

Accused parents demand public inquiry

By Sarah Womack, Social Affairs Correspondent

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Parents accused of killing or injuring their children demanded a public inquiry yesterday, claiming faulty medical evidence had "ripped the heart" out of their families and destroyed their lives.

After [gathering for a protest outside the High Court](#), where many had seen their children taken from them, and in some cases adopted, they said hundreds like them had been "put through hell".

Many said they were too frightened to have more children, because their new offspring could be put up for adoption or taken into care.

One man from Birmingham, who uses the pseudonym Mark Haynes - the parents are legally obliged to avoid identifying their children - said: "We sat in disbelief when it was put to us that our son of 17 weeks, Robert, had been smothered."

His wife, "Karen", 36, who has never been prosecuted, subsequently gave birth to a daughter. Two police officers waited outside the labour ward and took the baby away after 20 minutes. She was adopted at 20 months.

The paediatrician responsible for the medical report on Robert was [Prof Sir Roy Meadow](#), who said Karen had been alone with Robert on each of three occasions where her son had "episodes" of gasping for breath.

Her motive, he said, was Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, the subject of his famous 1977 paper in The Lancet which describes a perverse malady in which a depressed mother harms her baby in order to draw attention to herself.

Yesterday's demonstration followed the cases of [Sally Clark, who was cleared on appeal](#) of killing her two children, and [Trupti Patel, found not guilty](#) of killing her three babies.

Sir Roy's expert testimony was discredited in both cases but the Crown Prosecution Service has said it would be happy to use him again as a prosecution witness.

Many of the parents held banners saying "Innocent until proven guilty" and posed in front of pictures of their children whose faces had been covered to protect their identities.

Terry Cannings, from Essex, whose wife Angela [was convicted of murdering two of their children last year](#), said he had lost faith in British justice.

"Every day since Ange was convicted has been a misery," he said. "She needs something to hold on to, but they have ripped the heart out of her."

Mr Cannings sees his wife once a month, making a 10-hour round trip from his home in Salisbury, Wilts, to Bullwood Hall prison in Essex. "With me and Ange, we have never been in trouble with the social [services], we've never been in trouble with the police, and I just look at Ange and think she is in shock.

"I have no doubt about her innocence. I've known her for 21 years. People say to me about Ange coming out. I won't believe that until I see her come out," he added.

The 49-year-old decided to attend the protest because he could relate to the other parents' stories and wanted a change in the way child abuse cases were handled.

Penny Mellor, who organised the demonstration, called for a "full, immediate public inquiry" into all aspects of child abuse and the family court system. She said there was too much secrecy surrounding the family courts, and many parents were "gagged" from defending themselves in public. Many of the protesters wore gags to symbolise their inability to speak out.

She also wanted to highlight the failure of the General Medical Council to act on complaints against doctors involved in allegations of Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy over the last 12 years.

Last week Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, announced that he was appointing a group to consider whether an in-depth review was needed of cases involving Dr Alan Williams, a pathologist criticised in Mrs Clark's case.

The Crown Prosecution Service is also considering whether to order a review of cases involving Sir Roy, who is now retired, or Dr Williams.