

Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Paediatric Association, and the GMSC, the report laid out a model programme of preschool surveillance that could, so the Working Party believed, be justified by the scientific evidence that was available. The second document was the new contract for general practitioners, which introduced a new paediatric capitation allowance for general practitioners who provide an approved surveillance programme in their practices, and who are suitably trained to carry out the tests.

This book (one of whose authors was a member of the Joint Working Party) is the first postcontract guide for general practitioners about the screening of preschool children. Like the others in the series, it is intended to provide a concise, readable and practical guide that is likely to be consulted as much by health visitors as by the general practitioners at whom it is aimed. The screening programme described in the book is virtually identical to that proposed by the Joint Working Party, covering neonatal examinations, congenital dislocation of the hip, vision and hearing problems, heart disease, head circumference, weight and height problems, and cryptorchidism. Each topic has a brief epidemiological introduction, followed by detailed descriptions of the procedures involved in carrying out the tests, the criteria for passing or failing (a curiously anachronistic turn of phrase), and the circumstances in which the child ought to be referred. Brief suggestions for further reading are given.

This is unquestionably a most timely book, not least in offering general practitioners a quick check on whether it will be worth their while to undertake the necessary training to qualify for the new allowance. Its cook book format is plainly one that will appeal to most general practitioners, and if it is at all widely read it should substantially enhance the quality of surveillance in general practice. Whether it will be instrumental in bringing a measure of unity into a damagingly divided service is not a fair criterion against which to judge this particular book, but its success probably depends at least in part upon the responsiveness of general practitioners to the incentives introduced in their new contract.

J R BUTLER

Living Standards during Unemployment Vol 1. The Results. P Heady, M Smyth. (Pp 68; £10.60.) HMSO, 1989. ISBN 0-11-691271-5.

Reports from the Social Survey Division of OPCS are to be welcomed and one on unemployment especially so.

It is extraordinary just how little work has been published on the effects of unemployment from the UK—a country which could have specialised in this field in view of the size of the problem throughout the eighties. Almost no research has been commissioned or sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Security.

This new survey involved two interviews with a sample of about 3000 families whose breadwinners started to sign on in 1983 aged between 20 and 60. The first interview took place in the autumn of 1983 after they had been signing on for three months and the second interview took place a year later. The

survey was designed to see how living standards changed over the first 15 months of unemployment and to compare the circumstances of families whose breadwinners continued to sign on with those whose breadwinners returned to work. Most families experienced a rapid and substantial reduction in their material living standards. The main areas affected were food, clothing, and leisure activities. The psychological impact was considerable and was almost as great in the case of the wives of the unemployed men as in the case of the unemployed men themselves. As expected, the psychological wellbeing improved amongst those returning to work. For those who continued to sign on, the psychological scores for both men and their wives remained the same. There appeared to be no further deterioration or improvement over time. This result confirms the findings of Warr¹ that after an initial deterioration on first becoming unemployed, people's sense of psychological welfare tends on average to stabilise and not worsen over subsequent months. I have a number of criticisms of the report concerning the delay in publication, the form of the publication and the scope of the research.

The five year delay between data collection and publication is particularly unfortunate in a situation where definitions of "unemployment", of "eligibility for signing on" and the "levels of benefit" have changed frequently and dramatically. The report gives repeated caveats against drawing any conclusions that might pertain to 1989 and reminds us that the findings are clearly relevant "only to 1983/84".

The report is published in two volumes and separates the Results (Volume 1), with 1500 copies being printed, from the Technical issues and Methods. I have not yet seen the size of Volume 2 (with 2000 copies being printed) but the Results volume is only 68 pages long. The separation certainly makes the report less valuable for research purposes, as does the very limited reference section. The size of the print run suggests a limited readership.

The scope of the research itself was limited. It emphasised the loss of income and its effects but failed to address the impact of the loss of what Jahoda² called the secondary benefits of work. If going to work is not just about earning a living but also about activity, engaging in something productive, meeting people outside the family, enforcing a timetable on the day, about self esteem and status, then what is the effect of such a loss?

The authors simply asked informants what they had found the worst aspect of being unemployed. They then used a series of twelve questions used by the MRC/ESRC Social and Applied Psychology Unit to investigate the impact of unemployment by computing a "psychological wellbeing score". The method was not designed to detect the loss of Johoda's secondary benefits, nor was it likely to pick up characteristics that worsen over time with persistent unemployment.

Nevertheless, I found the report particularly easy to read. It is coauthored by Patrick Heady and Malcolm Smyth. Although an attempt has been made at marketing, with a new design for the front cover including the introduction of colour (somewhere between pale purple and off grey), it still looks anonymous. Why not a biographical note? Why not a brief history of the OPCS Social Survey Division and a list of

their recent publications? Dust covers and back covers have important uses beyond informing readers that HMSO accredited agents can be found in the Yellow Pages.

S C FARROW

- 1 Warr P. *Work, unemployment and mental health*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- 2 Jahoda M. *Employment and unemployment: a socio-psychological analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Statistics with Confidence, Ed MJ Gardner, DG Altman. (Pp 140; £7.95.) Medical Association, 1989. ISBN 0-7279-0222-9.

Contributors to medical publications have become increasingly aware of the need to apply statistical tests of significance to their data. Although this has represented an improvement on previous practice, statisticians have been aware that an overdependence on significance tests has developed. In most instances, the use of confidence intervals to complement significance tests will be vastly more informative.

In Britain, the British Medical Journal has been foremost in recognising the need to improve the standard of statistical presentation of data and has published several series of articles with a statistical theme. Even more importantly they have published statistical guidelines to which papers submitted to the BMJ are required to conform. These guidelines emphasise the importance of using confidence intervals.

This book arises directly from these origins, and indeed Part II consists of one chapter presenting the statistical guidelines and a second chapter giving check lists for assessing the statistical content of medical studies. The previous eight chapters cover the rationale for the use of confidence intervals and then detail methods for their construction. The great value of this book is that it presents, in an easily understood form, the methods which will be needed in most situations. These include those for use with survival data, relative risks, odds ratios, standardised ratios and rates, and basic non-parametric methods. Most introductory texts cover only a selection of these methods. To have them all included in a single slim and well written text, together with worked examples, should ensure the popularity of this book with medical researchers. The availability of a computer program to carry out the calculations will further enhance its appeal to this audience.

Does the book also serve a role as a medical undergraduate text book? The intentionally narrow field of coverage limits its value here. The curriculum at many medical schools allows so little time for medical statistics that time could not be found to use this book effectively. Where time in the curriculum is allocated more generously, this book could well be a valuable addition to the reading list. Students will appreciate the clearly worked examples, but they will, perhaps surprisingly, gain just as much from the chapter on statistical guidelines for authors. These eighteen pages are, of course, directed at aspiring authors of scientific papers. However, they contain, in concentrated form, much of the statistical wisdom which we would wish students to assimilate.

In summary, this is a book which fills a gap in the literature. The editors are to be