



## Letter to the Editor

### Causal connection between methamphetamine and neurotoxicity not established

We read with great interest the case report by Maranella and colleagues [1] in part because, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first reported case of neurotoxic and hepatic neonatal injury in a newborn with prenatal methamphetamine (MA) exposure. The authors concluded that, “the association between the neurological and the hepatic MA toxicity led to the severe cerebral damage and the neurological impairment.” [1] Given that causal statements drawn from this case study can have far-reaching implications, we believe further discussion is warranted.

While the mother and newborn had positive urine screens for MA, this alone does not indicate the amount or frequency of drug consumed. These factors, however, are critical in understanding the effects of any drug. Additionally, the authors do not report on factors already known to adversely impact child development, such as malnutrition, physical abuse, lack of prenatal care, chronic stress, and poverty [2–4]. Providing more context about the mother and her drug use would help the reader better understand whether prenatal methamphetamine exposure or other factors could be responsible for the adverse neurological and hepatic effects observed.

Causal claims like those presented by the authors can cause harm by promoting both the stigmatization and criminalization of drug use during pregnancy. In doing so, the authors may indirectly provide justification for the incarceration of pregnant mothers, which can be more harmful than prenatal MA exposure itself [5].

Thus, it is crucial that researchers do not make unwarranted causal claims regarding prenatal drug use—especially with limited evidence obtained from a single subject.

### References

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