

# Chapter 6

## Statistical Analysis with Incomplete Grouped Data

## 6.1 Missing Data in Longitudinal Studies

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- A major challenge for the analysis of longitudinal data is the problem of missing data
  - ▷ studies are designed to collect data on every subject at a set of prespecified follow-up times
  - ▷ often subjects miss some of their planned measurements for a variety of reasons
- We can have different patterns of missing data

## 6.1 Missing Data in Longitudinal Studies (cont'd)

Subject	Visits				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	x	x	x	x	x
2	x	x	x	?	?
3	?	x	x	x	x
4	?	x	?	x	?

- ▷ Subject 1: Completer
- ▷ Subject 2: dropout
- ▷ Subject 3: late entry
- ▷ Subject 4: intermittent

## 6.1 Missing Data in Longitudinal Studies (cont'd)

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- Implications of missingness:
  - ▷ we collect less data than originally planned  $\Rightarrow$  *loss of efficiency*
  - ▷ not all subjects have the same number of measurements  $\Rightarrow$  *unbalanced datasets*
  - ▷ missingness may depend on outcome  $\Rightarrow$  *potential bias*
- For the handling of missing data, we introduce the missing data indicator

$$r_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_{ij} \text{ is observed} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

## 6.1 Missing Data in Longitudinal Studies (cont'd)

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- We obtain a partition of the complete response vector  $y_i$ 
  - ▷ observed data  $y_i^o$ , containing those  $y_{ij}$  for which  $r_{ij} = 1$
  - ▷ missing data  $y_i^m$ , containing those  $y_{ij}$  for which  $r_{ij} = 0$
  
- **For the remaining we will focus on dropout**  $\Rightarrow$  notation can be simplified
  - ▷ Discrete dropout time:  $r_i^d = 1 + \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} r_{ij}$  (ordinal variable)
  - ▷ **Continuous time**:  $T_i^*$  denotes the time to dropout

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms

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- To describe the probabilistic relation between the measurement and missingness processes Rubin (1976, Biometrika) has introduced three mechanisms
- *Missing Completely At Random (MCAR)*: The probability that responses are missing is unrelated to both  $y_i^o$  and  $y_i^m$

$$p(r_i \mid y_i^o, y_i^m) = p(r_i)$$

- Examples
  - ▷ subjects go out of the study after providing a pre-determined number of measurements
  - ▷ laboratory measurements are lost due to equipment malfunction

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- Features of MCAR:
  - ▷ The observed data  $y_i^o$  can be considered a random sample of the complete data  $y_i$
  - ▷ We can use any statistical procedure that is valid for complete data
    - \* sample averages per time point
    - \* linear regression, ignoring the correlation (consistent, but not efficient)
    - \*  $t$ -test at the last time point
    - \* ...

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- *Missing At Random (MAR)*: The probability that responses are missing is related to  $y_i^o$ , but is unrelated to  $y_i^m$

$$p(r_i \mid y_i^o, y_i^m) = p(r_i \mid y_i^o)$$

- Examples
  - ▷ study protocol requires patients whose response value exceeds a threshold to be removed from the study
  - ▷ physicians give rescue medication to patients who do not respond to treatment

