Book Reviews

Editor: Ananda Sen

An Introduction to STATA for Health Researchers
Svend Juul, Morten Frydenberg
Stata Press, 2014, 346 pages, £49.99, paperback
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Readership: Researchers and analysts in the health industry with a range of experience using STATA.

The book is broken up into four main sections: The Basics of STATA, Data Management, Analysis and Graphs. There is also an additional, shorter section on advanced topics. The basics section, comprising four chapters, is an overview of STATA that is comprehensive and well put together and will allow even those who have never opened STATA before to get comfortable with the software's setup. Data management is covered in detail, providing instruction on how to do the most common data management tasks. This section contains ten chapters. This part of the book, more than any, reads like a reference manual, and particularly for beginning users, it could benefit from a working example applying many of these concepts to a single dataset. Nevertheless, the details covered are useful and easy to follow, and the exercises in the Appendix allow some practice for beginners. I particularly enjoyed Chapter 10 'Taking good care of your data', which offers advice on using and managing data throughout a research project. This chapter is an overview of some 'best practice' tips that even experienced researchers would benefit from reviewing.

While impossible to cover every aspect of statistical analysis in a single book, this book does a nice job of covering the most common methods, from simple to complex, with an emphasis on the common methods seen in the field of health research. The authors do not make any assumptions about the knowledge level of the reader on these methods but provide enough details and interpretation to aid a variety of users. The five chapters in the analysis section also integrate information and sample syntax on how to produce relevant graphics for each analysis type. Following and making sense of these graphics statements is aided by first reading through the Graphs chapter (Chapter 16), which details common formats of graph commands and options to customise graphs, which I believe to be one of STATA's great features. The Graphs chapter also covers the generation of some commonly used graphs (histograms, boxplots, etc.) in further detail. The Advanced Topics chapter (Chapter 17) touches briefly on some of the programming capabilities that STATA has, and offers enough detail on topics such as macros and loops to get one started in programming within STATA.

Although this book claims to provide an introduction to STATA, I find that it would not only be useful for novice STATA users but would also be beneficial to experienced STATA users. The detailed table of contents and index make finding specific topics and examples within the book a breeze. The book is ideal to keep on hand as a reference manual.

Melissa Plegue: *petrelim@umich.edu*
Department of Family Medicine
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA