

Why Are “Clinical” Effects Invisible?

By

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Practitioners in many fields (e.g., education, medicine, social work) have been critical of the products of large-scale experimental research and meta-analyses as providing information about average effects, which is too crude for practical use. Such practitioners often believe that they can reliably determine which interventions work by informal means (clinical insight) and can successfully adapt them to be more effective for specific clients. I use the framework of formal research design and statistical analysis to obtain insight about these claims. I argue that with plausible “clinical” sample sizes, formal research designs would be inadequately sensitive to reliably detect plausible sized effects. This casts doubt on practitioners claims and supports the importance of large scale experimental work and meta-analysis for practice policies.