

Children in eyewitness essay sample



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Children's Eyewitness Memory for Multiple Real-Life Events Uniforms Affect the Accuracy of Children's Eyewitness Identification Decisions The Effect of Repeated Questioning on Children's Accuracy and Consistency in Eyewitness Testimony

Eyewitnesses have always played a significant role in criminal justice system and gradually gain its importance in courtroom proceeding. The presence of eyewitnesses in courtroom is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of jury in decision-making and could greatly alter the outcome of criminal prosecution. In the past few years, the controversial issue of whether a child is a legitimate eyewitness has drawn high attention of social scientists and members of legal profession, and till now, it remains a hot topic among psychologists. Many psychologists and researchers doubt the credibility and the accuracy of children eyewitness and children's abilities of free-recalling after a stressful event. Since eyewitness evidence has the potential to influence jury in decision-making, the age aspect of this problem is critical in eyewitness testimony. Children's Eyewitness Memory for Multiple Real-Life Events The scientific studies has shown that the fallibility of children eyewitnesses is somewhat higher than adult eyewitnesses based on their past experience and prior knowledge (Joseph, Hartmut, & James, 2010).

A study conducted by Valerie and Charles (2009) examined children's accuracy of free recall for a series of similar real-life events and whether children's prior knowledge will influence recognition memory. Forty children, aged from 5 to 12 years old, were invited to four birthday parties with different themes and were interviewed about the parties 10 days later. Each party consisted of three different areas: crafts, stories, or games.

Participants were allocated to different group based on their age and went to different areas. While in a given area, participants completed one thematic activity and one generic activity. Then after 10 days, children will be interviewed about the multiple events. The prediction of the study was that older children would demonstrate better free recall and recognition for thematic events because they would be better at connecting the specific episodes with thematic theme. The result demonstrated that older children indeed did better than younger children at making meaning-based connections across multiple events. The data also showed that older children ranging from 7 to 12 years old had some degree of prior knowledge which helped them to improve the ability of accurately recalling past events. Moreover, according to Sarah, Mark and Christine (2009), prior knowledge and metacognitive monitoring processes could enhance true memory and decrease memory inaccuracy.

Prior knowledge is somewhat similar to a gist memory and it captures the overall meaning of an episode. A verbatim memory, on the other hand, captures the specific details of an event and is encoded along with gist memory trace. Verbatim memory traces become inaccessible more quickly than gist traces due to increased interference (Reyna, Mills, Estrada, & Brainerd, 2007). Therefore, based on the gist of an episode, younger children's capability of reconstructing a specific event were interfered, and it could lead them to report things that did not happen when the incident took place. Internal Validity: The participants were not randomly assigned to different groups; rather they were divided into groups based on their age. Additionally, the number of the children in each of the age groups varied; in

specific the proportion of male children in young age group (i. e. 5-9 years old) outweighed the proportion of female children. In contrast, there were more female children than male children in older age group (i. e. 10-12 years old). Thus gender might be a confound variable in this study; therefore, it has low internal validity. External Validity: For this study, it was not clear about how the researchers selected their participants as sample. The study only provided the age, gender, ethnic origin, and number of participants.

Construct Validity: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development protocol was used to measure children's ability of free recall. In addition, to test recognition memory, photographs of each of the events were shown to each participant. Half of the photograph was taken during the time of thematic parties but the other half did not take place at any of the parties. The participants had to provide as much as information they knew with each of the different pictures. This is a reliable method to measure children's cued recall memory and test children's recognition ability of differentiating a true from a lie. Uniforms Affect the Accuracy of Children's Eyewitness Identification Decisions This study examined children's recall accuracy under social pressure and whether or not the presence of uniforms had an effect on children's performance in eyewitness identification. Joseph, Hartmut and James (2010) investigated children's ability of accurately identifying targets under stress in target-present and target-absent line-ups. Certain predictions were made: when a uniformed administrator was presented, children will make more identification, which will reduce accuracy if the target is not in the line-up; in the meanwhile, children will experience

anxiety during the procedure and therefore higher anxiety should be associated with poorer performance.

Sixty participants, 31 male and 29 female aged from 9-10 years old, witnessed a mock crime before identification procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to different groups and were asked to identify the perpetrator when either the uniform man or the target was present or was absent. The observer then will record the number of times a participant identified somebody (choosing) and the number of correction (accuracy). This line-up identification study demonstrated that young children performed significantly worse when the line-up presented did not contain the actual culprit compared to adults, but compliance towards authority decreased with the increase of age. Stefanie and Claudia (2006) had suggested that the effect of authority and social influence could influence children's decisions and when adult expected the child to choose someone; therefore the child would feel pressured to choose an answer. Besides, social factors were other indicators in children eyewitnesses: Children assumed that an adult would not provide the task if the culprit was not presented, and hence children, through a reluctance to admit uncertainty, will still provide the answer regardless of the confidence in the selection. Sarah and Mark (2006) also noted that due to 'status and power differentials' between children and adults, children's decisions are easily to be influenced in an interview situation if they know someone, especially an authority figure, anticipated them giving the desirable answer.

