

Parent Profiles in Cases of Shaken Baby Syndrome

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SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

- ❖ Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is also called abusive head trauma.
- ❖ SBS is caused by shaking a child to the point of brain injury.
- ❖ Brain injuries include retinal hemorrhage, subdural hemorrhage, and brain damage.
- ❖ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) found that children are more likely to be abused in environments with prior incidents of violence, inadequate parenting, poor housing accommodations, and high levels of stress.

INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Shaken baby syndrome (SBS) is defined as physical abuse that occurs on a young child due to a violent incident where the baby is shaken to the point of cerebral damage (Guthkelch, 1971).
- ❖ Children 3 and under are at risk for SBS, with boys who are victims typically having their first incident by 1 year of age (Squier, 2011).
- ❖ Twenty-five to 30% of cases of SBS end in death and children who survive these incidents have significant neurological conditions such as cognitive impairment, behavioral issues, seizures, and blindness (Kemp et al., 2003).

BUILDING A PARENT PROFILE

- ❖ Forensic psychologists should use assessments such as the Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAP) to build a profile of parents that would be more likely to engage in SBS.
- ❖ Through use of the CAP, Milner et al. (1986) found that parents who abuse their children suffer from challenges such as unhappiness with self and others, issues with family and others, distress, and rigidity in beliefs.
- ❖ Building a profile of parent behaviors, based on factors captured in the CAP, serves to help forensic psychologists identify risk factors in cases of possible SBS.
- ❖ Identifying risk factors of parents or caregivers can help inform forensic psychologists' assessments, which includes recommendations for child abuse prevention services.



FORENSIC IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ Many SBS cases lack clear causality because multiple factors may be responsible for a presentation of SBS.
- ❖ Forensic psychologists must practice discretion in providing expert testimony in cases of SBS where supplemental reports provided by other practitioners heavily influence their findings.
- ❖ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) characterizes child maltreatment and harm as emotional, sexual, and physical abuse and instances happen across the spectrum of gender, race, and age.
- ❖ Forensic psychologists are called upon to assess cases where child abuse, such as SBS, has occurred.
- ❖ Due to challenges in diagnosis from an ethical, legal, and moral standpoint, forensic experts have an arduous task evaluating SBS cases (Johnson et al., 2020).
- ❖ There is confusion within the medical and legal disciplines regarding how to identify injuries that lead to a precise diagnosis of SBS (Johnson et al., 2020).

FUTURE RESEARCH

- ❖ Dias et al. (2005) found that over 80% of new parents have heard of SBS, which underscores the gap between knowledge and application of safety measures.
- ❖ Prevention based programs serve to address these concerns.
- ❖ Preventive measures would involve providing services to parents who are more likely to commit abuse according to the CAP.
- ❖ Evidence-based programs geared towards child abuse prevention have an ecological theoretical backing and are best suited to address the psychosocial needs of the family system (Nelson et al., 2001).

CONCLUSION

- ❖ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) found that child abuse prevention programs are most effective when protective and risk factors are addressed and when the family system is equipped with safety interventions.
- ❖ Identifying the population needing resources ensures that adequate support is available and this can be accomplished by developing a parental profile in individuals deemed a "high risk" of committing child abuse such as SBS.

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