

## Introduction

Alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to a range of cognitive and physical disabilities collectively referred to as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD; Hoyme et al., 2016). Although it is a global concern (Popova, Lange, Probst, Gmel, & Rehm, 2017), numerous prevalence studies have shown that South Africa has the highest prevalence of FASD worldwide (Olivier, 2017). This poster asks whether the evidence has led to increased awareness at a governmental level in South Africa.

## Method

We conducted a google search of the terms “fetal alcohol” and “foetal alcohol” restricted to South African government internet domains (.gov.za). We searched in 5 different time periods: 1999, 2000 – 2004, 2005 – 2009, 2010 – 2014 and 2015 – 2018. We used results referring to FASD as a proxy for awareness in government. We looked at whether the domains were for government departments, provincial government, local municipalities or national government.

## Results

The searches were conducted on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2019. After removing duplicates and pages that could not be accessed a total of 276 results were found between 1999 and 2018. There were no results in 1999 but the number of results steadily increased over time (see Figure 2). The majority of results were in the form of policy documents, budget documents and various reports (165), yet the results included news items or official statements (54), information booklets/pamphlets (25) and resource directories (5). We also examined the level of information on FASD in the search results. If it was mentioned that FASD is caused by alcohol consumption we categorised the result as having basic information. If there was more information (prevalence rates, impact of FASD on the child etc.) we categorised it as comprehensive information. If only the acronym or the terms fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder were mentioned it was seen as having no specific information (see Figure 3). Finally we examined whether the search result focussed on FASD specifically, whether it was mentioned as a key part of the result or whether there was only an incidental reference to FASD (see Figure 4).

## Discussion

From the first time international FASD-day was celebrated in South Africa in 1999 many researchers and organisations have worked on putting the spotlight on this public health concern. Various prevalence studies have been done in various provinces (Olivier, 2017; see Figure 1). Although no causal links can be drawn based on the information gathered here, there has been a definite increase in both Research and mentions from government websites.

## References:

- Hoyme, H. E., Kalberg, W. O., Elliott, A. J., Blankenship, J., Buckley, D., Marais, A.-S., ... May, P. A. (2016). Updated Clinical Guidelines for Diagnosing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. *PEDIATRICS*, 138(2). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-4256>;
- Olivier, L. (2017). *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in South Africa: A 20-year journey*. Retrieved from <https://cris.maastrichtuniversity.nl/portal/files/17846113/c5861.pdf%0A>; \*includes unpublished research
- Popova, S., Lange, S., Probst, C., Gmel, G., & Rehm, J. (2017). Estimation of national, regional, and global prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy and fetal alcohol syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*, 5(3), e290–e299. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30021-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30021-9)

