

Bill Brass

## Child Survivorship Estimation:

### Methods and Data Analysis

After reading a page or two of the paper I guessed it was by Griff Feeney, which was soon confirmed by the references to his own work. But I don't think my comments will be too biased by our friendship.

The paper is an unusual one since it is about the art of data analysis rather than the science. The prevalent latter type develops methods based on assumptions and shows how they work when the assumptions are largely satisfied. The present paper considers the nature of relevant observations, subject to common errors, and how analysis methods can be used to draw inferences about levels and trends of measures despite the defects. The latter is much more difficult depending on a mixture of thorough knowledge of the characteristics of the techniques and experience of their behaviour in the presence of typical errors. Learning the art of data analyses is far from easy; many demographers never succeed. Yet there is little guidance in the literature. Good teachers rely on real applications as models or warnings. The paper follows this plan.

I believe this kind of exposition is badly needed and that the quality here is high. There is nothing in the contents which would be novel to a highly experienced analyst of third world data on child survivorship but there are not many persons in this category compared with the numbers who use the methods. My guess is that the ratio is one to hundreds. A problem with the type of paper is that it requires much pedestrian detail in order to make the salient features absolutely clear. There is an essential wordiness which can not be dispensed with. The author has produced papers of a similar type in the past in which the detail, in my opinion, has been overdone. In the present exposition there is an excellent balance. In fact it is very well written indeed.

The necessary length and detail are a major reason for the frequent rejection of papers in the category by Journals. One of the aims of the Research Series of the Centre for Population Studies, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which I am now editing is to disseminate such work. Both the nature and quality of the paper here make me enthusiastic that it should be published.

I have few specific comments but a reference might be made to the work of Rogelio Fernandez Castilla on the effects of maternal age, birth order and birth spacing on child survival estimation. It is relevant to a number of the comments in the final section of Feeney's papers before the conclusion. The most convenient source is in the proceedings of the IUSSP International Population conference, New Delhi, 1989, vol. 2, pp.65-86.

Figure 4: Increase Vs. Level of Life Expectancy at Birth, 181 countries, 1950-1990

