

Estimating Causal Effects Using Proxies of a Latent Interference Network

Bar Weinstein
Tel Aviv University

TAU Statistics Seminar
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Talk Outline

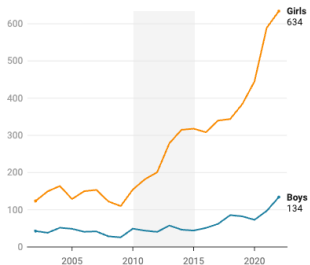
- ▶ Causal inference under **interference**.
- ▶ **Network interference structure**: measurements, misspecification, and proxies.

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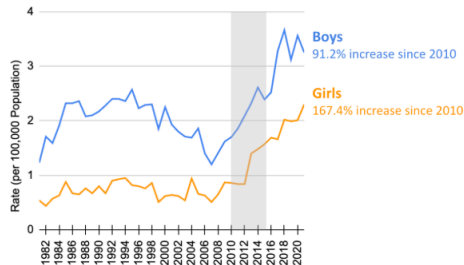
- ▶ Causal inference under **interference**.
- ▶ **Network interference structure**: measurements, misspecification, and proxies.
- ▶ Research conducted during my PhD (supervised by Daniel Nevo):
 1. Impact of network misspecification and network-misspecification-robust estimation.
 2. **Estimation with proxy networks** (focus of today's talk).
 3. Sensitivity analysis for contamination in egocentric-network RCTs.

U.S. Emergency Department Visits for Self-Harm (Ages 10-14)

Rate per 100,000 Population



U.S. Suicide Rates (Ages 10-14)



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 - ▶ Estimand: ATE
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 - ▶ Estimand: ATE
 - ▶ Recent commentary by Fulton (2025).
- ▶ However, social media usage among friends may affect the outcomes of an individual \Rightarrow **Interference!**
- ▶ ATE is irrelevant and other estimands are needed.

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- ▶ Cluster-randomized trial with cluster-level social media restriction
- ▶ Network-randomized trial
 - ▶ Estimands can be something like the average effect if $p\%$ of individuals are treated.
 - ▶ Requires correct measurement of the interference network.

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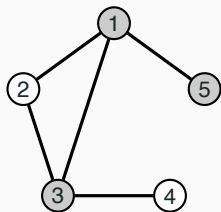
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 - ▶ Networks from multiple sources
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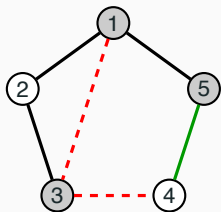
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How can we estimate causal effects when we only observe proxies of the interference network?

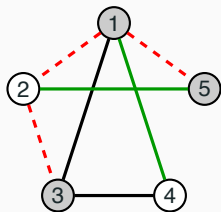
True Network



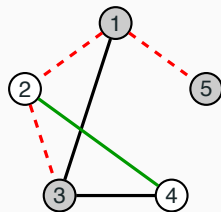
Proxy 1



Proxy 2



Proxy 3

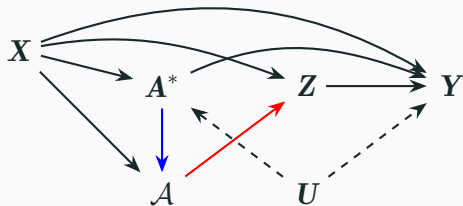
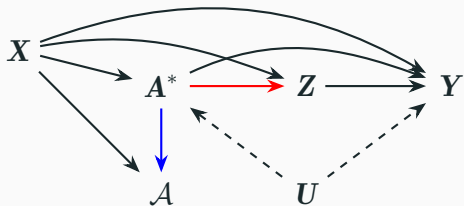


— Correct - - - Missing — Spurious ● Treated ○ Control

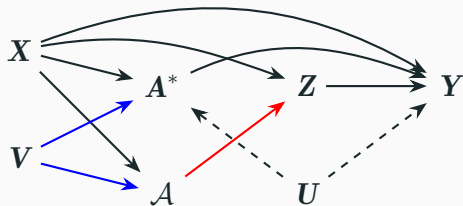
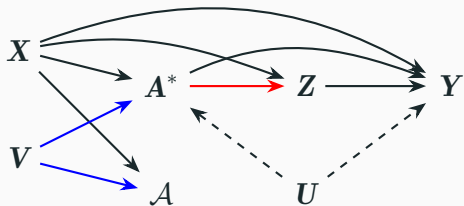
Setup

