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Inconsistencies in Children's Accounts

A Bibliography

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Scope

This bibliography provides research literature associated with the inconsistencies that occur in children's accounts during the forensic interview.

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are listed in date descending order. Links are provided to full text publications. However, this collection may not be complete. More information can be obtained in the Child Abuse Library Online. Additional articles may also be found in the CALiO™ bibliographies *Children Testifying-Issues & Concerns*, *Suggestibility of Children*, and *Children's Episodic & Script Memories*.

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Inconsistencies in Children's Accounts

A Bibliography

Wardell, V., Jameson, T., St. Jacques, P. L., Madan, C. R., & Palombo, D. J. (2025). Assessing autobiographical memory consistency: Machine and human approaches. *Behavior Research Methods*, *57*(6), 163. DOI:10.3758/s13428-025-02690-7

Memory is far from a stable representation of what we have encountered. Over time, we can forget, modify, and distort the details of our experiences. How autobiographical memory—the memories we have for our personal past—changes has important ramifications in both personal and public contexts. However, methodological challenges have hampered research in this area. Here, we introduce a standardized manual scoring procedure for systematically quantifying the consistency of narrative autobiographical memory recall and review advancements in natural language processing models that might be applied to examine changes in memory narratives. We compare the performance of manual and automated approaches on a large dataset of memories recalled at two time points placed approximately 2 months apart (*N*(memory pairs) = 1,026). We show that human and automated approaches are moderately correlated (r = .21-.46), though numerically human scorers provide conservative measures of consistency, while machines provide a liberal measure. We conclude by highlighting the strengths and limitations of both manual and automated approaches and recommend that human scoring be employed when the *types* of mnemonic details that are consistent over time and/or what drives *in*consistencies in memory are of interest.

Martschuk, N., Cashmore, J., Hoff, S., Parkinson, P., Goodman-Delahunty, J., Shackel, R., Cowdery, N., & Powell, M. B. (2024). The importance of consistency in complainants' evidence in the decision to prosecute child sexual abuse cases. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *158*, 107095. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107095

Attrition of child sexual abuse (CSA) cases occurs at different stages of investigation, and only a small proportion of the cases reported to police are referred for prosecution. Different factors have been linked with the prosecution of CSA cases; however, little is known about how prosecutors determine which cases should proceed and which should not. This paper investigated criteria and thresholds used by prosecuting lawyers in deciding whether a child sexual abuse case should proceed. Fifty-six Australian prosecution case files (79 complainants; 58 defendants) were reviewed. The cases included contemporaneous and historical allegations of child sexual abuse, ranging from a single incident to repeated, protracted abuse over a decade. Written notes and emails in prosecutors' files were searched for perceptions of the complainants, decisions to proceed and verdicts. When a complainant was considered inconsistent in some way, giving rise to recorded concerns about their credibility or reliability, 82.3 % of these cases culminated in discontinuance or an acquittal. Conversely, 78 % of cases with complainants who were regarded as largely consistent throughout the investigation resulted in a conviction. Recorded issues with a complainant's memory of the events, cognitive capacity, and confusion about the alleged assault were not associated with case outcomes. Most CSA cases that were referred for prosecution resulted in proceeding with charges against the defendant. Perceived issues with the consistency and credibility of the complainants' evidence were the most important decisional factors.

Bücken, C. A., Otgaar, H., London, K., Riesthuis, P., Battista, F., & Mangiulli, I. (2023). 'Nothing happened': Legal implications of false denials among abused children. *Child Abuse Review*, *32*(2), e2791. DOI:10.1002/car.2791

People lie on a frequent basis. However, when a victim of maltreatment lies by denying the abuse, lies can become forensically relevant. We have reviewed the relevant literature on the prevalence and memory consequences of such false denials. The way forensic interviewers proceed in the face of denying children will be shaped by their beliefs about the frequency with which truly abused children deny abuse. We discuss that estimates of the prevalence of false denials among abused children vary but that such false denials do happen. When falsely denying children eventually come forward with their experiences, a second issue lingers: how valid are maltreated children's statements after a false denial? We review the literature indicating that false denials can negatively affect memory for the investigative interview during which the lie was told. Yet, memory for the denied experience itself seems to be mostly preserved, and some research even found potential protective effects of false denials. We conclude that denials should always be handled with care in the court room, since the ground truth usually is not known, but that statements should not be dismissed based solely on previous denials.

Deck, S. L., Brubacher, S. P., Dickinson, J. J., & Powell, M. B. (2023). Consistency amongst pairs: How consistent are child co-witnesses with one another?. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *28*(2), 254-265. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12243

When multiple children are asked about the same event, the consistency of their reports may be used as a heuristic for credibility. Little research has considered how consistent child co-witnesses are likely to be. In this study, we explored how likely child co-witnesses were to report the same details from a mutually experienced event. Pairs of children participated in an educational science event during which the target attempted to coax the children into breaking preestablished rules for the session (i.e., commit transgressions). Children were individually interviewed about their experience on two

subsequent occasions. Co-witnesses tended to be quite inconsistent: 32%–55% of all details recalled were only mentioned by one co-witness. Various factors were associated with co-witness consistency, including delay before the interview, centrality of details recalled, and children's age and forthcomingness. The findings indicate that inconsistency between co-witnesses reflects a natural memory phenomenon, and that practitioners should be cautious of using co-witness consistency as an indicator of credibility.

