

**ARTICLE:**

Katz, C., Hershkowitz, I., Malloy, L.C., Lamb, M. E., Atabaki, A., & Spindler, S. (2012). Non-verbal behavior of children who disclose or do not disclose child abuse in investigative interviews. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 36(1), 12-20.

**SUMMARY:**

The purpose of this study was to examine differences between the non-verbal behaviors of disclosers and non-disclosers, associations between non-verbal behavior early in the interview and later disclosure/non-disclosure, and changing patterns of nonverbal behavior across successive phases of the forensic interviews.

**Method:**

Videotaped interviews of 40 alleged child abuse victims (15 girls, 25 boys) (3.1 years to 13.5 years) (sexual abuse = 14, physical abuse = 26).

Suspected perpetrators were parent figures (n = 26) or non-parent figures (n = 14)

Half of these Israeli children had disclosed and half did not

In all cases, independent evidence suggested abuse was likely to have occurred:

1. Detailed suspect confession (n = 20)
2. Corroborative eyewitness statements to police (n = 14)
3. Medical evidence indicative of abuse (n = 8)
4. Recording of actual abuse (n = 1)

All forensic interviews were conducted in Hebrew by six trained investigators using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. The length of these interviews ranged from 5-45 minutes (Mean of 12 minutes)

A coding scheme to measure nonverbal behaviors was developed specifically for the present study. The coders were unable to hear any sound during the recorded interviews, and they were never made aware of whether individual children had disclosed abuse.

The coders recorded the presence of any of the following non-verbal behaviors every 15 seconds:

1. Stress
2. Physical disengagement
3. Emotions: facial displays of negative emotions
4. Emotions: facial displays of positive emotions

Inter-rater reliability was established with practice interviews when coders had 90%+ agreement.

Most of the non-verbal behaviors were seldom observed making it impossible to meaningfully compare the frequencies with which each occurred. Thus, composite scores for each of the four categories were computed and analyzed. Negative emotions were very rarely seen so they were excluded from further analysis. This may be an indicator of interviewer skill which sought to limit children's negative emotions.

**Findings:**

1. Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences between disclosers and non-disclosers with respect to:
  - a. Children's age
  - b. Gender
  - c. Abuse type
  - d. Suspect identity
  - e. Interview length
  - f. Length of individual interview phases
2. Older children and sexual abuse victims showed more signs of stress than younger children and physical abuse victims
3. Children who did not disclose showed more physical disengagement
4. Physical disengagement was more prominent in the rapport-building and substantive phases than in the introductory phase
5. There was more physical disengagement in the non-disclosure than the disclosure group during the substantive phase of the interview

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