

Most physicians recognize shaken baby syndrome as a medical diagnosis

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A University of Colorado School of Medicine researcher and colleagues have conducted the first-ever survey of physicians on the validity of "abusive head trauma" as a medical diagnosis.

While shaking a baby has been recognized as a dangerous form of child abuse since the early 1970s, the validity of "[shaken baby syndrome](#)" and "abusive [head trauma](#)" has been questioned recently in some major media reports, court decisions and medical literature. In at least one case, a U.S. Supreme Court justice has commented that there is widespread controversy within the medical community about abusive head trauma and [shaken baby](#) syndrome.

"The truth is that this is a manufactured controversy - invented by a few authors, primarily so they can be used as expert witnesses," said Daniel Lindberg, associate professor of [emergency medicine](#) and pediatrics at the School of Medicine on the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. "Doctors who actually care for children are nearly unanimous in their agreement that shaking and abuse can clearly cause the findings that have been used to diagnose abusive head trauma."

Lindberg and his colleagues have conducted a survey that represents the first national, multi-disciplinary physician opinion on the validity of shaken baby syndrome and abusive head trauma and the likelihood of types of harm, such as subdural hematoma, severe retinal hemorrhages, coma and death, to result from various causes.

"Our results provide empiric data that clearly support the conclusion that shaken baby syndrome and abusive head trauma are generally accepted as valid medical diagnoses by a broad range of medical specialists," Lindberg said.

The survey, conducted between March and October 2015, was distributed to 1,378 clinicians at 10 of the nation's leading children's hospitals. The most common specialties listed among respondents were emergency medicine, critical care, neurology and radiology. Among the 628 survey respondents, 607, or 96.7 percent, characterized either shaken baby syndrome or abusive head trauma as valid diagnoses. The vast majority of those who considered those a valid diagnosis said they were informed by both scientific literature and their own clinical experience.

"It is critically important to dispel the myth that there is controversy about the harm resulting from abusive head trauma and shaken baby syndrome," Lindberg said. "The life and health of children are at stake here. There should be no confusion that these diagnoses are widely recognized and accepted among a range of physicians who provide care to these children."

More information: Sandeep K. Narang et al, Acceptance of Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma as Medical Diagnoses, *The Journal of Pediatrics* (2016). DOI: [10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.06.036](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.06.036)

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