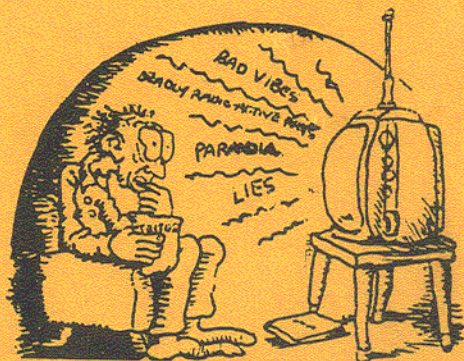


# RADICAL STATISTICS NEWSLETTER

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THE VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO WATCHING TV

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*Ruthen Reed*

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 committee known as "The Troika", and elected at the Annual General Meeting. The editorship of this newsletter rotates; the next editor will be Christy Maginn, who can be contacted via the address and telephone numbers given below. Apart from producing this newsletter, the work of the RSG is done by its subgroups whose membership is open to all interested parties. Please consult the contact people below if you wish to get involved. Use the newsletter to advertise if you wish to start a new group.

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**"Lies, Damned Lies,..... "**

**A NEW VENTURE**

In April, the Troika discussed how Radical Statistics can have more impact considering work many of its members do in, generally speaking, demystifying statistics. The idea evolved to produce a series of broadsheets. Each broadsheet would debunk an establishment claim (not necessarily a government claim) that is supposedly supported by statistical evidence but that cannot be substantiated. The aim of such a pamphlet would be to make the information accessible to all interested parties. Its distinguishing features would be to:

- a) demystify the production of statistics in a political context, and
- b) uncover the true relationships behind claimed statistical evidence.

The membership survey, which went out with the last issue of Radical Statistics, asked for authors of such debunking broadsheets to come forward and enough have already done so to make the idea seem feasible.

Examples offered from the survey so far:

*"The government is pouring money into the NHS"*

*"Fundholding GPs bring new money into the health service"*

Other claims made that we might seek authors to debunk:

*"The government is providing the public with more information than ever"*

*"Homelessness is not a serious problem"*

*"The NHS reorganisation ensures efficiency in health care provision"*

*"Aid to the third world is a luxury"*

*"There is not more inequality under the Tories"*

*"The Council Tax is fairer than the rates"*

The production team which, to date, consists of Ludi Simpson, Tim Hunkin and myself would work with each author to ensure consistency of design and good quality presentation with the view to attracting a wide readership.

The broadsheets could be free or at a nominal price if we use some of Radstats funds and seek joint funding from campaigns or Trades Unions who might bulk buy or jointly publish. Authors will be asked to specify their likely audience and any organisations who are potential buyers or joint funders.

We are very excited by this new venture and see it as a progressive, worthwhile activity which we are anxious to proceed with and make a success. So, if you feel you would like to contribute with material or suggestions, please contact me:

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Advance Notice  
RadStats Annual Conference  
22nd February 1992  
10am to 5pm  
Department of Social Policy  
University of Bristol  
8 Woodland Road  
Bristol BS8  
Full Information Next Issue

## **The Survey - Thankyou.**

Are you a model Radical Statistics member? An academic statistician in your forties, you are either a founder member from 1975, or joined in the late eighties and you want Radical Statistics to have more subgroups producing more pamphlets and books.

Before you yawn and say that you knew all that already: the model member is in a small minority. We will be summarising the results in time for the next issue of Radical Statistics.

Thank you to the 185 who have replied out of 300 questionnaires sent with the last RadStats. We have written to the 80 or so who offered to distribute leaflets, write articles, revitalise subgroups, or contribute to the "Lies, Damn Lies ..." series. Thanks for your offers - and if anyone else makes time for a project within Radical Statistics, just write to the newsletter editor.

Here's a preview of some of the critical comments made about the newsletter.

Would all contributors please note well:

- "Brighten it up"
- "There's no discussion on gays/lesbians"
- "Articles are not fully backed by fact"
- "It's lost radical-ness"
- "Short notice re meetings"
- "More on Building Societies re house prices"
- "Cliques"
- "Small print and academic articles"
- "Moving away from general issues"
- "Lacks objective perspective"
- "Too serious"

Ludi Simson, Bradford  
Sue Haslam, Oldham  
Jenny Palmer, Huddersfield

## **RADSTATS Northern Group - report of our first two meetings.**

The Northern group of RADSTATS is (I think) the first geographically based group in the organisation. We started after the last AGM (which was held in Leeds) and our purpose is simple - we hold meetings on topics of interest to ourselves and others who come to these meetings. We will discuss anything for which there is some expressed demand! So far we have held two meetings, both well attended and, if the number of people who came to both is any guide, both successful. Our meetings are open to all, though participants are encouraged to join up!

