

## **Forensic Interviewing: Variations on the single interview model**

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## **Agenda**

- Introduction of presenters
- The relevance of this presentation to social justice issues
- Rationale for a single interview
- Summary of the research on more than a single interview
- Ethical issues re a single interview
- NCAC variations on a single interview

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## **Single versus multiple interviews**

- Rationale for a single interview
  - May be less traumatizing than multiple interviews.
  - Effective use of interview (scarce) resources.
  - Avoids the perception or reality of programming the child.
- Rationale for more than a single interview
  - Gives the child more than one opportunity to disclose.
  - Gives the interviewer more information and more confidence in the decision.
  - May be helpful with children who are not in active disclosure when concerns arise.
  - May be useful in resolving complex and inconclusive cases.
  - May help various types of children in overcoming barriers to disclosure.

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**Why Does Our Presentation  
Relate to Social Justice Issues?**

- There is scant research on disclosures of African American versus White children’s disclosures, but the research indicates children of color are less likely to disclose sexual abuse.
- Children whose families are of color may well be less likely to trust child welfare interviewers, which may inhibit disclosures.
- Research in other domains indicates that child welfare professionals are less responsive to citizens of color, including children.

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**Why Does Our Presentation  
Relate to Social Justice Issues?**

- The research is scant and mixed, but it suggests that children are less likely to disclose abuse to interviewers whose ethnicity differs from their own.
- A social justice issue demands children from disadvantaged groups get more than one chance to tell, when they may have been abused.

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**RESEARCH ON MORE THAN  
A SINGLE INTERVIEW**

- Hershkowitz & Turner, 2007. The effects of repeated interviewing on children’s forensic statements of sexual abuse. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 31, 1131-1143.
- LaRooy, Pipe, & Murray, 2007. Enhancing children’s event recall after long delays. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 21, 1-17.
- La Rooy, D., Lamb, M., & Pipe, M.-E. (2009). Repeated Interviewing: A critical evaluation of the risks and potential benefits. In K. Kuehnle & M. Connell (Eds.) *Child Sexual Abuse: Research, Evaluation, and Testimony for the Courts*(pp. 327-364). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Patterson & Pipe, (2009) Exploratory assessments of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33 (8), 450-504.
- Leander, (2010). Police interviews with child sexual abuse victims. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34, 192-205.
- La Rooy, Katz, Malloy, & Lamb, (2010) Do we need to rethink guidance on repeated interviews? *Psychology, Public Policy, & the Law* 16, 373-392.

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## MORE RESEARCH

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, 118-129.

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2020, December 7). Adherence to the Revised NICHD Protocol Recommendations for Conducting Repeated Supportive Interviews Is Associated With the Likelihood That Children Will Allege Abuse. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/law0000295>.

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## STILL MORE RESEARCH

Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M.E., Blasbalg, U., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2021). The dynamics of two-session interviews with suspected victims of abuse who are reluctant to make allegations. Available from Michael E. [Lamb--mel37@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mel37@cam.ac.uk)

Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M., & Katz, C. (2014). Allegation rates in forensic child abuse interviews: Comparing the Revised NICHD and Standard NICHD Protocols. *Psychology, Public Policy, & Law*, 20(5), 336-346.

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### **Herhskowitz & Turner (2007). The effects of repeated interviewing on children's forensic statements of sexual abuse**

- Israeli Youth Investigator research
- 40 children (6-13 years) suspected of sexual abuse interviewed using the NICHD protocol
- Same investigator for both interviews
- 2 interviews with a 30 minute break in between; child given materials to draw during the break
- Second interview started with free recall of abuse related material, no rapport building

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**Hershkowitz & Terner (2007)**

- Interviewer behaviors
  - Spoke more in the first than second interview
  - Asked more open-ended questions in the second interview
- Information from the child
  - Greater proportion of central details in second interview
  - Second interview yielded new details, about 1/4 of the total.

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**Hershkowitz & Terner (2007)**

- Only 37% of the information from the first interview was repeated in the second interview.
- The children's narratives were better organized in the second interview.
- Note that these were not children who received a second interview because results of the first interview were incomplete or unsatisfactory.

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**Orbach, Y., Lamb, M. E., La Rooy, D., & Pipe, M-E (2012).**

- A case study of a 9-year-old witness to her sister's abduction at night.
- Over 6 interviews the witness was consistent in recall of events.
- Four months after the first interview, she recalled the abductor's voice and identity, which led to her sister's rescue.
- Her sister corroborated her account.