- ▶ Finite population of N units indexed by $i \in [N] = \{1, 2, \dots, N\}$.
- ▶ Covariates \mathbf{X}_i .
- ▶ Treatments $\mathbf{Z} = (Z_1, Z_2, \dots, Z_N)$.
- ▶ Outcomes $\mathbf{Y} = (Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_N)$.
- ▶ Latent interference network \mathbf{A}^* ; assume undirected and unweighted for simplicity.
- ▶ Observed proxies of the interference network $\mathcal{A} = \{\mathbf{A}_1, \dots, \mathbf{A}_B\}$.
 - ▶ Each \mathbf{A}_b is an $N \times N$ adjacency matrix.
- ▶ Observed data: $\mathcal{D} = (\mathbf{Y}, \mathbf{Z}, \mathcal{A}, \mathbf{X})$.

DAGs (Causal Proxies)



DAGs (Non-Causal Proxies)



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- ▶ Function of high-dimensional inputs; In practice summarized via

$$Y_i = f_Y(Z_i, \mathbf{X}_i, \phi_1(\mathbf{Z}_{-i}, \mathbf{A}^*), \phi_2(\mathbf{X}_{-i}, \mathbf{A}^*), \phi_{3,i}(\mathbf{A}^*), \mathbf{U}_i, \varepsilon_{Y_i}), \quad i \in [N]$$

- ▶ ϕ_1 – Exposure mapping (e.g., proportion of treated neighbors).
- ▶ ϕ_2 – Summarizing covariates (e.g., average age of neighbors).
- ▶ $\phi_{3,i}$ – Network summary statistics (e.g., global centrality measures).

Estimands

- ▶ Effects of hypothetical interventions on the population-level treatments.
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- ▶ For most DAGs shown, had we observed \mathbf{A}^* :

$$\mathbb{E}[Y_i(\mathbf{z}) \mid \mathbf{A}^*] = \mathbb{E}[Y_i \mid \mathbf{Z} = \mathbf{z}, \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}].$$

Types of Proxy Networks

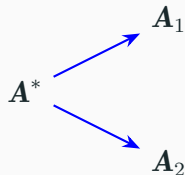
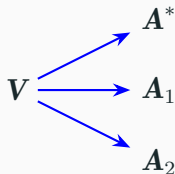
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- ▶ **Multiple sources.** Proxies from different sources.
 - ▶ Online networks, surveys, biological measurements, spatial data ...
- ▶ **Multilayer networks.** Each proxy represents a different type of relational structure (e.g., friendship, family, colleagues, etc.)



Parametric Identifiability

- ▶ η parameterize the **outcomes** model $p(\mathbf{Y} \mid \mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}; \eta)$.
- ▶ β_Z parameterize the **treatments** model $p(\mathbf{Z} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}; \beta_Z)$.
- ▶ θ parameterize the **latent network** model $p(\mathbf{A}^* \mid \mathbf{X}; \theta)$.
- ▶ γ parameterize the **proxy networks** model $p(\mathcal{A} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}; \gamma)$.
- ▶ Let $\Theta = (\eta, \beta_Z, \theta, \gamma)$ be the full parameter vector.

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- ▶ Let $\Theta = (\eta, \beta_Z, \theta, \gamma)$ be the full parameter vector.
- ▶ The complete-data likelihood is (causal proxies + observational study)

$$p(\mathcal{D}, \mathbf{A}^* \mid \Theta) = p(\mathbf{Y} \mid \mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \eta) p(\mathbf{Z} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \beta_Z) p(\mathcal{A} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \gamma) p(\mathbf{A}^* \mid \mathbf{X}, \theta).$$

- ▶ The observed-data likelihood is $p(\mathcal{D} \mid \Theta) = \sum_{\mathbf{A}^*} p(\mathcal{D}, \mathbf{A}^* \mid \Theta)$.

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- ▶ **Under what conditions and models is Θ identifiable?**

Parametric Identifiability

- ▶ $(Y, Z) \perp\!\!\!\perp \mathcal{A} \mid A^*, X$.
 - ▶ Under causal proxies + observational study DAG without U .
- ▶ Observed correlations between \mathcal{A} and Y, Z are mediated by A^* .

