

Observational Studies Aims and Scope

Observational Studies is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes papers on all aspects of observational studies. Researchers from all fields that make use of observational studies are encouraged to submit papers.

William Cochran defined an observational study as an empiric investigation in which "...the objective is to elucidate cause-and-effect relationships...[in which] it is not feasible to use controlled experimentation, in the sense of being able to impose the procedures or treatments whose effects it is desired to discover, or to assign subjects at random to different procedures."¹ Observational studies include "broken randomized experiments," in which encouragement to take a treatment is randomly assigned but the treatment itself is not imposed by random assignment (e.g., some people may not comply with the random assignment). Observational studies are important because randomized experimentation is sometimes unethical or infeasible. Observational studies also can be useful in providing less expensively obtained preliminary results that can lead to further testing in randomized experiments. Observational studies have played important roles in providing evidence on many topics. For example, observational studies provided the key evidence that smoking causes lung cancer.

There are several journals that deal with observational studies in specific fields, but this is the first journal that is devoted to observational studies across the wide range of fields that make use of them such as criminology, economics, education, epidemiology, medicine, political science, psychology, public health, public policy, and sociology. Topics covered by the journal include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Study protocols for observational studies. Before examining the outcomes that will form the basis for an observational study's conclusions, a study protocol should describe the design, exclusion criteria, primary and secondary outcomes, and proposed analyses. Following a publicly available study protocol makes a study more convincing and transparent. A public plan is subject to public scrutiny before the study begins, perhaps leading to a better study. In addition to publishing study protocols, the journal will publish comments on the study protocols and allow the authors of the study protocol to respond to the comments.
- Methodologies for observational studies. This includes statistical methods for all aspects of observational studies and methods for the conduct of observational studies such as methods for collecting data. In addition to novel methodological articles, the journal welcomes review articles on methodology relevant to observational studies as well as illustrations/explanations of methodologies that may have been developed in a more technical article in another journal.
- Software for observational studies. The journal welcomes articles describing software relevant to observational studies.
- Analyses of observational studies. The journal will publish analyses of observational studies. The journal encourages submissions of analyses that illustrate use of sound methodology and conduct of observational studies.