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David La Rooy[a], Sonja P. Brubacher[b], Anu Aromäki-Stratos[c], Mireille Cyr[d], Irit Hershkowitz[e], Julia Korkman[f], Trond Myklebust[g], Makiko Naka[h], Carlos E. Peixoto[i], Kim P. Roberts[j], Heather Stewart[k] & Michael E. Lamb[l]

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[a] Abertay University & Scottish Institute for Policing Research, Dundee Scotland, UK.

[b] Centre for Investigative Interviewing, Deakin University, Melbourne, AU

[c] Forensic Psychiatry Unit for Children and Adolescents, Intermunicipal Hospital District of Southwest Finland, Turku, Finland

[d] Département de psychologie, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128, Succursale Centre-Ville, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3C 3J7

[e] University of Haifa, Israel

[f] Åbo Akademi University & Helsinki University Hospital, Finland

[g] Norwegian Police University College, Research Department, Norway

[h] Department of Psychology, Hokkaido University, Japan

[I] Psicólogo Forense, Forensic Psychologist, Portugal

[j] Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, 75 University Ave W, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3C5

[k] Avenues Children's Justice Center, 257 11th Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

[l] Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RQ, UK.

Author Note: Correspondence: Dr David La Rooy (david@larooy.net). The structure of this article was determined by David La Rooy, Sonja Brubacher and Michael E. Lamb; all other contributors are listed alphabetically.

Abstract

This article reviews an evidence-based tool for training child forensic interviewers called the NICHD Protocol, with a specific focus on how the Protocol is being adapted in various countries. We include international contributions from experienced trainers, practitioners, and scientists, who are already using the Protocol or whose national or regional procedures have been directly influenced by the NICHD Protocol research (Canada, Finland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, and United States). Throughout the review, these experts comment on: How and when the Protocol was adopted in their country; who uses it; training procedures; challenges to implementation and translation; and other pertinent aspects. We aim to further promote good interviewing practice by sharing the experiences of these international experts. The NICHD Protocol can be easily incorporated into existing training programs worldwide and is available for free. It was originally developed in English and Hebrew and is available in several other languages at nichdprotocol.com.

The NICHD Protocol: A review of an internationally-used evidence-based tool for training child forensic interviewers

In this article, we describe the evidence base, development, and structure of a training tool for interviewing children known as the NICHD Protocol (the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol). This tool was developed through the intensive efforts of US Government Scientists at the National Institutes of Health in the 1990s and has been the subject of intensive evaluation and research ever since (see Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008).

Central to the development of interview guidelines has been knowledge of how memory works, children's developmental capabilities, and the conditions that improve children's ability to discuss their abuse experiences. After decades of experimental and applied research conducted primarily by psychologists we understand the strengths, weaknesses, and features of children's memory, and this knowledge has shaped professional recommendations about interviewing children (e.g., American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children [APSAC], 1990, 1997; Home Office, 1992, 2002, 2007, Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Scottish Executive, 2011). Because our knowledge of memory is now so advanced, core recommendations made by professional bodies worldwide share remarkable consensus (Lamb et al., 2007; Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy, & Katz, 2011). Small differences in procedure usually arise out of regional idiosyncratic legal constraints, rather than disagreements about the basic nature of memory and children's developing abilities. While structured, the NICHD Protocol is flexible enough to allow for such modifications to enhance its applicability for use around the world, which is the chief focus of

this article. For the first time, we present insights from researchers and practitioners regarding

how the protocol is being used and/or adapted internationally.

The importance of 'Best Practice' Interviewing

In the 80s and 90s high-profile child-abuse cases, such as the McMartin pre-school and

Kelly Michaels cases (Ceci & Bruck, 1995; Garven, Wood, Malpass, & Shaw, 1998; Myers,

2009) among others, sparked concerns throughout the psychological and legal worlds about the

suggestive ways in which children were interviewed. As a result of several decades of research

on poor interviewing techniques our understanding of children's suggestibility and false memory

(and the danger of therapist 'interventions') is very advanced (e.g., Brainerd & Reyna, 2005;

