

Response to Rezaeian: Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) extension for ecological studies.

Myriam Cevallos^{a*}, Charles Poole^b, Erik von Elm^c, Doug Altman^d, Matthias Egger^e for STROBE

^a CTU Bern, University of Bern, Finkenhubelweg 11, 3012 Bern, Switzerland

^b Department of Epidemiology, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina, 170 Rosenau Hall, CB #7400, 135 Dauer Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7400, USA

^c Centre d'épidémiologie clinique, Codirector Cochrane, Switzerland
Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois (CHUV) and University of Lausanne, IUMSP – Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, Biopôle 2, Route de la Corniche 10, CH-1010 Lausanne, Switzerland

^d Centre for Statistics in Medicine, University of Oxford, Botnar Research Centre, Windmill Road, OX3 7LD Oxford, UK

^e Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Bern, Finkenhubelweg 11 3012 Bern, Switzerland

*Corresponding author: strobe@ispm.unibe.ch, +41 31 631 35 28

In reply:

We thank Mohsen for his comments on the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology strengthening the reporting of observational studies in epidemiology (STROBE) Statement^{1,2}. The decision to focus on the three main epidemiological study designs, cross-sectional studies, cohort studies, and case-control studies was deliberately taken by the group when defining the scope of STROBE. As Rezaeian points out, several extensions to address the reporting issues that arise in specific studies and contexts have since been published^{3,4} and other extensions are in preparation.

We agree with Mohsen Rezaeian that an extension of STROBE to ecologic studies might be worth considering. In fact, the recent review of cross-sectional ecologic studies⁵ mentioned by Rezaeian not only highlighted the methodological shortcomings of ecologic studies published in major epidemiology journals, but also proposed a draft extension to STROBE to improve the reporting of these studies. Dufault and Klar⁵ suggested several items that should be reported in ecologic studies, including, for example, the intended level of inference or possible cross-level bias. Their list of items could serve as a useful point of departure for an extension of the STROBE statement to cross-sectional ecologic studies. Other types of ecologic studies exist, for example, studies based on longitudinal data; additional reporting issues might arise in these situations.

We encourage Mohsen Rezaeian to assemble a working group of interested epidemiologists and editors who will build on the evidence on the reporting of ecologic studies and proposals to improve their reporting⁵ to develop an extension of STROBE for ecologic studies. Detailed explanations on the rationale for the different recommendations, similar to the explanation and elaboration article written for STROBE², would strengthen such recommendations and provide a welcome service to the

field. We are pleased to report that several members of the STROBE group have expressed an interest in contributing to this effort.

References

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