OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to test whether or not there existed a gender disparity in plague fatalities in the Great London Plague of 1665.

Method:

- We compiled a database of death records from three London parishes in 1665, St. Giles of Cripplegate, All Hollows Broadstreet and Kensington.
- Unlike the vast majority of London's 130 parishes, these three extant parishes consistently recorded their burials books both by plague and deaths by gender.
- To test the representativeness of our research sample, we performed two analyses:
  1. A comparison of raw death records from the St. Giles of Cripplegate parish and the plague deaths reported by London's parishes from one of the parishes hardest hit by the 1665 plague, St. Giles of Cripplegate, with the statistics for this parish printed in the Bills of Mortality.
  2. A comparison of the monthly percentage of deaths caused by plague in our sample parishes with the monthly percentage of deaths caused by plague for all parishes listed in the Bills of Mortality.

RESULTS

1. A comparison of raw death records from the St. Giles of Cripplegate parish and the plague deaths reported by London's parishes demonstrates that the Bills of Mortality accurately recorded plague deaths.
2. A comparison of two of our sample parishes with the Bills of Mortality demonstrates that our sample was representative of the spread of plague in London in 1665 and thus representative of possible gender disparity in plague fatalities.
3. The analysis of our parish sample demonstrates there was no significant gender disparity in the 1665 London plague. Women and men died in nearly equal numbers during all phases of the plague outbreak.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis fails to support empirically the claim that there was a gender disparity between male and female plague fatalities in the 1665 Great London Plague. Epidemiological claims in the literature about the plague’s transmission and its demographic impact – based on gender disparities revealed in crisis mortality estimates – need to be reconsidered in light of the lack of evidence from parish death records.

LITERATURE CITED