

INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING OF CHILDREN

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INTERVIEWING CHILDREN IN INVESTIGATION OF ABUSE CASES

“Often the interview with a child and the statement made by the child are the single most important component of the investigation. The method by which those statements are elicited are crucial in determining whether or not a child has been maltreated.” (Aldridge, 1999).

How suggestible are children?

What are the sources of errors and suggestibility effects in a child’s memory?

Currently, researchers disagree on how misleading suggestions affect memory. Suggestibility is more likely to be the result of the combination of many different causal processes, which include social and cognitive factors. (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997).

Leading questions asked after the event and containing new information can permanently change the actual memory trace of the original event. (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). In that situation, the information provided either before, during or after the event has resulted in erasing or overwriting the initial memory, and the child then believes that the false event that is suggested to him or her has in fact occurred (Ceci and Huffman, 1997). However, in some situations, the memory of the original event can remain intact but misleading information may interfere with the retrieval of the actual memory of the event. (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). The child may in fact get confused about the different sources of information and may recognize an event as “familiar” while not remembering whether it is familiar because he or she actually observed it or because someone suggested it occurred to him or her. This phenomenon is called source misattribution and in that case, the child will more likely believe that the false event has in fact occurred (Ceci and Huffman, 1997). Young children are especially vulnerable to that phenomenon (Bruck and Ceci, 1999).

In some cases, suggestibility may only be the consequence of the child’s yielding to misleading questions because of what he or she perceives as social pressures. In this case, the child still has an intact memory of the event and knows that what he is telling does not come from his or her own memory (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). In fact, much evidence suggest that children’s suggestibility can be socially motivated. Young children in particular are typically very compliant with adults and want to please them Furthermore they are also very trusting with adults (Bruck and Ceci, 1999).

Some recent studies suggest that if suggestive interviews are stopped for some time, children’s false memories resulting from source misattributions disappear progressively to finally lead them to accurately claim that the false events they previously agreed had happened, never occurred (Bruck and Ceci, 1999).

What is the influence of age?

Ceci and Huffman (1997) conducted a review of studies looking at the cognitive and social conditions that can influence the accuracy of young children’s responses to interviews. They found that very young preschoolers (ages 3-4) were significantly more

vulnerable to suggestions than were older preschoolers (ages 5-6). Greenstock and Pipe (1996) found that research suggests that compliance with misleading suggestions decreases with age and that children are less likely to comply with misleading suggestions when they approach the age of 8 or 9 years. Children older than this age demonstrate a level of resistance to suggestions equivalent to that of adults. Therefore, preschoolers have been found to be more vulnerable to various suggestive techniques. However, Bruck and Ceci (1999) found that there were no age differences when children were asked misleading questions about central salient events. In that case children are mostly accurate in their report, regardless of age. However, in the study finding this result, the questions were asked to the children in a disconnected way and the interviewer was neutral. Other studies have found that when children are interviewed in a neutral way, they do report accurate information, even 3-year-olds recalled 90% accurate information when they were not interviewed with suggestive techniques (Ceci and Huffman, 1997). In fact, according to Myers (1992b), children have better memories than it is usually believed, and he states that with a skilled and patient interviewer, children can remember what they know.

Aldridge (1999) explains that according to Gabarino & Scott (1989), memory is an active process. It involves experiencing, encoding the information, storing it, and retrieving it when necessary. Perceiving, encoding and storing ability is approximately the same at any age, and if the child stores information about an event he or she experienced, he or she will be able to remember it (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). However, the ability to actually retrieve the information is what is generally harder for younger children because they have to translate their memories and its content into words (Aldridge, 1999). This is because younger children have not developed strategies for organizing and retrieving information from their memory yet. However, by the age of five, they can report information about an event in a consistent and comprehensible way, including temporal information and details about who participated in the event. (Aldridge, 1999). Therefore, free recall memory is closely related to age, which is not the case with recognition and reconstruction memory because with those people are provided with cues to retrieve the right information. However, recognition memory yields more inaccurate information than free recall memory (Lamb, Sternberg and Esplin, 1998). As already stated, the amount of information a child can recall from free recall memory is dependent on his or her age. As a consequence, research indicates that younger children are capable of accurately recalling events they have experienced, even after a long period of time, but they recall less than older children. However, preschoolers often remember more than they actually report when they are interviewed with open-ended questions. (Aldridge, 1999). Yet, if younger children do not have the strategies adults have to spontaneously remember events they experienced, they can be taught to use some memory strategies (Aldridge, 1999).