Ridley, Gabbert & La Rooy, 2013). Nowadays it is clear that suggestive and leading questions

can damage children's reports (e.g., Bull, 2010; Leichtman & Ceci, 1995). Poorly conducted

interviews have terrible consequences: Children are put through lengthy, stressful legal

proceedings only to have experts later testify that the interviews were inconclusive;

misunderstandings and inaccuracies may lead to false conviction or family breakup;

alternatively, abusers may be free to exploit other children. Finally, the work of everyone

involved in the case is impeded by the poor quality of their investigative interviews. Thus, the

NICHD Protocol was designed to provide interviewers with an evident structure, guiding them

through each phase of the interview and helping to avoid poor questioning strategies that may

lead to contamination or memory distortions (Lamb et al., 2007).

The importance of using 'open prompts'. Rather than conducting interviews in which

information (accurate or inaccurate) is 'delivered', research suggests that children will be much

more accurate when information is 'elicited' from free-recall memory (see Orbach & Pipe,

2011). Thus, interviewers who use open prompts are at an advantage because the information

that they obtain is likely to be more accurate irrespective of age, and they elicit longer and more detailed responses than closed and specific questions. For example, the open-ended prompt "tell me what happened" does not constrain the memory search to a particular topic, but rather allows the child to retrieve memories that are most accessible. It is important that interviewers understand the 'rule' that helps to decide whether or not interviewer prompts are indeed open: If the answer can be provided using more than just a few words then it is likely that an open-prompt has been delivered.

Children's verbal competence is not only important for interviewers, it also has an effect on the process of cases in court. Decisions can be affected by the length of the children`s responses in their testimonies (Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2009), demonstrating the importance of free recall and the use of a structured approach. Because open prompts are less likely to contain suggested information, defence counsel are far less able to criticise an interviewer for obtaining information through open-ended prompting.

In contrast to open-ended prompts, closed/focused questions restrict the range and length of possible responses and increase the risk of inaccuracy because interviewees may choose one of the options even if they cannot recognize the correct answer. What, when, where and how ('specific') type questions may appear 'open,' but often only require a few words to answer, and still signify the type of information expected from the child even if an exact response was not specified (e.g., "what colour was the car?"). These questions do elicit useful clarifying details but can lead to misunderstanding if they are not carefully composed. For example, in one reported case study an interviewee, when asked what colour the car was, provided the colour of the interior rather than exterior of the car (Jones & Krugman, 1986). A better question would have been to ask "what colour was the outside of the car?" It is well-understood that children

answer closed and specific questions less accurately than those that are open-ended (e.g., Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Orbach & Lamb, 2001).

Forensic interviewing research

Even though open-ended prompts are most effective in eliciting longer, more detailed, and more accurate responses, the recommendation to elicit information from children using open prompts is routinely not followed by forensic interviewers when they do not have a structured protocol to follow (e.g. Cederborg, La Rooy & Lamb, 2008; Korkman, Santtila, & Sandnabba, 2006; Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2009; La Rooy, Lamb & Memon, 2011; Myklebust & Bjorklund, 2006; Sternberg, Lamb, Davies, & Westcott, 2001). What is alarming from a service perspective is that, in many studies, considerable expense and effort was directed to training interviewers, who often believed that they were adhering to those recommendations. Research has thus revealed a disturbing dichotomy between 'knowledge about desirable practices' and 'the actual behavior of forensic investigators' (Lamb et al., 2008). Because it is quite easy to raise awareness of best practice principles, it is hard to imagine that best practice would not be adhered to and that traditional 'one-off' training courses change actual interviewing behavior very little (Aldridge & Cameron, 1999; Stevenson, Leung, & Cheung, 1992; Warren et al., 1999). Unfortunately, guidelines do not translate automatically into practice. Research shows that interviewers require a substantial amount of regular support and feedback about the quality of their interviews for improvements to be achieved and maintained (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2002a; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz & Esplin, 2002b). In sum, interviewers often 'know' what they should do in theory, but are unable to translate the theory into practice.

