



**A REVIEW OF CONTINUOUS UNIVARIATE PROBABILITY DISTRIBUTIONS FROM PEARSON'S FAMILY OF DISTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMPOSITE FAMILY OF DISTRIBUTIONS**

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**Abstract**

Seeking the flexibility of probability distributions in modeling real life phenomena could be adjudged as the driving force behind the development of new probability distributions. Methods for generating families of continuous univariate probability distributions have received widespread attention in recent decades. It is well established that much of practical statistical studies and developments in probability theory have been dominated by the normal distribution for several decades. However, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the increasing collection, tabulation, and publication of data by government, private institutions and agencies in demography, social sciences, biology and insurance revealed that the normal distribution was not sufficient for describing phenomena (homogenous with respect to all but random factors) in the real world situations. This reality spearheaded the need to develop other families of distributions that can be well adapted to real-life problems. In this paper, a review of families of continuous univariate probability distributions from the Pearson's family down to the composite family of distributions.

**Keywords:** continuous distribution; cumulative distribution function; probability density function; univariate distributions

**Mathematics Subject Classification:** 60G70; 62E20; 62F35; 62P05; 68W40

**Introduction**

The development of new flexible and highly adaptive univariate probability distributions has been at the forefront of the development of statistical theory. Beginning from the phenomenal work of Pearson (1895) down to the recent works of the contemporary scholars. The theory of continuous univariate probability distributions has become one of the most widely studied theories within the vanguard

of statistical modeling. Pearson (1895) introduced a system of differential equation from which continuous probability density functions (pdfs) can result as solutions. Owing to the difficulties in finding analytic solutions to the Pearson's system, many other methods for generating either probability density function (pdfs) or cumulative distribution functions (cdfs) have appeared in the literature. Indeed, the development of new continuous univariate probability

distributions is based on one fundamental premise – the need to arrive at models capable of fitting real life data adequately. The classical continuous univariate probability distributions, which contain one or two parameters, have been observed to break down when complexities exist in data structure. For example, the Weibull distribution was defined to handle random processes that are monotone in nature. When the monotonicity property is not present in data arising from real-life processes, it becomes inadequate to use the Weibull distribution to capture the behavior of such non-monotone processes. This situation has led to the formulation of various generalizations of the Weibull distribution so that it can handle both monotone and non-monotone processes.

Generally, the development of new continuous univariate probability distributions has been carried out either by adding extra parameter(s) to an already existing continuous univariate distribution or by combining two or more probability distributions to obtain new ones (Lee *et al.*, 2013). In this paper, we perform a review on the development of continuous univariate distributions from Pearson's family to the composite family of univariate distributions.

In Section 2, we looked at the families of continuous univariate distributions developed before the composite families of distributions. In Section 3, we examine the composite family of distributions. The paper closes in Section 4 with a conclusion.

### **Families of continuous univariate distributions before the composite families of distribution**

We shall consider the Pearson family of distributions, the skewed family of distributions, the exponentiated family of distributions and the beta-generated family of distributions.

#### **(a) The Pearson's family**

The oldest family of probability distribution is the Pearson family of distributions which was developed by Pearson (1895) and it was based on the solution of the differential equation

$$\frac{1}{f(x)} \frac{df(x)}{dx} = \frac{a+x}{c_0 + c_1x + c_2x^2} \quad (1)$$

where  $a$ ,  $c_0$ ,  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  are the parameters which control the shape of the distribution. The roots of the equation  $c_0 + c_1x + c_2x^2 = 0$  determine the form of solution of (1). In particular, when  $c_1 = c_2 = 0$ , the solution of (1) results to the normal distribution. Detailed discussion on the various types of Pearson classification is presented in Johnson *et al.* (1994). An extension of the Pearson's system was carried out by Dunning and Hanson (1977) and since then several works have appeared in the literature by adopting the framework. For example, the works Burr (1942), Fry (1993), Johnson *et al.* (1994), Asadl (1998), Nadarajah and Kotz (2007) and Kibria and Shakil (2011). The major advantage of the Pearson's families of distributions is that it allow one to generate non-symmetric distribution and this was an improvement on the previously held positions which makes the generation of non-symmetric distributions impossible. However, the drawback of the Pearson's family lies in the fact that not too many analytic solutions can result from the system in (1) and also, no probability distribution generated from (1) is suitable in fitting data sets with multi-component structure.

