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Jurors' Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure Patterns

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Jurors’ Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure Patterns

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Thesis submitted to
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
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Abstract
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Hannah Elias

The process of child disclosure of sexual abuse can be complex. Children often disclose abuse consistently across settings (continuous disclosure), though there is research to support that children may deny abuse or recant their allegations despite the abuse having truly occurred (London et al., 2008; Bradley & Wood, 1996; Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). In this study, data was collected from voluntary MTurk users ($N = 688$). Mock jurors responded to a survey assessing perceptions of child credibility, defendant guilt, and child susceptibility to external influence in response to each CSA disclosure pattern (continuous disclosure, denial, recantation). Additionally, expert witness testimony regarding typical child disclosure processes (present or absent) and child age (4- to 8-years-old) acted as independent variables. A number of significant results emerged with respect to disclosure patterns and expert witness presence. Forensic implications and future directions are discussed.
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Jurors’ Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure Patterns

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is tragically common in the United States. It is estimated that every nine minutes, evidence consistent with CSA is discovered by child protective services (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). However, the nature of CSA cases, if they reach court, is complex for several reasons. Cases are generally based on witness testimony rather than hard evidence, as many instances of abuse do not leave a physical mark (London et al., 2008). This often places jurors in a difficult position, basing decisions on the reports of children.

CSA cases are further complicated by the typical nature of child disclosure. Children are often reluctant to disclose sexual abuse and may deny it due to embarrassment or fear (Sorenson & Snow, 1991; Leander, Christianson, & Granhag, 2007). Relatedly, children sometimes recant their allegations (Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). Existing literature uncovers some aspects of the sexual abuse disclosure process, though an answer to the question of how children disclose remains complex, multifaceted, and incomplete.

Denial

Denial of sexual abuse occurs when a victim falsely claims that they have not experienced abuse. This phenomenon has been documented in the CSA literature in several studies. Sorensen and Snow (1991) investigated the process of sexual abuse disclosure for children, particularly examining the role of denial. The authors retrospectively analyzed case information in the form of clinical notes, conversation, and video and audio recordings from their past psychotherapy clients who had reported sexual abuse. In total, 116 cases of alleged abuse were analyzed, all of which were corroborated via a confession by the offender, a criminal court
conviction, or medical evidence consistent with sexual abuse. The victims ranged in age from 3- to 17-years-old with the majority being female (62%). Results showed that almost 75% of children denied the abuse at some point, typically when the children were first questioned either formally (in forensic interviews/court) or informally (by family, teachers, or friends). Denial, in this study, was defined as a child’s indication that they had not been abused, either when first questioned by a caregiver or in the initial formal investigation. After denial, children typically disclosed tentatively, giving only partial or vague information. Only 10% of children gave a report of the abuse without denying or giving tentative disclosures at some point. Full disclosures were eventually given by 96% of children. Additionally, 22% of children recanted and almost all (92%) of those 22% that recanted later reaffirmed the allegations. A recantation occurs when a child reneges a previous claim (i.e. “taking back” their story of sexual abuse).

In an earlier study, Bradley and Wood (1996) were interested in discovering patterns within children’s sexual abuse disclosures by examining the rate of occurrences such as denial. To do so, data were collected from 234 abuse cases (82% female) pulled from the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services in El Paso, Texas. Analyses showed that most victims (72%) disclosed abuse to a friend, family member, or teacher before making a report with police (the remaining 28% to which children first disclosed are unspecified). Some victims (6%) denied the abuse during the first non-forensic interview, but of those cases, over 50% completely disclosed the abuse in the same or the next interview with the police. Denial was further examined exclusively in 121 of the 234 cases in which maltreatment was confirmed by other means, and denial occurred in 7% of these cases.

Leander (2010) was also interested in CSA denial and performed a retrospective study examining primarily female children’s (5- to 7-years-old) denial and omission of verified abuse
information in CSA cases. Cases \((N = 27)\) were collected for analysis from various criminal investigations departments across Sweden. Case inclusion requirements included documentation (photo or video evidence) of the abuse occurring or nearly identical accounts from abusers and the children or other witnesses. Abuse information was gathered from forensic interview dialogue, and experimenters coded the details given by the children in their interviews.

Experimenters also coded omissions (children failing to answer questions about abuse details, conceptualized as avoidance by the authors) and denials (children denying details of abuse). Findings showed that the sample of children \((n = 27)\) provided 851 details. Children avoided talking about sexual abuse a total of 157 times during the first interview and denied verified abuse 95 times during the interviews. Abuse frequency did not significantly impact avoidance, but children who were abused consistently for greater than 6 months often denied maltreatment more than children maltreatment several times. Similarly, children subjected to intercourse denied treatment more often than children who were fondled.

Another investigation was performed to determine how much and what type of information children report about their sexual abuse experiences (Leander, Christianson, & Granhag, 2007). In particular, experimenters evaluated for denial and recantation within the disclosure process. The data for this study was gathered using forensic interview transcripts from the Criminal Investigation Department in Sweden, and all sexual assault cases involved the same perpetrator, who was a stranger to each child. The children ranged in age from 3- to 10-years-old, and the group was made of two boys and six girls \((total \ n = 8)\). The assaults were verified with photographic and video evidence, and the perpetrator voluntarily described each assault in detail. The police interviews provided information about the child’s age, type of assault, location of the assault, and so forth. Findings revealed that the children provided 135 details during
forensic interviews; 21.5% were sexual details, 51% were sensitive details, and 27.5% were neutral details. Five of the children did not report any sexual details. Of all the details reported, only 7.6% were about sexual acts. In total, the children either denied or displayed avoidance in reporting verified events 97 times. The youngest children (ages 3-5) denied the most details and the oldest three children (ages unspecified) in the full sample denied the least. There was one allegation made by a victim that was not supported by the perpetrator’s description of events (that he punched the child).

McElvaney, Greene, and Hogan (2012) outlined a process that children typically adhere to when disclosing sexual abuse. These common stages were determined by studying the disclosure patterns of 21 children, ranging from ages 8- to 18-years-old. The data were collected from the children in a semi-structured interview after they reported to an Irish hospital. Across interviews, a typical feature of the disclosure process was active withholding. Active withholding results from children wishing to hide the abuse and often takes the form of denial or disclosure to a close peer only. Many children provided the interviewers with examples of past abuse denial, primarily to friends and family. Another aspect of the disclosure process is the “pressure cooker effect” which features a feeling of ambivalence toward disclosure. Children reported feeling distressed in this stage, as though immense pressure was building to let the secret out. The third and final part of the disclosure process is confiding, in which children disclose their experiences. The authors conclude by noting that these stages (active withholding, pressure cooker effect, and confiding) are not necessarily sequential, and that past disclosure experiences may influence future disclosure processes.

