

# Recent Research Affecting Child Abuse Investigations

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# Learning Objectives

- Attendees will review recently published research affecting child abuse investigations and prosecutions.
- Attendees will relate this information to their current practices in the field.
- Attendees will identify multiple issues to raise with their local MDT to inform them of this emerging research and identify potential modifications to current practice.

## Quayle, E., & Newman, E. (2016).

An exploratory study of public reports to investigate patterns and themes of requests for sexual images of minors online. *Crime Science*, 5(1), 2.

# Online Risks??

**Purpose** – use online reports from the public to Cybertip.ca to explore:

- Types of behavior that alerted concerned adults/youth to make a report
- Information available about the young person
- Information about the suspect
- How the suspect and offender interacted with each other

# Online Risks??

- **Subjects/Design:**

- Cybertip.ca reviewed all reports classified by analysts as luring between September 2007-June 2011 to determine if there was presence of “luring” (communication with a person under 18 for the purposes of facilitating a sexual offense or abduction).
- 264 cases meeting this criteria were identified (about one per week), but 74 were excluded due to insufficient confirmation that grooming had occurred.
- Final n = 150

# Online Risks??

- Reporter
  - Family member – 50%
  - Victim – 30.7%
  - Friend – 4.0%
  - Babysitter – 1.3%
  - Neighbor - 0.67%
- Gender of Victim
  - Female – 86%
  - Male 14%
- Age of Victim – mostly teenagers
- Gender of Suspect
  - Male – 90%
  - Female – 10%

## Online Risks??

- Additional text (instant messaging, moderated game sites, social networking sites, skype-like programs, games with video and chat functions, etc.) were available in 166 (63%) of the cases
  - 94 of these included chat log data
- Themes observed in these 166 cases:
  - Request for sexual images of victim – 93%
  - Voyeurism (requesting victim to do something sexual) – 83%
  - Exhibitionism by offender – 36%
  - Contact request – 33%
  - Resistance shown by victim – 33%
  - Threats by offender – 24%
  - Victim self-generated content – 19%
  - Mobile phone involved – 17%
  - Deception of offender age and/or gender – 7%

**Earhart, B., Danby, M. C., Brubacher,  
S. P., Powell, M. B., & Sharman, S.  
(2018).**

A comparison of responses to substantive transition prompts in interviews with children. *Child Maltreatment*, 23(3), 221-225.



# Impact of transition prompts in FI's

- **Purpose** – compare children's responses to two transition prompting phrasings on rates of disclosure:
  - “Tell me **what** you're here to talk to me about today”
  - “Tell me **why** you're here to talk to me about today”
- **Subjects/Design:**
  - Children 5 to 9 years old were recruited from primary schools across Australia.
  - They were randomly assigned to the **what** (n=198) or **why** (n=203) conditions.

# Impact of transition prompts in FI's

- **Subjects/Design:**

- Children experienced four 25 minute scripted activity sessions which centered around six main activities (e.g., listening to a story, doing a puzzle)
- They were then interviewed 3-14 days after the final activity session.
- All interviews were conducted by the same interviewer who was blind to the assigned condition.
- After building rapport, the interviewer posed the assigned transition prompt.
- Children's initial responses to the transition prompts were coded as ***informative*** (made reference to some aspect of the activities) or ***uninformative*** (no reference to the activities).

# Impact of transition prompts in FI's

- Overall, children's answers were *informative* 63% of the time:
  - Older children were *informative* 69% of the time
  - Younger children were *informative* 49% of the time
  - Older children were **1.41 times more informative** than younger children.
- Impact of transition prompt:
  - **What** prompt - responded *informatively* 72% of the time
  - **Why** prompt - responded *informatively* 52% of the time
  - Children who received the **what** prompt were **1.38 times** more informative than those who received the **why** prompt.

# Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Karni-Visel, Y., & Ahern, E. C. (2018).

Is interviewer support associated with the reduced reluctance and enhanced informativeness of alleged child abuse victims? *Law and Human Behavior*, DOI: 10.1037/1hb0000303, 1-10.

# Importance of Rapport

- **Purpose** – determine whether children interviewed using the NICHD Revised Protocol were less reluctant and more informative than children interviewed using the NICHD Standard Protocol
- Revised protocol includes:
  - Emphasis on rapport building
  - Identification of signs of reluctance
  - Provision of supportive comments

# Importance of Rapport

## Subjects/Design:

- 254 children aged 4-14
- Disclosed multiple incidents of physical abuse by parents
- Interviewed by investigators from the Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Services.
  - 88 were interviewed using Standard Protocol
  - 166 were interviewed using the Revised Protocol.
- All cases were deemed as valid based on:
  - 65% reported by eyewitness
  - 15% by documented wounds and bruises
  - 15% by prior disclosures to professionals
  - 5% by suspect admission
  - 1% by medical reports

# Importance of Rapport

- Investigators recorded the presence or absence of each type of reluctance in each child utterance:
  - **Omissions** (no answer, nothing to say, don't know, don't remember)
  - Expressions of **resistance** (I don't want to tell you, I will only answer this one question)
  - **Denials** (It did not happen, I didn't say that)
- Investigators coded each child utterance as:
  - Responsive (included any forensically relevant information)
  - Whether these utterances included new forensically relevant information.

