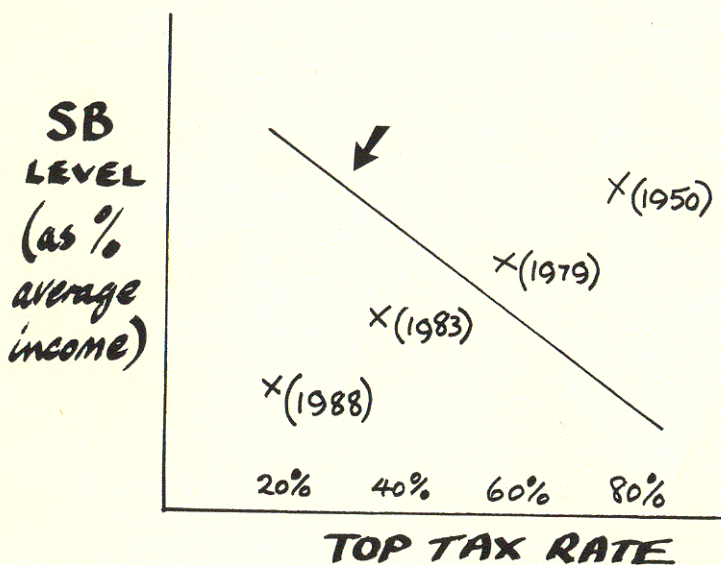


# RADICAL Statistics

## NEWSLETTER 41



↓ a TRUE\* blue line (rather than a true BLUE line)

\*Thatcherite Revised Utopian Estimate

*Russell Kee*

The Radical Statistics Group is a group of individuals based on the distribution of this newsletter. The small amount of central administrative work is done by a three person committee elected at the Annual General Meeting known as "The Troika" - names below. The editorship of this newsletter rotates - the next editor being as below. Apart from producing this newsletter, the work is done by its subgroups, whose membership is open to all interested parties; simply consult the person below. Use the newsletter to advertise if you wish to start a new subgroup.

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Copy Date

17th June 1988

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Newsletter  
produced by

*mostly faith, some  
hope but no charity*

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Report on 12Ath Radical Statistics Conference

Meeting House

Saturday, 27th February

It was a great success in terms of numbers, with nearly 100 attenders. A change from the previous London ventures. The meeting started with a talk by Wendy Moore of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. A short text is included elsewhere. The talk was well received and provoked several questions, which were taken up during coffee and later in the day.

After coffee, we dispersed into various working groups for a pre-lunch session and for two sessions in the afternoon. Nearly all of these have produced reports which are also included in this Newsletter. A final plenary session brought it all together, or tried to.

In the evening, a substantial number joined the Random Music Club at the Empress of Russia, which was fun. On Sunday morning we had our usual huddle over incomprehensible accounts and the greying membership, but this time were able to congratulate ourselves, and especially Dave Bayat and Janet Shapiro on the splendid turnout for the Conference.

## Where has Körner got us?

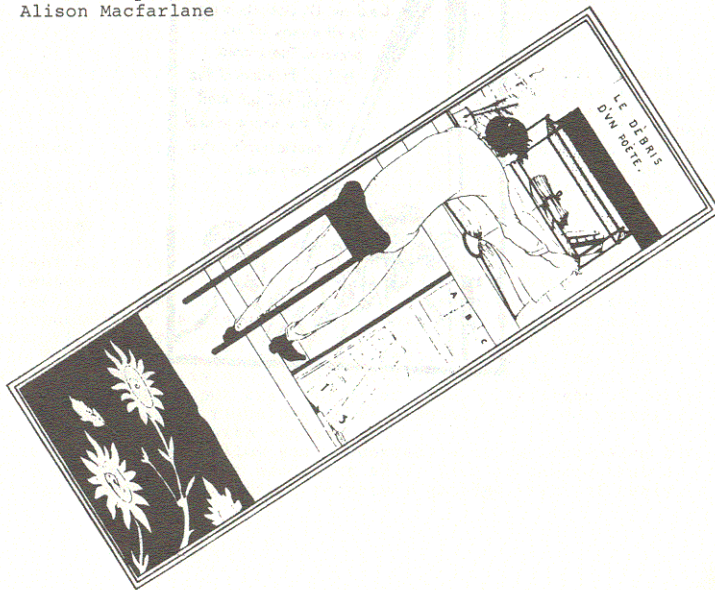
This workshop discussed the data which are being collected through the new NHS data collection systems specified by the Steering Group on Health Services Information, usually referred to as the Körner Committee, and asked whether they tell us any more about health or the NHS than their predecessors.