Azad and Leander (2015) evaluated maltreatment cases for differences in the disclosure patterns of sexually abused children ($n = 22$) compared to those of physically abused children ($n$
They also examined rates of the children’s denial of verified abuse-related information. Child reports were drawn from transcribed police interviews, and each child was interviewed twice across an unknown timespan. Abuse was verified by photographic or video documentation or a conviction of the perpetrator. Resistance to giving information was coded into two categories: omission/avoidance (failing to provide information, hereafter referred to as omissions), and denials (claims that the event detail did not occur). There was no difference in the number of denials nor omissions instances where physically and sexually abused children were compared. In the initial police interview, children provided a total of 224 details. Children denied information 93 times, and omitted information 413 times (CSA cases: 35 instances of denial, 154 instances of omittance). A significant effect emerged such that omission of details decreased between the first and second interviews, but denial rates did not significantly change. Additionally, age was significantly negatively correlated with omission, but not denial.

In summary, the literature suggests the child denials are commonplace in CSA cases. Often, children denied at least part of the complete abuse experience (Leander, 2010; Leander, Christianson, & Granhag, 2007). Literature varies in the rates of denial of an entire abuse event from 7% of children to 75% of children (Bradley & Wood, 1996; Sorenson & Snow, 1991). It is unlikely that all denials are true indicators that the maltreatment did not occur; in cases with a high likelihood of true abuse, instances of child denial are present (e.g., Bradley & Wood, 1996). Children subjected to intercourse were more likely to deny than children who were touched and younger children were more likely to deny than older children (Leander, 2010; Leander, Christianson, & Granhag, 2007). Researchers have theorized about children’s motivation for denial, resulting in several plausible explanations. For instance, Leander (2010), noted that children may deny sexual abuse due to their perception of personal responsibility or from shame.
Other potential reasons for denial include fear of retaliation and embarrassment (Sorenson & Snow, 1991; Lyon, 1995). Importantly, denial can occur after an initial disclosure, in which case a child would disaffirm their previous allegation. This type of denial is known as recantation.

**Recantation**

While recantation is not typical in CSA cases, it is undeniably present. London et al. (2008) performed a review of the CSA literature to examine child victim’s delay of disclosure, the merits of retrospective studies, various sampling procedures, and recantation. The recantation review included ten studies, focused particularly on the rates of recantation across the CSA literature. Recantation rates in these studies ranged from 4%-27%. However, the authors note that the study with the highest recantation rate (27%) includes a sample of children involved with the famous McMartin preschool case featuring unfounded allegations against daycare workers (Gonzalez et al., 1993). Six of the ten total studies featured cases that were included based on high credibility of CSA claims, according to London and colleagues. These five studies with substantiated cases ranged from 4-9% recantation rates, except for one study (at 23%) discussed subsequently in this document (Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007).

A study not included in the aforementioned review, O’Donohue and colleagues (2013), observed children’s sexual abuse disclosure process by examining the frequency of recantations, inconsistencies in reported details, and fantastical details within disclosure reports (O’Donohue et al., 2013). Retrospective interviews were conducted with victims of child/adolescent sexual abuse ($N = 97, 82$ female). Cases were required to include evidence of truthful allegations, such as perpetrator arrest, successful prosecution of the perpetrator, or sufficiently convincing eyewitness/DNA evidence. Even though most clinicians identified the reports as “very detailed” (67%), 27.8% were minorly detailed, and 5.2% were “not at all detailed,” recantations occurred
in 12 (12.4%) of cases. Of cases in which the context of recantation was known, four occurred in court, one occurred when the perpetrator was allowed back in the home, and four occurred during a forensic interview.

Bradley and Wood (1996), whose study is outlined in the denial section above, found a 3% recantation rate of victims who disclosed abuse, had medical evidence of abuse, whose abuser confessed, and whose case appeared in criminal court. Of the 8 victims, one recanted after her abuser moved back into her home, two had been told to recant by their mothers (with one later reaffirming the abuse), two others were suspected to have been pressured to recant and one reaffirmed abuse later, one recanted only partially (stated she could not remember two of the incidents she reported at first) and later reaffirmed the abuse.

To explore the possibility that the reason for recantation was that maltreatment allegations were untruthful from the outset, Malloy, Lyon, and Quas (2007) investigated CSA recantation prevalence within the context of dubious cases. Dubious cases include those lacking implicating evidence or involving custody disputes (n = 217, ages 2-17, primarily female) but had been substantiated by Child Protective Services and taken to dependency court. Forensic interview transcripts from case files were coded for abuse characteristics (including those of the perpetrator), family member reactions to abuse disclosure, consequences to the child and family after abuse was discovered, and timing and content of the disclosure. Results revealed that recantation occurred in 23.1% of cases, and, on average, the recantation occurred around their fourth interview (the number of interviews varied from case to case). Recantation was more likely when children were abused by a parental figure, when the non-offending caregiver was unsupportive, and when the child was younger. Additionally, children placed in foster care were less likely to recant than children who stayed with their families. Finally, recantation rates were
not statistically different in cases with much evidence against the defense vs. in cases where there was a motive to fabricate allegations (including custody-related conflict).

Malloy et al. (2016) further explored family circumstances and child variables in the context of recantation in children 3- to 16-years-old. Within a sample from an LA county court filing database ($N = 257$), 58 recanted reports were identified. Those 58 recantation cases were matched on age, perpetrator identity, and family supportiveness variables, with 58 non-recanted cases from a previous study. Most cases involved both parent figures and caregivers as the alleged abusers. Case files were coded on three variables: family belief of CSA allegations, child placement, and visitation. Findings showed that recantations were more likely in non-supportive families (56%) compared to supportive families (33%), and they increased when a family member expressed disbelief regarding maltreatment. Children who were places in foster care recanted at lower rates compared to children who remained in their original home (46% compared to 68%). Additionally, children who were separated from their siblings during home removal were less likely to recant due to alleviation of family pressure.

