ARTICLE:

SUMMARY:
The purpose of this study was to further assess the effect of human figure drawings on the content and accuracy of children’s reports.

EXPERIMENT ONE
There were two primary objectives with this first experiment – to explore whether 5-6 year old children are able to use a human figure drawing to report where they were touched and to better understand the impact of educational and social opportunities on children’s ability to tell.

Subjects:
125 children, ages 5-6, were recruited from schools with from various socioeconomic levels in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Design:
All of the children were visited by a male research assistant dressed in a blue uniform who invited them to visit the Fire Station and helped each child dress in a toy fireman’s hat. During this interaction, each child was touched on various parts of their body, but no touching of private parts occurred. During this process, the children were turned around three times to “turn you into a fire fighter” (Introduced fantasy). Then the children traveled with this research assistant on a double decker bus to the Fire Station where a real fireman talked to them about the work of firemen. When they returned to school, each child was given a cardboard medal (hung around their neck) by a female researcher for being good.

One month later each child was interviewed by a female researcher who showed them a medal like the one they received after returning to school from the fire station and then each child was asked to use a human figure drawing (clothed) to show the location of where he or she had been touched during the event. (This suggests recall about an interaction with the female researcher as opposed to the male researcher). Children who recalled putting on a costume during the fire station visit to their school were given the following instruction:

“You have already told me that you had to put on a costume when you visited the fire station. I heard that ___ helped you put on the costume. What I want you to do now is to use this picture to show me where _____ touched you when he put the costume on. Point to where he touched you.” Problems with this – this is very wordy for young children and it is misleading – the touching occurred at school with the male researcher, not at the fire station. What about just asking, “Where were you touched? Show me.”
For children who did not previously report putting on a costume, the interviewer asked:

“I heard that ______ helped you put on a costume to wear when you went to the fire station. What I want you to do now is to use this picture to show me where ____ touched you when he put the costume on. Point to where he touched you.” Again, this is very wordy and misleading.

Findings:
1. Ten children (8% of the sample) were not included in the analysis because they said they had not been touched during the fire station event. This is amazing – 8% denied a non-traumatic touch which is known to occur. Wouldn’t we expect higher rate for traumatic touch?
2. Overall, for children who did report being touched, their reports were only 37.6% complete. Only 4 out of 115 children reported being touched in all five locations.
3. Overall, only 47.8% of the touches disclosed by children were accurate. Is this an issue of children’s memory or how they were interviewed?
4. 11.3% of children indicated they had received at least one genital touch.
5. 25.5% of the children indicated they had received at least one touch to the breast.
6. There were no effects of socioeconomic status on the recall of touches.

EXPERIMENT TWO
The primary purpose of this experiment was to examine whether children could use body maps to indicate the location of touch under less challenging conditions.

Subjects:
46 5-6 year old children and their parents were invited to the Early Learning Project laboratory to participate in this experiment.

Design:
The child and caregiver were greeted by a confederate who then established rapport with the child asked them if he/she wanted to dress up in a fire service costume. While helping the child get dressed in this costume, each child was touched in the same manner as in Experiment 1. Each child was interviewed following one of three delays – immediately, 24 hours after the event, or 1 month after the event. During this interview, an individual who was not present during the event asked the child to use a body map to show where he or she had been touched when he or she dressed in the fire service costume. Again, lengthy instructions were provided:

“I heard that last time you were here (a minute ago) ____ helped you put on a fire service costume. What I want you to do now is I want you to use this picture to show me where ____ touched you when she put the costume on. Point to where she touched you.”

Findings:
1. Children indicated more correct touches when interviewed immediately after putting on the fire costume than when interviewed after a 24 hour or one month delay.
2. There was no significant difference in the amount of correct information recalled between the 24 hour and one month delay conditions.
3. Only 1 in 46 children reported being touched in all five locations.
4. Again, a significant percentage of children reported touches of a sexual nature which did not occur. 7.1% indicated they received at least one genital touch, and 23.8% indicated they had received at least one touch to the breast.

Practice Implications:
1. The manner of interviewing was much different than what we teach
2. Misleading questions were asked
3. The young age of the subjects must be considered when considering the application of this research.
4. It would be very hard to recall non-traumatic touches as there would be no real reason for full recall of this based on the innocuous nature of these touches. In sexual abuse, the touch is the primary aspect of the interaction whereas this touch was an small part of a broader activity.


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