International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

The Impact of Statistics in Human Psychology

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Abstract

The emergence of the field of statistics was both an inevitable and necessary occurrence given the advancements in the world of science. In psychology, the ability to understand statistics is rapidly becoming an increasingly specialized field because of the growing reliance on quantitative methods in research – not just qualitative. An understanding of statistics is vital for psychologists, both for the purposes of applying knowledge to enhance our community's understanding of the behavior of individuals, and as a vital part of education in psychology. Psychologists today may want to perform research with quantitative components. And even if we don't perform research – and not all of us do – a fundamental understanding of the major effects of research is very beneficial to our professional work in any case.

Keywords: Statistics, Psychology, Analytics, Data Visualisation

Introduction and abstract to Statistics in Human Psychology

The field of human psychology has made tremendous strides in understanding the mind and behavior of individuals. The human mind and experience are influenced by different factors including genetics, past experiences, unconscious mental states, cultural traditions, social interactions, and economies. Understanding the causes of a vast span of psychological processes and phenomena is not possible without employing statistical methods. This tool helps establish relationships between variables, aids us in generalizing findings, and validates theoretical and practical models. The importance of this tool has been highly valued in the cognitive science community, particularly among researchers in fields that are utilizing neurocognitive studies and brain imaging. Given the high demand for this tool in the field of human psychology today, the paper begins with an abstract, which looks into the need for statistics in reasoning conducted in psychology research. This essay will review how statistics serve psychological theories and support the reasoning of psychological activities. It will indicate the primitive formation of the branch of statistics in the field and demonstrate why solid statistical tools are important to draw valid conclusions from psychological data. Furthermore, this paper underlines the value of statistics using a basic reason given via 'effect size' and its significance in adopting quantitative and qualitative approaches. Overall, this form of information is important for a psychology student applying statistics and seeking a good fundamental benefit in psychology. (Hayes, 2020)(Mertler et al., 2021)

Historical Development of Statistical Methods in Psychology

Following Francis Galton's application of statistics to the psychological field at the end of the 19th century, E. B. Titchener, Joseph Jastrow, Karl Pearson, and Louis Leon Thurstone, among others, continued its development. One of the first and most important breakthroughs is attributed to the work of Edwin G. Boring who, near the mid-20th century, allowed the integration of statistical methods into psychological research, thus revolutionizing how research was conducted in psychological research. Nevertheless,

despite its brief history, the bulk of its development has been pioneered and molded by a relatively small group of specialists directly involved with, or working closely with, the editors and developers of statistical methods and research. (Anggoro et al.2024)

It seems appropriate, however, to provide some rudimentary background context to the development of statistical methods in the psychological research field, to suggest a more empirical view of the historical impact that has helped to shape modern psychological research. The goal of the present investigation, then, is neither to provide an exhaustive review of significant developments in statistical theory nor to consider how the concepts and research processes being developed by many key historical figures in psychology have been replaced, improved, or otherwise affected by contemporary developments. Methodological advances have been spurred on by a variety of factors, including changes in the broader societal culture, technological developments, and advances in the philosophy of psychological science. At the very least, the knowledge of these developments has the potential to allow researchers and their students to expand their understanding of the larger traditions within the field of psychology, and the various research dynamics that continue to evolve. (Spytska2023)

Descriptlive Statistics in Psychological Research

Descriptive statistics are the preliminary measures for summarizing and presenting the data collected from psychological research. Mean signifies the average of the collected data. Median refers to the 50th percentile of the data. Mode points out the most frequently occurring data. The standard deviation gives a compact form of summarizing the variation from the mean or center. These descriptive measures help represent the collected data in a more summarized way. Descriptive statistics have more importance in psychological studies because they possess various ways to group, compare, present, and interpret data. A researcher can depict the data in a quick and summarized fashion by using various graphical and tabular presentations such as frequency tables, cumulative frequency tables, pie charts, bar graphs, histograms, error bars, and stem-and-leaf plots around the central tendency.

