



# Center for Law & Human Behavior

The University of Texas at El Paso



RESEARCH ON INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING AND INTERROGATION  
HOW EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE CAN IMPROVE OUTCOMES

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## *Research in Brief*

**CBTIR**

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## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

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Many researchers are interested in which investigative interviewing methods are most effective in eliciting useful, accurate information from a source. This report provides a brief review of this literature and describes current and past research conducted by Dr. Misty Duke, in collaboration with Dr. James Wood, on non-coercive interviewing methods and the development of rapport in investigative interviews.

### **What Are The Research Findings?**

Many factors may be detrimental to effective investigative interviewing, primarily because they could lead sources to provide inaccurate information and/or false confessions. Effective interviewing methods elicit more true information than false information. These methods depend upon the development and maintenance of rapport throughout the interview.

### **What Were The Study's Limitations?**

The main limitation of research on investigative interviewing practices is that most studies have been conducted in laboratory settings. The few studies conducted in field settings have mostly been observational, or descriptive, in nature. More field experiments are required in order to determine that those methods found to be effective in a laboratory setting will also be effective in real-world settings.

## **Who Should Read This Report?**

Training officers from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies who conduct interviews and interrogations on a routine basis.

# RESEARCH ON INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING AND INTERROGATION: HOW EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE CAN IMPROVE OUTCOMES

## Project Overview

Some investigative interviewing practices that are taught to federal, state, and local law enforcement personnel may be detrimental in that they could bring about false confessions or cause someone to provide false information. Those interviewing practices that research has indicated might be useful in obtaining true confessions or true information often involve rapport-building.

Dr. Duke, in collaboration with Dr. James Wood, has conducted several research projects on investigative interviewing with both children and adults. This report will review a summary of each of those projects.

## Objectives

The objectives of the research were to:

Demonstrate under what circumstances an investigative interviewer might cause a child to develop a false memory of an event (Study 1)

How to avoid information loss in investigative interviews conducted with an interpreter (Study 2)

Develop a measure of rapport-building within the context of investigative interviewing (Study 3)

Test the effectiveness of strategies of interviewing conducted in the context of intelligence collection (Study 4)

## Methodology

Most research studies on effective interviewing strategies rely on analogue, experimental research. Analogue research is typically conducted within a laboratory (or other controlled) setting, which allows the researcher to tightly control the conditions under which observations are made. Such studies allow the researcher to isolate the effect of interview methods on source behavior.

### Study 1

Children were told that the interviewer “heard about” four events they had experienced and were asked to remember, and provide details, about those events. In fact, each child had only experienced three of the four events; the fourth event was fabricated by the experimenter. Two interviewing strategies were varied across children: 1) asking each child to help her teacher by remembering and 2) asking each child to imagine the event happening. Each child’s response to being asked to remember the false event was examined to determine how many children developed false memories of the event.

### Study 2

College students who spoke Spanish (“witnesses”) were asked to view a video of a crime and write down what they witnessed. Next, they were interviewed about the crime in English using an interpreter, who spoke both English and Spanish. Special headsets were used to

keep the witness from hearing the interviewer's questions in English and to keep the interviewer from hearing the witness' responses in Spanish. Another person observed the interview and took notes. All interviews were recorded. After the interview, the interviewer and observer completed a questionnaire about what they had learned about the crime. Then, the interviewer and observer either reviewed the observer's notes about the interview or listened to the English parts of the recording of the interview. They completed the questionnaire a second time. These questionnaires were examined to determine whether or not reviewing notes or listening to a recording reduced information loss.

### Study 3

College students watched a video about events leading up to an incident of domestic terrorism. They were told that they would be interviewed about the events and they were asked to withhold certain pieces of information from the interviewer. They were later told that they could reveal the information if they wished; the interviewer also increased pressure on the witness to reveal information. After the interview, the witness completed a questionnaire about the rapport she experienced with the interviewer. The amount of accurate information revealed to the interviewer was examined. Also, the witness' responses on the rapport questionnaire were used to develop a measure of rapport specific to the context of investigative interviews.

A follow-up study used a similar procedure except that witnesses were interviewed in one of three ways: 1) the interviewer put

pressure on the source to get her to talk, 2) the interviewer built rapport with the source, or 3) the interviewer did neither of these. The responses on the rapport questionnaire were examined to determine whether or not sources would perceive more rapport in the "rapport-building" interview.

