

TIPS FOR AUTHORS

Tips for Authors: Sample Size: Ask for Help!

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doi: 10.1111/j.1532-849X.2010.00589.x

Old timers may remember when the sample size for your research study was pretty much dictated by what you could afford. More recently, as the voices of professional statisticians have become louder and more insistent, it has become apparent that times have changed. Researchers making seat-of-the-pants estimates of proper sample size may expect to receive increasingly critical reviews.

Ceib Phillips, in her 2002 article *Sample Size and Power: What Is Enough?*¹ discusses, in accessible language, some of the more recent ins and outs of the sample size problem. While she covers the ground beautifully, I was reminded that this is not simple stuff but that it is important. She calls to our attention the requirements, these days, for power calculations in NIH grant proposals and mentions software packages available for helping the researcher arrive at an appropriate sample size (e.g., Systat 13, which can be found at www.systat.com or the free software package, Epi Info 3.5.1, downloadable at www.cdc.gov/EpiInfo).

I am also reminded of the old quote from somewhere that the function of statisticians is to keep researchers from making fools of themselves. That seems likely to be more true today than ever. A quick PubMed search on the topic of sample size resulted in a provocative list of recent publications about sample size. Check it out. Then reach for the phone the next time you are designing a study. Call the best local professional statistician you can find. Plan to include that individual in your budget. This is no game for amateurs. One or two statistics courses a few years ago may not have equipped you to cope with the requirements of 21st-century science.

Reference

1. Phillips C: Sample size and power: what is enough? *Semin Orthod* 2002;8:67-76

Erratum

doi: 10.1111/j.1532-849X.2010.00591.x

In reference 1,¹ Dr. Cherif A. Mohsen's affiliation was listed incorrectly; his correct affiliation is Associate Professor, Vice Dean, and Chairman, Department of Fixed Prosthodontics, Faculty of Dentistry, Minia University, Giza, Egypt. We apologize for this error.

Reference

1. Fahmy NZ, Mohsen CA: Assessment of an indirect metal ceramic repair system. *J Prosthodont* 2009;19:25-32

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