

Survey of members

Sue Haslam

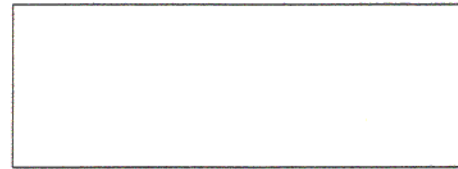
The ease at which this survey was conducted was made possible by enlisting the help of Jenny Palmer a student at The Polytechnic of Huddersfield. The School of Computing and Mathematics runs a women's one year full time HNC in Computer Studies. One of the course requirements is a work-related project and The Survey formed the basis of Jenny's project. She needed to hand in her completed project by the end of August so she spent the summer preparing the database for us. She used EPI INFO to analyse the results. We are extremely indebted to her for her conscientious effort and her attention to detail which has given us a most useful resource.

Four people were invited to give their comments on the results of the analysis and these are included in the section, "Contributions to the Survey Debate". Before this, the survey response rate and a summary of the results are given.

Survey Response Rate

	Sent	Received	Response rate
Individuals	234	175	75%
Institutions	45	13	29%
Overseas individuals	10	1	10%
Exchange/gratis copies	8	3	38%
Late payers	3	1	33%

Radical Statistics



Please correct and complete this label as necessary, so that we can update our records.

Membership Survey

June 1991

The purposes of this survey are to ascertain your views of the Radical Statistics Group and its role, to help target recruitment, and to invite you to state your interests and participate in the group's activities. We would really appreciate your time to return this questionnaire and promise we won't do such an extensive one very often!

The first section is about yourself, to give us a better idea of what kind of readership Radical Statistics reaches at present.

The second section asks your views on *Radical Statistics* and the group, and how you think they might usefully develop in the future.

The third section on the back page invites your practical contribution. But we'd like you all to return this questionnaire even if you can't fill that part in positively.

Confidentiality: No individual replies will be published or circulated, except the offers of help in the last section. Only details of your interests (Q.15), your date of joining (Q.6), and any corrections made to the label above will be added to the membership database.

Institutions: Please ask one of the more regular readers to complete this questionnaire, or to organise a collective response.

We have a student placement support in the early summer to help analyse the survey returns: a response by the end of June will allow us to make full use of this resource

Thanks very much. When you've completed the survey, please return it to:

Sue Haslam,
School of Computing & Mathematics
The Polytechnic of Huddersfield
Queensgate
Huddersfield HD1 3DH

UNIVARIATE DISTRIBUTION

Section A: About you

1. What is your age-group?

- 5% 1. Under 30 years
- 34% 2. 30-39 years
- 45% 3. 40-49 years
- 15% 4. 50 years or over

2. Your gender?

- 33% 1. Female
- 62% 2. Male

Please circle the appropriate response

Continue overleaf...

Survey of members

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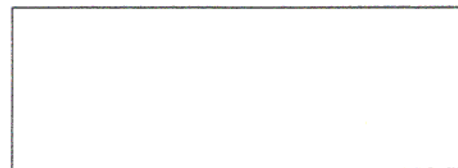
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46% 3. 40-49 years
15% 4. 50 years or over

2. Your gender?

- 33% 1. Female
62% 2. Male

Please circle the appropriate response

Continue overleaf...

Section A: About you continued

3. In what sector are you employed?

Please circle the appropriate response(s)

- 2% 98. Not in paid employment
 - 4% 1. Student
 - 2% 2. Central government
 - 6% 3. Local government
 - 34% 4. Academic - a teaching post
 - 14% 5. Academic - a non-teaching post
 - 2% 6. Teacher
 - 12% 7. Health Service
 - 3% 8. Voluntary sector
 - 3% 9. Private sector
 - 14% 0. Other, please write in.....
- 0.5% 1,0 1% 4,5
 0.5% 2,0 0.5% 5,7
 0.5% 3,8 0.5% 8,0

4. Where, if at all, do you use statistics and statistical techniques?

	In my job	In my studies	Elsewhere	I don't
a. I use statistics	1. <input type="checkbox"/>	2. <input type="checkbox"/>	3. <input type="checkbox"/>	4. <input type="checkbox"/>
b. I use statistical methods	1. <input type="checkbox"/>	2. <input type="checkbox"/>	3. <input type="checkbox"/>	4. <input type="checkbox"/>
	8%	21%	1%	9%
	72%	18%	7%	20%

5. How did you first hear about the Radical Statistics Group?

- 48% 1. From a friend or colleague
- 3% 2. By coming to the annual conference
- 6% 3. By seeing an advertisement about the group. Where: _____
- 19% 4. Through a Radical Statistics Publication
- 24% 0. Other, please write in:

6. When did you join the group, or first subscribe? (As far as you can remember!)

	1975-79	26%
19 --	1980-84	17%
	1985-89	40%
	1990-91	17%

7. Have you ever been to a Radical Statistics Conference?

- 44% 1. Yes
- 56% 2. No

Section B: About Radical Statistics

8. Which quality or qualities of the Radical Statistics journal are important to you?

- a. It is useful in my work 32% 57% 11%
- b. It is useful in my out-of-work activities 45% 44% 10%
- c. It gives me a wider perspective on statistical issues 5% 42% 53%
- d. I find out what my friends are up to 75% 18% 7%
- e. I like to keep tabs on what the Radical Statistics Group is doing 25% 59% 16%
- f. It provides an avenue for the kind of debate which I am unlikely to have at work 28% 45% 27%
- g. It is interesting general reading 12% 57% 31%

h. Other, please write in:

Eg. Alternative views & analysis/unique expertise/health issues/like-minded people/focus for campaigns/helps understanding of official statistics/sharpens political awareness.

9. What do you least like about Radical Statistics? You have a free hand here!

Eg. Arcane/name/lacks perception/oliquey/partisan/lack of structure/loss of radicalness/no gay or lesbian discussion/health group domination/academic head-banging/departure from scientific principles/lacks objective perspective/slanging matches/too serious/London orientated.

10. What kind of contributions should be encouraged by the editors of Radical Statistics?

- a. Book reviews 20% 51% 19%
- b. Graphics 43% 40% 17%
- c. Substantial original articles 11% 47% 42%
- d. Reprints of articles taken from elsewhere 24% 57% 9%
- e. Subgroup reports 7% 45% 48%
- f. Brief summaries of research in progress 11% 49% 41%
- g. Ideas for new Radical Statistics work 4% 42% 54%
- h. Political issues in Statistics 1% 15% 83%

i. Other, please write in:

Eg. More radical/visual representation/clarifying issues elsewhere confused/analyse political issues/letters/points of view/Third world/anecdotes.

11. In what ways would you like to see the Group develop?

- a. As a campaigning group for statisticians; (working conditions, contracts and ethics) 41% 39% 20%
- b. As working groups; producing pamphlets and books in the areas of health, education etc. 1% 23% 76%
- c. As a communications network; keeping in touch with ideas, developments, people and jobs. 6% 38% 56%
- d. Other, please write in:

Eg. Educative-help public interpret/be a "think tank"/identifying value of statistics/agitating/raising issues/ethics & support - RS is not a union/links with others.

12. Which audiences should Radical Statistics group seek?

- a. Trades Unions 7% 58% 35%
- b. Community & campaigning groups 2% 24% 74%
- c. MPs 8% 42% 50%
- d. Statisticians and research workers 1% 26% 73%

e. Other, please write in:

Eg. Students/media/Public Service managers/women/general public/educators/civil service/trades councils/health authorities/non-statistical professionals.

13. Please write in here any other comments you have on Radical Statistics and the Radical Statistics Group's activities

Eg. Glad RS exists/"Free thinking" Rads feel unwelcome/more regional awareness/unaffiliated political awareness/needs re-generation/lost impetus - too establishment/enjoy & use all past RS publications in work.

Section C: About you and Radical Statistics

14. Do you have material that might make an article for Radical Statistics? If so, what is it on?

15% Positive response.

Section C: About you and Radical Statistics
continued

15. In which areas might you be interested in working with others?

Please circle up to six.

(Your label on the front page has, at the bottom right corner, any interest you have expressed in previous years or when joining. What you circle here should include those on the label, unless you want to *deregister* a past interest.)

- | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| A Anti-poverty/welfare statistics | I Internationalisation and trade statistics | T Transport |
| B Crime, Law, Police | L Local government | U Trades Union campaigns |
| C Peace/nuclear arms | M Teaching statistics | W Statisticians as workers |
| D Philosophy and politics of statistics | N Developing countries | X Women in statistics |
| E Education | O Housing | Y Green/environment issues |
| F Economic statistics | P Un/Employment | Z Other (write in): |
| G Government statistics | R Race | See article: |
| H Health | S Surveys for pressure groups | Advice for Sub-groups. |

16. Would you like to help start a subgroup in one of these areas?

Please say which area here, and we will help with suggestions of how to go about it, other people who may be interested, and the experience of previous groups starting up. The only active subgroup at present is the Radical Statistics Health Group.

