Name(s)	Project Number
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Project Title

Is the Death Dip Real? An Examination of California Death Records

Abstract

Objectives/Goals

To test the hypothesis that humans are able to postpone their own death until after some landmark occasion, in this case their own birthday.

Methods/Materials

I wrote a Perl script to download 2 million of the 9 million California Death records available at vitals.rootsweb.com. I also used Perl scripts to filter out records with ages of less than 1 year or no birth date. Then I calculated the expected values of deaths per day using contingency table techniques. I then totaled the observed and expected values for each amount of difference between birthday and deathday, from death 182 days before the birthday to death 183 days after the birthday. By comparing the observed and expected values, I was able to see any differences. Data was also examined for other factors that might affect the ability to postpone death such as age, gender and ethnicity.

Results

I found very little difference between the expected and observed number of deaths per day, relative to the birthday. There were more deaths in the month after the birthday than would be expected if there were no effect. However, this difference was quite small. Deaths in the month before the birthday differed by only 0.1% from what would be expected if there were no effect.

Conclusions/Discussion

The purpose of this project was to find out whether humans can and do postpone their own deaths until after their birthdays. In the data that I examined, there was no decrease in the number of deaths before individual#s birthdates (as predicted by the death dip hypothesis of Phillips and Feldman, 1973) and there was little or no support for the hypothesis.

Summary Statement

To test the hypothesis that humans are able to postpone their own death until after some landmark occasion, in this case their own birthday.

Help Received

Ap2/02