# Importance of Rapport

## Transitional Phase

- Supportive comments
  - In Revised Protocol condition, interviewers made more supportive comments
- Expressions of reluctance
  - Children expressed less reluctance in Revised Protocol condition
- Style of questioning
  - Interviewers asked significantly fewer closed-ended forensically relevant questions in Revised Protocol
  - There were fewer closed-ended questions when the transitional phase was longer



# Importance of Rapport

## Substantive Phase

- Expressions of reluctance
  - Children in the Revised Protocol condition were less likely to express reluctance
- Style of questioning
  - Interviewers in Revised Protocol condition asked more open-ended questions and fewer closed-ended questions
- Informativeness
  - Children in Revised Protocol condition were significantly more likely to provide forensically relevant new details

## Leach, C., Powell, M. B., Sharman, S. J., & Anglim, J. (2016).

The relationship between children's age and disclosures of sexual abuse during forensic interviews. *Child Maltreatment*, 22(1), 79-88.

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- **Purpose** – examine the association between age and disclosure in conjunction with other variables likely to affect disclosure rates:
  - Child-suspect relationship
  - Suspect's history of violence and sexual assault
  - Suspect having prior charges for violent offenses
- **Subjects/Design:**
  - Data was gathered from a police case management database for sexual abuse cases involving a child between 3-16 during 2011. Suspect had to be at least 10 years old.
  - 527 cases were included in the study. Forensic interviews were done by police or child protection officers who were trained in a modified version of the NICHD protocol.

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- Mean age was 10.93 years
  - Ages 3-5 - 12.3%
  - Ages 6-12 – 43.1%
  - Ages 13-16 – 44.6%
- Gender:
  - Female – 81.2%
  - Male – 18.8%

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- 66.0% of cases had at least one form of corroborating evidence (medical evidence, corroborating witness(es), forensic evidence (DNA, suspect phone calls))
- 81% of the children disclosed at least one incident of child sexual abuse during forensic interview
- The proportion of cases in which children disclosed increased from age 3 to age 11, and then decreased to age 16

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- Two case characteristics were significantly associated with a disclosure in forensic interview:
  - Delay to police report:
    - If the abuse occurred more than 12 months prior to the interview 89.9% of the children disclosed.
    - If it was less than 12 months since the abuse occurred, only 79.5% of the children disclosed.
  - Prior disclosure:
    - 82.8% of the children who had made a prior disclosure disclosed during the forensic interview
    - 65.3% of those who had not previously disclosed made a disclosure in the forensic interview

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- As age increased:
  - The proportion of cases with extrafamilial suspects and penetration increased
  - The cases with male victims and juvenile suspects decreased
- Younger children were more likely to disclose when suspects had histories of violence
- Older children were less likely to disclose when suspects had histories of violence

# What predicts disclosure in a FI?

- QUOTE – “the results of the current study indicate that disclosures during forensic interviews are not only related to children’s ages but also to other case characteristics, such as the relationship between the child and the suspect, the severity of the abuse, the length of delay between the offense and the report to police, whether the child had previously disclosed, and whether the suspect had a previous charge for a violent crime.”



## Malloy, L. C., & Mugno, A. P. (2016).

Children's recantation of adult wrongdoing: An experimental investigation. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 145 (2016), 11-21.

# Recantation

- Purpose – conduct the first experimental study of children's recantation of adult wrongdoing to shed light on:
  - How often children recant true allegations of adult wrongdoing after disclosing
  - Factors that predict recantation of true allegations
  - Note: two factors of particular interest based on prior research – caregiver supportiveness and children's age
- **Subjects/Design:**
- 73 children fully participated:
  - Ages 6-7 – 38
  - Ages 8-9 - 35

# Recantation

- Children participated in a 15 minute “health and safety event”:
- Children were told a box labeled “Do Not Touch” should not be there and should have been taken to a local school. They were put aside after children were told they were fragile and should not be played with.
- Children visited three stations:
  - Temperature check
  - Care of Cuts
  - Dangers

# Recantation

- In Dangers presentation:
  - Experimenter took three dolls from the “Do Not Touch” box which were relevant to the Danger presentation, and told the child “I know we are not supposed to touch them, but I think it will be okay as long as we are very careful with them since they are fragile”.
  - The child was given two puppets, and the experimenter took one which was set to break.
  - When this puppet broke, the experimenter said, “Oh no! I broke it! We shouldn’t have touched these puppets when we were told not to. I will just put them away and maybe nobody will notice. Let’s have this be our secret and not tell anybody that the fireman puppet broke. I might get into trouble if anyone finds out I broke the puppet!”