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- ▶ **Strategy:** Construct a system of moment equations
 - ▶ e.g., $\text{Cov}(Y, \mathcal{A} \mid X), \text{Cov}(Z, \mathcal{A} \mid X), \text{Cov}(A_1, A_2 \mid X)$
- ▶ If the moment map $\mathcal{M}(\Theta)$ is injective, Θ is globally identifiable (Rothenberg, 1971).

Parametric Identifiability (Example)

$$A_{ij}^* \sim \text{Ber}(\theta),$$

$$A_{ij} \mid A_{ij}^* = k \sim \text{Ber}(\gamma_k), \quad k = 0, 1,$$

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- ▶ **Base Case:** Four unknowns $(\theta, \gamma_0, \gamma_1, \eta_2)$, but only three distinct equations $\mathbb{E}[Y_i], \Pr(A_{ij} = 1), \text{Cov}(Y_i, d_i^{obs}) \Rightarrow$ **not identifiable**.
- ▶ We can't distinguish between dense networks with high error and sparse networks with low error.

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4. **Network-correlated Y:** For example, if $\text{Cov}(\varepsilon_i, \varepsilon_j) = \rho A_{ij}^*$.

Bayesian Estimation

- Assume prior independence. The posterior (causal proxies + observational study) is

$$\begin{aligned} p(\boldsymbol{\Theta}, \mathbf{A}^* \mid \mathcal{D}) &\propto p(\mathbf{Y} \mid \mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\eta}) p(\boldsymbol{\eta}) \\ &\quad \times p(\mathbf{Z} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\beta}_Z) p(\boldsymbol{\beta}_Z) \\ &\quad \times p(\mathcal{A} \mid \mathbf{A}^*, \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\gamma}) p(\boldsymbol{\gamma}) \\ &\quad \times p(\mathbf{A}^* \mid \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\theta}) p(\boldsymbol{\theta}). \end{aligned}$$

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- ▶ Mixed space of continuous (Θ) and discrete (\mathbf{A}^*) parameters.
- ▶ SOTA is to marginalize out \mathbf{A}^* – not possible here!
- ▶ Possible solutions:
 - ▶ Continuous relaxations of \mathbf{A}^* .
 - ▶ Mixed Hamiltonian Monte Carlo.
 - ▶ Random-walk Metropolis within Gibbs.

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- ▶ **Our solution:** Block Gibbs with Locally Informed Proposals for \mathbf{A}^* .

Locally Informed Proposals

- ▶ Updating A^* state corresponds to ‘flipping’ some entries
($A_{ij}^* = 1 \rightarrow A_{ij}^* = 0$ or $A_{ij}^* = 0 \rightarrow A_{ij}^* = 1$)
- ▶ Random-walk proposals flips \Rightarrow high rejection rate and slow mixing.

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- ▶ **Solution:** use the conditional posterior to guide proposals:

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- ▶ Construct proposal distribution that biases flips towards high posterior probability states.
- ▶ **Information Triangulation:** each module contributes to the proposal.

Locally Informed Proposals

- The LIP for updating \mathbf{A}_t^* to \mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* is with structure (Zanella, 2020):

$$Q(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot) \propto g\left(\frac{p(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \mid \cdot)}{p(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot)}\right) \mathbb{I}(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \in H(\mathbf{A}_t^*)),$$

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- ▶ $H(\mathbf{A}_t^*)$ is Hamming ball of size 1 (i.e., all states that differ in one entry).

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- ▶ The LIP for updating \mathbf{A}_t^* to \mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* is with structure (Zanella, 2020):

$$Q(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot) \propto g\left(\frac{p(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \mid \cdot)}{p(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot)}\right) \mathbb{I}(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \in H(\mathbf{A}_t^*)),$$

- ▶ $H(\mathbf{A}_t^*)$ is Hamming ball of size 1 (i.e., all states that differ in one entry).
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- ▶ Asymptotic efficient and good mixing (Zanella, 2020).

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- ▶ Gradient-based approximations using First-order Taylor series (Grathwohl et al., 2021):

$$\tilde{\Delta}(ij, t \mid \cdot) = -(2A_{t,ij}^* - 1) \frac{\partial \log(p(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot))}{\partial A_{t,ij}^*} \approx \Delta(ij, t \mid \cdot)$$

- ▶ Single gradient evaluation and implemented via automatic differentiation.

