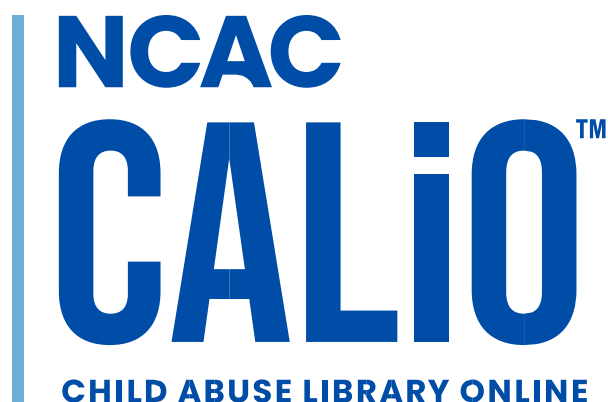




False Allegations in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

A Bibliography

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**Championing and Strengthening the
Global Response to Child Abuse**

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Scope

The issues pertaining to false allegations of abuse by children are among the more complex to understand psychologically and to interpret accurately. According to Lipian, Mills and Brantman (2004), false allegations of abuse may derive from (1) submitting to suggestion by authority figures; (2) the result of "pseudo memories;" or (3) the product of evading honest answers. This bibliography focuses specifically on literature related to false allegations of abuse experienced in childhood.

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 CALiO™, the Child Abuse Library Online.

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False Allegations in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

A Bibliography

Schemmel, J., Zell, K., Senberg, A., Sahlfeld, A. L., Otzipka, J., Volbert, R., & Zumbach-Basu, J. (2026). [Child sexual abuse allegations in child custody, child visitation, and child protection proceedings: A scoping review](#). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 0(0). DOI:10.1177/15248380261429518

Allegations of child sexual abuse (CSA) in family law cases, such as child custody, child visitation, and child protection proceedings, present complex and sensitive challenges for legal and psychological decision-making. This scoping review synthesizes key findings from 47 empirical studies examining the prevalence, substantiation, and legal consequences of CSA allegations as well as typical case characteristics in this context. The empirical literature falls into three main clusters: Canadian studies using large national datasets from the late 1990s and 2000s; Australian court-based studies primarily from the 2010s; and U.S. research spanning several decades with diverse methodologies. Overall, we found a mean CSA allegation prevalence of 8.9%, and indications that CSA allegations occur less frequently than allegations of other maltreatment types. Substantiation rates vary across studies but average around 43%, with only marginal evidence suggesting slightly lower substantiation when only custody and visitation disputes were analyzed. Deliberate false allegations are seemingly rare; most unsubstantiated claims appear to arise from genuine but mistaken concerns. Limited findings on legal consequences indicate that substantiated allegations usually lead to suspended contact between the accused parent and child. When allegations lack sufficient clarity, courts respond more variably, sometimes restricting contact despite non-substantiation. Significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding the timing and context of allegations, the association of substantiation with legal outcomes, and specific allegation constellations within families. Further empirical research, especially from European and non-Western jurisdictions, is essential to informing evidence-based, child-centered practice.

Boskovic, I., Maatz, L., Konstantinou, N., Van Der Laan, M., & Rassin, E. (2025). [Statement validity assessment of students' sexual assault accounts: Comparison of honest reports, false denials and false allegations using the criteria-based content analyses and the verifiability approach](#). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.70014

In this study, we investigated whether three types of sexual assault (SA) accounts, Full disclosure (Honest), False denial and False allegation, could be distinguished using Criteria-Based Content Analysis (CBCA) and the Verifiability Approach (VA). Student participants were pre-screened for a history of SA. Those with such a history were randomly assigned to either the Full disclosure group ($n = 39$) or the False denial group ($n = 48$), while students without prior SA experience were allocated to the False allegation group ($n = 95$). Each group received tailored instructions corresponding to their condition: to report honestly (Full disclosure), to omit the assault (False denial) or to fabricate an assault (False allegation). We hypothesized that honest reports and false denials would yield higher scores than false allegations on both CBCA and VA criteria. CBCA results revealed significant group differences only for the Logical Consistency criterion, with false allegations rated as significantly more coherent than both false denials and full disclosures. In contrast, the VA analysis showed no significant differences across conditions in any of the narrative characteristics examined. Overall, the use of CBCA and VA failed to identify meaningful distinctions among narratives of full disclosure, false denial, and false allegation of sexual assault. The study's limitations and implications for the assessment of SA accounts are discussed.

