



# **Alternative Hypotheses in the Child Forensic Interview**

## *A Bibliography*

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## Scope

This bibliography lists publications covering issues related to hypothesis testing in child forensic interviews.

## Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are listed in date descending order. Links are provided to full text publications when possible. However, this collection may not be complete. More information can be obtained in the Child Abuse Library Online.

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# Alternative Hypotheses in the Child Forensic Interview

## A Bibliography

Poole, D. A. (2016). *Interviewing children: The science of conversation in forensic contexts*. American Psychological Association. DOI:10.1037/14941-000

Because of children's incomplete language development, their greater risk of retrieving inaccurate information in response to memory cues, and their desire to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear (whether truthful or not), child eyewitness testimony can be unreliable. In this book, Debra Ann Poole presents a flexible, evidence-based approach to interviewing children that reduces the ambiguities and errors in children's responses. Through her descriptions of best practices, brief summaries of supporting research, and example interview dialogs, Poole provides a road map for anyone working in a forensic context.

Kirkpatrick, H. D. (2014). A Commentary on O'Donohue et al.'s "Analyzing child sexual abuse allegations". *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 14(2), 183-191. DOI:10.1080/15228932.2014.897541

This article comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the O'Donohue et al. (2013) model, which proposes 10 dimensions from which to analyze child sexual abuse allegations. Suggested improvements to 5 of the 10 dimensions are offered. Additional bedrock literature references in the field of assessing child sexual abuse are also offered.

O'Donohue, W., Benuto, L. T., & Cirlugea, O. (2014). Analyzing child sexual abuse allegations: Further considerations. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 14(3), 237-246. DOI:10.1080/15228932.2014.918476

We originally proposed a model for analyzing child sexual abuse allegations. Since we originally proposed our model, Dale and Gould and Kirkpatrick offered several critiques,

and Kirkpatrick offered several recommendations for strengthening it. In this commentary, we respond to these critiques and recommendations.

O'Donohue, W., Benuto, L. T., & Cirlugea, O. (2013). Analyzing child sexual abuse allegations. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 13(4), 296–314.  
DOI:10.1080/15228932.2013.822245

When children make allegations of sexual abuse, forensic professionals are often involved in attempts to develop a better understanding of these allegations. This article offers a model that can be used by forensic professionals to analyze allegations of abuse. The model seeks to either rule in or rule out plausible hypotheses that often surround abuse allegations. The ten dimensions are: (1) outcry analysis; (2) stake analysis; (3) parent/significant other suggestion analysis; (4) forensic interview analysis; (5) memory analysis; (6) analysis of the developmental sufficiency of abuse details provided by the child; (7) inconsistencies analysis; (8) logistical detail analysis; (9) fantastical details analysis; and (10) personological analysis.

Mart, E. G. (2010). Common errors in the assessment of allegations of child sexual abuse. *The Journal of Psychiatry & Law*, 38(3), 325–343.  
DOI:10.1177/009318531003800306

The assessment of child sexual abuse (CSA) allegations is a complex, challenging, high-stakes undertaking. The consequences of sloppy assessments leading to false positive or false negative court decisions are clearly severe. Despite this, many professionals and paraprofessionals who undertake such assessments continue to perform substandard child sexual abuse investigations. This article presents some of the common errors made by CSA investigators and suggests the use of research-based investigative protocols and ongoing training as ways of improving this situation.

O'Donohue, W., Benuto, L., & Fanetti, M. (2010). [Children's allegations of sexual abuse: A model for forensic assessment](#). *Psychological Injury and Law*, 3(2), 148-154.  
DOI:10.1007/s12207-010-9075-y

It is important both clinically and forensically to gain information to provide an understanding of the veracity of a child's allegations of sexual abuse. Even though it is reasonable to hypothesize that most allegations are true—children are not infallible and thus some allegations are false. A systematic model of pathways to false allegations—however rare or common—is important because so much depends on this question (i.e., both false positives and false negatives are harmful to children). We propose that there are two major pathways to false allegations of child sexual abuse: (1) the child is lying and (2) the child has a false memory due to his or her problems in information processing. We conclude by presenting a more detailed protocol for more formally evaluating these pathways to false allegations in specific cases.

Herman, S. (2009). [Forensic child sexual abuse evaluations: Accuracy, ethics, and admissibility](#). In K. Kuehnle & M. Connell (Eds.), *The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony* (pp. 327-361). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Forensic evaluators base their judgments about the validity of allegations or suspicions of child sexual abuse (CSA) on two types of evidence: (1) hard evidence such as perpetrator confessions, medical evidence, photographs or videos of the abuse, and other physical evidence and (2) soft psychosocial evidence. Considerable controversy exists with regard to which psychosocial case characteristics, if any, actually constitute probative evidence that either supports or weakens support for an allegation of sexual abuse. This chapter focuses on difficult cases—cases in which there is an uncorroborated report of sexual abuse by a child. It is in these cases that the opinions of forensic evaluators about the validity of abuse allegations are most likely to play a decisive role. The key questions addressed in this chapter are: How accurate are the judgments of forensic evaluators about the validity of children's uncorroborated reports of CSA? Are

evaluators' judgments about the validity of uncorroborated reports accurate enough to be used as a basis for making potentially life-altering legal decisions in child protection, civil disputes, or criminal investigations and prosecutions? Ethically, what role should mental health and social work professionals play in investigations of allegations of CSA and in related legal proceedings? Should expert witness testimony that purports to support the validity of an uncorroborated sexual abuse allegation be considered legally admissible evidence in civil or criminal legal proceedings in the United States?

Herman, S. (2005). Improving decision making in forensic child sexual abuse evaluations. *Law and Human Behavior*, 29(1), 87-120. DOI:10.1007/s10979-005-1400-8

Mental health professionals can assist legal decision makers in cases of allegations of child sexual abuse by collecting data using forensic interviews, psychological testing, and record reviews, and by summarizing relevant findings from social science research. Significant controversy surrounds another key task performed by mental health professionals in most child sexual abuse evaluations, i.e., deciding whether or not to substantiate unconfirmed abuse allegations. The available evidence indicates that, on the whole, these substantiation decisions currently lack adequate psychometric reliability and validity: an analysis of empirical research findings leads to the conclusion that at least 24% of all of these decisions are either false positive or false negative errors. Surprisingly, a reanalysis of existing research also indicates that it may be possible to develop reliable, objective procedures to improve the consistency and quality of decision making in this domain. A preliminary, empirically-grounded procedure for making substantiation decisions is proposed.

O'Donohue, W., & Fanetti, M. (1996). Assessing the occurrence of child sexual abuse: An information processing, hypothesis testing approach. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 1*(3), 269–281. DOI:10.1016/S1359-1789(96)00001-8

Mental health professionals often become concerned with the question of whether a child has been sexually abused, if only because the laws of most states stipulate that they are mandated reporters. Mental health professionals are also concerned with this question because: (a) sometimes it is the principle referral question, (b) recent epidemiological studies suggest a sufficiently high base rate for routine assessment, (c) it is relevant to the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and (d) it is relevant to treatment planning. In recent years, investigatory interviewing has become increasingly controversial with complaints of both false positives and false negatives. This paper critically reviews investigative interviewing and statement validity analysis. A model for understanding children's reports that is grounded in developmental information processing and hypothesis testing assessment is proposed.