Some studies require a group comparison strategy; researchers preferably present through comparative bar graphs and error bar diagrams. Researchers can also present the variability of data and highlight the difference between the groups using comparative error bars. Descriptive statistics provide a perfect ground to infer the significance of a study and represent the findings in a correct perspective. Descriptive statistics alone are not sufficient to ensure that the results from these explanations will be insightful in recruiting. They merely explain the 'what' of the study and narrate quite a little of 'how' and 'why'. Descriptive statistics also do not illustrate the evidence of an experimental impact value on a common field scenario or the statistical relevance of impact. For example, data collected from an experimental group about students in a classroom regarding their average marks in a statistics paper can tactfully depict the findings in a more representative way. Some additional items include a percentage of students who got above average marks, those with below average marks, some scored marks and some marks out of , and then there are some who scored one or less than one mark out of . The above strategy could assist in representing the data more descriptively about that classroom. (Shabbir & Wisdom, 2020)

Inferential Statistics and Hypothesis Testing

In the discipline of psychology, researchers commonly use inferential statistics when conducting hypothesis tests. At its core, inferential statistics provides researchers with necessary data to complete hypothesis testing and to further their research. Hypothesis testing occurs when researchers use inferential

statistics to determine a test statistic, which will help generate a p-value. Researchers then use this p-value to determine if there is enough evidence to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis, which assumes no relationship or difference between the two groups being tested.

A popular statement used to validate this conclusion is that some outcome "is statistically significant" at a given alpha level. The alpha, or significance level, used to determine statistical significance is usually set to 0.05. There are many aspects that contribute to the final analysis of the data, and these are critical for drawing proper conclusions. Four aspects that must be decided upon prior to indicating that results are significant are: the alpha level, the null and alternative hypothesis, the test used, and the interpretation of the p-value. Choosing a test to apply to a given set of data is necessary for valid conclusions to be drawn. Many tests set different requirements for the data: linear vs. non-linear, interval vs. ratio, number of groups being studied, etc. It is important to apply the correct test because when the wrong test is applied, it leads to an incorrect conclusion. When conducting research or any test, there are four possible outcomes: 1) to reject a false null hypothesis, 2) to fail to reject a true null hypothesis, 3) to reject a true null hypothesis, and 4) to fail to reject a false null hypothesis. (Rubin, 2021)(Di Leo & Sardanelli, 2020)

Type I error occurs when a researcher rejects the null hypothesis even when it is true. The probability of committing a Type I error is denoted by the alpha level. The alpha level is set by the researcher after considering the problem being researched. Type I error corresponds with the significance level. The lower the alpha level, the lower the probability of committing a Type I error. Type II error occurs when a researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis when it is actually false. The probability of committing a Type II error is denoted by beta. The power of the test (1 - beta) is the probability of correctly rejecting the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is false. There is no method to control both Type I and Type II errors. The level of significance is decreased; the validity of the research increases. However, this comes at a price. Decreasing the alpha level increases the likelihood of committing a Type II error. Power analysis is used to determine the number of participants needed to test a hypothesis. Power analysis depends on statistical significance, effect size, and sample sizes. Effect size indicates the strength of the relationship. A larger effect size will require fewer participants for the study.

Similarly, relationships, variables, and results also need to be looked at when doing research and analyzing data for a study to be valid. Theory development and validation are necessary to reach any conclusions for studying human behavior. In order to measure and conduct research, it is essential to reach a conclusion that is based on valid information. Focusing on the complete research design using proper tests to collect data and apply the right test to the data is needed to apply inferential statistics to conclude from a sample to a population. If these are not fulfilled, there could be possible errors, or the value of the conclusion will be weak, maybe even invalid. The main goal of inferential procedures is to make decisions about the population. However, because of practical and reasonable constraints, this is most often not feasible. Thus, researchers' decision-making rests on knowledge and experience without exact certainty. This must be taken into account when communicating. With the use of statistics, the population is drawn from the group of interest – the larger population.

