

Chapter 1 - Introduction to Data

Smoking habits of UK residents. (1.10, p. 20) A survey was conducted to study the smoking habits of UK residents. Below is a data matrix displaying a portion of the data collected in this survey. Note that “£” stands for British Pounds Sterling, “cig” stands for cigarettes, and “N/A” refers to a missing component of the data.

	sex	age	marital	grossIncome	smoke	amtWeekends	amtWeekdays
1	Female	42	Single	Under £2,600	Yes	12 cig/day	12 cig/day
2	Male	44	Single	£10,400 to £15,600	No	N/A	N/A
3	Male	53	Married	Above £36,400	Yes	6 cig/day	6 cig/day
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮
1691	Male	40	Single	£2,600 to £5,200	Yes	8 cig/day	8 cig/day

- (a) What does each row of the data matrix represent?
Each row represents the respondents demographics and answers to the survey questions.
- (b) How many participants were included in the survey?
There are 1691 observations in the data set.
- (c) Indicate whether each variable in the study is numerical or categorical. If numerical, identify as continuous or discrete. If categorical, indicate if the variable is ordinal.
- sex: categorical
age: numerical discrete
marital: categorical
grossIncome: categorical ordinal
smoke: categorical
amtWeekends: categorical ordinal
amtWeekdays: categorical ordinal
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Cheaters, scope of inference. (1.14, p. 29) Exercise 1.5 introduces a study where researchers studying the relationship between honesty, age, and self-control conducted an experiment on 160 children between the ages of 5 and 15¹. The researchers asked each child to toss a fair coin in private and to record the outcome (white or black) on a paper sheet, and said they would only reward children who report white. Half the students were explicitly told not to cheat and the others were not given any explicit instructions. Differences were observed in the cheating rates in the instruction and no instruction groups, as well as some differences across children's characteristics within each group.

- (a) Identify the population of interest and the sample in this study.
The population of interest is children between the ages of 5 and 15. The sample of the study is the 160 children that were chosen to participate.
- (b) Comment on whether or not the results of the study can be generalized to the population, and if the findings of the study can be used to establish causal relationships.
If the 160 children in the sample were selected randomly and are representative of the population, they results may be generalized to the entire population. A causal relationship can be established because there was a treatment group, those explicitly told not to cheat, and the control group that was not.

¹Alessandro Bucciol and Marco Piovesan. "Luck or cheating? A field experiment on honesty with children". In: Journal of Economic Psychology 32.1 (2011), pp. 73-78. Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1307694

Reading the paper. (1.28, p. 31) Below are excerpts from two articles published in the NY Times:

(a) An article titled Risks: Smokers Found More Prone to Dementia states the following:

“Researchers analyzed data from 23,123 health plan members who participated in a voluntary exam and health behavior survey from 1978 to 1985, when they were 50-60 years old. 23 years later, about 25% of the group had dementia, including 1,136 with Alzheimer’s disease and 416 with vascular dementia. After adjusting for other factors, the researchers concluded that pack-a- day smokers were 37% more likely than nonsmokers to develop dementia, and the risks went up with increased smoking; 44% for one to two packs a day; and twice the risk for more than two packs.”

Based on this study, can we conclude that smoking causes dementia later in life? Explain your reasoning. This is an observational study without a clear randomized treatment so a causal relationship cannot be inferred.

(b) Another article titled The School Bully Is Sleepy states the following:

“The University of Michigan study, collected survey data from parents on each child’s sleep habits and asked both parents and teachers to assess behavioral concerns. About a third of the students studied were identified by parents or teachers as having problems with disruptive behavior or bullying. The researchers found that children who had behavioral issues and those who were identified as bullies were twice as likely to have shown symptoms of sleep disorders.”.

A friend of yours who read the article says, “The study shows that sleep disorders lead to bullying in school children.” Is this statement justified? If not, how best can you describe the conclusion that can be drawn from this study?

This is an observational study without clear control and treatment groups, so claiming a causal relationship between sleep disorders and bullying cannot be made. The study shows that there is a correlation between sleep disorders and bullying, but may be caused by some other unknown factor.

Exercise and mental health. (1.34, p. 35) A researcher is interested in the effects of exercise on mental health and he proposes the following study: Use stratified random sampling to ensure representative proportions of 18-30, 31-40 and 41-55 year olds from the population. Next, randomly assign half the subjects from each age group to exercise twice a week, and instruct the rest not to exercise. Conduct a mental health exam at the beginning and at the end of the study, and compare the results.

(a) What type of study is this?

This type of study is a randomized experiment.

(b) What are the treatment and control groups in this study?

The treatment group is the study participants that were asked to exercise twice a week and the control group are those asked not to exercise. I'm concerned however that those asked to not exercise are also given a treatment.

(c) Does this study make use of blocking? If so, what is the blocking variable?

Yes, the groups are blocked by age group.

(d) Does this study make use of blinding?

No, participants were given instructions to exercise or to not exercise.

(e) Comment on whether or not the results of the study can be used to establish a causal relationship between exercise and mental health, and indicate whether or not the conclusions can be generalized to the population at large.

The study is lacking clear control and treatment groups which will not account for outside causes in the relationship between exercise and mental health.

(f) Suppose you are given the task of determining if this proposed study should get funding. Would you have any reservations about the study proposal?

I would have reservations about the study because it doesn't seem to account for participants initial activity level.