3. Alzheimer's disease results in a loss of cognitive ability beyond what is expected with typical aging. A local newspaper published an article with the following headline.

> Study Finds Strong Association Between Smoking and Alzheimer's

The article reported that a study tracked the medical histories of 21,123 men and women for 23 years. The article stated that, for those who smoked at least two packs of cigarettes a day, the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease was 2.57 times the risk for those who did not smoke.

(a) Identify the explanatory and response variables in the study.

Explanatory variable:

Response variable:

(b) Is the study described in the article an observational study or an experiment? Explain.

(c) Exercise status (regular weekly exercise versus no regular weekly exercise) was mentioned in the article as a possible confounding variable. Explain how exercise status could be a confounding variable in the study.

4. A company manufactures model rockets that require igniters to launch. Once an igniter is used to launch a rocket, the igniter cannot be reused. Sometimes an igniter fails to operate correctly, and the rocket does not launch. The company estimates that the overall failure rate, defined as the percent of all igniters that fail to operate correctly, is 15 percent.

   A company engineer develops a new igniter, called the super igniter, with the intent of lowering the failure rate. To test the performance of the super igniters, the engineer uses the following process.

   Step 1: One super igniter is selected at random and used in a rocket.

   Step 2: If the rocket launches, another super igniter is selected at random and used in a rocket.

   Step 2 is repeated until the process stops. The process stops when a super igniter fails to operate correctly or 32 super igniters have successfully launched rockets, whichever comes first. Assume that super igniter failures are independent.

   (a) If the failure rate of the super igniters is 15 percent, what is the probability that the first 30 super igniters selected using the testing process successfully launch rockets?

   (b) Given that the first 30 super igniters successfully launch rockets, what is the probability that the first failure occurs on the thirty-first or the thirty-second super igniter tested if the failure rate of the super igniters is 15 percent?

   (c) Given that the first 30 super igniters successfully launch rockets, is it reasonable to believe that the failure rate of the super igniters is less than 15 percent? Explain.

AP® STATISTICS
2016 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

Intent of Question

The primary goals of this question were to assess a student's ability to (1) identify explanatory and response variables from the description of a research study; (2) indicate and justify whether a study is observational or experimental; and (3) explain what confounding means in the context of a particular study with a specific confounding variable.

Solution

Part (a):

The explanatory variable is the person's degree of cigarette smoking. The response variable is whether the person develops Alzheimer's disease during the course of the study.

Part (b):

This is an observational study because the people in the study were not assigned to a certain degree of cigarette smoking. Rather, the degree of cigarette smoking for each person was passively observed and recorded, not manipulated by the researchers.

Part (c):

A confounding variable is one that is related to the explanatory variable and possibly influences the response variable. In this case it seems plausible that people who exercise more regularly might be more health conscious, therefore, less likely to smoke cigarettes than people who do not exercise regularly. Similarly, it's possible that people who exercise more regularly are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than people who do not exercise regularly. If both of these relationships turn out to be true, then smoking cigarettes would be associated with developing Alzheimer's disease due to the association of both variables with exercise, even if there were no cause-and-effect relationship between smoking cigarettes and developing Alzheimer's disease.

Scoring

Parts (a), (b), and (c) are scored as essentially correct (E), partially correct (P), or incorrect (I).

Part (a) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if both variables are described correctly. A correct description includes some degree of status of the variables, such as smoking versus not smoking and developing Alzeimer's versus not developing Alzheimer's.

Partially correct (P) if one variable is described correctly and one is not described correctly;
OR
if neither variable is described correctly but smoking is mentioned as the explanatory variable, and Alzheimer's is mentioned as the response variable;
OR
if the explanatory and response variables are correctly described but are interchanged.

Incorrect (I) if the response does not meet the criteria for E or P.

Question 3 (continued)

Note: Describing the variables only as smoking and Alzheimer's without a reference to levels/status is not sufficient for E. But making the connection between smoking and explanatory and between Alzheimer's and response is sufficient for P.

Part (b) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides the correct explanation that smoking status was not assigned *OR* that smoking status was only observed.

Partially correct (P) if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides a correct explanation but does not refer to smoking status as the variable that would have been assigned had it been an experiment; for instance, by simply stating that treatment was not assigned;
OR
if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides an explanation that says that smoking is observed (or that smoking status and Alzheimer's are observed) without a modifier for observed (such as, only, just, merely, simply) *AND* without indicating that treatments were not assigned.

Incorrect (I) if the response does not meet the criteria for E or P.

Notes:

- A response that states the explanatory variable was not assigned without naming smoking status is sufficient for E if the explanatory variable is correctly defined in part (a).
- A response that states that smoking status is ONLY observed (or that smoking status and Alzheimer's are ONLY observed) is sufficient for E.
- A response that says that Alzheimer's is observed without mentioning smoking status is scored I.
- A response that provides an incorrect statistical explanation (such as, "the study is observational because an experiment must have a control group") lowers the score in part (b) by one level (from E to P or from P to I).
- If Alzheimer's is given as the explanatory variable and smoking is given as the response variable in part (a), then part (b) should be scored accordingly with the two variables interchanged.
- Any phrase that refers to the "effect of smoking on Alzheimer's" or "the association between smoking and Alzheimer's" (rather than smoking status) should be ignored.

Part (c) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if the response includes the following two components:
1. Provides a reasonable explanation that exercise status is related to smoking status.
2. States that exercise status might influence whether the person develops Alzheimer's disease.

Partially correct (P) if the response describes only one of the two components;
OR
if the response only describes how smoking and exercise jointly influence whether the person develops Alzheimer's;
OR