

# PLSC 30600

Week 3: MAR estimation, reweighting, and imputation

Molly Offer-Westort

Department of Political Science,  
University of Chicago

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## Science table: MAR and regression estimation

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$R_i$	$Y_i^*(0)$
1	A	0	0	1	0
2	A	0	?	0	-99
3	B	0	1	1	1
4	B	0	?	0	-99
5	A	1	0	1	0
6	A	1	?	0	-99
7	B	1	1	1	1
8	B	1	?	0	-99
9	A	0	1	1	1
10	B	1	?	0	-99

## Regression estimation under MAR

- Under MAR, for all  $x \in \text{Supp}[X_i]$ :

$$E[Y_i | R_i = 0, \mathbf{X}_i = \mathbf{x}] = E[Y_i^* | R_i = 1, \mathbf{X}_i = \mathbf{x}] = E[Y_i | \mathbf{X}_i = \mathbf{x}].$$

- In our case, with two covariates by MAR:

$$E[Y_i | X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}] = E[Y_i^* | R_i = 1, X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}].$$

- Assume a functional form for the CEF, e.g.

$$E[Y_i | X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathbb{1}\{X_{[1]i} = B\} + \beta_2 X_{[2]i}.$$

- Use regression to estimate, predict for all  $i$ , then average.

## Science table: MAR and regression estimation

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$R_i$	$Y_i^*(0)$
1	A	0	0	1	0
2	A	0	?	0	$\hat{E}[Y_i   X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]}]$
3	B	0	1	1	1
4	B	0	?	0	$\hat{E}[Y_i   X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]}]$
5	A	1	0	1	0
6	A	1	?	0	$\hat{E}[Y_i   X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]}]$
7	B	1	1	1	1
8	B	1	?	0	$\hat{E}[Y_i   X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]}]$
9	A	0	1	1	1
10	B	1	?	0	$\hat{E}[Y_i   X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]}]$

## Science table: MAR regression plug-in

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$R_i$	$Y_i^*(0)$
1	A	0	0	1	0
2	A	0	?	0	$\hat{\beta}_0$
3	B	0	1	1	1
4	B	0	?	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2$
5	A	1	0	1	0
6	A	1	?	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_3$
7	B	1	1	1	1
8	B	1	?	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2 + \hat{\beta}_3$
9	A	0	1	1	1
10	B	1	?	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2 + \hat{\beta}_3$

$$E[Y_i | X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}] = \beta_0 + \beta_2 1\{X_{[1]i} = B\} + \beta_3 X_{[2]i}.$$

## Code: regression plug-in under MAR

```
> df <- data.frame(  
+   X_1 = c("A", "A", "B", "B", "A", "A", "B", "B", "B", "A", "B"),  
+   X_2 = c(0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1),  
+   R    = c(1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0),  
+   Ystar = c(0, -99, 1, -99, 0, -99, 1, -99, 1, -99)  
+ )  
> df$X_1 <- factor(df$X_1)  
> (fit <- lm(Ystar ~ X_1 + X_2, data = df, subset = R == 1))
```

Call:

```
lm(formula = Ystar ~ X_1 + X_2, data = df, subset = R == 1)
```

Coefficients:

(Intercept)	X_1B	X_2
0.4286	0.7143	-0.2857

## Code: regression plug-in under MAR

```
> df$yhat <- df$Ystar  
> df$yhat[which(df$R == 0)] <-  
+   predict(fit, newdata = df[which(df$R == 0), ])  
> round(df$yhat, 3)  
[1] 0.000 0.429 1.000 1.143 0.000 0.143 1.000 0.857 1.000 0.857  
> mean(df$yhat)  
[1] 0.6428571
```

## Science table: strong ignorability and regression estimation

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0	?	0	0
2	A	0	?	1	1	1
3	B	0	1	?	0	1
4	B	0	?	1	1	1
5	A	1	0	?	0	0
6	A	1	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	1	?	0	1
8	B	1	?	0	1	0
9	A	0	1	?	0	0
10	B	1	?	1	1	1

## Regression estimation under strong ignorability

- Under strong ignorability, for all  $x \in \text{Supp}[X_i]$ :

$$E[Y_i(d) | X_i = x] = E[Y_i | D_i = d, X_i = x], \quad d \in \{0, 1\}.$$

- We need a treatment indicator in the regression model.

