



**Statistical Policy
Working Paper 22**

**Report on Statistical Disclosure
Limitation Methodology**

**Prepared by
Subcommittee on Disclosure Limitation Methodology
Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology**

Statistical Policy Office
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget

May 1994

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(May 1994)

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PREFACE

The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology was organized by OMB in 1975 to investigate issues of data quality affecting Federal statistics. Members of the committee, selected by OMB on the basis of their individual expertise and interest in statistical methods, serve in a personal capacity rather than as agency representatives. The committee conducts its work through subcommittees that are organized to study particular issues. The subcommittees are open by invitation to Federal employees who wish to participate. Working papers are prepared by the subcommittee members and reflect only their individual and collective ideas.

The Subcommittee on Disclosure Limitation Methodology was formed in 1992 to update the work presented in Statistical Policy Working Paper 2, Report on Statistical Disclosure and Disclosure-Avoidance Techniques published in 1978. The Report on Statistical Disclosure Limitation Methodology, Statistical Policy Working Paper 22, discusses both tables and microdata and describes current practices of the principal Federal statistical agencies. The report includes a tutorial, guidelines, and recommendations for good practice; recommendations for further research; and an annotated bibliography. The Subcommittee plans to organize seminars and workshops in order to facilitate further communication concerning disclosure limitation.

The Subcommittee on Disclosure Limitation Methodology was chaired by Nancy Kirkendall of the Energy Information Administration, Department of Energy.

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Acknowledgements

In early 1992, an ad hoc interagency committee on Disclosure Risk Analysis was organized by Hermann Habermann, Office of Management and Budget. A subcommittee was formed to look at methodological issues and to analyze results of an informal survey of agency practices. That subcommittee became a Subcommittee of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) in early 1993. The Subcommittee would like to thank Hermann Habermann for getting us started, and Maria Gonzalez and the FCSM for adopting us and providing an audience for our paper.

Special thanks to Subcommittee member Laura Zayatz for her participation during the last two years. She helped to organize the review of papers, contributed extensively to the annotated bibliography and wrote the chapters on microdata and research issues in this working paper. In addition, she provided considerable input to the discussion of disclosure limitation methods in tables. Her knowledge of both theoretical and practical issues in disclosure limitation were invaluable.

Special thanks also go to Subcommittee member Bill Arends for his participation during the last two years. He helped in the review of papers, analyzed the results of the informal survey of agency practices, contacted agencies to get more detailed information and wrote the chapter on agency practices. He and Mary Ann Higgs pulled together information from all authors and prepared three drafts and the final version of this working paper, making them all look polished and professional. He also arranged for printing the draft reports.

Tom Jabine, Ginny deWolf and Larry Cox are relative newcomers to the subcommittee. Ginny joined in the fall of 1992, Tom and Larry in early 1993. Tom and Larry both participated in the work of the 1978 Subcommittee that prepared Statistical Policy Working Paper 2, providing the current Subcommittee with valuable continuity. Tom, Ginny and Larry all contributed extensively to the introductory and recommended practices chapters, and Tom provided thorough and thoughtful review and comment on all chapters. Larry provided particularly helpful insights on the research chapter.

Special thanks to Tore Dalenius, another participant in the preparation of Statistical Policy Working Paper 2, for his careful review of this paper. Thanks also to FCSM members Daniel Kasprzyk and Cynthia Clark for their thorough reviews of multiple drafts.

The Subcommittee would like to acknowledge three people who contributed to the annotated bibliography: Dorothy Wellington, who retired from the Environmental Protection Agency; Russell Hudson, Social Security Administration; and Bob Burton, National Center for Education Statistics.

Finally, the Subcommittee owes a debt of gratitude to Mary Ann A. Higgs of the National Agricultural Statistics Service for her efforts in preparing the report.

Nancy Kirkendall chaired the subcommittee and wrote the primer and tables chapters.