#### **(a) The skewed family**

The novel work on the method for generating skewed distributions based on the combination of two symmetric distributions is due to Azzalini (1985). The Azzalini framework starts off with a random variable  $X$  with a pdf symmetric about zero and another symmetric

random variable  $\gamma$  with absolutely continuous cdf  $G(x)$  and a pdf  $G'(x)$ . Then, for any real number  $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}$ ,

$$P(Y - \lambda X < 0) = E_x[P(Y < \lambda x | X = x)] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f_0(x)G(\lambda x)dx = 1/2.$$

Thus,

$$2f_0(x)G(\lambda x), \quad -\infty < x < \infty, \quad (2)$$

is a valid pdf. The equation (2) provides a general framework for generating skewed distributions for any choice of  $G(x)$  and  $F_0(x)$  with  $\lambda$  as the skew parameter. The survey paper by Kotz and Vicari (2005) gave a comprehensive summary of the development, characterizations and generalizations of the family of distribution in (2). A summary of the list of properties of the family of distribution was presented in Lee *et al.* (2013). Other generalizations of (2) are found in Azzalini (1986), Arnold *et al.* (1993), Pewsey (2000), Balakrishnan (2002), Arellano-Valle *et al.* (2004), Azzalini (2005), and Choudhury and Matin (2011). While the skew family of distributions provides us with a general framework for generating skewed distributions which are very important for applications, it is limited by the fact that distributions emanating from the framework are still unsuitable for fitting multi-component data sets.

**(C) The exponentiated family**

The exponentiated family of distributions is due to Mudholkar and Srivastava (1993). The approach is based on a random variable  $X$  having a baseline cdf  $F(x)$  and a parameter vector  $\theta$  Mudholkar and Srivastava (1993) define a new family of distributions by the cdf of the form

$$G(x) = [F(x)]^\theta, x \in \mathbb{R}, \theta > 0, \quad (3)$$

where for  $\theta = 1$ , (3) reduces to the cdf of the baseline distribution. Thus, the parameter  $\theta$  is an added parameter to the baseline distribution  $F(x)$ . Several families of

exponentiated distributions have been proposed in the literature. Some of them are found in the works of Gupta and Kundu (1999), Kundu and Raqab (2005), Nadarajah (2005), Elbatal (2011), Nadarajah *et al.*, (2011), Abdul-Moniem and Abdel-Hammed (2012), El-Gohary *et al.*, (2013), Ashour and Eltehiwy (2015) and Chaubey and Zhang (2015). While it is possible to generalize any probability distribution using the system in (3), members of the exponentiated family of distributions are however not suitable for fitting data with multi-components.

**(d) The beta-generated family**

The beta-generated family of distribution is due to Eugene *et al.* (2002). The cdf of a beta-class random variable  $X$  is defined as

$$G(x) = \int_0^{F(x)} \frac{1}{B(\alpha, \beta)} t^{\alpha-1} (1-t)^{\beta-1} dt, x \in \mathbb{R}, \alpha, \beta > 0, \quad (4)$$

Where  $B(\cdot, \cdot)$  is the complete beta function and  $F(x)$  is the cdf of any continuous random variable  $X$ . Several beta-generated probability distributions have appeared in the literature by taking  $F(x)$  as the cdf of different distributions. Some examples are found in the works of Nadarajah and Kotz (2004), Famoye *et al.*, (2005), Nadarajah and Kotz (2006), Akinsete *et al.*, (2008), Nadarajah and Gupta (2004), Kong *et al.*, (2007), Pescim *et al.*, (2010), Condino *et al.*, (2010), Alshawarbeh *et al.*, (2012) and MirMostafae *et al.*, (2015). The beta-generated family presents the largest class of probability distributions, but it is still not suitable for fitting heterogeneous data sets.

**The composite families of distribution**

Here we shall look at the various composite families of distributions as proposed in the literature for handling multi-component data such as composite framework by Cooray and Ananda (2005), Scollnik composite family of Distributions, Half-range composite family of distributions, the heavy-tailed two-

component composite family of distributions. The Cooray and Ananda composite family of distribution is used to start the subsection.

