

Hurdles in Observation Research

We have stated that there are four hurdles to observational research. In groups, your task is to work through the implications of these four hurdles given a 'real' example of an observational study: What is the effect of going to college on voting?

A researcher randomly surveyed 1256 high school seniors in 1965, and asked them a series of questions, including their gender, high school GPA, parents' level of education, parents' income, and parents' political involvement. In 1972 a follow up survey was conducted. Here the researchers asked whether or not the respondents attended college or not, and whether or not the respondents voted in the 1972 presidential election. The researchers want to know, did going to college positively affect the respondents' behavior to go out and vote in 1972. [Note: there are two sides to the handout.]

1. What is the credible mechanism that might link college to voting?
2. Could there be reverse causality? How?
3. What are some possible confounders here? Why/How might these be confounders?
4. What are the units of analysis in this study? What is the N?
5. What is the population that we are interested in? How is this different from our sample?

