

# Munchausen syndrome: the lying disorder

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Leslie Wilfred told her family in tears that her twin babies had both died in childbirth.

“ They took their first and last breath at the same time.” Leslie said. At the funeral, there were two urns holding the babies ashes and two ultrasounds of them. The Wilfred family mourned for the poor twin babies whose lives had been cut short. Little did they know that they had never existed at all.

The truth was that Leslie Wilfred was incapable of having children. She had her tubes tied prior to her marriage. The ultrasounds were just pictures that Wilfred had found online and the urns held nothing but air. The family soon found out that Leslie was suffering from a very serious illness: Munchausen Syndrome. Munchausen Syndrome is a psychiatric disorder in which the patient repeatedly lies about having medical illnesses in order to seek the attention of others. Munchausen Syndrome was named after Hieronymus Carl Friedrich Baron von Munchausen.

He was known for telling tales of ridiculously over exaggerated exploits. Munchausen joined the Russian Military in 1741 and took part in two battles against the Ottoman Empire. When he returned home, he told many outrageous stories of his time at war. Many years later, Richard Asher, a physician at the medical observation ward at the Central Middlesex Hospital, had a patient with the same symptoms as Munchausen. He then diagnosed and named the illness. Similar to Munchausen Syndrome, Munchausen By Proxy is also an attention-seeking illness.

Munchausen By Proxy is a rare version of child abuse in which a parent or guardian purposefully keeps their child sick by poisoning or injuring them for

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the attention of others. One individual that had MBP was Marybeth Tinning. In January of 1972 Tinning burst through the hospital doors with her eight year old daughter, Jennifer, in her arms. Within hours, the young girl was pronounced dead. The autopsy claimed that she passed away from acute meningitis but others suspected differently. Three weeks later, Tinning came back to the E.

R. with her two year old son, Joseph. In hysterics, she managed to tell the doctors that he had a viral infection in addition to epilepsy. The child died that night. The tragic loss of two children within the span of three weeks brought Marybeth an immense amount of sympathy and attention; which was just what she wanted. The next nine years brought the mysterious deaths of seven more of Tinning's children: Barbara, Nathan, Michael, Tami Lynne, Timothy, Mary Frances, and Jonathan.

Finally, people started to get suspicious. To the town of Duanesburg, NY, Marybeth Tinning was considered a serial killer. In 1985 Tinning was put on trial. There, she admitted to killing three of her children. She had used a pillow to smother Tami Lynn, Nathan, and Timothy.

Marybeth denied murdering any of her other kin. Finally, in 1987, Marybeth Tinning was sentenced 25 years of prison for 1st degree murder. As a sociopath she felt no guilt, no shame, and no remorse. A person with Munchausen By Proxy, if caught, would be charged with child abuse and either go to jail or be taken to a mental institute. The custody of their child would also be taken away. Munchausen By Proxy and Munchausen Syndrome

are both very difficult to diagnose because of the level of dishonesty that is involved.

Physicians must perform a number of tests and procedures in order to rule out all possibilities. A patient might say that they had cranial surgery, but they do not have any scars on their head. When people are truly very sick, their main priority is not to be seen as ill, it is to try to recover. Some signs that a patient might have Munchausen Syndrome is being almost eager to undergo tests and procedures no matter how painful, having an extremely well understanding of illnesses and tests, refusing to let physicians talk to friends or family, and not being able to access the patient's medical records. Munchausen Syndrome can be very hard to treat. Confronting the victims of Munchausen Syndrome does not seem to be very effective.

Providing the patient with empathetic professional therapy has been proven to cure them in a matter of time. You may be thinking, "How are these crazy disorders caused?" Well, scientists don't actually know why Munchausen Syndrome happens. But, these are some reasons that they think are the cause:

- Having a history of physical or mental abuse.
- Having a close relative with a serious illness.
- Having poor self-esteem.

- Having personality disorders. Another theory on why Munchausen Syndrome is caused is that a small section in the frontal lobe of the brain that causes jealousy, becomes so out-of-balance that a person comes to a point where they make up fake illnesses for themselves or their children just for attention. Munchausen Syndrome and Munchausen By Proxymay seem a bit frightening, but it only occurs in 0.02% – 5% of Americans so it is very

unlikely that you will ever encounter someone like this. All in all, Munchausen Syndrome is a perplexing disorder that no one will ever fully understand.