"Until 2003, Finnish child investigative interviews were not regulated, and children were oftentimes 'interviewed' repeatedly within the framework of psychiatric care, without the police involved and often without the interview being recorded. These interviews were both leading and not being suited to the developmental abilities of children (Korkman, Santtila, Drzewiecki & Sandnabba, 2008; Korkman et al., 2006; Korkman, Santtila, Westeråker & Sandnabba, 2008; Santtila, Korkman, & Sandnabba, 2004). National guidelines, introduced in 2003 (Taskinen, 2003), emphasized the need for all CSA suspicions to be reported to the police and their investigations to be police-led and properly conducted." – [Author], Finland

"In 2000, the Japanese Society for Law and Psychology was established and psychologists began to increasingly work with lawyers and in forensic contexts where they saw first-hand the effects of poor quality interviews and the harm that could be caused for both the defendant and child witness. Initially energy was focused on examining and publicizing the inadequacy of poor quality interviews but criticism alone from psychologists does not improve the quality of interviews that are conducted. At the same time in Japan, the number of referrals to Child Guidance Centers doubled, and then tripled, after the Prevention of Child Abuse Act was legislated in 2000 (Gido Gyakutai no Boushitou ni kansuru Houritsu.)" – [Author], Japan

An evidence-based solution to improve interviewing standards: The NICHD Protocol

The NICHD Protocol was developed in the mid-1990s to address shortcomings in the quality of interviews that were being conducted. It was created with input from a wide range of professionals including lawyers, developmental, clinical and forensic psychologists, police officers, and social workers, and has received intensive forensic evaluation (see Bull, 2010; Lamb et al., 2008; Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2011). It is now widely used internationally, and has been translated into nine languages.

"The interest in the NICHD Protocol started in Quebec (Canada) in 2000. With the agreement of Michael Lamb and his colleagues, we translated the Protocol into French and tested its effectiveness on interviewers' behaviors during investigative interviews. We compared interviews conducted by the same interviewers before and after training. For both CPS workers and police (see Cyr & Lamb, 2009), results showed that the NICHD Protocol was effective in increasing the number of open-ended questions, as well as the number of details obtained from these questions." – [Author], Canada

"We have initiated a translation of the NICHD Protocol to Portuguese language and judicial context. We checked that the translated verbatim text in fact accessed the cognitive processes that we intended to prompt. Our main concern was the translation of the expression "tell me", that in Portuguese can have several translations. So, with 4- to 15-year-old children we tested which was the best of three possible expressions to use in Portuguese and adopted the one that was the closest match (Peixoto, Alberto & Ribeiro, 2011). – [Author], Portugal

"The NICHD Protocol was translated into Hebrew and is now used with all alleged victims, witnesses and suspects, permitting us to perform descriptive studies as well as revealing field experiments. Comparing reports made by alleged victims to those made by young suspects and witnesses in corresponding cases allowed a measure of accuracy of the allegations and further validated the Protocol (Hershkowitz, Fisher, Lamb, & Horowitz, 2007)." – [Author], Israel

The NICHD Protocol has, at its core, developmentally-appropriate expectations about children's capabilities, and seeks to maximize the conditions under which children are most likely to describe their experiences of abuse accurately. What makes the approach taken by the developers of the NICHD Protocol so unique is that they sought to create forensic interviewing guidelines that clearly specified the types of interviewer prompts that were appropriate to use in interviews with children, while at the same time restricting opportunities for interviewers to fall into the 'suggestibility trap' by asking focused questions based on their own assumptions about things that might have happened. The goal was to create an interview Protocol that could be used by interviewers around the world with varying levels of experience and training.

Moreover, the Protocol also was developed to withstand legal challenge, and it was recently demonstrated that charges were more likely to be filed when investigators adhered to the protocol than when not (Pipe, Orbach, Lamb, Abbott, & Stewart, 2012). The solution lay in providing not only direction regarding general concepts about memory and suggestibility, but also specific and structured guidance about exactly the sorts of things that should be said, and in what order. The advantage of this structured approach was that it promised to level the playing field by providing all children with equal opportunities to recount their experiences regardless of individual interviewer biases and pre-existing beliefs about children's capabilities and case characteristics.

