

# Estimating user-defined nonlinear regression models in Stata and in Mata

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Based on A. Colin Cameron and Pravin K. Trivedi,  
*Microeconometrics using Stata*, Stata Press.

November 14, 2008

# 1. Introduction

- Consider nonlinear cross-section regression of  $y_i$  on  $\mathbf{x}_i$ .
- Example is  $y_i | \mathbf{x}_i \sim \text{Poisson}$  with mean  $\mu_i = \exp(\mathbf{x}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta})$ .
- This talk demonstrates various ways to code up the estimator,
  - using Stata command `m1`
  - and Mata command `optimize`

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## 2. Built-in command poisson

- Data from 2002 U.S. Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS).  
Data due to Deb, Munkin and Trivedi (2006)
- Aged 25-64 years working in private sector but not self-employed and not receiving public insurance (Medicare and Medicaid)
- Model `docvis` - annual number of doctor visits.

```

. use mus10data.dta, clear
. quietly keep if year02==1
. describe docvis private chronic female income

```

variable name	storage type	display format	value label	variable label
docvis	int	%8.0g		number of doctor visits
private	byte	%8.0g		= 1 if private insurance
chronic	byte	%8.0g		= 1 if a chronic condition
female	byte	%8.0g		= 1 if female
income	float	%9.0g		Income in \$ / 1000

```

. summarize docvis private chronic female income

```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
docvis	4412	3.957389	7.947601	0	134
private	4412	.7853581	.4106202	0	1
chronic	4412	.3263826	.4689423	0	1
female	4412	.4718948	.4992661	0	1
income	4412	34.34018	29.03987	-49.999	280.777

## Built-in command poisson

```
. poisson docvis private chronic female income, vce(robust)
```

```
Iteration 0: log pseudolikelihood = -18504.413  
Iteration 1: log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549  
Iteration 2: log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549
```

Poisson regression

```
Number of obs   =      4412  
Wald chi2(4)    =      594.72  
Prob > chi2     =      0.0000  
Pseudo R2      =      0.1930
```

Log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549

docvis	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
private	.7986652	.1090014	7.33	0.000	.5850263	1.012304
chronic	1.091865	.0559951	19.50	0.000	.9821167	1.201614
female	.4925481	.0585365	8.41	0.000	.3778187	.6072774
income	.003557	.0010825	3.29	0.001	.0014354	.0056787
_cons	-.2297262	.1108732	-2.07	0.038	-.4470338	-.0124186

Note: Nonrobust standard errors are (erroneously) much smaller.

**Marginal effects for nonlinear model:**  $\partial E[y|\mathbf{x}]/\partial x_j = \beta_j \times \exp(\mathbf{x}'\boldsymbol{\beta})$ .

. mfx

Marginal effects after poisson  
 y = predicted number of events (predict)  
 = 3.0296804

variable	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[	95% C.I.	]	x
private*	1.978178	.20441	9.68	0.000	1.57755	2.37881		.785358
chronic*	4.200068	.27941	15.03	0.000	3.65243	4.7477		.326383
female*	1.528406	.17758	8.61	0.000	1.18036	1.87645		.471895
income	.0107766	.00331	3.25	0.001	.00428	.017274		34.3402

(\*) dy/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1

. margeff

Average marginal effects on E(docvis) after poisson

docvis	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
private	2.404721	.2438573	9.86	0.000	1.926769 2.882672
chronic	4.599174	.2886176	15.94	0.000	4.033494 5.164854
female	1.900212	.2156694	8.81	0.000	1.477508 2.322917
income	.0140765	.004346	3.24	0.001	.0055585 .0225945

### 3. Command `ml` method `lf`

- First write a program we call `lfpois`.  
This constructs the log-likelihood

$$\sum_{i=1}^N \ln f(y_i | \mathbf{x}_i, \boldsymbol{\beta}) = \sum_{i=1}^N \{-\exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta}) + y_i \mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta} - \ln y_i!\}.$$

- Then give commands
  - `ml model lf lfpois (docvis = private chronic female income), vce(robust)`
  - `ml check`
  - `ml search`
  - `ml maximize`
- The `ml check` and `ml search` are optional.