Dykstra, V. W., Van der Kant, R., Keller, C. E., Bruer, K. C., Price, H. L., & Evans, A. D. (2023). The impact of the consistency of child witness and peer reports on credibility. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *38*(9-10), 6601-6623. DOI:10.1177/08862605221137708

Adults' perceptions of children's disclosures have important implications for the response to that disclosure. Children who experience adult transgressions, such as maltreatment, often choose to disclose this experience to a peer. Thus, peer disclosure recipients may transmit this disclosure to an adult or provide support for the child's own disclosure. Despite this, the influence of peer disclosure on a child witness's credibility, as well as on the perceptions of peer disclosure recipients, is unknown. The present study examined how child witnesses' and peer disclosure recipients' credibility is impacted when the peer either confirms or contradicts the witness's disclosure (or concealment) of an adult transgression. Participants listened to a child witness and peer being interviewed by an adult in one of four disclosure patterns (consistent disclose, consistent conceal, witness disclose/peer conceal, or witness conceal/peer disclose). Participants rated both the witness and the peer on dimensions of credibility (honesty and cognitive competence). Results revealed that both the witness and peer were more credible when their reports were consistent with one another. When inconsistent, the witness/peer who disclosed was considered more credible than the one who concealed. The findings indicate the

potential importance of peers in the disclosure process as they may support the witness's report and even be a credible discloser when the witness is reluctant to disclose.

VanMeter, F., Henderson, H., Konovalov, H., Karni-Visel, Y., & Blasbalg, U. (2023). Children's narrative coherence in 'Achieving Best Evidence' forensic interviews and courtroom testimony. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *29*(2), 203–221. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2021.2018438

In the United Kingdom, Section 27 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act permits "Achieving Best Evidence" (ABE) forensic interviews to replace the evidence-in-chief in cases involving children. It is therefore imperative that forensic interviewers elicit complete, reliable, and coherent narratives from children. The goal of the current research study was to assess the coherence of forensic interviews and whether the interviewers' emotional or cognitive support was associated with increases in the coherence of these interviews. Children's narrative coherence was examined in 80 transcripts of ABE investigative interviews with 7- to-15-year-olds who disclosed sexual abuse. Narrative coherence was assessed using the Narrative Coherence Coding Scheme, including three dimensions of narrative coherence: chronology, consistency, and theme (Reese et al., 2011). Findings revealed that first elicited events were more likely to be more coherent compared to subsequently elicited events, and child engagement was positively associated with all dimensions of narrative coherence. Interviewer support was positively associated with chronology, script accounts of abuse were associated with decreased consistency and chronology (but not theme), and cognitive support was not associated with any dimension of narrative coherence.

Wardell, V., Jameson, T., Bontkes, O. J. R., Le, M. L., Duan, T., St. Jacques, P. L., Madan, C. R., & Palombo, D. J. (2023). Fade In, fade out: Do shifts in visual perspective predict the consistency of real-world memories?. *Psychological Science*, *34*(8), 932-946. DOI:10.1177/09567976231180588

Memories of our personal past are not exact accounts of what occurred. Instead, memory reconstructs the past in adaptive—though not always faithful—ways. Using a naturalistic design, we asked how the visual perspective adopted in the mind's eye when recalling the past—namely, an "own eyes" versus "observer" perspective—relates to the stability of autobiographical memories. We hypothesized that changes in visual perspective over time would predict poorer consistency of memories. Young adults (N = 178) rated the phenomenology of and freely recalled self-selected memories of everyday events at two time points (10 weeks apart). Multilevel linear modeling revealed, as expected, that greater shifts in visual perspective over time predicted lower memory consistency, particularly for emotional details. Our results offer insight into the factors that predict the fidelity of memories for everyday events. Moreover, our results may elucidate new metrics that are useful in interpreting eyewitness testimony or experiences relayed in clinical contexts.

Rubínová, E., Blank, H., Koppel, J., Dufková, E., & Ost, J. (2022). Repeated recall of repeated events: Accuracy and consistency. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 11*(2), 229–244. DOI:10.1016/j.jarmac.2021.09.003

In both casual conversations and interview settings, people may be required to provide details of instances that were similar to other experiences. When this happens repeatedly, consistency across reports is often taken as a proxy for credibility. However, processes of schema formation and interference due to similarity make recall and accurate source attribution of details to specific instances challenging. We investigated the accuracy and consistency of recall in these contexts in a re-analysis of five studies. Confusions of details were widespread (1) across instances —participants frequently attributed the origin of

details to incorrect instances, but also (2) across repeated retrieval attempts — participants frequently changed parts of their reports. There was, however, a clear pattern of primacy and recency effects: Recall of the first and final instances was more accurate and consistent than recall of the middle instances. We discuss potential mechanisms underlying these effects as well as their practical implications.