Our first meeting was addressed by Cathie Marsh (from Manchester) and the chosen topic was the role of Official Statistics in the UK today. She led an animated discussion on this perennially important subject. This meeting took place against a background of the concerns raised by Radstats and other groups about the quality and selection of the statistics made available by the various branches of government in the post-Rayner years.

One of the crucial distinctions to emerge from the discussion was the (potentially) conflicting roles for statistics in the modern state including those for "simply" ruling like censuses; those relating to service provision like many health and social services statistics and those relating to self evaluation of the state, including many of the on-going surveys run by OPCS. Around this framework many of the difficulties relating to the purpose of these statistics, access to them, and the right to privacy were discussed. These factors affect both public and private collection of information.

The change in use of certain statistics, originally incidental by-products of the running of the service and now metamorphosed into policy objectives, was another topic of concern. Thus waiting list figures, which started as a by-product of the health service bureaucracy and which are mainly demand indicators, have come to be used as an index of health service and ministerial performance. In a similar way, claimed unemployment figures have become, by a form of goal displacement, the leading index of employment demand. Even leaving to one side the questions relating to "cooking the books" this is important.

Finally, there are a series of basic questions about official statistics which need answering. Some of them are to do with government policy but others address the professional users and producers of statistics more directly. Who are they for? Who should have access to them and how? What is the role of the professional who works outside government? Should they be made more accessible for general users? There is a project starting in Calderdale to make 1991 Census figures more widely available. Is this the trend of the future?

Our second meeting was held on 3 October and Nick Farrar, from Bradford, organised a discussion of the business plans of the Bradford Hospital Trusts. The emphasis of the plans as presented is on cost-containment while planning to increase services. This provides an interesting contrast to the service plans and trust applications! One very striking feature of these plans is the dearth of numbers in them, whether costs or needs. The few figures that did appear (eg a 3% increase in activity) are not referenced and there is no discussion at all of the basis for such estimates.

The various sides of the purchaser-provider-department split all have complex information needs. At present it appears that many providers are making up their charges as they go along. This is not from any mischievous intent but because of a total absence of even the most basic economic information on costs. This explains many of the extraordinary discrepancies in published schedules of costs. Standard market theory assumes that prices as market signals are set "rationally". This may not apply in the health service at present.

There are many crucial differences between hospitals and the sort of competitive manufacturing industry model implied by the concept of the internal market. In the usual industry, the range of products is small, the demand relatively stable, the lead time for the development of new products is long, the consumers are few in number and well informed, one industry can supply the entire country and there are other sources of supply for most things. None of this applies to hospital and community services. Pity the poor managers!

For the purchasers, life is (if possible) worse. They are faced with a population whose health needs are unknown. For those needs which can be quantified, the efficacy and effectiveness of various possible

interventions is usually unknown. Even the limited information that is available in the literature cannot be accessed in any convenient form (with some notable exceptions such as the NPEU/Oxford database of perinatal trials). The use of some crude indicators may make things worse. Thus waiting lists for procedures have been replaced by waiting lists for Outpatient Department appointments. Finally, there are no agreed measures of the quality of the care that will be provided by the various trusts and many resist the inclusion of explicit measurement in contracts. The effect of all this is that the Department of Health's advice on keeping things as they were last year is being followed religiously.

Some very specific problems have emerged. In many areas the entire budget for extra-regional referrals is vanishing to pay for secure hospital accommodation for people released from the prison service. This was totally unforeseen. The normal range of variation in the number of cases of some of the less common diseases is very wide and this can have disastrous effects on cash limited budgets with small contingency reserves.

A more basic problem is the lack of information. There are some interesting projects underway to fill this gap. In Bradford the District Health Authority (DHA) and the Community Health Council (CHC) have been involved in market research style studies of the attitudes of consumers and GPs to specific components of the health services. These studies have also covered perceived needs and health priorities. As a result, some shift of money away from the acute sector is planned. In Salford, several DHAs have joined together to fund a public health research centre, an initiative which could be replicated elsewhere to advantage. The Department of Health is providing funds to set up an information service based in Leeds. These initiatives need to be taken up more widely.

