CORRESPONDENCE

Shaken Baby Syndrome A Common Variant of Non-Accidental Head Injury in Infants

by Dr. med. Jakob Matschke, Dr. med. Bernd Herrmann, Dr. med. Jan Sperhake, Dr. med. Friederike Körber, Prof. Dr. med. Thomas Bajanowski, Prof. Dr. med. Markus Glatzel in volume 13/2009

Early Warning Signs

The review by Matschke et al. (1) refers to the important syndrome of retinal hemorrhage. This consequence of injury unfortunately tends to be neglected in the investigation of the shaken baby—despite the fact that experienced pediatricians consider it conclusive.

The non-invasive technique of funduscopy can clarify the diagnosis, particularly in cases of suspected abuse.

Furthermore, attention should be drawn to the early warning signs in shaken baby syndrome:

- Very young parents with slender psychosocial resources
- Mother's desire to discontinue breast feeding early
- Frequent visits to the doctor with trifling complaints, often outside office hours
- Poor sucking reflex, feeding problems, disturbed sleep
- Irritable or lethargic child

The German-language information campaign 'Vorsicht zerbrechlich' ("Caution, fragile") by Ute Thyen and Irene John can be found at www.kinderschutzbund-sh.de.

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REFERENCES

Matschke J, Herrmann B, Sperhake J, Körber F, Bajanowski T, Glatzel M: Shaken baby syndrome—a common variant of nonaccidental head injury in infants. *Dtsch Arztebl Int* 2009; 106: 211–7.

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In Reply:

We thank Dr. Stutzer for his kind comments on our article (1). Retinal hemorrhages are indeed an essential symptom of shaken baby syndrome. As we wrote, in every case of suspected abuse the child should undergo an exhaustive ocular examination, with documentation of all findings. However, the majority of investigating physicians act on the premise that retinal hemorrhages neither prove shaken baby syndrome per se nor are strictly necessary (2). We referred in our article to the psychosocial risk factors in shaken baby syndrome ("slender psychosocial resources"). The other "early warning signs" mentioned by Dr. Stutzer (e.g., "mother's desire to discontinue breast feeding early" or "frequent visits to the doctor with trifling complaints") may well also be significant, but we are not aware of any systematic

investigations of these factors in scientific literature. We are particularly grateful for the reference to the information campaign 'Vorsicht zerbrechlich' of the Schleswig-Holstein branch of the Kinderschutzbund (German Child Protection Alliance). We pointed out the special importance of public awareness campaigns in our article, with particular reference to the fact that in the USA, 4.4% of parents surveyed reported they had shaken their child "as a means of discipline" (3).

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors of both the letter and of the reply declare that no conflict of interest exists according to the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

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