### Study 4

This is an ongoing study. College students are led to believe that the purpose of the study is to examine performance on a general knowledge assessment. Half of the participants are induced to cheat on the assessment (the "guilty" participants), while half are not induced to cheat (the "innocent participants"). Next, all participants are accused of cheating and various interrogation methods are used in an attempt to elicit information from the source. The benefit of this methodology is that participants believe they are actually being interrogated (rather than merely role-playing an interrogation) and they also believe in the high-stakes consequences related to their behavior during the interrogation.

The participants are interrogated using one of two methods listed in the Army Field Manual: We Know All or Change of Scenery. Furthermore, participants' personality and perception of rapport are measured. The amount of information produced by participants will be examined to determine which method is most effective. Furthermore, participants' personality scores will be assessed to conclude whether or not personality determines the effectiveness of the interrogation methods. Finally, the participants' responses on the rapport

measure will be considered to determine how each interrogation method impacts on rapport.

## Major Study Findings

### Study 1

Although neither interview strategy was more likely to produce a false memory of the event, 28% of all children interviewed developed a false memory. This demonstrates how, for some children, simply telling them about an event the interviewer thinks is true can produce a memory for that event, even if it was never experienced. This is a demonstration of a reality monitoring error in which someone has difficulty distinguishing between a thought-about, or imagined event, and one that is actually experienced. Many research studies have demonstrated how this may occur in children and adults under various circumstances; some have even shown that a person may develop a false memory for committing a criminal act.

### Study 2

When interviewers reviewed notes about the interview taken by an observer, their knowledge of information about the crime improved over the knowledge they had immediately after the interview. When interviewers listened to a recording of the interview, their knowledge of information about the crime did not improve. Some previous research has demonstrated that information loss can occur when interviewing with an interpreter. This study demonstrated that one way to reduce that information loss is to review notes of the interview taken by a third party.

### Study 3

A 21-item measure of rapport in investigative interviewing contexts was developed (Rapport Scales for Investigative Interviews and Interrogations; RS<sub>3i</sub>). Ratings of rapport were generally higher for rapport-building interviews than for interviews characterized by interviewer pressure. Furthermore, participants who gave higher ratings of rapport were more likely to share previously withheld information with the interviewer. This study demonstrated that the RS<sub>3i</sub> can provide useful information about whether or not an interviewer is successful in building rapport with a source and that rapport may partially determine whether or not a source cooperates with an interviewer. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that rapport may help cooperative sources talk more during an interview and may prevent memory distortion. Furthermore, a few observational field studies have linked rapport-building in interviews with uncooperative sources with successful interview outcomes.

### Study 4

This study is ongoing so findings are not available at this time. It is expected that, when participants are interviewed using the Change of Scenery and We Know All interview methods, they will provide more information than when they are interviewed using a simple, direct questioning method. Furthermore, it is predicted that the interview methods will affect a person's cooperation during the interviews through that person's perception of her rapport with the interviewer. Finally, it is expected that, the

effectiveness of the interview methods will partially depend upon the participants' personality traits. This study is only the second to directly assess the effectiveness of interview methods listed in the Army Field Manual. The Manual is used by intelligence interviewers in civilian and military agencies. Furthermore, this study is one of the few to determine how characteristics of the source may impact the effectiveness of an interview method.

### Future Areas of Research

Research on rapport-building in an investigative interviewing context is still in its infancy. More research is required to determine which rapport-building behaviors are most effective and how rapport-building may be tailored to specific sources and specific interview contexts.

Most research on investigative interviewing has been conducted in a laboratory setting. The interview methods that have received initial empirical support must be field-tested to demonstrate that they are effective in real-world settings.

### Implications for Practice

Research findings on investigative interviewing suggest several recommendations for practitioners. First, interview methods that involve intense interviewer pressure, such as minimization and the false evidence ploy, should be used sparingly, and any confessions obtained through such methods should be examined critically. Additionally, interviewers should avoid asking leading questions which may distort memories for events.

Second, interviewers should spend significant time preparing for the interview through thorough investigation. This will allow interviewers to develop an effective interview plan tailored to the source.

Third, interviewers should focus on rapport-building throughout the interview. Interviewers-in-training may benefit from measuring a source's perception of rapport during role-playing exercises. Such feedback may improve their rapport-building skills.

Fourth, interviewers should try using information-gathering strategies during the interview. Such strategies produce more details about events which may then be checked for accuracy. Additionally, interviewers may benefit from having an observer take notes during the interview and reviewing those notes in order to remember more of the details mentioned during the interview.



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