

RCTS: NOT ALWAYS THE GOLD STANDARD

(even for impact evaluations!)

“RCTs are not the ‘gold standard of evaluation’. They are the absolute best at just *one thing* and terrible at almost everything else.”

- Heather Krause



WE ALL
COUNT

project for equity
in data science

5 REASONS TO CONSIDER USING A PROJECT DESIGN OTHER THAN AN RCT FOR YOUR RESEARCH

You can get much better information with much less money.

Your work will have greater emphasis on equity and ethics.

Your methods will likely be better for the people you're trying to support.

Funders are growing interested in innovative designs that are more efficient and effective.

Real solutions for your research questions are out there.

Unless you specifically want to know the **average treatment effect** for the **entire population** you can get better information for less money.

WHAT RCTS CANNOT TYPICALLY TELL YOU

Will this scale?

Who does this work for? (It's possible for the treatment to be very good for the population but very bad for lots of individual people within the population)

Why does this work?

How long does the effect last?

Where does this work?

WHAT COULD YOU USE INSTEAD OF AN RCT?

“What effect is our project having?”
(network models or matching)

“Why is our project causing impact?”
(hierarchical bayesian analysis or acyclic graphs)

“How and for whom is our project working best?” (decomposition or structural models)

If you want to hear more about the alternatives or arrange an in-person or online workshop you can get in touch with Heather Krause.

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