Wade, K. A., Riesthuis, P., Bücken, C., Otgaar, H., & Loftus, E. F. (2025). [Still lost in the mall False memories happen and that's what matters](#). *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 39(1), e70028. DOI:10.1002/acp.70028

For more than 25 years, psychologists have explored how people can develop rich false memories. Murphy et al. (2023) replicated the original “lost in the mall” study (Loftus and Pickrell 1995), demonstrating that 35% of participants developed false beliefs or

memories. Andrews and Brewin (in press) reanalyzed Murphy et al.'s data, concluding that participants who developed false memories reported 25% of the suggested details and 50% of their reports were potentially real memories. Based on this, Andrews and Brewin posited that only 4% of Murphy et al.'s participants developed false memories. We take issue with Andrews and Brewin's conclusions. Given human memory is reconstructive, we should expect participants' reports to contain remnants of accurate memories, self or schematic knowledge, or speculation. Moreover, even low false memory rates can be practically important. What matters is that suggestive influences can lead to substantial memory distortions and even plant new events that had not occurred.

Houben, S. T. L., Raymaekers, L., Loop, L., Vandervelt, D., Patihis, L., & Sauerland, M. (2024). [Alleged false accusations of abuse: Characteristics, consequences, and coping.](#) *Memory*, 32(1), 90–99. DOI:10.1080/09658211.2023.2284652

We have very little knowledge about the characteristics and consequences of false abuse accusations. Sixty-one members of a German support organisation for allegedly falsely accused individuals provided information about themselves, the accuser, the accusation, the consequences of the allegation, and their coping strategies. The majority of respondents were male (90%), accused of sexual abuse (89%), and a parent of the accuser (71%). The initial allegations were frequently (72%) associated with the accuser undergoing psychotherapy. The consequences for the accused were psychological, physiological, familial, job-related, personal, and legal in nature. These included a loss of contact (98%), altered family dynamics (92%), depressive symptoms (48%), and problems focussing at work (44%). Eleven accused (18%) faced legal prosecution, but none of them were charged. Frequent strategies to cope with the allegation included contacting the victim support organisation (100%), seeking therapy (51%), contacting counselling centres (43%) and other victim support organisations (23%). Most of the accused felt supported by their environment (84%). Supporting and elaborating upon

previous studies, this study exposes the potential consequences of alleged false accusations.

Spearman, K. J., Vaughan-Eden, V., Hardesty, J. L., & Campbell, J. (2024). [Post-separation abuse: A literature review connecting tactics to harm](#). *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 21(2), 145–164.
DOI:10.1080/26904586.2023.2177233

Post-separation abuse is a pervasive societal and public health problem. This literature review aims to critically synthesize the evidence on tactics and consequences of post-separation abuse. We examined 48 published articles in the US and Canada from 2011 through May 2022. Post-separation abuse encompasses a broad range of tactics perpetrated by a former intimate partner including patterns of psychological, legal, economic, and mesosystem abuse as well as weaponizing children. Functional consequences include risk of lethality and deprivation of fundamental human needs. Connecting tactics of post-separation abuse to harms experienced by survivors and their children is crucial for future research, policy, and intervention work to promote long-term safety, health, and well-being of children and adult survivors.

Bücker, C. A., Mangiulli, I., Uzun, S., & Otgaar, H. (2022). [False denials increase false memories for trauma-related discussions](#). *Memory*, 30(9), 1158–1171.
DOI:10.1080/09658211.2022.2094964

False denials are sometimes used to cope with traumatic experiences. We examined whether false denials can affect true and false memory production for a traumatic event and conversations surrounding the trauma. One hundred and twenty-six participants watched a trauma analogue video of a car crash before being randomly asked in a discussion with the experimenter to (1) respond honestly or (2) falsely deny that certain details happened in the video. After one week, all participants received misinformation about the discussion with the experimenter and the car crash. Finally, all participants

were instructed to respond truthfully in a source memory task. Participants who falsely denied information during the first session were statistically significantly more prone than honest participants to omit details they denied and to report misinformation about what was discussed in the first session. Our work suggests that false denials of a traumatic experience might lead to both forgetting and increased false memory levels for earlier conversations about the event.

Otgaar, H., Curci, A., Mangiulli, I., Battista, F., Rizzotti, E., & Sartori, G. (2022). [A court ruled case on therapy-induced false memories](#). *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 67(5), 2122–2129. DOI:10.1111/1556-4029.15073

We report on a unique Italian criminal case in which a court ruled that a therapist implanted false memories of abuse in a young girl. Using therapeutic excerpts, we show that the therapist used a multitude of problematic interventions that are all linked to false memory creation. Specifically, an analysis of the therapeutic excerpts showed that across many sessions, the therapist asked highly suggestive questions to the girl, implying that she was abused by her father. In addition, the girl underwent EMDR techniques that have been associated with memory undermining effects. Our analyses showed that although before treatment the girl did not have any recollection of being abused by her father, she gradually started to remember the abuse and identified the father as her abuser during the therapeutic sessions. The report clearly shows the danger of suggestive pressure in a therapeutic context causing patients to form false memories of abuse & supports the need to prevent the therapeutic practice of suggestive techniques.