Pichler, A. S., Powell, M., Sharman, S. J., Zydervelt, S., Westera, N., & Goodman-Delahunty, J. (2021). Inconsistencies in complainant's accounts of child sexual abuse arising in their cross-examination. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *27*(4), 341–356. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2020.1805743

A key cross-examination tactic in trials of child sexual abuse (CSA) is to highlight inconsistencies between sources of information to discredit the complainant's account. The present study examined the prevalence, origin and nature of inconsistencies arising in the cross-examination of complainants in CSA trials. Further, we examined the association between these inconsistencies and the types of question that elicited them in the earlier police interview of the child witness (i.e. open-ended, specific, or leading). Transcripts of videorecorded interviews (evidence-in-chief) of 73 complainants (15 males, 58 females) and subsequent cross-examinations at trial were coded. Results showed that inconsistencies were raised in the cross-examination of 94.5% of complainants; most between what the children said in their police interview versus their cross-examination. A greater proportion of inconsistencies was associated with specific than open-ended questions asked in the police interview. However, open-ended questions were associated with some inconsistencies, perhaps due to the longer answers they elicited. Shorter police interviews relying mainly on open-ended questions may minimise the opportunity for inconsistencies to arise in cross-examinations. Judges and juries require education about inconsistencies that arise from memory's reconstructive nature and lay people's tendency to use these inconsistencies to make inferences about the unreliability of witnesses.

Denne, E., Sullivan, C., Ernest, K., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2020). Assessing children's credibility in courtroom investigations of alleged child sexual abuse: Suggestibility, plausibility, and consistency. *Child Maltreatment, 25*(2), 224-232. DOI:10.1177/1077559519872825

As children's testimonies of child sexual abuse (CSA) often lack concrete evidence to corroborate a child's claims, attorneys devote a substantial amount of time to establishing a child as credible during the course of a trial. Examining 134 CSA victim testimonies for children aged 5–17 (M ¼ 12.48, SD ¼ 3.34; 90% female), we explored how attorneys assess child credibility through specifically targeting children's suggestibility/honesty, plausibility, and consistency. Results revealed that while prosecutors examine plausibility more often to establish credibility, defense attorneys focus their assessments on suggestibility/honesty and potential inconsistency. However, both attorneys asked many more questions about children's consistency than any other area of potential credibility. Furthermore, while prosecutors ask proportionally more credibility challenging questions of older children, the defense do not. These results suggest that prosecutors may be missing an opportunity to establish children as honest and consistent and elucidate a need to train attorneys on the implications of children's inconsistencies, suggestibility, and plausible abuse dynamics.

Szojka, Z. A., Nicol, A., & La Rooy, D. (2020). Narrative coherence in multiple forensic interviews with child witnesses alleging physical and sexual abuse. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *34*(5), 943-960. DOI:10.1002/acp.3673

This study investigated the narrative coherence of children's accounts elicited in multiple forensic interviews. Transcriptions of 56 police interviews with 28 children aged 3–14 years alleging physical and sexual abuse were coded for markers of completeness, consistency and connectedness. We found that multiple interviews increased the completeness of children's testimony, containing on average almost twice as much new information as single interviews, including crucial location, time and abuse-related details. When both

contradictions within the same interview and across interviews were considered, contradictions were not more frequent in multiple interviews. The frequency of linguistic markers of connectedness remained stable across interviews. Multiple interviews increase the narrative coherence of children's testimony through increasing their completeness without necessarily introducing contradictions or decreasing causal-temporal connections between details. However, as 'ground truth' is not known in field studies, further investigation of the relationship between the narrative coherence and accuracy of testimonies is required.

Hudson, C. A., Vrij, A., Akehurst, L., & Hope, L. (2019). The devil is in the detail: Deception and consistency over repeated interviews. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 25*(7), 752-770. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2019.1574790

Research indicates that truthful statements typically contain more details than fabricated statements, and that truth tellers are no more consistent than liars over multiple interviews. In this experiment, we examine the impact of (i) multiple interviewers and (ii) reverse order recall on liars' and truth tellers' consistency and amount of reported detail over repeated recall attempts. Participants either took part in a mock crime (lying condition) or an innocent event (truth telling condition) which they were subsequently interviewed about in two separate interview phases. Truth tellers provided more details overall, and more reminiscent details than liars. There were no differences between veracity groups for the number of omissions made or repetitions reported. Despite the popular belief that inconsistency is a cue to deception, we found little support for the notion that consistency (or lack of consistency) offers a diagnostic cue to deception. We found little evidence that switching interviewer or recalling in reverse order induced inconsistencies in liars. In fact, due to the number of reminiscent details in truth tellers' accounts, our findings suggest that accounts provided by liars tend to be slightly more consistent than those provided by truth tellers.

Hubbard, K., Saykaly, C., Lee, K., Lindsay, R. C. L., Bala, N., & Talwar, V. (2016). Children's recall accuracy for repeated events over multiple interviews: Comparing information types. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, 23*(6), 849-862. DOI:10.1080/13218719.2016.1256015

The present study examined children's recall accuracy for a repeated event over multiple interviews. Participants took part in three play sessions and were then questioned in three separate interviews a week later. The sample included 87 children between 4 to 10 years of age. Repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to examine total accuracy and accuracy for action (i.e., what happened during the play session) and detail (i.e., descriptions of objects, people, time, and locations) information. Older children were more accurate in their recall than were younger children, but total accuracy did not differ across interviews. Conversely, children were more accurate when recalling detail information compared to action information, and accuracy for detail information improved across the interviews, while accuracy for action information deteriorated from Interview 1 to 3. Implications for judging the accuracy of children's witness testimony in real-world forensic contexts involving multiple events and interviews are discussed.

