

Statistical methods in cancer research.

Vol. 1. The analysis of case-control studies.

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Journal article : [International Agency for Research on Cancer Scientific Publications](#) No.32 pp.338 pp.

Abstract : Substantial advances have been made over the past 10 years or so in the study of statistical techniques for the analysis of observational (as opposed to experimental) data. Partly as a result of this, case-control studies have come into increasing favour, and they are now one of the commonest forms of epidemiological research.

investigation. They are particularly appropriate when the disease under study is uncommon, so that accumulation of a fair number of cases in a prospective study would take a long time; it will then often be far more economical in time and labour to study a set of cases and a corresponding set of controls. The main price that is paid is the logical complexity of the resulting situation. Even in ideal circumstances it is not always obvious how to interpret the results of a case-control study, especially when a matched case-control study has been used, and the choice of controls will always be open to challenge by critics.

The present book is welcome as containing an extremely full account of the statistical methods for analysing case-control data. The main technical material is contained in four chapters which set out first what are referred to as classic methods of analysis for grouped and for matched data and then more recently developed methods based on logistic regression. All the methods are set forth clearly and in detail and are fully illustrated both with small artificial sets of data and with larger examples drawn from the literature. These chapters form an invaluable handbook for any statistician engaged in case-control study analysis.

Preceding them are three other chapters of a more general nature. The first is an introduction to case-control studies, their strengths and weaknesses and their methods of implementation and interpretation, by DR. PHILIP COLE. Next comes a chapter on "Fundamental measures of disease occurrence and association" which is essentially a brief introduction to basic epidemiological concepts, and rather a good one. Chapter 3 is largely devoted to bias, confounding and interaction. This is not always successful: the science of epidemiology as a whole seems to be less than fully understood, and the notion of confounding in particular, and when this occurs in the complex case-control study it is perhaps not possible at present to provide an exposition which is at the same time lucid and non-controversial. It might have been helpful if this chapter had been linked to the logistic models treated in chapters 6 and 7.

An appendix contains Fortran computer programs for tackling some of the methods described in the text. This is a sad falling-off from the rest of the book. If the programs are inadequately documented, they contain non-standard Fortran and they lack consistency and they contain a large number of misprints, not all of which can be blamed on the typesetters. In view of their great potential usefulness, it is to be hoped that the authors will give proper attention to these programs in a later edition.
Healy.

ISBN : 9283211324

Record Number : 19812703200

Publisher : Distributed for IARC by WHO, Geneva, Switzerland

Language of text : not specified

Language of summary : not specified

Indexing terms for this abstract:

Organism descriptor(s) : man

Descriptor(s) : analytical methods, case studies, computer software, epidemiology, human diseases, methodology, neoplasms, statistical analysis, surveys, techniques

Identifier(s) : analytical techniques, cancers, computer programs, manuals, methods

Broader term(s) : Homo, Hominidae, primates, mammals, vertebrates, Chordata, eukaryotes

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