



Society for Research in Child Development

Office for Policy and Communications
1313 L Street, NW • Washington, DC 20005
OFFICE: (202) 289-7905 • FAX: (202) 289-4203

PRESS RELEASE

Child Development (July/August issue)

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON JULY 20, 2007 (12:01 AM)

Contact Information:

Andrea Browning
Society for Research in Child Development
Office for Policy and Communications
(202) 289-7905
abrowning@srcd.org

Children's Memories of Long-Ago Events May Be More Accurate Than Previously Thought

Children's memories of events that occurred long ago may be more accurate than their recollections of events that took place recently. These findings may have implications for cases of child sexual abuse, when children are often the only witnesses. In the past, it has been assumed that because memory tends to fade with the passage of time, children's reports given a long time after an event are less accurate than reports given soon after the events took place.

These findings are from a study that was conducted by researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada and Deakin University in Australia. They are reported in the July/August 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

In the study, 5- and 6-year-olds participated in a classroom activity one or four times and were interviewed twice about the last or only occurrence of the activity.

Children who took part in the activity once were more inaccurate when the first interview took place 21 days after the activity than when it took place 3 days after the activity. But the long delay had no effect on the accuracy of reports by children who took part in the activity four times when they were asked about details that were the same in each activity. When questioned 21 days after the last activity about details that varied each time, children with repeated experience were more inaccurate when the second interview took place the day after the first interview than they were when 21 days had lapsed between the two interviews. Thus, the researchers found that the timing of the interviews was more important than the actual delay.

The study's findings show that children's memories can be accurate even when they are interviewed a while after an event. "Reports from child witnesses should not be automatically dismissed just because the alleged events occurred a long time ago," according to Kim P. Roberts, associate professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University and the study's lead author. "In cases involving alleged abuse of children, it may be useful for police to find out if anyone has been talking to children about the abuse (e.g., concerned parents, teachers, etc.) and, perhaps more importantly, *when* these conversations took place, so that they can assess the risk that children's memories have been contaminated by false information."

###

Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 4, *The Roles of Prior Experience and the Timing of Misinformation Presentation on Young Children's Event Memories* by Roberts, KP

(Wilfrid Laurier University), and Powell, MB (Deakin University). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.