- Example CEF specification:

$$E[Y_i | D_i, X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_i + \beta_2 1\{X_{[1]i} = B\} + \beta_3 X_{[2]i}.$$

- Predict  $\hat{Y}_i(0)$  and  $\hat{Y}_i(1)$ , then average differences.

## Definition: regression estimator for causal inference

### Definition (Regression Estimator for Causal Inference)

Let  $Y_i(0)$ ,  $Y_i(1)$ , and  $D_i$  be random variables with  $\text{Supp}[D_i] = \{0, 1\}$ . Let  $Y_i = Y_i(1) \cdot D_i + Y_i(0) \cdot (1 - D_i)$  and  $\tau_i = Y_i(1) - Y_i(0)$ , and let  $\mathbf{X}_i$  be a random vector. Given  $n$  i.i.d. observations of  $(Y_i, D_i, \mathbf{X}_i)$ , the regression estimator for  $E[\tau_i]$  is

$$\hat{E}[\tau_i] = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \mathbf{X}_i] - \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 0, \mathbf{X}_i],$$

where  $\hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = d, \mathbf{X}_i = \mathbf{x}]$  is an estimator of the CEF.

# Science table: strong ignorability and regression imputation

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0	$\hat{m}_1(x)$	0	0
2	A	0	$\hat{m}_0(x)$	1	1	1
3	B	0	1	$\hat{m}_1(x)$	0	1
4	B	0	$\hat{m}_0(x)$	1	1	1
5	A	1	0	$\hat{m}_1(x)$	0	0
6	A	1	$\hat{m}_0(x)$	1	1	1
7	B	1	1	$\hat{m}_1(x)$	0	1
8	B	1	$\hat{m}_0(x)$	0	1	0
9	A	0	1	$\hat{m}_1(x)$	0	0
10	B	1	$\hat{m}_0(x)$	1	1	1

$$\hat{m}_d(x) = \hat{\mathbb{E}} [ Y_i \mid D_i = d, X_{[1]i} = x_{[1]}, X_{[2]i} = x_{[2]} ] , \quad d \in \{0, 1\}.$$

## Science table: strong ignorability regression plug-in

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1$	0	0
2	A	0	$\hat{\beta}_0$	1	1	1
3	B	0	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_2$	0	1
4	B	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2$	1	1	1
5	A	1	0	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_3$	0	0
6	A	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_3$	1	1	1
7	B	1	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_2 + \hat{\beta}_3$	0	1
8	B	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2 + \hat{\beta}_3$	0	1	0
9	A	0	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1$	0	0
10	B	1	$\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2 + \hat{\beta}_3$	1	1	1

$$E[Y_i | D_i, X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i}] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_i + \beta_2 1\{X_{[1]i} = B\} + \beta_3 X_{[2]i}.$$

## Code: regression plug-in under ignorability

```
> df <- data.frame(  
+   X_1 = c("A", "A", "B", "B", "A", "A", "B", "B", "B", "A", "B"),  
+   X_2 = c(0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1),  
+   D   = c(0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1),  
+   Y   = c(0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1)  
+ )  
> df$X_1 <- factor(df$X_1)  
> (fit_ign <- lm(Y ~ D + X_1 + X_2, data = df))
```

Call:

```
lm(formula = Y ~ D + X_1 + X_2, data = df)
```

Coefficients:

(Intercept)	D	X_1B	X_2
0.3143	0.3571	0.3571	-0.1429

## Code: regression plug-in under ignorability

```
> df$yhat_1 <- df$Y
> df$yhat_0 <- df$Y
> df$yhat_1[which(df$D == 0)] <-
+   predict(fit_ign,
+           newdata = transform(df[which(df$D == 0), ], D = 1))
> df$yhat_0[which(df$D == 1)] <-
+   predict(fit_ign,
+           newdata = transform(df[which(df$D == 1), ], D = 0))
```

## Code: regression plug-in under ignorability

```
> round(df[, c("yhat_0", "yhat_1")], 3)
   yhat_0 yhat_1
1  0.000  0.671
2  0.314  1.000
3  1.000  1.029
4  0.671  1.000
5  0.000  0.529
6  0.171  1.000
7  1.000  0.886
8  0.529  0.000
9  0.000  0.671
10 0.529  1.000

> mean(df$yhat_1 - df$yhat_0)
[1] 0.3571429
```

# Directed Acyclic Graphs

- DAGs: what problem are we solving?
- We keep writing assumptions like:

$$Y_i(d) \perp\!\!\!\perp D_i \mid X_i \quad \text{or} \quad Y_i \perp\!\!\!\perp R_i \mid X_i.$$

- A DAG is a compact way to encode which *conditional independences are plausible* based on the data-generating process.
- Main use today: selecting (and *not* selecting) adjustment variables.

