

RADICAL STATISTICS NEWSLETTER 40



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EDUCATION GROUP

We produced 1000 copies of 'Figuring Out Education Spending' which have sold steadily since June. We have already covered our costs and there is a good chance that we will eventually sell most of them. However, sales have not been as fast as they were for 'Reading Between the Numbers'; nearly all the 3000 copies of RBTN have now been sold. It is interesting to speculate why this should be. Somewhat ironically, in view of its intended audience, RBTN has appealed to teachers in further and higher education and has been used on a number of courses. FOES is ostensibly a more campaigning pamphlet with perhaps a broader appeal, but so obviously appropriate for courses in education departments. Reaction to FOES has been muted but nobody has argued with our conclusions.

Our one other activity (apart from possible work on Statistics for School Reorganisations - see Steve Simpson's article in RSN39) has been to contribute a talk in the BSSRS series 'Beneath the White Coat'.

IAN PLEWIS

Health group report

Enough time has now passed since the publication of 'Facing the figures' for those concerned to recover our sanity and to hold meetings to discuss future plans with the encouraging number of new people who are now joining us. Five project areas have emerged grouped round either particular interests or possible new projects. There is an understandable reluctance to embark on any other project which is in danger of turning into another lengthy book. A more popular idea at present is producing 'broadsheets', in the form of sheets of A3 paper folded into 4 A4 pages. For the benefit of anyone who does not get health group mailings, the interest/project groups are listed below with a contact telephone number.

International comparisons No specific project is planned at present, but there is an interest in looking at health statistics produced by international agencies such as the World Bank, in terms of their validity and appropriateness. Another interest is comparisons between different countries' health care systems. Contact Anthony Zwi, 01 387 7050 ext 5711 (work) or 01 341 6123 (home).

Inequalities An outline has been produced for a possible broadsheet which would cover critically the arguments put forward by Julian Le Grand and Raymond Illsley and lifestyle explanations of inequalities. It would also cover the debate about whether the gap is widening. Contact Mel Bartley 01 359 3185 (home) or George Davey Smith 01 387 7050 ext 5713 (work) or 01 733 6485 (home).

A new unofficial guide to official health statistics This idea originated at last year's conference, and there are people willing to contribute. The range of topics and possible authors has been discussed. Themes include statistics about population structure, ill health, factors causing ill health, hospital activity and care in the community. Before tackling the pamphlet, this group may do a broadsheet on NHS management statistics, including Korner, performance indicators, diagnostic related groups, QALYs etc. Contact Jenny Head 01 387 7050 ext 5702 or Alison Macfarlane 0727 52111 (home) or 0865 816876 (work).

Community health profiles Two complementary approaches have been identified. One starts by putting together routinely collected and the other involves surveys. It is planned to do a broadsheet to outline methods for these two approaches. In discussion, it was assumed that the people who actually end up doing profiles are likely to be experienced, but the important thing is to involve local communities in deciding what questions to ask. Contact Luise Parsons 091 265 4188 (work).

Critique of primary health care white paper This will acknowledge that some of the proposals in the white paper are good ones, but questions whether the planned measures will achieve them. The plan is to move fairly quickly on this. Contact Kev Hopayian 0728 832370 (home).

Meanwhile, 'Facing the figures' is still selling well and we have nearly recovered our costs. We also get invitations to give talks based on it and it has received a number of complimentary reviews.

Alison Macfarlane

Health group workshops for Radical Statistics Conference

The Health group has planned four workshops for the conference on February 27:

1. Where has Korner got us?

What data are being collected through the new NHS data systems. Do they tell us any more about health or the NHS than their predecessors did?

2. Monitoring hospital activity

What is the basis for performance indicators, diagnostic related groups and Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs)? What use are they in evaluating hospital activity? Are there any alternative approaches which could be used to build up a picture of what is happening in a given district?

3. Monitoring care in the community

In comparison with hospitals, very few statistics are collected about care in the community, and the NHS and local government collect the data independently making it difficult to look at the interface between them. Is it possible to use the existing statistics to monitor what is and is not happening in the community?

4. Prevention - the rhetoric and the practice. An international perspective

An examination of statistics related to this issue in several countries.