Otgaar, H., Howe, M. L., & Patihs, L. (2022). [What science tells us about false and repressed memories](#). *Memory*, 30(1), 16–21. DOI:10.1080/09658211.2020.1870699

What does science tell us about memory phenomena such as false and repressed memories? This issue is highly pressing as incorrect knowledge about these memory

phenomena might contribute to egregious effects in the courtroom such as false accusations of abuse. In the current article, we provide a succinct review of the scientific nature of false & repressed memories. We demonstrate that research has shown that about 30% of tested subjects formed false memories of autobiographical experiences. Furthermore, this empirical work has also revealed that such false memories can even be implanted for negative events & events that allegedly occurred repeatedly. Concerning the controversial topic of repressed memories, we show that plausible alternative explanations exist for why people claim to have forgotten traumatic experiences. Finally, we demonstrate that people continue to believe that unconscious repression of traumatic incidents can exist. Disseminating scientifically articulated knowledge on the functioning of memory to contexts such as the courtroom is necessary to prevent the occurrence of false accusations and miscarriages of justice.

Principe, G. F., & London, K. (2022). How parents can shape what children remember: Implications for the testimony of young witnesses. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 11(3), 289–302. DOI:10.1037/mac0000059

Forensic investigations involving children carry heavy consequences and often present immense challenges. Most child maltreatment allegations first occur in an informal setting, where young witnesses discuss legally relevant information with parents before official interviews. After decades of developmental research on how various qualities of formal interviews can shape children's forensic reports, a growing body of work examining parent-child memory-sharing exchanges demonstrates that informal conversations with others outside of investigative interviews are a powerful source of mnemonic influence. Not only can suggestions offered by parents intrude into children's later independent accounts, they also can lead children to make novel and elaborate reports of nonoccurring events. Despite the potency of parental conversations on children's recollections, children typically fail to recognize parents as the source of memory errors. We offer suggestions for future research and legal practice.

Roos, M. S. de, & Jones, D. N. (2022). [Self-affirmation and false allegations: The effects on responses to disclosures of sexual victimization](#). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(11-12), NP9016–NP9039. DOI:10.1177/1077801219828537

The rise of the #MeToo movement highlights the prevalence of sexual victimization and gives a voice to victims who may have been silent before. Nevertheless, survivors or victims of sexual violence who come forward may be blamed or not believed. These reactions are evident both with adult and child victims. Further, fears about false accusations of sexual misconduct may negatively impact responses to disclosures. This study aimed to examine gender differences in perceptions toward the #MeToo movement, and the extent to which these translate into a skeptical response to disclosure. Further, we wanted to explore whether proximity to false allegations of sexual violence was linked with more negative responses and whether use of self-affirmations may decrease the likelihood of such a response. Through an online survey ($N = 235$) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk, we assessed participants' exposure to and perceptions of the #MeToo movement. Further, we asked them about their proximity to sexual violence (victimization or perpetration) and to false allegations. Using a threat manipulation (news article about false accusation) and a self-affirmation exercise, we studied the effects of both variables on responses to disclosure. Results indicated that after reading an article about a false accusation, male participants were more likely to blame a victim of childhood sexual abuse and to perceive the abuse as less harmful, compared with female participants. Further, we found that self-affirmation was linked with more supportive responses to a disclosure. These findings highlight the threatening nature of false accusations of sexual violence for men, and how this threat may shape the narrative regarding sexual violence. Opportunities to use self-affirmation to change this narrative to a more supportive one are discussed.

O'Neal, E. N., & Hayes, B. E. (2020). "Most [false reports] involve teens": Officer attitudes toward teenage sexual assault complainants—A qualitative analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 26(1), 24–45. DOI:10.1177/1077801219828537

Scholars, advocates, and victims have repeatedly criticized the police treatment of sexual assault (SA) complainants. Apathetic attitudes and hostile behavior on the part of the police have likely resulted from socialization into a culture that condones the use of force and violence and blames SA victims for their victimization. Using data from in-depth semistructured interviews with 52 Los Angeles Police Department sex crimes detectives, we examine officer attitudes toward teenage complainants of SA. Notably, almost three fourths of the respondents ($n = 38$; 73%) mentioned that teenagers lie about SA. Practical implications, theoretical advancements, and directions for future research are discussed.

Korkman, J., Antfolk, J., Fagerlund, M., & Santtila, P. (2019). The prevalence of unfounded suspicions of child sexual abuse in Finland. *Nordic Psychology*, 71(1), 39–50. DOI:10.1080/19012276.2018.1470554

Scholars and investigators of child sexual abuse (CSA) have long pointed out that some CSA allegations may be unfounded. However, no population-based estimates of presents the first population-based prevalence estimates of unfounded allegations of CSA. We analyzed two data collections: first, a representative sample of adolescents ($N = 11,364$; aged 12 or 15 years), and second, a representative sample of adults ($N = 2,484$, mean age 34 years). Experiences of CSA were reported by 2.4% of adolescents CSA had taken place) were reported by 1.5% of adolescents and 1.9% of adults. Of the unfounded suspicions, 14.5% and 9.1%, for adolescents and adults, respectively, had been reported to the authorities. The prevalence of CSA seems to decrease while more and more allegations reach the authorities. Whereas a low threshold for reporting suspicions of CSA to authorities is in the interest of protecting as many actual CSA victims as possible, more research is needed to separate unfounded vs. founded allegations to minimize the risk of erroneous conclusions in investigations of CSA.

