

and in the building industry, 50% in manual workers, 47% in "white collar" workers and 39% in females. Recently Doniach et al (1975) established similar findings in London, e.g. 61% in workers from the shipping industry, 47.2% in clerical workers, 26% in housewives; there were more positive cases in residential areas of dockland than in (semi-)urban residential areas, which exceeded again the prevalence in a more rural area.

Oldham (1973) reported on the frequency of asbestos bodies in consecutive autopsies in different areas and on the observer variation in viewing these slides. He found: Finland 38% positive; Glasgow and London hospitals (covering areas which include docks and asbestos factories) 22-26% positive; Dresden, Belfast, London RPGS and Liverpool (covering industrial areas which include docks or manufacturers of asbestos products) 13-17% positive; Dorchester and Nottingham (industrial towns without an asbestos industry) 6-9%; and Galway (entirely rural) 1%. He also estimated that in the London area the proportion of people in whom asbestos bodies can be found in the lungs post mortem appears to be rising by about 1% per year in persons over the age of 30. An increase of the percentage of asbestos bodies can be a real increase or be caused by improved techniques, more attention or a more prolonged search of specimens. Due to the techniques used, the figures given certainly underreport the true prevalence.

From this short review of the literature one may conclude that the presence of asbestos bodies probably provides a useful indicator of exposure to asbestos, both from the occupational as well as from environmental sources. As the number of fibres is nearly always higher than the number of asbestos bodies and many fibres can be found without asbestos bodies (Pooley 1973), the prevalence of asbestos exposure certainly is higher than the number of cases with asbestos bodies. One should realise that the number of asbestos fibres or bodies present is the result of all exposures (old and recent) and elimination (by breakdown, coughing up etc. etc.). Moreover the results of the different methods described in the literature hardly ever are comparable.

Pathological processes

Pathological processes in man, due to asbestos, might also serve as indicators of asbestos exposure. The different possibilities to be considered are:

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