

Introduction to Biostatistics (BIOS 4120)
Breheny

Assignment 1

Due: Tuesday, February 3

1. One study on slavery in America estimated that “11.9% of slaves were skilled craftsmen.” This estimate was based on the records of thirty plantations in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. The study is making a generalization about a population based on a sample.
 - (a) In this study, what is the population of interest?
 - (b) In this study, what does the sample consist of?
 - (c) Could the study’s generalization be biased? If so, what type of bias would this be?
2. A Dutch study of rheumatoid arthritis found that patients who experienced more pain were more likely to respond to a health survey. In their questionnaire, 2% of respondents said that they experience no pain associated with their condition.
 - (a) Is the “2%” number an estimate or a parameter of interest?
 - (b) Is the “2%” number a biased estimate? If so, what type of bias is present?
 - (c) Is the true percentage of individuals with rheumatoid arthritis who suffer no pain likely to be less than 2%, greater than 2%, or equal to 2%?
3. The ICON site for this course contains an article by Abramowicz *et al.* (2008) on the epidemiology of ultrasound. Read the section on the second page titled “Low Birth Weight.”
 - (a) The authors discuss the use of animal studies to make inferences about humans. What sampling concept that we discussed in class does this violate?
 - (b) Are the observational studies and controlled experiments in agreement?
 - (c) Do the authors seem to place more emphasis on the observational studies or the randomized controlled experiments?
 - (d) It is not explicitly stated in the article, but were the controlled experiments randomized controlled, double-blind experiments?
4. The National Institutes of Health conducted a randomized controlled double-blind experiment to determine whether vitamin C prevents and/or cures the common cold. Subjects were assigned to one of four groups:

Group	Prevention	Therapy
1	placebo	placebo
2	vitamin C	placebo
3	placebo	vitamin C
4	vitamin C	vitamin C

All subjects were given six capsules a day for prevention, and an additional six capsules a day for therapy if they came down with a cold. In group 1, both sets of capsules just contained the placebo. In group 2, the prevention capsules had vitamin C while the therapy capsules were filled with the placebo. Group 3 was the reverse. In group 4, all the capsules were filled with vitamin C.

- (a) Groups 2 and 4 had the fewest colds, while groups 3 and 4 had the shortest colds. Does this provide evidence that vitamin C is effective at preventing and/or curing colds?
 - (b) Could the results in part (a) be affected by confounding?
 - (c) Investigators later discovered that the blinding of subjects failed in this study (vitamin C has a characteristic sour taste that the placebo lacked; this was noticed by subjects who broke the capsules). Based on this new information, could the results in part (a) be affected by perception bias?
 - (d) Among those subjects who remained blinded, vitamin C had no effect. Could this comparison, in which we have restricted the analysis to include only those patients who remained blinded, be affected by confounding?
 - (e) Based on all of the information you have been provided with in this question, do you think this experiment provides evidence that vitamin C is effective at preventing and/or curing colds? Or do you think that the study is inconclusive?
5. A 1979 randomized trial was performed comparing a surgical treatment for angina pectoris (chest pains due to obstruction of the coronary arteries) to a placebo (non-surgical medical management). In the study, 6 of the patients randomized to receive surgery died before they could be operated on. There was a subsequent debate over how best to analyze the data. Some favored approach A, in which all patients were analyzed as they were randomized. Others favored approach B, in which those 6 patients were excluded on the grounds that they never actually received the surgical treatment that they were randomized to. Which approach do you think is better? Why?
6. True or False: In a hypothesis test, the null hypothesis can be summarized as “nothing is going on besides chance variation.”
7. The null hypothesis is a hypothesis about (i) the sample (ii) the population