

Fact Sheet: Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy



**CRIME VICTIMS'
INSTITUTE**

**COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
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Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy: The Facts

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What is Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSbP)?

The term Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy originated in 1977 to describe a new and rare form of child maltreatment. What differentiates this form of child abuse from others is that the caregiver uses medical professionals to facilitate harm to the child. Essentially, the caregiver elicits medical (physical or mental health) care for the child, based on their desire for the child to be recognized as unwell and receive treatment even though actual health issues are not present. Although MSbP continues to be used in the United States and other countries, several other terms have been added, such as factitious disorder by proxy, pediatric condition falsification, medical child abuse, fabricated or induced illness, or more recently, factitious disorder imposed on another.[1] Regardless of the specific term being used, it is important to recognize that this is both a mental illness and a form of child abuse in which a person acts as if an individual they are caring for has a physical or mental illness when the person is not really sick.[2]

Have you Heard? [2]

- Common characteristics among people with MSbP include being a parent (usually a mother) and appearing overly concerned about their child or designated patient.
- Some warning signs include the child or dependent person having a history of many hospitalizations and the child or dependent person's condition and symptoms not matching the results of diagnostic tests.
- Unfortunately, there are no reliable statistics regarding the number of people in the U.S. who suffer from MSbP, and it is difficult to assess its prevalence because many cases go undetected. However, estimates suggest that about 1,000 of the 2.5 million cases of child abuse reported annually are related to MSbP.

What are the Consequences?

There are various consequences for children who are falsely labelled as ill. For example, they may receive needless and/or harmful treatments, a genuine disease may be induced by the caregiver's actions, develop chronic invalidism, or even develop MSbP as an adult.[3] Indeed, children can die suddenly and develop future mental and/or physical problems as a result of their caregiver's disorder.[4]

How to Support Survivors of MSbP?

MSbP is a disease that is usually severe, difficult to diagnose and treat, and to which children fall victim.[4] Survivors often experience the physical and emotional effects of their trauma, an extreme sense of isolation, and shame around what happened to them. Because of low public awareness of MSbP, it can be difficult for survivors to explain what they've been through.[5] In order to better diagnose MSbP and support survivors, vigilance and awareness are essential. Physicians and medical staff, mental health professionals, service providers, victim advocates, and ordinary citizens alike should remain vigilant and seek to spread awareness of this under-recognized form of abuse.

Resources

Texas

- **Department of Family and Protective Services -- 1-800-252-5400**

National

- **Munchausen Support -- <https://www.munchausensupport.com/resources/survivors/>**
- **Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy: The Complete Guide -- <https://www.sandstonecare.com/blog/munchausen-syndrome-by-proxy/>**
- **Munchausen -- <https://www.munchausen.com/munchausen-by-proxy/>**
- **Child Impact Projects -- <https://www.childimpactprojects.com/home>**

References

- [1]Glaser, D. (2020). Fabricated or induced illness: From "Munchausen by proxy" to child and family-oriented action. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 108, 104649.
- [2]Cleveland Clinic. (2021). Factitious Disorder Imposed on Another (FDIA). <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9834-factitious-disorder-imposed-on-another-fdia>
- [3]Meadow, R. (1989). ABC of child abuse. Munchausen syndrome by proxy. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 299(6693), 248.
- [4]Rusinowska, B., Satora, M., Tybulczuk, B., Romanek, Z., Sękowska, M., & Pyrka, Z. (2023). Overprotective mother or Munchausen syndrome by proxy? Characteristics of the disease based on a literature review. *Medical Science Pulse*, 17(3), 11-18.
- [5]Munchausen Support. (2024). <https://www.munchausensupport.com/resources/survivors/>

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Resources

- Texas Abuse Hotline (suspicions of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children, adults with disabilities, or people 65 +) <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/>
800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/get-help/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888
- Aging and Disability Resource Center 855-937-2372
- Victim Connect Resource Center 855-484-2846
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988