Finally, Celik et al. (2018) examined characteristic differences between victims that recant and victims that do not recant in medical and legal contexts. Recantation was defined as “denial of the first abuse disclosure at the second interview” as cases were coded across two interviews conducted six months apart (p. 614). In total, children in 30 of the total 239 cases referred for CSA (12.6%) recanted their first disclosure. Recantation cases ($n = 27$) were compared to a control sample of randomly selected, non-recantation cases ($n = 27$) to assess group differences on the following variables: physical evidence, abuser identity, earliest age of abuse, polyvictimization, abuse repetition, secret-keeping and help-seeking by the child, and whether the child’s family was supportive or non-supportive. The recantation and control
samples did not differ by victim age, gender, or parent age. Within the recantation group, abuse by a family member, repetition of abuse, and co-occurrence of physical/sexual abuse was more common. There were no significant differences on Traumatic Symptom Index scores between the recantation and the control samples.

While no conclusive evidence exists as to why children recant, there is general agreement on several risk factors that increase a child’s likelihood of recantation (some of which have been discussed previously in this document). One such risk factor is pressure on the child by family members and authority figures to withdraw their accusation (Rieser, 1991). As demonstrated by Malloy et al. (2016), children whose family members were unsupportive or disbelieving may be at higher risk of recantation. Interestingly, accidental disclosures are common among young children, thus they may be motivated to recant after understanding the consequences of disclosure (Sorensen & Snow, 1991; Celik et al., 2018). For children, recantation could be an escape from going through many interviews, reliving the experience, feeling responsible for their abuser going to prison, and so forth.

In summary, recantation rates vary among the literature, ranging from 4-13% with occasional occurrences of rates over 20% (O’Donohue et al., 2013; London et al., 2008). Importantly, recantation rates are mostly assessed in studies with highly exclusive inclusion criteria; cases only qualify for consideration if substantial evidence points to defendant guilt, such as secondary eyewitness testimony, medical evidence, or conviction in a criminal court (O’Donohue, 2013; Bradley & Wood, 1996). In fact, recantation rates did not differ across cases, even when “dubious” cases (those with a clear motivation for fabricating sexual abuse) were compared with cases including great evidence of defendant guilt (Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). Literature suggests that children often recant in situations in which they feel pressured. For
example, recantation rates increase when family members are unsupportive or express disbelief in the child’s story, or when children remained in the home (Malloy et al., 2016).

It is possible for a defense attorney to use a child’s recantation, creating a compelling case for the defendant’s innocence. In a case study, the major influence of child recantation on jurors’ perceptions of defendant guilt is exhibited. Young and Hogan (2013) describe the circumstances around the sexual abuse of a 14-year-old girl by her 25-year-old brother. Compelling evidence of the abuse existed, including documentation in the child’s diary, immediate disclosure to her father, and taped confession by the perpetrator. However, after 18 months of being pressured by her family, the victim recanted her story, and the jury found the perpetrator not guilty. As such, it is illustrated that child recantation of maltreatment may be a result of family pressure and general disbelief about CSA, though a jury might perceive recantation as evidence that no abuse occurred.

A study examining beliefs about CSA in an undergraduate sample found that approximately 65% of people endorsed that a child would recant when questioned by authorities about abuse (McGuire & London, 2017). However, to convict a suspect, jury members must be certain of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. A jury may deliver a not guilty verdict despite the majority belief that children do occasionally recant on true abuse because a child’s recantation creates doubt. One goal of the study outlined in this proposal is to examine juror’s perceptions of various disclosure patterns including recantation, denial, and continuous disclosure. Before the need for this study is further articulated, research on juror’s perceptions of child witnesses, with a focus on CSA cases, will be reviewed.

*Jurors’ Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse*
Attributes of the child victim can also affect a jury’s opinion of CSA testimony. For example, there are mixed findings pertaining to child age. Mock jurors are sensitive to the fact that young children are suggestible and may claim to remember events that have not occurred (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005). As children become older, they are viewed as less suggestible and more likely to accurately recall events. In comparison to a 7-year-old, a 10-year-old witness was perceived to be less likely to be mistaken and less suggestible when testifying in a theft case (Nikonova & Ogloff, 2005). However, the same study included a 23-year-old witness, who was considered less reliable than the 10-year-old.

Similarly, a study by Holcomb and Jacquin (2007) found a 5-year-old’s sexual abuse testimony to receive higher credibility ratings than that of an 11- or 16-year-old. While cognitive ability improves with age, jurors tend to view older children as less trustworthy and more capable of fabricating a sexual scenario, particularly teenagers (Myers et al., 1999; Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). This tendency to believe young victims is further exemplified by Golding et al.’s (2015) findings that a 6-year-old’s testimony, compared to a 15-year old’s, resulted in higher credibility ratings, more anger towards the defendant, and more guilty verdicts. Another study compared juror attitudes towards 5-year-old and 10-year-old witnesses and found no differences in believability or conviction rates (Bottoms et al., 2014). These mixed results within CSA literature tells us that jurors do not always consider child age to factor into perceptions of reliability.

Another aspect of CSA cases that may impact juror perceptions is the child’s exposure to coercion or suggestible interview styles. Mock jurors tend to recognize when a child’s testimony is rooted in external influence. For example, during a court case, direct questioning by an attorney is more open ended while cross examinations questions are posed in a more leading
style (Mugno, Klemfuss, & Lyon, 2016). Mock jurors were more likely to convict the defendant in a direct questioning condition than a cross examination condition (Mugno, et al., 2016). This effect seems to generalize to types of interviewing that take place prior to court. Mock jurors were more likely to convict a defendant when the forensic interview with the child was in a nonsuggestive free-recall style as opposed to the suggestive style (Tubb, Wood, & Hosch, 1999). Similar results emerged in a later study wherein children were considered less reliable when questioned in a way that was considerably suggestive compared to moderately suggestive or not suggestive (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005). A study from Mindthoff and colleagues (2020) resulted in similar findings, and they concluded that mock jurors are able to differentiate between problematic and appropriate CSA interview styles and make verdict decisions accordingly.

**Expert Witness Testimony**

Expert witnesses may be helpful in educating jurors about misconceptions that jurors may hold related to CSA (Zajac et al., 2013). For example, one common CSA misconception is that mock jurors often conflate detail with accuracy (the more detailed an account, the more likely it is to be true). However, it is possible that because children who are falsely testifying might believe what they are saying, the reports will be just as detailed as true ones.

