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Interviewing at the scene of the crime: Effects on children's recall of alleged abuse

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Purpose. This study was designed to determine whether environmental contextual cues, provided by visits to the scenes of alleged abuse, would facilitate the recall of information by alleged victims of child sexual abuse.

Method. Participants were 96 4- to 13-year-olds who reported being victims of sexual abuse. Of the children, 50 were interviewed in the investigators' offices, and 46 were interviewed at the scene of the alleged abuse. Analyses focused on the effects of interview location, age, delay betweeen incident and interview, number of reported incidents, and familiarity with the scene on the number of details provided in office interviews and at the scene.

Results. Children in the two groups did not differ with respect to the number of informative details reported. On average, children interviewed at the office reported 231.8 details, whereas children interviewed at the scene reported 234.7 details. In both interviewing conditions, older children (aged 7–9 and 10–13 years) provided significantly more details than younger children (aged 4–6 years). Children who experienced multiple incidents provided significantly more details than children who reported experiencing single incidents. No significant interactions between environmental contextual cues, age, delay, scene familiarity and number of incidents were apparent.

Conclusions. The present study is a pioneering attempt to examine the value of physical context reinstatement in forensic settings. The results may also guide future research on contextual cueing in forensic settings.

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Several researchers have suggested that contextual retrieval cues may enhance the completeness and accuracy of memory retrieval in forensic contexts (Dietze & Thomson, 1993; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Gee & Pipe, 1995; Geiselman, 1988; Geiselman *et al.*, 1984; Geiselman, Fisher, MacKinnon, & Holland, 1985; Geiselman, Saywitz, & Bornstein, 1993; Goodman & Aman, 1990; Goodman, Batterman-Faunce, & Kenney, 1993; McCauley & Fisher, 1996; Memon, Cronin, Eaves, & Bull, 1996; Peterson & Bell, 1996; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Price & Goodman, 1990; Wilkinson, 1988). Contextual cues should enhance memory retrieval because features of a memory trace accessible at the time of retrieval bring to awareness other features of the 'to be remembered' (TBR) event that are not otherwise accessible (Tulving, 1983; Underwood, 1969). The greater the overlap between retrieval cues and encoding features, the greater their predicted effectiveness. The present study was designed to determine whether the contextual cues available at the scene of alleged abuse would facilitate retrieval of information about the incident, and whether these cues would differentially affect younger and older children.

Many researchers have demonstrated that contextual cueing enhances the retrieval of information (Cutler & Penrod, 1988; Cutler, Penrod, & Martens, 1987; Geiselman *et al.*, 1985; Gibling & Davies, 1988; Krafka & Penrod, 1985; Malpass & Devine, 1981), although some researchers have failed to document this effect (McSpadden, Schooler, & Loftus, 1988; Memon *et al.*, 1996). The mental reinstatement of context (guiding interviewees to think about the context in which the TBR event occurred) has also been studied quite widely (e.g. Dietze & Thomson, 1993; Geiselman & Padilla, 1988; Geiselman *et al.*, 1993), and structured procedures of this type constitute one component of the 'cognitive interview' (Geiselman *et al.*, 1984; McCauley & Fisher, 1995). Returning the interviewee to the place where the TBR event occurred, and thereby effecting physical context reinstatement, may also influence the retrieval of event information. Compared with verbal cues, visual contextual cues should facilitate information access and recall because they are more complete and because the cues are presented in the same modality (vision) as that in which they were experienced. Their effects should be especially strong in the case of younger children who rely less upon semantic encoding and are less flexible in their retrieval search than older children (Ackerman, 1981; Daehler & Greco, 1985; Gee & Pipe, 1995).

In every study reported to date, researchers have found that children recount more information, with no adverse effect on accuracy, when interviewed where the TBR event occurred (Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Price & Goodman, 1990; Smith, Ratner, & Hobart, 1987; Wilkinson, 1988). Moreover, Gee and Pipe (1995) suggested that contextual cues may significantly increase both the accuracy of young children's accounts and their resistance to suggestibility. Wilkinson (1988) showed that 3- to 5-year-old children greatly benefited when permitted to retrieve event information at the scene, and in the only study concerned with physical context reinstatement in the course of forensic investigations, Hershkowitz and her colleagues (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998) found that physical context reinstatement (alleged victims of sexual abuse were re-interviewed at the scene of the alleged incident) appeared to facilitate the retrieval of additional details by the children studied. These

researchers, however, were not able to differentiate between the effects of context reinstatement and the effect of re-interviewing.