Price, H. L., Connolly, D. A., & Gordon, H. M. (2016). Children who experienced a repeated event only appear less accurate in a second interview than those who experienced a unique event. *Law and Human Behavior*, *40*(4), 362-373. DOI:10.1037/lhb0000194

When children have experienced a repeated event, reports of experienced details may be inconsistently reported across multiple interviews. In 3 experiments, we explored consistency of children's reports of an instance of a repeated event after a long delay (Exp. 1, N 53, Mage 7.95 years; Exp. 2, N 70, Mage 5.77 years, Exp. 3, N 59, Mage 4.88 years). In all experiments, children either experienced 1 or 4 activity sessions, followed at a relatively short delay (days or weeks) by an initial memory test. Then, following a longer delay (4 months or 1 year), children were reinterviewed with the same memory questions.

We analyzed the consistency of children's memory reports across the 2 interviews, as well as forgetting, reminiscence, and accuracy, defined with both narrow and broad criteria. A highly consistent pattern was observed across the 3 experiments with children who experienced a single event appearing more consistent than children who experienced a repeated event. We conclude that inconsistencies across multiple interviews can be expected from children who have experienced repeated events and these inconsistencies are often reflective of accurate, but different, recall.

Andrews, S. J., Lamb, M. E., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). Question types, responsiveness and self-contradictions when prosecutors and defense attorneys question alleged victims of child sexual abuse. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *29*(2), 253-261. DOI:10.1002/acp.3103

We examined 120 trial transcripts of 6- to 12-year-old children testifying to sexual abuse. Age and attorney role were analyzed in relation to question types, children's responsiveness and self-contradiction frequency. A total of 48,716 question–response pairs were identified. Attorneys used more closed-ended than open-ended prompts. Prosecutors used more invitations (3% vs. 0%), directives, and option-posing prompts than defense attorneys, who used more suggestive prompts than prosecutors. Children were more unresponsive to defense attorneys than to prosecutors. Self-contradictions were identified in 95% of the cases. Defense attorneys elicited more self-contradictions than prosecutors, but nearly all prosecutors (86%) elicited at least one self-contradiction. Suggestive questions elicited more self-contradictions than any other prompt type. There were no associations with age. These findings suggest that neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys question children in developmentally appropriate ways.

Andrews, S. J., Lamb, M. E., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). The effects of question repetition on responses when prosecutors and defense attorneys question children alleging sexual abuse in court. *Law and Human Behavior*, *39*(6), 559-570. DOI:10.1037/lhb0000152

This study examined the effects of repeated questions (n = 12,169) on 6- to 12-year-olds' testimony in child sexual abuse cases. We examined transcripts of direct- and cross-examinations of 120 children, categorizing how attorneys asked repeated questions in-court and how children responded. Defense attorneys repeated more questions (33.6% of total questions asked) than prosecutors (17.8%) and repeated questions using more suggestive prompts (38% of their repeated questions) than prosecutors (15%). In response, children typically repeated or elaborated on their answers and seldom contradicted themselves. Self-contradictions were most often elicited by suggestive and option-posing prompts posed by either type of attorney. Child age did not affect the numbers of questions repeated, the types of prompts used by attorneys to repeat questions, or how children responded to repetition. Most (61.5%) repeated questions were repeated more than once and, as repetition frequency increased, so did the number of self-contradictions. 'Asked-and-answered' objections were rarely raised (n = 45) and were more likely to be overruled than sustained by judges. Findings suggest that attorneys frequently ask children 'risky' repeated questions. Both attorneys and the judiciary need more training in identifying and restricting the unnecessary repetition of questions.

Lawson, M., & London, K. (2015). Tell me everything you discussed: Children's memory for dyadic conversations after a 1-week or a 3-week delay. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 33*(4), 429-445. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2184

In child abuse investigations, children are often asked to recount previous conversations related to the allegations (i.e., "conversational testimony"). To explore children's ability to provide conversational testimony, we staged a semi-structured novel dyadic

conversation between an adult researcher and 8-year-old children (n = 90). Children's gist recall and recognition memory for their own statements, their conversational partner's statements, and question–answer pairs were tested after either a 1-week or a 3-week delay. The results revealed that children recounted a minority of the conversation, although children recalled more after a short delay (7%) than after a long delay (4%). A majority of children's free recall statements were accurate (68%); however, approximately one-third of their free recall statements were incorrect. Children almost exclusively recounted their own statements, and rarely recalled any of the adult's statements or the question–answer pairs during free recall. Reports of the adult's statements and question–answer pairs increased with cued recall questioning, but remained minimal. During recognition testing, children were able to distinguish between true and false recognition items for their own statements and the adult's statements, but performed at chance level on recognition items concerning question–answer pairs. Forensic implications of the results are discussed.

Andrews, S. J., & Lamb, M. E. (2014). The effects of age and delay on responses to repeated questions in forensic interviews with children alleging sexual abuse. *Law and Human Behavior*, *38*(2), 171-180. DOI:10.1037/lhb0000064

We examined transcripts of forensic interviews with 115 children aged between 3 and 12 years, interviewed between 1 day and 18 months after allegedly experiencing a single incident of sexual abuse. Repeated questions were categorized with respect to the reasons why interviewers asked questions again, how interviewers asked repeated questions, and how children responded. On average, interviewers asked 3 repeated questions per interview. As age increased, the frequency of question repetition declined but there was no association between repetition and delay. Interviewers most often repeated questions for clarification (53.1%), but questions were also repeated frequently to challenge children’s previous responses (23.7%), and for no apparent reason (20.1%). In

response, children typically repeated (54.1%) or elaborated on (31.5%) their previous answers; they contradicted themselves less often (10.8%). Questions repeated using suggestive prompts were more likely to elicit contradictions. There was no association between age or delay and the reasons why questions were repeated, how they were repeated, and how children responded. These findings emphasize the importance of training forensic interviewers to repeat questions only when the children or interviewers seek clarification and to encourage children who are anxious or reluctant to disclose. All repeated questions should be open-ended and interviewers should explain to children why questions are being repeated.

