflet which we might use to publicise the Group and recruit new membership - especially students and younger statistical workers and researchers. Thus its written in a buoyant and promotional way, and I'm asking the Newsletter to publish it so that you can all give feedback on: what works and what doesn't? what more needs to be said? any smart ideas for getting it produced, for getting it out? anyone fancy designing the illustration(s)? I'd welcome constructive feedback (eg if you have a specific suggestion, try to spell it out for me). If you can send them to my home address by the end of March (57 Upper Lewes Road, Brighton, BN1 3FG, Sussex) - or better still get them to me at the AGM - then I'll report on the feedback to the Steering Group and see what their reaction is to the progress to date.

I envisage the leaflet as being A4 sized, folded so as to consist of four sides. It should be suitable for pinning on boards, leaving on seats, slipping into Statistical handbooks, and so on.

DRAFT LEAFLET

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Why Radical Statistics?

Statistics may bore a lot of people, but somehow they often seem to carry the day in political arguments. Statistics may be regarded with distrust and suspicion as just so much propaganda but governments invest vast sums in keeping them up to date and accurate. Statistical methods may be confusing and full of arbitrary assumptions, but they are increasingly important in social research and in the allocation of resources.

For example, statistics are used to justify the nuclear arms race ("they have more weapons than we do, therefore we have to re-arm") and to make it appear more palatable ("official estimates say that only 45% of the population will be wiped out in nuclear war). They are used to say that ours is an equal society, that poverty and homelessness are insignificant, and that selective education raises scholastic performance. There is barely an area of social life for which statistics are not produced, and barely a political controversy in which they are not called into action.

Are the statistics themselves, the raw data, shaped by ideological frameworks? How does this affect the working conditions of statisticians? Are social problems being treated in fragmented and restricted ways? What does this mean about widely used methods of statistical analysis? Why are statistics so often presented in misleading and overtechnical language? Can they be demystified, made

available to more people? And what do these questions imply for statistical work, research, and teaching? These are the questions that the Radical Statistics Group is tackling: if any of them concern you, too, why don't you join us?

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How the Radical Statistics Group works

The Radical Statistics Group is an organisation of statisticians and social scientists. We come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and in common we are concerned about the production and use of statistics in modern society. We are affiliated to the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, and cooperate with other groups challenging the power structures that underlie so much contemporary science, technology and technique. Statistics, as a field that combines abstract and mathematical methods of analysis, together with very concrete data about social issues, is a particularly important area for critical work, for the challenging of domination of all kinds.

Since our foundation in 1975, the Radical Statistics Group has been active in a number of fields. A lot of work is done through our subgroups: in the last few years these have included groups on education, health, nuclear war, race, and women and statistics. Other activity involves the whole group, which meets at least annually, and has a triennial Newsletter.

Publications are one of our main products. Our subgroups have prepared more than ten pamphlets and information packs, on topics like perinatal mortality (on which an audiotape is available), the nuclear numbers game, educational research, and race statistics. Several books have emerged from our discussions, some of them achieving considerable impact in their fields. These have formed the subject of meetings and interventions in the media. We are also active, as Group members or in an individual capacity, in media, professional and other debates over the interpretation of statistics. Sometimes this may mean us taking on the conventional role of experts, arguing against the expertise brought into play in the service of dominant ideologies. But we also try to demystify expertise, to explain how and why statistical approaches work - or don't work - and how they can be applied in different ways.

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MONTAGE of newspaper headlines ("lies, damned lies", "balance of terror", "cost of living", "Thatcher fudges the figures", etc.) with RADICAL STATISTICS logo and some wonderful leading question such as: "Do Statistics get You Down?", or "Are the Numbers Neutral?".

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Up-to-date list of RSG publications (those in print only). Tear-off strip to apply for membership and subscribe to newsletter, to be sent to 9 Poland Street.