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A Nationwide Survey of Child Interviewing Practices in Canada¹

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L'objectif de cette étude était de sensibiliser les professionnels au degré de consensus et d'uniformité des techniques d'entrevue qui, ultimement, influencent l'expérience des enfants victimes et leur progression au sein du système juridique canadien. Nous avons sondé 200 professionnels interviewant des enfants au Canada sur les directives et les techniques qu'ils utilisent, leurs perceptions de leur formation et du cadre d'entrevues ainsi que les besoins et défis auxquels ils font face quotidiennement. Les résultats dévoilent une grande variété de pratiques utilisées partout au pays ainsi que des différences en ce qui concerne la durée de la formation obtenue et qui la fournit. Les policiers et les intervenants des services de protection de l'enfance ont tendance à avoir différents taux de satisfaction quant aux cadres d'entrevue. Certains aspects communs ont été notés, et ce, peu importe l'organisme et l'emplacement. En effet, la plupart des interviewers pouvaient aisément identifier les défis liés à l'entrevue de témoins vulnérables et exprimer le désir de recevoir des formations supplémentaires (ex. une couverture plus ample du sujet et un suivi régulier). Les réponses dévoilent une connaissance de la recherche contemporaine, ainsi que de petits groupes de pensées plus traditionnelles, sur les

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compétences des enfants témoins et les techniques d'entrevue. Bien que des différences en matière de cadres d'entrevues et de fournisseurs de formation ne causent pas nécessairement des problèmes, le développement d'une seule politique canadienne sur les éléments importants liés à l'entrevue de témoins vulnérables que des programmes de formation doivent respecter pourrait avoir de la valeur.

Mots clés : enfants, entrevues, formation, sondage, pratiques d'entrevues, témoins vulnérables, police, protection de l'enfance, centre de défense de l'enfance

The goal of the present study was to create professional awareness about the degree of consensus and consistency in the interview techniques that ultimately influence child victims' experiences and progression through the legal system in Canada. We surveyed 200 professionals who interview children in Canada about the guidelines and techniques they use, their perceptions of their training and interviewing arrangements, and the needs and challenges they face in daily practice. Results revealed a wide variety of practices in use across the country, and differences in length of training and who provided it. Police and child protection workers tended to differ on their satisfaction with interviewing arrangements. Commonalities were observed across organizations and locales in that most interviewers could readily identify challenges in talking to vulnerable witnesses and desires for additional training (e.g., greater topic breadth and regular follow-ups). Responses revealed awareness of contemporary research, as well as pockets of more traditional thinking, about child witness capabilities and interviewing techniques. Although variety in interviewing guidelines and training providers is not necessarily problematic, the development of a single nationwide policy on the core components of vulnerable witness interviewing, to which training programs must adhere, could have particular value.

Keywords: children, interviewing, training, survey, interview practices, vulnerable witnesses, police, child protection, child advocacy centre

In 2002, the London Family Court Clinic published a report called "Child Witnesses in Canada: Where We've Been, Where We're Going." The report reviewed aspects of children's participation in the legal system, and while it primarily focused on courtroom practices, it also made reference to recommendations concerning training for investigative interviewers of children. The report identified dissimilar training for professionals across the legal system as one of the key operational challenges to better service delivery for child witnesses and victims. Problematically, child witnesses in different parts of the country could

face different experiences at each stage of the legal process, including the investigative interview. Researchers, practitioners, and legal professionals have also noted that child-interviewing practices vary widely across Canada (Luther 2014; Quan 2014; Brubacher et al. 2016).

Little is known about the type, frequency, and duration of training provided to Canadian investigative interviewers of vulnerable witnesses. Indeed, only one small study involved the querying of Canadian investigative interviewers about their training needs and questioning procedures with children. Roberts and Cameron (2015) surveyed 13 front-line interviewers, eight of whom regularly interviewed children. Of these eight, all but one had received training. Most respondents used the cognitive interview (Fisher and Geiselman 1992) or the StepWise Interview (Yuille, Marxsen, and Cooper 1999; Yuille, Cooper, and Hervé 2009).

In contrast to the lack of research on the *nature* of training, a substantially larger body of research exists regarding the questioning *performance* of Canadian interviewers (Dion and Cyr 2008; Cyr and Lamb 2009; Price and Roberts 2011; Rischke, Roberts, and Price 2011; Luther et al. 2015). Overall, those findings are similar to what has been reported elsewhere: untrained interviewers ask few of the recommended (e.g., open-ended) question types, but training leads to improvements in the types of questions interviewers ask, at least in the short term.

Best practice interviewing

There is international consensus on the features of best practice interviewing (La Rooy et al. 2015; Poole 2016; Powell et al. 2016). Chief among the features is the use of open-ended prompts. These are questions that encourage elaborate responses and do not dictate the content of what should be reported (e.g., “Tell me everything you can remember”). Open-ended questions elicit information from recall as opposed to recognition memory, which means that reported information is more likely to be accurate in response to open than to closed questions (Porter, Yuille, and Bent 1995). In contrast, closed or specific questions (e.g., “What colour was his shirt?”) have the tendency to limit both the length and scope of responses. These questions do not promote the generation of information by children themselves and rather focus on narrow details the interviewer has deemed important. Further, specific questions are more likely to be suggestive (e.g., “What did he have on under his pants?” when a child may not have access to

that information), which have been clearly demonstrated to negatively impact children's accuracy (e.g., Bruck and Ceci 1999).

In addition to open-ended questions, most experts agree that interviews with vulnerable witnesses such as children should include some form of interview instructions (Brubacher, Poole, and Dickinson 2015), a practice narrative phase (Roberts et al. 2011; Whiting and Price 2017), a funnel approach to introducing the topic of concern (Lamb et al. 2007; Powell and Snow 2007), and avoidance of leading, suggestive, or coercive questioning (La Rooy et al. 2015; Powell et al. 2016). Most experts also agree that flexibility is important. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the use of a flexible method assisted interviewers in asking open-ended questions and including key interview components (see Lamb 2016).

