



Celebrating 50 Years of Research and Academic Endeavour

Thinking critically about RCTs (in the light of the Nobel Prize to RCTs)

Abstract

Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) have been used in various disciplines to study causality. Their use in development economics was pioneered in the early 2000s, and has become among the most popular methodological technique in use. For some time now, the claim to methodological superiority has been questioned by economists on grounds of external validity, the meaningfulness of the average treatment effect as a measure of effectiveness of treatment and so on. One important concern with RCTs is related to the ethics of doing such experiments. This talk will highlight some of the ethical concerns that arise from a handful of RCTs conducted in India. It argues that there are many grey areas that cannot be brushed aside any longer and on which there must be proactive engagement from those who approve RCTs (e.g., the Internal Review Boards at US universities) and those who do RCTs.