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# Book of the Short Papers

**Editors: Antonio Balzanella, Matilde Bini,  
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# Preface

This book includes the contributions presented at the 51st Scientific Meeting of the Italian Statistical Society (SIS) held in Caserta at the Università della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, from the 22nd to 24th of June, 2022.

The conference has registered more than 300 presentations, including 4 keynotes in plenary invited sessions and 9 presentations in 3 guest sessions, 48 presentations collected in 16 specialized sessions and 68 presentations in 17 solicited sessions, all dealing with specific themes in methodological and/or applied statistics and demography. Furthermore, more than 200 contributions, with one or more authors, have been spontaneously submitted to the Program Committee and arranged in 43 contributed sessions.

The high number of contributions and the large participation at the conference show that researchers have met the challenge of pursuing working even in the face of the pandemic period from which we are only now emerging. The research activity in our field therefore has never stopped, and the desire to participate in scientific events, as a place for exchange and discussion on new developments in our field, remains a living characteristic of our scientific community.

With the publication of this book, we wish to offer to all members of the Italian Statistical Society, all international academics, researchers, Ph.D. students, and all interested practitioners, a good snapshot of the on-going research in the statistical and demographic fields. We deeply thank all contributors for having submitted their works to the conference and all the researchers for their remarkable job in acting as referees accurately and timely. We also would like to thank the International Biometric Society (IBS) – Italian region, the European Network for Business and Industrial Statistics (ENBIS) and the Italian Society of Statistical Physics (SIFS) we had the pleasure of hosting. A special thanks is addressed to the Scientific and Organizational Committees for their great efforts devoted to all the organizational aspects, to the Università della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli” and to the Department of Mathematics and Physics who made this event possible, as well as to the Municipality of the Town of Caserta who has patronized the event and to all the funders for their supports.

Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to the publisher Pearson Italia for all the support received.

# Analyzing different causes of one-inflation in capture recapture models for criminal populations.

*Modelli cattura-ricattura per la stima di popolazioni criminali: analisi delle diverse cause di one-inflation.*

Davide Di Cecco, Andrea Tancredi and Tiziana Tuoto

**Abstract** Our goal is the estimation of the size of various criminal populations on the basis of administrative data on criminal proceedings by exploiting capture-recapture models for repeated count data. The data at our disposal exhibit an abundance of units that are captured exactly once, which suggests the necessity of explicitly modeling this deviation. We distinguish three possible causes for this phenomenon, namely, the erroneous inclusion of out-of-scope units, a particular behavioural effect preventing subsequent captures after the first one, and missed links in a Record Linkage step. We then propose three families of “one-inflated” models to estimate the number of uncaptured units which we compare on datasets of Italian criminal proceedings.

**Abstract** *L'utilizzo di modelli cattura ricattura per stimare il numero di criminali non è nuovo in letteratura. In questo lavoro intendiamo stimare il numero di individui connessi a specifiche attività criminali in Italia sulla base dei dati sul numero di provvedimenti giudiziari individuali. I dati mostrano chiaramente la necessità di modellizzare l'eccesso di individui catturati solo una volta. Individuiamo 3 cause possibili per questo fenomeno noto come “one-inflation”: la presenza di unità che andrebbero escluse dalla popolazione; un behavioural effect già noto nella stima delle popolazioni animali; e la presenza di mancati abbinamenti in una fase preliminare di Record Linkage. Proponiamo di conseguenza 3 strategie per le 3 possibili cause.*

**Key words:** Criminal populations. Capture-recapture. Official statistics.

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Davide Di Cecco  
Università di Roma La Sapienza e-mail: [davide.dicecco@uniroma1.it](mailto:davide.dicecco@uniroma1.it)

Andrea Tancredi  
Università di Roma La Sapienza e-mail: [andrea.tancredi@uniroma1.it](mailto:andrea.tancredi@uniroma1.it)

Tiziana Tuoto  
ISTAT, e-mail: [tuoto@istat.it](mailto:tuoto@istat.it)

## 1 Introduction

Estimating the number of people involved in certain illegal activities helps us in allocating the police forces to counter it, in evaluating the effectiveness of prevention and counteraction policies, and in evaluating the economic value associated to those activities. The European Parliament and Council identified the smuggling of goods, prostitution exploitation and drug trafficking as the main sources of illegal economic transactions to report in the national accounts aggregates. In this work we aim at estimating the number of people involved in these three illegal activities in Italy during 2014 by exploiting administrative data on criminal proceedings in a capture–recapture model.

