

## P02-70 - CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE REPORT

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**Objectives:** To review how children's memory, communicative skills, social knowledge, and social tendencies can influence the quality of forensic interviews with children, in the special setting of child sexual abuse.

**Methods:** A review of the studies designed to evaluate children's capacities as witnesses.

**Results:** The research demonstrates both

- 1) how much researchers and interviewers have collectively learned about children's communicative and memory retrieval capacities and
- 2) that this information can be used by interviewers to maximize the value of their investigative interviews with alleged victims of abuse.

Controlled studies have repeatedly shown that the quality of interviewing, reliably and dramatically improves, when interviewers employ a structured interview protocol.

**Conclusions:** Professional (and popular) interest in child sexual abuse was prompted in part by dramatic increases in the numbers of reported cases, and by awareness that many cases of abuse might go unrecognized because the victims were the only possible sources of information and were seldom given the appropriate opportunities to describe their experiences to those who might have been able to help them.

The use of a structured protocol improves the quality of information obtained by investigators from alleged victims, thereby increasing the likelihood that interventions will be appropriate.