O'Donohue, W., Cummings, C., & Willis, B. (2018). The frequency of false allegations of child sexual abuse: A critical review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(5), 459–475. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2018.1477224

The rate of false allegations has been a topic of research spanning back to as early as the 1970s. Studies have often relied on data gathered by Child Protective Services workers and court administrators. Some researchers have also used hypothetical scenarios to estimate rates. However, given the plethora of sampling methods, there is a large variation in estimated rates of false allegations of sexual abuse depending on the data source and context of the allegation. Additionally, methodological problems such as unclear or invalid criteria used to judge truth or falsity of an allegation, unrepresentative samples, and ignoring important contextual variables such as the stage at which an allegation is made, currently all render the determination of actual rates of false child sexual abuse allegations to be unknown. This examination of literature is intended to gain a firmer understanding of the frequency at which allegations are false and during which stage of prosecution they occur, thus assisting with the legal practice of distinguishing between a false versus positive allegation. Research reviewed supports two general conclusions: (a) the vast majority of allegations are true but (b) false allegations do occur at some non-negligible rate. Suggestions for future research, as well as cautions about claims about specific rates of false allegations in the courtroom, are provided.

Talwar, V., Hubbard, K., Saykaly, C., Lee, K., Lindsay, R. C. L., & Bala, N. (2018). Does parental coaching affect children's false reports? Comparing verbal markers of deception. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 36(1), 84–97. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2331

The present study examined differences in children's true and false narratives as a function of parental coaching by comparing the verbal markers associated with deception. Children (N = 65, 4–7 years old) played the same game with an adult stranger over three consecutive days. Parents coached their children to falsely allege that they had played a second game and to generate details for the fabricated event. One week

after the last play session, children were interviewed about their experiences. For children with the least amount of parental coaching, true and false reports could be distinguished by multiple verbal markers of deception (e.g., cognitive processes, temporal information, self-references). The fabricated reports of children who spent more time being coached by a parent resembled their truthful reports. These findings have implications for real-world forensic contexts when children have been coached to make false allegations and fabricate information at the behest of a parent.

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. (2016). [APSAC position paper on allegations of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in divorce/parental relationship dissolution.](#)

Faller, K. C. (2016). [Commentary on the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children's position paper on allegations of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in divorce/parental relationship dissolution.](#) *Journal of Child Custody*, 13(4), 307-316. DOI:10.1080/15379418.2016.1253049

In January, 2016, the Board of Directors of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children approved a position paper on allegations of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in divorce/parental relationship dissolution. This commentary describes the range of dynamics that can lead to allegations of interpersonal violence in divorce/relationship dissolution, outlines the process employed in developing the position paper, and provides a description of the contents of the position paper.

Happel, R. F. (2016). The process of disclosure for child victims. In W. O'Donohue & M. Fanetti (Eds.), *Forensic interviews regarding child sexual abuse* (pp. 107-122). Springer, Cham. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-21097-1_6

Pépin-Gagné, J., & Parent, S. (2016). Coaching, touching, and false allegations of sexual abuse in Canada. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 40(2), 162-172.
DOI:10.1177/0193723515615176

Whether in sports training or in physical education contexts, touching is an integral component of the coaches' tasks. However, recent evidence suggests that touching has become a significant concern for coaches in Canada and elsewhere, maybe due to the increased sensitivity toward child protection discourses. In fact, it appears that some coaches are concerned that touching children while coaching can potentially lead to false allegations of abuse by young people in their care or by the young person's parents. These apprehensions are pushing some coaches to protect themselves by adopting various strategies or by avoiding certain situations, like touching. Recent evidence suggests that fears of false allegations can represent an obstacle for the prevention of sexual abuse. Moreover, these fears can have a significant impact on the victims of these crimes. Throughout this article, we explore the question of touching in coaching and the fears of false allegations of sexual abuse sometimes associated. The authors focus on understanding the foundations of these fears and offer some answers to the difficult questions that arise from this situation from a Canadian perspective.