Baugerud, G. A., Magnussen, S., & Melinder, A. (2014). High accuracy but low consistency in children's long-term recall of a real-life stressful event. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 126*, 357-368. DOI:10.1016/j.jecp.2014.05.009

The accuracy and consistency of children's memories of their removals from their biological families by the Child Protective Services (CPS) was investigated. A researcher was present during the removals and documented what happened. A total of 37 maltreated children, aged 3 to 12 years, were interviewed 1 week and 3 months after the removals. The accuracy of the memory reports was high at both time points, but their consistency was fairly low; in all age groups (3–6, 7–10, and 11–12 years), a high percentage of new accurate information was reported during the second interview and a high percentage of the accurate information reported in the first interview was omitted in the second interview. Older children were significantly more consistent in their memory reports than younger children. The results show that low consistency in memory does not imply memory inaccuracy and has implications for the interpretation of successive interviews of children in forensic contexts.

Lyon, T. D., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2014). Children's memory for conversations about sexual abuse: Legal and psychological implications. *Roger Williams University Law Review, 19*, 411-450.

Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J., & Brubacher, S. (2014). Sources of unreliable testimony from children. *Roger Williams University Law Review*, *19*, 382-410.

We distilled research findings on sources of unreliable testimony from children into four principles that capture how the field of forensic developmental psychology conceptualizes this topic. The studies selected to illustrate these principles address three major questions: (a) how do young children perform in eyewitness studies, (b) why are some children less accurate than others, and (c) what phenomena generate unreliable testimony? Throughout our research, our focus is on factors other than lying that produce inaccurate or seemingly inconsistent autobiographical reports. Collectively, this research has shown that (a) children's eyewitness accuracy is highly dependent on context, (b) neurological immaturity makes children vulnerable to errors under some circumstances, and (c) some children are more swayed by external influences than others. Finally, the diversity of factors that can influence the reliability of children's testimony dictates that (d) analyzing children's testimony as if they were adults (i.e., with adult abilities, sensibilities, and motivations) will lead to frequent misunderstandings. It takes considerable knowledge of development—including information about developmental psycholinguistics, memory development, and the gradual emergence of cognitive control—to work with child witnesses and to analyze cases as there are many sources of unreliable testimony.

Odinot, G., Memon, A., La Rooy, D., & Millen, A. (2013). Are two interviews better than one? Eyewitness memory across repeated cognitive interviews. *PloS One*, *8*(10), e76305. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0076305

Eyewitnesses to a filmed event were interviewed twice using a Cognitive Interview to examine the effects of variations in delay between the repeated interviews (immediately & 2 days; immediately & 7 days; 7 & 9 days) and the identity of the interviewers (same or different across the two repeated interviews). Hypermnesia (an increase in total amount of information recalled in the repeated interview) occurred without any decrease in the overall accuracy. Reminiscence (the recall of new information in the repeated interview) was also found in all conditions but was least apparent in the longest delay condition, and came with little cost to the overall accuracy of information gathered. The number of errors, increased across the interviews, but the relative accuracy of participants' responses was unaffected. However, when accuracy was calculated based on all unique details provided across both interviews and compared to the accuracy of recall in just the first interview it was found to be slightly lower. The identity of the interviewer (whether the same or different across interviews) had no effects on the number of correct details. There was an increase in recall of new details with little cost to the overall accuracy of information gathered. Importantly, these results suggest that witnesses are unlikely to report everything they remember during a single Cognitive Interview, however exhaustive, and a second opportunity to recall information about the events in question may provide investigators with additional information.

Orbach, Y., Lamb, M. E., La Rooy, D., & Pipe, M. E. (2012). A case study of witness consistency and memory recovery across multiple investigative interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *26*(1), 118-129. DOI:10.1002/acp.1803

Access to audio recordings of five interviews (Interviews 2–6), and to the interviewer's contemporaneous notes during an initial unrecorded interview, made it possible to assess consistency across repeated attempts by a 9-year-old to describe her older

sister's abduction from their shared bedroom. Information provided in each of the interviews was systematically analysed to determine whether each unit of information was new, consistent (repeated) or contradictory in relation to earlier reported information and whether any informative detail provided in the witness' initial interview was subsequently omitted. In addition, the witness' accounts were compared with details provided by the victim upon her rescue. This case analysis is particularly informative in light of widespread professional concerns about the effects of repeated interviewing on the quality and accuracy of children's accounts of experienced events.