Data from the Ministry of Justice report alleged crimes for which the judicial authority started a criminal proceeding. We count the number of times each individual appears in the Prosecutor’s offices registers. Under a (reasonable) assumption of time–homogeneous capture probabilities, the data can then be summarized as counts of units captured  $j$  times,  $\{n_j\}_{j=1,2,\dots}$ .

Figure 1 depicts our data. We observed a total of 3349 smugglers (top figure), 2740 prostitution exploiters (mid), and 34964 drugs traffickers (bottom).

The common parametric approach to estimate the number  $n_0$  of individuals unreported to the justice system, is to define a counting distribution for the observed (truncated in zero) number of captures in the population. We considered various distributional alternatives: Poisson, Geometric, Negative Binomial, finite mixtures of Poisson and of Geometric. Even considering different parametric options, in all three observed distributions the number of units captured exactly once exceeds the expectation under the model hypothesis. This phenomenon is known in literature as “one–inflation” and is of particular importance, as it typically implies a substantial difference in the estimates of  $n_0$ .

## 2 Causes of one–inflation

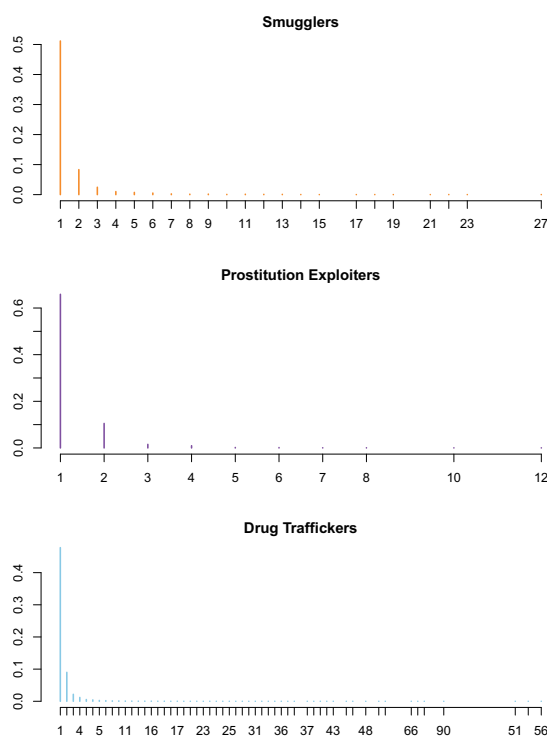
One–inflation might be generated by different factors, and we have identified the following three possible mechanisms:

1. a specific behaviour of the units, which learn how to avoid subsequent captures after the first one;
2. the presence of spurious units which do not belong to the reference population;
3. errors in re-identifying the units (linkage errors), due to the lack of unique identifiers and error-prone soft identifiers.

In our data we cannot exclude any of the previous factors having an impact on the observed excess of “ones”.

The first mechanism generating one–inflation can be viewed as an extreme form of what in animal abundance analysis is called “trap shy” behaviour. In our case, we suppose that, after the first capture, a portion of persons involved in illegal activities

## Different causes of one-inflation



**Fig. 1** Relative frequencies of observed number of captures for smugglers (top), prostitution exploiters (mid), and drug traffickers (bottom) in Italy in 2014

acquires the necessary knowledge/ability to avoid any subsequent capture. This can be formalized as a latent subpopulation presenting right-censored data, as we only know that their potential number of captures is larger than one. This hypothesis has been explored in depths in several recent papers (see, e.g., [6], [7], [8], [1]).

We cannot exclude the presence of spurious cases as source of one-inflation in our data. Indeed, we analyse records from the reported offences for which the judicial authority started a proceeding. However, we actually do not have information on whether the person reported was sentenced in court or acquitted. Then, a portion of the units captured once may be out-of-scope, and should be discarded from the analysis. The presence of out-of-scope or spurious captures has been considered, for example, in [2], [5]. Under this hypothesis, the observed value  $n_1$  represents an upper bound for the real number of criminals captured once.

Finally, due to privacy issue, our data are not provided with a unique identifier, hence, we cannot exclude the possibility of one-inflation deriving from linkage errors. In fact, when matching information does not suffice to recognise multiple captures of the same individual, the resulting missing links erroneously increase the number of singletons. The effect of linkage errors on population size estimates in the

multiple system estimation framework has been investigated both with a Bayesian perspective, see [9] and with a frequentist approach [3], and [4].

