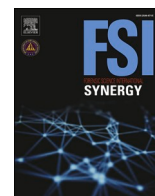


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Confessions in AHT cases are unreliable: A letter to the editor

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The experiences of accused parents in France as reported in “Why admitted cases of AHT make a low quality reference standard” [1] reflect the same high-pressure approach to interrogations I’ve seen in the U.S.

I agree with the authors: Confessions elicited by law enforcement under these circumstances are too unreliable to prove the model of Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma (SBS/AHT) that now informs legal decision-making.

Over decades of following the medical and legal debate about SBS/AHT, and working with accused families, I have reviewed uncounted interrogations in which investigators mislead and confuse distraught parents and caregivers, rejecting any non-abusive narrative of what happened. One of my prison correspondents says he confessed so the state wouldn’t go after his wife. Another father says he came out of the interrogation terrified his efforts to revive his son had done more harm than good. My own files and the public record both contain reports of parents who endured blistering interrogations, only to learn later that the child’s medical findings did not match the investigators’ representations—see, for example, the recent case of Cassandra Black Elk in North Dakota [2].

Thank you for exploring this critical, challenging topic.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Susan Luttner has provided editorial services for researchers (JDL, PEL) studying SBS/AHT. She occasionally consults with attorneys new to the arena who are unfamiliar with the medical literature. She also maintains a blog on SBS (<https://onsbs.com/>) and is working on a book.

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