Smit, A. E., Antokolskaia, M. V., & Bijleveld, C. C. (2015). [Between Scylla and Charybdis: A literature review of sexual abuse allegations in divorce proceedings](#). *Psychology*, 6(11), 1373-1384. DOI:10.4236/psych.2015.611134

In this study international literature is reviewed on allegations of child sexual abuse (CSA) during divorce proceedings. It aims to build upon the existing knowledge on this topic by combining empirical findings from various disciplines. We attempted to answer four research questions that focus on 1) the prevalence of CSA allegations in divorce procedures; 2) the response of family court judges; 3) the ratio of founded vs. unfounded allegations of CSA under these circumstances; and 4) the possible consequences of the false positives and false negatives in legal decision making for the children and parents

involved. The literature study shows that civil judges often seek professional help. The judge generally tends to (temporarily) stop contact between accused parent and child during an investigation. Additionally, there is a general concern about the many actors involved in such cases. It can also be cautiously assumed that one in seven to eight allegations is not founded. We conclude that civil judges have to make important decisions under difficult circumstances: there is little or no evidence, no guidelines, external help lengthens the trial, and there are serious consequences of false positives and false negatives in legal decision-making. Literature is surprisingly scarce and generally outdated.

Beker, J., & Robin, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Assessing child maltreatment reports: The problem of false allegations*. Routledge.

MacKay, T. (2014). [False allegations of child abuse in contested family law cases: The implications for psychological practice](#). *Educational & Child Psychology*, 31(3), 85–96.

Educational psychologists are working increasingly with children who are not only from families where there has been divorce or separation but who are also the subject of contested family law cases. This study investigates 107 children from 72 families in which residence issues had been previously settled but which were subject to ongoing disputes regarding contact or change of residence. Such cases are marked in general by allegations and counter-allegations of each parent in regard to the historical or current conduct of the other. This study considers the frequency of allegations of child physical or sexual abuse in cases of this kind, with a particular focus on false allegations. It also notes the high prevalence of mental health problems among the children involved in the disputes. Implications for educational psychology practice are examined.

Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J. J., Brubacher, S. P., Liberty, A. E., & Kaake, A. M. (2014). Deficient cognitive control fuels children's exuberant false allegations. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 118*, 101-109. DOI:10.1016/j.jecp.2013.08.013

In eyewitness studies as in actual investigations, a minority of children generate numerous false (and sometimes incredulous) allegations. To explore the characteristics of these children, we re-interviewed and administered a battery of tasks to 61 children (ages 4-9 years) who had previously participated in an eyewitness study where a man broke a "germ rule" twice when he tried to touch them. Performance on utilization, response conflict (Luria tapping), and theory of mind tasks predicted the number of false reports of touching (with age and time since the event controlled) and correctly classified 90.16% of the children as typical witnesses or exuberant (more than 3) false reporters. Results of a factor analysis pointed to a common process underlying performance on these tasks that accounted for 49% of the variability in false reports. Relations between task performance and testimony confirmed that the mechanisms underlying occasional intrusions are different from those that drive persistent confabulation and that deficient cognitive control fuels young children's exuberant false reports.

Ahern, E. C., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2011). [Young children's emerging ability to make false statements](#). *Developmental Psychology, 47*(1), 61-66. DOI:10.1037/a0021272

This study examined the origins of children's ability to make consciously false statements, a necessary component of lying. Children 2 to 5 years of age were rewarded for claiming that they saw a picture of a bird when viewing pictures of fish. They were asked outcome questions ("Do you win/lose?"), recognition questions ("Do you have a bird/fish?"), and recall questions ("What do you have?"), which were hypothesized to vary in difficulty depending on the need for consciousness of falsity (less for outcome questions) and self-generation of an appropriate response (more for recall questions). The youngest children (21/2 to 31/2 years old) were above chance on outcome questions, but it was not until age 31/2 that children performed above chance on recognition questions or were capable of

maintaining false claims across question types. Findings have implications for understanding the emergence of deception in young children.

Lindahl, M. W. (2009). Beyond Munchausen by proxy: A proposed conceptualization for cases of recurring, unsubstantiated sexual abuse allegations. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 18*(2), 206–220. DOI:10.1080/10538710902758576

In the emerging literature, cases involving recurring, unsubstantiated allegations of child sexual abuse have generally been categorized as Munchausen by proxy. Recent scholars have recommended restricting the label to the original conceptualization, involving purposeful deception motivated by psychological needs for medical attention. This leaves many cases unclassified that do not fit the Munchausen by proxy criteria, involve significant risks to the child, and ultimately fall outside of existing structures for Child Protective Services/legal intervention. This paper presents a reconceptualization of such cases, proposing to label them "recurring sexual abuse allegation" cases. Defining the set of cases more clearly can aid child protection workers in their management and encourage research on prevalence, consequences to children, treatment strategies, and needed legal reforms.