Saturday February 27, 8 pm

The Empress of Russia, 362 St John Street, London EC1

The upstairs room at the Empress of Russia has been booked for a social/musical evening in aid of the Nicaragua Statistics Fund. There will be a mixture of background music in an English/Irish traditional vein and music to listen to. Further musical contributions will be welcome, so if you play any sort of acoustic music, don't be backward in coming forward. Because the pub does not have a music and dancing licence, the room can only be let to clubs which exist for musical purposes, so this will be the first, and perhaps the last, meeting of the 'Random music club'! Make sure you don't miss this possibly unique event.

Nicaragua Statistics Fund

242 Keighley Road, Bradford BD9 4JZ

These notes summarise (1) the 1987 activities of the Radstats' Nicaragua Statistics Fund; (2) Developments in Nicaraguan statistical work; (3) priorities of the Nicaragua Statistics Fund in 1988; and (4) an Appeal for continued support. I would appreciate comments by correspondence or at the 1988 Radstats AGM.

1. NICARAGUA STATISTICS FUND: 1987 UPDATE

DONATIONS

1.1 A long run of the journals of the RSS and 'Economics', textbooks, solar calculators and floppy discs have been sent to INEC (government statistics institute, UNAN-Leon (University statistics department) and INIES (socio-economic studies institute). £295 has been used to buy Spanish-language texts, and to make the shipment of books and journals.

CONTACTS IN BRITAIN

1.2 Donations have been made by many individuals. Collective contributions have been made by Nottingham Computer Resource Centre workers, some staff and students at the London School of Economics, and Campaign Coffee in Edinburgh. Other individuals have offered specialist help when the need arises.

VISITS TO NICARAGUA

1.3 Four statisticians from Britain visited Nicaragua in 1987 (to our knowledge), each of them visiting places of statistics work. One worked for a month in the Ministry of Education and another is at INIES for 9 months. A lecturer from LSE is due to visit and give econometrics classes in the spring of 1988.

PUBLIC FACE

1.4 In 1987 an article appeared in Nicaragua Today, and the Fund had a display at the RSS conference in Oxford. The Statistics in Nicaragua report (*) has been republished.

REPRESENTATIVE IN NICARAGUA

1.5 Elsbeth Epema, a Dutch demographer working at INEC in Managua, has very kindly volunteered to keep in touch with our contacts in Nicaragua, to inform us of new developments and to suggest needs which we might respond to. She does this with the support of the Director of INEC.

2. DEVELOPMENTS IN NICARAGUA

CONTEXT

2.1 While the US continues to fund the Contra war, there is no doubt that it exacerbates Nicaragua's many problems of underdevelopment. In statistics the economic and social effects of the war threaten efforts to narrow the gap between the varied statistical needs of flowering social, economic and educational programmes and Nicaragua's small stock of numerate (let alone

statistical) skills. For more discussion, see Statistics in Nicaragua report (*).

2.2 A particular problem for developing all planning and research is posed by the lack of experienced and skilled workers. Before the Revolution in Nicaragua there was little interest in social planning. The efforts to change this situation are dogged by not only the small size of the professional workforce but also its instability: on the one hand there are frequent mobilisations from all parts of Nicaragua to help defend the country, and on the other hand economic instability in this case means that professional workers can be attracted by a greater income in speculative commerce and production.

PRIORITIES

2.3 The demand on statisticians is very different in Nicaragua from that in Britain. The emphasis is not in the main on sensitive techniques to extract more than a cursory description of trends, patterns and processes, but rather on extracting the cursory description itself. A practical, generalist approach is required.

2.4 There is a lack of personnel who combine skills of statistics with systems analysis and computing to adapt and apply standard survey methods and experimental methods, from design to presentation.

2.5 Computing: IBM compatible micros are now quite widespread in research, teaching, and administration, but very much under-used. There is a loosely-applied policy of promoting DBase-3, Lotus, and Wordperfect. SPSS-pc is available; BMDP-pc is used at UNAN-Leon.

2.6 In planning at all levels there is a lack of simple trend indicators and forecasts. Current work involves indicators of production and prices, educational coverage, and improved coverage of vital statistics.

2.7 The training of student statisticians is seeking to orient them towards working with non-numerate colleagues. More than half the first graduates from the University statistics degree in January 1987 returned to the University within the year, to teach. Since then, the course lecturers have extended and improved both the work experience part of the degree and their own participation in interdisciplinary research. The other side of this coin is the low support for the pure mathematics degree, whose intake has dropped so far as to cause concerned discussion of its future.

