

Critical appraisal of epidemiological studies and clinical trials

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Abstrak

This book presents a system of critical appraisal applicable to clinical, epidemiological and public health studies and to many other fields. It assumes no prior knowledge. The methods are relevant to students, practitioners and policymakers. The book shows how to assess if the results of one study or of many studies show a causal effect. The book discusses study designs: randomised and non-randomised trials, cohort studies, case-control studies, and surveys, showing the presentation of results including person-time and survival analysis, and issues in the selection of subjects. The system shows how to describe a study, how to detect and assess selection biases, observation bias, confounding, and chance variation, and how to assess internal validity and external validity (generalisability). Statistical methods are presented assuming no previous knowledge, and showing applications to each study design. Positive features of causation including strength, dose-response, and consistency are discussed. The book shows how to do systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and discusses publication bias. Systems of assessing all evidence are shown, leading to a general method of critical appraisal based on 20 key questions in five groups, which can be applied to any type of study or any topic. Six chapters show the application of this method to randomised trials, prospective and retrospective cohort studies, and case-control studies. An appendix summarises key statistical methods, each with a worked example. Each main chapter has self-test questions, with answers provided.