

'Socio-medical' expertise in court: An analysis of the 'abusive head trauma' controversy in Norway

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In this paper I analyze the medical controversy on 'abusive head trauma' (AHT) in Norway as it has been expressed in discussion papers and articles in the period 2018-2022. I have conducted a qualitative content analysis and analyzed the empirical material from the theoretical perspective Science and Technology Studies (STS). STS which is an empirically based social science theory, provides insight into how social and material elements influence the production of knowledge as well as the use of scientific knowledge in the courtroom.

I argue that the controversy can be understood as two different framings of the AHT diagnosis: A '*specialized triad-frame*' where the triad is defined as the single evidence of AHT, but only valid if the shaking is observed or confessed, and a '*multidisciplinary clinical frame*' where the triad can be valid as evidence if it occurs together with other findings like for instance bruises or fractures. The two framings represented by two groups of medical experts illustrate their perception and enactment on scientific knowledge and the significance of clinical examinations. The framings also indicate how these experts view their role in court.

The analysis concludes that despite holding different ideas of the criteria that valid knowledge needs to fulfill, both parties combine scientific and social arguments in the controversy on AHT. Hence, from an STS-perspective I argue that both groups produce and perform '*socio-medical*' expertise.

In addition to provide insight about the specific medical arguments in the AHT controversy, the paper contributes to the understanding of the production and distribution of scientific knowledge.