Lyon, T. D., Malloy, L. C., Quas, J. A., & Talwar, V. A. (2008). [Coaching, truth induction, and young maltreated children's false allegations and false denials](#). *Child Development, 79*(4), 914–929. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01167.x

This study examined the effects of coaching (encouragement and rehearsal of false reports) and truth induction (a child-friendly version of the oath or general reassurance about the consequences of disclosure) on 4- to 7-year-old maltreated children's reports (N = 198). Children were questioned using free recall, repeated yes – no questions, and highly suggestive suppositional questions. Coaching impaired children's accuracy. For free-recall and repeated yes – no questions, the oath exhibited some positive effects, but

this effect diminished in the face of highly suggestive questions. Reassurance had few positive effects and no ill effects. Neither age nor understanding of the meaning and negative consequences of lying consistently predicted accuracy. The results support the utility of truth induction in enhancing the accuracy of child witnesses' reports.

Faller, K. C. (2007). Coaching children about sexual abuse: A pilot study of professionals' perceptions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(9), 947–959.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.05.004

Examines professionals' perceptions on coaching children about sexual abuse. Relevant to the coaching issue is a recent analysis of the Canadian Incidence Study 98 Data (data collected periodically in Canada and used to project the rates, types, and risk factors for child maltreatment, 2005). Trocmé and Bala explored the issue of intentional false allegations of all kinds of maltreatment (as opposed to unsubstantiated cases, which were 31% of the dispositions), who made the false reports, and on what types of cases. This study is a survey of 7,672 child protection workers and, therefore, represents their opinions regarding intentionality. Overall, the researchers found an intentional false allegation rate of 4%. The most frequent type of maltreatment to involve a false allegation was neglect, although slightly higher proportions of sexual abuse cases (6%) were deemed false than other types of child maltreatment (neglect = 4%, physical abuse = 4%, and emotional abuse = 2%). Non-custodial parents' (usually fathers) allegations of all types of maltreatment were more likely to be intentionally false (15%) than custodial parents' (2%) (usually mothers). Only 2% of false reports were made by children; none of children's false reports involved sexual abuse. On the other hand, the child protection workers involved in Trocmé and Bala's study report the frequency of false allegations in custody disputes as 12%, three times the overall rate of false allegations. They did not differentiate coaching from other types of false allegations.

Kopetski, L. M., Rand, D. C., & Rand, R. (2006). Incidence, gender, and false allegations of child abuse: Data on 84 parental alienation syndrome cases. In R. A. Gardner, S. R. Sauber, & D. Lorandos (Eds.), *The international handbook of parental alienation syndrome: Conceptual, clinical and legal considerations* (pp. 65-70). Charles C. Thomas Publisher Limited.

This chapter presents descriptive statistics on 84 cases of parental alienation syndrome (PAS), compiled by a custody evaluator in Colorado. Kopetski's work on alienation began in the 1970s and was fully developed by the time she learned of Richard Gardner's work. In 1991, Kopetski presented her work on PAS at the Fifteenth Annual child custody Conference in Keystone, Colorado (Kopetski, 1991). She recognized Gardner's contribution in the introduction, and described her astonishment upon learning of his work in 1987. Simultaneously, while unaware of Gardner's work, she had arrived at observations and conclusions that were remarkably similar in many respects. The paper included descriptive statistics on 84 cases, which Kopetski used to test some of Gardner's findings and hypotheses, such as those relating to the disproportionate number of alienating mother. Kopetski's clinical observations of PAS families were eventually in *The Colorado Layer* (Kopetski, 1998). Her descriptive statistics on 84 cases are published here for the first time. They document a significant increase in PAS cases from 1976 to 1990. The ratio of mothers to fathers alienating was 2 to 1. False allegations of child abuse, defined as physical or sexual abuse, or child neglect, appeared in 54 percent of cases, with child neglect alleged primarily by alienating fathers and sex abuse alleged primarily by alienating mothers.

Trocmé, N., & Bala, N. (2005). False allegations of abuse and neglect when parents separate. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(12), 1333-1345.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.06.016

The 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-98) is the first national study to document the rate of intentionally false allegations of abuse and neglect investigated by child welfare services in Canada. This paper provides a detailed

summary of the characteristics associated with intentionally false reports of child abuse and neglect within the context of parental separation. A multistage sampling design was used, first to select a representative sample of 51 child welfare service areas across Canada. Child maltreatment investigations conducted in the selected sites during the months of October–December 1998 were tracked, yielding a final sample of 7,672 child maltreatment investigations reported to child welfare authorities because of suspected child abuse or neglect. Consistent with other national studies of reported child maltreatment, CIS-98 data indicate that more than one-third of maltreatment investigations are unsubstantiated, but only 4% of all cases are considered to be intentionally fabricated. Within the subsample of cases wherein a custody or access dispute has occurred, the rate of intentionally false allegations is higher: 12%. Results of this analysis show that neglect is the most common form of intentionally fabricated maltreatment, while anonymous reporters and noncustodial parents (usually fathers) most frequently make intentionally false reports. Of the intentionally false allegations of maltreatment tracked by the CIS-98, custodial parents (usually mothers) and children were least likely to fabricate reports of abuse or neglect. While the CIS-98 documents that the rate of intentionally false allegations is relatively low, these results raise important clinical and legal issues, which require further consideration.