Empirical examinations of expert witness perceptions have focused on the breadth of juror knowledge concerning CSA. Morrison and Greene (1992) examined how CSA knowledge of a typical juror compares to expert CSA knowledge. Two samples were included in this study, an expert sample \( n = 50 \) and a mock juror sample \( n = 150 \). Those in the expert sample qualified by having considerable research and/or practical experience with child sexual abuse. Each participant was given the Child Sexual Abuse Questionnaire, which gauges knowledge of various aspects of CSA (e.g. credibility of CSA reports, typical victim responses, typical
offender characteristics, typical offense type characteristics). Experts were more accurate in judging 22 items than were jurors, demonstrating that generally, jurors do not have an understanding of CSA that holds up to expert knowledge.

Expert witness testimony is valued in the conceptually complicated circumstance of recovered memory cases. Buck and Warren (2010) predicted that expert testimony for the defense in an alleged case of recovered CSA memories (arguing against recovered memory credibility) would influence jurors above and beyond the expert testimony for the prosecution (arguing for recovered memory credibility). Results revealed that significantly fewer participants found the defendant guilty when the defense expert witness was present as compared to absent. In contrast, the prosecution expert witness and the victim’s therapists did not significantly influence verdicts. In the mock jury group deliberations, 17% of groups in the absent defense expert witness conditions found the defendant guilty, compared to zero groups in the defense expert witness present conditions.

Ryan and Westera (2018) provide further evidence to suggest the effectiveness of expert witness testimony in their study of adult rape cases. They predicted that expert witness testimony inclusion and a rationale for victim behavior (i.e., why they froze during the attack) would increase perceptions of the prosecution’s believability and the defendant’s guilt. Findings resulted in no significant main effect between conditions on measures of victim credibility, victim blameworthiness, or defendant guilt. There was, however, an interaction effect such that when the victim’s rationale for behavior and expert witness testimony were given, perceptions of the defendant guilt increased compared to when these pieces of information were absent.

The question of juror judgement regarding expert testimony quality has also been examined in CSA cases. Parrot and colleagues (2015) predicted that an expert witness who
appeared to have greater knowledge compared to a less knowledgeable expert witness, would be perceived as more credible. Greater knowledge, in this case, reflected greater testimony clarity, expertise, case understanding, and so on. Mock jurors were undergraduate students \((N = 136, 81\% \text{ female})\) given a testimony regarding a capital murder case. Each participant watched one of four videos—true expert witnesses testifying a mock case—across two conditions categories: male/female and high knowledge/low knowledge. Although low knowledge expert witnesses were perceived as more likeable than their high knowledge counterparts, the other aspects of credibility (trustworthiness, confidence, and knowledge) did not yield significant differences due to experimental condition. In all conditions, the expert testimony claimed the accused would likely cause further harm if not convicted. There was no significant difference between conditions regarding participant perceptions of the defendant’s likelihood to reoffend. In sum, participants were no more likely to agree with an expert witness of greater knowledge compared to an expert witness of less knowledge.

McAuliff and Duckworth (2010) were also interested in the ability of jurors to distinguish scientifically sound expert witness testimony from unsound expert witness testimony. Participants \((N = 223 \text{ community members}, M = 34\text{-year-old, 51}\% \text{ female})\) read a trial summary of a CSA case in which a 10-year-old child testified that her stepfather had sexually assaulted her, and the defense testified the child’s memory of the event had been manufactured via leading questions. Depending on condition, the expert witness in the scenario presents their study featuring either a strong and valid design, a missing control group, a confound, or experimenter bias. Additionally, the expert witness’s study is either published in a peer reviewed journal or unpublished. After reading the trial summary, participants indicated their final verdict (convict or not) and rated defendant guilt, child credibility, and police interviewing integrity on a 1-7 Likert
scale. In addition, they rated the quality of the testimony provided by the expert witness. There were neither significant main effects of internal validity nor main effects of publication status, and the interaction effect was also nonsignificant. In contrast, participants did identify the expert testimony as higher in quality when the expert witness presented their research with a valid design than when the expert witness presented their research as missing control a group, but more subtle design flaws (confounds and experimenter bias) did not influence participants’ appraisals of the expert witness. Most importantly, appraisals of the quality of the expert witness did not influence participant ratings of defendant credibility, guilt, trial verdict nor perceptions of police interviewing quality.

In summary, though mock jurors are not often able to distinguish between good and poor quality expert witness testimony, expert witness testimony in general is often warranted. Expert witness testimony has been shown to provide valuable information about CSA above and beyond juror’s present knowledge (Morrison & Greene, 1992). Misconceptions about CSA exist among potential jurors, and these can be corrected by including expert witness testimony (Zajac et al., 2013; Morrison & Greene, 1992). In both adult rape cases and CSA cases, expert witness testimony has been shown to alter juror’s perceptions of defendant guilt and witness credibility (Ryan & Westera, 2018; Buck & Warren, 2010).

Proposed Study

Pre-existing literature highlights three typical patterns of child disclosure of maltreatment: continuous disclosure, denial, and recantation. Research shows there is reason to believe a child has truly experienced maltreatment despite adherence to any of these disclosure patterns (Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007; Bradley & Wood, 1996). At present, no literature exists investigating jurors’ perceptions of child disclosure across these three disclosure patterns. As
such, the current study will novelly contribute to the literature by examining jurors’ perceptions of child credibility and defendant guilt in each of three conditions: continuous child disclosure (disclosure in the first forensic interview and in court), child denial (denial in the first forensic interview but disclosure in the second and in court), and child recantation (recants charges in court that were made in the first forensic interview). Definitions of disclosure patterns are consistent with London et al. (2008). Additionally, no study to date that we are aware of has examined the impact of expert witness testimony regarding child disclosure patterns on jurors’ perceptions of CSA cases. Legal teams often produce expert witness testimony to educate jurors about research findings (Morrison & Greene, 1992). Therefore, the current study will also investigate the impact of expert witness testimony for the prosecution regarding child disclosure patterns on juror perceptions of child credibility and defendant guilt. Finally, the present study will analyze differences in jurors’ perceptions of child disclosure patterns by child age (age 4 years vs. age 8 years). A child’s developmental stage may result in adjusted expectations for jurors regarding consistency of disclosure.