It was felt that the new data collection systems had a chequered history and were not based on a systematic assessment of information needs. As a result the data are more appropriate for management than for developing or improving clinical services. The choice of data items is based on a spare part surgery model of health service provision. Much of the work which goes on in the NHS is not reflected in the data, which also fail to measure need or outcome.

There was an inconclusive discussion about whether statisticians should try to do good things with bad statistics. Because the data collected are so evidently irrelevant to most health workers' concerns there was a reluctance to do so. This led to a complete division of opinion as to whether the main task should be to try to make Körner systems work better, to change them by varying amounts, or to rethink the whole approach to the information needed for health service provision.

There was agreement, however, about what the Health Group should do in the immediate future. It was thought that we should tell people about the statistics collected through the new systems, while also trying to gather together statistics collected by alternative means.

Mel Bartley  
Alison Macfarlane



Notes for Rad Stats newsletter from conference workshop on

## MONITORING HOSPITAL ACTIVITY

An aim of this workshop was to identify ways of measuring important aspects of hospital-based activity which could make a meaningful and valid contribution to routine public reporting about local health service performance.

Technical and political weaknesses in existing performance monitoring arrangements were discussed, many based on personal experiences especially in relation to the DHSS Performance Indicator (PI) packages; pretending that differences in performance between hospitals don't exist was generally regarded as an unhelpful option. On 'Resource Management' and its predecessors, views were mixed. Better information about clinical costs could help make judgements about 'value for money', which would always be made, more explicit - but could such information also be used to facilitate privatisation?

The needs of managers, doctors and the DHSS were seen to dominate the data-collecting and evaluation processes. There was consensus that alternative performance indicator models were needed, empowering health service users, providing tools to make meaningful choices.

The crucial need for measures of the outcome of health care was stressed - PIs for effectiveness as well as 'efficiency' (itself a far from neutral concept), and ways of measuring consumer satisfaction with care as well as its clinical outcomes. The political debate on outcomes was seen as an area of concern for Radical Statistics, recognising that the NHS is only one factor contributing to health status which can't be judged out of context of widening social and environmental inequalities.

Future concerns for the Health Group should therefore focus on an alternative (user-based) PI model, the political debate on health outcome measurement (how, what and why) and the impact of the NHS on health status.

Karen Buck and Jacky Holloway.



#### PREVENTION: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

This workshop was attended by about 15-20 people. Unfortunately, time was very limited and so issues were raised without being discussed in a lot of detail. The purpose of the session was specified as being to identify issues which would benefit from international comparisons of prevention and promotion activities.

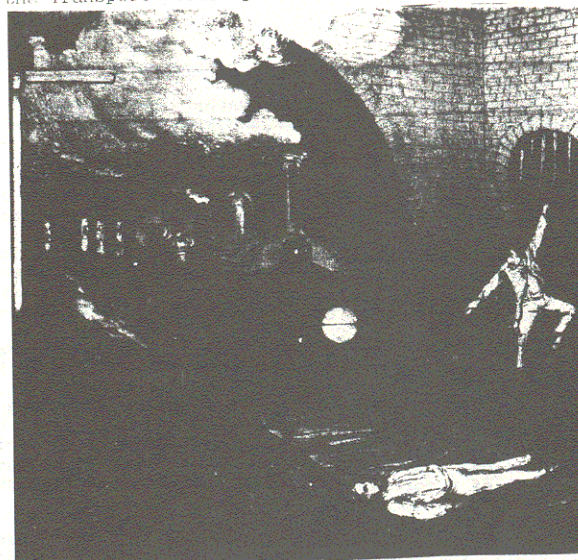
The issues raised included:

