

rmcorrShiny: A web application for repeated measures correlation

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DOI:

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Submitted:

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Summary

The most common techniques for calculating the correlation (e.g., Pearson correlation) between two variables are based on the assumption that each data point of paired measures represents an independent observation. Take, for example, a study that calculates the correlation between a person's age and the volume of a region of the brain. In this example, each individual contributes a data point consisting of a brain volume and an age. However, it is not uncommon for studies to use repeated measures designs, such as a study that collected the brain region volume and age at two different time points (Raz et al., 2005). Each participant in this study contributed two (repeated) data points of paired measures. Repeated measures of the same individual are no longer independent observations and should not be analyzed as such. Erroneously modeling repeated measures data as independent observations is surprisingly prevalent in published research, even though such results will generally be misleading (Aarts, Verhage, Veenvliet, Dolan, & Van Der Sluis, 2014; Bakdash, Marusich, Kenworthy, Twedt, & Zaroukian, 2020; Lazic, 2010). A common solution to this problem is to use aggregated data: first taking an average of the repeated measures data of each person so that each person again contributes a single paired data point, and then calculating the correlation from these averages (between-participants).

Instead of aggregation, an alternative solution is to calculate the repeated measures correlation (Bakdash & Marusich, 2017; Bland & Altman, 1995a, 1995b), which assesses the common intra-individual (within-participants) association for paired repeated measures data. The repeated measures correlation technique is conceptually similar to a null multi-level model, with a common slope but varying intercept for each individual. Calculating the repeated measures correlation has multiple potential benefits. It is simpler and more straightforward to implement than a multilevel model, with the potential for far greater statistical power than aggregation. It may also provide insights into patterns among individuals that aggregation may obscure (Bakdash & Marusich, 2017).

Statement of need

We previously developed the `rmcorr` R package (Bakdash & Marusich, 2020) to make the repeated measures correlation technique widely available for researchers; it has since also been adapted as a function in the `Pingouin` statistics package (Vallat, 2018) for Python. However, the use of both of these packages requires some facility with programming languages and thus they are not universally accessible.

Here we introduce `rmcorrShiny`, a `Shiny` (Chang et al., 2021) app, which provides an intuitive graphical interface for computing and plotting the repeated measures correlation

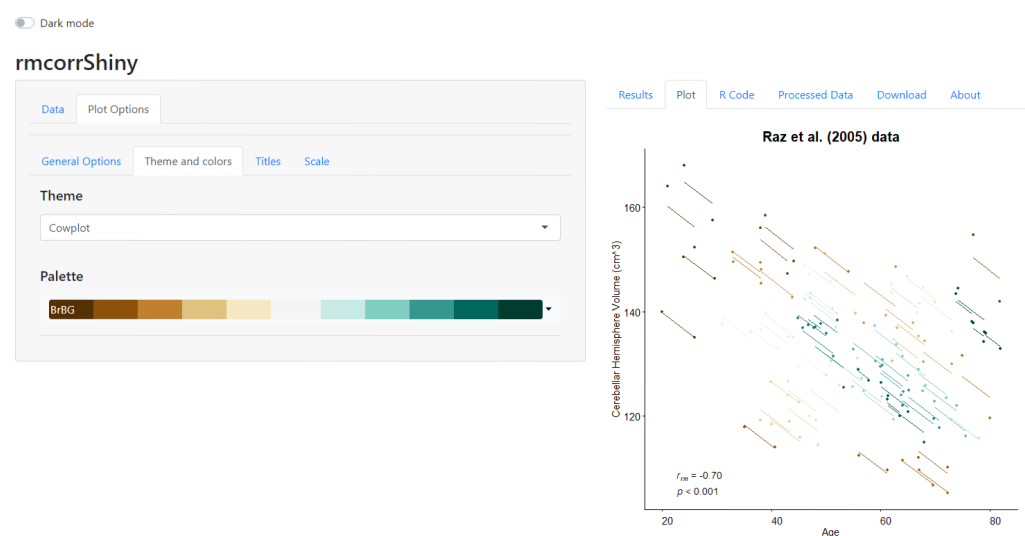


Figure 1: Screenshot of the `rmcorrShiny` app, showing an input tab with **Discuss** options and the Plot output tab, using example data from Raz et al. (2005)

(see Figure 1 below). The primary features of `rmcorrShiny` include:

- The ability to import data in a variety of different file formats or to use one of four included sample datasets.
- The display of raw output from `rmcorr` as well as formatted output for reporting results.
- Multiple options to generate and customize `rmcorr` plots (making use of the `ggplot2` package (Wickham, 2016; Wickham et al., 2020) and palettes from the `RColorBrewer` (Neuwirth, 2014) and `pals` (Wright, 2019) packages).
- Customized R code using the data and options chosen by the user that can be directly pasted and executed in R to produce the same output as in `rmcorrShiny`.
- The ability to download plots (in multiple file formats) or a .zip file of all output.

Note that many features in `rmcorrShiny`, including the panel interface, were based on modifications of code from the `Raincloud-shiny` app (Forn-Cuní, 2021).

Screenshot Added a placeholder figure. The quality is very mediocre. Will save it uncompressed for the final version. LM: I think using the plot output tab is good for the screenshot, but maybe the choosing variables tab for the input? we can talk about it

`rmcorrShiny` can be used in a web browser [here](#) or the package can be installed from Github and run in R, using the following commands (**BIG TODO**):

```
devtools::install_github("lmarusich/rmcorrShiny")
library(rmcorrShiny)
rmcorrShiny::rmcorrShiny_run()
```

Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge contributions from....

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