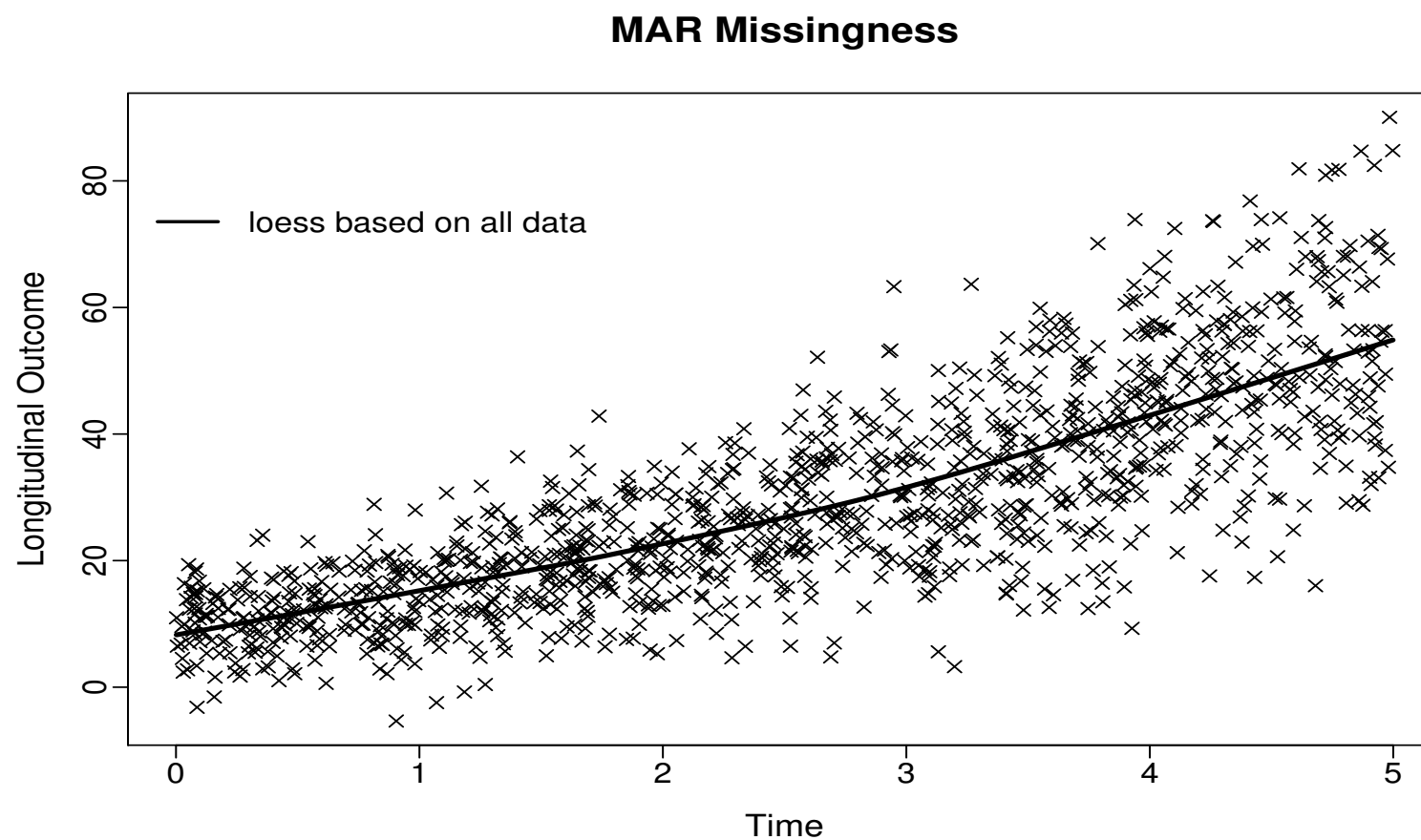


## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

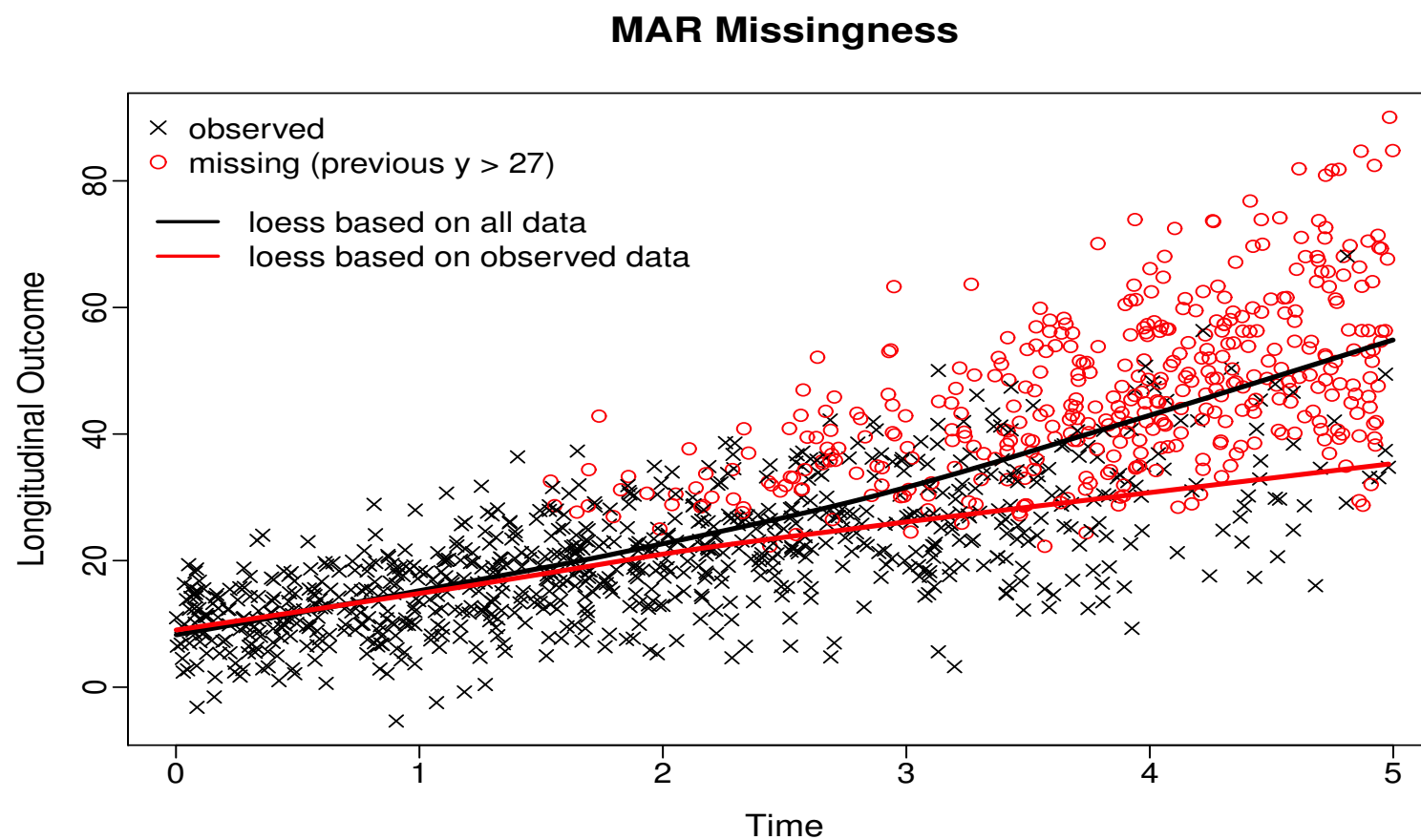
- Features of MAR:
  - ▷ The observed data cannot be considered a random sample from the target population
  - ▷ Not all statistical procedures provide valid results

Not valid under MAR	Valid under MAR
sample marginal evolutions	sample subject-specific evolutions
methods based on moments, such as GEE	likelihood based inference
mixed models with misspecified correlation structure	mixed models with correctly specified correlation structure
