

How Long Did Their Hearts Go On? Survival Analysis of the Titanic Survivors

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Abstract

This talk will present some material that did not make it to the ‘final cut’ in the 600-word article “How long did their hearts go on? A Titanic study” in the Christmas 2003 Edition of the British Medical Journal. It will also discuss some technical statistical issues related to how we created synthetic comparison groups, and how we avoided the errors made by other authors, e.g., those who have studied the longevity of jazz musicians. The differences between ‘current lifetables’—commonly used, and frequently misunderstood by the public—and cohort lifetables will be illustrated. The synthetic nature of the comparison groups we created is used to illustrate the limiting behaviour of the stratified log rank test when each stratum consists of one passenger and an ‘effectively infinite’ number of comparison persons who were not on the Titanic. The 2003 Christmas Edition of the BMJ is available online at <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/content/vol327/issue7429/>.