What is the influence of child characteristics?

Geddie, Fradin and Beer (2000) state they have seen some very young children who were able to give very accurate and detailed reports when interviewed, while some older children were not able to do so. Ceci and Huffman (1997) explain it is clear that individual differences exist among children and that some young children are in fact more resistant to suggestions than others. Certain interview conditions such as social

pressures or suggestive techniques such as leading questions may differentially affect children of the same age. However, they state that researchers have little understanding of what causes these differences.

Geddie et al. (2000) decided to look at three child characteristics they believed would be likely to affect the children's ability to recall accurate information in an interview. These characteristics were metamemory ability (knowledge about the process of storing and retrieving information), intellectual functioning, and temperament. They also looked at the children's age and demographic variables including ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). They found that age was the best predictor. They also found that children with higher intellectual functioning, higher metamemory ability or/and with an easier temperament recalled more information. Demographic variables also were significantly related to recall of more information, with Caucasians and children with higher SES recalling the most. They also found that younger children, children with lower intellectual functioning, African-Americans and children with lower SES were more suggestible (answered incorrectly to misleading questions). However, many factors were inter-correlated and after controlling for that, race, age and metamemory were the three factors that affected the amount of information the children recalled accurately. Race and age were the factors that influenced suggestibility. Possible explanation for the findings concerning the influence of race on suggestibility on recall is the racial differences between the African-American children and the interviewers (Geddie et al., 2000).

What in the interview increases the likelihood of false accounts?

Ceci and Huffman (1997) found in their literature review that the number of interviews and the length of the interval of time over which they were conducted resulted in the greatest level of suggestibility among children. They also outlined how in actual investigations of child abuse allegations, children are in fact interviewed many times by many different people over long period of times that can last up until years after the event. They report that before a child testifies in court, he or she has typically been interviewed 3.5 to 11 times.

Ceci and Huffman (1997) report that three main factors were found to increase the likelihood of false reports. Those are repeatedly interviewing a child with suggestive techniques over a long period of time, telling the child that someone he or she considers to be an authority (i.e. a parent) said the event did happen, and asking the child to create mental images of an event that did not happen repeatedly.

Bruck and Ceci (1999) emphasize that interviewer bias is a major factor as well. When interviewed by biased interviewers, Bruck and Ceci (1999) found that children often made inaccurate reports that were consistent with the interviewers' bias, even if the interviewer bias consisted of false beliefs. This means that when the interviewer had false beliefs, the children often gave an inaccurate report that matched the interviewer's beliefs. However, they found that if the interviewer was neutral, children's reports were accurate. Bruck and Ceci (1999) explain that when an interviewer is biased, his or her bias affects the way the interview is conducted and the questions that are asked to the child. In fact, Ceci and Huffman (1997) explain that when interviewers have a bias, they rarely test alternative hypothesis with the child during the interview. They found that research suggests that testing at least one plausible alternative hypothesis when the

interviewer holds a preferred hypothesis appears to minimize the risks of false accounts that can result from suggestions. Therefore, they encourage professionals who interview young children to think about and come up with alternative hypothesis that they can test at the same time they try to elicit statements that would confirm their main hypothesis.

The type of question also affects children's suggestibility. Bruck and Ceci (1999) found that open-ended questions (such as "Tell me what happened"), which rely on free recall, are more likely to elicit accurate details than specific questions (such as "Where did you hurt yourself?"). These in fact increase the likelihood of false reports. They explain that forced choice questions also increase children's suggestibility because children typically don't answer "I don't know" when they are asked a question, especially young children because of their being generally cooperative with adults.