Correlation and Regression Analysis in Psychology

Correlation and regression analyses are fundamental tools in psychological research. These statistical techniques enable us to examine the potential relationship between and among variables. Correlation coefficients show us both the direction of the relationship between two or more variables and the extent to which that relationship is consistent. The most commonly used measure of correlation is Pearson’s r,

which possesses four possible outcomes: r can be positive, negative, or zero, each indicating the direction of the relationship, with higher or lower scores on two variables shifting in the same or opposite directions. The value of r can also range from -1 to 1, with |r| reflecting the strength of the relationship.

Regressions work in a similar vein to correlation in that they assess the relationship between variables. However, in a regression, we also attempt to predict an outcome based on a number of variables. In essence, we use a predictor variable to predict the average score on an outcome variable. A regression can also be run with multiple predictor or independent variables, and it is these types of regression that are often carried out in psychological research where we are interested in identifying predictors of complex psychological phenomena. In this way, correlation and regression analyses are instrumental in explaining and predicting psychological behavior. It is important to remember that correlation does not imply causation. This is particularly true with correlational studies; to confuse correlation with causation could introduce the dangers of inferring causality from correlation. Despite its limitations, correlation is vital in the development of psychological theory and informs many psychological practices such as the establishment and monitoring of professional and regulatory guidelines, psychometric assessments, and identification of risk factors for problem behaviors.

Experimental Design and Statistical Control

Experimental design is crucial for studies that call for an experimental manipulation of variables. They let researchers establish a cause-and-effect relationship by creating a controlled, systematic experiment. Comparing experimental groups to different control groups or to themselves at a different time—with either baseline or a different level of the independent variable—is a more reliable approach to testing ideas than a correlational study. Correlation is a good first step in identifying variables we may want to study in an experiment, but directionality confounds make it a less reliable test of theory by itself. Yet, experimental designs have trade-offs. Between-subjects designs have a primary advantage of preventing carryover effects, but they can exacerbate selection bias in field or small sample studies; within-subject designs are optimal in reducing power demand and the standard error of the estimates, but they make carryover effects more likely. As with some other designs, randomization helps in mitigating their weaknesses.

Defining the experimental conditions in the study leads to developing a construct using independent and dependent variables. The independent variable is the condition in the study that participants are exposed to, such as a treatment or form of measurement. Independent variables may have multiple levels. The dependent variable is the response of the subjects to the conditions, such as quiz score improvement or positive emotions. Experimental studies also have control variables. These are all variables other than the independent variable that have some influence or impact on the dependent variables. The size of the control variable is directly related to the dependent variable or outcomes that we want to study. Psychologists always prefer correlative variables also to be examined. Sample size and power represent the reliability in finding significant outcomes. Power is the ability to identify true effects in our statistical studies. A 0.80 power, for instance, means 80% of the time we can find truth in what we examined. Many experiments have various sample sizes which are determined through a calculation of power and its implications in making decisions. The impact of varying sample sizes on the results needs to be critically interpreted in the experimental findings.

Researchers conduct an experiment to resolve the effect of the treatment; however, there are alternative explanations for the effect of the treatment. The researchers recognize the existing relations between the

treatment and other possible factors that cause the effects of the treatment in the subjects. Control variables are used to help rule out alternative explanations. Any variable that is practically believed by the researcher will have a wider impact on the outcomes of a study; however, it is not the cause of interest for the study. An experiment, for instance, wants to assess the impact of nicotine on GPA. Students are expected to be exposed to a nicotine patch, and another experimental group will be exposed to no nicotine patch. The following are the control variables: weeks, months, or years students remain as smokers, non-menthol and menthol smokers, students who chew Nicorette, and students who drink alcohol or exercise. Some major effects on the research would have been omitted if these control variables were not included in the analysis of this study.

The Role of Statistics in Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Quantitative and qualitative research in psychology take two distinct paths of study and come with differing objectives. When conducting quantitative research, one works with numerical values obtained from a measurable outcome. Through statistical techniques, these studies supply precise measurements to be utilized in confirming or disproving a hypothesis while allowing for the generalization of findings across a broader population pool. Alternatively, researchers engaged in qualitative studies are not concerned with statistical generalizability. Instead, they strive to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences, behaviors, and definable phenomena characterizing a specific domain. As a result, these studies typically contain rich, in-depth data collection, including lengthy interviews, detailed observations, or participant journals.

