

Editorial

This Special Issue consists of ten contributions, each addressing in one way or another, the interface between official (that is, government statistics) and ethics. On first impression one might suppose that the work and personnel of official statistics, guided as they are by law and science, offer few opportunities for ethical issues to arise. As the diverse group of papers collected in this Special Edition of the *Statistical Journal of the IAOS* on *Official Statistics and Ethics* demonstrates, ethical challenges, threats, and issues abound as do safeguards and responses.

In official statistics, ethical problems usually arise in one of two quite different ways: first, due to actions or inactions that run counter to generally accepted scientific ideals, and second, where the tools of science and our profession, regardless of how technically sound, are misused. These challenges, once recognized, have often given rise to new laws, regulations, and policies, the rearrangement of statistical operations, a range of technical and technological innovations, and various training activities. These newly recognized challenges have also motivated national and international professional associations of statisticians to revise their ethics documents.

The selection of papers presented here illustrates the diversity of challenges and responses in various countries around the world. The papers are organized in two groups: six that focus primarily on challenges presented (papers by Berumen and Beker, Ramachandran, Forbes, et al., Ljones, Ward, and Bailar) and four (contributions by Bodin, Morganstein, Martín-Guzmán and Villán, and Seltzer) that document some of the responses developed to address these and other challenges. Of course, a number of the papers dealing with challenges also discuss responses and safeguards, and many of those dealing with responses also describe the related challenges.

The group of papers focusing on issues and challenges begins with a contribution by Edmundo Berumen and Victor Beker describing a series of ongoing problems in official statistics in Argentina that began with the measurement of price statistics and has escalated to concerns over the very credibility of the nation-

al statistical office. Ramasamy Ramachandran's paper addresses a quite different kind of ethical concern, namely, how well do national statistical offices meet their obligations to provide the kinds of local area data that users increasingly need. The paper by Sharleen Forbes and her colleagues from Statistics New Zealand reviews a number of ethical challenges that their office has had to deal with in the past few years. Olav Ljones describes an emerging set of new challenges to the independence and integrity of national statistical offices arising from the increased reliance placed on administrative record systems as a source of statistics. Next, the paper by the late Michael Ward raises fundamental questions about assumptions implicit in price measurement in the United Kingdom. (An early draft of this paper was submitted by the author when the announcement of this Special Edition first appeared. Unfortunately, Michael Ward died unexpectedly, in October 2008, before he could revise his contribution. His colleagues, Derek Blades and Carol Carson, generously agreed to assist in reviewing and lightly editing Michael's draft. The views expressed remain those of Michael Ward.) The final paper in this group is by Barbara Bailar and deals with an incident in 2003 relating to the timing of the release of poverty statistics by the US Census Bureau. It is set against the background of the varied history of policies, pressures, and practices that the Census Bureau staff had had to deal with over the past 40 years.

The first of the four contributions that focus on responses to ethical challenges of one sort or another is by Jean-Louis Bodin and addresses the range of possible responses by the statistical community at large to threats to the integrity of national statistical systems with special attention to recent developments in Argentina and Greece. The second, by David Morganstein, reviews ongoing efforts to update the International Statistical Institute's (ISI's) Declaration of Professional Ethics, first adopted in 1985, highlighting those issues of special relevance to official statistics. (Although the author is the chair of the ISI Committee on Professional Ethics, the paper is written in his individual capacity.) The third paper in this group, con-

tributed by Martín-Guzmán Pilar and Villán Ildefonso, reviews the long history laws and practices dealing with the protection of confidentiality of statistical data in Spain. The final contribution by William Seltzer presents a user's guide to a short course on ethics in the work of a national statistical office. It is based on the revised version of a portion of a short course he co-presented at the 58th session of the ISI in Durban in 2009.

Some of the papers presented here provide critical assessments of past or ongoing practices in one or another country. In several instances, the concerned national statistical agency was offered the opportunity to prepare a response. In only one case, that of the Malaysian Department of Statistics, was this offer accepted. Accordingly, their response follows Ramasamy Ramachandran's paper, followed, in turn, by a brief rejoinder by the author.

Reflecting the relevance of this Special Issue to countries in different parts of the world, the authors of these papers come from eight different countries: Argentina, France, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The expertise of the authors in the subjects they address in these papers is clear: many of them have or had experience at senior levels in national or international statistical offices; in addition, some have served as Presidents of national or international professional statistical societies.

Despite the diversity and expertise of the authors represented in this volume, it should be stressed that the descriptions and "answers" they provide are not definitive. Both in the policy and ethical domains problems and solutions evolve and circumstances vary. What is

invariant is the need to be continually aware of the ethical dimensions of our work as statisticians. This awareness is best fostered by continuing discussion, writing, research, and training about ethical challenges and appropriate responses to these challenges. It is hoped that this Special Edition will assist in this effort.

In addition to the authors, several persons are due special thanks for making this Special Edition possible. First, Siu-Ming Tam, Editor-in-Chief of this Journal, deserves thanks from all those with an interest in statistical ethics for sparking interest in this Special Edition and for his continuing support in seeing the project through to a successful conclusion. Second, the authors and I owe special gratitude to Rob Edwards, Associate Guest Editor of this Special Edition and formerly of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the IMF Statistical Bureau. He worked on editing all the papers in this issue, giving special attention to papers by authors whose mother tongue was not English. Thanks are also due to the staff of the ISI Permanent Office and the IOS Press for all the help they provided at different stages of the work involved in planning and producing this Special Edition.

However, as stated in the general disclaimer that follows, I alone am responsible for the selection of the papers published in this Special Issue, while the authors themselves are solely responsible for the content of their papers.

William Seltzer, Guest Editor

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