Repeating specific questions and repeatedly suggesting information also increases the likelihood of false accounts. Bruck and Ceci (1999) found that when young children are repeatedly asked the same specific questions within the same interview or across different interviews, they are more likely to report inaccurate information. In addition, they may have started answering the specific questions by guessing only to cooperate but after a while they no longer seem to be guessing and appear to be very confident about what they are saying, omitting sentences such as "it might have been". Bruck and Ceci (1999) explain that some interviewers convey their bias not only through leading questions but also by giving information about the event to the child. When this is repeated across many interviews, this may increase the likelihood of false accounts. In one study, one year after an event occurred, children who were interviewed in a neutral way gave accurate reports about the event. However, children who were repeatedly given misinformation about the event not only reported the misleading suggestions to their interviewers but they also reported inaccurate events that had not been suggested to them but that were consistent with the other misleading suggestions. Bruck and Ceci (1999) also found that children are more likely to report a false information during the third suggestive interview than in the second one. They conclude that children may not benefit from being re-interviewed, which goes against the advice to re-interview the children because it supposedly helps them remember new and important details. In fact, they found studies that suggested that reports given during the first interview, as long as it is conducted by a neutral interviewer, are the most accurate.

Interviewers can also use faint verbal and non-verbal cues to set the emotional atmosphere during the interview and thus convey bias (Bruck and Ceci, 1999). For example, if the interviewer creates an atmosphere of accusation, children are more likely to report inaccurate information when asked misleading questions about events they actually don't remember experiencing. (Bruck and Ceci, 1999).

Bruck and Ceci (1999) have also found that if a child is told multiple times that a person "does bad things", he or she might believe it and report it to their interviewer.

Bruck and Ceci (1999) also found that the use of anatomically correct dolls did not help the children with reporting more accurate information. They even found that it appeared to increase the likelihood of false accounts among younger children (3-4 year-olds) when they were asked to use the dolls to show what had been done to them during a medical visit or show events that had actually never happened. They suggest that the children's inaccurate actions are likely to be the result of implicit suggestions that it was allowed to show sexualized behaviors. These suggestions were probably the consequence

of asking the children to use the dolls to show and talk about touching of the genitals. Furthermore, they suggest that because the dolls were new to them, children were likely to be drawn to explore the toys and insert fingers and other objects in their cavities.

Bruck and Ceci (1999) also report that guided imagery may be suggestive because it may feed into source misattributions errors, especially for young children.

Parents can also suggest false events and therefore increase the likelihood of false accounts (Bruck and Ceci, 1999).

Finally, Bruck and Ceci (1999) explain that the number of suggestive techniques used in an actual interview depends on how biased the interviewer is. Unfortunately, when different techniques are combined in one interview, their influence on suggestibility is much worse than that of single techniques, which is what is mostly studied in research. They found two studies that supported that finding. In these studies, children who had been interviewed with a combination of suggestive techniques accurately answered 42% of the questions, as compared with 83% for the children who were only asked leading questions.

What is the effect of suggestive interviews on children's credibility?

Ceci and Huffman (1997) explain that some experts claim that with the content-based criteria analysis (CBCA), they can successfully determine the validity of a child's statement. CBCA consists of 18 criteria and assesses the general characteristics, specific content and motivation-related content of a statement. The presence or absence of these criteria indicates the level of accuracy of the report that is being analyzed. However, Ceci and Huffman (1997) found that research actually suggested that it the right combination of the criteria to determine the accuracy of a child's report was not clear. Furthermore, Bruck and Ceci (1999) found that children's reports coming from suggestive interviewing appeared highly credible to trained professionals in the fields of child development, mental health and forensics. Those professionals were not able to discriminate between children whose reports were accurate from those whose reports were false. In fact, after repeated interviews, children's false reports had the same linguistic markers, including the same amount of spontaneous statements, details, adjectives, emotional terms, and dialogue statements, as did true narratives. However, they found two measures that would allow to differentiate to some extent true and false reports: across interviews, children who reported true events were more likely to be consistent with the same details, and some children who reported false accounts told more and more aggressive, exaggerated, and fantastical details.

Research Questions

Bruck and Ceci (1999) suggested that more research should be done on multiple suggestive techniques, which is more representative of what occurs in investigative interviews. They also encouraged more research on suggestibility, and what causes false reports, by studying children's responses to interviews over longer periods of time. Ceci and Huffman (1997) also encourage more research on what causes source misattribution.

