

Overview

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

Statement From the Journal's Founding Editor, Dylan Small

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.

1. Cochran, W.G. The Planning of Observational Studies of Human Populations. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (General)*, 1965; 128: 234-255.

Scope

Topics covered by *Observational Studies* include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Methodology/Practice.** The journal considers original research detailing the development of statistical methods for all aspects of design, conduct, analysis, and interpretation of observational studies—including rigorous causal inference methodology. Applications are an important element of methodological research; original research featuring the practice of observational studies front-and-center should use principled, state-of-the-art approaches and/or clearly communicate a novel angle to the philosophy or interpretation of such an analysis in a way that would be of interest to a technical audience.
- **Tutorials.** The journal considers review/tutorial articles on methodology relevant to observational studies as well as illustrations/explanations of methodologies that may have been developed in a more technical article. The journal also welcomes articles describing software relevant to observational studies.
- **Protocols.** The journal considers detailed protocols for prospective and retrospective observational studies (i.e., a detailed description of the design, exclusion criteria, primary and secondary outcomes, and analysis plans). 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.
- **Special issues.** On a biennial basis, the journal releases public calls for contributed commentaries on a seminal paper. The journal occasionally invites specific commentaries on an original research paper or invites authors to write reports following a Data Challenge at the American Causal Inference Conference.

For more information on journal article submissions, please read the journal's documentation on **Article Types** and **Manuscript Preparation**.