

The incidence of sterilisation and its reversal in the United Kingdom

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National data are collected centrally for operations performed in UK National Health Service hospitals and family planning clinics. Many vasectomies are now performed by general practitioners in their office premises. No data are available on these operations and those performed elsewhere in the private sector. We set out to determine the incidence of sterilisation and reversal operations in both genders by searching GP computer records. Records from 620 practices contributing to the General Practice Research Database during the years 1992-1999 were searched. Analysis was carried out on the records of 1680592 women aged 20-54 years and 1895253 men aged 20-64 years. The incidence of sterilisation for all years combined was 4.78 per 1000 person years at risk for women aged 20-54 and 4.48 per 1000 person years at risk for men aged 20-64. Whereas in men the incidence was little different at the beginning and end of the study period, for women there was a 30% decrease. The popularity of sterilisation had reversed, changing from more popular in women before 1996 to more popular in men after 1996. The incidence of sterilisation reversal for all years combined was 0.13 per 1000 person years at risk for women aged 20-54 and 0.18 per 1000 person years at risk for men aged 20-64. The decrease in incidence of female sterilisation coincides with the launch of contraceptive implants and the levonorgestrel intrauterine system. The UK is one of only four countries in the world where uptake of vasectomy is greater than that of tubal occlusion.