

ZMATH 2016f.01267

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Probability: a matter of life and death.

Aust. Sr. Math. J. 30, No. 1, 18-24 (2016).

Summary: Life tables are mathematical tables that document probabilities of dying and life expectancies at different ages in a society. Thus, the life table contains some essential features of the health of a population. Probability is often regarded as a difficult branch of mathematics. Life tables provide an interesting approach to introducing concepts in probability. Concepts such as complementary events and conditional probability become easy to understand when presented in the context of a life table. Furthermore, in the authors' experience, they can generate useful class discussion as students begin to link the mathematics to life, and death, in society. This article presents 12 problems that illustrate how life tables can be used to explain ideas in probability theory, followed by detailed solutions and comments. (ERIC)

Classification: K50 M60 M70

Keywords: probability; mathematical concepts; mortality rate