Research questions and hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a. We predict a main effect of age on child credibility such that a 4-year-old will be viewed as more credible than an 8-year-old.

Hypothesis 1b. We predict a main effect of age on the continuous and dichotomous measures of defendant guilt such the defendant will be viewed as more guilty when the child is aged four than when the child is aged eight.

Hypothesis 1 Rationale: In preschool-aged samples, children have been found to be viewed as more credible and the defendant as more guilty than in school-aged samples (in the majority of
the literature investigating jurors perceptions of CSA; Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005; Nikonova & Ogloff, 2005).

**Hypothesis 2.** We predict a main effect of age on susceptibility to external influences such that a 4-year-old witness will be considered more susceptible to external influences than an 8-year-old witness.

*Hypothesis 2 Rationale:* Mock jurors have found young children to be more easily influenced than older children regarding CSA (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005).

**Hypothesis 3a.** We predict a main effect of expert witness presence on child credibility, meaning that participants in the expert witness present conditions will perceive child credibility to be higher compared to expert witness absent conditions.

**Hypothesis 3b.** We predict a main effect of expert witness presence on defendant guilt, meaning that participants in the expert witness present conditions will perceive defendant guilt to be higher compared to expert witness absent conditions.

*Hypothesis 3 Rationale:* Expert witnesses have been found to impact jurors’ perceptions of child credibility and defendant guilt on continuous and dichotomous measures of defendant guilt to impact jurors’ perceptions in CSA cases (Buck & Warren, 2010; McAuliff & Duckworth, 2010).

**Research Question 1.** Will there be an interaction effect of Age x Disclosure Type x Expert Witness Presence on child credibility and both measures of defendant guilt? For instance, the 8-year-old who recants in the expert witness present condition may be considered more credible than the 8-year-old who recants in the expert witness absent condition. Current literature does not provide enough information to sustain a hypothesis, thus this is posed as a research question.

**Research Question 2.** Will there be a main effect of disclosure type on jurors’ perceptions of susceptibility to external influences? It is possible that participants in the recantation and/or
denial conditions may perceive the child witness to be more susceptible to influence. Current literature does not provide enough information to create a hypothesis, thus this is posed as a research question.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online survey database. The final sample was comprised of 688 participants. Target sample size was determined based on other sample sizes of similar studies published in top-tier journals (Krackow, in press). All participants were at least 18 years old, and participation was not restricted to master users of MTurk. This study only included participants who reside in the U.S. because the study involves the context of the U.S. justice system. Participants were compensated $2 for their participation (a typical amount per MTurk survey of this length).

A demographics questionnaire prompted participants to identify themselves as male (56.5%), female (42.9%), or nonbinary (0.6%). Participants ranged in age from 19- to 78-years-old ($M = 39.2$) Participants indicated their race/ethnicity as White (75.7%), Asian/Asian American (9.9%), Black (9.6%), Hispanic/Latine (6.1%), Native American/Indigenous (2.5%), or biracial (1.6%). Of the entire sample there were 232 participants were in the continuous disclosure condition, 225 in the denial condition, and 231 in the recantation condition. There were 352 participants in the expert witness present condition and 336 in the expert witness absent condition. Finally, there were 352 participants in the 4-year-old condition and 336 in the 8-year-old condition.

**Design**
The experiment included 12 conditions, employing a 2 (child age: 4, 8) x 3 (disclosure: continuous control, denial, recantation) x 2 (Expert witness: present, absent) factorial design.

**Procedure**

Participants began the study by giving informed consent. Consenting participants were randomly assigned to one of the 12 conditions and, based on condition, were given a trial scenario to read detailing a CSA case (Krackow, in press; Krackow & Elias, 2021). In each condition, all participants first received the following identical base information within the scenario: a female child (4- or 8-years-old) reports that she was visited by her father in her bedroom and touched on the genitals while putting her to bed. The child disclosed the abuse to her mother when she returned and was immediately interviewed by the local Child Advocacy Center (CAC).

Next, additional information was added based on condition which were manipulated by the provision of condition-specific scenarios:

*Continuous Control Condition + Expert Witness Absent.* During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand regarding the genital touch by the father.

*Denial Condition + Expert Witness Absent.* During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. At this point, the child undergoes a second forensic interview (48 hours later) in which the child does report any genital touch. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand regarding genital touch by the father.

*Recantation Condition + Expert Witness Absent.* During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand that they were **not** sexually touched by the father.
Continuous Control Condition + Expert Witness Present. During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand regarding the genital touch by the father. A CSA-disclosure-pattern expert witness testifies for the prosecution that continuous disclosure is the most common form of child disclosure patterns and introduces other possible, though less likely, disclosure patterns (denial and recantation).

Denial Condition + Expert Witness Present. During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. At this point, the child undergoes a second forensic interview (48 hours later) in which the child does report any genital touch. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand regarding genital touch by the father. A CSA-disclosure-pattern expert witness testifies for the prosecution that denial is not uncommon in child disclosure patterns and introduces other possible disclosure patterns with varying levels of likelihood (continuous disclosure and recantation).

Recantation Condition + Expert Witness Present. During the CAC forensic interview, the child reports genital touch by the father. The case goes to trial, and the child testifies on the witness stand that they were not sexually touched by the father. A CSA-disclosure-pattern expert witness testifies for the prosecution that recantation does occur, though it is less common than continuous disclosure or denial.

Following the trial scenario, participants were presented with several questions featuring Likert-type scale response options ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (there’s no doubt in my mind); these questions assessed participant’s perceptions of child credibility (via mean ratings of child credibility, trustworthiness, and believability questions), defendant guilt (via mean ratings of guilt, the likelihood the defendant committed the crime, and defendant believability
questions), and child susceptibility to external influence (via mean ratings of child suggestibility and the likelihood that influence from another person prompted the child’s abuse allegation; Krackow & Longo, 2016; Krackow, in press; Orcutt et al., 2001; Tessier & Krackow, 2013). Additionally, participants responded to a question of their final decision regarding dichotomous defendant guilt (guilty or not guilty).