In general, older children recall more information than younger children (e.g. Dietze & Thomson, 1993; Gee & Pipe, 1995; Goodman & Reed, 1986; Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998; Lamb, Sternberg, Esplin, & Chadwick, 1998b; Ornstein, Gordan, & Larus, 1992; Peterson & Bell, 1996; Pipe, Gee, & Wilson, 1993; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas, & Moan, 1991). In the laboratory, moreover, contextual cues increase the amount of information reported by both younger and older children (Gee & Pipe, 1995; Pipe & Wilson, 1994), allowing younger children who are interviewed using contextual object cues to perform at the level of older children interviewed without such cues (Gee & Pipe, 1995). In forensic settings, contextual cues do not seem to help younger children more than older children, however, and do not reduce age differences in the quantity of information recalled (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998). Hershkowitz *et al.* (1998) reported that re-interviewing at the scene of the alleged incidents did not assist younger children more than older children.

Several factors may have helped create differences between physical context reinstatement in the laboratory and in forensic contexts. In the laboratory, the return to the scene and the scene itself are staged and structured by researchers (Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Price & Goodman, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1987; Wilkinson, 1988), whereas in forensic contexts children guide investigators to the places where incidents have allegedly occurred (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998). In the laboratory, interviewers thus have complete control over the degree of overlap between encoding and recall conditions and are able to eliminate potential distractions, whereas forensic investigators have no control over the crime scenes, which may not appear as they did during the alleged incidents. Most importantly, suspects are not present during visit-interviews, and incident-irrelevant distractions may impede memory retrieval. Thus, the facilitative effects of a scene's contextual cues may be offset, at least in part, by the inhibitory effects of the scene's distractors.

Several researchers have shown that the shorter the delay between the time of the incident and the time of the interview, the greater the amount of information retrieved (Baker-Ward, Gordon, Ornstein, Larus, & Chubb, 1993; Gee & Pipe, 1995; Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998; Lamb *et al.*, 1998b; McCauley & Fisher, 1995; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Salmon & Pipe, in press; Saywitz *et al.*, 1991), and that delay has a greater effect on young children than on older children (Flin, Boon, Knox, & Bull, 1992; Lamb *et al.*, 1998b; Ornstein *et al.*, 1992).

Although contextual cues should be more effective after longer delays (when internal cues have weakened) than after short delays, the evidence is mixed. Pipe *et al.* (1993) found the expected effect in a laboratory analogue study, but the same effect was not evident in Hershkowitz *et al.*'s (1998) study of forensic interviews. The accuracy of the information retrieved also seems to be greater the shorter the delay, at least in the laboratory (Gee & Pipe, 1995; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Powell & Thomson, 1996). Powell and Thomson (1996) found that children who had experienced repeated events recalled more information than those who experienced single events. In field settings, Hershkowitz *et al.*

(1998) and Sternberg *et al.* (1996) likewise found that children who reported multiple incidents provided more informative details than children who reported single incidents.

In forensic contexts, the need to avoid suggestive contamination limits the use of contextual retrieval cues (King & Yuille, 1987). In most cases, for example, the victims and the suspects are the sole witnesses, and thus the sole sources of information, including contextual information, about the alleged incidents. The need to avoid suggestive contamination in forensic investigations precludes several techniques that have been used in experimental-analogue studies, including the use of verbal cues that refer to undisclosed contextual elements (Goodman & Aman, 1990; O'Callaghan & D'Arcy, 1989; Wilson & Pipe, 1989), the physical presentation of objects associated with the TBR event that have not been mentioned by the child (Gee & Pipe, 1995; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Salmon, Bidrose, & Pipe, 1995; Smith *et al.*, 1987; Wilson & Pipe, 1989), and the presentation of scale-models of the context in which the TBR events are believed to have occurred (DeLoache, Kolstad, & Anderson, 1991).

To avoid such risks of contamination, Hershkowitz *et al.* (1998) exposed children to the alleged incidents' physical settings only after the settings had been identified by the children. In that study, victims of alleged sexual abuse provided 30% more informative details during follow-up interviews at the scene of the incidents than in the initial office interviews. Eighty-five per cent of the gain in informative details involved information not mentioned during the office interviews; the rest were new details related to the spatial location of previously mentioned people, objects or events. As noted earlier, however, Hershkowitz *et al.* were not able to differentiate the effects of contextual reinstatement from the effects of re-interviewing.