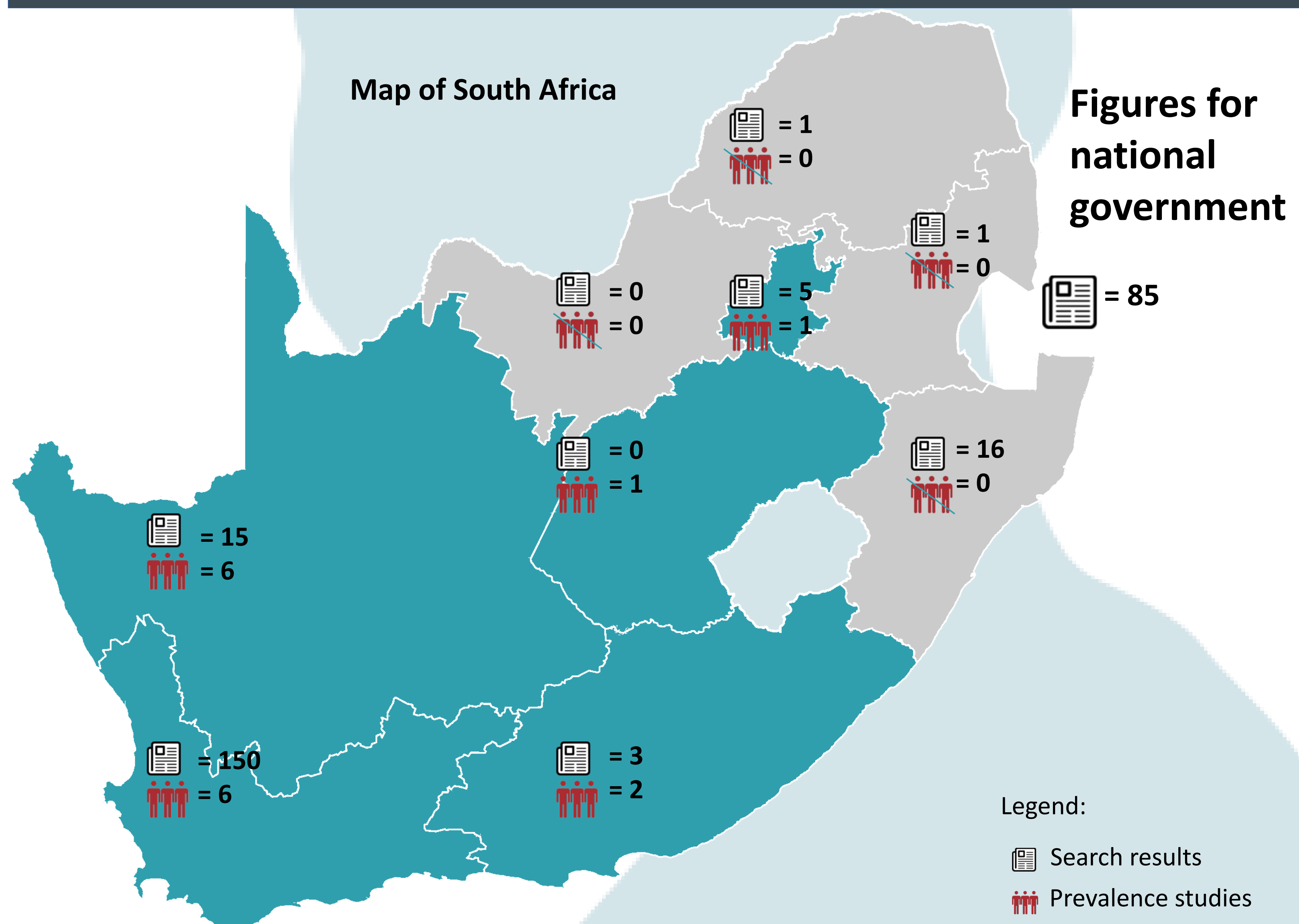
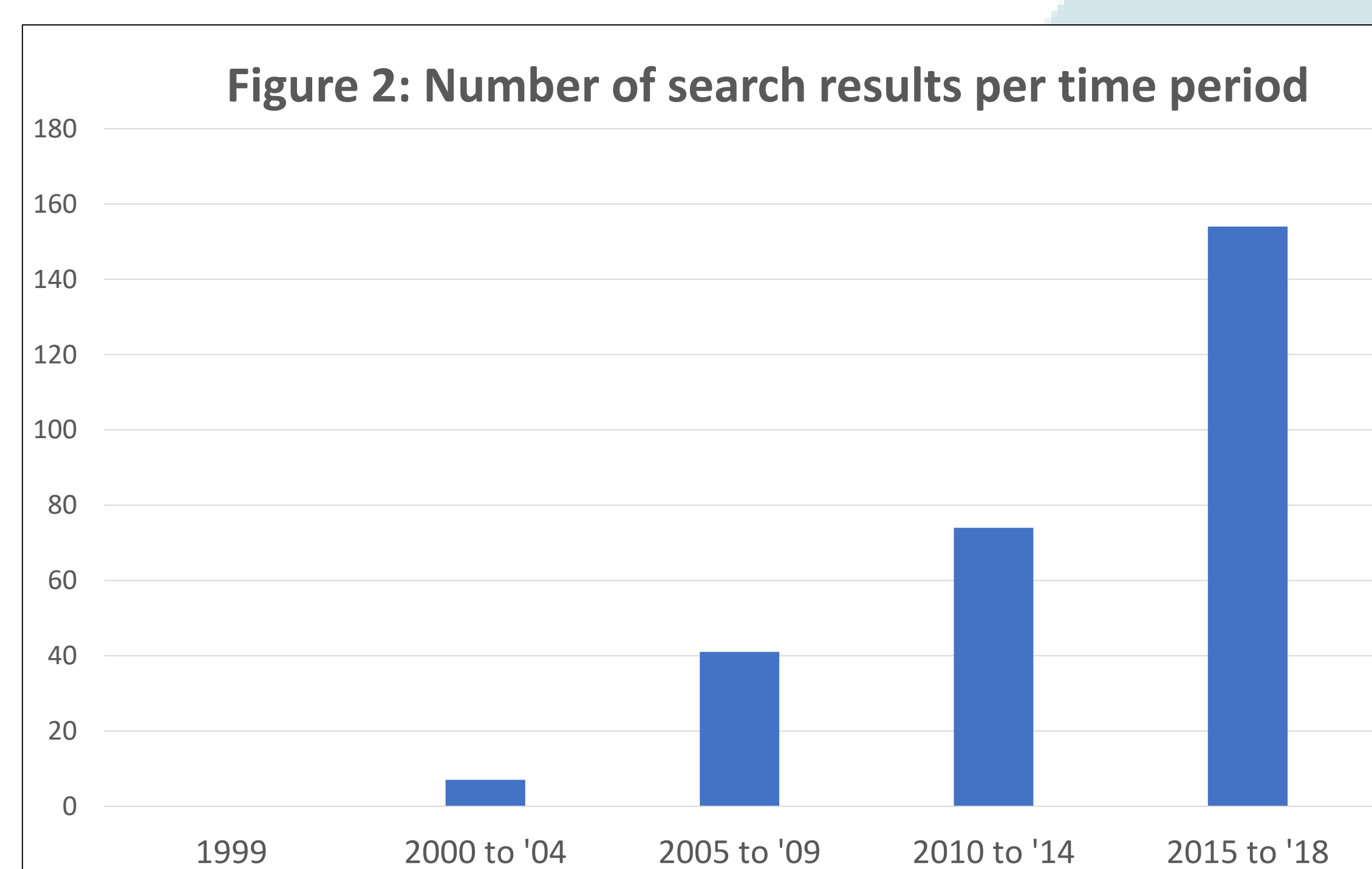


Figure 1: Number of search results and prevalence studies per province 1999 - 2018



## Conclusion

Since 1999, FASD related information seems to be increasingly available on South African governmental websites. Even though no causal link between governmental website mentions and increased research on FASD prevalence rates in different provinces, can be drawn, increased attention to FASD as a significant public health concern by government departments, seem to have increased while more scientific literature and evidence about its prevalence becomes available over time.