Algorithm A Single \mathbf{A}^* Update with LIP

Input: Data \mathcal{D} , continuous parameters Θ , current state \mathbf{A}_t^* , log-posterior $\log p(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot)$, number of entries to update $K \geq 1$.

- 1: Compute differences $\tilde{\Delta}(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot) \equiv \tilde{\Delta}(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \mathcal{D}, \Theta)$.
- 2: Compute $q(ij \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot) = \text{Softmax}\left(\frac{1}{2}\tilde{\Delta}(\mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot)\right)$.
- 3: Sample without replacement K edges \mathcal{I} using Gumbel-Max trick with probabilities $q(ij \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot)$.
- 4: Compute *forward* probability $q(\mathcal{I} \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot) = \prod_{ij \in \mathcal{I}} q(ij \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot)$.
- 5: $\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^* \leftarrow \text{FlipEntries}(\mathbf{A}_t^*, \mathcal{I})$.
- 6: Compute *backward* probability $q(\mathcal{I} \mid \mathbf{A}_{t+1}^*, \cdot) = \prod_{ij \in \mathcal{I}} q(ij \mid \mathbf{A}_{t+1}^*, \cdot)$.
- 7: Accept with probability

$$\min \left(\exp \left(\Delta(\mathbf{A}_{t+1}^*, \mathbf{A}_t^* \mid \cdot) \right) \frac{q(\mathcal{I} \mid \mathbf{A}_{t+1}^*, \cdot)}{q(\mathcal{I} \mid \mathbf{A}_t^*, \cdot)}, 1 \right).$$

Block Gibbs Sampler

- ▶ Alternate between updating A^* with LIP and Θ with any continuous kernel (HMC, NUTS, etc.)
- ▶ We perform L updates of A^* per iteration (maximum of $L \times K$ total flips per iteration).

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 4. Refine \mathbf{A}_0^* by performing a short sequence of LIP updates given Θ_0 .

Numerical Illustration

- ▶ Simulated data with $N = 500$ units.
- ▶ Latent network $\Pr(A_{ij}^* = 1) = \text{expit}(\boldsymbol{\theta}^\top \mathbf{X})$ with edge-level covariates.
- ▶ Single or two proxy networks from differential measurement error models.
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- ▶ **Estimands:**
 1. Dynamic policy assigning treatment through two thresholds of one covariate.
 2. Total Treatment Effect: treating all versus none of the units.

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► Baseline methods:

1. **True:** using true network A^* (“True”).
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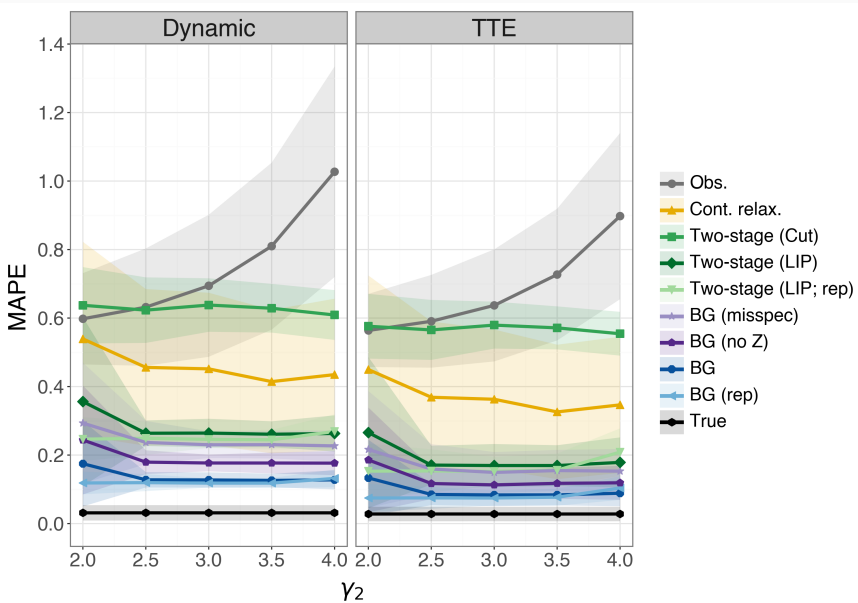
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4. **Two-stage samplers:** estimate A^* from proxies \mathcal{A} and plug-in into outcome model.
 - Without LIP refinement (“Cut”)
 - With LIP refinement with one (“LIP”) or two proxies (“LIP; rep”).