Lipian, M. S., Mills, M. J., & Brantman, A. (2004). Assessing the verity of children's allegations of abuse: A psychiatric overview. *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry*, 27(3), 249–263. DOI:10.1016/j.ijlp.2004.03.003

This overview discusses the evaluation of children's allegations of physical and sexual abuse. Like similar false allegations by adults, false recounts by children can be the result of one of three different scenarios: (1) the false claims come from submitting to suggestion by authority figures; (2) the false allegations are the result of "pseudo memories;" or (3) the false claims are the product of evading honest answers. The authors of this article examine all these scenarios in detail. The factors underlying false

accusations are explored, including how child development may affect accusations, how emotions may influence cognition, how memory functions in children of different ages, and how suggestible and reliable youngsters' statements are. Analysis is supplemented by practical suggestions to evaluate whether a child's allegation is true or false. Such evaluations are critical to appropriately work with the child and the accused offender in clinical and legal settings.

Poole, D. A., & Lindsay, D. S. (2002). Reducing child witnesses' false reports of misinformation from parents. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 81(2), 117-140. DOI:10.1006/jecp.2001.2648

This study explored whether a source-monitoring training (SMT) procedure, in which children distinguished between events they recently witnessed versus events they only heard described, would help 3- to 8-year-olds to report only experienced events during a target interview. Children who witnessed science demonstrations and subsequently heard their parents describe nonexperienced events received SMT before or after a forensic-style interview. SMT reduced the number of false reports that 7- and 8-year-old children reported in response to direct questions but had no impact on the performance of younger children. Combined with earlier results, these data suggest a transition between 3 and 8 years of age in the strategic use of source-monitoring information to support verbal reports, such that only 7- and 8-year-olds generalize training to a difficult memory task that does not include mention of specific alternative sources.

Bala, N., Lee, J., & McNamara, E. (2001). Children as witnesses: Understanding their capacities, needs, and experiences. *Journal of Social Distress & the Homeless*, 10(1), 41-68. DOI:10.1023/A:1009429602266

Historically the law regarded children as inherently unreliable and made it difficult for them to testify. Since 1975 awareness of child abuse has increased and research has

established that children can be reliable witnesses. Governments began to recognize the needs and capacities of children and enacted legal reforms to facilitate prosecutions for child abuse. This paper reports on a survey of victim witness workers and other justice system professionals which reveals some of the continued failings of that system in dealing with children. Although relatively rare, there are cases of false allegations of abuse, usually a result of investigations by poorly trained professionals. Further legal reforms and better human supports are required to ensure that the needs of children are met and their capacities as witnesses are fully appreciated.

Hershkowitz, I. (2001). A case study of child sexual false allegation. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25(10), 1397-1411. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(01)00274-5

The objectives of the case study reported in this article were twofold. The first objective was to follow the path by which a naive suggestion made in the course of a mother-child conversation was transformed into an allegation of severe sexual abuse. The second objective was to analyze the child's interview scientifically and explore the limitations of scientific tools for detecting implausible allegations. Independent case facts were collected and analyzed to determine whether the event described by the child was likely to have happened. The credibility of the child's account was assessed using Criterion-Based Content Analysis and the information provided in both the "implausible" and "corrected" statements was compared to quantify the fabricated details in the implausible statement. The event described by the child was "very unlikely to have happened" but the credibility assessment failed to detect its implausibility. Comparison of the two statements revealed that the child did fabricate central details but incorporated them into a description of an event she really experienced, and most of the information provided was truthful. The pressure to conform to suggestions can be irresistible, inducing some children to make false allegations of severe sexual abuse. Scientific tools designed for credibility assessment are limited and may fail to detect

implausible statements especially when they incorporate information about genuinely experienced events.

Ost, J., Costall, A., & Bull, R. (2001). False confessions and false memories: A model for understanding retractors' experiences. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 12(3), 549-579. DOI:10.1080/09585180127393

The present paper examines reports by 'retractors' (i.e. adults who have retracted their earlier claims of childhood abuse) to explore suggestions in the literature of possible similarities between their experiences and the experiences of individuals who falsely confess to criminal acts. Despite concerns about the reliability of retractors' reports, these individuals provide valuable insight into the processes involved in making and then repudiating claims of abuse. The present analysis revealed similarities between the contexts in which retractors came to report that they were sexually abused and the contexts in which false confessions arise. Although caution must be taken in generalizing from these findings, these similarities indicate that models of false confession could serve as a useful basis for conceptualizing the processes involved in the development of claims of childhood sexual abuse that are subsequently retracted.