- 1  $y$  is stored in global macro `ML_y1`.  
It is referred to as `$ML_y1`
- 2  $\mathbf{x}$  is combined with  $\beta$  as the index  $\mathbf{x}'\beta$   
It is referred to as the program argument `theta1`
- 3 In  $f(y|\mathbf{x}, \beta)$  is referred to as the program argument `lf`

```
. program define lfpois
1.  version 10.0
2.  args lf theta1                // theta1=x'b, lf=lnf(y)
3.  tempvar lnyfact mu
4.  local y "$ML_y1"             // Define y so program more readable
5.  generate double `lnyfact' = lnfactorial(`y')
6.  generate double `mu' = exp(`theta1')
7.  quietly replace `lf' = -`mu' + `y'*`theta1' - `lnyfact'
8.  end
```

Arguments, temporary variables and local variables are local macros, referenced in single quotes.

# Stata command ml method lf for Poisson MLE

```
. * Compute the estimator  
. ml maximize
```

```
initial:      log pseudolikelihood = -23017.072  
rescale:     log pseudolikelihood = -23017.072  
Iteration 0: log pseudolikelihood = -23017.072  
Iteration 1: log pseudolikelihood = -19777.405  
Iteration 2: log pseudolikelihood = -18513.54  
Iteration 3: log pseudolikelihood = -18503.556  
Iteration 4: log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549  
Iteration 5: log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549
```

```
Log pseudolikelihood = -18503.549  
Number of obs      =      4412  
Wald chi2(4)       =      594.72  
Prob > chi2        =      0.0000
```

docvis	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
private	.7986654	.1090015	7.33	0.000	.5850265	1.012304
chronic	1.091865	.0559951	19.50	0.000	.9821167	1.201614
female	.4925481	.0585365	8.41	0.000	.3778187	.6072775
income	.003557	.0010825	3.29	0.001	.0014354	.0056787
_cons	-.2297263	.1108733	-2.07	0.038	-.4470339	-.0124188

- Command `ml` is not restricted to likelihood functions.  
 e.g. For OLS maximize  $-\sum_{i=1}^N (y_i - \mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta})^2$ .  
 quietly replace 'lnf' = -('y'-exp('theta1'))^2  
 But must then use robust standard errors.
  
- Command `ml` can handle models with more than one index.  
 e.g. For negative binomial have two indexes  $\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta}$  and  $\alpha$ .  
`args lnf theta1 a`  
 and  
`ml model lf lfnb (docvis = private chronic female  
 income) ()`
  
- Number of numerical derivatives = number of indexes.  
 Fast if few indexes.

## 4. Check program by simulation

- Generate sample of size  $N$  from

$$y_i \sim \text{Poisson}[\exp(\alpha + \beta x_i)]$$

$$x_i \sim N[0, 0.5^2]$$

$$\alpha = 2; \beta = 1.$$

- To check consistency
  - Set  $N = 100,000$
  - Does  $\hat{\alpha} = 2$ ? Does  $\hat{\beta} = 1$ ?

- To check computation of the standard errors  $s_{\hat{\alpha}}$  and  $s_{\hat{\beta}}$ .
  - Set  $N = 500$ .
  - Draw 2,000 samples of size  $N$  and obtain 2,000 estimates using command `simulate` or command `postfile`
  - Does  $\sqrt{\frac{1}{1999} \sum_{s=1}^{2000} (\hat{\beta}^{(s)} - \bar{\hat{\beta}})^2} = \frac{1}{2000} \sum_{s=1}^{2000} s_{\hat{\beta}}^{(s)}$ ?
  - i.e. Over the simulations:  
Does the st. deviation of  $\hat{\beta} =$  the average st. error of  $\hat{\beta}$ ?

