

Preface

This special issue is the result of a joint effort between the Panel on Confidentiality and Data Access of the Committee on National Statistics and the Social Science Research Council and the Journal of Official Statistics.

In recent years, something of a crisis has emerged in the survey world where various societal developments and forces have functioned to erode survey response rates. One of these developments is the massive computerization and burgeoning information processing capacities that have become commonplace since the 1960s. Concerns about confidentiality have grown in response to the myriad of societal developments which bombard potential survey respondents. This dual trend of increasing nonresponse and increasing confidentiality concerns is international and can be seen in most countries that conduct government surveys.

In response to these trends, the Panel on Confidentiality and Data Access sponsored a Conference on Disclosure Limitation Approaches and Data Access, held in March 1991. The purpose of this conference was to examine the American situation, both from a statistical and computer science perspective and a social science, legal perspective. The papers presented at this conference provided the basis for most of the articles published in this special issue.

All articles have undergone the JOS editorial process which entails both rigorous peer review and extensive editorial scrutiny. Some of the discussion pieces were originally presented at the conference and these authors were given the opportunity to revise their discussions to reflect changes in the original papers. Other discussion pieces, not previously presented at the conference, were solicited from the broader international statistical community to complement the issue with perspectives and experiences from other countries. Internationally, most government statistical agencies are experiencing similar confidentiality and data access problems and are seeking solutions from similar scientific and legal developments. Statistics Sweden has generously sponsored the work of the Editorial Board and the production of this special issue.

The Panel on Confidentiality and Data Access operated under the aegis of the U.S. Committee on National Statistics of the U.S. National Academy of Science – National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council. Support from the panel has been provided by the National Science Foundation, the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Internal Revenue Service's Statistics of Income Division, the National Institute on Aging, the National Center for Education Statistics, and other U.S. federal agencies through contributions to the work of the Committee on National Statistics. The panel has sought to develop recommendations that can aid government statistical agencies in their stewardship of data for policy decisions and research.

The scope of these articles is broad, in keeping with the nature of the problems addressed by the panel. The articles deal with fundamental ethical and philosophical issues of privacy and information as well as technical issues of statistical disclosure limitation. The scope is

not so broad, however, that it encompasses all issues of importance in privacy and information. In particular, the articles do not deal directly with such issues as regulation of the private-sector information industry, the establishment of commercial encryption standards, and the collection and use of information about individuals by government agencies for regulatory and administrative purposes. Instead they deal with government statistical agencies as they address general issues of privacy in social and policy research, the assessment of disclosure risk, informed consent in surveys, statistical disclosure limitation methods, and legal and administrative issues of confidentiality and data access.

It is the hope of both the panel and the JOS Editorial Board that this special issue will prove a valuable complement to the panel's final report, *Private Lives and Public Policies: Confidentiality and Accessibility of Government Statistics*, which will be published in the fall of 1993.

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