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No. 179, 2003

Bongaarts, John and Griffith Feeney. "Estimating mean lifetime," *Policy Research Division Working Paper* no. 179. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

Abstract

The life expectancy implied by current age-specific mortality rates is calculated with life table methods that are among the oldest and most fundamental tools of demography. We demonstrate that these conventional estimates of period life expectancy are affected by an undesirable "tempo effect." The tempo effect is positive when the mean age at death is rising and negative when the mean age is declining. Estimates of the effect for females in three countries with high and rising life expectancy range from 1.6 years in the United States and Sweden to 2.4 years in France for the period 1980–95.

This paper has been published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* as part of a special series of Inaugural Articles by NAS members, including John Bongaarts, who were elected in April 2002.

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