It is essential to ascertain the unique attributes of quantitative research in psychology and the crucial role that statistics play in this type of study. Statistical techniques play a pivotal role in the root of quantitative research. Statistics allow researchers to mine precise measurements, thus leading to attaining specific information. By finding whether a treatment benefits or harms a specific population, investigators can subsequently ascertain such treatments' substance. The qualitative researcher, however, frequently generates broad, global themes or patterns without obtaining precise numerical measurements. Consequently, the "true" nature of the data often reveals itself indirectly and is embedded within critical interpretations of context. Given the utility of both statistical and qualitative research, there is advocacy for the use of a mixed-methods approach to enhance the breadth of psychological research while also producing findings that are more actionable. Necessary methodological considerations are also important when using qualitative research to frame a particular hypothesis, particularly the challenge of obtaining precise or substantive numeric findings to statistically analyze. Be that as it may, the interpretation of qualitative surveys and themes uncovered from statistical analyses results in an ability to generalize or outline the human-based phenomena. This reflects the strength of mixed-methods research where both statistics and qualitative data can complement and deepen each other's interpretation.

Ethical Considerations in Statistical Analysis in Psychology

Ethical considerations guide researchers to guard against harming the participants that contribute to the data they are analyzing. Handling the ethical considerations of statistics in many domains, not just psychology, is generally considered a local and situational affair. Here, we focus on eight key ethical considerations regarding statistics in psychology. These are as follows. Informed consent: Agreement on what this involves, especially with respect to a transparent disclosure of anticipated data handling, is active

in the disciplinary debate. Data fabrication and/or selection: While fabricating data is clearly unethical and fraudulent, selecting data is more metaphorical and varies in the intensity of its considered ethics.
Three orientations can be identified in the literature. Representativeness of findings: Misrepresentation of the meaning of statistical information due to human error, selective reporting bias, or accidental misrepresentation is a common ethical breach. Integrity of findings: Similarly, the values of a researcher's creation are judged to be compromised if the data claims a cosmopolitan interest yet the data refer heavily to specific territories. Yet, beyond caring about the seeming inclusivity represented in percentages, the "falsification of findings" can also have repercussions for the enterprise of psychological science and its scientific credibility. Given these ethical complications, it is then argued that adopting a different proportion of statistics around ethical breaches may be a different approach in thinking of considering these issues. However, the discipline continues to rely on broad meta-ethical frameworks and principles as well as some combined data handling guidelines. Insofar as a substantial proportion of the human statistics of this Further Consideration section involved undergraduate participants across the aforementioned universities, our data handling and statistical implications regarding human subjects will either be reported in the result summaries or—in those consequences where universities as human data sources are not noted explicitly—are generalizable across psychology practice, especially in psychology training contexts. To adhere to these research processes, the study's Institutional Review Board approved this Human Research Ethical project for the ethical handling of human data. Ethical research that all possible steps would be taken to ensure the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of all research participants was explicitly utilized and followed for this human research project. Informed consent approving future data use will be transitive if the sharing of individual-caused data compromises the anonymity of the participants. Earliest release access to anonymous data should be read as confidential and as such is not transitive under informed consent for data-sharing purposes, and sharing it externally will result in the automatic withdrawal of informed consent. Ensuring the ethical recruitment of participants (as well as other research procedures involving human subjects) developed by and in collaboration with our IRB is part of the work practices undertaken by research teams in psychology training contexts, institutional research protocols, and ethical research best practice. (Craig et al., 2020)(Bosma & Granger, 2022)(Isbell et al.2022)