2.8 Because of the instability of personnel, there is a perspective of building out from the strongest bases in statistics. These are INEC and UNAN-Leon. Both spread their statistical experience through their collaborative work with other institutions.

BEYOND THE STATISTICAL SMOKESCREEN

A.N.E.M.

2.9 The Nicaraguan Association of Statisticians and Mathematicians was launched in 1987: Asociación Nicaragüense de Estadísticos y Matemáticos. It has 82 members (end 1987), has issued a journal which carries mostly translated articles from foreign sources, and held a founding seminar to discuss problems largely from the University perspective. ANEM's president is Juan Rocha, secretary of the Applied Mathematics Department of UNAN-Leon; he is preparing an article on the development of statistics in Nicaragua which will be translated to English. ANEM will be important in developing relations with statistical bodies in other countries. ANEM is affiliated to CONAPRO, the national committee of professional organisations which seeks to unify 'professionals' in overcoming underdevelopment and the aggression.

3. NICARAGUA STATISTICS FUND: PRIORITIES IN 1988

- 3.1 Publicise the need for peace and a stop to intervention in Nicaragua's sovereignty, as indispensable for statistical development as it is for justice.
- 3.2 Concentrate on links with (a) ANEM, promoting correspondence between it and RSS/IOS; (b) INEC, the government statistics institute; and (c) UNAN-Leon, the main University statistics centre. Encourage direct links between other Nicaraguan institutions and individual statisticians or institutions in Britain.
- 3.3 Encourage visits of volunteers to Nicaragua from Britain. Either short-term (eg. a 2-week course leaving notes in Spanish, during UNAN's Jan-mid-March recess) or longer term (more flexible) using TecNica's technical volunteer scheme (see Statistics in Nicaragua report (*)).
- 3.4 Continue to appeal for cash donations to fund solar calculators, texts, and floppy discs.
- 3.5 Continue to channel texts to Nicaragua: launch an appeal for each statistician on holiday in Spain to return with texts.

4. APPEAL

ALL READERS OF THIS REPORT ARE URGED TO SUPPORT THE NICARAGUA STATISTICS FUND'S EFFORTS. OUR PERSONAL CONDITIONS ALLOW MANY OF US TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO NICARAGUA'S SURVIVAL. THE FUND IS ONE OF THE EXPRESSIONS OF OUR COMMITMENT TO SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT. THE INTERNATIONAL LINKS MADE WITH NICARAGUA ARE THEMSELVES AN ACHIEVEMENT TO NURTURE.

Saturday February 27th 10.00 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Friends Meeting House, St. Martins Lane, London WC2

The media use statistics in ways which distract attention from the real problems. The purpose of this conference is to explore ways in which we can both:
 - see through this statistical smokescreen, and
 - use statistics in a constructive way in political debates about health services, transport, housing and education.

Details from: David Bayat, 27 St. Thomas House,
 4, West Arbour St.,
 London E1 6PY
 01 790 3460
 01 348 3485

Janet Shapiro,

.....
 The programme will include the following speakers:

- Wendy Moore Health Journalist and Secretary to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom
- Dr Martin Mogridge Transport Studies Group, UCL
 'The Downs-Thomson Paradox: -
 or increasing road capacity lowers traffic speed in congested city centres.'
- John Adams Department of Geography, UCL
 'Evaluating the effectiveness of road safety measures.'
- Roy Carr-Hill and John Lintott will lead a seminar on 'Alternative Social Trends'

The Health Group Workshops and some of the sessions will run in parallel.

The conference fee (including tea or coffee) will be £5 (£2.50 unwaged). Lunch will be available. Please contact David or Janet very soon if you would like a creche to be provided.

for RADICAL STATISTICS

In this short piece David Drew and Steve Wisner describe some of the work of COMMUNITY RESEARCH and THE SURVEY UNIT at Sheffield City Polytechnic.

Shortly after the Radical Statistics Group was formed we began in our newsletters to mention the 'Fire brigade'. This was to have been a highly trained group of radical statisticians who rushed to the assistance of community groups to help them in their hour of need. It didn't quite work out like that. Or maybe it did. In the first decade of the group we saw some very healthy developments in our different sub-groups and some groups have been particularly active in giving assistance to community groups.