marginal residuals	subject-specific residuals

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)



## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)



## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

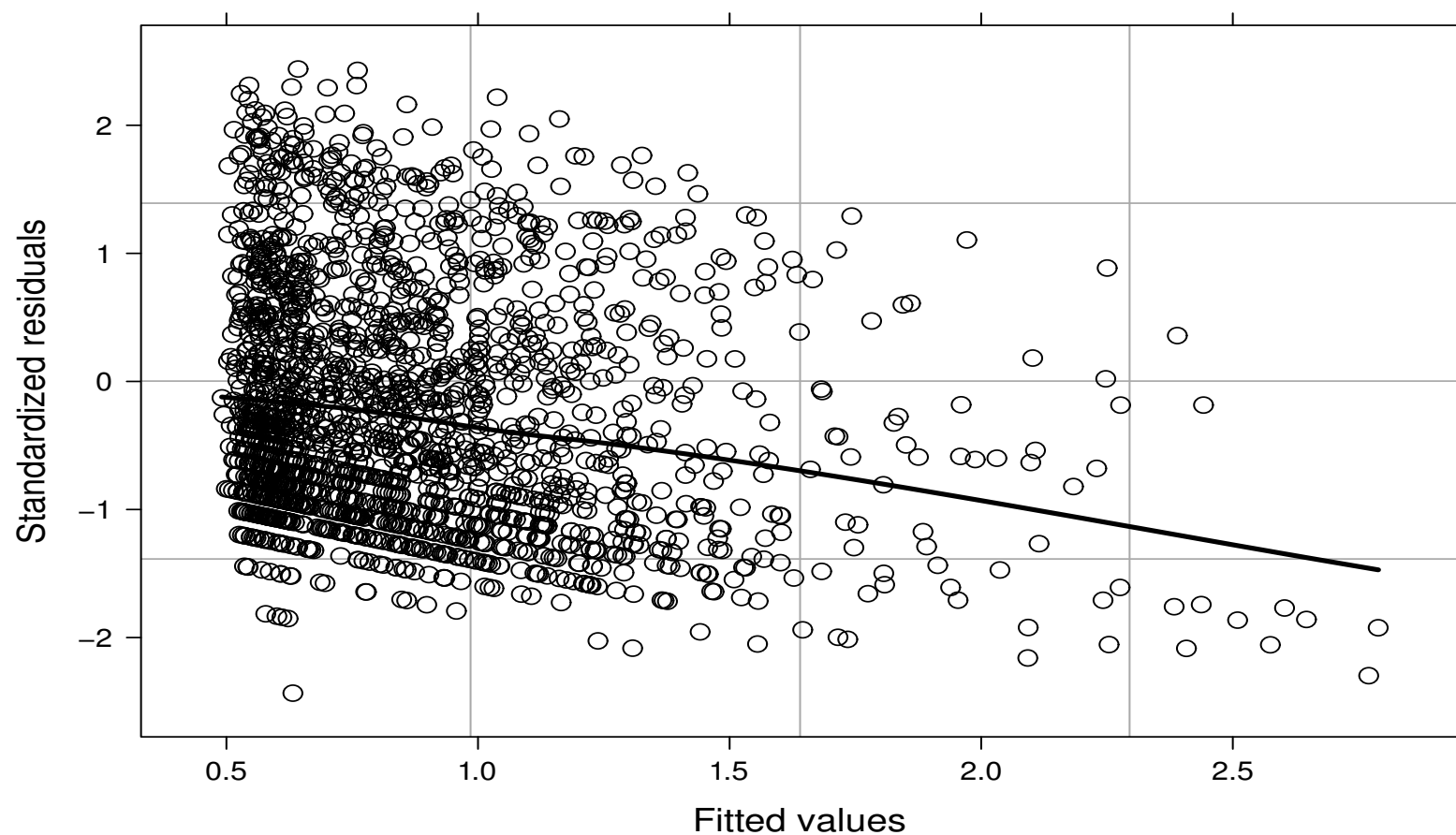
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- To illustrate the important implications of incomplete data, let's return the residuals plots we have seen in Chapter 2 (pp.124–128)
- We had fitted the following model to the PBC dataset