The finding that semi-structured guidelines can aid interviewers need not imply that one single interview procedure, trained by a single group of experts, should be used by everyone. Such a monopolistic approach risks impeding the process of continual learning and change driven by different perspectives from both researchers and practitioners. However, nationwide standards should be developed with regard to the basic content of child interview training programs and interview procedures/parameters (as was recommended in the United States: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 1997). As a starting point, we aimed to find out what content was being taught to child interviewing professionals across Canada, by whom, and where such training took place.

Interview protocols and guidelines

Among the protocols and guidelines used to train child interviewers, relatively few have undergone extensive empirical evaluation. The NICHD protocol (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development: Lamb et al., 2007) has been the subject of the most research. Numerous international studies have supported the effectiveness of the protocol and of its best practice components (e.g., open-ended questions, rapport, a practice phase). Many other protocols and guidelines exist but have received less direct empirical attention. For example, the cognitive interview is perhaps the most well-researched protocol for adults, but its use with children has received less focus except in modified forms (Memon, Meissner, and Fraser 2010). The StepWise interview, though in regular use in several areas in Canada, has been the subject of only one empirical evaluation in the last decade (Yuille

et al. 2009). It is critical to note, however, that many contemporary protocols and guidelines include similar recommendations (Newlin et al. 2015), and those recommendations are clearly supported by empirical work that does not directly address any individual protocol.

Improving collaboration among researchers and investigative interviewers

For several decades, academics in developmental, cognitive, and forensic psychology have studied topics related to children's participation in the legal system, including memory capability, suggestibility, credibility, and communicative competence (for a review, see Lamb et al. 2015). Importantly, though some of these findings are conveyed directly to practitioners by researchers and there have been impressive examples in several jurisdictions of collaborative development of interview guidelines (e.g., State of Michigan Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect and Department of Human Services 2011), this practice is far from universal. Further, even when evidence-based training is provided, it is clear that recommendations (though often endorsed by professionals) are not implemented in practice (Lamb 2016). This lack of implementation is not necessarily reflective of a lack of interest or motivation, but may better reflect limitations of the ways in which training and feedback are rolled out (Rischke et al. 2011). Irrespective of the reasons, the research literature consistently highlights a gap between knowledge of best practice interviewing principles and actual practice in forensic interviews (Lamb 2016).

In recent years, there has been a move to enhance dialogue between academic researchers and practitioners to increase bi-directional communication. These changes are evidenced by groups (such as the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group, www.iiirg.org) that directly and systematically involve researchers and practitioners in their membership and actively facilitate collaborations. In keeping with this trend, the present research was designed and authored by academics and practitioners, and its focus was on the voices of front-line Canadian investigative interviewers with respect to their practices, training needs, and interviewing challenges.

Aims of the present study

The goal of this research was to generate a descriptive picture of child interviewing nationwide. We surveyed police officers and child protection workers – the two groups of professionals most often tasked with

interviewing children in Canada – about the guidelines and techniques they use, their perceptions of their training and interviewing arrangements, and the challenges they face in daily practice. Ultimately, the survey was designed to create awareness for professionals (e.g., forensic interviewers such as mental health, law enforcement, and child protection professionals, as well as lawyers, judges, and researchers) of the degree of consensus and consistency in the interview techniques that ultimately influence children’s experiences and progression through the legal system.

Method

Participants

Recruitment

Potential participating organizations were first identified by searching the Internet for all police detachments, child protection agencies, and Child (and Youth) Advocacy Centres (hereafter, CAC) in each Canadian province and territory. Where e-mail addresses were available, we sent an invitation describing the project and included a link to the survey. If e-mail addresses were not available online, a research assistant attempted to contact each agency or unit by telephone to request an appropriate e-mail address. Social media profiles of the authors (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) were also used to advertise the survey links. Because of the potential number of respondents who accessed the survey through social media or word of mouth (passed on via colleagues), we could not determine an upper limit on how many potential participants were made aware of the survey. In total, we made direct contact with 435 police detachments, local child protection agencies, and CACs across Canada.

Respondents

A preliminary report was published in *Blue Line* magazine² in November 2015, which provided a brief overview of the findings and included a call for additional participants, particularly in under-represented regions of the country. After publication of that article, an additional nine participants completed the survey. The final sample included 200 professionals, for a response rate of approximately 46% (of those we directly contacted). Note that this figure is an overestimate, given that most of the organizations we contacted would have employed more than one individual who conducts interviews with children.

Table 1: Response rates from each Canadian province and territory, ordered by percentage of sample

Province/Territory	N Organizations Contacted	N Individuals Responding	% of Sample (n = 200)
Saskatchewan	34 ^a	81	40.5
Ontario	92	39	19.5
Alberta	111	24	12.0
British Columbia	28	13	6.5
Quebec	20	12	6.0
Northwest Territories	17	8	4.0
Manitoba	49	5	2.5
Nova Scotia	26	4	2.0
Nunavut	7	4	2.0
Yukon	21	3	1.5
Newfoundland & Labrador	8	2	1.0
Prince Edward Island	11	2	1.0
New Brunswick	11	1	0.5
Decline to respond		2	1.0

^a Although we directly contacted 34 organizations in Saskatchewan, we do not know how many police were reached via Saskatchewan chiefs of police.

Most respondents (95%) worked in child protection (20%, $n = 40$) and police departments (75%, $n = 150$). Three identified a CAC as their organization (1.5%, $n = 3$), five worked in other organizations (e.g., legal, medical), and two declined to provide employment information. These 10 participants were collapsed into one *other professionals* group. Despite targeted attempts, response rates were not representative across all regions (see Table 1). For example, a high percentage of respondents (40.5%) were from the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's chiefs of police actively supported the project, which certainly contributed to this high percentage. Other jurisdictions with relatively high response rates included Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec.

We did not statistically compare the nine participants who responded after publication of the *Blue Line* article with the remainder of the sample, but we did explore their responses to each question. Overall, their pattern of responses was very similar to that for the full sample, except that they represented a greater percentage of police (89%, 8/9), all had received some training (whereas 7% of the full sample had not received any), and six of the nine were from provinces or territories that composed 4% or less of the full sample.