To overcome this problem in the present study, the authors compared a first formal interview at the scene of the crime with a first formal interview at the office. They expected that an interview at the scene would provide exposure to contextual cues associated with memory of the incident and hypothesized that: (1) environmental contextual cues would enhance memory of incident-related information, leading children interviewed at the scene to report more details about the incident in the whole interview and the first narrative than children interviewed at the office; (2) older children would provide more information in the whole interview and the first narrative than younger children in both office and scene interviews; in addition, younger children should benefit more than older children from external environmental cues because they recall less event information and have less effective retrieval strategies than older children; (3) children who experienced long delays between the incident and the interview would produce fewer details in both the office and scene interviews; in addition, physical reinstatement should be more helpful to children who experienced long delays than to children who were interviewed after short delays; (4) children reporting multiple incidents would produce more details than children reporting single incidents, regardless of location; and (5) children reporting abuse in unfamiliar settings would benefit from physical contextual reinstatement more than children reporting abuse in familiar settings.

Method

Participants and procedure

Forensic interviews were conducted by six experienced youth investigators (two males, four females) with 104 alleged victims of sexual abuse in various parts of Israel. All cases that were referred to these investigators during 1996 were included in the study, provided the alleged crimes involved extra-familial perpetrators and took place outside the victims' homes. Seven of the original 104 cases were excluded from the sample because the scene of the alleged events was inaccessible or because the investigators failed to follow the interview protocol closely, and one case was excluded because independent evidence suggested that the allegations were false. The remaining 96 children (67 females and 29 males) ranged in age from 4.3 to 13.5 years (M = 9.4, SD = 2.5) and appeared to have made valid or credible allegations consistent with independent evidence when this was available. The children were randomly assigned to two groups. Fifty of the children (40 girls and 10 boys) ranging in age from 4.4 to 13.4 years (M = 9.4, SD = 2.4) were interviewed in the office. Forty-six of the children (27 girls and 19 boys) ranging in age from 4.0 to 13.5 years (M = 9.3, SD = 2.6) were interviewed at the scene of the incidents, following a brief disclosure of an allegation and its location in the investigators' office. The children in each of the two experimental groups (office and scene interviews) were divided into three age groups: 4- to 6-year-olds (N = 9 in each group), 7- to 9-year-olds (N = 16 and 11, in the office and scene groups, respectively), and 10- to 13-year-olds (N = 25 and 26, in the office and scene groups, respectively).

The alleged crimes included anal or genital penetration (N = 11), fondling of sexual organs (N = 29), touching of sexual organs over the clothes (N = 23) and sexual exposure (N = 33). Of the incidents, 73 occurred in locations familiar to the alleged victims, and 16 happened in unfamiliar locations. Information about scene familiarity was missing for seven of the cases. Of the children, 67 reported a single incident, whereas 28 reported multiple incidents. Information about the number of incidents was missing for one case. The time between the incident (or last incident, in multiple incident cases) and the interview ranged between 0 and 75 days (M = 10.8, SD = 14.3), with 37 children experiencing a delay of one week or less, and 27 children experiencing a delay of more than one week. Information about delay was missing for 32 cases. There were no differences between children interviewed at the office and children interviewed at the scene with respect to age, the frequency of abuse, the type of abuse, time delay and familiarity with the scene. There were no cases in which the alleged victim refused to go to the scene of the incident or appeared hesitant to do so.

All interviews included in the sample tightly followed a structured interview protocol available from the authors. Children in the 'Office Group' were interviewed entirely in the investigators' offices, whereas children in the 'Scene Group' completed the pre-substantive part of the interview in an office, but were interviewed about substantive issues at the scene, directly after briefly disclosing the alleged incidents and their locations. All phases of the interviews were audio-recorded, with the audio-recording continued throughout the journey to the scene. No discussion of investigation-related topics occurred during these journeys.