There are some specific tensions arising from the working of the internal market. The link between DHA "strategic" planning and provider "tactical" planning is tenuous. Units with specific development plans, such as the lung transplant unit in Bradford, could pursue these without either having, or perhaps being able, to consider either the needs of the local populations or the effects on other services within the provider unit. In principle, the purchaser can apply various sanctions based on their contracts but consumer

sovereignty is hard to find in the health service. Furthermore, the paucity of information on outcomes of health care makes it harder to argue for sanctions for non-compliance.

The purchasers have posed a set of questions. Is this service any good? Is it worth the cost? How do I decide between this service and the cheaper service on offer up the motorway? The CHCs pose another set of questions. Is this service acceptable? Does anyone want it? Are the surroundings good enough? The providers ask does anyone want it? What will they pay us for it? How much does it cost us anyway? RadStats are not in a position to answer all of these. What we can do and what we propose to do is to start a discussion. We will circulate a list of headings for discussion to interested parties. The replies to these will be converted into a report for publication in the newsletter and/or other appropriate places. We hope to show those of us struggling with the new NHS that you are not alone! If you want to take part get in touch!

Finally, many thanks to all those who turned up for these meetings and whose thoughts are reproduced above (I hope) and, particularly, to Cathie Marsh and Nick Farrar for leading them, to Ludi Simpson for mailing lists and sound advice and to Waqar Ahmad for being our host.

The provisional date and place for our next meeting is Thursday, 30 January 1992 at 7 pm in Room E1, Richmond Building, University of Bradford. The topic will be performance and outcome in Local Authority services. This is a topic which raises many of the same questions as the process/outcome question in health care and we look forward to a lively debate! Anyone who wants final details should send me an SAE or an E-mail address. Any member who has a topic for a meeting and plans to hold it in the North of England is welcome to get in touch with me and I'll help to advertise it, etc..

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## Health Group report

Yoav Ben-Shlomo & Alison Macfarlane

The Health Group has had a busy time over the last few months. On March 21, the group was delighted to welcome Sheila McKechnie, Director of Shelter, to give a talk on "housing, homelessness and health" at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Her talk focused mainly on the availability of housing statistics and their limitations. Problems with definitions, quality of data and validation were highlighted. The sensitivity of research on housing was illustrated especially with respect to Government commissioned research. It was interesting to hear a little about the French Government's approach to their homelessness problem, attempting to reintegrate young homeless into society by tackling both housing and unemployment. This was a project funded by the Ministry of Education and showed a way for interdepartmental collaboration. As we were to find out a few weeks later, the French approach was different from that in the recent English health promotion green paper, *The Health of the Nation*, which discusses housing but offers few policies.

*The Health of the Nation* was published on 4 June but its later drafts showed strong escapist tendencies and were leaked to the Labour Party and others, including ourselves. This gave us a rare opportunity to plan in advance for a rapid response. We used the draft document to prepare a list of questions to send to the press and also to take to the press conference, to which a member of the group gained access with great difficulty. Apparently, the Department of Health does not recognise *Radical Statistics* as a bona fide publication! After our intrepid gatecrasher returned from the press conference with the published version of the document, our draft press release was finalised and faxed to the Press Association and a few selected newspapers. By coincidence, 4 June was also the evening which had been set aside for envelope stuffing for *Radical Statistics* 48. Many of the same people were involved so we were able to include the press release, hot off the photocopier, with the mailing. It was also circulated to statisticians on the computerised list maintained on the Joint Academic Computer Network (JANET) and an extended version, with graphs to illustrate, was prepared for our regular page in the magazine *Health Matters*.

Throughout the immediate spate of articles written to welcome *The Health of the Nation*, we were disappointed to find uncritical and even euphoric responses from people who we would have expected to have taken a more critical perspective. Allyson Pollock put this point of view to the Editor of the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, who invited us to contribute one of the two opening articles to a series of about 20 on themes either included in or ignored by *The Health of the Nation*. The resulting article, to which many people contributed, appeared in the *BMJ* on 3 August and is reproduced in this newsletter.

Meanwhile, a meeting was hastily organised to provide an immediate forum for debate and discussion on *The Health of the Nation*. This took place on Wednesday, 24 July and a wide array of speakers contributed: Yoav Ben-Shlomo, George Davey Smith, Bobby Jacobson, Alison Macfarlane, Allyson Pollock and Geoff Rayner. Many topics were raised such as the limitations of the document, its general approach, the usefulness or otherwise of targets for coronary heart disease, stroke and the health of 'pregnant women, babies and children'. The green paper was compared with health promotion policies of other political parties and the Faculty of Public Health.

