

THE PRESENT SITUATION OF LEPROSY IN ITALY ¹

MAURIZIO TERNI
AND FEDERICO L. SIGNORINI
*From the Istituto di Igiene e Microbiologia
Università di Firenze, Italy*

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Leprosy has been a notifiable disease in Italy since 1923.

Leprosy patients are generally hospitalized, at the expense of the government, in four special sections of the dermatology departments of the Universities of Genoa in northwestern Italy, Bari in southeastern Italy, Cagliari in southern Sardinia, and Messina in Sicily.

Patients who are not considered infectious, however, may be cared for in their homes subject to regular medical examinations; but they may be required to go to the hospital at any time by decision of the competent public health authority.

LEPROSY STATISTICS

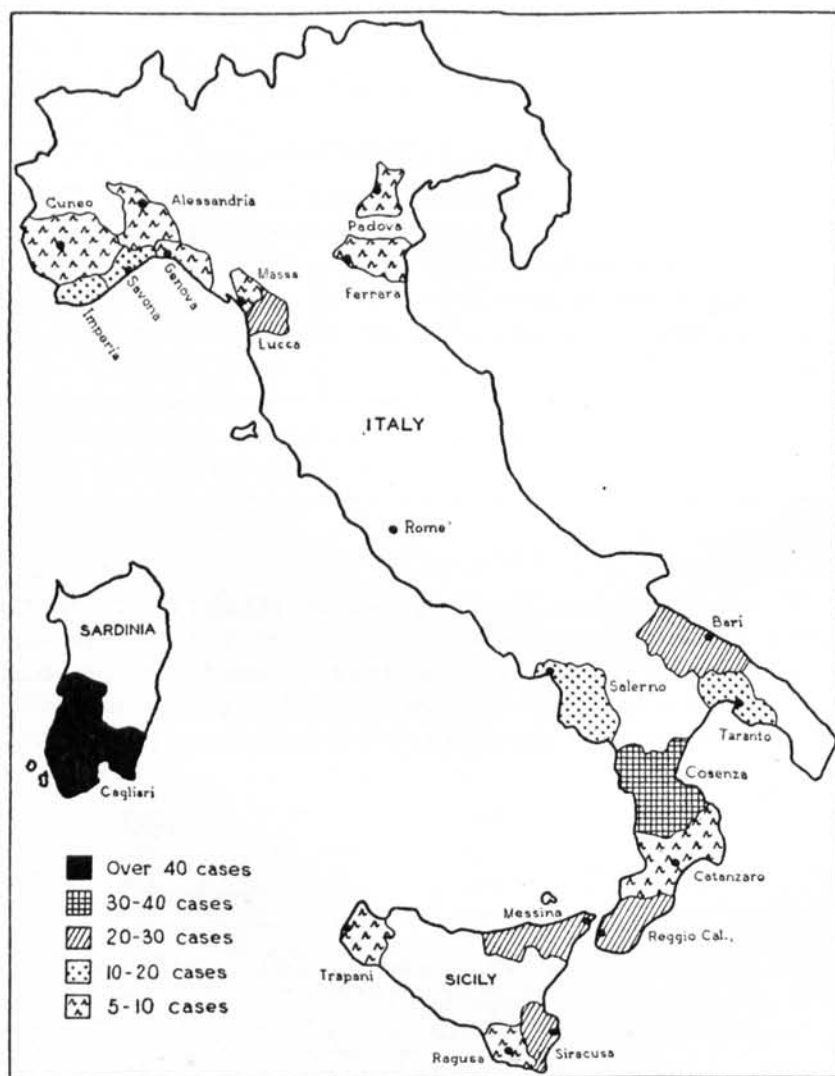
Census statistics.—There are available official figures for the number of cases of leprosy known to exist from time to time. These data are generally referred to as "censuses," but that term does not have the same significance as when an enumeration is based on an intensive examination of the populace. The available figures are:

1912.....	208	1931.....	308
1923.....	182	1942.....	373
1926.....	264	1945.....	348
1929.....	240	1947.....	364

In 1929, when the official figure was 240, a nonofficial figure was 391. The figure of 373 for 1942 is the difference between 735 reported from 1926 to 1942 and 362 known to have died. The figure for 1947 is that obtained by Tobia (18) as a result of an accurate epidemiological investigation carried out under the auspices of the public health authority.

Annual accretions of new cases.—In the period of 24 years

¹ This note has been prepared from bone-bare data supplied by the authors, on request for information which might be used in the News section, but which was too comprehensive to be used in that way.—EDITOR.



TEXT-FIG. 1.

TEXT-FIG. 1. Distribution of cases of leprosy by provinces in Italy, 1947.

from 1925 to 1948, a total of 839 new cases was reported, an average of 34.9 a year. The annual figures are as follows:

1925.....	73	1933.....	20	1941.....	37
1926.....	61	1934.....	21	1942.....	30
1927.....	54	1935.....	54	1943.....	9
1928.....	63	1936.....	54	1944.....	8
1929.....	71	1937.....	21	1945.....	19
1930.....	43	1938.....	41	1946.....	24
1931.....	20	1939.....	24	1947.....	17
1932.....	16	1940.....	32	1948.....	27