Wood, J. M., & Garven, S. (2000). [How sexual abuse interviews go astray: Implications for prosecutors, police, and child protection services](#). *Child Maltreatment: Journal of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children*, 5(2), 109-118. DOI:10.1177/1077559500005002003

This article argues that child sexual abuse interviews can go astray in two different ways: (a) improper interviewing has the potential to elicit false allegations from children, and (b) clumsy interviewing does not typically produce false allegations, but may have other negative consequences, particularly for child victims. The article clarifies the distinction between the two kinds of bad interviewing and suggests that clumsy interviewing is the more common of the two. The potential negative consequences of both improper and

clumsy interviewing are described, along with implications for prosecutors, police, & child services. In the authors' opinion, improper interviewing can probably be eliminated rather easily, but clumsy interviewing may be considerably more resistant to change.

Anderson, E. M., & Levine, M. (1999). Concerns about allegations of child sexual abuse against teachers and the teaching environment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23(8), 833-843. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(99)00054-X

The major objective was to determine teachers' awareness of the potential for child abuse allegations against themselves and the effects on the teaching environment. Of 3,000 questionnaires sent out to a random sample of New York state teachers, 515 were returned. The responding teachers were similar in terms of gender, age, and racial/ethnic distribution. A large percent of the respondents (56%) were aware of false allegations made against a teacher in their school district. 36.5% expressed concern that a child abuse allegation could be made against them. In response to a vignette, 42% advised a new teacher against being alone in a room with a student; 62% advised against casual touching; 70% advised against hugging or putting an arm around a student. Males more than female teachers, especially those teaching upper grades, advised against such contact. The more teachers expressed concern about abuse allegations against themselves, the more teachers advised against contact. Fear of abuse allegations are salient for teachers and may cause them to limit contact with student, thus having potentially adverse consequences for both students and the teaching environment.

Dammeyer, M. D., Nightingale, N. N., & McCoy, M. L. (1997). Repressed memory and other controversial origins of sexual abuse allegations: Beliefs among psychologists and clinical social workers. *Child Maltreatment*, 2(3), 252-263. DOI:10.1177/1077559597002003007

The purpose of this study was to assess beliefs about repressed memory and other controversial origins of sexual abuse allegations. This was examined by conducting a

national survey of psychologists and clinical social workers. The results indicated that experimental psychologists and clinicians differ regarding belief in repressed memory, with clinicians expressing more confidence that such memories can and do exist. No differences were found between clinicians with different types of academic training. However, academic degree and level of research involvement were found to be related to views toward one or more of the following: (a) usefulness of anatomical dolls, (b) leading questions, or (c) the possibility of therapeutic techniques leading to false allegations of sexual abuse. Although the respondents' sex often accounted for a significant portion of the variance, removing this influence did not alter the overall pattern of the results. Possible explanations for these results are discussed.

Everson, M. D., Boat, B. W., Bourg, S., & Robertson, K. R. (1996). Beliefs among professionals about rates of false allegations of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 11*(4), 541–553. DOI:10.1177/088626096011004006

A total of 244 judges, law enforcement officers, mental health practitioners, and child protection service (CPS) workers were surveyed to explore their beliefs about the frequency with which children lie or fail to tell the truth when they allege sexual abuse. Results indicated that judges and law enforcement officers were significantly more skeptical of children's reports than were mental health and CPS workers. Although age, gender, and years of experience did not appear to affect beliefs about credibility, those professionals who dealt with more cases of child sexual abuse in the previous year were significantly more likely to believe the reports of children than were professionals who worked with fewer cases. Significant differences also were found among professional groups on whether children never or frequently lie about sexual abuse. Finally, across all groups, reports of sexual abuse made by female adolescents were viewed as significantly less believable than other groups of children. The implications of these findings for professionals are discussed.

Ney, T. (Ed.). (1995). *True and false allegations of child sexual abuse: Assessment and case management*. Routledge. DOI:10.4324/9780203777374

Ney wrote this book for a wide-ranging readership of seasoned professionals and students training to be social workers, child and youth care workers, probation officers, counselors and psychologists, nurses, medical practitioners, and teachers. Legal professionals may also find it helpful. Ney's aim is to address the many questions professionals confront concerning true and false allegations of child sexual abuse. The book focuses on improving skill level, competent assessment, and case management. While Ney and authors of the other chapters examine complex theory, they write in ways more readable for the lay person. Using every day and legally relevant examples, complicated principles are translated into practical recommendations for practice. A lengthy list of references for further research is presented after each chapter.

Mikkelsen, E. J., Gutheil, T. G., & Emens, M. (1992). False sexual-abuse allegations by children and adolescents: Contextual factors and clinical subtypes. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 46(4), 556-570.
DOI:10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.1992.46.4.556

The authors present a typology of false allegations of sexual abuse against children that is derived from the literature and their clinical experience. The specific subtypes described are false allegations (1) arising out of custody disputes, (2) stemming from accusers' psychological disturbances, (3) resulting from conscious manipulation, (4) being caused by iatrogenic elements.