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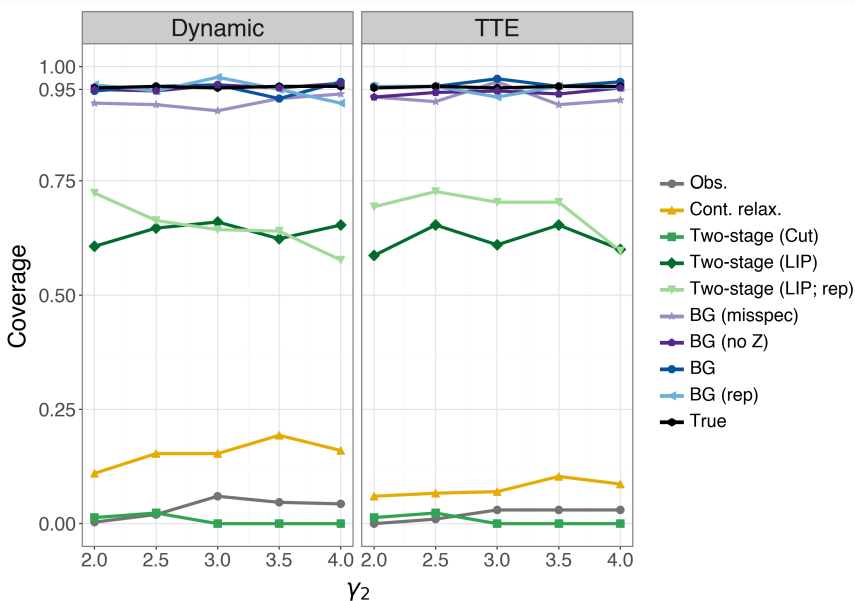
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 - Without LIP refinement (“Cut”)
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5. **Block Gibbs** (with $K = L = 1$ updates per iteration):
 - With one (“BG”) or two proxies (“BG (rep)”).
 - Without the treatment model (“BG (no Z)”).
 - With misspecification due to omitted covariate (“BG (misspec)”).

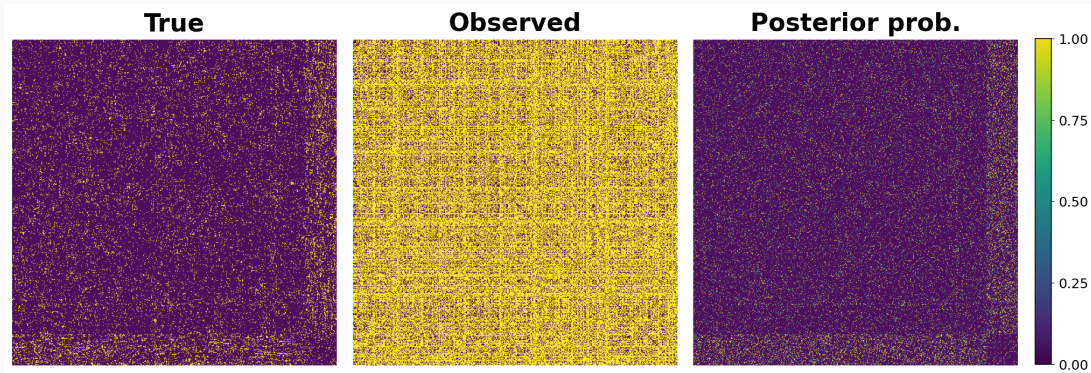
$$MAPE = N^{-1} \sum_{i=1}^N \left| \frac{\hat{\tau}_i - \tau_i}{\tau_i} \right|$$



Empirical coverage of 95% CIs



Network reconstruction in one iteration

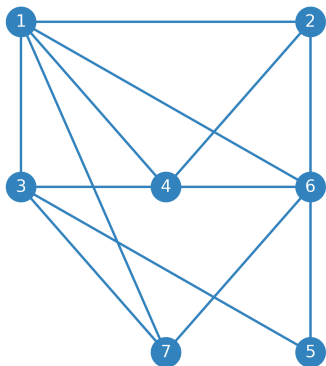


Extensions and Future Work

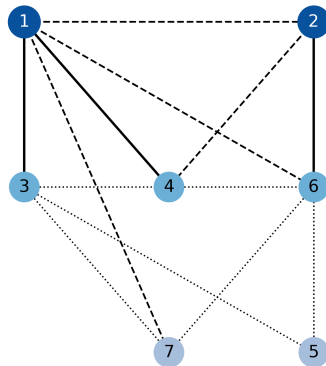
- ▶ Estimands of intervention on the interference network structure.
- ▶ DOE with latent or uncertain interference network.
- ▶ Dimension of latent network is $\mathcal{O}(N^2)$ – feasible for small to moderate networks.
- ▶ Robustness to model misspecification.