Materials and procedure

The survey consisted of 14 questions and was delivered using Qualtrics via an e-mailed survey link (see Appendix A). All participants completed the survey between October 2014 and December 2015. For some questions, response options were developed by the researchers and provided in a dropdown menu. Most questions were free-response text boxes, allowing participants the freedom to write their thoughts, comments, and opinions with no restriction on length. Participants were provided an unlimited amount of time to complete the survey once it was opened and were able to exit and revisit the survey if needed. All responses were anonymous and cannot be traced back to individuals.

Coding

Common themes were identified by two of the authors jointly, and categories for coding these themes were developed into a coding manual. For example, in response to a question about challenges experienced when interviewing children, many participants mentioned the establishment of children's trust, not appearing intimidating to children, and difficulties relating to children. The category of *barriers between interviewer and child* was created for these types of responses. Another example of a category for this question was *external factors*, which included concerns about early complaint contamination of children's reports. Category codes are provided in Table 2, except for Question 1 regarding training on specific interview protocols or guidelines and Question 10 asking respondents about topics on which they would like to learn more. These two questions yielded a large number of categories and are presented in the *Results* (see Tables 3 and 4, respectively).

Reliability

After all themes had been identified and operationally defined, anonymized survey responses were coded by two independent research assistants blind to the study's aims and the respondents' professions. Reliability of category assignment for each question was assessed with Cohen's Kappa. Values ranged from 0.80 to 0.95 ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 0.05$). Each disagreement was resolved through discussion between the coders. The coders consulted the authors in three instances where the coders were unable to identify an interview technique or individual who delivered training.

Table 2: Coding categories and examples

Survey Question	Category and Example
Q2. General advice	Advice related to conducting the interview (e.g., build rapport, ask open-ended questions) Developmental considerations (e.g., use age-appropriate language, avoid abstract concepts) Non-verbal aids (e.g., draw pictures, use body diagrams) Safety planning (e.g., develop a safety plan, discuss safety at end of interview)
Q3. Who provided training?	Academics Canadian Child Abuse Association (CCAA) Children's Aid Society (or similar) Conference "Expert" (unspecified) The Forensic Alliance Forensic interviewing consultants In-house trainers/colleagues Provincial police college Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) White Buffalo Other
Q4. Length	None/1–2 days/a week/more than a week
Q5. Follow-up training	Yes (unelaborated) No Other training (i.e., unrelated courses) In-house informal discussion with colleagues Peer-review procedures Self-directed (e.g., reading literature)
Q7b. Rationale for interviewing arrangement	Child factors (e.g. easier for child to concentrate) Interviewer factors (e.g., we have our own specific agenda) Communication factors (e.g., child is comfortable talking one on one) Collaborative reasons (e.g., can meet both legal and protective needs simultaneously) Practical constraints (e.g., not enough interviewers to do interviews in teams) Prosecutorial concerns (e.g., fewer people involved makes it easier to get interview accepted in court) Trained/told to do it that way

Q7e. Feelings about interview arrangement	Satisfied Dissatisfied Ambivalent It depends on situation
Q9. Challenges	Interviewer factors (e.g., struggling with asking open-ended questions, lack of confidence) Child factors (e.g., keeping attention, dealing with limited vocabulary) Communication barriers (e.g., not knowing how to effectively build rapport, gaining trust) Training-related (e.g., feeling that training was not sufficient, wanting to learn more) Organizational issues (e.g., lack of time to prepare for interview, space not child-friendly) External influences (e.g., concern that report may be contaminated by caregiver, coaching) Legal related (e.g., concern that child will not appear credible, making sure the charge will not be dismissed) Interview outcomes (e.g., worry about what will happen to the child/suspect after the investigation)

Table 3: Interview protocols and guidelines on which respondents received training

Response	Child Protection	Police	Other	Total
Cognitive interview	3 (5%)	29 (16%)	3 (17%)	35
Motivational interviewing	2 (4%)	0	0	2
NCAC Framework ^a	1 (2%)	3 (2%)	3 (17%)	7
NICHHD protocol ^b	7 (13%)	19 (10%)	3 (17%)	29
Pure Version	0	2 (1%)	0	2
RATAC ^c	2 (4%)	7 (4%)	0	9
Reid	0	4 (2%)	0	4
Signs of Safety	2 (4%)	0	0	2
StepWise	22 (39%)	27 (15%)	4 (22%)	53
Statement Validity Analysis	1 (2%)	1 (1%)	0	2
White Buffalo	0	62 (34%)	0	62
Other ^d	2 (4%)	6 (3%)	2 (11%)	10
Non-specific	14 (25%)	24 (13%)	3 (17%)	41

Note: Table totals 258 responses from 197 respondents. Percentages are in parentheses and calculated from total responses for each professional group.

^a NCAC (National Children's Advocacy Centre guidelines)

^b NICHHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development protocol)

^c RATAC (Rapport, Anatomy identification, Touch inquiry, Abuse scenario, Closure)

^d Seven unique names of interview protocols/guidelines/instructions were provided, and three respondents provided unelaborated "yes" answers.

Table 4: Topics about which interviewers desired more information

Category	% ^a	Police % ^b	Child Protection % ^b
		(n = 108)	(n = 40)
Interviewing protocols/guidelines	25.0	25.0	25.0
Follow-up training	21.6	23.1	17.5
Child development – diversely able	10.1	8.3	15.0
Court-associated topics	8.1	11.1	0.0
Credibility assessment	8.1	5.6	15.0
Developing rapport	6.8	8.3	2.5
Child development – normative	6.1	7.4	2.5
Unique situations	4.1	3.7	5.0
Types of abuse	3.4	2.8	5.0
Interviewing reluctant children	3.4	3.7	2.5
Becoming certified	1.4	0.0	5.0
Cultural considerations	1.4	0.0	5.0
Historical abuse	0.7	0.9	0.0

Note: The 10 other professionals (9 responses) were omitted from the table. Their responses related to interviewing protocols, follow-up training, child development, and types of abuse.