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \log(\text{serBilir}_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Time}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Female}_i + \beta_3 \text{Age}_i + \\ \quad \beta_4 \{ \text{D-penicil}_i \times \text{Time}_{ij} \} + \beta_5 \{ \text{Female}_i \times \text{Time}_{ij} \} + \varepsilon_{ij} \\ \varepsilon_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, V_i) \quad V_i \text{ has a continuous AR1 structure} \end{array} \right.$$

and the scatterplot of the standardized residuals versus fitted values was

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)



## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- We see a clear systematic trend
- What's the problem?
  - ▷ is this really a model misspecification, or
  - ▷ is it an artefact of missing data?
- Why we say that:
  - ▷ patients with high serum bilirubin levels have higher chance of dropping out
  - ▷ the model will account for that and give as average longitudinal evolution the average of patients who did not drop out (i.e., observed evolutions), and the patients who did drop out (i.e., unobserved evolutions)

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- However, the residuals are calculated based on the observed data
- Hence, even if the model is correct, we could still see systematic trends because of dropout

**With MAR incomplete data standard residuals plots may show misleading systematic trends**

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- *Missing Not At Random (MNAR)*: The probability that responses are missing is related to  $y_i^m$ , and possibly also to  $y_i^o$

$$p(r_i \mid y_i^m) \quad \text{or} \quad p(r_i \mid y_i^o, y_i^m)$$

- Examples
  - ▷ in studies on drug addicts, people who return to drugs are less likely than others to report their status
  - ▷ in longitudinal studies for quality-of-life, patients may fail to complete the questionnaire at occasions when their quality-of-life is compromised



## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- Features of MNAR
  - ▷ The observed data cannot be considered a random sample from the target population
  - ▷ Only procedures that explicitly model the joint distribution  $\{y_i^o, y_i^m, r_i\}$  provide valid inferences  $\Rightarrow$  **analyses which are valid under MAR will not be valid under MNAR**

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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**We cannot tell from the data at hand whether the missing data mechanism is MAR or MNAR**

Note: We can distinguish between MCAR and MAR

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- *Missing Covariate Depended*: The probability that responses are missing is related to covariates  $x$

$$p(r_i \mid x_i, y_i^o, y_i^m) = p(r_i \mid x_i)$$

- Examples
  - ▷ in study on hypertensive patients, overweight patients are inclined not to have their blood pressure measured, and BMI is related with blood pressure

## 6.2 Missing Data Mechanisms (cont'd)

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- Features of Missing Covariate Depended
  - ▷ If we do not include the covariates that drive the missingness process in the regression model for the longitudinal outcome  $Y$ , and these covariates are associated with  $Y$ , then we obtain an MNAR mechanism

