



brain injury AUSTRALIA

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**N E X T M O N D A Y S E P T E M B E R 1 4 -
B R A I N I N J U R Y A W A R E N E S S W E E K B E G I N S
C H I L D R E N A N D I N F L I C T E D B R A I N I N J U R Y – C R I M E S O F C A R E**

Traumatic Brain Injury is the leading cause of death and disability in children who have been abused. Infants, who are beaten or shaken – sometimes called “shaken baby syndrome” - are at the greatest risk. **The New South Wales Government’s Child Death Review Team’s 10-year survey of 136 fatal assaults found that children less than 1 year old were 16 times more likely to die than those aged between 5 and 15 .**

More than 50 children with inflicted Traumatic Brain Injuries have been admitted to New South Wales’ two statewide children’s hospitals - The Children’s Hospital at Westmead and Sydney Children’s Hospital - over the last 5 years alone, and their numbers are increasing. Their average age was 10 months. The international research evidence shows that around **1 in 3 of these children will die as a result of the injuries to their brain.** And of those who survive, **as many as 2 in every 3 will grow up with profound and permanent disabilities** that will affect them not only physically but also in their thinking ability, their emotions and behaviour.

17 year-old Rebecca is one who survived. A week before her 2nd birthday, she was shaken so violently by a caregiver it left her paralysed. She had to learn to walk and talk all over again. The damage to her brain also affected her vision and her ability to read and write, as well as her memory and her capacity to learn. Rebecca spent 1 month in hospital, and 9 years in rehabilitation. And like many other children with disabilities, fitting into a mainstream school and making friends was hard. She was bullied as a result.

According to Nick Rushworth, the Executive Officer of Brain Injury Australia, the real rate of inflicted Traumatic Brain Injury may be dramatically higher than the numbers of children admitted to hospital. **“During 2007-08, over 12,000 of the notifications of physical abuse made to Australia’s child protection agencies were substantiated.** That is, there was reason to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be physically abused,” he says. “But in that year, less than 200 infants were hospitalised due to assault. If you look at the results of surveys done overseas, **for every 1 child admitted to hospital with inflicted Traumatic Brain Injury, there may be as many as 150 other children in the community who suffer inflicted trauma to their heads from caregivers. New South Wales hospitals are seeing just the tip of the iceberg.”** The NSW Department of Community Services responded to 327 reports of “baby shaking” between 2004 and 2006 alone. 284 reports required “further investigation”.

And for 1 in every 3 children, their inflicted Traumatic Brain Injury may go undetected in hospital. As many as 1 in 3 of those children will go on to be re-injured, and 1 in 10 die as a result. “The sad truth is that almost all inflicted Traumatic Brain Injury, like other child abuse, is carried out by parents, their partners or other family members,” says Nick Rushworth. “But Brain Injury Australia believes that caregivers - of especially very young children - would reconsider ever shaking or hitting them if they knew the potentially devastating effects on the developing brain.”

For more information, to arrange interviews with Rebecca and Nick, contact Nick Rushworth Executive Officer Brain Injury Australia on (0417) 373 622