To the best of our knowledge, the explicit modeling of linkage errors in repeated count data for population size estimation is a topic not previously considered. In this contribution, we will show some possible linkage errors modeling in this setting, to derive population size estimates that will take into account the linkage uncertainty. In addition, we compare and discuss the estimates produced by the different sources of one-inflation.

### 3 Linkage errors in repeated count data

The lack of unique identifiers is a common situation both in social science and in natural science applications. Linkage procedures allow recognising the same unit even in the absence of a unique identifier, hence they are a prerequisite for population size estimates. Usually, the linkage is far from being a simple operation and it might introduce some errors, namely false and missed links. The linkage procedure finds a trade-off between the two kinds of linkage errors. In addition, the two errors have opposite effects on repeated count data, and consequently on population size estimates. The false links erroneously increase counts greater than one, since different units are erroneously recognised as the same one. On the other side, missed links, i.e. failure in recognising the same unit, increase the number of singletons.

Since the linkage procedure is actually a statistical activity, the one-inflation generated by linkage errors can be considered from both a primary and a secondary analysis perspective. In the former, the linkage and the population size estimate are viewed as components of a unique process and, via a hierarchical structure, as in [9] and [10], we are able to propagate the uncertainty between the parameter estimation step and the matching procedure. A clear advantage of this approach is that we are able to take into account at the same time both the two types of linkage errors.

Due to its relevance in real life application, we also consider the secondary analysis perspective, that is we assume that the linkage has been performed by someone else, and only quality indicators like linkage errors are available to be included in the subsequent analysis. In this perspective we explicitly model the one-inflation caused by missed links, since usually the linker tries to minimise the false matches, at the price of accepting some highest level of missed link errors. A specific characteristic of this model is the additional uncertainty affecting the total number of distinct units, as a consequence of the linkage error itself. Actually, assuming that our data is affected by missed links reduces the sample size in terms of distinct units and the observed one can be considered an upper-bound of the true one. On the contrary, when modeling the one-inflation due to the behavioural effect and spurious cases, we can consider as fixed the observed number of distinct units.



### 4 Results

For the sake of brevity, we only show in Table 4 some results on prostitution exploiters data, considering both non inflated and one-inflated models and other standard estimates for the proposed setting. For the one-inflation model generated by linkage errors we assume a secondary analysis framework. In particular we show the results obtained by taking a Poisson and a Geometric distribution for the individual captures  $y^*$  and assuming that the observed captures  $y$  are given by a Binomial variate with size  $y^* - 1$  and that  $y^* - y$  extra singletons are added to the data set. The idea underlying the model is that when the individual records subsequent to the first capture are compared with the initial record we may fail to link the records reducing the number of captures for that individual from  $y^*$  to  $y^* - m$  where  $m$  is the number of missing links. Moreover the missing links cannot be matched to any other records. In fact, we exclude both the possibility to have false matches and the chance to reconstruct, by the missing links, a sub-cluster of records referring to a given individual. This way the missing links may provide only single captures. Note also that while for the one-inflation caused by behavioural effects and spurious cases, Bayesian inference can be obtained via standard Markov Chain Monte Carlo simulation algorithms, for the one-inflation model caused by linkage error, due to the likelihood intractability, we opted for an approximate Bayesian computation (ABC) approach.

Estimator/Model	$\hat{N}$	95%CI. $\hat{N}$
Ignoring one-inflation		
Poisson	7210	6780 - 7689
Geometric	13332	12415 - 14394
Chao	9851	8961 - 10868
Zelterman	10030	9033 - 11027
Poisson Mixture model	10073	9049 - 11110
Modeling one-inflation behavioural effect $\hat{\omega}$		
One-inflated Poisson	3895	3656 - 4156 0.645
One-inflated Geometric	8182	7406 - 9233 0.478
One-inflated Poisson mixture model	6613	5284 - 9870 0.261
Modeling one-inflation spurious cases $\hat{\psi}$		
One-inflated Poisson	3154	3035-3304 0.560
One-inflated Poisson mixture model	4711	3744 - 8799 0.163
Modeling one-inflation linkage error $\hat{\mu}$		
One-inflated Poisson	2362	2090 - 2681 0.645
One-inflated Geometric	9384	7896 - 10720 0.323

**Table 1** Prostitution exploitation data: posterior mean and credible intervals for the population size  $N$ , posterior mean for the one-inflation parameters  $\omega, \psi$  and  $\mu$  accordingly to the source of one-inflation.

Specification on the different models and additional results will be presented during the conference and in an extended version of this contribution.

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