## 5. Command `ml` methods `d0`, `d1`, `d2`

- More general.
- Computes the log-density for each observation.  
This then needs to be summed using `mlsum`
- Enters parameters  $\beta$  directly, rather than via index  $\mathbf{x}'\beta$ .
- Method `d0` needs to compute  $q$  numerical derivatives if  $q$  parameters.
- Can provide first derivatives (method `d1`) and second derivatives (method `d2`) .  
This speeds up computation.

- For method d0 extra arguments is todo
- mlevel converts  $\beta$  to  $x'\beta$
- mlsum converts  $x'_i\beta$  to  $\sum_{i=1}^N x'_i\beta$ .

```
. * Method d0: Program d0pois to be called by command ml method d0
. program define d0pois
1.   version 10.0
2.   args todo b lnf           // todo is not used, b=b, lnf=lnL
3.   tempvar theta1          // theta1=x'b given in eq(1)
4.   mlevel `theta1' = `b', eq(1)
5.   local y $ML_y1         // Define y so program more readable
6.   mlsum `lnf' = -exp(`theta1') + `y'*`theta1' - lnfactorial(`y')
7. end
```

# Stata command ml method d0 for Poisson MLE

```
. ml model d0 d0pois (docvis = private chronic female income)
. ml maximize
```

```
initial:      log likelihood = -33899.609
alternative:  log likelihood = -28031.767
rescale:     log likelihood = -24020.669
Iteration 0:  log likelihood = -24020.669
Iteration 1:  log likelihood = -18845.464
Iteration 2:  log likelihood = -18510.257
Iteration 3:  log likelihood = -18503.552
Iteration 4:  log likelihood = -18503.549
Iteration 5:  log likelihood = -18503.549
```

Log likelihood = -18503.549

```
Number of obs   =      4412
wald chi2(4)    =      8052.34
Prob > chi2     =      0.0000
```

docvis	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
private	.7986653	.027719	28.81	0.000	.7443371 .8529936
chronic	1.091865	.0157985	69.11	0.000	1.060901 1.12283
female	.4925481	.0160073	30.77	0.000	.4611744 .5239218
income	.003557	.0002412	14.75	0.000	.0030844 .0040297
_cons	-.2297263	.0287022	-8.00	0.000	-.2859815 -.173471



## Stata command ml method d2 for Poisson MLE

- Preceding gives nonrobust standard errors.
- To get robust standard errors need to use method d1 or d2.

```
. * Method d2: Program d2pois to be called by command ml method d2
. program define d2pois
1.     version 10.0
2.     args todo b lnf g negH           // Add g and negH to the arguments list
3.     tempvar theta1                 // theta1 = x'b where x given in eq(1)
4.     mlval `theta1' = `b', eq(1)
5.     local y $ML_y1                 // Define y so program more readable
6.     mlsum `lnf' = -exp(`theta1') + `y'*`theta1' - lnfactorial(`y')
7.     if (`todo'==0 | `lnf'>=.) exit // d1 extra code from here
8.     tempname d1
9.     mlvecsum `lnf' `d1' = `y' - exp(`theta1')
10.    matrix `g' = (`d1')
11.    if (`todo'==0 | `lnf'>=.) exit // d2 extra code from here
12.    tempname d11
13.    mlmatsum `lnf' `d11' = exp(`theta1')
14.    matrix `negH' = `d11'
15. end
```

## 6. Newton-Raphson algorithm using Mata

- Iterative algorithms are rules to compute  $\hat{\theta}_{s+1}$  given  $\hat{\theta}_s$ .
- Gradient methods use a rule of the form

$$\hat{\theta}_{s+1} = \hat{\theta}_s + \mathbf{A}_s \mathbf{g}_s$$

where  $\mathbf{g}_s$  is the gradient of the objective function evaluated at  $\hat{\theta}_s$ .

- Newton-Raphson (NR) method approximates the objective function at  $\hat{\theta}_s$  by a quadratic function.

