



Pergamon

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Letter to the Editor

Re: The incidence of severe physical abuse in Wales (Sibert et al., 2002)

Congratulations to Dr. Sibert and to *Child Abuse & Neglect The International Journal* for the writing and publication of this article (Sibert et al., 2002)! Although the population of Wales is a mere 3 million or so, a small fraction of the UK and a smaller fraction of the world, the authors have made a huge contribution by determining the incidence of severe physical abuse in that jurisdiction. Hopefully, this approach might be applied to larger jurisdictions and even whole countries.

The authors correctly recognize that counting the summaries of reports that are found in registries or in the data banks of public social services seriously underestimates severe and fatal physical abuse. (Probably these files seriously underestimate abuse of all types and levels of severity.) The authors also recognize that the body politic is concerned about these serious cases. The authors further recognized that surveillance of health care providers is necessary in order to enumerate the serious cases. Whether or not their exact methodology could be exported to jurisdictions with different practice styles of pediatricians is uncertain. However, surveillance in the health system in such a way as to find the seriously injured infants and children is essential.

One can hope that the authors will continue to monitor the incidence of serious physical abuse. The most important reason for determining such a number is to look for trends over time. Another reason is to be able to make valid comparisons between population sets. It is interesting and concerning that their incidence was similar to that found by Kempe (1971) three decades earlier. Most of us who work in hospitals that receive seriously injured infants and children are not surprised by this finding. It remains to keep the methodology constant, and to introduce interventions that promise to reduce the incidence of serious physical abuse. If we can't reduce these cases, what can we do?

David L. Chadwick

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4816 Rushville Lane, Le Mesa, CA 91941, USA

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