

**SKELETAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND ASSOCIATED
SOCIOLOGICAL RISK FACTORS**

By

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ABSTRACT

Children are at a greater risk for abuse due to their small size and powerlessness. As pregnancies and births can be easily hidden, a child's death can be equally as unnoticeable. Often, these deaths are unknown until skeletal evidence is discovered. At this point, any incriminating evidence that may have been soft tissue in nature is gone or of no use, and all that remains is the skeleton. This is especially important in areas of the United States that are characterized by hot and humid climates, as in the Southeast, or in situations that mimic such conditions. These circumstances favor a faster rate of decomposition and thus quicker and earlier loss of soft tissue along with any of the important information it could provide about identification and time and manner of death.

It is important for law enforcement agents and forensic anthropologists to be familiar with what the patterns of child abuse look like by being able to differentiate between intentional trauma from non-intentional trauma; this requires a basic knowledge of bone biology and healing rates in order to sequence injuries to aid in the determination of cause and manner of death. It also necessary to understand what other events can mimic child abuse such as disease. In addition to the skeletal evidence, the sociological risk factors that can increase the risk of child abuse must also be taken into consideration.