

Alternatives to Random Assignment for Outcome Evaluations – Described Audio Transcript

(min:sec)

- 00:00 [An animated classroom with a chalkboard reads “Alternatives to Random Assignment for Outcome Evaluations.” The words change to “Alternatives to Non-Equivalent Comparison Groups for Outcome Evaluations.” The words change again to “Alternatives to One Group Pre-test/Post-test Design for Outcome Evaluations.” The words change a final time to read “Alternatives to Random Assignment for Outcome Evaluations.”]
- 00:09 >> Narrator: A rigorous outcome evaluation compares the outcomes for individuals who got the intervention - the treatment group -
[Two icons with text boxes. The first icon reads “treatment group”]
- 00:15 >> to a comparison group of individuals who did not get the intervention.
[The second icon reads “Comparison Group”]
- 00:21 >> When selecting a comparison group for an outcome study, there are a number of methods, or tools, to choose from.
[A toolbox with three text boxes inside appears. The text boxes read, “Random Assignment,” “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design”, and “One Group pre-Test/Post-Test Design”]
- 00:31 >> Of those, random assignment is considered to be the gold-standard approach.
[Two of the text boxes disappear and the “Random Assignment” text box moves to the middle of the screen. A “#1” ribbon lands next to the text box.]
- 00:38 >> Random assignment works by taking a pool of eligible individuals
[Two boxes appear on screen, one labeled “Treatment Group” and the other “Control Group”.]
- 00:44 >> and randomly assigning them to either the treatment group or the control group.
[Icons of people appear and are randomly sorted into the treatment and control group boxes.]
- 00:48 >> Randomly assigning individuals ensures that factors that could affect your outcome of interest -
00:55 >> such as motivation to participate or criminal history - are evenly distributed across the two groups.
[Within each box, text is displayed under each person that reads either “Criminal history” or “No criminal history.” In each box, 2 people have a criminal history and 1 does not. An equals sign appears between the two boxes.]
- 01:00 >> In this way, random assignment allows you to be sure that any observed differences in outcomes are due to the reentry program.
[A blue box emphasizes the word “Treatment” in the first box.]
- 01:09 >> While random assignment is highly regarded, it may not always be feasible in real-world settings.

- [The toolbox appears again with all three “tools” in it. The textbox labeled “Random Assignment” is crossed out.]
- 01:17 >> There may be ethical concerns about withholding treatment from those who need it.
[A text box appears labeled “Ethical concerns about withholding treatment.”]
- 01:23 >> There may also be backlash from program participants or referring partners that could hurt enrollment.
[A second text box appears labeled “Backlash could slow enrollment.”]
- 01:28 >> In some cases, there are concerns about artificially reducing the number of people served.
[A third text box appears labeled “Concerns about limiting participants.”]
- 01:34 >> In others, implementing random assignment in a practitioner-led environment is difficult.
[A fourth text box appears labeled “Difficult to implement program”.]
- 01:39 >> One way to minimize these concerns is to randomize the provision of treatment by facility or by cohort.
[The “Treatment Group” and “Control Group” boxes reappear. An image of a building appears in each box.]
- 01:47 >> Individuals held in the facility or belonging to the cohort assigned to the treatment group receive programming.
[The images of buildings disappear and are replaced by images of calendars.]
- 01:52 >> Those in other facilities and cohorts do not.
[A pulsating circle appears around the calendar in the “Treatment Group” box.]
- 01:58 >> If random assignment is not feasible, the best alternative approach is to use what’s called a non-equivalent comparison group.
[The toolbox reappears. A circle appears around the text box “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design.”]
- 02:08 >> A nonequivalent comparison group consists of a group of individuals who are as similar to the treatment group as possible.
[The “Treatment Group” and “Control Group” boxes reappear, each with three people in it. An “approximately equal to” sign is displayed between the two boxes.]
- 02:15 >> With this approach, the researcher does not control who gets the reentry programming.
[A lock appears at the bottom left-hand corner of the “Treatment Group” box.]
- 02:20 >> The goal is to pick a comparison group that minimizes differences between the two groups.
[A dotted line encircles the “Control Group” box.]
- 02:27 >> There are two common approaches that fall under this umbrella. The first is called a waitlist design.
[A textbox appears on a yellow screen with the label “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design.” Another textbox appears to the right of the first text box with the words “Waitlist Design” inside. A line connects the two boxes.]