La Rooy, D., & Lamb, M. E. (2011). What happens when interviewers ask repeated questions in forensic interviews with children alleging abuse?. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *26*(1), 20-25. DOI:10.1007/s11896-010-9069-4

This study was designed to explore 1) the ways in which interviewers refocus alleged victims of abuse on their previous responses and 2) how children responded when they were refocused on their previous responses. Transcripts of 37 forensic interviews conducted by British police officers trained using the best practices spelled out in the Memorandum of Good Practice were examined. The instances in which interviewers asked repeated questions were isolated and coded into categories with respect to the reasons why interviewers needed to ask the repeated question (i.e., there was no apparent reason, to challenge a child's response, clarification, no answer the first time the question was asked, digression, or compound question). The children's responses to the repeated questions were further categorised into mutually exclusive categories (i.e., elaboration, repetition, contradiction, or no answer). On average interviewers asked children 8 repeated questions per interview. Most of the time interviewers asked repeated questions to challenge a previous response (62%), but they were also sometimes asked for no apparent reason (20%). Children repeated previous responses or elaborated on a previous response 81% of the time and contradicted themselves 7% of the time when re-

asked the same question. We conclude that children did not appear unduly pressured to change their answers, and, more importantly, did not contradict themselves when interviewers attempted to refocus them on particular responses.

La Rooy, D., Katz, C., Malloy, L. C., & Lamb, M. E. (2010). Do we need to rethink guidance on repeated interviews?. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *16*(4), 373-392. DOI:10.1037/a0019909

Within the legal system, children are frequently interviewed about their experiences more than once, with different information elicited in different interviews. The presumed positive and negative effects of multiple interviewing have generated debate and controversy within the legal system and among researchers. Some commentators emphasize that repeated interviews foster inaccurate recall and are inherently suggestive, whereas others emphasize the benefits of allowing witnesses more than 1 opportunity to recall information. In this article, we briefly review the literature on repeated interviewing before presenting a series of cases highlighting what happens when children are interviewed more than once for various reasons. We conclude that, when interviewers follow internationally recognized best-practice guidelines emphasizing open-questions and free memory recall, alleged victims of abuse should be interviewed more than once to ensure that more complete accounts are obtained. Implications for current legal guidelines concerning repeated interviewing are discussed.

London, K., & Kuldofsky, S. (2010). Factors affecting the reliability of children's reports. In G. M. Davies & D. B. Wright (Eds.), *New frontiers in applied memory* (119-141). Psychology Press.

Howie, P., Kurukulasuriya, N., Nash, L., & Marsh, A. (2009). Inconsistencies in children's recall of witnessed events: The role of age, question format and perceived reason for question repetition. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *14*(2), 311-329. DOI:10.1348/135532508X383879

Children's inconsistencies when answering repeated questions about past events are a source of concern in forensic, educational, and other contexts. Theoretical accounts of these inconsistencies have predominantly assumed that children shift because they infer adult dissatisfaction with their initial answer. This study aimed to test this account via examination of the effects of question format on shifting, as well as via direct questioning of children. Four-, five-, and seven-year-olds (N = 226) were asked 17 recall questions about a recent classroom activity, with eight target questions repeated in one of four formats: no-correct (mildly misleading questions to which the correct answer was 'no'), yes-correct (mildly misleading questions to which the correct answer was 'yes'), specific open wh- questions, and forced-choice questions. They were then asked about the adult's reasons for repetition. Accuracy, shifting, and interpretations of question repetition were examined. Shifting from accuracy decreased with age, and was affected by question format in 4-year-olds only, who shifted more to no-correct than to forced-choice questions. Shifting towards accuracy was more common in forced-choice questions than either no-correct or open questions, but there were no significant age differences. First-answer-unsatisfactory interpretations of question repetition were rare, especially in the two younger groups. The oldest group offered a wider range of interpretations and also showed some evidence of an association between first-answer-unsatisfactory interpretations and shifting. Overall, our findings present a challenge to first-answer-unsatisfactory explanations of young children's shifting in recall settings, at least where overt pressure to shift is low. Forensic implications are considered.

Krähenbühl, S., Blades, M., & Eiser, C. (2009). The effect of repeated questioning on children's accuracy and consistency in eyewitness testimony. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *14*(2), 263-278. DOI:10.1348/135532508X398549

In police interviews children may be asked the same question many times. We investigated how the number of repetitions and the interval between those repetitions affected the accuracy and consistency of children's responses. 156 children aged 4–9 years watched a staged event and were interviewed individually 1 week later. Children were asked eight open-ended questions, which were each repeated a further four times (making a total of forty questions). Half these open-ended questions could be answered from information in the event, and half were unanswerable (so children should have said 'don't know' in response to these questions). The questions were repeated in gist form. The interval between an initial question and its repetitions was varied by use of other questions and twenty non-repeated filler questions. The intervals between repetitions were immediate repetition, repetition after a delay of three intervening questions, after a delay of six intervening questions, and after ten or more intervening questions. Over a quarter of children's responses to repeated questions changed, usually resulting in a decline in accuracy, particularly after the first repetition. Subsequently, the number of repetitions and delay interval had little effect on responses to answerable questions although accuracy to unanswerable questions continued to decline. Question repetition had a negative affect on children's consistency and accuracy. For unanswerable questions in particular, the more often a question was repeated the more likely children were to invent a response.

La Rooy, D., Lamb, M. E., & Pipe, M.-E. (2009). Repeated interviewing: A critical evaluation of the risks and potential benefits. 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.

Goodman, G. S., & Quas, J. A. (2008). Repeated interviews and children's memory: It's more than just how many. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *17*(6), 386-390. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00611.x

A crucial issue in the study of eyewitness memory concerns effects of repeated interviews on children's memory accuracy. There is growing belief that exposure to repeated interviews causes increased errors. In some situations, it may. Yet, several studies reveal increased accuracy with repeated interviewing, even when the interviews include misleading questions. We review repeated-interview research in relation to event veracity, interviewer bias, and delay. We conclude that when and how children are interviewed is at least as important for their accuracy as is how many times they are interviewed.