- (1) Ways of examining promotion and preventive work. This can be defined narrowly in terms of the role of health services, or could be looked at more broadly in terms of the whole social, economic and political system. The way in which "prevention" is defined in a society may provide clues as to how this issue is tackled.
- (2) The problems faced by researchers attempting to gather information on promotion and preventive services, particularly where such data are not routinely collected by the health services. It is also very difficult to obtain comprehensive data e.g., that covering community-based, water-based and voluntary organisation-related prevention activities.
- (3) There is growing concern with whether statistics which are collected and assumed to monitor "prevention" really do so. The example given was of infant mortality rates in underdeveloped countries. A declining IMR is assumed to reflect improved health status of children and the success of preventive programmes. However, on closer examination, it is possible that more infants are surviving, but that many of those that would have died in the first year of life become frail and sickly for the next few years and may still die before the age of five.
- (4) There was considerable concern over how to get information back to countries as a way of providing this as a means of empowering people. That are the strategies for doing this?
- (5) It was generally felt that documentary examples of "good practice" with respect to preventive programmes would be a good idea.

It was felt that all of these issues may be worth pursuing. Those interested can contact Anthony Zwi at the Department of Community Medicine, 66-72 Gower Street, LONDON. WC1E 6EA or Telephone 01-387 7050 Ext. 5706

Another area of interest not touched upon in the workshop but which Anthony Zwi intends to pursue is the political abuse and manipulation of health statistics. Those interested in this should contact him.

#### Report on the Transport Workshops



Workshop 1 : The Downs-Thomson Paradox:- or increasing road capacity lowers traffic speed in congested city centres.

Dr Martin Mogridge, from the Transport Studies Group, UCL, outlined the attempts at analysis of traffic flows into central London, and in particular the efforts made to measure journey times. Many surveys have been conducted since 1938. These included one in 1949, which surveyed 2000 households, and another in 1980, which surveyed 14,000 households. The aim was to collect reliable 'origin-destination' data. Apparently bus journey times have remained fairly constant, but the measure of car journey times, being measured 'kerb to kerb', (excluding access or parking time), gave a false impression of being shorter than public transport journey times. It was generally inferred, that where journey times by private car and by public transport were roughly equal, the car would be preferred. However, when road congestion made car journeys slower there would be a shift to public transport. Road 'improvements', giving increased road space and faster flowing traffic would attract these travellers back until full capacity was reached, car journey times increased and public transport again became competitive. This syndrome is known as the Downs-Thomson Paradox.

Martin Mogridge recommended that providing more road capacity was not the solution, and comprehensive planning policies, which would introduce more controls and supply the required public transport routes, were needed. The group suggested that no attempt had been made to assess 'unmet need' for transport facilities, and that orbital routes were sadly lacking. It was unanimously expressed that there should be access to the data so expensively gathered. Academic institutions and Pressure Groups should be able to access the relevant data-bases through computer links such as JANET. General open discussion about transport provision should be encouraged.



## Workshop 2: Evaluating the effectiveness of road safety measures.

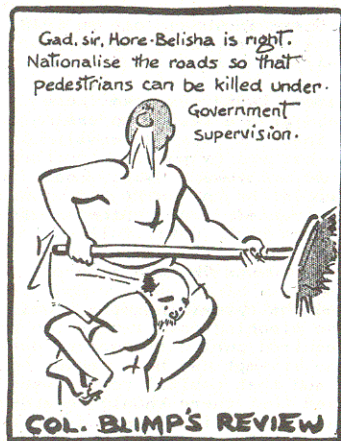
Dr John Adams from the Department of Geography, UCL, presented the many pitfalls of interpreting data about risk and safety. He demonstrated that accident data, with sparse sets of data, can easily be misused to give an illusory proof of 'increased safety' after the installation of a road improvement. Also, if accident statistics are to be accepted as a measure of safety, some of the most dangerous stretches of road can be called 'safe' merely because of sensible compensating behaviour of those using them.

