JENNIFER'S FATE STILL A MYSTERY TO FAMILY

3 weeks after girl's body was found, DNA analysis is still pending

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IT HAS been almost three weeks since police recovered the body of a 12-year-old Jennifer Williams, who went missing on December 20 near her Parkwood home, but they are yet to confirm this by DNA analysis.

Forensic expert David Klzower (pictured) said this was an unacceptable amount of time for the Williams family to wait for clarity. "It's frustrating for everyone. They are waiting for justice," he said.

Klzower said that while the body was "probably" already decomposing when it was discovered, it was still relatively fresh and therefore simple to extract the DNA. "You would think this was a priority case. What if it turns out it's not her body? Now, a month down the line, they have severely diminished their chances of finding her."

Klzower said that South African forensic labs were incredibly slow and didn't stand up to the high standards in places such as the UK. Dr Professor Lerato Martin, head ofUCT's division for forensic medicine and toxicology said a one-month wait for a DNA result wasn't unreasonable at all.

"There are many cases of tests we have to request and many cases we are working on," she said.

She said the tests took on average three days, from admittance to the mortuary, to completion of the analysis. These results are communicated to the investigating officer and a provisional report is filed.

But Martin said the other tests could often take a bit longer, especially those that are provided to the forensic pathology services in external agencies.

Carolyn Hainstock, of the mobile group DNA Project, said firearms was a far more involved process than TV shows such as CSI make it out to be.

There are48 labs and people specialising in different fields, she said. "There isn't just one mastermind pathologist calling all the shots."

But she said that in cases where a body was being identified, especially if reference DNA had been provided by the family, the lab process should take no longer than 48 hours. However, she added that the large amount of cases being processed by South African forensic labs often resulted in delays.

"Additionally, if a body has already started to decompose it will degrade the DNA evidence," she said. "This means the tests might need to be done several times to get a result."

Vanessa Lachh, data of the DNA Project, said people had to realise that every case was important to the family involved and police couldn't just assign priority to cases that the media had picked up.

"There is such a high incidence rate in this country," she said. "Every case is a priority to the family of the victim."

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