

☠ Demography from Skeletal Remains ☠

Attempting to reconstruct population demography from skeletal remains is different than using data collected from epitaphs. For one thing, there might not be written records indicating the age and sex of the deceased individual. In addition, if the remains are from an ossuary (multiple secondary burial) context, there can be a jumble of skeletal elements that need to be sorted out before a demographic study can proceed, particularly regarding the minimum number of individuals (MNI).

Because we do not have an ossuary teaching collection with which to practice doing demography from fragmentary and mixed skeletal elements, today's project approximates a collection of remains using googly eyes, wooden circles and hearts, and popsicle sticks. Your task is to determine within your group the MNI of your "ossuary" and to construct a chart of mortality rates in the same manner as your cemetery project. As always, although you are working in a group to collect information, your write-up should be your own work.

Your final report should be 4 pages double-spaced and include the following information:

1. MNI

- a. Create a table of individuals (i.e., how many 0-5 year olds, how many 40-50 year old males?), including minimum number of individuals. See attached sheet.
- b. Discuss how you arrived at your MNI. (If you want, you can include an inventory list or table to show this visually.)

2. Mortality Rates

- a. Create three histograms of mortality rates: all individuals, including children; males; females. See handout from Project 1 for sample histograms.
- b. Discuss the differing mortality rates you generated above. Do males tend to live longer than females? Is infant mortality high or low in this population?

3. Commingled Remains

- a. What are the disadvantages of studying commingled remains from a population? What kinds of bioarchaeological questions can you ask, and how are you limited by your data set?
- b. What does the presence of men, women, and children of all ages tell you about the social structure of this population?

4. Epitaphs versus Skeletons

- a. Discuss the ways in which this demographic exercise using "skeletal" material differed from Project 1. What are the respective advantages and disadvantages to epitaphs and skeletons in reconstructing populations?
- b. Demographic information from epitaphs usually comes from a cemetery context, in which individuals are buried and marked separately, whereas in ossuaries, individuals are all jumbled up. Discuss how an ossuary is formed differently from a cemetery, both culturally and archaeologically, and the implications this type of burial has for the social and ritual norms of a group.

MNI Table:

Age	Sex	MNI
0-5	/	
5-10	/	
10-20	/	
20-30	♂	
	♀	
30-40	♂	
	♀	
40-50	♂	
	♀	
50+	♂	
	♀	
MNI	=	

Mortality Rate Chart (♀):

Age	# who lived to this age	# who died in this range	Mortality rate
20-30			
30-40			
40-50			
50+			

Mortality Rate Chart (total population):

Age	# who lived to this age	# who died in this range	Mortality rate
0-5			
5-10			
10-20			
20-30			
30-40			
40-50			
50+			

Mortality Rate Chart (♂):

Age	# who lived to this age	# who died in this range	Mortality rate
20-30			
30-40			
40-50			
50+			