La Rooy, D. J., & Lamb, M. E. (2008). What happens when young witnesses are interviewed more than once?. *Forensic Update*, *95*, 25-28.

Quas, J. A., Davis, E. L., Goodman, G. S., & Myers, J. E. (2007). Repeated questions, deception, and children's true and false reports of body touch. *Child Maltreatment*, *12*(1), 60-67. DOI:10.1177/1077559506296141

Four- to 7-year-olds' ability to answer repeated questions about body touch either honestly or dishonestly was examined. Children experienced a play event, during which one third of the children were touched innocuously. Two weeks later, they returned for a memory interview. Some children who had not been touched were instructed to lie during the interview and say that they had been touched. Children so instructed were consistent in maintaining the lie but performed poorly when answering repeated questions unrelated to the lie. Children who were not touched and told the truth were accurate when answering repeated questions. Of note, children who had been touched and told the truth

were the most inconsistent. Results call into question the common assumption that consistency is a useful indicator of veracity in children's eyewitness accounts.

Quas, J. A., Malloy, L. C., Melinder, A., Goodman, G. S., D'Mello, M., & Schaaf, J. (2007). Developmental differences in the effects of repeated interviews and interviewer bias on young children's event memory and false reports. *Developmental Psychology, 43*(4), 823-837. DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.43.4.823

The present study investigated developmental differences in the effects of repeated interviews and interviewer bias on children's memory and suggestibility. Three- and 5-year-olds were singly or repeatedly interviewed about a play event by a highly biased or control interviewer. Children interviewed once by the biased interviewer after a long delay made the most errors. Children interviewed repeatedly, regardless of interviewer bias, were more accurate and less likely to falsely claim that they played with a man. In free recall, among children questioned once after a long delay by the biased interviewer, 5-year-olds were more likely than were 3-year-olds to claim falsely that they played with a man. However, in response to direct questions, 3-year-olds were more easily manipulated into implying that they played with him. Findings suggest that interviewer bias is particularly problematic when children's memory has weakened. In contrast, repeated interviews that occur a short time after a to-be-remembered event do not necessarily increase children's errors, even when interviews include misleading questions and interviewer bias. Implications for developmental differences in memory and suggestibility are discussed.

Fivush, R., McDermott Sales, J., Goldberg, A., Bahrick, L., & Parker, J. (2004). Weathering the storm: Children's long-term recall of Hurricane Andrew. *Memory*, *12*(1), 104-118. DOI:10.1080/09658210244000397

Children who experienced a highly stressful natural disaster, Hurricane Andrew, were interviewed within a few months of the event, when they were 3–4 years old, and again 6 years later, when they were 9–10 years old. Children were grouped into low, moderate, or high stress groups depending on the severity of the experienced storm. All children were able to recall this event in vivid detail 6 years later. In fact, children reported over twice as many propositions at the second interview as at the first. At the initial interview, children in the high stress group reported less information than children in the moderate stress group, but 6 years later, children in all three stress groups reported similar amounts of information. However, children in the high stress group needed more questions and prompts than children in the other stress groups. Yet children in the high stress group also reported more consistent information between the two interviews, especially about the storm, than children in the other stress groups. Implications for children's developing memory of stressful events are discussed.

Zajac, R., Gross, J., & Hayne, H. (2003). Asked and answered: Questioning children in the courtroom. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, *10*(1), 199-209. DOI:10.1375/pplt.2003.10.1.199

In the present experiment, we analysed court transcripts in which children aged 5 to 13 years provided the key evidence in sexual abuse trials. We developed two separate coding schemes for lawyers' questions and children's responses. Consistent with past research, defence lawyers conducting cross-examination asked a higher proportion of complex, grammatically confusing, credibility-challenging, leading, and closed questions than prosecution lawyers. In responding to defence lawyers' questions, child witnesses rarely asked for clarification and often attempted to answer questions that were ambiguous or did not make sense. Furthermore, over 75% of children changed at least

one aspect of their testimony during the cross-examination process. These findings have important implications for the way in which children are examined in court.

Ghetti, S., Goodman, G. S., Eisen, M. L., Qin, J., & Davis, S. L. (2002). Consistency in children's reports of sexual and physical abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *26*(9), 977-995. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00367-8

The goal of the present study was to investigate the consistency of children's reports of sexual and physical abuse. A group of 222 children, ages 3–16 years, participated. As part of legal investigations, the children were interviewed twice about their alleged experiences of abuse. The consistency of children's reports of sexual and physical abuse was examined in the two interviews, in relation to age, type of abuse, gender, memory, suggestibility, and cognitive capabilities. Older children were more consistent than younger children in their reports of sexual and physical abuse. Children were more consistent when reporting sexual abuse than physical abuse. Girls were more consistent than boys in sexual abuse reports. Consistency in sexual abuse reports was predicted by measures of memory, whereas consistency in physical abuse reports was not. Cognitive abilities did not predict consistency in sexual abuse or physical abuse reports. Implications for understanding children's allegations of abuse are discussed.