**(a) The Cooray and Ananda composite family of distributions**

The composite family of distribution was developed by Cooray and Ananda (2005) within the context of application to insurance data. The composite method involved the generation of distribution functions that can be used to model multi-component data. Unlike the previous families which precede the composite method, only the composite method can be used to generate distributions that can handle multi-component data. The composite method of Cooray and Ananda (2005) involves combining two distributions with densities  $f_1$  and  $f_2$ . A random variable  $X$  is said to belong to a composite family of distributions if its pdf  $f(x)$  can be written as

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} af_1(x), & \text{if } x \in (-\infty, u] \\ af_2(x), & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty) \end{cases} \quad (5)$$

where  $a$  is the normalizing constant,  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  are pdfs with support on the real line. The unknown  $\mu$  is determined so that the newly formed pdf  $f(x)$  is continuous and differentiable at  $\mu$ . The continuity and differentiability conditions are achieved by imposing the following constraints:

$$f_1(u) = f_2(u) \text{ and } f_1'(u) = f_2'(u).$$

Various composite distributions have been formulated in the literature and examples include: the composite log normal-Pareto distribution by Cooray and Ananda (2005), the composite Inverse gamma-Pareto distribution by Aminzadeh and Deng (2019), the Weibull and inverse Weibull composite distribution by Cooray et al. (2010) and Composite Weibull-Pareto distribution by Cooray (2009).

Taking  $f_1(x)$  and  $f_2(x)$  and as the pdf of the lognormal and Pareto distribution respectively, Cooray and Ananda (2005) used the system in (5) to define the composite lognormal Pareto distribution with pdf expressed as

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{\alpha u^\alpha}{(1 + \Phi(z))x^{\alpha+1}} \exp\left[-\frac{\alpha^2}{2z^2} \ln(x/u)\right] & \text{if } x \in (0, u] \\ \frac{\alpha u^\alpha}{(1 + \Phi(z))x^{\alpha+1}} & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty) \end{cases} \quad (6)$$

Where  $\Phi(Z)$  is the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distribution, and  $Z$  is a known constant given by the positive solution of the equation  $\exp(-Z^2) = 2\omega k^2$ . The authors consequently applied the model in fitting insurance and financial data. Preda and Ciumara (2006) also used the system in (5) to define the composite Weibull Pareto distribution by taking  $f_1(x)$  and  $f_2(x)$  as the pdf of the Weibull and Pareto distribution respectively. The pdf of the composite Weibull Pareto distribution was given by

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{(k+1)^2 \alpha}{(2k+1)x} \left(\frac{x}{u}\right)^{\alpha k} \exp\left[-\left(\frac{k+1}{k}\right)\left(\frac{x}{u}\right)^{\alpha k}\right] & \text{if } x \in (0, u] \\ \left(\frac{k+1}{2k+1}\right)\left(\frac{\alpha}{x}\right)\left(\frac{u}{x}\right)^\alpha & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty) \end{cases}, \quad (7)$$

where the value of  $K$  is a known constant given by the positive solution of the equation

$$\exp\left(1 + \frac{1}{k}\right) = k + 1.$$

The authors provided expressions for the moments of the distribution as well as the likelihood function and consequently established a maximum likelihood estimation procedure for the distribution. The distribution was further tested using simulated data sets.

Benatmane et al. (2020) also used the system in (5) to generate the composite Rayleigh Pareto distribution by taking  $f_1(x)$  and  $f_2(x)$  as the pdf of the Rayleigh and Pareto distribution respectively to define a pdf with the form

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} 1.551 \frac{x}{u} \exp\left[-1.35 \frac{x^2}{u^2}\right] & \text{if } x \in (0, u) \\ \frac{0.40209}{x^{1.69996}} u^{0.69995} & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty), \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

The authors observed that the density has a similar shape as the lognormal Pareto distribution although with larger tail. The distribution was further applied in fitting simulated data and two real insurance data namely the Algerian fire insurance and the Danish fire insurance data. Other works developed using (5) include the composite exponential-Pareto distribution (Teodorescu and Vernice, 2006, 2009).