In addition to these questions, an attention check was administered to ensure participant attention and comprehension. Attention check questions for participants in the expert witness absent conditions asked which disclosure pattern was described and at what point the child disclosed maltreatment (in the forensic interview and in court, in the second forensic interview and in court but not the first forensic interview, or in the forensic interview and not in court). Attention check questions in the expert witness present condition presented the same questions regarding the point at which the child disclosed maltreatment, the name of the disclosure pattern (continuous, denial, or recantation), and an additional question: whether or not a particular disclosure pattern indicates that maltreatment occurred. At the end of the study, two additional scenarios were presented regarding topics unrelated to the study topic. Participants were instructed to respond to a total of five questions on the additional scenarios, allowing the researchers to assess sincere effort on surveys on the part of participants (Krackow, in press). (Note: although these additional scenarios were administered as attention checks, they were not factored into data inclusion criteria due to the high number of eliminations based on any incorrect response within the first set of attention check questions). Finally, participants responded to a demographic questionnaire inquiring as to their age, gender identification, and race/ethnicity.
Data was collected at two separate time points because initial data collection produced an insufficient number of participants required for statistical analysis. In the first round of collection, data was collected from 908 participants. Data from 323 participants were excluded due to incomplete data or incorrect responses on any of the attention check questions. In the second round of collection, data was collected from 264 participants. Data from 161 participants were excluded based on criteria identical to first round exclusion. Therefore, data from a total of 688 participants were analyzed in the final, combined data set (585 from the first set, 103 from the second set). See Table 1 for frequencies across all conditions.

Results

There were no outliers on any of the three dependent variables (child credibility, defendant guilt, and child susceptibility to external influence). The data are therefore representative of all participants included in analyses.

Child credibility ($\alpha = .947$) assessed participants’ views of the reliability of the child witness across all conditions. The between-subjects effects of Age, Disclosure Type, and Expert Witness Presence were analyzed in a $2 \times 3 \times 2$ ANOVA (Age: 4, 8 x Disclosure Type: Continuous, Denial, Recantation x Expert Witness: present, absent). Results indicated that Levene’s test of equality of error variances was significant. Therefore, the analyses of variance cannot be interpreted with the assumption that error variances of the child credibility variable were equal across groups.

See Table 2 for child credibility multivariate ANOVA results and Table 3 for condition means and standard deviations. There was a significant main effect of disclosure type. Results from Tukey’s post hoc analysis showed that the continuous disclosure condition was significantly different from the denial condition ($p = .014$) and recantation condition ($p < .001$).
Additionally, the denial and recantation conditions were significantly different from each other ($p = .004$). Mean patterns followed expectations such the child was found to be most credible for participants in the continuous disclosure condition ($M = 7.15$, $SE = .090$) followed by the denial condition ($M = 6.78$, $SE = .092$) followed by the recantation condition ($M = 6.40$, $SE = .091$).

There was also a significant main effect of expert witness presence. Mean patterns followed expectations such that the child was found to be more credible for participants in the expert witness present condition ($M = 6.91$, $SE = .074$) compared to the expert witness absent condition ($M = 6.65$, $SE = .075$). The main effect for child witness age was not significant (4-year-old $M = 6.75$, $SE = .073$; 8-year-old $M = 6.81$, $SE = .075$).

There was a significant interaction effect of Disclosure Type x Expert Witness Presence. Results from Tukey’s post hoc analysis showed that in the expert witness present condition, continuous disclosure was significantly different from recantation, $p = .018$. Mean patterns followed expectations such that participants exposed to expert witness testimony viewed the child as more credible in the continuous disclosure condition ($M = 7.16$, $SE = .124$) than in the recantation condition ($M = 6.71$, $SE = .131$). Results from Tukey’s post hoc analysis also showed that in the expert witness absent condition, continuous disclosure was significantly different from recantation, $p < .001$, and denial was significantly different than recantation, $p = .003$. Means patterns followed expectations such that participants not exposed to expert witness testimony viewed the child as more credible in the continuous disclosure condition ($M = 7.14$, $SE = .132$) than the recantation condition ($M = 6.08$, $SE = .126$) and as more credible in the denial condition ($M = 6.71$, $SE = .132$) than the recantation condition ($M = 6.08$, $SE = .126$).
There were no significant two-way interaction effect among Child Age x Disclosure Type or Child age x Expert Witness Presence. The three-way interaction (i.e. Child Age x Disclosure Type x Expert Witness Presence) was also not significant.

Defendant guilt ($\alpha = .873$) assessed participants’ views of the level of culpability from the defendant in the matter of the alleged abuse. Results were analyzed with 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA (Age: 4, 8 x Disclosure Type: continuous, denial, recantation x Expert Witness: present, absent). Results indicated that Levene’s test of equality of error variances were significant. Therefore, the analyses of variance cannot be interpreted with the assumption that error variances of the defendant guilt variable were equal across groups.

See Table 4 for defendant guilt multivariate ANOVA results and Table 5 for condition means and standard deviations. There was a significant main effect of disclosure type. Results from Tukey’s post hoc analysis showed that the continuous disclosure condition was significantly different from the denial condition ($p < .001$) and recantation condition ($p < .001$). Additionally, the denial and recantation conditions were significantly different from one another ($p < .001$). Mean patterns followed expectations such the defendant was viewed as most guilty by participants in the continuous disclosure condition ($M = 7.74, SE = .14$) followed by the denial condition ($M = 7.34, SE = .142$) followed by the recantation condition ($M = 6.36, SE = .141$). There was also a significant main effect of expert witness presence. Mean patterns followed expectations such that the defendant was viewed as most guilty by participants in the expert witness present condition ($M = 7.50, SE = .144$) compared to the expert witness absent condition ($M = 6.79, SE = .116$). The main effect for child witness age was not significant (4-year-old $M = 7.05, SE = .114$; 8-year-old $M = 7.24, SE = .117$).
There were no significant two-way interaction effects among Child Age x Disclosure Type, Child Age x Expert Witness Presence, or Disclosure Type x Expert Witness Presence on continuous defendant guilt. The three-way interaction (i.e. Child Age x Disclosure Type x Expert Witness Presence) was also not significant.

A dichotomous measure of defendant guilt (i.e. participants’ final decision as to whether enough evidence exists to convict the defendant) was assessed using a logistic regression. This variable will be referred to as dichotomous defendant guilt. Results of the logistic regression indicate that disclosure type was the only variable to significantly influence juror’s verdict determinations ($p = .003$). Participants in the recantation condition were 4.37 times more likely to find the defendant not guilty compared to participants in the continuous disclosure condition (95% CI [1.71, 11.19], $B = 1.48$, $SE = .48$, $df = 1$, $p = .002$).