The Protocol covers all stages of the investigative interview (see Table 1). The introductory phase was influenced by various law enforcement agencies in different jurisdictions

who requested the inclusion of questions designed to establish that children understood the

difference between true and false statements in anticipation of legal challenges to children's

credibility. Interestingly, use of the Protocol in general has been shown to improve assessments

of credibility:

*"Research conducted in Israel stressed that use of the Protocol positively affects not just the
quality of interviewers' questioning and children's statements but also improves the ability of
professionals to distinguish between plausible and implausible statements and assess the
statement's credibility (Hershkowitz et al, 2007)." – [Author], Israel.*

[Insert Table 1 about here]

In the introductory and ground rules phase interviewers inform children that they should

tell the truth and that they will be required to describe events in detail because the interviewer

was not present and therefore does not know what has happened. Children are also instructed to

say, "I don't remember" or "I don't know" when unsure. Both conveying interviewer naiveté

and giving the child permission to say "I don't know" have positive effects on error reduction in

lab events (e.g., Gee, Gregory & Pipe, 1999; Mulder & Vrij, 1996). Children are also told to say

"I don't understand", when they do not understand what the interviewer is saying. This initial

phase is designed to remove potential pressure that could manifest itself as suggestive influence

later in the interview should the children feel that they must acquiesce to leading questions or

suggestive utterances. These ground rules can also serve as a form of protection for the

interviewer if a suggestive or leading question is inadvertently asked. The number and type of

ground rules used can differ across jurisdictions due to legal requirements. One of the core

aspects of the Protocol is that it is flexible enough to permit variation in procedures:

*"In Utah, there have been a few revisions made to the Protocol due in part to courtroom
experiences. For example, in Salt Lake City, it is called 'NICHD investigative interview
guidelines'. The term Protocol has been misused, overstated and exaggerated within local
courts. Interviewers were unfairly and inaccurately criticized for conducting improper
interviews when others erroneously stated that because interviewers failed to ask every question,*

they did not "follow Protocol". Other revisions consist of the addition of two new ground rules including eliciting a promise to tell the truth." – [Author], USA

"The NICHD Protocol was adapted for use by child protection workers in Canada. Because these workers have to cover a set of issues with children (e.g., use of alcohol in the home, whether children are taken to school) we modified the Protocol so that in the first half of the interview, children were given control to discuss any event(s) they chose; in the second half; interviewers indicated a change in topic and raised one of the issues that had to be addressed." (Price & Roberts, 2011; Rischke, Roberts, & Price, 2011). – [Author], Canada

Interviewers create a relaxed, supportive environment while trying to gauge the children's social and emotional needs. Building and maintaining rapport can be critical to the child's willingness to talk in the interview, and is further extended during what is known as the Practice Interview (see Roberts, Brubacher, Powell & Price, 2011 for a review). In the practice interview, children are prompted to describe a real episodic experience in detail in response to open-prompts. In this way, they practice reporting the level of detail required, and become aware that interviewers are naïve regarding their experiences. Interviewers can often elicit events from children during the rapport-building phase (e.g., "tell me about the things you like to do" followed up with prompts about a specific time the child engaged in that activity). The significance of this phase is that it also focuses children on actual events because they are asked to provide specific details about things that really happened – not things that they, for example, have been told to say by others.

The transition between the introductory, rapport-building, and practice narrative phases (collectively, the pre-substantive phase) and the substantive phase of the interview is important. In the transition phase, a series of prompts are used to identify the target event/s under investigation as non-suggestively as possible. Because suggestive questions are defined as any information introduced by the interviewer that has not already been mentioned by the child, the interviewer cannot be the first to raise the topic. Hence, in an effort to be non-suggestive the

interviewer should simply ask the child if they know why they are being interviewed, and if so, the interviewer should try to obtain an account by using an open-prompt such as "tell me what happened", followed by further open prompting (see Orbach & Pipe, 2011, for further details).