It chooses  $\hat{\theta}_{s+1}$  to maximize this approximation.

Then

$$\hat{\theta}_{s+1} = -\mathbf{H}_s^{-1} \mathbf{g}_s$$

where  $\mathbf{H}_s$  is the Hessian evaluated at  $\hat{\theta}_s$ .

- Poisson objective function, gradient and Hessian are:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q(\boldsymbol{\beta}) &= \sum_{i=1}^N \{-\exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta}) + y_i \mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta} - \ln y_i!\} \\
 \mathbf{g}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) &= \sum_{i=1}^N (y_i - \exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta})) \mathbf{x}_i \\
 \mathbf{H}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) &= \sum_{i=1}^N -\exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta}) \mathbf{x}_i \mathbf{x}'_i.
 \end{aligned}$$

- So NR is

$$\begin{aligned}
 \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_{s+1} &= \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s - \mathbf{H}(\hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s)^{-1} \times \mathbf{g}(\hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s) \\
 &= \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s + \left[ \sum_{i=1}^N \exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s) \mathbf{x}_i \mathbf{x}'_i \right]^{-1} \times \sum_{i=1}^N (y_i - \exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_s)) \mathbf{x}_i.
 \end{aligned}$$

- Core Mata code is

```
> mata
>   cha = 1                               // initialize stopping criterion
>   do {
>     mu = exp(x*b)
>     grad = x'(y-mu)                     // kx1 gradient vector
>     hes = makesymmetric((x:*mu)'x)     // negative of the kxk hessian matrix
>     bold = b
>     b = bold + cholinv(hes)*(grad)
>     cha = (bold-b)'(bold-b)/(b'b)
>     iter = iter + 1
>   } while (cha > 1e-16)                 // end of iteration loops
> end
```

- 1 Define  $y$  and  $x$  in Stata  
`generate cons = 1`  
`local y docvis`  
`local xlist private chronic female income cons`
- 2 Read these in to Mata using `st_view`  
`: st_view(y=., ., "y")`  
`: st_view(X=., ., tokens("xlist"))`
- 3 Do the analysis in Mata and compute  $b$  and  $V$
- 4 Pass these back to Stata using `st_matrix`  
`st_matrix("b",b')`  
`st_matrix("V",vb)`  
Post results using command `ereturn`

Do the NR iterations to compute  $\hat{\beta}$ .

```
. * Complete Mata code for Poisson MLE NR iterations
. mata
----- mata (type end to exit) -----
:   st_view(y=., ., "`y'")           // read in stata data to y and X
:
:   st_view(X=., ., tokens("`xlist'"))
:
:   b = J(cols(X),1,0)               // compute starting values
:
:   n = rows(X)
:
:   iter = 1                          // initialize number of iterations
:
:   cha = 1                           // initialize stopping criterion
:
:   do {
>     mu = exp(X*b)
>     grad = X'(y-mu)                // kx1 gradient vector
>     hes = makesymmetric((X:*mu)'X) // negative of the kxk hessian matrix
>     bold = b
>     b = bold + cholinv(hes)*(grad)
>     cha = (bold-b)'(bold-b)/(b'b)
>     iter = iter + 1
> } while (cha > 1e-16)              // end of iteration loops
```

Compute the variance-covariance matrix of  $\hat{\beta}$ .

```
: mu = exp(X*b)
: hes = (X:*mu)'X
: vgrad = ((X:*(y-mu))'(X:*(y-mu)))
: vb = cholinv(hes)*vgrad*cholinv(hes)*n/(n-cols(X))
: iter                // num iterations
  13
: cha                // stopping criterion
  1.11465e-24
: st_matrix("b",b') // pass results from Mata to Stata
: st_matrix("v",vb) // pass results from Mata to Stata
: end
```

---

Present results nicely formatted.

```
. * Present results, nicely formatted using Stata command ereturn  
. matrix colnames b = `xlist'  
  
. matrix colnames v = `xlist'  
  
. matrix rownames v = `xlist'  
  
. ereturn post b v  
  
. ereturn display
```