Egocentric-Network Randomized Trials

(A) Population network



(B) Sampled ego-network

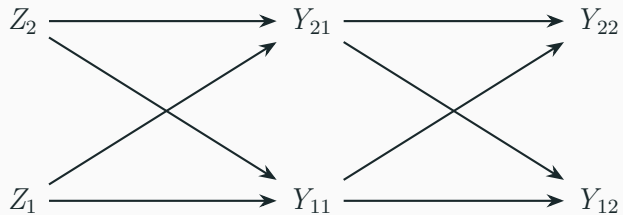


— Observed ● Ego ● Alter ● Non-recruited
- - - Latent ego edges Other latent edges

Thank You!

- ▶ BW and DN. Causal Inference with Misspecified Network Interference Structure. *Biometrics*, 2026. Discussion paper.
- ▶ BW and DN. Bayesian Estimation of Causal Effects Using Proxies of a Latent Interference Network. R&R at *JMLR*.
- ▶ BW and DN. Sensitivity Analysis for Contamination in Egocentric-Network Randomized Trials with Interference. *To be submitted*.

DAG given A^*



Parameteric Identifiability – Local

We can write the observed-data Fisher Information Matrix as

$$\mathcal{I}_{obs}(\Theta) = \mathcal{I}_{comp}(\Theta) - \mathcal{I}_{miss}(\Theta).$$

- ▶ Θ is locally identifiable at Θ_0 if $\mathcal{I}_{obs}(\Theta_0)$ nonsingular.
- ▶ That will be the case if $\mathcal{I}_{obs}(\Theta)$ is strictly block-diagonally dominant matrix.
- ▶ Intuitively, identification is stronger when the data modules (outcomes, treatments, proxies) depend on the latent network A^* through *distinct* structural features.

Parametric Identifiability (Example)

Base Case:

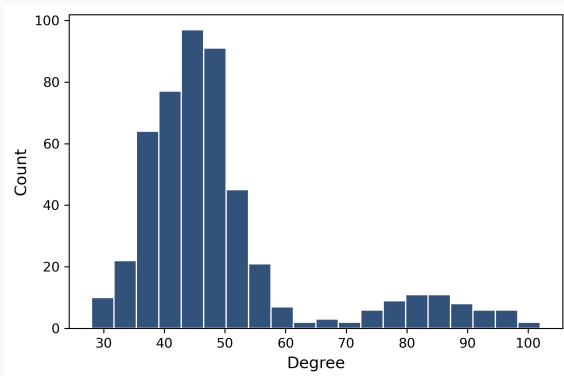
- ▶ $\mathbb{E}[Z_i] = p_z$
 - ▶ $\mathbb{E}[Y_i \mid Z_i = z] = \eta_1 z + \eta_2(N-1)p_z\theta$
 - ▶ $\mathbb{E}[Y_i] = \eta_1 p_z + \eta_2(N-1)p_z\theta$
 - ▶ $\mu_A = \Pr(A_{ij} = 1) = \gamma_1\theta + \gamma_0(1-\theta)$
 - ▶ $\text{Cov}(Y_i, d_i^{obs}) = \eta_2(N-1)p_z\theta(\gamma_1 - \mu_A)$
1. **Two proxies:** $m_{AD} = \frac{2}{N(N-1)} \sum_{i < j} |A_{1,ij} - A_{2,ij}|$ and
 $\mathbb{E}[m_{AD}] = 2 [\gamma_1(1-\gamma_1)\theta + \gamma_0(1-\gamma_0)(1-\theta)]$
 2. **Network-dependent Z:** $\mathbb{E}[Z_i Z_j] = \frac{p_z^2}{(N-1)^2} \left[\frac{1}{\theta} + ((N-1)^2 - 1) \right]$ and
 $\text{Cov}(Z_i, d_i^{obs}) = p_z(1-\theta)(\gamma_1 - \gamma_0)$
 3. **Network-correlated Y:** $\mathbb{E}[Y_i Y_j \mid A_{ij} = 1] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i Y_j \mid A_{ij} = 0] =$
 $\left[\frac{\gamma_1\theta}{\mu_A} - \frac{(1-\gamma_1)\theta}{1-\mu_A} \right] [2\eta_2 p_z (\mathbb{E}[Y_i] - \eta_2\theta p_z) + \eta_2^2 p_z^2 + \rho.]$