According to Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin, and Mitchell (2001) more than four-fifths of the children who make allegations do so in response to a completely open prompt. For this reason, interviewers should always allow children to raise the topic themselves. If children do not make allegations, however, and the investigators have good reason to suspect that they were indeed abused the interviewer may need to move on to use a series of increasingly focused prompts, perhaps including a prompt like "your teacher told me that you said someone has touched your privates. Tell me about that". This prompt is suggestive because it refers to information that the child has not told the investigator. It should be used only if necessary, and in such a way as to focus attention without identifying the alleged perpetrator, the location, or other details about the suspected incidents. If the child agrees with the investigator's assertion, it is crucial that the investigator resume using open-ended prompts returning control to the child, starting with: "So someone touched your privates. Tell me everything about that." As noted above, some children do not make allegations in response to such prompts when they are first given the opportunity to do so, and investigators should always consider whether it would be best to abort the interview rather than ask contaminating suggestive questions. Of course, when there are child protection concerns, it is often necessary to proceed with caution, despite the attendant risks. New research has also focused on revising the protocol to include supportive and facilitative strategies for approaching reluctant children (Lamb, Hershkowitz, & Lyon, 2013).

When children do make allegations, interviewers are encouraged to elicit further information using additional open-prompts such as "then what happened," "tell me more about

that," and "you said X, tell me more about that," for example. Once the child has provided an

initial account it is sometimes necessary to ask whether the abuse occurred "one time or more

than one time" in order to clarify the components of specific incidents. While not an open-ended

prompt, this format is recommended when asking about frequency because children have

difficulty estimating a specific number of occurrences (Sharman, Powell, & Roberts, 2011;

Wandrey, Lyon, Quas & Friedman, 2012), and reduces the risk that an inaccurate specific

number could hurt credibility. Research showing the difficulty children (and adults) have with

source monitoring has influenced the expectations we should have about the number of separate

incidents that interviewers can hope children will describe accurately (for further research on

children's ability to describe specific occurrences of repeated events, see Brubacher, Powell, &

Roberts, 2014; Roberts & Powell, 2001, for reviews). Interviewers are encouraged to focus on

the times that are likely to be the best remembered – the first time, the last time, and another time

(Lamb et al., 2007).

After children have provided sufficiently detailed narrative accounts, interviewers may

want to consider taking a break, if requested by the child or if the interviewer wants to check

with those observing the interview (unobtrusively) whether more detailed information is

required. For example, in Norway, interviews with suspected child sexual abuse victims are

conducted at a Statens Barnehus (Child Advocacy Centre) and the 'break' is used to consult with

the judge (sometimes more than once).

*"The interview is conducted in specially-designed video interview suite, whilst the judge,
prosecution, defense lawyers and state-funded counsel to the complainant observe the interview.
The interview process and the presence of observers in the monitor room are normally explained
to children in developmentally-appropriate terms. Once the interviewer has elicited an account
from the child, he/she takes a break to consult counsel and the judge. The judge gives both
parties the opportunity to suggest topics or identify contradictions that they want investigated.
The interviewer then returns to the interview room to address these issues. This process
continues until the judge and counsel are satisfied. The video replaces the need for the child to*

attend or testify in open court. The child's involvement in the judicial process almost always comes to an end after the interview, even if the case is appealed." – [Author], Norway

After the break interviewers can ask focused questions to explore important details that may be missing. Because memory and many other cognitive skills develop over time and younger children can be less informative than older children about their experiences, preschool-aged children may require more focused questions than older children:

"A recent study demonstrated that even very young children can benefit from Protocol-guided interviews but stressed that some strategies (e.g., asking focused questions paired with open-ended follow-up prompts) are more effective than others in evoking elaborated statements (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Orbach, Katz, & Horowitz, 2012)." – [Author], Israel

As previously noted, focused questions of the wh-/how variety are preferable to yes/no questions (e.g., "was it A or B?") or those providing choices. Hence, it is particularly important that interviewers only ask these questions when absolutely necessary, and that they follow up with open-ended questions that transfer control back to the child and minimise contamination.

Close to termination of the interview, children are asked how others came to find out about the abuse, because doing so may have the benefit of producing new investigative leads (Orbach & Pipe, 2011). Finally, children are invited to ask any questions they may have of the interviewer, given contact information should they wish to speak with the interviewer again, and the interview is closed on a neutral topic.

Using a standardized approach to interviewing has important advantages that go beyond simply conducting superior interviews. A standardized approach gives all children who are interviewed an equal opportunity to disclose or not disclose alleged abuse. Personal biases such as underestimating children's capabilities, or those resulting from certain case characteristics, are minimized.

