How long do Argentines live and how we die?

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The aim of this paper is to analyze mortality, recognizing its role in the population dynamics and its relationship with socioeconomic development, with special emphasis on mortality trends in Argentina during the 20th Century. We also examine determinants and mortality differentials by sex, age, socioeconomic status, region and causes, for a country with almost no available data from the Life Insurance Companies.

Life expectancy at birth ($e_0$), since the late 19th Century, had an almost linear upward trend. From 1883 (mid-year of the first inter-census period) until 2001, $e_0$ increased from 33 to 74 years, an absolute increase of 41 years, equivalent to 0.35 years per calendar year. Deviations from the line are small, though improvements have not been uniform throughout the period.

The mortality of a country is the result, at the aggregate level of mortality in the various regions within it. The values of life expectancy discussed above are a weighted average that hides significant regional differences, indicating inequalities in living conditions among populations. However, the gap between regions has declined significantly, from more than 13 years in 1914 to 6 years in 2001/02.

In the last half century (since 1960 to 2007), the general level of mortality (gross mortality rate) decreased 43%, and the largest reduction corresponds to infectious diseases (74%), continuing to lose weight among the causes of death. The lowest relative reduction corresponds to deaths by violence or external causes (35%).

There is a wide disparity of opinion whether technical, medical and environmental future changes will have more or less impact than in the past. The balance of these factors is far from being established, but more detailed knowledge of the different aspects involved is a key element, to which this paper tries to contribute.

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