



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Journal of Experimental Child Psychology

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp)



## High accuracy but low consistency in children's long-term recall of a real-life stressful event



Gunn Astrid Baugerud\*, Svein Magnussen, Annika Melinder

Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, 0317 Oslo, Norway

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 21 June 2013

Revised 30 May 2014

#### Keywords:

Memory accuracy

Memory consistency

Autobiographical memory

Stressful events

Maltreated children

Repeated interviewing

### ABSTRACT

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.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Accuracy in episodic memory refers to correspondence between memory reports and documentation of what actually happened; consistency in memory refers to agreement between memory reports at different points in time (Koriat, 2012; van Giezen, Arensman, Spinhoven, & Wolters, 2005). Both are considered important factors in the evaluation of memory in real-life forensic settings, where low

\* Corresponding author. Fax: +47 22 84 50 01.

E-mail address: [gunnba@psykologi.uio.no](mailto:gunnba@psykologi.uio.no) (G.A. Baugerud).

consistency has been interpreted as indicating unreliable memory and inconsistent reports over time are judged as less likely to be true than events that have been consistently reported (Brainerd & Reyna, 2005). Research indicates that these perceptions can affect the assessment of children in forensic situations when they are interviewed multiple times, with the extent to which their memory reports are consistent with one another influencing perception of their reliability (Ceci & Bruck, 2006). However, this is a false assumption. High consistency in successive episodic memory reports does not inevitably imply high accuracy and, vice versa, low consistency does not imply low accuracy; information that is consistently reported may be inaccurate, and novel information may be either inaccurate or accurate (La Rooy, Katz, Malloy, & Lamb, 2010).

In forensic contexts, children are typically interviewed about stressful incidents that occurred weeks, months, or even years earlier, and they are often interviewed on multiple occasions with intervals between interviews lasting weeks. Children's long-term memory of stressful personal experiences has been studied in the context of real-life events such as painful medical procedures (Peterson, Moores, & White, 2001; Quas et al., 1999), natural disasters (Ackil, Van Abbema, & Bauer, 2003; Fivush, Sales, Goldberg, Bahrick, & Parker, 2004), and physical injuries (Peterson, 1999; Peterson & Whalen, 2001), and studies have tried to emulate the pattern of interviewing found in real life. These studies have shown that, in general, children remember such events well but that their memory reports are not necessarily consistent over time (Fivush et al., 2004). Ghetti, Goodman, Eisen, Quin, and Davis (2002) interviewed children about a physical examination that was conducted 3 days before the interview as part of a legal investigation into suspected abuse, and the children were then reinterviewed after another 3 days. The results showed that older children were more consistent in their reports than younger children. Similar results were reported by Baker-Ward, Gordon, Ornstein, Larus, and Clubb (1993) using longer intervals between interviews. Sometimes children introduced new information in successive interviews; Cederborg, LaRooy, and Lamb (2008) interviewed children with intellectual disabilities who were suspected victims of abuse and found that a substantial amount of the information added in repeated interviews was new information, and Hershkowitz and Terner (2007) reported that children who were reinterviewed about alleged sexual abuse reported nearly 25% new information in the second interview. Potential explanations for some of these differences have included the children's age. In a recent study, O'Neill and Zajac (2013) interviewed 5- and 6-year-old and 9- and 10-year-old children about a surprise event and found that when the children were reinterviewed, the accuracy of their memory reports decreased. In particular, younger children made more changes in their memory reports and reported less correct information than older children. Concerns have been raised that younger children are more error prone than older children when questioned repeatedly about an event (Bruck & Ceci, 2004; Schaaf, Alexander, & Goodman, 2008).

It should be noted, however, that the emergence of new information in repeated interviews does not necessarily imply reduced accuracy of memory reports. The reminiscence phenomenon, or the emergence of new, correct, previously unreported information when people are repeatedly interviewed, is well documented in laboratory studies (Gilbert & Fisher, 2006; Payne, 1987) and confirmed by field research (La Rooy et al., 2010). Repeated interviewing may have the effect of enhancing recall of new details while retaining previously recalled information (Gordon, Baker-Ward, & Ornstein, 2001). A number of studies examining repeated interviewing with children, reviewed by La Rooy and colleagues (2010), reported that children may recount new information in subsequent interviews and that a fairly high percentage of the new information was correct when children were interviewed across short time intervals. Recall delays of months reduced the accuracy of new information, producing an accuracy rate of approximately 50% (La Rooy et al., 2010). In a recent case study, Orbach, Lamb, La Rooy, and Pipe (2012) examined the consistency of a 9-year-old's repeated accounts of her older sister's abduction from their shared bedroom. Six forensic interviews were conducted over a 4-month period, and the results suggested that even if new details appeared in repeated interviews across several months, most of the information was accurate and the core content remained stable, indicating high consistency in the child's memory reports. Recently, Odinet, Memon, La Rooy, and Millen (2013) examined the effect of repeated interviews on adult participants' memory performance and found that consistency was not strongly related to accuracy.

Assessing the consistency of memory reports entails making comparisons between successive reports of an event. Evaluations of accuracy and the relationship between accuracy and consistency

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7275410>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7275410>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)