Nevertheless, children may not know that if it is acceptable to say 'I don't know' when they have no clue about the answer in eyewitness testimony.

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Internal Validity: The internal validity of this study is remarkably high since they did use random assignment by which the children were allocated.

Through randomly assigning children into different conditions, the researchers vastly diminished within-group variability. In other words, the individuality (e. g., IQ, experience, personality) of each child would not be held accountable to the dependent variable in this study. It's the key control with which ensures the casual relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

External Validity: Since the researchers in this study did not randomly select their sample from the population, rather they approached children and parents from an elementary school. It suggests the low ability to represent the whole pupil population in UK. Thus gives them low external validity.

Construct Validity: The study is high in construct validity since the measures used in the study measure the variables they were designed to measure. By analyzing the numbers of choosing and correct identification, the observers could measure the accuracy of children's identification. Also, the presence of uniforms manipulated children's performance. The Effect of Repeated Questioning on Children's Accuracy and Consistency In Eyewitness

Testimony

Sometimes children's false memories could be created by leading questions and incessant, and their information could be inattentively misled by investigators during interview. Similarly, the experiment conducted by Sarah, Mark, and Christine (2009) demonstrates that repetition can affect children's performance and also has a main effect on the likelihood of changing responses during children eyewitness testimony. The purpose of this study

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was to find out whether or not repeating questions will result in a decline in accuracy and increase children's suggestibility. To test children's inconsistency, 156 participants ranged in from age 4 to 9 years old experienced an event in their classrooms, and they will be interviewed individually for the event a week later. The participants were divided into three groups based on their age: The first group consisted of 57 children aged 8 to 9, the second group had 51 children aged 6 to 7 and the third group had 48 children aged 4 to 5. During the interview, each question will be asked for five times. The repetition was manipulated so that the repeated question will immediately follow the question after it was first asked.

Two types of question will be asked: answerable questions, which could be answered from information that children watched in the event, and unanswerable questions, which could not be answered. After interviewing each child, the observer found out that children were more likely to change their answers if the questions were being repetitively asked throughout the experiment because children mostly assumed that a repeated question implied that the original answer was wrong or undesirable. Furthermore, the interview was held one day after the event took place, which could distort children's memory about the initial event. Annika, Kristen, Young, Gail, Christian, Kyrre, & Svein (2010) found that the effect of delay could be a potentially serious problem of target misidentification. The longer the delay time is; the possibility of forgetting is exponentially greater. Memory could be distorted, and post event misinformation could lead to wrongful memory retrieval as memory fades (Neil, Amber, & James, 2010).

Internal Validity: The researchers assigned participants to different three groups based on their age, so there was no control group in this study. Other internal validity issues could be order effect, for example, fatigue could be built up by numerous repetitions throughout the experiment, and thus children's performance could be affected. Additionally, Children were interviewed one week later after the event took place, thus history effect could be also involved. External Validity: The study is low in external validity because the participants were not randomly selected from the population. All children, in fact, were exclusively from lower to middle-class families and lived in a small town in UK. The sample could not represent the wider population in real world situations. Construct Validity: Multiple repetitions were used to measure how repeated questioning affected children's performance. Therefore, we can say that this study has high construct validity.

Critique

Outside the laboratory, there is a growing number of evidence highlighting problems with children's misidentification. In many cases, a miss identification made by children eyewitnesses also contributes to miscarriages of justice. Although DNA testing of evidence can yield conclusive proof of innocence of men, mistaken identification is illustrated as the primary basis for conviction. Therefore, recognition memory and free recall ability are essential for children eyewitnesses. These three studies indicated that older children perform greater chance of resisting misinformation compared to younger children.

Thus how to minimize age-related differences in the ability of children to increase resistance to false memory and therefore accurately identify a wanted target has become the primary task in children eyewitness testimony. So far the most important task in child eyewitness is to decrease young children's suggestibility and to maintain the same answers while the questions are being asked second time. The interviewer can gather the information more accurately with three methods: encouraging the child witness to provide as many details as possible, carefully organizing the order of questioning, and using open-ended questions with no time frame instead of close-ended questions to enable a better conversation. All of these tactics could lower the rate of misidentification in children eyewitnesses thereby increase the chance of correct rejection in eyewitness investigation.

Reference

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