Bruck and Ceci (1999) as well as Ceci and Huffman (1997), and Geddie et al. (2000), suggest that more research should be done on individual differences among same age children (preschoolers) and how they influence their suggestibility. They recommend studying cognitive, psychological, demographic and physiological factors. Geddie et al.

(2000) also recommend studying the impact of individual differences between child and interviewer.

Finally, more research is needed to determine how CBCA should be used when children have been repeatedly exposed to suggestions over long periods of time. (Ceci and Huffman, 1997).

What are the guidelines for interviewing children?

Lamb et al. (1998) encourage professionals to interview the child as soon as possible after the alleged events and to maintain an electronic record of the interview to disprove allegations that the child's testimony contained details suggested by the interviewer.

What can I do during the preparation phase of the interview?

Interviewers are encouraged to prepare themselves by gathering as much information as possible about the alleged events, the child's abilities and their motivations to be honest or misleading. It is essential to evaluate the child's linguistic competence informally before interviewing him or her. To do so, interviewers can observe informal conversations between the child and familiar adults accompanying him or her. This can help interviewers evaluate whether and when rapport has been established with the child, formulate questions with a developmentally appropriate language, and help them avoiding becoming impatient when child's responses are too short and thus being tempted to ask too many focused questions. (Lamb et al., 1998).

How important is the rapport building phase of the interview and how can I maximize its effectiveness?

Children are usually reticent with an unfamiliar adult and this makes them uncommunicative (Lamb et al., 1998). Monk (1998) recommends that interviewers discuss neutral topic such as school to help decrease the child's anxiety and establish a sense of rapport. She also suggests that this neutral conversation is another opportunity for interviewers to assess the child's emotional and developmental level, if it has not been done before. Lamb et al. (1998) recommend that such a neutral conversation be used to train the child in recalling and talking about a past event, such as birthday, to develop a response pattern in which detailed description from recall memory rather than yes/no responses predominate. During the conversation, interviewers should encourage the child to "really tell everything" about it, and emphasize that they expect to hear a detailed report and that they are really interested in the child's experiences. Research confirms that such training leads to increase in amounts of information provided by the child when they are asked the first question of the substantive part of the interview (Lamb et al., 1998).

Lamb et al. (1998) explain that children are generally used to being tested by adults, and are hardly treated as unique sources of information. Usually children know that the adults already know the answers to their questions. Therefore, the child needs to be motivated to give as much information and details as possible. Mulder and Vrij (1996) found in their study that the introduction of the two rules, "I don't know" is an acceptable answer and the interviewer will not be able to help the child answer the question, reduced suggestibility. The conversational rules of an interview are very different than those they

are used to with adults at school and at home. In both cases, children know that adults usually already have the relevant information and will help them find the answer to the question. Therefore the interviewer should explain to the child that this time, the interviewer does not know the answer to the questions he or she will ask, and that the child is the only one who can provide the information they are looking for. The interviewer should emphasize and make it clear that he or she will not be able to help the child in answering the questions. In fact, Mulder and Vrij (1996) have found some studies that have shown that children who were told they would not receive help from the experimenter to achieve a task did better than children who expected the experimenter's help. Research also suggests that incorrect answers often come from the assumption adults as well as children hold that they must answer all the questions, regardless of the fact they may not know the answer. In Mulder and Vrij's study, the effect of the two rules were tested on a group of very young children (4-5) and a group of older children (8-10). They found that the children gave fewer incorrect answers (26% vs. 40%) when they were explicitly told the interviewer could not help them answer the questions and children gave fewer incorrect answers (21% vs. 46%) when they were told that "I don't know" is an acceptable answer. Results for younger and older children are almost the same, suggesting that both age groups are influenced in the same way by the rules. They also found that the percentage of incorrect answers in the condition with both rules being told to children was the lowest (18%) as opposed to the results from the condition with no rules which were the highest (59%). They also found that the presence of both rules resulted in an increase in meaningful information reported by the children while the "I don't know" explanation alone lead to an increase in resistance to suggestion.

