

The Human Mortality Database: Principles, Practice, and Prognosis

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The Human Mortality Database (www.mortality.org) began in 2000 as a collaborative project involving research teams at the University of California, Berkeley (USA) and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany). The online database was launched in May 2002 with data for 17 countries. As of October 2005, the collection had grown to include 24 countries, as well as longer and more detailed data series for several of the original countries. There are plans for continued expansion.

From its beginning, the HMD project has been guided by some general principles about how to organize and distribute demographic data for public use. These include comparability, flexibility, accessibility, and reproducibility. However, the project has also had to confront other issues, such as how to define the set of countries that can be included in the database in its current format. The presentation will discuss these general principles and the relationship between this project and other mortality databases.

Various practical matters encountered in the process of building the database will be discussed as well. These include issues related to data processing, data quality, documentation, website interface, and user experiences. The presentation will also review the research output of the project, including information about published articles, conference papers, and other works that have used HMD data.

The presentation will describe both the history of the project and its prognosis for the future. It will provide an update about plans for adding more countries to the collection, as well as improvements in the online presentation of data. Some methodological developments and other challenges will also be highlighted.

¹ The author is currently on leave from the University of California, Berkeley.