# Recantation

- A different person interviewed the children immediately following the event using a modified version of the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol.
  - This interview included some suggestive questions, and if the child did not disclose about the broken puppet, then the puppet was shown to the child who was asked what happened (introduction of evidence)
- Children were given a Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-IV (PPVT-4) to assess for verbal abilities

# Recantation

- Children's mothers were coached to be either:
  - Supportive – “you did a great job of telling the truth”
  - Non-supportive condition – “you are getting her in a lot of trouble – need to fix it if anyone else talks to you”
- Child was then interviewed by a different person after mothers had communicated the above to their kids.
- This interviewer used the same approach as in Interview 1, but told the child they had lost the notes from Interview 1 so they needed to find out exactly what had happened during the event.

# Recantation

- Recantation was not related to any demographic variables
- Children's verbal ability was equivalent across the various conditions and not related to recantation
- Timing of children's disclosure about broken puppet:
  - Free Recall – 20.5%
  - Focused Questions – 38.4%
  - Suggestive Questions – 31.5%

# Recantation

- 23.3% of the children recanted their prior disclosure about the broken puppet during Interview 2
  - None of the children in the supportive caregiver condition recanted
  - 46% of the children in the non-supportive caregiver condition recanted
- No significant age differences were found related to recantation



## Dickinson, J. J., & Poole, D.A. (2016).

The influence of disclosure history and body diagrams on children's reports of inappropriate touching: Evidence from a new analog paradigm.  
*Law and Human Behavior, 4(1), 1-12.*

# Drawings.... Chapter 652...

- **Purpose** - to answer three major questions:
  1. Is Germ Detective a promising analog procedure?
  2. Do children who have made a prior disclosure perform differently between two interview protocols?
  3. Do diagrams effectively and safely elicit reports of innocuous but inappropriate touching?
- Disclaimer – good amount of controversy regarding use of drawings in forensic interviews. Diagrams have been found to increase disclosures (both true and false), so caution is required if using drawings.
- Tension between sensitivity to detect abuse vs. specificity for actual abuse

# Drawings.... Chapter 652...

- **Subjects/Design:**

- 287 children

- Ages 4-9

- Recruited from small town/rural Midwest and NY Metropolitan Region

- **Gender:**

- Female – 44.6%

- Male – 55.4%

# Germ Detective Paradigm

- **Session 1** - Assistant discusses potential contamination impacts of touching and that Mr. Science has been instructed to not touch others to avoid spreading germs. Also says he might forget this rule, so please remind him if he forgets. Following this, Mr. Science attempts to touch the child twice (shake child's hand and brush water off child's cheek) while doing three germ education activities:
  - Water Bottle Sneeze (sneeze spray)
  - Glitter Transfer (touch transfer)
  - Germ Glow (handwashing)

# Germ Detective Paradigm

- **Session 2** - Assistant calls parents about six days later and learns whether the child made a disclosure about the laboratory visit with Mr. Science. Any child who disclosed in the laboratory or later to the parent is put on the phone and asked about the touching (assigned to Disclosure Condition). For kids who did not ever disclose, they are either asked some questions to encourage disclosure (Disclosure condition) OR the assistant confirms the upcoming appointment at the laboratory (Nondisclosure condition).
- **Session 3** - Assistant asks the parent about disclosures since phone call. Children who disclosed following phone call are moved to Disclosure Condition. All children then participate in an interview.

# Types of Interviews in Study

- Conventional-first condition – early interview phases conducted without body diagram, open-ended prompts about Germ Detective, and then yes-no questions about wrongdoing and touching without diagram, and then use of drawings with both open-ended and yes-no questions
  - 67 without previous disclosures
  - 78 with previous disclosures
- Diagram-first condition – initial phase conducted with body diagram, much like conventional-first condition, except diagram-assisted questions prior to the conventional approach
  - 61 without previous disclosures
  - 81 with previous disclosures

# Drawings.... Chapter 652...

- About half of the children attempted to block at least one touch by Mr. Science.
- 100% of the older children disclosed either in laboratory, before phone call, or during the phone call
- During open-ended portion of interviews at laboratory, disclosure increased with age of the child being interviewed
- Participants were more likely to disclose during focused questions than open-ended questions