The structured investigative protocol

The initial pre-substantive phase included an introduction by the interviewer and some rapport building. This phase of the interview was also used to explain the importance of telling the truth, to encourage the child to correct the interviewer and to request clarification when necessary, and to train the child in memory retrieval by asking him or her to describe a recent holiday from beginning to end 'as best as you can'. In both the pre-substantive and substantive phases of the interview, investigators were instructed to probe using open-ended follow-up utterances such as 'Tell me about [a person, object, or action, mentioned by the child]?', 'Tell me more about . . .', or 'Then what happened?', when appropriate. Following the pre-substantive section, the interviewer shifted focus by using a non-suggestive utterance: 'Now that I know you a little better, I would like to discuss the reason you came here today.' Other non-suggestive prompts were used at this stage if the child did not make an allegation in response to this prompt.

When the children had made an allegation, those in the office group were given an open 'invitation': 'Tell me everything that happened to you, from the beginning to the end, as best you can remember', whereas children in the scene group were asked: 'Where did it happen?' and were then asked to accompany the investigator 'to the place where these things happened', with the explanation that 'sometimes I can understand what happened better when the child tells me at the place where it happened'. Upon arrival at the scene, children in this group were asked to 'Look around, try to remember the time you were here with [the perpetrator, as named by the child] and tell me everything that happened from the moment you got here until the end'.

In both groups, the first substantive invitation was followed by open-ended probes ('Tell me more about that' or 'And then what happened?') and cue questions ('Tell me more about [something the child had mentioned]') referring to information provided by the children earlier. Focused, non-suggestive questions were asked only if some crucial information was still missing after exhaustive open-ended questioning. If multiple incidents happened at the same site, the investigators asked children to discuss each incident separately. If additional incidents happened at different locations, the interviewers asked the children to guide them to the other locations and, if accessible, continued the interviews there, avoiding any substantive conversation on the way, as on the way to the first scene. If the additional location was inaccessible, interviewing continued at the initial location. Investigators then asked children if there was anything else they wanted to tell, anything they thought the interviewer should know, or anything they wanted to ask. Thereafter, the interviewers thanked the children for their cooperation and shifted focus to neutral topics.

The investigative strategies reflected in this structured protocol give priority to open-ended questions, probes and retrieval cues, encourage eyewitnesses to provide as much information as possible from free-recall, and emphasize reports of event-specific information. These strategies are universally recommended by expert professional groups (American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), 1990, 1997; Bull, 1992, 1995, 1996; Home Office, 1992; Lamb, Sternberg, & Esplin, 1995, 1998a; Lamb *et al.*, 1999; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Yuille, Hunter, Joffe, & Zaparniuk, 1993) and are consistent with empirical research demonstrating that open-ended questions elicit more accurate event information than focused questions (Dent, 1982, 1986; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Geiselman *et al.*, 1984; Oates & Shrimpton, 1991; Orbach & Lamb, 1999).

Data coding

All interviews were transcribed from audio-recordings and checked to ensure their completeness and accuracy. Two raters identified substantive utterances (those related to the investigated incident) then tabulated the number of new details conveyed in the child's statement about the investigated event using a technique developed by Yuille and Cutshall (1986, 1989; Cutshall & Yuille 1990) and elaborated by Lamb *et al.* (1996). Details were defined as words or phrases identifying or describing individuals, objects or events (actions) related to the investigated incident or to its immediate disclosure. Only new details were tabulated. Restatements of facts were not counted. The children's first narratives were defined as the first substantive free-recall statements or utterances produced by the children in response to the interviewers' substantive or non-substantive utterances.

Raters were trained on an independent set of transcripts until they reached 87% inter-rater agreement before coding the transcripts included in the study. During the course of coding, 20% of the transcripts were independently coded by two raters to ensure that they remained reliable.

Results

Interviews in the two groups did not differ with respect to the total length (in minutes) and the number of investigative utterances. Contrary to expectation, there were no significant differences in the total number of details provided by children in the two groups (M_{office} = 231.80, SD = 142.18; M_{scene} = 234.72, SD = 132.35; r_{office} = 53–638; r_{scene} = 50–776). Moreover, children interviewed at the office

Table 1. Effect of age and delay on number of details provided by children in the two interviewing conditions

	Total number of details			Number of details in first narrative			
	M	SD	*p*<	*M*	SD	%	*p*<
Age:							
4–6 (*N* = 18)	122.33	58.52	.001	23.56	19.02	23	.05
7–9 (*N* = 27)	251.26	133.42		49.74	44.39	20	
10–13 (*N* = 51)	262.76	140.23		52.80	39.47	23	
Delay:*							
One week or less (*N* = 37)	219.03	119.24	n.s.	45.65	45.58	24	n.s.
More than one week (*N* = 27)	273.00	172.36		43.63	36.08	19	

*Categories with missing cases.

provided significantly more details in their first narrative response (M = 56.00, SD = 42.41) than children in the scene group (M = 36.09, SD = 33.13, $F(1,95) = 7.47$, $p < .05$).