There are difficulties which are inherent in the data, and difficulties in finding valid statistical techniques to handle it, but most confusing of all, we have the motives and prejudice of the DTP, which has possession of the raw data and presents most of the summaries and interpretations.

The discussion centred around the shifting of risk, particularly from vehicle passenger to pedestrian and cyclist. There was also the feeling that the Road Lobby exerted more influence upon the DTP than was properly representative, and this led to a reiteration of the necessity for interested groups to have access to the raw data, and to be able to use the facilities of information technology for search and retrieval. It was felt that Radical Statistics should campaign for the accessibility of this data as part of a more general campaign for changes which increase the safety of travel.

There was a lively interest in the issues of transport and safety, which could be the basis for a subgroup. Anyone interested in joining such a group should contact:

Janet Shapiro 01 348 3485



## Radical Statistics Conference

### Report on Nicaragua workshop

The introduction explained changes that had taken place since the overthrow of Somoza in 1979, including the unification and growth of social programmes and the demand for statistical work to aid evaluation and planning, and the setting up of a Statistics and Mathematics society, ANEM, with 82 members, in 1987.

General strategies for the Nicaragua Statistics Fund subgroup of Radstats had been:

- encouraging links between counterparts in Nicaragua and Britain (which now exist with the Government statistics office INEC, the main University centre for statistics teaching UNAN-Leon, and the independent socio-economic studies institute INIES, as well as with ANEM.)
- Encouraging visits to Nicaragua, for example through TECNICA which places volunteer technical workers.
- Material aid to send textbooks, microcomputer parts, and pay shipping for larger donations of texts or journals.

The workshop came up with plans for future work:

- Donations should be continued, including from income derived from tax donations. (Cheques to 'Nicaragua Statistics Fund' to Gen. Co-ord.)
- Materials should be collected, concentrating on those which visitors travelling to Nicaragua could take: Spanish language statistics texts and any technical dictionaries (are you going on holiday to Spain this year? Find a University bookshop), and floppy discs 5 1/4 inches.
- Visitors to Nicaragua please contact general co-ordinator or warehouse co-ordinator to take some of the donations.
- Exchange of journals with ANEM (JRSS now being exchanged): we will ask ANEM for an open letter to present to journals in Britain.
- Request from ANEM a list of their members' interests, providing them with our own.
- Supply offprints of articles on request.
- Supply micro printer ribbons when we have details of appropriate models.
- Publicise news of developments in Nicaragua to statisticians in Britain.

General co-ordinator: Steve Simpson, 41 Park Crescent, Bradford  
BD3 0JZ. Tel (h): 0274-635469  
(note change)

Warehouse co-ordinator (to receive all material donations):  
Jeff Evans (NSF)  
Middlesex Polytechnic  
Queensway, Enfield, Middlesex, EN3 4BF

London-based contact: Jim Thomas,  
Dept of Economics, LSE  
Houghton Street, Aldwych,  
London WC2A 2AE



The Group's membership currently comprises:

Sue Blennerhassett	Hilary Guite
Libby Cooper	Jenny Head
David Drew (Coordinator)	Jacky Holloway
Jeff Evans	Judith Sim
Tony Fletcher	Joe Wholley

#### Background

Libby Cooper outlined the process of doing research, crystallizing ideas, choosing a method, designing a survey, training interviewers, analysing with SPSSX, reports with graphics and discussion. Most people doing research within pressure groups undervalue their own resources and knowledge. Libby is working at PNL (CRAC see RADSTATS 39). She is working on homelessness and housing at present in particular but has helped over 40 groups.

David Drew outlined the work at Sheffield City Polytechnic in a group called Community Research now renamed The Survey Unit (see RADSTATS 40). The group contains statisticians, psychologists, sociologists and systems analysts and is parallel to the group called Community OR also at the Polytechnic, coordinated by Colin Thunhurst and Jim Bryant. Most of their work is with local authority departments, the Race Equality Unit and Sheffield's Employment Department. Their work with pressure groups is currently restricted by lack of resources but they have worked with a group of doctors in a Radical Health practice.