Greenland et al. (1999)

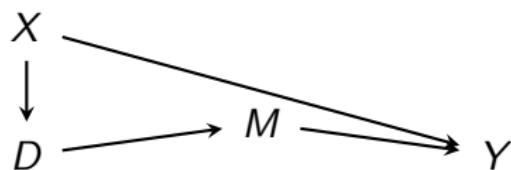
## Association vs causation: $\Pr[Y \mid D]$ vs $\Pr[Y \mid do(D)]$

- $\Pr[Y = y \mid D = d]$ : observational association.
- $\Pr[Y = y \mid do(D = d)]$ : distribution of  $Y$  under intervention setting  $D := d$ .
- **Graph surgery:**  $do(D = d)$  deletes all arrows into  $D$  (intervention breaks causes of  $D$ ).
- Conditioning does not change the graph; it filters/stratifies the observed data.

Pearl et al. (2016)

# DAG primitives: nodes, arrows, paths, ancestors

- Node = variable.
- Arrow  $A \rightarrow B$  means  $A$  is a direct cause of  $B$ .
- A *path* is any sequence of adjacent arrows (ignore direction).
- A *directed path* is a causal pathway (all arrows forward).
- $A$  is an *ancestor* of  $B$  if there is a directed path  $A \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow B$ .  
(ancestor/descendant : parent/child)



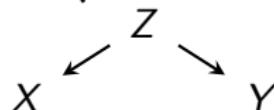
$D \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$  is a directed path;  
 $D \leftarrow X \rightarrow Y$  is a backdoor path.

# Chain, fork, collider

**Chain**  
 $X \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$

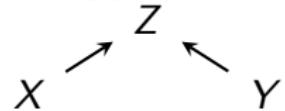
Conditioning on  $Z$  blocks  
the path.

**Fork (confounder)**



Conditioning on  $Z$  blocks  
the backdoor.

**Collider**

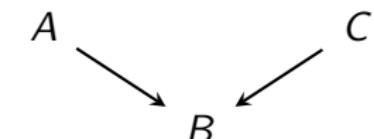


Path blocked unless you  
condition on  $Z$  (or a  
descendant).

## d-separation: the blocking definition

- “Blocking a path” means: given a conditioning set  $Z$ , that path cannot transmit statistical association between its endpoints under the graphical rules of d-separation.
- A path is **blocked** by a conditioning set  $Z$  if *there exists at least one node* on the path such that:
  - the path contains a **chain** or **fork**  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$  or  $A \leftarrow B \rightarrow C$  with the middle node  $B \in Z$ ; or
  - the path contains a **collider**  $A \rightarrow B \leftarrow C$  with  $B \notin Z$  and no descendant of  $B$  in  $Z$ .
- If every path between  $X$  and  $Y$  is blocked by  $Z$ , then  $X$  and  $Y$  are **d-separated** by  $Z$ .
- Pearl et al. convention: d-separated  $\Rightarrow$  *guaranteed* conditional independence (given the model); d-connected  $\Rightarrow$  dependence is *typical* (except cancellations).

## Collider intuition: “selection” creates dependence



$A \rightarrow B \leftarrow C$  (collider at  $B$ )

- Think of:
  - $A$  = ability,  $C$  = effort,  
 $B$  = admission to a selective program.
- In the full population, ability and effort can be independent:
- The collider  $B$  blocks the path between  $A$  and  $C$  unless we condition on  $B$ .

$$A \perp\!\!\!\perp C \iff \Pr[C | A] = \Pr[C].$$

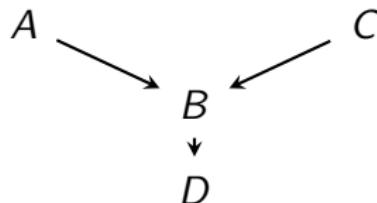
## Conditioning on admission opens the collider path

- Now restrict attention to admitted students: condition on  $B = 1$ .
- Intuition: admission depends on *either* high ability or high effort (or both).
  - If  $A$  is low but  $B = 1$ , then  $C$  must be high to “compensate.”
  - If  $A$  is high and  $B = 1$ , then  $C$  can be lower and admission still occurs.
- Result: within the selected group  $B = 1$ ,  $A$  and  $C$  become dependent:

$$\Pr[C \mid A, B = 1] \neq \Pr[C \mid B = 1].$$

- DAG language: conditioning on a collider **opens** the path  $A \rightarrow B \leftarrow C$ .

