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EPIDEMIOLOGY

(Prof. R. VAN DER LENDE)

In the Netherlands we are conducting follow-up studies in random samples from populations of a rural area (Vlagtwedde) and a polluted area (Vlaardingen). These studies are carried out once every three years. In all studies we ask questions about respiratory symptoms with the aid of a standard questionnaire. In the second study i.e. three years after the first one, we also asked questions about absence from work caused by respiratory diseases.

The first slide shows the proportion of men with one or more periods of absence from work in Vlagtwedde, the rural area, and in Vlaardingen, the polluted area. For this presentation we have divided the men in 2 age groups, namely 15-29 and 30-39 at the first investigation. Clearly, in the polluted area there is more absenteeism, especially in the older groups. Of course it is possible that people in a town are more inclined to stay home from work than people in rural areas do, at least that is generally believed. However, in our opinion such difference in behaviour cannot account for the great difference in absenteeism between Vlagtwedde and Vlaardingen in the men aged 30-39, because the difference is much smaller in the men aged 15-29.

In slide II the incidence of one or more periods of absenteeism is presented in people without respiratory symptoms and in people with respiratory symptoms. I would like to make it clear, that the prevalence of respiratory symptoms

is based on the data of the first investigation, and that we asked in the second study about the incidence of one or more periods of absenteeism in the past three years, that is, since the first investigation started. I think it is very impressive to see how large the difference in absenteeism is between people with respiratory symptoms and people without respiratory symptoms. One might say that the presence of respiratory symptoms is a distinct risk for absenteeism from work in the future.

Slide III shows that people who are exposed to dust, smoke or irritating gases in their occupations, have more absence from work than people who are not exposed. However the combination of a "dusty job" and living in an air polluted area is the greatest risk for absence of work.

ABSENTEEISM FROM WORK IN MEN IN THE PAST 3 YEARS, CAUSED BY LUNG DISEASE

AGE	VLAGTWEDDE		VLAARDINGEN	
	15 - 29 Nt = 345 %	30 - 39 Nt = 328 %	15 - 29 Nt = 333 %	30 - 39 Nt = 230 %
MEN WITH ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF ABSENTEEISM	4.9	4.6	6.9	12.2

Fig. 1

ABSENTEEISM FROM WORK IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS, IN MEN AGED
15-39 WITHOUT AND WITH RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS

	VLAGTWEDDE		VLAARDINGEN	
	Nt	ABS.IN %	Nt	ABS.IN %
NO RESP. SYMPTOMS	434	3.0	291	5.2
PERSISTENT COUGH	59	10.2	65	20.0
PERSISTENT PHLEGM	47	14.9	69	26.1
DYSPNOEA GRADE 3	27	11.1	29	24.1
WHEEZE GRADE 3	22	9.1	34	29.4
ASTHMATIC ATTACKS	19	15.8	24	12.5
BRONCHITIS PERIODS	45	15.6	84	20.2

Fig. 2

	VLAGTWEDDE				VLAARDINGEN			
	15-29 YEARS		30-39 YEARS		15-29 YEARS		30-39 YEARS	
	Nt	ABS.IN %	Nt	ABS.IN %	Nt	ABS.IN %	Nt	ABS.IN %
MEN WITH "DUSTY" WORK	131	5.3	108	7.4	102	6.9	106	17.0
MEN WITH "CLEAN" WORK	214	4.7	220	3.2	230	7.0	124	8.1

Fig. 3