^a Percentage of all police and child protection responses to question.

^b Percentage of all responses in professional category.

Results

Data are largely descriptive. When possible and appropriate, differences between professional groups (police and child protection) were analyzed with Pearson's chi-square tests. All confidence intervals (CI) are 95%. Significant effects within contingency tables were identified by calculating the individual cell chi-squares, and alpha (0.05) was divided by the number of cells in the omnibus chi-square analysis to control for Type 1 errors. The 10 *other professionals* are represented in overall totals but were omitted from all analyses; degrees of freedom reported in chi-square tests are therefore less than the total number of responses for each question. Analyses by region (province/territory) were not possible due to many small cell sizes, but descriptive patterns are reported where applicable.

Training techniques

Specific guidelines

Respondents were asked whether they used a specific recognized interview protocol or set of techniques, or conversely, received general

advice about interviewing that was not embedded within a protocol structure (Questions 1 and 2, Appendix A). Many participants ($n = 86$) answered both questions. Of the 197 respondents who answered Question 1, 21% ($n = 41$) said they did not receive training in using any specific interview protocol or guideline. The remaining 79% ($n = 156$) provided 217 responses. A breakdown of responses by professional group can be found in Table 3.

With the exception of Saskatchewan (where police reported being trained by a consulting company that was reported only in that province³), interviewing protocols and guidelines were primarily spread among four procedures that will be recognized by researchers of child interviews: the cognitive interview (Fisher and Geiselman 1992), the NICHD protocol (Lamb et al. 2007), the StepWise Interview guidelines (Yuille et al. 2009), and RATAc (Rapport, Anatomy identification, Touch inquiry, Abuse scenario, Closure: Anderson et al. 2010).

To compare across professions, we conducted a 2 (profession: child protection, police) \times 4 (protocol/guideline) chi-square analysis. In addition to the *other professionals*, we also omitted the White Buffalo training (unique to Saskatchewan) and any guidelines that were mentioned by fewer than five respondents (after removing *other professionals*), leaving 116 responses for analyses. Only one cell had an expected count less than 5. The chi-square was significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 116) = 12.17$, $p = 0.007$, Cramer's $V = 0.324$. Specifically, child protection workers (8.8%, CI = 0, 18.32) were significantly less likely than police (35.4%, CI = 23.50, 47.30) to have received training in using the cognitive interview, and significantly more likely to have received training in the StepWise guidelines (child protection 64.7%, CI = 48.64, 80.76; police 32.9%, CI = 21.20, 44.60).

Descriptively, the StepWise Interview guidelines were taught frequently in the West (Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan accounting for 58.4% of StepWise training locations), while most respondents from Quebec were trained in the NICHD protocol (38.5% of responses in the NICHD category, and 76.9% of responses from Quebec). Respondents from Ontario frequently indicated that they had not received training in the use of *specific* protocols or guidelines (39% of Ontario respondents).

General advice

Of the participants trained in using specific guidelines, 55% ($n = 86$) also explained what types of general advice they had received about

interviewing children. The 86 respondents provided 141 answers, which were coded into four categories. Most responses concerned advice related to conducting the *interview* itself (58%), such as using open-ended questions and avoiding suggestive ones. Only 13% of responses mentioned *developmental considerations*, such as using age-appropriate language. The use of *non-verbal aids* such as body diagrams was reported in 23% of responses, and the *development of a safety plan* (e.g., if child discloses information that may require a joint investigation) was mentioned in 6% of responses. We conducted a 2 (profession) \times 4 (advice) chi-square analysis, which was significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 133) = 8.77, p = 0.032$, Cramer's $V = 0.257$. Alpha for assessing the contribution of the individual cells was 0.006 (0.05/8). None of the chi-square tests for the adjusted standardized residuals survived the alpha correction, $p \geq 0.02$. There were no clear regional patterns.

Details of the training

Who delivered training

Most respondents (197/200; 98.5%) provided one or more answers regarding from whom they had received their training (290 responses). Many response categories were inherently tied to region (e.g., provincial police colleges largely trained only police officers, and only some provinces have provincial police colleges). Police outside Saskatchewan were trained in provincial police colleges (27% of police respondents after White Buffalo training was removed; 38/139), by in-house trainers and colleagues (27%, locale not specified), by the RCMP (11%), by academics (9%), by The Forensic Alliance (6%), and by a variety of other means (20%). Responses from child protection workers (72 responses) were predominantly in-house (37%), the Canadian Child Abuse Association (13%), academics (11%), and forensic interviewing consultants (10%). The remaining 29% of responses were distributed across the other categories (all less than 5%; e.g., at a conference, from an "interviewing expert" [non-specific]).

Length of training

Of the 197 respondents who answered the question about who had trained them, 194 provided the length of their training. Fourteen (7%) said they had not received any training at all. The most frequent response was one week (63%, $n = 122$), followed by one to two days (20%, $n = 38$; three of these reported less than a full day), and 10% ($n = 20$) reported

more than one week. Removing the 10 *other professionals* left 185 responses for a 2 (profession) \times 4 (length of training: none, up to two days, up to one week, more than one week) chi-square analysis. There were significant differences by profession, χ^2 (3, $N = 185$) = 16.76, $p = 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.301$. A week's training was reported by 70% of police (CI = 62.46, 77.34) versus 36% of child protection (CI = 20.84, 50.96). In contrast, 39% of child protection workers (CI = 23.23, 53.77) reported training up to two days versus just 15% of police (CI = 9.29, 20.91). The professions did not differ at the extreme ends of training length (none, more than a week).

Training that ran longer than one week was only reported in Alberta (16% of length options), British Columbia (10%), Ontario (37%), Quebec (26%), and Saskatchewan (11%). The 14 respondents who indicated no training were spread across six provinces and territories. On the whole, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario yielded the widest distribution of responses across the training length categories (these provinces also had relatively large numbers of respondents compared to most other regions).