Geddie, Beer, Bartosik and Wuensch (2001) found that younger children did not benefit from such instructions about the interview rules as compared to older children, however they admit that they may not have explained the rules well enough to the younger children. Mulder and Vrij (1996) outlines the importance of giving an explanation which is clear to very young children and to make sure that the child has really understood the explanation. They also recommend to be careful with how the "expectancy of help" rule is explained. They suggest that putting too much emphasis on the fact that the adult cannot help the child can lead to a situation in which the child will feel abandoned. Yet interviewers need to emphasize this rule. Mulder and Vrij (1996) suggest that a way to avoid this is to compensate this rule with conducting the interview in locations perceived by the child to be safe and supportive.

How can I transition from the rapport building phase to the substantive phase of the interview?

Lamb et al. (1998) recommend interviewers to make the transition from the rapport-building phase to the substantive phase of the interview by saying something like: "I understand that something may have happened to you yesterday. Please tell me about that." Usually the child's response is very short and interviewers must be patient and remind the child again that they are really interested in detailed descriptions of what happened. Interviewers can elicit some more information from recall memory by coming back to a salient component of the child's account. Lamb et al. (1998) give the following example: "You mentioned it happened at Grandma's house. Tell me everything that happened from the minute that you got to Grandma's". Interviewers can also elicit more

information by feigning confusion and showing interest in all the details reported by the child. (Lamb et al., 1998).

How should I conduct the substantive phase of the interview?

Monk (1998) emphasizes the importance of using a language the child can understand and making sure he or she understands what you are saying, not assuming it. She also recommends asking the child to identify his or her own body parts so that interviewers can in turn use the child's words when discussing these body parts.

Since recognition memory is more prone to error than freely recalled information, Lamb et al. (1998) explain that it is essential to start by eliciting as much information as possible from recall memory. Monk (1998) explains the literature indicates that interviewers should begin with open-ended questions, and then focused questions, and then leading questions. Interviewers should work with the least suggestive techniques to the more suggestive ones.

Lamb et al. (1998) outline that unfortunately, open-ended questions usually yields incomplete reports, especially with preschoolers. This forces interviewers to start asking more focused questions early in the interview. Lamb et al. (1998) explain that even the most skillful interviewers have to use direct and leading questions. They state that using this type of questions does not invalidate the child's report provided that appropriate measures are used to minimize the potential risk of false accounts. In fact, this risk can be limited by the way the questions are framed and organized. First, if the interviewer has to use a focused question, they recommend the question be immediately followed with an open-ended question to make the child use their free recall memory again to expand on the topic the interviewer is trying to explore with the child. Lamb et al. (1998) give the following example: "Did anything ever happen in the living room?", then, "Tell me everything that happened there." They argue that this strategy minimizes the child's reliance on recognition memory and emphasizes recall memory. Second, if the focused question is a leading question, they recommend interviewers frame it as an indirect question (i.e. "What color is the sky?" instead of "Is the sky blue?"). Greenstock and Pipe found that younger children gave significantly fewer correct responses to directly misleading questions than they gave to indirectly misleading ones. For older children the accuracy did not differ between direct and indirect questions. Furthermore, younger children performed as well as older children when they were asked indirect misleading questions. When the misleading questions were indirect, children generally answered 74% of the questions correctly as compared to 25% among younger children when the misleading questions were direct. Finally, Lamb et al. (1998) recommend the interviewer wait until the end of the interview before asking leading questions and limit the suggestions as much as possible (i.e. "Did anything ever happened to your vagina?" instead of "Did he do anything to your vagina?"). Coercive repetition should also be avoided.

Lamb et al. (1998) recommend interviewers ask "Did this happen one time or more than one time?" if they want to determine whether multiple incidents occurred. In fact, they explain it is easier for young children to answer this question as opposed to questions such as "How many times". If the child answers "more than one time", they recommend that interviewers elicit more information by using time or location cues such as "the first time" or "the last time" or "the time it happened in the barn". This method of

interviewing the child may prevent the child from only making a general description of their abusive experiences.

What is cognitive interviewing and is it effective?

