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# Myths, Mysteries, and Monsters: When Shaken Babies Make the News

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## **Abstract**

As the predominant cause of infant head injury that often results in death or long-term disability, Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is both a criminal act and a public health concern. This article reports the findings of a qualitative content analysis of SBS-related news coverage from 1996 to 2007, exploring how broadcast and print news media categorize, frame, and source stories about SBS. This study reveals that while the legitimacy of SBS is widely acknowledged by child abuse experts in the United States, news reports typically frame SBS as a questionable diagnosis, the perpetrators as monsters, and the act of abuse unpreventable. Further, thematic health coverage appeared least frequently of all story types, reflecting a criminal justice rather than public health approach to reporting about SBS. These findings have several implications for crafting the media campaign strategy for *The Period of PURPLE Crying: Keeping Babies Safe in North Carolina*.