Follow-up training

Of 200 participants, 14 had never received any training and two additional participants declined to answer. From the 184 who responded to the question about follow-up training, 10 gave an unelaborated "yes" response. The remaining 174 respondents gave 182 answers. Ninety (49% of 184) indicated that they had not received follow-up training; six included justifications (e.g., citing lack of funds). The remaining 92 answers fell into four categories: *other training* (38%), *in-house informal discussion with colleagues* (35%), *peer-review procedures* (15%), and *self-directed* (13%; e.g., "I stay current by accessing the literature").

A 2 (profession) \times 5 (follow-up category) chi-square test indicated significant differences across organizations, χ^2 (4, $N = 167$) = 17.23, $p = 0.002$, Cramer's $V = 0.321$. Police respondents (53%, CI = 44.79, 61.81) were more likely than child protection workers (31%, 16.02, 46.78) to indicate that they received no follow-up training (88% of all "no" responses were from police). Child protection workers (20%, CI = 6.75, 33.25) were more likely than police (3%, CI = 0.09, 5.91) to indicate that they took responsibility for their own follow-up training (on their own time and/or at their own expense). No regional patterns were evident.

Interview arrangements

We were also interested in identifying how interviews are typically conducted. We asked respondents whether they usually interview children alone or with another person in the room. This question was answered by 199 participants: 74% reported usually interviewing alone and 26% reported usually interviewing with another person. A 2 (profession) \times 2 (arrangement) chi-square indicated no significant differences in reports by organization, χ^2 (2, $N = 190$) < 1 , $p = 0.83$, Cramer's $V = 0.015$. Team interviewing was frequently reported in Nova Scotia (100% of 4 responses), Prince Edward Island (100% of 2 responses), Nunavut (75% of 4 responses), and the Yukon (67% of 3 responses). In provinces with higher response rates, the ratio of individual to team reports was very similar to the average (3:1). The most frequent arrangement reported was a police officer conducting the interview with a child protection worker monitoring ($n = 109$), either in the same room (17%, 18/109), a different room (72%), or circumstance-dependent (11%).

Participants were asked for the rationale for their interviewing arrangement (e.g., "if you interview individually, why?") and how they felt about it. The question about the rationale was answered by 165 participants, who gave 217 responses coded into seven categories (child factors, interviewer factors, communication factors, collaborative reasons, practical constraints, prosecutorial concerns, and trained/told to do it that way). The most frequent reason cited for the interview arrangement (33%) related to child factors. For example, participants who interviewed individually and referred to factors associated with the child frequently cited reasons such as the child's attention span and ability to maintain focus with just one person present. Participants who interviewed as a team and cited child factors predominantly described the benefit to the child of only having a single interview wherein both the investigative and risk assessment issues were covered. Nevertheless, participants mentioning child factors were overwhelmingly more likely to interview individually (82%) than as a team (18%). Indeed, a 2 (arrangement) \times 7 (responses) chi-square test regarding the rationale behind the arrangement strongly demonstrated a different pattern for individual versus team interviewers, χ^2 (6, $N = 217$) = 30.11, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.375$. In addition to citing child factors, respondents who interviewed individually were likely to mention practical constraints (17%, CI = 11.23, 22.97) (e.g., being the only person in the unit trained to conduct child interviews), while those who interviewed

in teams did so infrequently (5%, CI = 0, 11.32). Participants who interviewed in teams cited reasons of collaboration (34%, CI = 21.50, 46.30) more so than did those who interviewed individually (8%, CI = 3.47, 11.73).

Perceptions of the interview arrangement

In contrast to their rationales, there were no significant differences between those who interviewed individually and those who interviewed in teams with respect to their feelings about their interviewing arrangements (as individuals or teams), $\chi^2 (3, N = 170) < 1, p = 0.86$, Cramer's $V = 0.066$. The majority (79%, $n = 134$) indicated that they were *satisfied*. Only 9% ($n = 16$) said they were *dissatisfied*. A few were *ambivalent* (e.g., "it doesn't really matter to me," 5%, $n = 9$) and a few said that *it depended* on the situation (6%, $n = 11$). There were five respondents who did not understand the question and were omitted from the following analysis.

Significant differences emerged when we compared perceptions about interviewing arrangements across police and child protection respondents, $\chi^2 (3, N = 162) = 13.24, p = 0.004$, Cramer's $V = 0.286$. Police were more likely to be satisfied (84%, CI = 77.71, 90.49) than were child protection workers (56%, CI = 39.37, 71.83). The remaining responses from child protection workers were spread across dissatisfied (19%), ambivalent (11%), or dependent on the situation (14%).

Assessment of risk

There were 180 participants who answered the question about risk assessment. Although we provided five response categories, the responses "risk assessed in separate interview at another time" and "no further child protection [after the forensic interview] occurs" were rare ($n = 9$ and 2, respectively). Thus, there were three dominant procedures for assessing child protection risks, and these did not differ across police and child protection respondents, $\chi^2 (2, N = 162) < 1, p = 0.99$, Cramer's $V = 0.008$. The majority (61%) indicated that all types of child maltreatment risk were assessed in the forensic interview. A further 23% reported that risk assessment in the forensic interview was confined primarily to the presenting issue, and 16% indicated that risk was assessed separately by conducting another interview immediately after the conclusion of the forensic interview.

Examination of the responses suggested that respondents from Ontario and Saskatchewan were relatively less likely to assess all types of risk during the forensic interview and relatively more likely to do so immediately following the forensic interview. The relationship between the response to the risk assessment question and the interviewing arrangement (team, individual) was not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 169) < 1, p = 0.81$, Cramer's $V = 0.05$.

Biggest challenges

Respondents found interviewing to be challenging. Most ($n = 177$) listed one or more of their greatest interviewing challenges, for a total of 250 responses across eight categories. The most frequently mentioned challenge related to the *child* (29%; e.g., unwillingness or inability to provide information, difficulties knowing whether a child was telling the truth, atypical development). The second most common challenge was *overcoming communication barriers* between child and interviewer (17%). *Training-related* challenges were described in only 10% of responses to this question, but were present throughout the survey in responses to multiple questions. Across many questions, participants expressed frustration about a general dearth of initial and follow-up training and felt ill equipped to conduct an interview.

