

2. Aim of study and method

Sample

The study sample comprised all coronial autopsy cases where the autopsy was performed during a one week (7 day) retrospective period in early 2005, in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man. The date was chosen to exclude any weeks with a bank holiday and the date was notified retrospectively to avoid bias in the study week. It was also before the implementation (in June 2005) of the important changes to the Coroners Rules 1984 that placed greater restriction on the taking of material for histology and toxicology etc.

NCEPOD allowed 11 weeks from the chosen study week before the data were requested from coroners' offices. This was to ensure sufficient time for the majority of autopsy reports to be completed and submitted to the coroner concerned. The data were accepted until the end of January 2006.

The only exclusion that applied to the study was suspected homicide cases. Paediatric cases were included in the sample population.

Based on 2003 data published in 2004, it was estimated that on average 2,300 coronial autopsies would be performed per week³. Taking into account a 1.6% decline in autopsy rate (based on the average rate of decline in coronial autopsies between 1993 and 2003) and the excluded homicide cases, it was anticipated that the study sample would consist of approximately 2,260 coronial autopsy cases.