
This book is a detailed account of a study which is perhaps notable in that it was planned and initiated prior to the events in Cleveland. It will be most relevant to those planning similar studies and as the basis of further research in this area.

Both practitioners and policy makers in the field of child sexual abuse require information about the magnitude of the problem and the risk factors involved. This study claims to address the first of these issues by identifying the number of sexually abused children reported during 1987. The recurrent nature of child sexual abuse as well as the proportion of children abused is required if valid statements are to be made about the magnitude of the problem. The study also collected sociodemographic information on cases identified but because of the lack of similar data on the resident population, risk was not calculated for variables other than age and sex.

The authors used a practical method of ensuring confidentiality and their approach probably contributed to the high degree of cooperation they appear to have obtained from a wide range of individuals and bodies. This is likely to have enhanced both the ascertainment of cases and the accuracy of the data. However the social, cultural, and legislative differences between Northern Ireland and other countries, particularly in relation to sexual education and health care services, may limit the extent to which the results can be generalised.

The lack of clarity and agreement on the definition and diagnostic criteria of child sexual abuse continues to hamper the comparability of studies. The authors have taken account of the different criteria for abuse and the varying levels of diagnostic certainty, producing a categorisation which lends itself to comparison.

The study makes a useful contribution but only those with a special interest would be likely to tackle the 100 pages of text contained in this publication.

C K McGaugherty
Department of Public Health Medicine
Belfast


One of the products of the IARC Monograph vol 42, Silica and some silicates (1987), was a study group which had the task of producing new and updated epidemiological studies to help fill the gaps in knowledge on the relationship between occupational exposure to silica and the risk of cancer, especially of the lung. This scientific publication is the outcome of that endeavour. Besides a foreword and an introductory chapter there are 11 other chapters each consisting of an epidemiological paper which tends to update or complement earlier work by the same authors. The main and justified emphasis is to present epidemiological studies of workers exposed to silica but with a negligible risk of confound of the effects of smoking and other carcinogens such as polymeric aromatic hydrocarbons in foundries or ionising radiation in mining. About half the work clearly achieves this with credible attempts in the remainder.

Thus there are case-referent studies by Lagorio et al in ceramic workers and by Siemiatycki et al whose multieposure multisite monitoring study had less control over potential confounders. Cohort studies on exposed workers are presented by Koskela et al in granite workers, Meiherr et al in slate quarry workers, and by Thomas and Winter et al, both in pottery workers. Lyne and her Nordic colleagues present comparative data from occupational mortality and cancer registers in their four countries while relationship free from confounding of the contribution of sero-evaluated confounders is derived from routine “preventive” medical examinations. Finally, three studies by Chiyotani et al, Merlo et al, and Tornling et al studied cancer risk among known silicotics. The first two of these two of these studies generalised the effects of smoking and showed an association between silica and an increased risk of lung cancer even in non-smokers.

Most of the data presented are consistent with a statistically significant, modest (less than twofold), excess of lung cancer in workers with a history of occupational exposure to silica. However, the associations between cancer risk and time since first exposure, duration of exposure, and estimated dose are inconsistent. The estimates of exposure are based on occupational histories and on qualitative descriptions of the work, not on quantitative environmental sampling, and strong consistent evidence of a dose-response relationship between silica and lung cancer is still absent. The one cohort and one case-referent study investigating silicotics and non-silicotics separately have shown that the excess cancer risk was mainly attributable to the silica-exposed group. However, it is still not possible to distinguish whether silica increased the risk of lung cancer or whether it is merely a surrogate for exposure.

In summary, this topic is a difficult one to study, and generally the authors have made commendable efforts to investigate it within the restraints beyond their control. The book is essential reading for those who wish to be updated on epidemiological progress in this field.

R M Pickering
Medical Statistics & Computing
Southampton General Hospital
Southampton