A 2 (profession) \times 8 (challenge category: interviewer factors, child factors, communication barriers, organizational issues, training, external influences, legal-related, interview outcomes) chi-square revealed significant differences in the challenges faced by police versus child protection respondents, $\chi^2(7, N = 243) = 16.81, p = 0.019$, Cramer's $V = 0.263$. Although none of the chi-square statistics in the individual cells survived the conservative alpha correction ($0.05/16 = 0.003$), examination of the adjusted standardized residuals suggested that child protection respondents were likely to report challenges associated with *training* (19%, CI = 8.36, 29.44 versus 7% of police, CI = 3.68, 11.12) and *organizational issues* (15%, CI = 5.46, 24.74 versus 5% of police, CI = 2.11, 8.49; e.g., a lack of equipment or appropriate interview setting). Police, in contrast, found the greatest challenges in *barriers* (20%, CI = 13.87, 25.13 versus 9% of child protection, CI = 1.42, 16.98; e.g., establishing rapport, making the child feel comfortable) and the *legal applications* of their interviews (10%, CI = 5.33, 13.67 versus 4% of child protection, CI = 0, 8.95; e.g., how the interview may be criticized based on the judicial system's interpretation of how the child acts).

A desire for more information

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to state whether there was anything about child interviewing in general that they would like to have more information about. Of the participants, 127 responded with 157 responses coded into 13 categories (see Table 4). Respondents most often reported wanting exposure to alternative guidelines and protocols in addition to the one they were currently using, followed by a desire for follow-up or refresher training. Interviewers also expressed a desire to learn more about how to work with a child's special circumstances, including assessing truthfulness, dealing with inconsistencies in a child's story, and working with children who may have diverse abilities. There were too many categories to permit meaningful analyses.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to gather information on investigative interviewing practices and training procedures from police officers and child protection workers nationwide. We asked respondents whether they had been trained in any specific interview guidelines, what information they had received about interviewing children, who had trained them and for how long, whether or not that training was refreshed, details of their interviewing arrangements, challenges related to interviewing, and topics about which they wished to learn more. Most questions evinced a wide variety of responses. There were some differences across organizations and geographically, but variability was just as likely within these conditions as across them. Thus, rather than focusing on regional and professional differences, the discussion is organized around the three main themes of the survey: how child witness interviews are conducted in Canada, what training interviewers received, and what additional knowledge interviewers seek.

How child witness interviews are conducted in Canada

Interview guidelines

Most investigative interviewers (all professions; 79% of the sample) had been exposed to one or more widely recognized guidelines. In western Canada, interviewers were frequently trained in the StepWise Interview guidelines developed by John Yuille in British Columbia; in contrast, interviewers in Quebec were frequently trained in the

NICHHD protocol, and more than one-third of Ontario respondents reported not having been trained to use a specific set of guidelines. Police were more likely than child protection workers to have received training in the cognitive interview, and the reverse was true for the StepWise guidelines. A quarter of child protection workers reported not having been trained in a specific protocol, as did one-fifth of police officers (after removal of the over-represented cohort who received training from White Buffalo).

The use of interview guidelines or a semi-scripted protocol is known to aid interviewers in adhering to best practice recommendations. Training in general principles alone has been associated with improved knowledge about what to do, but difficulty remains in translating that knowledge into practice during actual interviews (Lamb et al. 2007). For this reason, numerous training groups have developed written guidance for interviewers that includes all key concepts and interview phases. These guidelines and protocols are updated as the research literature on child interviewing grows. Thus, interview guidelines that are based on empirical research findings have tended to increase in similarity in recent years (La Rooy et al. 2015; Newlin et al. 2015). Some of the guidelines reported here, such as the Reid technique, however, do not include elements considered best practice in the interviewing of children (Meyer and Reppucci 2007). Further discussion of many of the protocols and guidelines reported in the current study and designed for use with children can be found in Chapter 7 of Poole's (2016) interviewing handbook. Regarding the respondents who reported not having been trained in widely used interview guidelines, we did not ask whether they used an interview guide of any kind (e.g., provincial, in-house); it is likely that some do, although this was not mentioned in any free recall response.

Interview arrangements

A subsection of the survey asked interviewers about their typical interview arrangements. Three-quarters reported typically conducting interviews with children individually. Nearly half of all respondents indicated that police conducted the interview and a child protection worker usually observed from another room. Regardless of the interview arrangement, the most frequent reason cited was to improve circumstances for the child, and more than three-quarters of the sample reported being satisfied with their respective arrangements. Child protection workers were less satisfied than police. Just over half (56%) of

child protection workers were satisfied. The remainder were dissatisfied, ambivalent, or indicated that it depended on the situation.

Child protection workers and police officers in Canada frequently conduct joint investigative child interviews (Olivier and Smith 1988; Dion and Cyr 2008; Cyr and Lamb 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada 2010; Tonmyr and Gonzales 2015). Anecdotally, many child protection workers have expressed frustration when police take charge of the interview. The needs of the child protection and criminal justice systems overlap but are not always completely in harmony, due to differences in mandates. Some jurisdictions have developed joint police–child protection investigation protocols to address these challenges, but there is substantial variation in where (even within single cities) and how they are implemented (see Department of Justice 2015). While police are tasked with gathering evidence to make decisions about whether a crime has been committed, child protection workers are tasked with assessing the type and possible risk of abuse or neglect to children (Public Health Agency of Canada 2010; Fallon et al. 2012; Trocmé et al. 2014; Fegert and Stötzel 2016; Wegner-Lohin and Trocmé 2016).