External influence ($\alpha = .638$) assessed participants’ views of the child witness’ susceptibility to influence from others. The between subjects effects of age, disclosure type, and expert witness presence were analyzed. Results indicated that Levene’s test of equality of error variances were significant. Therefore, the analyses of variance cannot be interpreted with the assumption that error variances of the susceptibility to external influence variable were equal across groups.

See Table 6 for child susceptibility to external influence multivariate ANOVA results and Table 7 for condition means and standard deviations. All three main effects were significant. First, there was a significant main effect of disclosure type. Results from Tukey’s post hoc analysis showed that the continuous disclosure condition and recantation condition were significantly different from one another ($p < .001$). Similarly, the denial and recantation conditions were significantly different ($p < .001$). Mean patterns followed expectations such the
child was found to be most susceptible to external influence for participants in the recantation condition \( (M = 2.52, SE = .069) \) followed by the denial condition \( (M = 2.61, SE = .070) \) followed by the continuous disclosure condition \( (M = 3.06, SE = .069) \). There was also a significant main effect of expert witness presence. Mean patterns followed expectations such that the child was found to be more susceptible to external influence for participants in the expert witness absent condition \( (M = 2.88, SE = .057) \) compared to the expert witness present condition \( (M = 2.58, SE = .056) \). Finally, the main effect for child witness age was significant. Mean patterns followed expectations such that the child was found to be more susceptible to external influence for participants in the 4-year-old condition \( (M = 2.83, SE = .056) \) compared to the 8-year-old condition \( (M = 2.64, SE = .057) \).

There was a significant interaction effect of Disclosure Type \( \times \) Expert Witness Presence. Results from simple main effects analysis showed that in the continuous disclosure condition, expert witness presence was significantly different from expert witness absence, \( p < .001 \), such that participants exposed to expert witness testimony viewed the child as less susceptible to external influence \( (M = 2.24, SE = .094) \) compared to participants not exposed to expert witness testimony \( (M = 2.80, SE = .100) \). This effect of expert witness presence did not reveal itself in the denial condition \( (\text{Exp. witness present } M = 2.50, SE .096; \text{ absent } M = 2.740, SE = .100) \) nor the recantation condition \( (\text{Exp. witness present } M = 3.04, SE = .099; \text{ absent } M = 3.09, SE = .096) \).

There were no significant two-way interaction effects among Child Age \( \times \) Disclosure Type or Child Age \( \times \) Expert Witness Presence. The three-way interaction was also not significant (i.e. Child Age \( \times \) Disclosure Type \( \times \) Expert Witness Presence).

Discussion
Results yielded significant findings in line with experimental hypotheses. Our hypothesis regarding the main effect of child age on susceptibility to external influence was observed. Across conditions, the 4-year-old was perceived as more susceptible to external influence than the 8-year-old. Other main effect predictions, however, were not observed. We predicted a main effect of age on both the child credibility and defendant guilt variables. Results did not support either of these predictions.

Results from this study also contribute to the mixed findings in CSA literature regarding child age. Mock jurors did perceive a younger child (4 y/o) to be more suggestible than an older child (8 y/o), a finding in congruence with child suggestibility literature (Nikonova & Ogloff, 2005). It appears that mock jurors are aware that a 4-year-old is more suggestible and their memories are more easily manipulated than an older child (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005). Child witness age did not appear to factor into mock jurors’ perceptions of child credibility or defendant guilt. Current literature presents mixed findings regarding the influence of child age, and this study adds support to literature in which child age does not influence jurors’ perceptions of child credibility, at least when children are of elementary school age or younger (Bottoms et al., 2014, Holcomb & Jacquin, 2007). It is possible that this finding is a result of the ages selected for our study. Participants were informed that the child was either 4-years-old or 8-years-old, depending on condition. It is possible that mock jurors’ perceive 8-year-old children to be young enough to maintain the innocence and trustworthiness that prompts greater perceptions of credibility in preschool children.

We predicted the presence of expert witness testimony, compared to its absence, would cause increased perceptions of both child credibility and defendant guilt. Both effects were observed. This study indicates that the presence of an expert witness can significantly influence
jurors’ perceptions of CSA case proceedings. The presence of expert witness testimony in support of the child witness appears to increase mock jurors’ belief in validity of CSA allegations (with the exception of some interaction effects discussed below). Mock jurors appear to trust testimony from an expert in the field. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature regarding the efficacy of expert witness testimony and uniquely represent the advantage of expert witness testimony in CSA cases (Buck & Warren, 2010; Morrison & Greene, 1992; Ryan & Westera, 2018).

Due to a lack of present literature regarding jurors’ perceptions of child disclosure patterns, we were unable form a directional hypothesis prior to this study. However, results indicated that child disclosure patterns had significant effects on jurors’ perceptions. Mock jurors perceived child credibility and defendant guilt to be significantly greater when children continuously disclose their abuse, followed by when they deny, and followed by when they recant. Mock jurors perceived children to be the most susceptible to external influence when they recant, followed by when they deny, followed by when they continually disclose abuse. Finally, mock jurors were significantly more likely to give a not guilty verdict in the recantation condition than in the continuous disclosure condition. In short, mock jurors typically found child witness testimony most favorable when disclosure was continuous and least favorable when disclosure was recanted.

Importantly, a significant interaction effect exists for disclosure type and expert witness presence on child credibility. The presence of an expert witness resulted in increased perceptions of child credibility in the continuous rather than recantation conditions. In other words, the combination of expert witness testimony and continuous disclosure was significantly more convincing to mock jurors than expert testimony and recantation. This suggests that recantation
is perceived negatively even in the face of expert witness testimony. By contrast, the absence of expert witness testimony resulted in significant differences in perceptions of child credibility when participants were in the continuous disclosure condition compared to the denial condition as well as continuous disclosure condition compared to the recantation condition. Therefore, when an expert witness was absent, mock jurors favored the continuous condition compared to the denial condition, but when an expert witness was present, mock jurors did not distinguish between the continuous and denial conditions. It is notable that recantation remains significantly less favorable to jurors across all conditions. Perhaps jurors are able to accept the child’s confusion and fear as reasons for abuse denial in the initial stages of disclosure (denial pattern) but not in the final stages of disclosure (recantation pattern).

