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Men more likely to be accused of shaking infants, study finds

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Men are nearly three times more likely than women to be accused of violently shaking an infant, The Medill Justice Project reports in a story published today.

Out of nearly 3,000 cases nationwide, 72.5 percent of those accused of shaken-baby syndrome crimes are men, while 27.5 percent are women, The Medill Justice Project discovered in its first published finding in more than a year of research on this largely opaque criminal justice issue. Shaken-baby syndrome crimes involve caregivers who are accused of inflicting severe head trauma on children, typically under the age of 2, causing a triad of symptoms—brain bleeding, brain swelling and bleeding within the eye.

Experts interviewed about the gender discrepancy point to more than one cause for why so many more men than women are accused of shaken-baby syndrome crimes. While there is no clear consensus on the causes, some experts posit that men are not as socialized as women in how to care for infants. With new national data on gender, hospitals and advocacy organizations may be better equipped to provide shaken-baby syndrome prevention resources to men and women. Only a handful of major organizations target men and women differently in their shaken-baby syndrome prevention efforts.

Working with undergraduate journalism students at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, The Medill Justice Project identified and confirmed

more than 3,600 cases of shaken-baby syndrome by running defendant names and other identifiers through proprietary legal databases, cross-referencing them with police, appellate court and medical records, where available. More than 30 sources provided The Medill Justice Project with case information.

The Medill Justice Project plans to make its national shaken-baby syndrome database available to the public. With the help of a team of engineering graduate students at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering, The Medill Justice Project database is tracking and confirming nearly 40 categories of information on thousands of cases, with gender being the first. After another category is confirmed, the first phase of the database will be released on its website for researchers, journalists and others as a public service.

Provided by Northwestern University

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