Our survey revealed that just over half of the respondents assess all types of risk during the forensic interview and 16% do it immediately afterwards. These findings imply that, in 28% of the cases, risk either is not assessed at all or is assessed at a separate time, necessitating another interview. Though an investigative interview has a different aim than a more holistic risk assessment, it is also clear that many children suffer from multiple types of child abuse. In a sample of 2,030 U.S. children, Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner (2007) found that poly-victimization is frequent, with 69% having experienced more than one form of child abuse/neglect. We recommend the development of a national policy statement with a clear and consistent message on the joint training of police and child protection workers on protection of children and to promote best practices and maintain the integrity of the process.

Nature of the training received by Canadian child witness interviewers

Training topics

Many respondents reported having received training or general advice about interviewing children. Most of the topics, however, were relevant

to investigative interviews with any target group, such as building rapport, asking open-ended questions, and avoiding suggestion or coercion (e.g., Swanner et al. 2016). It was surprising that just 13% referred to learning about child development, considering that children and other vulnerable witnesses present with unique interviewing challenges (Bull 2010).

Nearly a quarter of the sample referred to training in the use of non-verbal aids such as dolls (rarely) and body diagrams (frequently). The use of non-verbal aids has been an issue of contention between and within research groups and investigative interviewers, especially where these aids are used to elicit (rather than clarify) allegations (Poole and Bruck 2012; Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center 2016). While the manner in which non-verbal aids were used in the current sample is unknown, nine participants explicitly reported RATAC training where body diagrams are used early in the interview (Anatomy Identification and Touch Inquiry).

Poole and her colleagues have demonstrated that body diagrams can increase both true and erroneous reports of touch (Bruck, Kelley, and Poole 2016; Dickinson and Poole 2016) and that non-verbal aids can be particularly risky for children who are cognitively immature (Poole et al. 2014). Broadly speaking, if best practice techniques (which focus on verbal recall) are maximized, the need for riskier non-verbal aids is diminished (Salmon et al. 2012). Nevertheless, practitioners who face the realities absent from innocuous laboratory studies argue that they will keep non-verbal aids in their proverbial back pockets for a minority of situations. That is, the consequences of not eliciting a touch report have the potential to be greater for forensic interviewers than for research assistants following children's participation in a lab study. In any case, users of non-verbal aids should keep abreast of the relevant child development literature.

Training delivery, length, and follow-up

The survey revealed a wide variety in who delivered the training. In many cases it was impossible to know who actually delivered it. For example, respondents citing their provincial police college may have received training from a variety of speakers (e.g., academics, other practitioners). Most of our sample had received some kind of training in child witness interviewing. Just 14 respondents indicated having received no training, and three did not answer the question about training length. These three responded to other survey questions but

omitted responses on several questions related to training; thus, the percentage of untrained child interviewers was somewhere between 7% and 8.5% ($n = 14-17$). One-week classroom-based training was the standard, particularly among police. Training length for child protection workers was more variable.

Despite encouraging results concerning the proportion of respondents who had received some initial training, roughly half reported no follow-up or refresher training, and a lack of follow-up training was particularly prevalent among police respondents. Of the 51% that did engage in follow-up, much of it was informal (35% of all follow-up training), such as discussion with colleagues or attending presentations at conferences. Other research that has reported on the prevalence of follow-up training includes work by Wolfman, Brown, and Jose (2016) in New Zealand. Approximately two-thirds of the 39 interviewers in their sample received ongoing practice-focused supervision, and the most frequent response from that group (34.6%) was that these follow-up sessions occurred monthly. Further, 80.7% of the interviewers who received regular follow-up agreed or strongly agreed that supervision was important for their roles as specialist child interviewers. Indeed, strong evidence points to the need for regular, ongoing refresher training and feedback, as without it, interviewer performance tends to decline (e.g., Lamb et al. 2002; Cyr et al. 2012).

Research has shown that interviewing children is an expert skill, requiring knowledge acquisition over time, an evidence-based method, multiple attempts at practice, and regular feedback (Benson and Powell 2015; Lamb 2016; Poole 2016). Self- and peer review of the quality of interviews (Lamb et al. 2002; Stolzenberg and Lyon 2015) and refresher training several months after the conclusion of training (Rischke et al. 2011) are two procedures that have been shown to be effective. More recently, leading experts in child interviewing and training research have pointed to the use of technology as a potentially more effective mode of training (Benson and Powell 2015; Lamb 2016; Poole 2016). Unlike traditional classroom-based training, online programs permit interview training to be delivered in a way that is consistent with principles of effective human learning if they are well designed. These principles are spaced learning over time (rather than learning in a block over a span of days), immediate feedback on performance during learning, interactivity with learning content, and a flexible learning environment (e.g., at times and locations convenient to the trainee; see Powell 2008).

What do Canadian interviewers seek?

Regardless of organization, interviewers clearly expressed the need to have more education and training relating to communicating with children, children's memory and suggestibility, and children's understanding of the interview process. Indeed, although they did not express it explicitly, the majority of respondents asked for more information on child development (both normative and of children with diverse abilities). A desire for training in cultural practices was expressed by a small number of respondents, but it bears mention, considering that the 2011 census revealed that 20.6% of the Canadian population was foreign-born, the highest percentage among the G8 countries. Thirteen different ethnic origins in Canada had more than 1 million members, and 19% identified themselves as members of a visible minority group (Statistics Canada 2011). Immigrant children may face unique barriers to participating in the legal system (e.g., Roberts, Qi, and Zhang 2016).

A recurrent theme in responses to many questions was the desire for increased training (and/or follow-up training). Not only are Canadian child interviewers seeking more training (longer or more frequent), but also they appeared keen to learn a wide variety of topics and desired breadth of knowledge about interviewing protocols. The most frequent response to the question about what else they wanted information on was additional interviewing guidelines and procedures. Some child protection workers expressed frustration over a lack of training opportunities and over general workplace-associated challenges. Present in 14% of responses (across multiple questions) were mentions of the difficulty eliciting information from children using open-ended questions and avoiding leading questions. Although not a frequently observed concern, the experience of these respondents likely reflects the need for more practice-based training. Research has demonstrated that interviewers can learn to adhere to open-ended questioning practices with children and, when they do so, they experience improvements in the information elicited and in positive interviewer behaviours (Benson and Powell 2015).