16% Positive response but more interest in joining rather than starting. Areas of interest, eg. Employment/crime/developing countries/education/poverty/local government/green issues/international trade/teaching statistics/women in statistics.

17. Could you use the Radical Statistics promotional leaflet (circulated with the last issue) or other material, to help advertise Radical Statistics and its publications?

- 36% 1. Yes. How many leaflets? Please write in: 1650+
- 64% 2. No

18. Debunking broadsheets.

The last Troika discussed a proposal for brief campaigning broadsheets to debunk current establishment claims. These could be published jointly with another organisation that a member is involved with, or could go out under Radical Statistics' name alone, as appropriate to each one. Do you have material for such a broadsheet? If so what is it on?

See RS 49

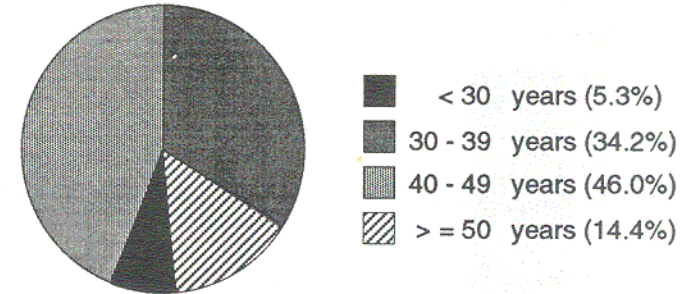
19. Please write any other comments you have about your possible work with Radical Statistics:

Eg. Willing to comment on other drafts/help new people develop their ideas/like to encourage others/publicise meetings/publicise pamphlets/consider any help that is needed/Health Matters page.

Thankyou very much for your time. Please return using the label provided on the front page.

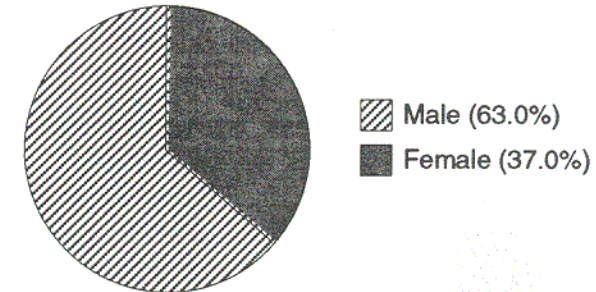
Summary of Results

Age:



Membership is high from students of the late 1960's

Gender:



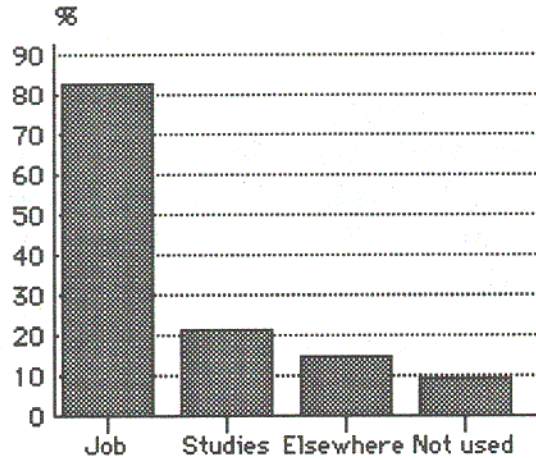
Is the proportion of women higher than statisticians/researchers in Britain generally?

Occupation:

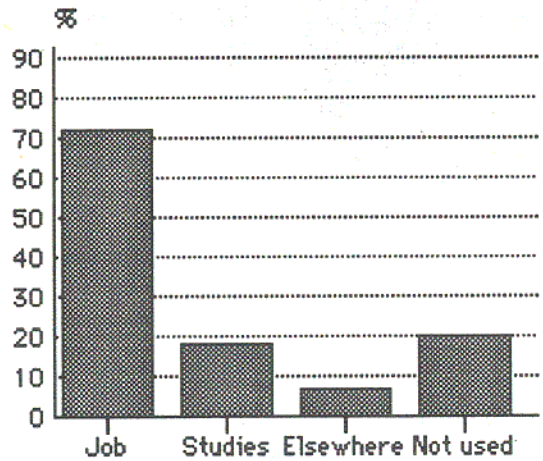
The largest group by far is teaching academics (35%), though academics do not reach half of the total (49%). The Health Service is by far the largest non-academic sector represented (12%).

Statisticians?:

Use of Statistics



Use of Statistical Methods



Statistics are not used by one tenth of responding members and statistical methods are not used by nearly one quarter.

Recruitment:

The main source of hearing about RadStats is via friends or colleagues (44%), followed by RadStats publications (19%).

Year of joining:

A lot of originals have stayed the course, with steady if slow recruitment since.