## Why descendants of a collider matter (conditioning “leaks” information)



$D$  is a descendant of the collider  
 $B$

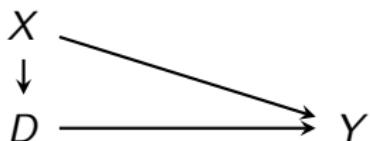
- Let  $D = \text{program completion}$ , where  $B \rightarrow D$ .
- Conditioning on  $D = 1$  gives (partial) information about  $B$ .
- This can also induce dependence between  $A$  and  $C$ :
$$\Pr[C | A, D = 1] \neq \Pr[C | D = 1].$$
- Rule: a collider blocks a path *only if* we do not condition on the collider *and* do not condition on any of its descendants.

## Adjustment for causal effects: backdoor criterion

- A **backdoor path** from  $D$  to  $Y$  is any path that begins with an arrow *into*  $D$ .
- A set  $Z$  satisfies the **backdoor criterion** for  $(D, Y)$  if:
  - no element of  $Z$  is a descendant of  $D$ , and
  - $Z$  blocks every backdoor path from  $D$  to  $Y$ .
- If the backdoor criterion holds, then the causal effect is identified by:

$$\Pr[Y = y \mid do(D = d)] = \sum_z \Pr[Y = y \mid D = d, Z = z] \Pr[Z = z].$$

## Example: confounding and a valid adjustment set



- Backdoor:  $D \leftarrow X \rightarrow Y$ .
- $Z = \{X\}$  blocks the backdoor and has no descendants of  $D$ .
- Graphically:  $Y(d) \perp\!\!\!\perp D \mid X$  is plausible if this DAG is correct.

## Post-treatment adjustment changes the estimand (and can bias)

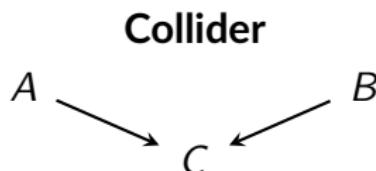


- $M$  is a mediator: conditioning on  $M$  blocks part of the causal effect, and gives us a conditional association, not a causal effect.
- If you want the **total effect** ( $\Pr[Y|do(D = d)]$ ),  $M$  is not in a backdoor adjustment set.
- More generally: descendants of  $D$  are excluded by the backdoor criterion.

# Mediator vs collider: why the rule differs



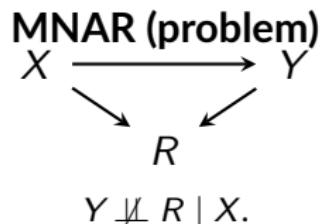
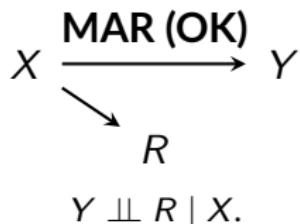
Conditioning on  $M$  changes the estimand (direct vs total effect).



Conditioning on  $C$  creates bias by opening a path.

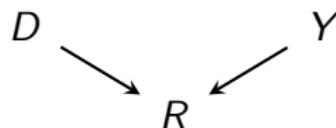
- Mediators: conditioning changes which effect you estimate.
- Colliders: conditioning breaks identification entirely.

## Missing data as a DAG: MAR vs MNAR



- $R$  is the response/observation indicator (e.g.,  $Y$  observed if  $R = 1$ ).
- Under MAR, conditioning on  $X$  blocks all paths between  $Y$  and  $R$ .

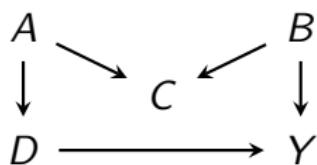
## Complete-case analysis is conditioning on $R = 1$ (selection)



Conditioning on  $R = 1$  opens the collider at  $R$ .