"The Protocol was initially tested and implemented in Israel in 1996, and has strongly affected the practice of child investigation since. The first, partially-scripted, version was implemented

and tested by Sternberg et al. (1997) in Israel following unfruitful efforts to train the interviewers to conduct appropriate interviews. This study evoked the first insight that a structured Protocol rather than general guidelines can lead to better organized questioning and that children are very responsive when the rapport-building is structured, providing remarkably more forensic information in their first spontaneous statement." – [Author], Israel

"The translated Protocol was introduced in Japan in 2009. It was preferred over earlier guidelines due to the fact that it is semi-structured with specific words and phrases suggested for interviewers to use. So far, more than 1000 professionals in Japan have been trained on the NICHD Protocol." – [Author], Japan

Training child forensic interviewers

Initial training should be intensive and last for five to ten days. The content should include discussion of the fact that children can be reliable witnesses, and the role of the investigative interviewer in promoting the well being of children in the forensic context. Interviewers do not necessarily need to become 'experts' during the training but should learn basic concepts of child development particularly relating to memory, language, time, touch, attention, social skills and cognitive abilities. It is also worth raising awareness of key studies that are described in the literature so interviewers can get a flavour of the science behind many of the recommendations, which in turn will prepare them to defend their interviewing practices in court if challenged by defense counsel.

"According to national guidelines (Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, 2006; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2009), the child interviewers using the NICHD Protocol should be familiar with developmental as well as forensic psychology. In addition to police officers, there are five University Hospital units specialized in assessing allegations of CSA. The staff consists of psychologists specialized in child forensic interviewing as well as medical doctors and social workers (and nurses with a degree in family therapy). " – [Author], Finland.

"Because child interviewing is an expert skill, our provincial Police College is adopting a new course exclusively on child interviewing. It will provide extensive practice and feedback on adherence to a NICHD-style Protocol. " – [Author], Canada

Beyond knowledge of children's developmental capabilities, interviewers also must understand the different components of a best practice interview: Ground rules, rapport building,

the practice interview, and questioning children about substantive issues using different kinds of

techniques, with a focus on appropriate interviewer prompts and eliciting narrative information

about what happened during the event(s). This is the core of the initial training. The trainers

should discuss each one of these parts, including a detailed rationale of its importance.

"Since 2008, a full week of training in the NICHD Protocol is offered to police officers in Quebec as part of a four-week program on child maltreatment investigation. The Protocol training includes a review of knowledge on child's memory, suggestibility, children's language and development, as well as a detailed explanation of the structure and use of the Protocol and discrimination of type of questions. For new investigators, the NICHD Protocol is perceived as helpful and reassuring." – [Author], Canada

"Our training for child forensic interviewers includes 10 days of theory about children's development, particularly concerning memory, language and suggestibility, decision making, beliefs and attitudes and the impact of these, and studies of child interviews using the Protocol as well as supervision in small groups where interviews conducted by each participant are watched and analysed. Trainees also are requested to hand in self-evaluated interviews. One clear challenge is that only a very limited number of police officers are trained each year, implying that a large share of the forensic child interviews in Finland are still being done by virtually untrained police officers." – [Author], Finland

"We encountered similar difficulties in our training as has been experienced elsewhere. For instance, trainees confused forensic interviews with counseling or therapy, probably due to the high value of empathy and social support. There were also some difficulties explaining the importance of eliciting narratives, which may reflect personal beliefs and practices surrounding adult-child conversation. These problems were met with modification of training rather than changing the Protocol, highlighting the absolute importance of continual monitoring of standards." – [Author], Japan

After this introduction, the trainers should expose the interviewers to real NICHD

Protocol interviews (preferably via videotape but a transcript can be useful as well) that present

questions, dilemmas and difficulties concerning the discussed issues. Finally, exercises in role

playing for all the participants should take place; these should be followed by detailed feedback

from the group members and at the end by the trainer. Trainers should also have a way of

recognizing good interviewers who demonstrate an adherence to best practice guidelines.