This meeting was a fore-runner of the subsequent, highly successful, one day conference 'The Health of the Nation: are we on target?' held on Saturday, 21 September at the Connaught Halls and attended by around 90 people. This meeting was jointly organised by Radical Statistics and the Public Health Alliance and particular thanks goes to Maggie Winters of the PHA for her hard work.

The topics and speakers were:

The Health of the Nation: what's in it and what's not?	Geoff Rayner
Alternative approaches: an international perspective.	Alex Scott Samuel
Monitoring targets or target monitoring: the role of health statistics in setting a strategy	Alison Macfarlane

Making it work: the possibilities  
for interdepartmental collaboration David Hunter

Afternoon workshops were held on:

Social inequalities David Blanc, Alex Bryson

Ethnicity Waqar Ahmed,  
Jenette Golding

Food safety Robin Jenkins,  
Linda Allen

Housing Joe Oldman, Jim Connelly

Mel Bartley give a final summing up and personal view on the  
importance of the document and the politics of disease prevention.

A brief summary of the views expressed at the conference will be sent  
in jointly by the Health Group and the Public Health Alliance to the  
Department of Health's consultation on *The Health of the Nation*,  
before we go on to publish the proceedings of the conference in the  
next two months.

All this activity has meant that the preparation of the second edition of  
'The unofficial guide to official health statistics' has been set aside  
temporarily but certainly not permanently. Authors are still being  
sought for some sections, such as community health statistics. Alison  
Macfarlane (0727 521111) would be glad to hear from potential  
contributors.

## NATIONAL HOMEWORKING SURVEY

*Roslyn Perkins*

The National Group on Homeworking has launched a major new homeworking survey. This survey is very comprehensive and aims to provide the basis of demands for more resources at a local level and legislative change at a national level.

The last major survey was conducted by Catherine Hakim for the DOE in 1981. Those results make strange reading to those involved with homeworkers on a day to day basis. According to the Hakim survey, homeworkers are generally satisfied with their pay and do not face any significant hazards. It also under represented the numbers of black people (particularly women) involved in Homeworking. The Hakim survey contributed to the torpor that surrounded the issue of legal protection for homeworkers in the 1980's. The result is that, in 1991, most homeworkers are still considered "sort of" self employed and thus not covered by legislation such as the Health and Safety at Work Act and other employment protection laws.

The survey will yield information on the following:

1. Types of homeworking and geographical and demographic distribution
2. Reasons why people do homeworking
3. Economic position of the homeworker within the household
4. Problems of legality and fears over claiming benefits and getting help; what employment status homeworkers have
5. Health and safety - how dangerous the work is and what provisions homeworkers need. How much are employers breaking the law on health and safety?
6. What training and childcare do homeworkers need?
7. Effects on the family, particularly the children of homeworkers.

A pilot survey in Calderdale has been written up by Yorkshire and Humberside Low Pay Unit. Fifty-seven interviews were carried out and all but one homeworker was female. The results directly contradict the Hakim study and also show big differences in conditions between white workers and black workers. The report also highlights some

serious health and safety problems. The report concludes with a set of demands for stronger employment law to cover homeworkers, wage control and local support in the form of training, childcare and advice.

The survey can be used by any groups connected with homeworkers. If you are interested in using the survey or helping with the processing work, contact one of the groups listed below. Surveys will be carried out over the next 6-7 months and analysis for 3-4 months after that.

Contacts:

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The Radical Statistics Newsletter is available by subscription. Current rates are £5 per year for low waged and £10 for waged, institutions, and overseas. The cost to unwaged people is £3. This newsletter is available from the Radical Statistics Group (Subs.), *c/o*. London Hazards Centre, 3rd. Floor, Headland House, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8DS.

The Radical Statistics Newsletter is usually produced three times per year.

All members of the Radical Statistics Group are invited to contribute to the Newsletter. Articles may vary from brief notices to detailed articles. Letters and reviews are also welcome.

Articles should be sent to the next editor using the address given below.

#### **Data Protection Act**

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, any member of the Radical Statistics Group is entitled to ask:

- a) For a printout of his/her personal details and the record's name and address (as kept on the Radical Statistics Group computer).
- b) That his/her personal details do not be so stored. Anyone wishing to avail themselves of this right, please contact the Troika (address on inside front cover) with requests in triplicate.

#### **Editor of Newsletter No 50**

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**Deadline for copy: 31st December 1991.**

As well as hard copy, contributions on floppy disc or via electronic mail may be welcome. It will help the editor if you contact them when preparing to send copy, to find out preferred formats.