The other members of the group contributed their experience. Jeff Evans was particularly interested in teaching the "barefoot statistician", Joe had considerable experience of assessment and evaluation in Virginia USA, Jenny is working in Community Health and Sue is preparing a publication on Community Health Surveys. Tony has been involved for a long time in hazards of work and is preparing a document on surveys in this area.

#### What we could be doing

Libby is working on three separate areas in which surveys are required; the assessment of community needs, evaluation, and research for campaigning purposes. There are already a number of relevant publications on helping small groups to do surveys. These include:

Doing your own research - Eileen Kane  
Age Concern ?  
Do it yourself social surveys

It was agreed that we should:

- (1) Review and circulate available materials to the group. (DD to do this).
- (2) On the basis of the available material EITHER produce a pack of such materials with an annotated bibliography OR produce a booklet of our own.
- (3) Run courses for groups. (DD and LC to work on this with anyone else interested).

Could members of the group send to me by Friday March 25th the materials they have, or at least a reference, and over the Easter holidays we will collect these together and circulate them.

#### Report on Alternative Social Trends Workshop

Roy Carr-Hill and John Lintott introduced the background to the whole project and invited comments. Views were generally favourable, although various suggestions were made about other important perspectives and better data.

We also discussed possibilities of distributing the finished product. A lot of useful suggestions were made here.



EPISODES IN THE LIVES OF THE GREAT  
LOUIS XIV FINDS A SHELL ON THE BEACH, AS RECORDED BY A COURT PAINTER



**RADICAL STATISTICS GROUP**

Financial Statement for 13 months 7.1.87 - 22.2.88

Note that we have decided to bring the accounting year for the financial statement up to just before the AGM. This makes for a business like environment, fostering the spirit of the enterprise culture etc. (the York end of the Troika have accordingly asked Lord Young for a grant to small businesses). It does mean that the accounts look particularly rosy 'cos several people apparently like suffering in January and so ask for their S.O.s to be paid then.

. Note also that this year has been particularly frugal 'cos the Troika members have not been able to sign cheques (which we recommend as a magic way of according debtors prison). This should, hopefully, be solved at the AGM so that we can join Britain's booming credit card economy again.

. Nuff excuses - here are the numbers.

**EXPENDITURE**

Radical Statistics Health Group (10/1/87)	10.00
Standing Order Refund (7/2/87)	6.00
Janet Shapiro (RSN postage) (16/2/87)	60.00
Reimbursement of Conference Expenses (1/3/87)	40.51
BSSRS for printing RSNs	413.50
BSSRC affiliation for 2 years	200.00
Gower (Books)	28.85
Janet Shapiro (RSN expenses)	50.00
Empress of Russia for gig	25.00
Bank charges	2.04
Total Expenditure 7.1.87 - 22.2.88	£832.90

**INCOME**

From Bank statements

January - March 1987 363.05

March 87 - February 88

Cash/Cheques

From paying in book 351.20

Standing Orders

Named 145.50

Un-named 182.00

327.50

Total Income 7.1.87 - 22.2.88 £1341.75

Of which:

Conference 1987 121.00

Publications 33.35

Note that there was no receipt from Publications Distribution this year.

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Excess of Income over Expenditure

£1041.75 - £832.90 = £208.85

(see caveat at beginnings for apparent rosiness of cash-flow)

NOTE : To our astonishment this matches with the bank statement

because	Balance at 22.2.88	1119.94
	Unbanked deposits	79.90
	So total balance	1196.94

and Cheques paid by Dave Saunders

	not yet debited	- 685.50
	leaving a balance of	508.34
	our balance as of 7.1.87 was	299.49

	So the difference is	208.85
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Assets 7.1.87

Unbanked credits 63.40

Current a/c 299.49

Deposit a/c 408.63

Uncashed debits -10.00

761.52

Assets 20.2.88

Unrecorded credits 76.90

Current a/c 1119.94

Deposit a/c 439.91

Less uncashed debits -688.50

948.25

Improvements in asset position £186.73

Membership payments

As Dave said last year, we cannot ascribe many of the standing orders to a particular guilty party. But it is clear that very few have got the message about our change in subs. We have tried to keep to Dave's rule that £3 = 2 newsletters but I'm afraid that we've probably been more softhearted. We have, however just sent out a letter to those paying less than £5 whose names we know.