**(a) Scollnik composite family of distributions**

Scollnik (2007) offered a different variant of composite family of distribution different from that of Cooray and Ananda (2005) by allowing for flexibility of the mixing weights thus replacing the constant weights as found in the framework of Cooray and Ananda (2005). This approach was further extended by Scollnik and Sun (2012). The Scollnik and Sun (2012) model is of the form

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} r f_1^*(x), & \text{if } x \in (-\infty, u) \\ (1-r) f_2^*(x), & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty), \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

where

$$f_1^*(x) = \frac{f_1(x)}{F_1(u)} \text{ and } f_2^*(x) = \frac{f_2(x)}{1 - F_2(u)},$$

$f_i(\cdot)$  and  $F_i(\cdot)$  are pdf and cdf of some distributions respectively and  $r$  is the mixing weight. Scollnik and Sun (2012) took  $f_1(x)$  and  $f_2(x)$  to be the Weibull and the Lomax distributions respectively with pdfs

$$f_1(x) = \frac{\alpha}{\lambda} \left(\frac{x}{\lambda}\right)^{\alpha-1} \exp\left[-\left(\frac{x}{\lambda}\right)^\alpha\right], x > 0,$$

$$f_2(x) = \frac{\beta \sigma^\beta}{(\sigma + x)^{\beta+1}}, x > 0.$$

Applying the continuity condition that  $f(x)$  is right continuous and left continuous at the

threshold  $\mu$ , Nadarajah and Baker (2014) obtained the value of  $r$  as

$$r = \frac{f_1(u)[1 - F_2(u)]}{f_1(u)[1 - F_2(u)] + f_2(u)F_1(u)},$$

Where  $0 \leq r \leq 1$ .

Teodorescu and Vernice (2013) studied some mathematical properties of the families of Composite distributions in (9). They obtained the cdf of the density in (9) as

$$F(x) = \begin{cases} r \frac{F_1(x)}{F_1(u)}, & \text{if } x \in (-\infty, u) \\ r + (1-r) \frac{F_2(x) - F_2(u)}{1 - F_2(u)}, & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty). \end{cases}$$

They also obtained the  $n$ -th order initial moment of the random variable following the density in (9),  $E_n(f)$  as

$$E_n(f) = r E_n(f_1^*) + (1-r) E_n(f_2^*),$$

where

$$E_n(\cdot) = E(X^n)$$

The characteristic function was also obtained as

$$\varphi_f(t) = r \varphi_{f_1^*}(t) + (1-r) \varphi_{f_2^*}(t), \quad t \in R,$$

where

$$\varphi(\cdot)(t) = E(e^{itx})$$

Teodorescu and Vernice (2013) also offered a framework for generating random samples from the distribution as well as a methodology for the estimation of the parameters of the distribution.

**(a) Half-range composite family of distributions**

The family of composite distributions defined by Cooray and Ananda (2005) has its range or support in the entire real line. Baker et al. (2015) arguing that since loss data are assume positive values, there is need to half the real line and in the process they developed a new families of composite distributions with pdf of the form

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{1 + \phi} f_1^*(x), & \text{if } x \in (0, u) \\ \frac{\phi}{1 + \phi} f_2^*(x), & \text{if } x \in [u, \infty). \end{cases} \quad (10)$$

Baker et al. (2015) also imposed the continuity and differentiability condition on the density in (10) in order to make the density smooth. Some other results obtained by the authors include:

$$\phi = \frac{\frac{d}{dp} \ln F_1(u)}{\frac{d}{dp} \ln(1 - F_2(u))},$$

and the solution of the equation

$$\frac{d}{dp} \ln \left[ \frac{F_1(u)}{F_2(u)} \right] = 0$$

For  $\mu$  will give an estimate for  $\mu$ . Using (10), the authors defined the composite Weibull transformed beta distribution which has the composite Weibull-Burr XII, composite Weibull-log logistic, composite Weibull-inverse paralogistic, composite Weibull-generalized Pareto and composite Weibull-inverse Pareto as sub distributions.

