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Foreword

These proceedings are from a workshop on the use of deprivation indices in small area studies of environment and health, which was the third in a series of occasional meetings held by the Small Areas Health Statistics Unit.[1 2]

The Small Area Health Statistics Unit is an independent unit, funded by government, for the investigation of disease in small areas, particularly in the vicinity of industrial installations.[3] It has four main terms of reference. Firstly, to examine reports of unusual clusters of disease in small areas around point sources of pollution. Secondly, to build up background information on the distribution of disease in small areas. Thirdly, to study the available statistics and, where appropriate, investigate. And fourthly, with others, to work on the methodology for small area enquiries. Crucial to each of the above is how to deal with socioeconomic variables and the problem of confounding. These proceedings are therefore timely, and, we hope, provide a valuable summary of current work in this area, as well as a pointer to future directions.

The meeting focussed on a number of related issues concerned with control for socioeconomic confounding measured at the small area level. Firstly, the size and extent of the relationship between small area deprivation measures and disease is documented, as well as the potential for confounding near point sources of environmental pollution. Secondly, the problem of the ecological fallacy is addressed, that is the use of group versus individual data, with consideration of what is the appropriate level of analysis. Thirdly, possible analytical approaches are discussed, contrasting standardisation and regression methodologies. Fourthly, there is consideration of various methods for construction of deprivation indices based on census variables and their relationship to other data, with particular focus on the 1991 UK census.

The meeting included both invited and submitted papers, and poster presentations. These proceedings include extended contributions, following peer review, of the oral presentations and selected abstracts. Each paper is followed by edited discussion, together with general discussion. We trust that readers will find plenty of interest!

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1 Elliott P, ed. *Methodology of enquiries into disease clustering.* London: Small Area Health Statistics Unit, 1989.
2 Westlake AJ, ed. *Geographical methods in small area health studies.* London: Small Area Health Statistics Unit, 1992.
3 Elliott P, Westlake AJ, Kleinschmidt I, *et al.* The Small Area Health Statistics Unit: a national facility for investigating health around point sources of environmental pollution in the United Kingdom. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1992;**46**:345–9.