The Population at Risk.—The gross number of workers who may be exposed to the inhalation of asbestos dust to any extent is unknown, and, owing to the great variety of processes concerned, there are insuperable difficulties in ascertaining this figure. Nor, in fact, would enlightenment on this point be of any particular value.

It is otherwise, however, with respect to the figure representing the number constantly exposed in the course of their daily work to the influence of pure or almost pure asbestos dust. Some information on this point is very desirable to check the adequacy of the sample of workers examined, and to envisage the problem confronting the industry.

While only a rough approximation is possible, it is believed that about 2,200 is the present number of persons in this country exposed in their daily work to the inhalation of asbestos dust, either pure or admixed with a small proportion of cotton. It should not be overlooked that this figure does not include the considerable number of workers exposed to the influence of mixed dusts of which asbestos is but one, and commonly not more than 20 per cent. of the mixture.

Of these 2,200, the sample examined numbered 363 (excluding 11 for reasons referred to later) or 16.5 per cent.

Selection of Workers for Examination.—The selection of workers for examination was not left entirely to chance, since it was early evident that the proportion of those employed 10 years and upwards in the industry was very small; therefore, in each factory those longest employed were preferred, since the importance of including a sufficient sample of this group is evident. Regard was also paid to the other end of the scale so as to obtain information as to the length of exposure to dust necessary before effects are manifested, and also to the particular process on which the worker was engaged.

By balancing the component groups of the sample in this way as the enquiry proceeded, it was felt that the maximum information would be obtained in the shortest time.

It follows, therefore, that in respect of length of exposure to asbestos dust, the component groups of the sample do not bear the same relationship to each other as the corresponding groups of the industry under review. The subjoined Tables will make this clear. Table 1 shows the distribution according to length of employment (not necessarily in one factory) of 775 workers, the total number engaged on those processes in several factories. Table 2 shows the sample of 363 workers distributed in the same way.

TABLE 1.

Years employed.	Number.	Percentage of Total.
0–4	483	62·3
5–9	200	25·8
10–14	51	6·6
15–19	24	3·1
20 and over ...	17	2·2
Totals ...	775	100

TABLE 2

Years employed	Number.	Percentage of Total.
0–4	88	24·2
5–9	141	38·8
10–14	84	23·2
15–19	28	7·7
20 and over ...	22	6·1
Totals ...	363	100

The enormous preponderance numerically of workers employed under five years is striking, as also is the very low percentage of workers employed 10 years or longer.

Comparison of the two tables shows that the effect of the method of selection of workers for examination is that the number examined in each successive five years employment group is a progressively greater proportion of the total number which could have been examined in each particular group.