**(a) The heavy-tail two-component composite family of distributions**

The procedural attempts in the modeling of multi-component data particularly those exhibiting heavy-tailed to the right can be found in some forms in the works of Mandava et al. (2011), Carreau and Bengio (2009), Kuhl and Bhairgond (2000), Debbabi (2015), Li et al (2012) and Kollu et al (2012). However, Debbabi et al. (2016) put this framework into a unified family of hybrid distributions of the form

$$h(x) = \begin{cases} f_N(x), & \text{if } x \leq u \\ f_{GPD}(x), & \text{if } x > u \end{cases} \quad (11)$$

Where  $F_N$  and  $F_{GPD}$  are the probability density functions of the normal distribution and the generalized Pareto distribution (GPD) respectively and  $\mu$  is the junction point. The distribution in (11) was adapted to two-component heavy-tailed distributions with tails to the right which is normally exhibited by many data sets. The authors further specified the explicit form of the model as

$$h_{\xi, \beta}^{\mu, \sigma}(x, u) = \begin{cases} \gamma f_{\mu, \sigma}(x), & \text{if } x \leq u \\ \gamma g_{\xi, \beta}(x - u), & \text{if } x > u, \end{cases} \quad (12)$$

Where  $\mu \in \mathbb{R}$  and  $\sigma > 0$  are the mean and standard deviation of the Gaussian distribution with pdf  $F_{\mu, \sigma}$  expressed as

$$f_{\mu, \sigma}(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma^2} \exp\left(-\frac{(x - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right), \forall x \in \mathbb{R},$$

While  $\xi$  and  $\beta$  represent the tail index and the scale parameter respectively of the GPD with pdf  $g_{\xi, \beta}$  expressed as

$$g_{\xi, \beta}(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{\beta} \left(1 + \frac{\xi}{\beta} x\right)^{-1-\frac{1}{\xi}} & \text{if } \xi \neq 0 \\ \frac{1}{\beta} \exp\left(-\frac{x}{\beta}\right), & \text{if } \xi = 0 \end{cases} \quad x \in D(\xi, \beta),$$

where

$$D(\xi, \beta) = \begin{cases} [0, \infty), & \text{if } \xi \neq 0 \\ \left[0, -\frac{\xi}{\beta}\right], & \text{if } \xi = 0 \end{cases}.$$

The parameter  $\gamma$  was defined as a regulating parameter rather than as a weight in order to ensure that  $\int_{\mathbb{R}} h_{\xi, \beta}^{\mu, \sigma} = 1$ . In order to determine the value of this parameter, the authors further defined the pdf in (12) as

$$h_{\xi, \beta}^{\mu, \sigma}(x, u) = \gamma(1 - H(x - u))f_{\mu, \sigma}(x) + \gamma H(x - u)g_{\xi, \beta}(x), \quad (13)$$

Where  $H$  is the Heaviside function defined as

$$H(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } x > 0 \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}.$$

Thus by integrating (13) and equating to 1, the authors obtained the value of  $\gamma$  as

$$\gamma = \frac{1}{F_{\mu, \sigma}(u) + 1},$$

where  $F_{\mu, \sigma}$  is the cdf of the Gaussian distribution. The authors developed an unsupervised algorithm for the estimation of the free parameters of the distribution and suggested that any other distribution could be used in place of the Gaussian distribution while retaining the GPD at all times.

Though the literature on heavy-tail two-component composite distributions is sparse, Osatohanmwen et al. (2024) recently offered a general framework for generating a three-component composite distribution that

included the two-component families. The general three-component framework can be seen as the general family of composite distributions, which includes all other families of composite distributions. Osatohanmwun (2025) also studied a two-component variant of the three-component framework called the half-normal-GPD distribution and applied it to financial and rainfall data.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have reviewed various families of continuous univariate distributions, highlighting their properties, applications, and significance in statistical modeling. These distributions serve as fundamental tools for understanding and analyzing real-world data, each with unique characteristics suited for different types of modeling scenarios. Our discussion covered families of distributions before and after the composite families of distributions. Additionally, we explored more flexible and generalized families that allow for greater adaptability in modeling skewed, heavy-tailed, or multimodal data. Understanding the strengths and limitations of these distributions is crucial in selecting the appropriate model for a given dataset. Future research may focus on developing new families of distributions that better capture complex real-world phenomena, as well as advancing computational methods for parameter estimation and inference. By synthesizing the key features of these distribution families, this review provides a foundation for further exploration and application in fields such as finance, engineering, environmental science, and medical research. The choice of an appropriate univariate continuous distribution remains a critical step in statistical analysis, and continued advancements in this area will enhance the

robustness and accuracy of probabilistic modeling.

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