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**Blasbalg, Hershkowitz, Lamb, & Karni-Visel (2020)**

- 202 Israeli children, ages 3-14, who exhibited reluctance to disclose were interviewed using the Revised NICHD Protocol.
- These children received a second interview.
- 104 children disclosed during the second interview.
- Disclosure was associated with interview support, use of invitational probes, and the absence of close-ended questions.

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**Failure to Disclose in High Certainty Cases**

- Lyon, T. (2007) False denials: Overcoming methodological biases in abuse disclosure research. In M.E. Pipe, M. Lamb, Y. Orbach, & A. Cederborg (Eds.), *Disclosing abuse: Delays, denials, retractions, and incomplete accounts*, (pp. 41-62). Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Earlbaum.
- Reviewed 21 studies involving children with gonorrhoea, 1965 to 1993.
- 579 children.
- Of these children, 250 (43%) provided some sort of disclosure.
- When children younger than 3 or whose age couldn't be determined, were eliminated from the sample, 16 studies.
- 42% of the children (185/437) made some sort of report.

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**Hershkowitz, Lamb, & Katz, 2014**

- 426 4-13 year old alleged victims of intrafamilial abuse with corroborating evidence were randomly assigned to either the Revised NICHD or Standard NICHD Protocol.

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### Hershkowitz, Lamb & Katz (2014)

Standard NICHD protocol (N = 165)

#### Disclosure Failure Rate

Total Samples 49.7

Prior Disclosure

Yes 36.4

No 56.4

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### Hershkowitz, Lamb & Katz (2014)

Revised NICHD protocol (N = 261)

#### Disclosure Failure Rate

Total Sample 40.7

Prior Disclosure

Yes 24.4

No 48.5

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### Reappraisal of Current FI Practice

- We have relied on the single-session-only interview format since the early 1990s.
- The single-session-only format has a high rate of disclosure failures.
- Many true cases of abuse are therefore missed or mistakenly unsubstantiated, leaving child victims to fend for themselves against their abusers.

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**APSAC Code of Ethics (1997)**

“We conduct ourselves at all times in a manner consistent with the best interests of the child, and hold this principle above all others. We recognize that determining what constitutes the best interests of a child can be a complex undertaking, requiring analysis of varying values, interests, cultural differences, and childhood needs and capabilities. When certain objectives or purposes compete, the APSAC member makes the best interests of the child the priority in evaluating alternatives.” (p. 2)

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**“In the best interests of the child,” when a single session may not be sufficient:**

1. Young chronological or developmental age
2. Language or cultural issues that impede communication
3. Significant symptoms of psychological trauma (e.g., dissociation)
4. Major rapport, attention, or separation problems

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**“In the best interests of the child”**

5. Significant anxiety, fear, or distress observed in interview or reported by caregivers
6. Significant barriers to disclosure reported or suspected (e.g., perpetrator is a close family member).
7. Concerns about external influences on child (e.g., coaching; threats; perpetrator with access)

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**“In the best interests of the child”**

- 8. Non-disclosure despite credible prior disclosure or other substantive evidence of abuse
- 9. Child’s account vague, incomplete, inconsistent, or contradictory
- 10. Significant discrepancies in child’s current account vs. prior account or other substantive evidence

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**“In the best interests of the child”**

- 11. Complex case history (e.g., poly-victimization; counter-accusations in a custody dispute)
- 12. Additional perpetrator(s) or multiple events likely

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**Ethics of Single-Session-Only Format**

- Single-session-only ≠ ethical practice
- Single-session-only ≠ accepted practice
- Single-session only ≠ best practice

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## Variable-Session Format

### Variable-session interview

Interviewer has the option, as needed, to conduct one or more follow-up sessions or to refer the child for multiple or extended interviews.

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## Adoption of Variable-Session Format

- Retooling of current FI training programs
- Supplemental training of substantial numbers of current forensic interviewers.

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## The Great Unknown

Who will provide the leadership for this reformation in our field?

- Top down?
- Bottom up?

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### References

Everson, M. D. (2021). Do ethical standards apply to forensic interviewers? *APSAC Advisor*, 33(1), 40-46.

Everson, M. D., & Rodriguez, S. M. (2020). Why forensic balance should be recognized as a foundational best practice standard. *APSAC Advisor*, 32(2), 92-99.

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### Other Models of More than a Single Interview

- Neither model is just a forensic interview.
- APSAC Forensic Mental Health Evaluations of Children in Suspected Child Maltreatment Cases
  - In draft;
  - Will recommend more than a single interview session with the child.
- Extended Forensic Assessments—6 sessions

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