

The role of the statistical editor

As known by the collaborators of Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria (RBP), I have assessed most of the articles submitted for publication in this journal over the last two years. My assessment is restricted to the statistical methods employed. It is with great honor that I now become the official statistics editor of RBP. I accept this task for understanding that statistical methods are a part of high-quality scientific work, as the ones reported by means of the publications of RBP.

When I started my scientific assessment work with RBP, I received some general guidelines that I have always kept in my memory: our role is to support and to guide; we must ensure the greatest simplicity without losing rigor; the focus of the articles is psychiatry, not statistics; and others. Although it is our goal to follow the guidelines, now and then we leave the main path and enter more general discussions. I am sure that we have made mistakes, requesting more detailed analyses that might have led to some short delays, but all of this was in the name of excellence. You can believe that our goal is always to encourage and support researchers – a scarce group in our society.

I shall enjoy this message to make a general orientation: 1) the author must always have in mind the sample unit with which he works. The number of sample units is what defines the sample size. For instance, it is impossible to perform a study with 10 units and refer 30 as the sample size in the analysis; 2) the widespread culture of using $m \pm s$ to refer to “mean” and “standard deviation” is not adequate. To the inattentive reader, this could suggest that there is a statistical interval from $m-s$ to $m+s$. This interpretation is inaccurate! We suggest authors to write sample size, mean, and standard deviation values in the clearest possible manner. For example, write down the vector $(n; m; s)$; 3) in the case of studies involving the whole of the target-population, there is no need to perform inferential statistic studies and only the descriptive study must be presented, because the sample is the population itself.

I am thankful for the confidence that the editors of RBP have always had in our work group. Aiming at excellence, we hope to enhance our relationship with the authors. As statisticians we understand that our collaboration, regarded and accepted as essential, is indeed the duty of science workmen. Scientists live to serve society, whereas we, statisticians, live to support science; we deal with the essential invisible in a rational and adequate manner.

“The statistician is the Wizard who makes ‘scientific’ statements about invisible states and quantities. However, contrary to the real wishes (or witches), (s)he attaches uncertainties to these statements”.

Carlos Pereira
Statistical editor