Editorial

This issue begins with two articles about the effect of demographic change. Maria Sol Torres Minoldo turns a spotlight on Argentina, while Alan Marshall, John Read, and James Nazroo focus on the United Kingdom. Both pieces take issue with the argument, common in the media and amongst politicians of all stripes, that an ageing population is increasingly likely to constitute an unsustainable drain on national resources. Specifically Minoldo produces considerable data to show that the 'dependency' ratio (of 'working adults' to 'pensioners') is seriously flawed at assessing levels of real material dependency in society. Marshall, Read and Nazroo decompose estimates of population ageing. They show that, contrary to public discourse, older age longevity accounts for only a small part of expected demographic change, with the far larger part due to the ageing of the baby boom cohort. As such population ageing may largely be a temporary, not permanent, phenomenon.

We follow this article with two reflections on the research process. In the first Alan Sloan provides us with some qualitative reflections from his work as a survey interviewer. He highlights the social context of non-response and the emotional and practical ways that interviewers respond. For many of us who work regularly with survey data this reflection from the messy and human side of data collection serves as a salutary reminder of the social uncertainty that data retain. Following this, Stephen Gorard addresses the contentious issue of how to assess the trustworthiness of evidence. His article produces a framework to be used both by users and producers of research evidence that enables a judgement-based star-rating of research evidence. The framework emphasises design, sample size and quality, data quality, fidelity of intervention, and threats to validity.

We finish the issue with four comment pieces addressing a diverse range of contemporary issues – all of which in different ways highlight the ways in which statistics and social policy are interwoven. The first piece by Alison Macfarlane provides an overview of what has happened with care.data, the proposed data linkage between GP and hospital records. She shows that poor handling of the process and the huge public resistance engendered has produced serious obstacles for academic health research. Ludi Simpson then offers a cogent critique of the ways in which segregation measures are used. He points out

that since there will always be some segregation these measures provide ready grist for politicians seeking to ignite moral panics over racial segregation.

Boycott Workfare provides us with an important discussion of the impact of and use of statistics to support the workfare policies forming part of the government's social policies. The comment is a critique of workfare, forming part of the government's austerity politics, which involves a toughening of the treatment of and sanctions put on welfare claimants. The edition ends with a discussion of abortion and abortion statistics in Ireland by Frank Houghton. His comment exposes the ways in which the Irish government and public institutions shy away from openness around the actual number of abortions taking place in a country which has been criticised for its restrictive abortion regulations.

With this issue of Radical Statistics we welcome Trude Sundberg, a Social Policy expert from the University of Kent to the editorial team and say goodbye and thank you to Alistair Greig who has been part of the team for the past two years.

If you have an article or short comment piece that you think would be suitable for a future issue of Radical Statistics or ideas about a themed set of articles please get in touch with us.

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