As explained in the previous sections, the amount of information a child can recall from free recall memory is dependent on his or her age, and younger children recall less than older children or adults. Therefore, interviewers have to resort to reconstruction memory, which is not dependent on age, to retrieve the information stored in the child's memory that can't be accessed through free recall. Reconstruction memory can include procedures such as revisiting or mentally reconstructing the scene where the alleged event occurred, reinstating the context in which it occurred, and the use of cues. Cognitive interviewing is an interview technique that explores this type of memory and procedures to enhance the child's report. In fact, it has helped even young children to give a more detailed report when interviewed. (Aldridge, 1999)

Cognitive interviewing uses two theoretical principles of memory. The first one is that memory includes many features and the more features overlap with the stored event, the more successful information retrieval will be because there are more pathways to access the desired information. If one pathway does not work, another one can be tried, and the more pathways there are, the more likely the child will eventually retrieve the information. The second principle is that the memory of an event is formed within a context and cues from this context can become associated to the memory of the event. This means that if a person is provided with these cues, this may trigger his or her memory of the associated event. This suggests that someone can recall more information about an event if they can return to the same physical or emotional state they were in at the time of the event. This return does not have to be "real", it can be imagined, pictured in details in the persons' mind. This is called state-dependent learning. (Aldridge, 1999)

Cognitive interviewing thus uses 4 main retrieval strategies. The first one is context reinstatement where the child is encouraged to manipulate concrete objects, draw pictures of the event. The child can also revisit the scene of the alleged event. He can also be asked to mentally recreate the scene of the event with details about the smells, touch sensations, noises, weather, etc. This last technique is called context reenactment. The second strategy is to instruct the child to report everything he can, even partial information and details he or she may not consider important (Aldridge, 1999). The theory behind this is that these unimportant details may provide the child with additional cues that may trigger his recalling crucial information (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). Furthermore, the "report everything" instruction may decrease social pressures for the child to evaluate the relevance of the information he or she wants to communicate. Thus, the level of anxiety may also be decreased (Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). The third strategy is to ask the child to recall the event in a variety of ways, in different time sequences (for example, telling the event backward, or starting from the most important moment and going back to what happened before that and after that, etc.). The last strategy is to ask the child to recall the event from different perspective (for example, when the event happened, what was the teddy bear on the couch seeing, etc.). (Aldridge, 1999)

Research indicates that using memory strategies to prompt a child's memory during an interview has resulted in children's reports containing significantly more

information and details with fewer errors. Several studies have examined the use of the cognitive interview with children and they all found positive results, with an average of 26% more accurate information and details without increasing incorrect information. As a result, cognitive interviewing has been acknowledged as one of the most successful interview techniques used in real-life investigations. (Aldridge, 1999).

However, not all the components of cognitive interviewing are as effective (Aldridge, 1999, Hayes and Delamothe, 1997). Hayes and Delamothe (1997) found that there were no significant problems with context reenactment. However, it is important to note that using the terms “pretend” and “imagine” was avoided. They also found that there did not appear to be specific issues with the “report everything” instruction or with the “reverse order” of recall strategy. Yet, it is important to remember that the ability to organize event sequences in the correct temporal order improves a lot in early childhood. Aldridge (1999) found that the strategy involving recalling the event from different perspectives was an issue for children and led to more false reports because, instead of reporting what they actually experienced, the children reported what logically could have happened. Hayes and Delamothe (1997) also remind the reader that it is to be expected that this strategy effectiveness will vary depending on the age of the child because major developmental changes in children’s perspective-taking ability occur during the preschool and early school years. In their study, the two components “report everything” and context reinstatement alone yielded significant positive results. This provides a solution to the disadvantage brought by the two other instructions, which effectiveness may depend on the child’s age. This suggests that using only the two strategies of “report everything” instruction and context reinstatement is enough to enhance significantly the child’s report.

Although cognitive interviewing has been found effective to increase the amount of correct information a child report, Hayes and Delamothe (1997) did not find a protective effect against misleading suggestions that were provided before the interview. Therefore, they recommend interviewing the child with this technique as soon as possible to prevent children from being exposed to misleading suggestions first. In fact, research has indicated that cognitive interviewing improves resistance to misleading suggestions offered to the child after the interview.

