



rites of passage

Death and the Anthropologist

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What kills anthropologists? Do we tend to die from the same causes as other people in our society and at the same age? Or is there something different about the risks that anthropologists face that produce a different mortality profile? A preliminary study of mortality among anthropologists carried out as part of a biostatistics class in the University of Arizona Tri-University Master's in Public Health Program compares causes of mortality among anthropologists to national statistics.

The National Longitudinal Mortality Study and other national mortality data sets do not treat anthropologists as a separate category. The only available source of mortality data for anthropologists is thus obituaries published in *AN*. Although all obituaries submitted to *AN* are published, not all deaths of anthropologists are submitted, making the data source unrepresentative. Additional problems exist, such as the frequent lack of specification of the causes of death. Calls to departments, colleagues and family members were not always fruitful in revealing additional information.

Age of Death

The study found that the mean age of death was 69.9 years; 70.6 for males and 67.2 for females. Although the overall mean does not differ from national averages, male anthropologists die at significantly older ages than the national mean for males (68), while female anthropologists die at significantly younger ages than the national mean age of death for females (74).

The lack of significant differences in age of death for anthropologists in comparison to the national population might be interpreted as implying that anthropologists suffer excess mortality, given their middle class position and longer expected longevity. The reason for the significantly earlier age of death for female anthropologists requires explanation not provided by available data.

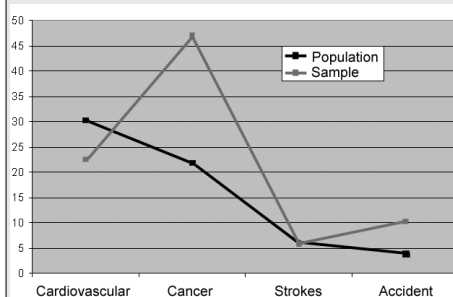
Major Causes of Death

The major causes of death of anthropologists in the sample were cancer (47.0%), cardiovascular disease (22.4%), accidents (10.2%) and strokes (5.9%). In comparison with national rates, the deaths of anthropologists due to cancer and accidents were significantly higher for anthropologists than for the national population.

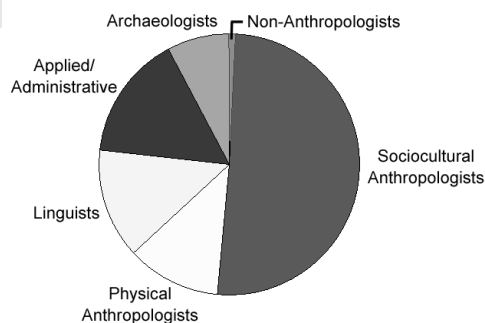
The primary causes of death for anthropologists mirror national figures (cardiovascular, can-

cer, accidents and stroke), but anthropologists are significantly more likely to die from cancer and accidents. While accidents may reflect fieldwork

Causes of Death in Sample of Anthropologists Compared to National Population Mortality



Cause of Death	Population percentage	Sample percentage
Cardiovascular	30.2	22.4
Cancer	21.8	47.0
Strokes	6.2	5.9
Accident	3.8	10.2



Sample. A total of 527 obituaries were found for a 10-year period (1990–99), but many were not used in final analyses because of missing data, particularly cause of death (201). The total sample was 73.6% male and 26.4% female. After excluding missing data for specialization, sociocultural anthropologists constituted 49%, archaeologists 26%, physical anthropologists 6%, linguists 7%, applied/administrative 8% and non-anthropologists 4% of the sample.

risks, the excess mortality due to cancer is not explicable within the parameters of this study, although it could rest in the fact that cancer is less related to conditions of lifestyle, whereas heart disease and stroke are. Indeed, we found that obituary writers were more willing to disclose a cause of death that was less critical or suggestive of a person's lifestyle. Obituaries generally

die from cancer, the reason is not apparent, and an important focus for future research. □

Michael Winkelman is principally interested in shamanism, medical anthropology, psychological anthropology and intercultural relations and communication. His applied work focuses on interethnic relations in the US, particularly in medical, legal and educational settings.

DEATH NOTICES

AN is the association's major vehicle for information about the deaths of our colleagues, but it is only as good as the intelligence received. As a service to the discipline, please notify the managing editor as soon as you learn of a death. Death Notices may be a maximum of 500 words and are always enhanced by a photo. Please submit materials via email, disk or CD to Stacy Lathrop, 2200 Wilson Blvd, Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201-3357; slathrop@aaanet.org.

KENNETH LOUIS BEALS JR, 65, physical anthropologist noted for his work on human adaptation to climate, died December 13, 2005. Beals retired from the department of anthropology at Oregon State University in 1995. After retiring, he worked with his wife Maria to help refugee families from Guatemala, and he consulted with colleagues in Argen-



tina, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Europe and other world areas.

Beals began his career with a significant *American Anthropologist* paper with A J Kelso that presented the Law of Biocultural Evolution (*AA* 77:566–79). The insight of this paper is to look at variance in data about human characteristics as a variable. Beals and Kelso found that along with human cultural change toward "innovations in transportation, and with the growth of popula-