

## Editorial

This issue of Radical Statistics comes out of the February 2012 Radical Statistics Conference, which was held at the British Library in London. The conference focused on the *Mis-Measurement of Health and Wealth* and was the best ever attended Radical Statistics conference. Five of the eight presentations given at the conference are collected here (we hope to include the remaining three presentations in some form in a future issue of Radical Statistics).<sup>1</sup> As a set, the papers published here are very much in the radical statistics tradition: they do not simply critique mainstream methods of measuring, but also reveal the social necessity of challenging such measures and begin to propose alternatives.

The issue begins with Howard Reed's critique of the ways that UK debt statistics are constructed and interpreted. He unpicks the UK Coalition Government's 'maxed-out credit card' explanation of current government finances, and demonstrates the links between this reading of the data and the 'austerity' policies which are responsible for slowing growth in GDP (and therefore exacerbating the debt/GDP ratio). Howard also points out that contrary to popular opinion, the previous Labour government's real spending was very much in line with historical precedent.

In his article Prem Sikka continues the focus on the (mis)interpretation of wealth, but moves the spotlight from political parties to the 'big four' accountancy firms. He argues that these firms' (Ernst & Young, KPMG, PwC, and Deloitte & Touche) creation of ever-new tax-avoidance schemes for their large corporate clients undermines democracy by systematically reducing the public purse and, therefore, governments' spending power. He provides multiple examples of tax avoidance, some of which skirt close to illegality (and some of which cross that boundary), and concludes with suggestions for preventing this systematic mis-counting of corporate wealth.

Roy Carr-Hill, in the article that follows, looks not at how to count the wealth of governments or corporations, but instead how to measure the well-being of individuals. In doing so he goes back to first

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<sup>1</sup> Video-recordings of the conference presentations are available to watch on the Radical Statistics website: [www.radstats.org.uk/conf2012](http://www.radstats.org.uk/conf2012)

principles, seeking to identify what well-being really might look like if we abandon the principle that more (for example more consumption, more growth) automatically means better. Instead he proposes a multi-dimensional approach to welfare and well-being and argues that collective, as well as individual, well-being be taken into consideration. The article concludes with a proposed framework for assessing social and political arrangements using indicators that measure five key dimensions of well-being: being, having, doing, relating and surviving.

The next two papers move away from a focus on well-being and wealth, exploring instead the ways in which health and ill-health are measured. The first of these, by David Healy, is a critique of the ‘gold standard’ of medical research: randomised controlled trials (RCTs). In an overview of RCTs of antidepressants, he shows the various ways in which these trials have missed or miscounted suicidal episodes. David suggests ways of remedying this problem, including collating and (re)assessing the credibility of clinical reports (as an alternative source of information to RCTs), and argues for the introduction of a new toxicity metric.

The second (and final conference paper), by Valerie Saunders, is also a critique of medical research, and a contribution to the longstanding nature *vs.* nurture debate. Focusing on three studies, each chosen as exemplifying a different strand of research that has ‘found’ a genetic component to schizophrenia (twin studies, family studies and meta-analyses), Valerie highlights the limitations of these studies. She then uses international data to argue for the importance of environmental and psychosocial causes in explaining the onset of schizophrenia.

In addition to these conference papers, the issue includes the first paper in what we hope will become an occasional series on *Reduced Statistics*. In his paper Alex Fenton assesses cuts to the statistical and analytic capacity of the UK Department for Communities and Local Government and outlines the consequences of these cuts, which undermine the capacity for evidence-based policy-making. The issue concludes with a review by Jane Galbraith of the book *Statistics: a Graphic Guide*. Book reviews are very welcome, so please get in touch with the editors if you have a publication in mind that you would like to review in a future *Radical Statistics*’ or if you have a book that you would like someone else to review. And please keep all of your contributions coming!

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