"Initial training includes extensive role play so that trainees can practice conducting mock interviews using the Protocol. This allows participants to receive feedback in a non-threatening,

supportive environment before conducting interviews on real cases. The result is decreased anxiety and increased confidence. Introducing participants to feedback during their initial forensic interview training program helps to normalize the process. This ensures that future feedback is expected and welcomed." – [Author], USA

"Videotaped interviews conducted with real victims are used to show good practice with the Protocol, and examples of challenges and difficulties typically faced with children at different ages. The training also includes practice in small groups of four police officers with actors playing script roles of children. These are videotaped and discussed in the group afterwards. The supervision of these practices is done alternatively by a team made up of psychologists or social workers and police officers. After a week's training, a practical exam is undertaken to certify the training." – [Author], Canada

"Although improvements in training were not evident initially, we found that by emphasizing the importance of following the Protocol, enhancing and practicing the use of open-ended questions, and role playing with review and feedback three to four times, benefits were observed. The analysis of the most recent sample in 2010 showed interviewers used more open-ended questions and less focused questions in the post- than in pre-interviews, which resulted in the increase of information provided by the interviewees (Naka, 2011). Although there is a long way to go until full implementation of the NICHD Protocol in the legal system, according to a survey by Yamamoto (2012), the number of Child Guidance Centers utilizing the protocol increased 12 out of 144 in 2007 to 65 out of 146 in 2010." – [Author], Japan

It is also important that police trainers are experienced forensic interviewers who can share their experiences concerning the importance of using the guidelines and the challenges of presenting their work in the legal context. Ideally, experienced prosecutors should provide guidance about specific legal requirements with viewpoints of experts for the defense also considered.

"The regulations and guidelines in Norway state that investigative interviews of children should only be conducted by qualified interviewers who had been specially trained. All police officers in Norway complete a three-year bachelor's degree at the Norwegian Police University College (NPUC) before beginning patrol work, or embarking on further specialised training, including use of structured interview models influenced by the NICHD Protocol research.." – [Author], Norway

Being in possession of the NICHD Protocol, and using it to provide desirable structure to interviews does not require huge organizational changes or expense. The Protocol does not

contradict the key recommendations of other published interview guidelines and it can be easily

incorporated into existing training.

"Providing this highly specialized and intensive training is very cost effective. Once local experts and representatives of crucial disciplines are identified, they are cultivated as trainers. In some cases, there is no extra fee required for trainers as they provide forensic interview training within their scope of work. In other cases, trainers are employed on a contracted basis. The cost of training materials is nominal and many have access to free training space." – [Author], USA

It is absolutely crucial, however, to understand that NICHD Protocol interview training

must be accompanied with ongoing feedback. Initial training programs that do not dovetail with

ongoing feedback for interviewers are not sufficient at improving investigative interviewing in

the long term (Lamb et al., 2002a; 2002b; Powell, 2008).

"As research shows practice and feedback are necessary for the maintenance of skills (Lamb et al., 2008), we are now providing continual training, feedback and support for interviewers in many locations in Japan." – [Author], Japan

"Initial training, however intensive, is not enough to maintain the quality of interview practices. Therefore, our training program is continuous and both informal and formal approaches are implemented to address positive and negative interviewer behavior. For example, when conducting forensic interviews on actual cases feedback is provided during the interview break(s) and again during the debriefing process immediately following each interview. Forensic interviews are always viewed during team case review meetings. ." – [Author], USA

"Following training with child protection workers in Ontario, the workers initiated 'lunch labs' where they could meet informally and focus on a particular issue of interviewing children, illustrating how the trained can themselves become the trainers." – [Author], Canada

Most jurisdictions, for a variety of reasons, do not provide interviewers the support and

feedback that they need which can result in disastrous consequences when they are taken to task

about the quality of their interviews (La Rooy & Halley, 2010).

"Without feedback, interviewers can make the inaccurate judgment that the Protocol 'doesn't work'. Interviewers believe that they are following the Protocol but it is only when systematic feedback is given that they realize how little they have actually used the Protocol." - [Author], Canada

Challenges to Implementation

In most cases, experienced interviewers can provide follow-up training and feedback to less experienced interviewers. In Quebec, Canada, there are some police departments with only one interviewer, posing a challenge for external feedback. Due to the structured guidelines of the protocol, however, we suggest that well-trained interviewers could potentially reflect on the quality of their own interviews at regular intervals.