Conference attendance:

Just under half of responding members have attended a RadStats conference.

The only statements about RadStats that got over 50% endorsement as 'very important':

- 50% RadStats gives me a wider perspective on statistical issues
- 51% RadStats editors should encourage ideas for new RadStats work
- 80% RadStats editors should encourage articles on political issues in statistics
- 77% RadStats should develop more working groups producing pamphlets and books in the areas of health, education etc.
- 55% RadStats should develop as a communication network, keeping in touch with ideas, developments, people and jobs
- 73% RadStats' audience should include statisticians and research workers
- 50.1% RadStats' audience should include MPs

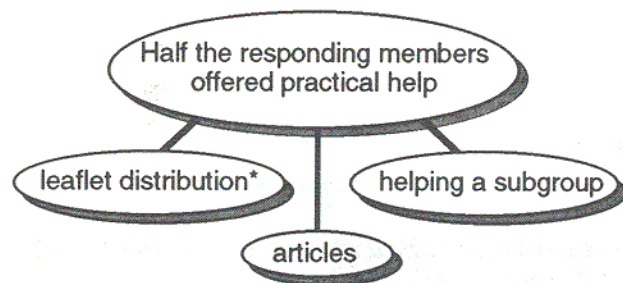
The only statements about RadStats which over one third said were 'not important':

- 45% RadStats is useful in my out-of-work activities.
- 70% RadStats tells me what my friends are up to
- 40% RadStats editors should encourage graphics
- 40% RadStats should develop as a campaigning group for statisticians (on working conditions, contracts and ethics)

There was least positive support, ie. fewest rating as 'very important' for:

- 10% RadStats is useful in my work
- 10% RadStats is useful in my out-of-work activities
- 7% RadStats tells me what my friends are up to
- 10% RadStats editors should encourage reprints of articles taken from elsewhere.

Offers of contribution:



*at least a trickle of **NEW** members have resulted from leaflets requested from the survey

Offers to work with others within their field of interest:

Over half expressed Health as one of their interests with 16% offering no interest in working with others.

Some Issues

Roles of conference:

Over half of the members haven't been and only 2% joined after going to one. Conference seems to work as a discussion forum for members, not as a public event or a recruiting ground. Is this something to continue?

Main role:

RadStats is not expected to be a campaigning group for statisticians nor to be of direct use in work or out-of-work activities. It (a) keeps the political grey cells going within members' professional area, and (b) aids non-researchers and researchers alike to act in the political arena with more confidence. (However, there is minority support for other roles, and no-one has been polemical *against* other roles. It's more that RadStats' political edge makes it distinctive and useful: this is supported by various critical comments that it is not 'political' enough.

Main gripes:

Seem to be RadStats' cliquiness, and contributions to RadStats that don't have sufficient of a political edge to them, or are too assuming of a narrow political position on the part of readers.

Audience:

It is expected to be wide - strong support for all the four options given, and many others written in (particularly students).

A professional body:

Few are not statisticians or professional researchers. This might be a strength when campaigning with other groups, but also may have resulted in a limited political vision.

Contributions to Survey Debate

1. Radical Statistics: where should we go from here?

Radical Statistics has been around for over a decade. The recent survey of members indicate a clear consensus about its aims. These are to provide information on the use of statistics, both generally and on specific areas such as health and education. To help other community/campaigning groups with the provision and interpretation of official statistics and to highlight the misuse or lack of statistics by all official bodies of whatever political complexion. Whilst other aspects of statistics, both methodological and job-related, may be of interest to some members, Radical Statistics is not an organisation simply for statisticians. Some members do not even use statistics themselves. The key aspect that unites these diverse individuals is their interest in the *political* and *social* use of statistics.

The greatest asset of the group without doubt is its members and their knowledge and expertise. To coordinate this body into responding quickly to current issues and to provide an active network of information it is essential to have an appropriate infrastructure. Our response to the recent Government document "The Health of The Nation" aptly demonstrates the important contribution this group can and has made to the debate over health promotion. This was not achieved without a severe strain on a few members and would have greatly benefited from secretarial assistance or a coordinator. Providing this would have financial implications. It is encouraging to see the current troika actively pursuing new members rather than waiting for members to appear by word of mouth. Political consciousness surely does not show such a strong cohort effect, as the age structure of our membership might suggest. To what degree Radical Statistics can or wishes to become more professional is not clear. If we truly wish to achieve our aims and get our views heard in the political debate then we must question how well these are currently achieved and how this might be improved. Is it not time to open the debate?

