

grams, particularly for education, have not been as broad as in Puerto Rico.

An extensive bibliography and several appendixes which bring together some of the author's previously published articles on labor force definition, measurement, and classification add to the usefulness of this timely study.

GERTRUDE BANCROFT

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ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS¹

IN 1889, Sir Arthur Newsholme first wrote *THE ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS* for "medical officers of health and medical practitioners studying for a diploma in public health." Rewritten in 1899, and again in 1923 when Newsholme lengthened the title to read *THE ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS IN THEIR BEARING ON SOCIAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS*, this book long enjoyed great popularity in the United States as well as in Great Britain. No recent book has been written with the same general approach to the subject matter until publication of *ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS* by Bernard Benjamin. As Mr. Benjamin explains in his Preface, he was asked to revise Newsholme's book but found "that developments in the fields of public health and population as well as the statistical methods associated therewith necessitated a complete rewriting of the text." He states further that "Newsholme's teaching of vital and health statistics was based on the narrative account of the available sources of statistics and of their use in every day conditions. . . . I have tried to copy this method."

In this new *ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS*, the author gives a concise description of sources of data relating to population, marriages, births, deaths, and disease. Official publications and special reports on these data are cited for both the United States and Great Britain. Considerable attention is given to the errors, limitations, and biases to be looked for in the data,

¹ Benjamin, Bernard: *ELEMENTS OF VITAL STATISTICS*. London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., and Chicago, Quadrangle Books, Inc. (\$10.00) 352 pages.

such as inaccurate reporting of age, occupation, etc., under-registration of births and deaths, under-reporting of notifiable diseases, and differences in methods of recording and classifying causes of death. The methods for interpreting demographic and health statistics involve chiefly the use of rates. The various types of rates in common usage are defined and methods of computation and adjustment for factors such as age are described in detail. Included is a brief description of rates developed to measure fertility of populations; gross and net reproduction rates are given for England and Wales in 1954 and the uses of other indices of fertility are illustrated. Life tables are explained and several methods for computing abridged life tables are described. This is the most technical section of the book, but obviously it could not be avoided.

More than half of this book is devoted to morbidity statistics (Chapters 8–19). The data assembled cover a wide range of health problems and the discussion is both interesting and illuminating. Sources of data and methods of analyzing them are described with illustrations from many different studies. The importance of statistical studies and surveys for evaluating public health problems is well demonstrated. Infectious diseases, tuberculosis, cancer, and mental diseases are the subjects of special chapters; and in other chapters, statistics on maternity and child welfare, health of school children, and of industrial groups are reviewed. Potential uses of hospital statistics and of records of general practitioners in the National Health Insurance program for the measurement of sickness experience and of health services are commented on briefly. Finally, there is a short discussion of the problems associated with field surveys.

Although most of the data and nearly all the references to special studies given in this book are for Great Britain, the methods described and the findings relative to the association of various personal characteristics and of social and economic conditions with the risk of death and of disease are equally valid in the United States. Comparability of basic vital statistics in the two countries is given special attention. The book is clearly written and provides a wealth of information on current health statistics and on trends. It is a valuable

reference book for professional health workers and for others interested in understanding statistics in this field.

DOROTHY G. WIEHL

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CONTRACEPTION AND FERTILITY AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN

IN most Western countries the introduction of birth control and the dissemination of contraceptive knowledge have led to a rapid decline, and in some social groups the virtual disappearance, of the large family. As reproduction increasingly becomes a matter for conscious individual choice, the study of population moves further away from biology and becomes a problem for the social sciences. But although demographers have agreed that the declines in Western birth rates were due to deliberate decisions to adopt some method of family limitation, the subject has often been considered too delicate to investigate, and with the exception of the Indianapolis inquiry and the study of family limitation undertaken on behalf of the British Royal Commission on Population, there have been no large-scale studies of unselected groups which aimed to assess the extent of the practice in modern communities. The study by Freedman, Whelpton and Campbell,¹ based on a national probability sample of 2,713 native white married women, aged 18 to 39, is the first attempt to give figures which are valid for the United States as a whole. A long and detailed questionnaire, relating to reproductive behaviour and to ideas and ideals as to family size was administered to these women, and the book consists of an analysis of the replies.

As was to be expected a number of interesting, and to some degree unexpected, results emerge. In the first place, no fewer than one-third of the couples were classified as having some impairment of fecundity, and 10 per cent were definitely sterile, 9 per cent as a result of operations which had a sterilizing effect,

¹ Freedman, Ronald; Whelpton, Pascal K.; and Campbell, Arthur A.: *FAMILY PLANNING, STERILITY AND POPULATION GROWTH*. New York, McGraw Hill Company, 1959. pp. xix + 515, \$9.50.