"Although trained investigators who work in the same office could help each other with the use of the Protocol, in some areas of Quebec there is only one trained officer to interview children. Consequently, they do not benefit from the support of colleagues. (Cyr, Dion, McDuff, & Trotier-Sylvain, 2012)." – [Author], Canada

There is also a role for future Protocol-based research to test the benefits of electronic feedback (e.g., via skype) at regular intervals on the maintenance of performance. We encourage such research especially by those based in countries with numerous remotely-based units.

A second challenge to implementation is experienced in countries where the legal system is not yet oriented towards best-practice interviewing. All of the experts who provided commentary throughout this review work in countries where high-quality interviewing of child victim/witnesses is already encouraged, or where recent changes have taken place to facilitate the transition to incorporating the Protocol. Portugal is one of the most recent countries to initiate adoption of the Protocol and is slowly seeing improvements to its legal system with regards to child interviewing:

"Currently children make several formal statements (to child protection services, police, prosecutor's office, forensic assessment, judge) sometimes as often as nine times (Peixoto, 2012; Ribiero, 2009) and interviews are not video-recorded. Judges do not have proper training in child interviewing and do not use any standardised forensic interview procedure. While Portuguese Law acknowledges the importance of procedures that elicit spontaneous testimony, the proper conditions to support such interviewing do not as yet exist. We recently started to use our translated NICHD Protocol in real cases and are collecting data to assess its efficacy. The next step is to evaluate the degree of improvement that the use of the Protocol can bring to the Portuguese judicial procedures, with the aim of changing legal policy." – [Author], Portugal

Conclusions

In summary, our understanding of the issues surrounding the forensic interviewing of children have helped shape many professional recommendations internationally. Because our knowledge of memory and suggestibility is now so advanced, core recommendations made by professional bodies worldwide reveal remarkable consensus. The Protocol encompasses this body of knowledge and reflects these international recommendations, and was developed from a sound theoretical and empirical research base through the dedicated work of experts invested in improving the welfare of children worldwide.

"Several agencies within Salt Lake County participated in a study with Michael Lamb and his colleagues at NICHD from 1997-2000. The results were so convincing and the forensic interviews improved so dramatically that the Children's Justice Center developed a training curriculum in 2001. The NICHD Protocol is exclusively taught as the method for conducting forensic interviews of child victims and witnesses." – [Author], USA

The forensic interview plays a crucial role in the context of child abuse investigations and it often determines how the rest of the investigation progresses. Consequently, proper training of forensic interviewers is paramount. Initial training must always be accompanied by continuous ongoing training and support. In order for this approach to be successful, it must be supported by all those involved in child interviewing from the front line interviewers, to administrators and managers, and government officials that mandate guidelines. If forensic interviewers are expected to do such important work, they need to be properly equipped with the support and tools necessary to be successful. We believe that the NICHD Protocol can provide exactly that support to those involved in the critically important role of front-line investigative interviewers of child victims and witnesses. The freely-available full protocol can be found at www.nichdprotocol.com in a variety of languages.

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Table 1.

A summary of the stages of the structured NICHD Protocol

_____

1. Introduction

2. Ground rules

     - Truth & lies

     - Transfer of control (e.g., "don't know," "don't guess," "correct me if I am wrong.")

3. Rapport (e.g., "what do you like to do? [wait for and answer] Tell me about that.")

4. Practice Interview (Memory training/Cognitive support)

5. Transition to substantive phase

6. Investigate incident(s)

     - Open-ended prompts (e.g., "Tell me what happened.")

     - Separation of incidents (e.g., "Did X happen one time, or more than one time?")

  [Option to take a Break if necessary]

7. Focused questions about information not already mentioned followed by open-ended prompts

8. Disclosure information (Who did the child initially tell? Who else knows what happened?)

9. Closure (e.g., "Anything else you want to tell," "Do you have any questions to ask me?")

10. Neutral topic (e.g., "What are you going to do when you leave?")

_____

Note. The full version of the NICHD protocol can be found by visiting nichdprotocol.com, along

with the adapted 'Ten Step Investigative Interview' by Lyon, 2005.