The breakdown for which we have records is:

Amount in £	1.50	2	3	4	5	7	10	Total
by S/O	2	6	63	1	7	1	1	81
by cheque	8	1	7	-	37	12	2	67

Everything will be much better when we have recomputerised the data base.

This creative accounting show has been brought to you by

Roy Carr-Hill) Joint membership/  
Bob Lavers ) treasurers secretary

## RADICAL STATISTICS HEALTH GROUP

### Rewrite of 'Unofficial Guide to Official Health Statistics'

We had a meeting on 21st March to discuss this new project. We decided that it would be useful to quickly produce a couple of broadsheets that could be sent to trade unions, community health groups, health campaigns etc. as well as rewriting the unofficial guide. It was suggested that one broadsheet would cover Performance Indicators, Diagnostic Related Groups and QALYs and that another would cover Korner.

We hope that you will be able to attend our next meeting on this project.

### NEXT MEETINGS

21st April 6pm To discuss rewrite of Unofficial Guide (outline attached)

11th May 6pm To discuss progress on broadsheets

Both meetings will be held at 5th floor Seminar Room, Dept. of Community Medicine(UCL), 66-72 Gower Street.

Jenny Head

01 387 7050 x 5702

Alison Macfarlane

0727 52111(home) or 0865 816876 (work).



NEWSPAPER HEADINGS:  
"INFLUENZA MICROBE DISCOVERED AT A LONDON HOSPITAL."

## The new unofficial guide to official health statistics

This is the second draft outline for the new unofficial guide to official health statistics. It came out of a meeting held in December, at which it was decided that unpublished sources and data which are only in computer readable form should also be included. It was also decided that the new guide should have a more local focus than the old one, so should describe local as well as national sources. In describing national sources, we should describe what data are collected in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

### Introduction

How data collection is organised in the Government Statistical Service, local government and the NHS

### Statistics about the population

Demographic structure

Housing and environmental health

Employment and unemployment

Social security payments

Mortality and morbidity, including discussion of problems in monitoring inequalities

Health and safety at work

### Monitoring hospital activity

Staffing and resources

Use of in-patient, out-patient and day case facilities

Critique of Korner

Performance indicators, QALYs, and diagnostic related groups

Quality assurance techniques

Commercial hospitals and home

### Monitoring care in the community

Social services

Family practitioner services

Community nursing and community health services

Voluntary organisations

Informal carers

### Conclusions

What is left out and what do we really need

Using what we have despite its deficiencies

### The next steps

A further meeting is needed to discuss and modify this outline. At the same time we need to look for people to do the writing.

February 21 1988



The Radical Statistics Newsletter is available by subscription. Current rates are £5 per year for individuals and £7 for institutions and £1.50 for the unwaged. The newsletter is available from the Radical Statistics Group, c/- BSSRS, 25 Horsell Rd, London N5 1XL. Tel 01 607 9615.

The Radical Statistics Newsletter is produced three times a year in May, July and December

Editors: send the typed newsletter to Janet Shapiro one month before they want the newsletter to reach readers. Copy to be typed on A4 paper.

Contributors: send articles to the Editor by the copydate on A4 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 can also be sent to "The Editor, RSG, c/- BSSRS, 25 Horsell Rd, London N5 1XL.

Next Editor: UNKNOWN AS YET, PLEASE SEND MATERIAL TO

C

Roy A. Carr-Hill  
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(home) 0904 643075

BY 17TH JUNE 1988

## DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

- (a) for a printout of his/her personal details (name and address) as kept on the RadStats computer
- (b) 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.

WHERE IS THE  
(VOLUNTEER) TO BE

Editor of  
Newsletter  
No. 42