- Even if  $D$  and  $Y$  are independent marginally, restricting to the observed sample ( $R = 1$ ) can induce  $D - Y$  association.
- This is the collider lesson applied to missingness/selection.
- Under MAR, we try to block the  $Y \rightarrow R$  channel given covariates (previous slide).

## Greenland et al. (1999): bad controls (conditioning can create confounding)



$C$  is a collider on  $A \rightarrow C \leftarrow B$ .

- Without conditioning on  $C$ , the collider blocks that path.
- Conditioning on  $C$  opens the collider and induces association between  $A$  and  $B$ .
- This opens a new backdoor from  $D$  to  $Y$  through  $A$  and  $B$ .
- Lesson: “control for  $C$ ” can *increase* bias.

## Why this mistake is tempting: total vs direct effects

- In the DAG,  $C$  is *affected by* both  $A$  and  $B$ .
- Researchers often reason:  
*" $C$  is related to both treatment and outcome, so we should control for it."*
- But this mixes up two different causal questions:
  - **Total effect of  $D$  on  $Y$ :** effect through *all* causal paths.
  - **Direct effect of  $D$  on  $Y$ :** effect *not operating through intermediates*.
- Conditioning on  $C$  does *not* identify a direct effect here—it creates bias.

## What conditioning on $C$ actually does

- $C$  is a **collider** on the path  $D \leftarrow A \rightarrow C \leftarrow B \rightarrow Y$ .
- Conditioning on  $C$ :
  - induces dependence between  $A$  and  $B$ ;
  - opens a backdoor path from  $D$  to  $Y$ ;
  - violates ignorability for the total effect.
- Formally, after conditioning on  $C$ :

$$\Pr[Y(d) | D, C] \neq \Pr[Y(d) | C].$$

- So the resulting estimand is neither:
  - the total effect of  $D$  on  $Y$ , nor
  - a well-defined direct effect.

## Practical workflow for choosing controls

- Step 1: draw a DAG that reflects substantive knowledge.
- Step 2: decide the estimand (total effect? direct effect?).
- Step 3: find a backdoor adjustment set (blocks all arrows-into- $D$  paths, avoids descendants of  $D$ ).
- Step 4: check for **colliders** and **post-treatment variables** you might accidentally condition on.
- Step 5: translate to an estimator (regression / weighting / matching), then diagnose overlap and sensitivity later.

## Science table: strong ignorability and the propensity score

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0	?	0	0
2	A	0	?	1	1	1
3	B	0	1	?	0	1
4	B	0	?	1	1	1
5	A	1	0	?	0	0
6	A	1	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	1	?	0	1
8	B	1	?	0	1	0
9	A	0	1	?	0	0
10	B	1	?	1	1	1

## Science table: add the (empirical) propensity score

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$p_D(X_i)$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0.33	0	?	0	0
2	A	0	0.33	?	1	1	1
3	B	0	0.50	1	?	0	1
4	B	0	0.50	?	1	1	1
5	A	1	0.50	0	?	0	0
6	A	1	0.50	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	0.67	1	?	0	1
8	B	1	0.67	?	0	1	0
9	A	0	0.33	1	?	0	0
10	B	1	0.67	?	1	1	1

$X_{[1]}$	$X_{[2]}$	$n$	$p_D(X)$
A	0	3	0.33
A	1	2	0.50
B	0	2	0.50
B	1	3	0.67

## Science table: hot deck imputation (propensity score)

$i$	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$p_D(X_i)$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	$D_i$	$Y_i$
1	A	0	0.33	0	donor	0	0
2	A	0	0.33	donor	1	1	1
3	B	0	0.50	1	donor	0	1
4	B	0	0.50	donor	1	1	1
5	A	1	0.50	0	donor	0	0
6	A	1	0.50	donor	1	1	1
7	B	1	0.67	1	donor	0	1
8	B	1	0.67	donor	0	1	0
9	A	0	0.33	1	donor	0	0
10	B	1	0.67	donor	1	1	1

- For each missing potential outcome, choose a nearest-neighbor donor in  $p_D(X)$  from the opposite treatment arm.
- Impute  $\hat{Y}_i(0)$  or  $\hat{Y}_i(1)$  with that donor's observed outcome.

## References I

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