

Guest editorial

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Gathering complete, accurate, and reliable information is necessary to achieve justice in society. Nevertheless, this is a difficult task and research has shown that it is dependent upon many factors, relating to the interviewee, interviewer, environment, and context. Thus, the method used to elicit information, investigative interviewing, is at the heart of any investigation and it is one of the most important tools in an investigator's tool box. As a result, over the past twenty years practitioners and researchers have sought, and in some countries have substantially succeeded, in developing procedures that improve the quality of interviews of witnesses, victims, and suspects of crime. This body of work has seen successful outcomes of the interplay between academic research and real world practice in an attempt to prevent miscarriages of justice. This attention, it could be argued, is more important when focussing upon those deemed vulnerable, who seem to be at the centre of many miscarriage of justice cases. This special issue aims to outline recent developments in this field and focuses upon the practical aspects of interviewing in an investigation and how this can impact on practice in the courts. We have gathered together a collection of papers with authors from six different countries who report empirical research that examines new aspects of the field and how research can advance current practice and policy.

Using hypothetical narrative accounts of child abuse the first paper by Burrows, Powell, and Benson examines prosecutor views as to the importance and reasoning why children may need further questioning. Thematic analysis revealed three recommendations to guide questioning and these are discussed within the context of their implications for investigative interviewing of children. The second paper also concerns child interviewees within the court-room environment. Using a mock-courtroom study Saykaly, Crossman, Morris, and Talwar examine the influence of question-type on children's ability to maintain a truthful or untruthful account in that setting. The third paper also examines the consistency of testimony from children. Van Can, Dodier, Otgaar, and Verkamp examine the efficacy of a specialised interview technique, the Modified Cognitive Interview (MCI), and how it promotes adolescent accurate recall about a negative emotional event and the impact of the MCI on within-statement consistency.

The final three papers focus on the importance of ethical interviewing of those suspected of committing an offence and how it is necessary to provide safe-guards that prevent false testimony being obtained in the investigation and in court. The first of these is a paper by Luther and Snook who report upon a technique that is utilised in Canada; the 'Mr. Big technique'. A recent Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruling resulted in stricter rules being placed on how police obtain confessions using this controversial method. The paper reviews the social psychological literature related to compliance and the six main principles of social influence in relation to the 'Mr Big' technique. Similarly, the penultimate paper by Sauerland, Mehlkopf, Krix, and Sagana looks at how deceptive interrogation techniques can cause inconsistencies in suspect reports, and warns against using such methods.

The final paper by O'Mahony, Creaton, Smith, and Milne explores the role of the intermediary working in criminal courts with defendants. Intermediaries were introduced in the UK to aid vulnerable interviewees within the criminal justice process. In this paper intermediaries were interviewed about their experiences and recommendations are made for additional training to help them understand the psychological processes and conflicts they may experience when working with defendants.

Taken together these papers provide a flavour of the state of current knowledge about investigative interviewing and how this relates to court-room practice. They explore current notions of best practice; identify risks to the interview process, examine gaps in our knowledge and future directions for research. We hope that readers find these papers stimulating and that they contribute further to the development of new research which in turn impacts upon investigative interviewing theory and practice and on justice.

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