As with other interview techniques, the cognitive interview should start with a rapport building phase in which instructions about the interview should be provided to the children before the substantive phase begins. Research has indicated that children who practice the cognitive interview first by recalling important neutral event such as a holiday or a birthday have improved their performance during the substantive phase of the interview. (Aldridge, 1999). Hayes and Delamothe (1997) suggest that methods for instructing children in cognitive interview techniques may have to be modified according to the child’s age. They further suggest that children under 7 years-old may need a longer training phase (during the rapport building phase) in cognitive interviewing techniques to get the best report possible.

Saywitz, Geiselman and Bornstein (1992) recommend interviewers who want to use this technique to get training and guidelines to help them. In fact, they found that when the interviewer could use a set of guidelines when using the technique, the children recalled 45% more accurate information than in a standard interview, as compared to 26% more when interviewers were not using guidelines.

Cognitive interviewing is currently used with children aged 7 to 12. This technique may have negative effects by “facilitating enhancement of flashbacks, feeling as if the traumatic event were reoccurring, reliving the experience, intrusive thoughts and perceptions” (p. 122, Aldridge, 1999). However, this can provide a therapeutic opportunity to process these painful and traumatic memories and transform them into a healthier memory.

What is the Narrative Elaboration (NE) procedure and how effective is it?

The Narrative Elaboration (NE) procedure is a technique that was recently developed to provide interviewers with an intermediate step between free recall questions and specific questions. Its goal was to help children work around developmental limitations they have with their memory retrieval strategies. It uses four “reminder” cue cards that each contains a generic pictorial representation of four categories the interviewer wants information on during the interview. They are participants, setting, actions, and conversation and affective states. The interviewer trains the child in the use of the cards before starting the substantive interview. The substantive phase of the interview starts with open-ended questions, using free recall memory, as recommended by research guidelines. However, before the interviewer starts asking focused questions he will present each of the four cue cards and ask the child “Does this card remind you to tell anything more?”. Only after all the cards are presented will the more specific questions be asked. Children interviewed with NE procedure report a greater amount of accurate information, but not a greater amount of inaccurate information about staged events than do children presented with the cue cards but not trained in their use. (Camparo, Wagner and Saywitz, 2001)

The original NE procedure involves two training sessions and two videotaped segments, limiting its accessibility and usefulness. However Camparo et al. (2001) tested a shortened version that only involves a 20-minute training session and no videotaped material. All interviewers received around 12 hours of training in the use of the NE procedure, which included practice sessions with feedback and modeling. Camparo et al. (2001) found that the shortened version was as effective as the original one. Children trained and interviewed with this procedure reported greater amount of accurate information but no greater amount of inaccurate information about the event they were interviewed about, than children who were interviewed with the procedure but who had not been trained. They also found that both the NE procedure with and without training for the children resulted in a greater amount of accurate but no greater amount of inaccurate information than a standard interview. When children were asked misleading questions and suggested false events, the NE procedure did not lead to greater reports of false information relative to a standard interview or exposure to the cue cards without training. However, standard deviations were large, which suggests that some children may report significantly more false information when the cue cards are used than other children. However, 98% of the children ranging in age from 6 to 12 resisted to the suggestions of false events after the first free recall question and those who went on to provide false information consistent with the misleading questions did so after repeated questioning. NE procedure are designed to be used in situations where a child has already reported experiencing an event, which suggests that interviewers should probably not use cue cards with children who have denied experiencing an event when asked about it.

What is the effect of the interview environment on the child's report?

Greenstock and Pipe (1996) state that the judicial system does not always take pay attention to the child's level of stress during the event and when testifying, nor to their reaction to the courtroom environment. They found that some research suggested that social support at the time of an interview about a past event may improve the child's report of the event without increasing inaccurate information. They found that Moston and Engelberg (1990) reported that when a peer was present during the interview, the child recalled more accurate information during free recall than when the child was interviewed alone. Peer support was particularly effective when children were allowed to discuss the event just before the interview. This effect of peer support was attributed to the reduction of stress and the "presence of an active deterrent to compliance with misleading suggestions" (p. 70). In Greenstock and Pipe's study (1996), children between the age of 5 and 7 were interviewed in presence of another child from the same gender and were compared to children interviewed alone. Peer support did not influence children's reports about the event or their responses to questions. There was no significant difference in the level of anxiety in children interviewed alone or with a peer present. However, they suggest that the fact that the children being present during the interview were friends of the children being interviewed put more pressure on the children and did not have the expected supportive effect. Also, in this study, peers were asked to sit quietly and only observe during the interview, while in Moston's study they were encouraged to participate actively in it.