- 02:33 >> In this design, individuals who express interest in a reentry program and are admitted make up the treatment group.
- [The screen fades and two new boxes appear. The left box is titled “Interested in program” and has six people inside the box. The left box is titled “Reentry Program.”]
- 02:44 >> Those who are interested but placed on a waitlist and don’t receive programming form a comparison group.
- [Three people are transferred from the “Interested in program” box to the “Reentry program” box. The words “Treatment Group” appear at the bottom of that box. The left box now reads “Program Waitlist” and below the three remaining people is the caption “Nonequivalent Comparison Group.”]
- 02:51 >> A second approach to forming a nonequivalent comparison group is to employ a matched comparison group design.
- [The yellow screen reappears and a new textbox is added to the right of “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design” and below “Waitlist Design.” It reads “Matched Comparison Group Design.” There is also a line connecting this text box to the “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design.”]
- 03:00 >> In a matched comparison group design, researchers use administrative data or other available screening data to identify a comparison group that is similar to the treatment group.
- [Two boxes appear, each with three people in it. The left box is labeled “Treatment Group” and has a lock on the upper left-hand corner. The right box is labeled “Nonequivalent Comparison Group.” An “approximately equal to” sign is displayed between the two boxes.]
- 03:12 >> Comparison group members should meet program eligibility criteria and reflect the background characteristics of treatment group members.
- 03:20 >> One common approach to forming a matched comparison group is to use ex post facto matching.
- 03:30 >> This approach uses administrative data to pair each treatment group member with a similar comparison group member on a one-to-one basis.
- [A gray box appears, connecting two people at a time, one from each box. Between each pairing an “approximately equal to” sign appears. To the right of each pairing is the image of a folder, representing administrative data.]
- 03:37 >> In some cases, the data needed to match treatment and comparison group members is not available.
- [The toolbox reappears and the text box with “Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design” is crossed out.]
- 03:46 >> A third approach to identifying a comparison group is to use a one-group pre-test/post-test design.
- [A dotted-line circle appears around the text box labeled “One Group Pre-Test/Post-Test Design.”]
- 03:52 >> In a one-group pre-test/post-test design, outcome data is collected from the same group of individuals at two points in time.

[A box appears with three people in it and is labeled "Before Programming." A second box appears to the right labeled "After Programming." The three people in the first box are "copied" and the copies are moved to the second box.]

04:01 >> Group outcomes in the period prior to when programming is offered make up the comparison data.

[The words "Comparison Data" appear under the first box.]

04:07 >> Group outcomes collected after the programming has been provided represent the treatment data.

[The words "Treatment Data" appear under the second box.]

04:15 >> While a one-group pre-test/post-test design can be useful for supplemental analyses,

04:20 >> it is not recommended as the primary approach for evaluating a reentry program.

04:25 >> In summary, there are many ways to select a comparison group for an outcome study.

[The toolbox with three text boxes reappears.]

04:31 >> Not all methods are created equal, so it's important to be mindful of limitations.

04:36 >> Random assignment is the strongest method for assessing whether a reentry program is affecting outcomes.

[A dotted-line circle appears around the text box "Random Assignment".]

04:42 >> A close second, nonequivalent comparison group designs, enable meaningful comparisons of outcomes that control for some, but not all, factors.

[The first circle disappears and a new dotted-line circle appears around the text box "Non-Equivalent Comparison Group Design."]

04:52 >> Finally, one-group pre-test/post-test designs can be useful for supplemental analyses, but the findings that they produce are limited.

[The second circle disappears and a new dotted-line circle appears around the text box "One group pre-test/post-test design".]