The three-way interaction of age, disclosure type, and expert witness presence was not significant. This addresses our second research question and indicates that jurors’ perceptions of child testimony validity are not impacted by the combination of age, child disclosure type, and expert witness presence.

**Implications and future directions**

Several key takeaways should be noted based on the results of this study. First, it appears that expert witness testimony is influential in mock juror perceptions of CSA cases. Legal teams assembling evidence to support CSA allegations would be strengthened with the addition of expert witness testimony. It should be considered, however, that effect sizes for the main effects of expert witness presence were quite small for child credibility and defendant guilt, which may indicate minimal practical significance. It is likely that our statistically significant findings were a result of our large sample size. Further research is needed to determine the *in vivo* implications
of expert witness testimony. Additionally, future research should explore the effect of opposing expert witness testimony (expert witnesses testimony for both the plaintiff and defendant).

Second, it is clear that disruptions to continuous disclosure by a child witness (i.e. denial or recantation) present a significant barrier to jurors’ perceptions of child testimony validity. Effect sizes across this variable were of medium size, therefore this finding is likely to have practical implications on court proceedings. However, as this is a mostly unexplored area of research, it is essential that further research continues to explore the effect of disclosure patterns on jurors’ perceptions. The literature would benefit from a comparison of different disclosure patterns and case verdicts using records of true CSA court cases.

Third, it is possible that expert witness testimony may influence jurors’ perceptions of child disclosure patterns specifically. This pattern of results was less clear. The presence of expert witness testimony did appear to have some influence on mock juror perceptions (e.g. child credibility was significantly higher for jurors in the continuous vs. denial conditions when an expert witness was absent, but this effect did not appear when the expert witness was present). However, these effect sizes were quite small, and no interaction effect occurred for defendant guilt. Future research should explore these interaction effects in greater depth.

**Limitations**

Several considerations should be made regarding these findings. First, results indicated small effect sizes. It is possible that some findings are statistically significant but do not carry practical significance. Our conclusions are also limited by the theoretical nature of our study. The survey was administered online and mock jurors made judgments based on a short vignette. These findings do not take jury interactions or the court room setting into account. It is possible that a jury would find a child’s testimony more compelling if they witnessed it firsthand or that
conversations among jurors may influence perceptions. Research should be carried out in applied settings to determine the generalizability of these effects. In this study, race was purposefully not specified for the child, defendant, nor expert witness given that it is possible that findings regarding child credibility or defendant guilt are subject to change with the manipulation of race. Future research should explore the effects of race on juror perceptions of expert witness validity. Lastly, the sample was collected in two phases to gather enough participant data. Because the survey was administered two separate times, it is possible, though highly unlikely, that some participants participated twice (even though they were instructed not to in the survey).

**Conclusion**

In sum, this study uniquely compared child disclosure patterns to determine how mock jurors’ might perceive the validity of child testimony in the context of each disclosure type. All three dependent variables—child credibility, defendant guilt, and susceptibility to external influence—were significantly impacted by child disclosure patterns wherein mock jurors preferred continuous disclosure more than denial and denial more than recantation. This study also explored the influence of expert witness testimony on jurors’ perceptions of child testimony in CSA cases. Expert witness presence did appear to result in more favorable attitudes toward child testimony via a slight increase in child credibility and defendant guilt perceptions, though small effect sizes should be considered. Overall, expert witness presence did not overcome mock jurors’ negative perceptions of recantation. Recantation, across all conditions, was found to be significantly less favorable to jurors than any other type of disclosure pattern. Jurors appear unable to accept beyond a reasonable doubt that recantation is a viable form of disclosure. Finally, child age influenced jurors’ perceptions of child susceptibility to external influence such that a 4-year-old was seen as more susceptible than an 8-year-old. Future research should
continue to target the interaction between expert witness testimony and child disclosure patterns in CSA cases. Additionally, research in applied settings would help to determine the practical significance of these findings.
References


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https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-010-9219-3


https://doi.org/10.1080/15228932.2013.838103


Appendix

Table 1.

*Condition Distribution Frequency*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Recantation, EW Present</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Recantation, EW Present</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Absent</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Absent</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Continuous, EW Absent</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Denial, EW Absent</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
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Table 2.

*Child Credibility Variable Multivariate ANOVA Results*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>.551</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>17.2**</td>
<td>2, 675</td>
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<td>.048</td>
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<td>Expert Witness</td>
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<td>1, 675</td>
<td>.013*</td>
<td>.009</td>
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<td>.588</td>
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<td>Age x Expert Wit.</td>
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<td>Age x Disclosure x Expert Wit.</td>
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<td>2, 675</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.006</td>
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* = p < .05, ** = p < .01
Table 3.

*Child Credibility Variable Means and Standard Deviations*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>7.16</td>
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<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
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<td>8 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
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<td>6.85</td>
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<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Absent</td>
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<td>1.45</td>
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<td>4 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>1.61</td>
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</table>

Table 4.

*Defendant Guilt Variable Multivariate ANOVA Results*

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<th>η²</th>
</tr>
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<td>Disclosure</td>
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<td>Expert Witness</td>
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<td>.826</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age x Disclosure x Exp. Wit.</td>
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<td>2, 676</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.007</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01

Table 5.

*Defendant Guilt Variable Means and Standard Deviations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
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<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.

Child Susceptibility to External Influence Variable Multivariate ANOVA Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1, 676</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>18.03**</td>
<td>2, 676</td>
<td>&lt;.001**</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Witness</td>
<td>13.70**</td>
<td>1, 676</td>
<td>&lt;.001**</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age x Disclosure</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>2, 676</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age x Exp. Wit.</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>1, 676</td>
<td>.732</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure x Exp. Wit.</td>
<td>3.44*</td>
<td>2, 676</td>
<td>.033*</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age x Disclosure x Exp. Wit.</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>2, 676</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 7.

Child Susceptibility to External Influence Variable Means and Standard Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Recantation, EW Present</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Continuous, EW Present</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Denial, EW Present</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Recantation, EW Present</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Continuous, EW Absent</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Denial, EW Absent</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and Description</td>
<td>Score 1</td>
<td>Score 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Continuous, EW Absent</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Denial, EW Absent</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 y.o., Recantation, EW Absent</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>