A 3 (Age: 4–6, 7–9, and 10–13-year-olds) × 2 (Location of interview: office, scene) analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that age positively affected the amount of information provided by children in both interviewing conditions, with older children (aged 7–9 and 10–13 years) providing significantly more details in the whole interview ($F(2,95) = 8.22$, $p < .001$) and in their first narrative ($F(2,95) = 4.23$, $p < .05$) than younger children (see Table 1). There was no interaction between age and location of the interview on measures of the children's output. Thus, younger children did not benefit more than older ones from environmental contextual cues.

Additional ANOVAs were performed to test the effect of delay (up to one week vs. more than one week), the number of incidents (multiple vs. single) and scene familiarity (familiar vs. unfamiliar) on the number of informative details provided by the children in the whole interview and in the first narrative. Contrary to expectations, there was no significant association between number of details and the length of delay, suggesting that physical context reinstatement was not more effective when there was a longer delay between the incident and the interview (see Table 1).

The number of reported incidents significantly affected the total number of details reported ($F(1,94) = 12.06$, $p < .01$). As expected, children who reported experiencing multiple incidents of abuse provided proportionally more details than children who had experienced single incidents, but there was no effect of the number of incidents on the number of details in children's first narrative and there were no interactions between the number of incidents and location of the interview (see Table 2).

Contrary to expectation, there was no significant main effect of scene familiarity on the total number of details or on the number of details in the first narrative.

Table 2. Effect of number of incidents and scene familiarity on the number of details provided by children in the two interviewing conditions

	Total number of details			Number of details in first narrative			
	M	SD	*p*<	*M*	SD	%	*p*<
Number of incidents:*							
Single (*N* = 67)	204.87	103.86	.001	49.51	39.99	26	n.s.
Multiple (*N* = 28)	306.29	176.56		40.32	37.90	14	
Scene familiarity:*							
Familiar (*N* = 73)	223.90	129.42	n.s.	44.93	34.27	23	n.s.
Unfamiliar (*N* = 15)	268.44	123.17		52.81	55.84	19	

*Categories with missing cases.

There was a significant interaction, however, between interview location and scene familiarity ($F(1,88) = 11.86$, $p < .001$), with children reporting abuse in unfamiliar locations giving longer first narratives when interviewed in the office ($M = 102.33$, SD = 63.18) than children interviewed at the scene ($M = 23.10$, SD = 19.04). Thus scene interviews were not more effective when the incidents happened in unfamiliar locations.

Discussion

It was predicted that children interviewed at the scene of the alleged incidents would provide significantly more information than children interviewed in the investigators' offices because interviewing at the scene of the crime would constitute the ultimate environmental contextual reinstatement, involving the maximum possible overlap between encoding and retrieval conditions (Tulving, 1983). The failure to reveal differences between the amounts of information retrieved in scene and office interviews was thus unexpected and difficult to explain. Examining the distribution and timing of interviewers' utterance types in interviews of the two experimental groups revealed that there was no significant difference in the total number of interviewer utterances and the duration of the interviews. Office and scene interviews were, however, structurally dissimilar. There was a significant difference in the number of invitations made by interviewers in their offices and at the scenes. Interviewers made more invitations in scene interviews than in office interviews (*M*s = 13.34 and 19.65 for office and scene, respectively; $F(1,95) = 10.01$, $p < .005$). This too should have increased the amount of information provided at the scene.

The predictions were based mainly on the findings of laboratory-analogue studies in which contextual cues and physical context reinstatement were used, and it is very likely that some essential differences between context reinstatement in the laboratory and in forensic contexts explain these unexpected findings. For example,

interviewers have full control over the scene in most laboratory studies, whereas forensic interviewers lack control over the crime scenes visited. In some forensic cases, as a result, the dynamic nature of the scene may introduce unexpected distractions which reduce the overlap between the encoding and retrieval conditions and thus interfere with memory retrieval. Public places (like shopping malls or health clubs) are more likely to have undergone contextual changes between the incident and the visit and are also likely to provide more distracting cues than a controlled retrieval 'scene' in the laboratory. Thus, the total amount of information produced by alleged victims of sexual abuse at the scene of the incident might have reflected the competing effects of enhancing contextual cues and inhibiting distractions.

