

The Brookbush Institute Publishes a NEW Glossary Term: 'Retrospective Study'

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-- - Excerpt from Glossary Term:
[Retrospective Study](#)
- Additional Glossary Term: [Systematic Review](#)
- Related Courses: [Chiropractor Continuing Education](#)

DEFINITION

Retrospective Study: A retrospective study is a research design in which investigators analyze pre-existing data or records to evaluate the relationship between exposures (independent variables) and outcomes (dependent variables) that have already occurred. Rather than enrolling participants before outcomes develop (as in prospective studies), retrospective studies work backward from outcomes to exposures, making them less resource-



Intensive but also more vulnerable to bias. These studies are common in epidemiology, clinical research, and human movement science when data already exist (e.g., hospital records, university athletics records).

Retrospective designs can identify associations that provide the first crucial signals for future research and the development of models for prevention and intervention. "

Dr. Brent Brookbush, CEO of Brookbush Institute

data extraction and interpretation.

RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

A retrospective study is a research design in which investigators analyze pre-existing data or records to evaluate relationships between exposures (independent variables) and outcomes (dependent variables) that have already taken place.

SEMANTIC CLARIFICATION

"Retrospective" indicates that both exposures and outcomes have already occurred at the time of study initiation.

Study emphasizes systematic and replicable analysis, not individuals with a history of ACL rupture and compare their rates of knee osteoarthritis at follow-up with individuals without prior ACL injury.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Efficient for analyzing readily available data
Useful for studying rare outcomes

APPLIED EXAMPLE

Research Question:
Is there an association between previous ACL injuries and the development of knee osteoarthritis?

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Efficient for analyzing readily available data
Useful for studying rare outcomes or long-latency conditions

More prone to bias (e.g., selection bias, recall bias)
Difficult to establish temporal relationship between exposure and outcome

Retrospective Study -

<https://brookbushinstitute.com/glossary/retrospective>

APPLIED EXAMPLE

- Research Question: Is there an association between previous ACL injuries and the development of knee osteoarthritis?
- Retrospective Study Design: Researchers use existing patient records to identify individuals with a history of ACL rupture and compare their rates of knee osteoarthritis at follow-up with individuals without prior ACL injury.
- Why Retrospective is Appropriate: Tracking this relationship prospectively over decades would be prohibitively time- and resource-intensive. By analyzing existing records, researchers can identify relationships and calculate the strength of correlations. Although retrospective data are more vulnerable to certain biases and provide weaker evidence for causality, a rigorous, methodological approach to analyzing available data still offers stronger evidence than non-research methods.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF RETROSPECTIVE STUDIES

Strengths

- When a large amount of data has already been collected and is relatively well-organized, retrospective studies can be conducted efficiently, saving both time and resources.
 - Retrospective studies are particularly valuable for investigating rare outcomes or conditions with long latency periods, such as secondary effects of injury, chronic disease progression, or adverse side effects.
 - These studies allow researchers to explore questions that would be impractical, unethical, or prohibitively expensive to study prospectively.
- Retrospective analysis can also provide preliminary insights that inform the design and methodology of future prospective studies.

Limitations

- Retrospective studies are more vulnerable to recall bias, selection bias, and incomplete or missing data.
- Confounding variables are more difficult to identify, control, or account for because both assignment and exposure occurred in the past.
- Retrospective designs provide weaker support for causal inference, since the temporal sequence between exposure and outcome is harder to establish and may be biased.
 - The validity of findings depends heavily on the accuracy, completeness, and quality of the existing records used.

TYPES OF RETROSPECTIVE STUDIES...

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