

## Letters

### Fatal child abuse in the Southern Free State

**To the Editor:** The article on fatal child abuse in the Southern Free State<sup>1</sup> is interesting and would have had more credibility had there been any actual practising clinicians as authors especially as the generalisation in the conclusion is about medical doctors.

I find the conclusion to be somewhat anecdotal and more a gut feeling than actual evidence that this research has shown. The authors have not clearly shown how or if cases of child abuse can be identified early and if this early identification can prevent morbidity. I assume they are writing of further morbidity. The authors draw the conclusion from their gut feeling that early diagnosis of child abuse may prevent mortality.

This conclusion is more sensationalistic and this research has in no way the power to make this conclusion. The reviewers of this research need to review any scientific article on the evidence presented and as such should not have published such sensationalism that belongs more to the lay press.

Of concern the obvious bias is the reporting of deaths from the post mortem records only. There may have been children who may have not undergone post mortem examinations. Nineteen cases were identified; I would have liked to know the actual number of childhood deaths that underwent post-mortem examinations during that time and how one could assess whether early identification of signs of abuse would have prevented these fatalities?

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#### References

1. Kotze, G., Jäger, I., van Schalkwyk, L., & Joubert, G. Noodlottige kindermishandeling: 'n literatuuroorsig en die profiel in die Suid-Vrystaat (1995-2003)/ Fatal child abuse: a literature review and the profile in the Southern Free State (1995-2003). *SA Fam Pract* 2007; 49(9): 15.

**Author's response:** We thank the letter writer for the interest shown in this student project and for the comments, which could be of value in improving our undergraduate medical student projects.

#### Gina Joubert

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