Another important difference between physical context reinstatement in analogue and forensic settings relates to the initiation of the scene interviews. Because forensic investigators need to avoid potentially suggestive contamination, physical context-reinstatement could only take place after a disclosure of the allegation and the location by the victim, following which the interviews had to stop while the child guided the investigator to the scene. Eleven of the 46 children in the scene condition were actually interrupted in the middle of an ongoing verbal response, and the interruption of information retrieval while traveling to the scene and discussing non-substantive topics might have adversely affected memory retrieval. In addition, focused verbal exchanges between interviewers and children on the way to the scene might have diminished the benefits of narrative training (Saywitz & Snyder, 1996; Sternberg *et al.*, 1997) built into the structured interview.

When Hershkowitz *et al.* (1998) interviewed children at the scene of the alleged abuse, they reported a 30% gain in the number of new details children provided at the scene following an exhaustive interview at the investigators' offices. The present authors' failure to demonstrate that a visit to the scene was similarly beneficial could be attributed to important differences between the two studies. In Hershkowitz's study, children provided new details at the scene when given an opportunity for a second retrieval after completing an uninterrupted account at the investigators' offices, whereas in the present study, the first substantive retrieval at the scene took place after the children's spontaneous reports were interrupted. In addition, Hershkowitz *et al.* were not able to differentiate between the effects of contextual reinstatement and the effects of re-interviewing (Fivush & Schwarzmueller, 1995).

As in previous research (e.g. Dietze & Thomson, 1993; Gee & Pipe, 1995; Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998; Lamb *et al.*, 1998b; Peterson & Bell, 1996; Pipe *et al.*, 1993; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Saywitz *et al.*, 1991), older children in the present study produced significantly more information than younger children in both conditions. Like the children studied by Hershkowitz *et al.* (1998), older children provided more information than younger children in their first narrative, although physical context reinstatement did not differentially affect younger and older children, as reported by Gee and Pipe (1995) and Price and Wilson (1994). There was no significant difference between the amounts of information provided by children interviewed after short and long delays and there was no interaction between context and delay.

The latter findings may reflect the fact that almost all interviews took place soon after the alleged incidents.

The present authors' expectations that younger children and children who experienced longer delays would face more difficult retrieval tasks and would, therefore, benefit from context reinstatement more than older children and children who experienced shorter delay were based on reports of such interactions in laboratory studies (Gee & Pipe, 1995; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Powell & Thomson, 1996). Such interactions were not found, however, in the only previous field study exploring this association in forensic contexts (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998).

The fact that children who experienced multiple incidents of abuse provided more details than did children who experienced a single incident is consistent with previous research (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 1998; Powell & Thomson, 1996; Sternberg *et al.*, 1996) and with the present authors' expectations. Interviewers were instructed to encourage children who experienced multiple incidents to avoid generic-script descriptions, which summarize a number of events, and instead to provide event-specific information. It is thus not surprising that children who experienced multiple incidents had more to talk about. In both interviewing conditions, children who experienced multiple incidents of abuse provided more details in their first narratives than children who reported experiencing single incidents.

Studies of physical context reinstatement are quite rare (Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Price & Goodman, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1987; Wilkinson, 1988). The expecation that interviews at the scene of the incident would be more beneficial to children who reported abuse in unfamiliar locations was based on the assumption that those children would face more difficult retrieval tasks and would, therefore, benefit from environmental cues at the scene (Wilkinson, 1988) more than children who reported abuse in familiar locations, and could thus reconstruct the scene mentally without such cues.

Children's accounts of stressful real world experiences have seldom been studied, and further research is clearly needed on ways to provide contextual cues in forensic settings without interrupting children's narratives. One possible non-suggestive strategy might include 'mental context reinstatement' in the investigators' offices. The effectiveness of the 'mental reinstatement' technique has been demonstrated in many laboratory studies (e.g. Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Geiselman & Padilla, 1988; Geiselman *et al.*, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1993) and its application in forensic investigative inteviews may permit a wide range of contextual cues to be employed while avoiding several of the problems encounterd in the present study. Specifically, the delay between disclosure and the provision of contextual cues could be minimized, irrelevant distracting cues could be minimized or altogether eliminated, and the retrieval processes could proceed without interruption.

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