Lamb, M. E., & Fauchier, A. (2001). The effects of question type on self-contradictions by children in the course of forensic interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *15*(5), 483-491. DOI:10.1002/acp.726

Twenty-four forensic interviews of seven alleged victims of child sexual abuse were examined to elucidate the circumstances in which the children contradicted forensically relevant details they had provided earlier. Suggestive questions by the interviewers elicited a disproportionate number of contradictions, whereas open-ended invitations never elicited contradictions. Because contradictions necessarily imply that details were

stated inaccurately at least once, these close analyses of forensic interviews demonstrate that, as in analogue contexts, open-ended prompts yield more accurate information than do focused questions, particularly option-posing and suggestive prompts.

Peterson, C., Moores, L., & White, G. (2001). Recounting the same events again and again: Children's consistency across multiple interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 15*(4), 353-371. DOI:10.1002/acp.708

Children (2–13 years at time of injury) were interviewed four times about an injury that required hospital Emergency Room treatment, namely at 1 week, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years. The consistency of children's reports was assessed and all children gave mostly the same information at each interview, although consistency was higher for older children and for injury rather than hospital details. Furthermore, details recalled at every interview were virtually always accurate while details that were sometimes omitted were a little less likely to be accurate. New information that was introduced after 6 months was more likely to be accurate than inaccurate but new information introduced at 1 or 2 years post-injury was just as likely to be wrong as right (except for 12–13-year-olds). Implications for forensic situations are discussed. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Brock, P., & Cutler, B. L. (1999). Examining the cognitive interview in a double-test paradigm. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, *5*(1-2), 29-45. DOI:10.1080/10683169908414992

The Cognitive Interview (CI) was compared with a standard interview protocol (based on the National Transportation Safety Board) to interview witnesses of a videotaped traffic accident. Witnesses were tested twice, five minutes after viewing the accident and again two weeks later. The CI elicited approximately 70% more correct facts than did the standard interview, and at equivalent accuracy rates, at both the first interview and the

second interview. The double-testing procedure generated novel data patterns that may allow us to identify incorrect recollections; other results lead us to question some legal assumptions about the diagnosticity of inconsistent recollections.

Powell, M. B., & Thomson, D. M. (1997). The effect of an intervening interview on children's ability to remember one occurrence of a repeated event. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, *2*(2), 247-262. DOI:10.1111/j.2044-8333.1997.tb00346.x

The effect of an intervening interview on 4–5- and 6–8-year-old children's ability to remember an occurrence of a repeated event at six-weeks' delay was examined. The timing of the interpolated interview and the final test were also systematically examined. Children experienced six occurrences of an event which were highly similar; each occurrence had the same underlying structure but included unpredictable variations in the specific exemplars of items or 'instantiations' across the series. All children were required to recall the instantiation of each item that was included in the final occurrence in the series. The results indicated that inclusion of a one-week interpolated interview enhanced the number of correct instantiations that could be recalled about the occurrence in a six-week interview compared to when there was no interpolated interview. However, the effect of the interpolated interview on subsequent recall was reduced when the second interview was extended to three months. In fact, the decline in performance of children who were interviewed at a one-week delay and again at a three-month delay was such that these children received no more benefit from the initial interview than children who received their first interview at a six-week delay. Interestingly, the performance of the latter children improved rather than declined in the second interview. The implications of the findings for children's eyewitness testimony are discussed.

Memon, A., & Vartoukian, R. (1996). The effects of repeated questioning on young children's eyewitness testimony. *British Journal of Psychology*, *87*(3), 403-415. DOI:10.1111/j.2044-8295.1996.tb02598.x

The aim of the present study was to explore the conditions under which repeated questions would influence memory performance. Children of five and seven years of age witnessed a staged event and were then individually interviewed with a free-recall test and closed and open form questions, some of which were repeated in the interview. Some children were warned that questions might be repeated. The older children were more accurate on both open and closed question forms than the younger children. In both groups recall improved upon second questioning with open questions, whereas accuracy of responses deteriorated somewhat upon repetition of closed questions. On the basis of these data it is concluded that if closed questions are repeated in a witness interview it may lead the witness to assume incorrectly that his or her first response was incorrect; however, the findings support the use of repeated questioning as a probe for more information to open-ended questions.

Fivush, R., & Shukat, J. R. (1995). Content, consistency, and coherence of early autobiographical recall. In M. S. Zaragoza, J. R. Graham, G. C. N. Hall, R. Hirschman, & Y. S. Ben-Porath (Eds.), *Memory and testimony in the child witness* (pp. 5–23). Sage Publications, Inc.

Poole, D. A., & White, L. T. (1991). Effects of question repetition on the eyewitness testimony of children and adults. *Developmental Psychology, 27*(6), 975-986. DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.27.6.975

This study examined witnesses' answers to repeated questions about a novel event, both within and across interviews. Ss in 4 age groups (4-, 6-, and 8-year-olds and adults; N = 133) individually witnessed an ambiguous incident. Some Ss were interviewed immediately and 1 week later; others were interviewed only once, 1 week later. Children

were as accurate as adults when responding to open-ended questions, but 4-year-olds were more likely to change responses to yes-no questions. Adults speculated more frequently than children on a specific question about which they had no information, and answers to this question became more certain with repetition. An "inoculation" procedure was successful in reducing the frequency of inappropriate speculation. When open ended questions were used, a moderate amount of repetition primarily influenced presentation style rather than accuracy.