Cut-posterior

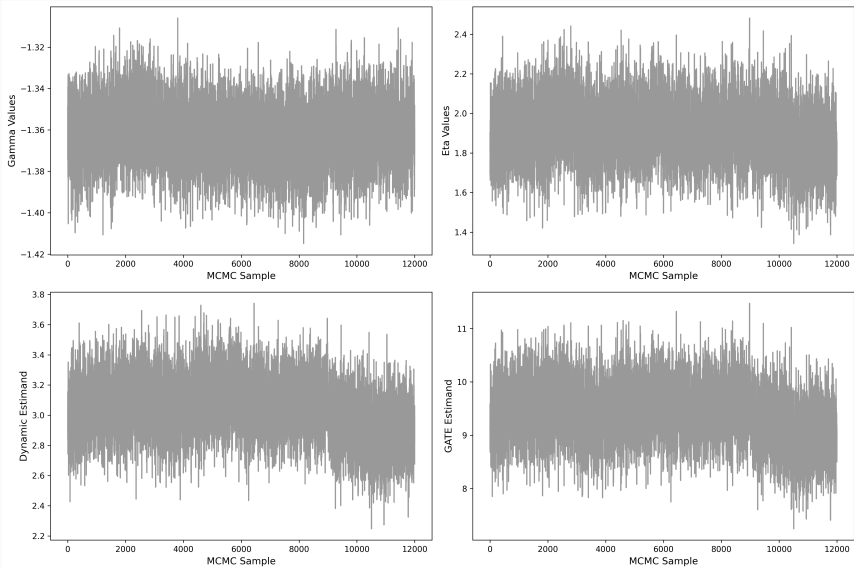
$$p(\boldsymbol{\eta}, \boldsymbol{\theta}, \boldsymbol{\gamma}, \boldsymbol{A}^* \mid \mathcal{D}) \propto \underbrace{p(\boldsymbol{\eta} \mid \boldsymbol{Y}, \boldsymbol{Z}, \boldsymbol{A}^*, \boldsymbol{X})}_{\text{Outcome module}} \underbrace{p(\boldsymbol{\theta}, \boldsymbol{\gamma}, \boldsymbol{A}^* \mid \mathcal{A}, \boldsymbol{X})}_{\text{Network module}} \underbrace{p(\boldsymbol{Y} \mid \boldsymbol{Z}, \boldsymbol{A}^*, \boldsymbol{X})}_{\text{Feedback term}}.$$

Numerical Illustration

Degree distribution of the A^* in one iteration



Traceplot of key parameters and estimands



Numerical Illustration – Full Details

$$X_{1,i} \sim N(0, 1), \quad X_{2,i} \sim \text{Ber}(0.1)$$

$$\Pr(A_{ij}^* = 1 \mid \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\theta}) = s(-2 + \tilde{X}_{2,ij})$$

$$\Pr(A_{ij} = 1 \mid A_{ij}^*, \mathbf{X}, \boldsymbol{\gamma}) = s(A_{ij}^* \gamma_0 + (1 - A_{ij}^*)(\gamma_1 + \gamma_2 \tilde{X}_{1,ij} + \gamma_3 \tilde{X}_{2,ij}))$$

$$\Pr(Z_i = 1) = p_z \frac{d_i^*}{N - 1}$$

$$\mu_i = -1 + 3Z_i + 2\phi_1 - 0.5X_{1,i}$$

$$Y_i = \mu_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad \varepsilon_i \sim N(0, 1)$$

where we set $\gamma_0 = \text{logit}(0.95) - \gamma_2/2$, $\gamma_1 = \text{logit}(0.05) + \gamma_2/2$, and took

$\gamma_2 \in \{2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4\}$. Edge-level covariates are defined as

$\tilde{X}_{1,ij} = |X_{1,i} - X_{1,j}|$, capturing the covariate distance, and

$\tilde{X}_{2,ij} = \mathbb{I}\{X_{2,i} + X_{2,j} = 1\}$, an indicator of exactly one of the two units have $X_2 = 1$.