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
private	.7986654	.1090509	7.32	0.000	.5849295	1.012401
chronic	1.091865	.0560205	19.49	0.000	.9820669	1.201663
female	.4925481	.058563	8.41	0.000	.3777666	.6073295
income	.003557	.001083	3.28	0.001	.0014344	.0056796
cons	-.2297263	.1109236	-2.07	0.038	-.4471325	-.0123202



## 7. Mata command optimize

- Mata command `optimize` uses same optimizer as command `ml`, but different syntax.
- Minimal syntax is  
*void evaluator(todo, p, v, g, H)*  
where  
*p* is parameter vector  
*v* defines objective function, and  
if *todo* = 0 then gradient *g* and Hessian *H* are optional.
- Type `v` evaluator provides formula for  $1 \times N$  vector  $\mathbf{v}$ , where  $\mathbf{e}'\mathbf{v} = f(\mathbf{p})$ .  
Suited to m-estimators (MLE, LS, just-identified NLIV).
- Type `d` evaluator provides formula for scalar  $v$  where  $v = f(\mathbf{p})$ .  
Suited to over-identified generalized method of moments (GMM).

## Declare the function poissonmle and st\_view data

```
. mata
```

```
----- mata (type end to exit) -----
```

```
: void poissonmle(todo, b, y, x, lndensity, g, H)
```

```
> {
```

```
>   xb = x*b'
```

```
>   mu = exp(xb)
```

```
>   lndensity = -mu + y:*xb - lnfactorial(y)
```

```
>   if (todo == 0) return
```

```
>   g = (y-mu):*x
```

```
>   if (todo == 1) return
```

```
>   H = - cross(X, mu, X)
```

```
> }
```

```
: st_view(y=., ., "`y'")
```

```
: st_view(X=., ., tokens("`xlist'"))
```

Initialize command `optimize` and optimize using `v2` evaluator.

```
:   S = optimize_init()
:   optimize_init_evaluator(S, &poissonmle())
:   optimize_init_evaluatoretype(S, "v2")
:   optimize_init_argument(S, 1, y)
:   optimize_init_argument(S, 2, x)
:   optimize_init_params(S, J(1,cols(x),0))
:   b = optimize(S)
Iteration 0:  f(p) = -33899.609
Iteration 1:  f(p) = -19668.697
Iteration 2:  f(p) = -18585.609
Iteration 3:  f(p) = -18503.779
Iteration 4:  f(p) = -18503.549
Iteration 5:  f(p) = -18503.549
```

Compute variance covariance matrix and list results.

```
: vbrob = optimize_result_v_robust(S)
: serob = (sqrt(diagonal(vbrob)))'
: b \ serob
```

	1	2	3	4	5
1	.7986653788	1.091865108	.4925480693	.0035570127	-.2297263376
2	.1090014507	.0559951312	.0585364746	.0010824894	.1108732568

```
: end
```

Note: Can `st_matrix` back to Stata and `ereturn display` results. Results are the same as from command `Poisson`.

## 8. NL2SLS example

- Poisson MLE inconsistent if  $E[y - \exp(\mathbf{x}'\boldsymbol{\beta})|\mathbf{x}] \neq 0$ , due to endogenous regressors.
- Assume there are instruments  $\mathbf{z}$  such that

$$E[\mathbf{z}_i(y_i - \exp(\mathbf{x}'\boldsymbol{\beta}))] = 0.$$

- Define the  $r \times 1$  vector

$$\mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) = \left[ \sum_i \mathbf{z}_i(y_i - \exp(\mathbf{x}'\boldsymbol{\beta})) \right].$$

- In just-identified case: # instruments = # regressors ( $r = K$ ) use the nonlinear instrumental variables (NLIV) estimator that solves

$$\mathbf{h}(\hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}) = \mathbf{0}.$$