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data

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- We have seen what are the implication of missingness and how it complicates matters
- To this end, several approaches have been proposed to account for missing data
  - ▷ **depending on the missing data mechanism, not all of them provide valid results!**

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Complete Cases Analysis**

- ▷ **General idea:** Restrict analyses to only those subjects for which all measurements are observed

- ▷ **Advantages:**

- \* very simple to implement
    - \* standard software can be used

- Disadvantages:**

- \* substantial loss of information
    - \* valid inferences only when missingness is completely unrelated to the outcome (i.e., MCAR)

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Last Observation Carried Forward (LOCF)**

- ▷ **General idea:** Any missing value is replaced by the last observed value

- ▷ **Advantages:**

- \* very simple to implement
    - \* standard software can be used

- Disadvantages:**

- \* extremely strong assumption that a subject's measurement stays at the same level as soon as he/she is not observed
      - \* even if the mechanism is MCAR, LOCF may not provide valid results
      - \* overestimates precision

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Unconditional Mean Imputation**

- ▷ **General idea:** Each missing outcome  $y_{ij}^m$  is replaced by the average of the observed measurements at the  $j$ -th occasion

- ▷ **Advantages:**

- \* very simple to implement
    - \* standard software can be used

- Disadvantages:**

- \* can only be implemented with balanced designs
    - \* it provides valid results only under MCAR
    - \* overestimates precision



## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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### • Conditional Mean Imputation

- ▷ **General idea:** The vector  $y_i^m$  of missing observations for the  $i$ -th subject is replaced by its prediction, conditional on the vector  $y_i^o$  of observed observations for that subject
  - \* we specify a model for  $y_i^m$  conditional on  $y_i^o$  and parameters  $\psi$  – often this model will result from a full specification of the marginal model  $y_i = (y_i^o, y_i^m)$
  - \* we fit the model to the completers and obtain estimates  $\hat{\psi}$  for the parameters
  - \* based on this fitted model we can calculate predictions for the missing observations, i.e.,

$$\hat{y}_i^m = E(y_i^m \mid y_i^o, \hat{\psi})$$

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Conditional Mean Imputation**

- ▷ **Advantages:**

- \* less strict assumptions than the previously mentioned approaches

- Disadvantages:**

- \* requires programming for its implementation
    - \* overestimates precision

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Multiple Imputation**

- ▷ A common issue in all aforementioned imputation technique was the *overestimation of precision*  
⇒ no correction was made for the uncertainty introduced from imputing the missing observations
- ▷ **General idea:** To propagate this uncertainty we impute not only once but *multiple* times from the conditional distribution  $p(\mathbf{y}_i^m \mid \mathbf{y}_i^o, \hat{\psi})$ 
  - \*  $M$  completed datasets are formed
  - \* we perform the same analysis in each
  - \* we pool the estimated parameters using Rubin's formulas

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- Multiple Imputation

- ▷ Advantages:

- \* correctly propagates uncertainty due to incomplete data
    - \* valid under MAR
    - \* allows for different types of analysis (e.g., concentrate at a specific time point – cross-sectional analysis)

- Disadvantages:

- \* not available for grouped/clustered data in all software

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Full Specification of the Outcome Distribution**

- ▷ **General idea:** Use a model for the joint distribution of the responses – this includes the models we have seen in Chapter 2, 3, & 5 (but not the GEE approach of Chapter 4)

- ▷ **Advantages:**

- \* no requirement to impute data
- \* available in all standard software
- \* valid results under MCAR and MAR

- Disadvantages:**

- \* not valid results under MNAR

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Summary/Take home message**

- ▷ It is now universally recognized (i.e., officially also by FDA) that the default type of statistical analysis should provide valid results under MAR
- ▷ Hence, whenever we have missing data in the outcome, it is advisable to employ a full-likelihood approach based on the models we have seen for continuous and categorical responses
  - ⇒ **No need for (multiple) imputation**
- ▷ *However*, to be protected we need an appropriate specification of the joint distribution of the data
- ▷ This encompasses both the mean and the covariance/correlation structure
  - ⇒ **do not favor simpler covariance matrices if the  $p$ -value is just non-significant**

## 6.3 Analysis with Incomplete Data (cont'd)

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- **Summary/Take home message**

- ▷ When we also have missing data in the covariates a Multiple Imputation approach should be employed

## 6.4 Review of Key Points

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