

Shaking may cause brain damage and serious long-term effects to infants

Crying is the only way a baby can express its feelings and needs. If the parents or caregivers cannot find the cause of the inconsolable crying of the infant, they might react sharply and shake the baby. The violent shake of the infant's head causes brain damage and, as a result, the infant stops crying. For this reason, this behaviour may be repeated in similar situations.

This is one of the serious consequences extracted from the bibliographic review carried out by a group of interns of the Teaching Maternity Unit of the University College of Health Care of the University of Granada (UGR) published by the Nursing Journal Rol.

Concepción Ruiz Rodríguez, lecturer of the Department of Nursing of the UGR and head of the research group, explains that the "shaken baby syndrome" is not well-known and may cause several injuries which, in most cases, have no outward physical signs. Although the seriousness of the brain damage depends on the frequency, intensity and duration of the shake, there are other minor injuries observed due to this syndrome, such as irritability, lethargy, convulsions, vomiting or lack of appetite, and others that are more serious such as eye injury and broken bones.

Most victims are under two years old, and the most vulnerable victims include premature babies, low-weight babies, babies with excessive colic, disabled babies, twins and stepchildren. The aggressors are chiefly men, frequently the father (44%) followed by the mother's boyfriend living in the family home (20%). The most frequent aggressors among women are the babysitters (18%) and the mothers (7%).

According to the information collected from the scientific articles published over the last five years, the researcher assures that "in most of the cases diagnosed, the cause is abuse or mistreatment". For this reason, early detection and especially appropriate prevention by health professionals is essential, because this syndrome may cause serious long-term effects on the infant. In fact, a poor assessment could lead to serious consequences or even the death of the victim. 20% of victims die during the days following the aggression, and of those who survive, 50% suffer from a wide variety of disabilities and only 30% recover fully.

Concepción Ruiz points out "the importance of establishing prevention and early detection programmes in which experts in early childhood healthcare are involved.

It is necessary to offer educational courses for parents and health professionals where they can learn about the characteristics of this syndrome and some strategies to deal with stressful situations. However, the researcher wants to make it clear that "the aim is to educate and inform without alarming parents, to prevent parents who have not mistreated their children from feeling guilty, and to clarify misconceptions".

Source: Universidad de Granada

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