Smoke killed baby, says autopsy report

TRAGIC MEMORY: Three-month-old Keamogetswe Kunene died last week

BEREFT: Thabang Molefe, 20, says he wants the police to pay for allegedly killing his child. Police had fired teargas near his house at Majakaneng to disperse protesters PHOTO: BAFANA MAHLANGU

Lindile Sifile

A PRELIMINARY autopsy report into the death of a three-month-old baby has confirmed that he died from smoke inhalation.

Keamogetswe Kunene died after three police teargas canisters landed in her home at Majakaneng in North West last Friday.

Police fired the canisters to disperse a group of residents who were protesting against erratic water supply in the area. The protest was taking place on the N4 highway about 100 metres from the baby's home.

Three teargas canisters were found about 10 metres from the room where the baby had been sleeping.

Sowetan has seen the death notification form which states that Keamogetswe died of "unnatural causes and smoke inhalation".

The postmortem was conducted at the state mortuary in Brits on Tuesday. A full pathology report is not yet available.

FATHER FOUND GAS CANISTERS NEAR BABY

Her father Thabiso Molefe said he had been in an outside toilet when the canisters landed in his yard.

"I normally look after him (Keamogetswe) when I'm available during the day, and on that day the creche had closed because of the protest.

"I must have gone for three minutes and when I returned he had blood coming out of his nose," said the 20-year-old single father.

An ambulance was called and police came an hour later to collect the empty teargas canisters.

"I want the police to pay for what they did. Now my mother and I are suffering because we have to deal with our loss, and we are still looking for money to bury her.

"They killed my child because there was no fire or smoke in the house before I went to the toilet," said Molefe.

He said police came to take a statement from him and also took Keamogetswe's clinic card on Monday, three days after the incident.

The baby's grandmother, Kedisaletse Kunene, said police wanted to establish if the child had any previous illnesses that could have led to the death.

According to the grandmother, he had never fallen sick and the only time he was taken to the clinic was to get immunisations.

North West police spokesman Brigadier Thulani Ngubane said a notice of death for Home Affairs's administrative purposes was not evidence enough.

Ngubane said a detailed pathology report normally took about two weeks to compile.

He said a pathology report forms part of the docket to be taken to the National Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration.

Johan Rousseau, a death industry expert and government consultant, said the pathology report was important as it gave specific details like toxicology and histology.

He said this was normally done by the National Health Laboratory Services and took about three to six months to compile.

"Histology samples would show what gases were in the lungs while toxicology would tell what was in the blood. Unfortunately, our pathology departments have a huge backlog, hence they take so long to process results," said Rousseau.

Ngubane did not reply to questions Sowetan sent to him, which included whether it was police procedure to collect empty teargas canisters after they had discharged them during protests.

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