

MY457/MY557

Causal Inference for Experimental and Observational Studies

Week 2: Randomized Controlled Trials

Paper: Zhang, N., Gereke, J., & Baldassarri, D. (2022). Everyday discrimination in public spaces: a field experiment in the Milan metro. *European Sociological Review*, 38(5), 679-693.

1. General

- a. What is the purpose/relevance of this study? What research gap does this paper try to fill?
- b. Why do the authors conduct a field experiment? Or put differently: Why can we not just collect all “bench-sitting data” in the Italian tube system and then test whether “sitting-rates” differ by race?
- c. Why was the field experiment conducted twice? Do you see a problem with the timing of the field experiment?

2. Measurement

- a. What is the treatment? What is the outcome (variable)? Which exact causal question do the authors try to answer?
- b. What is the unit of analysis / what are the observations?
- c. Why is it difficult to measure everyday discrimination?
- d. Why do the authors use three (treatment/control) groups / different types of treatments (instead of two)?

3. Research design

- a. How would you assess whether the field experiment is (likely to be) internally valid? Do the authors provide supporting tests for the identifying assumption(s)?
- b. What are the key concerns why this field experiment may not be internally validity?
- c. Do the authors remove some observations? If so, why? If not, would you recommend doing so? Discuss.
- d. How do the authors measure individuals’ demographics? Do you see a problem with that?

4. Heterogeneity and mechanisms

- a. According to the authors, what are the two competing theories that explain everyday discrimination? How do they test which one is (more likely to be) true? Discuss their approach.
- b. Which heterogeneous effects do the authors examine? Which other ones would you have assessed?

Final question:

- How would you assess everyday discrimination? Can you define a research design where treatment assignment is (kind of) random, without you (the researcher) directly having control over treatment status?