Orbach, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Sternberg and Horowitz (2000) studied the effect of environmental cues provided by visits to the scenes of alleged abuse and found no difference regarding the amount of information and details reported between the children who were taken to the scene of the crime and those who were interviewed in an office as usual. They hypothesize that the interruption in the child's interview to take him or her to the scene may have decreased the effect of the preparation phase of the interview and therefore canceled the eventual positive impact of environmental cues.

Research Question

More research is needed on the effect of interview rules in situations that cause more stress, in order to be closer to real-life situation (ex : visiting the doctor or dentist), The time lapse between event and an interview should also be varied. (Mulder and Vrij, 1996). Greenstock and Pipe (1996) recommend more research should be done on the impact of the form of a question on the accuracy of children's response.

Aldridge (1999) suggests more research is needed on cognitive interviewing techniques with preschool children. Hayes and Delamothe (1997) recommend more research on the effectiveness of the different components of the cognitive interview, on the effect of cognitive interview on, and on the effects of cognitive interviewing techniques used in a context closer to actual forensic conditions.

More research on NE procedures is needed to determine which children may be at greater risk for reporting false information with the cue cards and why. (Camparo et al., 2001).

Orbach et al. (2000) recommend more research on the impact of taking a child to the scene of the crime. Greenstock and Pipe (1996) also recommend more research on the influence of peer support. There was no literature on the influence of chaperone support during interviews.

How to improve interviewers' performances?

What is the effectiveness of traditional training?

Davey and Hill (1999) found that interview practice varied a lot and that some practices were at odds with the literature guidelines. In recent years, departments of social services have provided their staff with more and more sexual abuse interview training, which quality has also improved. However, these new training programs are yet to be evaluated in a rigorous way. (Doris, Mazur and Thomas, 1995).

Research suggests that although the mastery of knowledge is indispensable for practice, it is simple to provide it to workers and that the real difficulty is the acquisition of skills by workers. Lamb et al. (1998) evaluated the performance of interviewers who attended an intensive seminar consisting of 40 hours. In these training sessions, memory processes were described, children's linguistic and memory capacities were reviewed, factors influencing suggestibility were discussed and it was recommended that interviews be organized in a rapport-building phase, substantive phase and closure phase. The conceptual bases of statement validity analysis and CBCA were also explained to the interviewers. They reviewed videotapes of forensic interviews that illustrated appropriate and inappropriate use of both open-ended and focused questions. Interviewers in training were encouraged to ask questions and discussions were a big part of the training. Lamb et al. (1998) found that the interviewers who participated in the training continued to rely on focused questions to elicit information from children. They suggest that this outlines how difficult it is for interviewers to obtain information from children. It is even more difficult for interviewers who have little experience with children, receive little or no formal training, conduct investigative interviews infrequently and seldom review their interviews.

What is the most effective way to improve performance?

Lamb et al. (1998) suggest that interviewers have difficulty internalizing interview techniques guidelines and may need more explicit guidelines to take with them during the interview. They found that when forensic interviewers were required to follow very specific scripts in the rapport-building phase of their interviews, children were effectively "trained" in open-ended questions. This resulted in children providing two and a half as many details and words in response to the first question of the substantive part of the interview as children who were interviewed by interviewers who did not have a script to follow. These children then continued to provide more information all along the interview. Lamb et al. (1998) suggest detailed interview protocols or scripts are effective in making interviewers use open-ended questions or questions that are non suggestive as possible. They also outline the importance of continued peer review, training, and the systematic analysis of videotaped and transcribed interviews. Doris et al. (1995) also recommend more in-depth practicum training, as well as continuing expert supervision and ongoing education.

Research Questions

More research is needed in general to evaluate training programs, particularly in the area of worker competency in the performance of assigned tasks. (Doris et al., 1995).

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