There are though some basic flaws with the idea of a fire brigade, in particular, the assumption that we all have time for such work. After a full day at the office do you feel like doing some more statistics? I would rather be with the kids.

In Sheffield the COMMUNITY RESEARCH group was formed partly to overcome this problem. As a group of ten we design, plan, execute and analyse surveys on a funded basis. The group includes sociologists, statisticians and systems analysts and we have carried out work for the Race Equality Unit and Education Department of Sheffield City Council and the Commission for Racial Equality. This is on a consultancy basis. We also provide advice to community groups.

There seems to be a vast potential for work with community groups (see Libby Cooper's article in the last RADICAL STATISTICS). We were recently approached by a group of doctors and social workers in Sheffield whose plan was to carry out a survey of local health needs prior to the building of a new Health Centre in the area. In the end our advice was that they should not use a survey (at least in the first instance) and one of our number (Jim Bryant) worked with them to help establish their objectives and how in future we may be able to assist them.

We have also had approaches from a Community Health Council asking for help in establishing a health profile of the area (Calderdale) using census statistics. Although we had the statistical resources, we did not have time to do this project and they didn't have the funds for a fully costed piece of work.

December 1987 saw the establishment of a full cost Survey Unit at Sheffield Polytechnic and we hope that a by-product of this work will be that we can devote more resources to research in collaboration with small groups. We hope that funding will be sufficient for us to do other work costed at a much lower rates than normal.

We would very much like to have links with other groups doing similar work and hope that these ideas will be discussed at the RADSTATS AGM.

Note: This development is in parallel with the group named COMMUNITY O.R. which is directed by Colin Thurstur and Jim Bryant at Northern College and the Polytechnic.

Further details of COMMUNITY RESEARCH and THE SHEFFIELD SURVEY UNIT can be obtained from David Drew or Steve Wisner, Department of Applied Statistics and Operational Research, Sheffield City Polytechnic, Pond Street, Sheffield 1.
(0742-720911 X2401)

Greer embellishes her argument with many relevant details. Her discussion takes in infertility, chastity, family planning technology and its history, abortion and infanticide. She discusses the eugenics movement and the population industry from Malthus to today, and in her concluding chapter on the myth of overpopulation drives home the message that people are not a problem but that the problem is the poverty and squalor in which many of them live, conditions which are created by the greed of men most notably those in the West.

If the principal function of writing is to stimulate creative thought then Greer certainly does that. This book is about the population industry and is by someone who, as not part of that industry, can see the whole and how the pieces fit together. It is food for thought for those working in demography and also for those interested in general Third World and development issues. It places population studies in its political context. Vital, if you'll forgive the pun, reading for all those concerned with the subject.

STATISTICS IN NICARAGUA

APPEAL

CASH Please make a commitment to support Nicaragua's survival through the 'Nicaragua Statistics Fund'. Money will be used for Spanish texts, solar calculators and floppy discs.

BOOK TAX ON HOLIDAYS TO SPAIN If you visit Spain this year and pass through a University town, make a point of buying one or some Spanish textbooks: translations of standard English-language texts are always useful.

DIRECT LINKS Visit Nicaragua to learn of the situation and to work if you are able. Make contact through the fund with your counterparts in Nicaragua.

(*) 'Statistics in Nicaragua: a report'. Available from the Nicaragua Statistics Fund, price £1.

NICARAGUA STATISTICS FUND, c/o 242 Keighley Road, Bradford BD9 4JZ

- For peace - To respond to the immediate needs of statistics work in Nicaragua - To encourage statisticians in Britain to visit Nicaragua - To encourage lasting links between statisticians in Nicaragua and in Britain

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Contributors: send articles to the Editor by the copydate on A44 paper, typed single-spaced with 1½ inch margins all round. All members of RSG are invited to contribute to the newsletter - articles may vary from very short to quite long. Letters and reviews are also welcome.

Addresses: The Editor's address usually appears in the last newsletter, but articles to "The Editor, RSG, c/- BSSRS, 25 Horsell Rd, London N5 1XL.

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DATA PROTECTION ACT

In accordance with the DPA, any member is entitled to ask

- for a printout of his/her personal details (name and address) as kept on the RadStats computer
- that his/her personal details should not be so stored

Anyone wishing to avail themselves of this right, please contact the Troika with requests in triplicate.