Limitations

A substantial limitation of the current study was that it was not geographically representative, nor was it evenly balanced between police and child protection respondents. Few selected CAC as their organization, but it is possible that some police and child protection workers

based in CACs elected to select police or child protection as their primary designation. The small number of responses from the Territories and the provinces east of Quebec indicates that the findings are most characteristic of practices in central and western Canada. Nevertheless, garnering additional responses from regions with low response rates is likely to increase, rather than decrease, the variability observed in interview practices and training procedures.

As with all survey research, our data reflect self-report. This paper characterizes interviewing training as described to us by 200 interviewers, rather than what they actually experienced. We anticipate that some information is likely reported quite accurately (e.g., training duration), whereas other information will certainly be subject to more interpretation, and some will have been forgotten. Nonetheless, what respondents reported is likely what stood out to them as memorable and relevant. For example, 13% reported learning about child development, but we know anecdotally that most training courses include this topic to some degree, so it may be the case that the ways in which child development is taught are not facilitating connections between the material and interviewers' actual practice (Powell 2008). These findings have implications for researchers in terms of effective translation of psychological principles into practical applications for interviewers.

Finally, the majority of survey questions were open-ended, allowing respondents the freedom to answer as they chose. To make the information digestible, members of the research team created themes that allowed similar responses to be grouped together. While this practice is standard, it results in a somewhat muted picture of the true variability of responses.

Conclusion

The present research yields new information and awareness regarding child investigative interviewing practices in Canada. Importantly, it highlights some of the needs of front-line interviewers. There is a lack of consensus nationwide on the strategies used for interviewing children, and on the frequency and delivery of training. Considerable variability existed in the responses to most survey questions. Broadly, interviewers agreed that interviewing children was a highly specialized and challenging skill, and the majority desired more training, in terms of length, frequency, and topics, including knowledge of multiple protocols and guidelines.

It is the position of the research team that small differences across interviewing guidelines are not necessarily a problem. Contemporary best practice interview protocols share similar features, are flexible, and continually change in accordance with new research and practical developments. What is needed, however, is a specific and comprehensive national policy developed by a body of stakeholders (front-line police and child protection interviewers, trainers, academics, and relevant government officials) that outlines the necessary and sufficient features of child interview guidelines and associated training. We hope that the present research raises awareness of this need and prompts national calls for action.

Notes

- 1 The authors wish to thank all of the investigative interviewers who took the time to complete the survey, and the Saskatchewan Chiefs of Police for assistance in distributing the survey in SK. The project was funded by Department of Justice Grant 4760305 to KPR, SPB, BSC, HLP, and LB. Preliminary results of the survey were published in *Blue Line* magazine in November 2015. Data were presented at the twenty-first annual International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and the 2016 Peace Country Child Abuse Conference.
- 2 *Blue Line* has been Canada's national law enforcement magazine since 1989. It releases monthly publications online and in print, with a per issue circulation of about 13,000.
- 3 A large number of police officers from Saskatchewan ($n = 59$) reported receiving training from White Buffalo consulting. This training organization was not reported by other professions or provinces/territories. We were not able to obtain further information about the protocol or guidelines used.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. There are no correct or incorrect responses. We strongly value everything that you are able to tell us about how your unit/team interviews child victims and witnesses. You may choose to omit any question; if you do not want to answer a question, please check the box marked "I do not wish to answer this question."

1. Have you and members of your unit/team received training in any specific child interviewing guidelines? (E.g., Cognitive interview, NICHHD Protocol, RATAC, StepWise guidelines. Please explain to the best of your ability):

2. If you did *not* receive training in specific guidelines, please explain to the best of your ability what advice you were given about interviewing children (e.g., build rapport, conduct a practice interview, use body diagrams, ask open-ended questions, etc.):

3. Who provided the training or advice? (Examples: A colleague, supervisor, forensic consultant, academic consultant/researcher. Please specify):

4. How long did the training last?

5. Did you receive any follow-up training/do you receive ongoing training or advice? Please explain.

6. Please describe your organization (Child Protection, Child Advocacy Centre, Police Department, Other - please specify):

- 7a. Are children typically interviewed by an individual or in teams?

- 7b. What is the rationale behind that interviewing arrangement? Please explain.

- 7c. If you interview as part of a team, please describe who are the members of your team (e.g., police and child protection):

- 7d. If you interview as part of a team, please describe where your team members are located (e.g., behind mirror/in same room):
-
- 7e. Regardless of whether you interview individually or with a team member, how do you feel about the interviewing arrangement, with regards to your participation?
-
8. With regard to the forensic interview, how is child protection risk assessed? If more than one response is applicable, please explain.
- Risk assessment in the forensic interview is confined primarily to the presenting issue identified in the referral
 - All types of child maltreatment risk are assessed *during* the forensic interview (neglect, physical, domestic violence, emotional, sexual)
 - Other types of child protection risk assessed immediately *following* the conclusion of the forensic interview
 - Other types of child protection risk assessed in separate interview at another time
 - No further child protection assessment occurs
9. What do you find to be the greatest challenge(s) associated with interviewing child victims/witnesses?
-
10. What aspects of interviewing would you like to have more information/training on?
-
11. Please select the province or territory in which you are employed: (dropdown menu)
-
12. Please indicate the size of the locale in which you work - if you are unsure of the population please provide your best estimate: (dropdown menu)
- Remote (population not centred in a locality)
 - Rural/hamlet (less than 300 residents)
 - Village (300-1,000 residents)
 - Small town (1,000-30,000 residents)
 - Large town (30,000-100,000 residents)
 - City (>100,000 residents)
 - Major Metropolitan Area (>1 million residents)
 - Do not wish to respond

13. Does your unit serve a First Nations population (dropdown menu):
- No
 - Not regularly
 - Yes/often
 - Do not wish to respond
14. What major languages are spoken by the population you serve (from most dominant to least). Please list to the best of your ability.