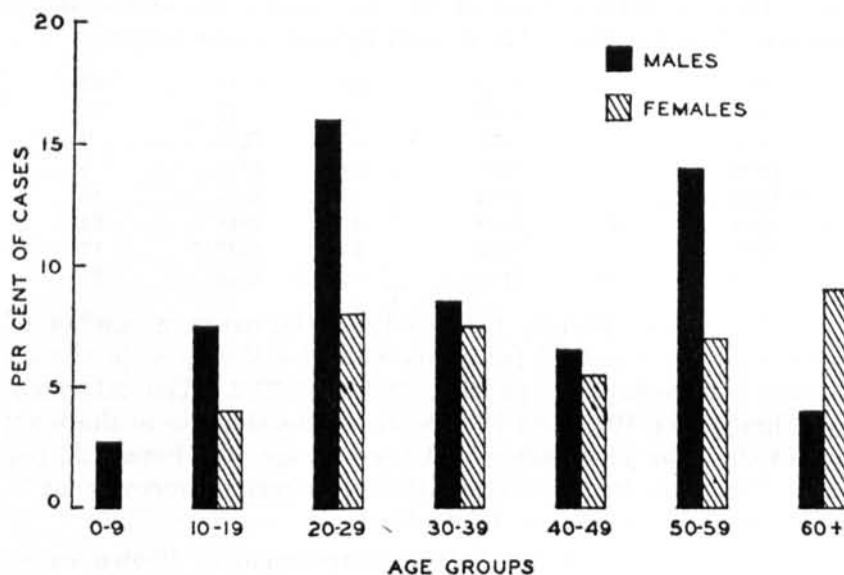
In the 5-year period, 1925 to 1929, the average number of cases reported was 64.4 per year, while for the next three such periods the averages were 24.0, 38.8, and 23.2. The extremely low figures for 1943 and 1944 were, obviously, due to the war; but in the four years after that the average was barely 22 per year. That this low figure signifies a material improvement in the leprosy situation may be doubted.

Geographic distribution.—The distribution of known cases, according to Tobia's 1947 survey, is shown in Text-fig. 1. On that map are indicated and named only those provinces in which there are 5 or more cases. It will be noted that the areas of the peninsula itself which are affected constitute two distinct and widely separated zones, one in the northern—but not the mountainous northernmost—part of the country, and one in the south, with most cases in Cosenza. The largest number, however, is in southern Sardinia, where there are more than 40 cases.

Sources of cases.—Of the 364 cases recorded in 1947, no less than 84 (23%) were of foreign origin, infected in other countries where the disease is endemic. The largest group, 175 cases (48%), were autochthonous ones generally occurring in small groups often around imported cases; while the next largest group, 105 cases (29%), were classified as of unknown origin.

Age and sex.—Of 200 cases, 118 were males and 82 females, a sex ratio of 1.4 to 1. The age distribution is shown, by sexes, in Text-fig. 2. It is noteworthy that with the males there are two conspicuous peaks, in the 20-29 and the 50-59 decades. With the females this trend is much less marked; with them the largest group of all was the 60+ one, and there they greatly predominated above males.

Occupation.—According to the findings of Tobia in 159 cases, 39 (25%) of the individuals were peasants and 48 (30%) were laborers. The others were scattered over a considerable variety of occupations and professions, without discernible significance.



TEXT-FIG. 2.

TEXT-FIG. 2. Percentage distribution of cases by age for males and females.

RECENT STUDIES ON LEPROSY

Several studies have been reported in recent years, all of them published in Italian periodicals. The epidemiological study of Tobia (18) has been mentioned. Most of the other studies have to do with treatment, necessarily on a small scale compared with such work in many other places.

Good results with sulfones have been reported by Cannata of Genoa (4), Bertaccini of Bari (1), Martinotti of Bologna (12), and La Scala of Messina (11). Sulfones and streptomycin have been used together, also with good results, by Semmola and Bartoloni of Florence (17); and streptomycin and penicillin together have been effective in the hands of Cannata (5). The latter found that vitamins B₁ and D₂ given in large doses, had no effect on the specific lesions but were beneficial as regards the general condition. Streptomycin and PAS were used by Pisacane of Messina (14) and by Bosco of Perugia (3) with some improvements. Poor results were observed by Rizzi and Borelli of Parma (15) using penicillin alone. Late improvement following a strong initial reaction was observed by Schuppli (16) after the use of a preparation called "Cibazol" (2-para-aminobenzen-sulfamido-tiazole).

Other recent studies are: Boncinelli, of Bari (2) on the hyperergy of maculo-anesthetic cases; Casciano, of Messina (7) on the intradermal histamine reaction and the failure of reflex erythema in anesthetic leprosy; Ciaccio and Puglisi, of Messina (8) on hematology in leprosy cases; Pisacane, of Messina (13) on sarcoid leprosy; De Blasio, of Naples (9, 10) on the cultivation of acid-fast organisms—the tubercle bacillus and paratuberculosis bacilli—from the nodules of human and rat leprosy; Cannata (6) on the leprous erythrocyte sedimentation rate in the presence of leprous antigens.

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In the 37th meeting of the Italian Dermatology and Syphilology Society, May 1950, the following authors presented papers on leprosy:

- a. *Therapy.* Bertaccini (Bari), Cottini and Musumeci (Catania), Pinetti (Gagliari), Cannata (Genova), Grassi (Pisa), Nicoletti (Lucca).
- b. *Epidemiology.* Tamponi (Parma), Cattaneo (Milano), De Angelis (Pisa).
- c. *Lepromin test.* Boncinelli (Bari), Artom (Verona).
- d. *Other arguments.* Comel (Pisa), Artom (Verona), Tinozzi (Pavia).

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