Common Statistical Errors and Misinterpretations

Errors and misinterpretations of statistical findings are common in psychological research and can lead to conclusions about the significance of research findings that are untrue. For example, a p-value attached to a reported group difference may imply a very low chance of the null hypothesis being true given the data, leading to the conclusion that a 'real' difference has been obtained, when in fact the tested relationship either does not exist or cannot be supported by the data. Many other pitfalls can occur. Common misinterpretations of statistics can lead to dubious or 'overselling' of suboptimal or 'null' results, which further undermines the credibility of the published research findings or their future potential application.
Differentiating between correlation and causation is germane to understanding the research evidence in psychology. Explaining causation, however, does not follow directly from sophisticated statistical tests in the absence of random assignment to conditions or other strong matching procedures. In addition, publication bias against negative or null results, and excessive salience given to positive findings, can make a given finding based on flawed statistical reasoning appear more significant than it really is. Errors of misinterpretation are preventable through attentive application of the statistical techniques and the use

of guidelines in the collection, interpretation, and publication (Singhal & Kalra, 2021) of research findings. Training in statistics will always be a crucial part of this process, as the use of peer review to date has not resulted in the building of a high-quality body of literature in the field of psychological research. There are examples of all scientific research that have been questioned due to statistical misinterpretation, and there have been several high-profile cases in the field of psychology where undue prominence has been given to statistically significant results.

Emerging Trends and Technologies in Statistical Analysis in Psychology

Contemporary research in psychology uses more advanced and complex statistical techniques than ever before, illustrating the impact of good quality statistical analysis. As a result, the amount of psychological research has grown in general, ranging from behavioral experiments to longitudinal observational studies. The growing interest in big data and large datasets attests to this fact. They show potential in psychology in turmoil, but also raise concerns about privacy and ethical considerations. Advanced statistical modeling is used to analyze large datasets, which can result in insightful results, even though a reductionist approach is often required. In addition to an increasing interest in machine learning techniques, data analysis packages increasingly include Bayesian statistics. This brings a new appreciation of uncertainty and a focus on inference. There are now ethical principles and guidelines that emphasize data collection and analysis. The need to consider the potential for ethical breaches is increasingly recognized, as are the general implications of data sharing. At the same time, progress continues. There is ongoing development of software to enable researchers to conduct unprecedented, collaborative research. There are also recommendations for the best forms and minimum levels of statistical education that should be taught to students. It is an exciting time for psychological statistics, and the next decade may see some remarkable changes in the field. In this paper, we reflect on emerging trends and discuss changes that are likely to have a substantial influence on 21st-century statistics in psychology. (Adams & McGuire, 2022)

The Future of Statistics in Advancing Psychological Research

As psychology continues to develop as a scientific discipline, the demand for a better understanding of numbers and more rigorous statistical methods has followed suit. The use of common statistical methods and the abuse of those techniques has drawn significant attention from the psychological research community. It is increasingly expected and demanded that psychological research be conducted in ways that provide much more secure conclusions and are more convincingly based on empirical data. This clear trajectory not only suggests the importance of a new era in psychological statistics but also the potential benefits that could be derived from greater collaboration between statisticians and psychologists in the future. To do so more effectively, psychologists have turned to learning more versatile skills that will allow them to analyze data in unheralded ways. Statistics is and continues to be one of the central means for doing so. The importance of such versatility, therefore, only further suggests the importance of statistics for the future. (Acquisti et al.2020)

These emerging tools and the technologies that enable them, such as advanced data visualization and interactive graphics, along with tools such as statistical software, are increasingly likely to bridge such methodological rubicons, and the future of psychological statistics is, therefore, considered reliant upon operations of such technological entities. More generally, the rise of data demonstration, along with its close relatives, has enabled a more open system of exchange between psychological statisticians, as part of a wider field of open science initiatives concerned with transparency through data sharing and

phenomena replication. Such initiatives are also ethically important and are becoming increasingly addressed in the training of psychologists. Given access to the data, in this scientific environment, anyone has the potential to be the best statistician for the job. For these reasons, psychological statistics (and psychological science generally) can also be seen as being continuous with the art of statistical and probabilistic inference. The future, therefore, very much looks to be a further evolution in this direction. (Alaimo & Kallinikos, 2022)(Boh et al.2023)

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