

Cognitive Interview Method in Child Eyewitnesses

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INTRODUCTION

The **Cognitive Interview** ^[1] is a procedure mainly used in police investigations to obtain reliable and valid testimonies from witnesses. The scientific validity of this technique is based on its cognitive basis. The CI hinges on two well-known principles of memory: (1) the multicomponent view of the memory trace, and (2) the encoding-specificity principle.

In its original form, it was composed of 4 mnemonic techniques, designed to improve recall and communication:

- Report Everything
- Mental Reinstatement
- Change Perspective
- Change Order



The CI method was reviewed ^[2] and other techniques based on social and communicative principles were added in order to enhance interviewee's comfort.

However, studies carried out so far are scarce. In Spain no empirical studies proving the efficacy of this procedure with Spanish participants are available.

The aim of this work is to conduct a systematic review of the available empirical studies that use CI with children.

ABSTRACT

The Cognitive Interview (CI) has been tested as a method to obtain reliable statements from children. In the present review, after an analysis of the studies carried out until now, we can conclude that, although CI is better than other procedures used so far, more research is needed to clarify some aspects.

METHOD

- An online search was conducted in the following databases: **IME (CSIC database)**, **Psycarticles**, **PsycNet**, **PubMed**, and **PubPsyc**, following the inclusion criteria (i), (ii) and (iii) ^[4 articles].
- The inclusion criteria were broadened (iv) and the **Google Scholar** tool was used to increase the number of databases ^[17 articles].
- References from experts in Legal Psychology ^[2 articles].

Inclusion criteria

- (i) Use of the Cognitive Interview as an interview technique in the field of police investigation, (ii) Empirical application of the CI method, (iii) application in a child sample and (iv) articles in English or Spanish.

23 articles obtained = 6 non empirical studies (ii) = 9 non related to children (iii) =

8
articles reviewed

RESULTS

All the articles reviewed agree on the superiority of the CI method [21 - 27% more of correct information [3], [8] compared to the procedure used so far (Structured Interview)].

The increase in correct information is occasionally accompanied by an increase of errors and confabulations [4],[5],[7].

Regardless of this, the accuracy rate is not affected in any case.

Furthermore, the amount of correct information is clearly superior to the errors; of every 6 correct answers, children make 1 mistake [5].

Difficulties have been found in change order and change perspective techniques.

Change Order mnemonic's use is approved by some authors [8] but rejected by others who say that it can increase children's suggestibility level [11].

Change perspective mnemonic is harder to apply, so many authors suggest omitting it with younger kids [10].

The CI is also effective after long delays [7].

After long periods (6 months) the CI proves to be more effective when it comes to elicit correct information.

They found that the number of errors do not increase, although more confabulations are found.

A previous CI interview elicits more correct information in later interviews (regardless of it is a CI or Structured Interview).

A second interview generates new correct information that was not remembered during the first interview (reminiscence effect). The CI generates more correct information in following interviews [7].

The statements obtained through CI do not hinder the application of later reliability assessment techniques.

CI statements of observed events contain more visual, affective, spatial and temporal information than CI statements of imagined events [10].

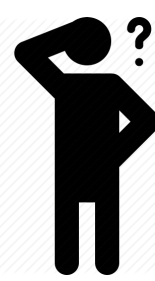
The latest modifications of CI elicits greater amounts of correct details compared to the reviewed CI.

Indeed, the best procedure to use with young and very young children is a CI composed by Context Reinstatement, Report All and Cued Recall [11].

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS



All the studies reviewed agree on the fact that CI elicits better statements in children.



- (1) Some studies state that the increase of the correct information is accompanied by an increment of errors and confabulations.
- (2) Other authors affirm that just when the interview is conducted after long delays children tend to make up (confabulate) some details.



Whatever the case is, the fact is that the accuracy rate is not affected in any case.



The nature of the events selected in the studies is not stressful nor generates fear in children. Hence, the generalization of the findings could be compromised.



The restricted access to some articles may affect the results shown in this literature review.



It would be convenient to carry out a Spanish adaptation of the CI and test its validity in child eyewitnesses.

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