

# A long-lasting pandemic: diseases caused by dust containing silica: Italy within the international context

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## KEY WORDS

Silica; silicosis; history; Industrial Revolution; Italy

## SUMMARY

*Diseases caused by dust containing silica represent an exemplary case study in the field of work-related diseases and in the history of the discovery of chronic industrial disease and its relationship to industrial society. Both dust and steam are indissolubly linked to the Industrial Revolution which everywhere was expected to replace slaves with masses of proletarians "like lesser gods". The identification of different nosological entities of dust-related diseases, the discovery that the most harmful dust particles in gold mines were invisible, insurance compensation and the development of the silicosis threshold limit value were all subjects of intense political negotiation that accompanied, with the connivance of doctors and scientists, a compromise between the health of workers and the economic health of industry. The preference for damage compensation (insurance system) over risk prevention (industrial hygienic measures) was also asserted and maintained in post-war Italy. Decline and modification of silicosis in Italy proceeded at the same rate as the introduction and subsequent application of more effective preventative legislation, especially with the protest movements of the working class at the end of the 1960s, together with the elimination of entire sectors of industrial activities, first those specialising in extraction and then the metallurgy.*

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