- In over-identified case ( $r > K$ ) the GMM estimator minimizes

$$Q(\boldsymbol{\beta}) = \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta})' \mathbf{W} \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta}).$$

- GMM estimator minimizes

$$Q(\boldsymbol{\beta}) = \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta})' \mathbf{W} \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta}).$$

- The  $K \times 1$  gradient vector is

$$\mathbf{g}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) = \partial Q(\boldsymbol{\beta}) / \partial \boldsymbol{\beta} = \mathbf{G}(\boldsymbol{\beta})' \mathbf{W} \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta}).$$

- The  $K \times K$  expected Hessian is

$$\mathbf{H}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) = \partial^2 Q(\boldsymbol{\beta}) / \partial \boldsymbol{\beta} \partial \boldsymbol{\beta}' = \mathbf{G}(\boldsymbol{\beta})' \mathbf{W} \mathbf{G}(\boldsymbol{\beta})'.$$

- Where

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{G}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) &= - \sum_i \exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta}) \mathbf{z}_i \mathbf{x}'_i \\ \mathbf{h}(\boldsymbol{\beta}) &= \sum_i \mathbf{z}_i (y_i - \exp(\mathbf{x}'_i \boldsymbol{\beta})) \\ \mathbf{W} &= (\mathbf{Z}' \mathbf{Z})^{-1} = \left( \sum_i \mathbf{z}_i \mathbf{z}'_i \right)^{-1} \end{aligned}$$

- Application treats private as endogenous with single instrument  
 firm size:  
 local zlist firm size chronic female income cons

Declare the function pgmm and st\_view data

```
. mata
```

---

mata (type end to exit)

```
: void pgmm(todo, b, y, X, Z, Qb, g, H)
> {
>   xb = X*b'
>   mu = exp(Xb)
>   h = Z'(y-mu)
>   W = cholinv(cross(Z,Z))
>   Qb = h'W*h
>   if (todo == 0) return
>   G = -(mu:*Z)'X
>   g = (G'W*h)'
>   if (todo == 1) return
>   H = G'W*G
>   _makesymmetric(H)
> }

: st_view(y=., ., "`y'")

: st_view(X=., ., tokens("`xlist'"))

: st_view(Z=., ., tokens("`zlist'"))
```

Initialize command `optimize` and optimize using `d2` evaluator.

```
: s = optimize_init()
: optimize_init_which(S,"min")
: optimize_init_evaluator(S, &pgmm())
: optimize_init_evaluators(S, "d2")
: optimize_init_argument(S, 1, y)
: optimize_init_argument(S, 2, x)
: optimize_init_argument(S, 3, z)
: optimize_init_params(S, J(1,cols(x),0))
: optimize_init_technique(S,"nr")

: b = optimize(S)
Iteration 0: f(p) = 71995.212
Iteration 1: f(p) = 9259.0408
Iteration 2: f(p) = 1186.8103
Iteration 3: f(p) = 3.4395408
Iteration 4: f(p) = .00006905
Iteration 5: f(p) = 5.672e-14
Iteration 6: f(p) = 1.953e-27
```



Compute variance covariance matrix (manually) and list results.

```
: // Compute robust estimate of VCE and se's
: xb = x*b'
:
: mu = exp(xb)
: h = Z'(y-mu)
:
: w = cholinv(cross(Z,Z))
:
: G = -(mu:*Z)'x
:
: Shat = ((y-mu):*Z)'((y-mu):*Z)*rows(x)/(rows(x)-cols(x))
:
: vb = luinv(G'w*G)*G'w*Shat*w*G*luinv(G'w*G)
:
: seb = (sqrt(diagonal(vb)))'
:
: b \ seb
           1             2             3             4             5
1  1.340291853   1.072907529   .477817773   .0027832801   -.6832461817
2  1.559899278   .0763116698   .0690784466   .0021932119   1.350370916
: end
```

Coefficient of private of 0.799 becomes 1.340  
and standard error of 0.109 becomes 1.559.



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