Yoav Ben-Shlomo

2. Radstats - a Creature of the 60s?

Radstats has never prided itself on a clear focus.

We have always taken comfort in notions of a "broad church".

Indeed, this has been our strength over the years. How many other organisations can point to a Newsletter with *as policy* a continually changing editorship and identity? How many other disorganisations develop off-the-cuff remarks into venerated policy (eg the Troika, or indeed the very name "Radical Statistics" which was originally just a stop-gap)?

By all the rules of organisational evolution we should have gone under years ago. The fact that we haven't, despite doing so much wrong must mean that we have been doing something right. The main thing we have done right, I believe, is that *we have not taken ourselves too seriously*. Whatever else changes, let that not change. Despite its autocracies, there is something uniquely democratic and open about the statistical profession. Even the RSS has until now kept itself open to anyone interested in the area. Would the BMA admit me just because I'm interested in my own health? Of course not!

My comments on the survey are:

1. We should do it more often! (Well done to those who put in the hard work.)
2. Everybody over 45 should be bumped off, or at least removed from positions of power. Furthermore, nostalgia should be banned - none of the old lags should be allowed to refer to the days before 1980 (soon to be changed to 1990).
3. Emphasis should be given to
 - (a) recruiting new blood
 - (b) energising just one group to compete in excellence with the Health Group
 - (c) getting a regular "column" in a major organ, eg Grauniad, a TUC outlet, or even Private Eye
 - (d) regional decentralisation, following the excellent lead of the Yorkshire puddings in our midst
 - (e) trying to say *nice* things about Roy Carr-Hill. (See RS 47)

John Bibby

3. From the freehand comments elicited by the survey, I discern a significant weight of concern that RadStats newsletter is too often cliquy in an unwelcoming way, variable in quality and regularity, veering between unpolitical and narrowly political, boring, unfocussed and lacking in impact. I guess that many with these concerns would welcome higher standards of writing, closer editing more in the nature of a journal, more professional administration, more political rigour (if not a 'line') to give us shape, direction and impact.

Statistical methods and statisticians are fairly unique in applying a scientific method to a very wide variety of subjects within the social and political fields (and others). We usually work in isolation from others with similar training. Those who wish to be critical and self-critical about statistical practice often do not have an accessible peer group to gain solidarity from, to develop ideas with and give them a practical political impact.

No wonder then (and it is not of concern) that RadStats attracts a wide range of people with a wider range of motives and demands, contributing with variable standards. No wonder that RadStats has survived 17 years and 50 issues because of rather than in spite of a lack of definition and a way of working that involves for example a different editor for each edition. No wonder that conferences are more social and idea-bashing than working events and recruiting grounds (half of the membership have been to a conference but only two per cent joined after going to one!).

I am in favour of RadStats having much more practical and political impact, a higher quality and quantity of output. But any move to improve standards must not standardise. Why should being politically rigorous mean narrowly politically motivated?

A greater contribution from younger statisticians and researchers is needed too, but we can't blame ourselves entirely for any current shortfall. This generation is simply not the politically aware generation of students of the late 60s that later started up RadStats.

I believe that structure has to follow action, in spite of my recent contribution on the purely administrative side, and a belief that the Lies Damned Lies ... broadsheets debunking establishment claims (see RS49) provide a very apt structure to draw out good contributions with political impact. I like this appropriate comment from Stephen Jay Gould's 'Mismeasure of Man': "If it is to have enduring value, sound debunking must do more than replace one social prejudice with another. It must use more adequate biology (read statistics) to drive out fallacious ideas."

Steve Simpson

4. It is often said that the NHS is drowning in data but thirsting for information. One positive effect of the changes in the NHS has been to make this problem apparent to a new audience. What can we contribute? Clearly transforming the NHS informatics is beyond our grasp, but we can take part. In RADSTATS there are people with various combinations of political awareness, technical skill, and personal involvement in the subject of health. This is a value mixture, and if we wish, could go far.

In the north of England we're trying to get local discussions going, looking at present information needs, availability of this information, and access to it. We can bring together people who need information, those who have (some of) it, and those skilled in getting hold of it. Perhaps after more clearly defining who wants to know, and what is available, we can try and ensure that the important information becomes available. Obviously this overlaps to an extent with the work of the health group, but this diversity is a strength of our organisation.

Other people in other areas will have their own ideas as to the most appropriate ways of getting involved. There are lots of other difficult areas, e.g. local taxation, census access, regional policy, health inequality... where a committed group can make a difference. Some of these topics are already under consideration by people in RADSTATS, others aren't, but participants are always welcome. Remember the importance of a diversity of perspectives.

Anthony Stalnes