**Analyzing the Relationship Between**

**Lead Exposure and Mental Ability**

**Background**

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| Lead is a heavy metal that can cause a variety of symptoms when it enters the human body. Lead interferes with the development of the nervous system and can cause headaches, confusion, irritability, and in severe cases, seizures, comas, and death. Lead has also been linked to learning and behavioral disorders. Lead can enter the human body through contaminated air, food, water, soil, or in manufactured products such as paint. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have set the acceptable level of lead to 10micrograms/deciliter. The following data shows the results of a fictitious study of children born and raised in a town near a lead smelter. The blood levels of lead and IQs of the children were all measured at different ages. | *http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/9c/Dioscorides01.jpg/250px-Dioscorides01.jpg**Pedanius Dioscorides observed the effect of lead on the mind in the first century A.D.* |

1. Form a hypothesis about the relationship between lead levels in blood and IQ. Will this effect be consistent for all age levels, or will it affect certain age groups differently?

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1. Given the information in the background, how were children living near the lead processing plant most likely exposure to the metal? Describe two possible routes of exposure.

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1. Would you classify the lead exposure of the children as chronic or acute? Explain.

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1. In this study, what would be considered the independent and dependent variable? The *independent variable* is selected or controlled as part of the study. Thee *dependent variable* is measured or observed as a result of the independent variable.

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**Data Analysis**

The table below shows the results of the study. Four different groups of children were studied. The IQ and blood-lead levels were measured for each child in each group at specific ages.

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|  | **Age** | Average blood-lead concentration (micrograms per deciliter) | **Average IQ score** |
| **Group 1: Low Exposure** | 1 year | 8.3 | 109.4 |
| 3 years | 11.8 | 109.3 |
| 5 years | 11.6 | 110.2 |
| 7 years | 8.3 | 109.3 |
| 9 years | 6.6 | 109.6 |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Group 2: Low-Moderate Exposure** | 1 year | 12.6 | 104.7 |
| 3 years | 18.6 | 106.5 |
| 5 years | 17.4 | 106.5 |
| 7 years | 12.6 | 106.1 |
| 9 years | 10.1 | 107.7 |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Group 3: Moderate-High Exposure** | 1 year | 16.8 | 102.9 |
| 3 years | 24.4 | 102.9 |
| 5 years | 22.4 | 102.2 |
| 7 years | 17.2 | 104.1 |
| 9 years | 23.6 | 98.8 |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Group 4: High Exposure** | 1 year | 24.2 | 100.0 |
| 3 years | 34.4 | 101.3 |
| 5 years | 30.2 | 100.0 |
| 7 years | 13.7 | 102.7 |
| 9 years | 20.0 | 98.7 |

Make a scatterplot graph below of the relationship between lead concentration and IQ. The independent variable should go on the x-axis, and the dependent variable should go on the y-axis.



1. What relationship exists between blood lead concentration and measured IQ?

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1. Based on the data analysis, does the legal limit of 10 micrograms per deciliter seem reasonable? Justify your answer.

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Make a line graph below of the change in IQ over time for each measured group. In this case, **time will go on the x-axis and IQ will go on the y-axis**. Graph one separate line for each exposure group.



1. How does the relationship between lead concentration and IQ change as the child gets older?

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**Conclusion**

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| The guidelines published by the CDC for managing children with elevated lead levels in their blood are shown to the right. Use this information to answer the following question. | **Blood Level (μg/dL)** | **Recommended Treatment** |
| 10-14 | Continue monitoring blood lead levels. |
| 15-19 | Continue monitoring, minimize possible exposures. |
| 20-44 | Full medical evaluation, minimize possible exposures, consider chelation therapy. |

1. Based on your analysis, What recommendations would you have for each of the tested groups of children? Be as specific as possible. Should they move to a different area of town? Have their food or water tested for lead?

Group 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Group 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Group 3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Group 4: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Imagine that you are mayor of this town. The lead smelting plant is the single biggest employer, bringing hundreds of well-paying manufacturing jobs to the area. Given the results of this study, what steps would you take to protect the mental health of the children while still maintaining a good relationship with the lead smelter?

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1. Lead was used as an additive in gasoline in the United States up until the 1980s. Why do you think this decision was made? What effect would you predict this change might have had on the blood lead levels of Americans?

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**Conclusion**

1. A widespread theory about the downfall of Rome places lead poisoning as a possible culpric. Read the history section of the Wikipedia entry on lead poisoning shown below. Describe the major sources of exposure the Romans had to lead. Do you believe, based on the symptoms of lead poisoning, that this could have affected the entire population in such a dramatic way? Write your answer on a separate piece of paper.

Article: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lead_poisoning#History>

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