Numerical Illustration – Priors and Estimands

We assume $N(0, 3^2)$ priors for all coefficients and $\sigma \sim \text{HalfNormal}(0, 3^2)$.

The dynamic estimand is $\tau(h_{c_1}, h_{c_2}) = \mu(h_{c_1}) - \mu(h_{c_2})$, with thresholds $c_1 = 0.75$ and $c_2 = 1.5$. The static policy is the Total Treatment Effects (TTE), $\tau(1, 0)$, comparing the scenarios where all units are treated versus none.

Semi-synthetic Data Application

- ▶ Multilayer network dataset collected by Magnani et al. (2013), which originally contained five layers describing social connections among $N = 61$ employees at Aarhus University's Department of Computer Science. We remove the co-authorship layer.
- ▶ we sequentially designated each layer as the latent interference network A^* , treating the remaining three layers as observed proxies \mathcal{A} . The joint distribution of the four layers was modeled using LSM with shared bivariate latent positions \mathbf{V}

$$\Pr(A_{b,ij} = 1 \mid \mathbf{V}, \gamma) = s(\gamma_{b,0} - e^{\gamma_{b,1}} \|\mathbf{V}_i - \mathbf{V}_j\|_2),$$

where $\gamma_{b,0}$ controls the baseline probability of edge creation in layer b and $\gamma_{b,1}$ controls how latent distances affects edge probabilities.

- ▶ We assumed $\mathbf{V}_i \sim N_2(\mathbf{0}, I)$, and hierarchical priors for the layer-specific parameters

$$\gamma_{b,j} \sim N(\mu_j, \sigma_j^2), \mu_j \sim N(0, 3^2), \sigma_j \sim \text{HalfNormal}(0, 3^2), j = 0, 1.$$

Semi-synthetic Data Application

<i>Method</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Leisure</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Work</i>
True	0.070 (0.045)	0.104 (0.080)	0.055 (0.041)	0.040 (0.024)
BG	0.132 (0.059)	0.157 (0.095)	0.111 (0.049)	0.096 (0.036)
Two-stage	0.397 (0.099)	0.187 (0.059)	0.169 (0.044)	0.287 (0.073)
OR	0.783 (0.198)	0.419 (0.229)	0.272 (0.057)	0.320 (0.065)
AND	0.501 (0.093)	0.233 (0.061)	0.425 (0.072)	0.324 (0.055)

Table: Mean (SD) of MAPE values across 300 iterations of the TTE estimand by layer and estimation method.

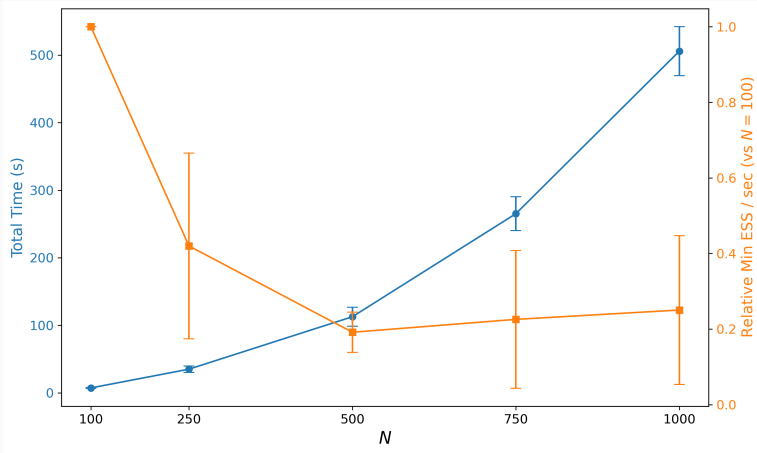


Figure: Scaling and mixing of the BG across 10 iterations in one setup. For varying sample sizes N , the figure shows the average (\pm SD) of wall-clock time (in seconds) to obtain 1.2×10^4 MCMC samples (left y-axis, blue), and the relative minimal effective sample size (ESS) per second compared to $N = 100$ (right y-axis, orange). Clock-wall times were obtained on a PC equipped with a 12-core Apple Silicon (ARM64) processor and 48 GB of RAM, running macOS (Darwin Kernel 24.6.0).