
**SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME: A SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICO-LEGAL
PERSPECTIVE****A Le Roux-Kemp*****E Burger******SUMMARY**

Shaken Baby Syndrome refers to the violent and repetitive shaking of an infant, and is a form of abusive head trauma. It was first described in 1974, and has since been the topic of intensive study and discussion. The syndrome has classically been diagnosed with a triad of injuries, namely subdural haemorrhage, retinal haemorrhage and encephalopathy (brain abnormalities). However, recent publications have led to some doubt regarding the causation and diagnostic significance of the triad. It is now generally accepted that other conditions, even natural diseases, may cause the findings listed in the so-called "triad". To date, no reported case law is available on Shaken Baby Syndrome in South Africa; therefore this article focuses on cases in the United States and United Kingdom to delineate some of the issues associated with litigating the condition. This includes the obligation of expert witnesses to give independent, factual evidence about their areas of expertise. It is recommended that medical and legal professionals involved in cases of alleged child abuse should collect as much information as possible about the context of the case. Confessions by parents or caregivers should be treated with circumspection. Awareness campaigns should be aimed at informing the public of the dangers of shaking an infant. And with regards to Shaken Baby Syndrome an increased focus on evidence-based medicine is necessary to dissipate the uncertainty around the condition.

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