## Drawings.... Chapter 652...

- Higher percentage of accurate disclosures during the first three interview phases (open-ended questions, questions about wrongdoing, questions about touching without a diagram) – 85.1% vs. Fourth Phase (diagram-assisted questions about touching – 55.0%
- Fewer younger than older children disclosed touching to a specific body part
  - Ages 4-6.5 – 67.4%
  - Ages 6.5-9 – 85.9%
- Fewer children without previous disclosures disclosed touching than children who had previously disclosed
  - No prior disclosure – 67.2%
  - Prior disclosure – 84.9%



# Drawings.... Chapter 652...

- Quote (page 9)

“Body Diagrams did not impair accuracy when used to elicit initial reports but were more detrimental than verbal questions alone when used to probe for additional disclosures later in interviews”

## DeLorenzi, L., Daire, A. P., & Bloom, Z. D. (2016).

Predicting treatment attrition for child sexual abuse victims: The role of child trauma and co-occurring caregiver intimate partner violence. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*, 7(1), 40-52.

# Does IPV affect kids completing treatment?

- **Purpose** - determine whether a relationship exists between child trauma symptomatology and a CSA client's therapy graduation status; and a relationship on a caregiver's exposure to interpersonal violence predicts whether a child completes treatment.

## Subjects/Design:

- 132 case records from NCAtrak for children seen at a CAC in Florida between 2010 and 2012:
- Sexual abuse victims
- Children were no longer in treatment
- Completed both the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) and Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC) at intake
- Had caregivers who either confirmed or denied past or current Interpersonal Violence (IPV)

# Does IPV affect kids completing treatment?

## Findings:

- Rates for completing treatment:
  - No IPV in home – 50%
  - IPV in home – 29%
- The odds of a CSA victim prematurely terminating treatment are 2.5 times higher if parents confirm past or current IPV than children whose parents denied IPV.

## Eldred, M. L., Gifford, E. J., & McCutchan, S. A. (2016).

Factors predicting prosecution of child maltreatment cases, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70, 201-205.

# What predicts a case being prosecuted?

- **Purpose** – to expand on existing literature in identifying case characteristics affecting the prosecution of child abuse
- **Subjects/Design** - Data came from five sources:
  - Electronic court records (2005-2013)
  - Child Protective Services records
  - Court files
  - Birth records
  - Geolytics
- Ratio was calculated for number of cases with criminal child maltreatment charges/total CPS reports.
  - Court records were then pulled from two counties with the highest ratio, two counties with the lowest ratio, and the four most populous counties.
  - A total of 406 court records were included in analysis.

# What predicts a case being prosecuted?

- 40% of persons charged with child maltreatment were prosecuted for child maltreatment or another charge
- 24.5% of those prosecuted were not convicted on any charge
- 21% of those arrested were convicted of the child maltreatment charge
- 39% of those arrested were also charged with a concurrent charge (11% of these were felonies)
- There was physical evidence in only 18% of the arrests.

# What predicts a case being prosecuted?

- Two case characteristics significantly associated with being prosecuted:
  - Presence of any concurrent non-child maltreatment charge
  - Current felony non-child maltreatment charge
- CPS factors significantly associated with a case being prosecuted:
  - Prior CPS report more than 30 days prior to the arrest date
  - CPS investigation or assessment for abuse within 30 days of the arrest date



# What predicts a case being prosecuted?

- QUOTE – “if the goal is not to prosecute and convict specifically for child maltreatment, but rather to incapacitate the offender under any charged offense, it is logical, as the data suggest, for a prosecutor to pursue cases with clearer burdens of proof that do not require the trauma of having a child testify” (p. 205)

## Finkelhor, D., Vaquerano, J., & Stranski, M. (2017).

Sex trafficking of minors: How many juveniles are being prostituted in the US? Durham NH: Crimes Against Children Research Center. Retrieved from [http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV279\\_Revised\\_Sex\\_Trafficking\\_Bulletin.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV279_Revised_Sex_Trafficking_Bulletin.pdf)

# What do we know?

- **Purpose** - to review some of the estimates of sex trafficking of minors and highlight their weaknesses
- **Subjects/Design** - Numerous studies which are widely cited in the literature were evaluated by the researchers at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.

## Estes and Weiner (2001)

- Authors suggest about 326,000 children were “at risk for commercial sexual exploitation”
  - “at risk” does not equate to # of trafficked minors
  - Some of these “at risk” estimations are “crude guesses”
  - There is clearly duplication of individuals identified in the various subgroups, but the extent of this is unknown
- *“In sum, no one should cite the 326,000 number from Estes and Weiner as a scientifically based estimate of the number of prostituted juveniles.”*

# National Juvenile Prostitution Survey (2010)

- Questionnaires completed by a representative national sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies
  - “In the calendar year 2005, did your agency detain or arrest any juveniles for crimes involving prostitution?”
- Estimated 1,450 arrests/detentions of juveniles for prostitution (95% confidence interval ranging from 1,287-1,614)
- This is a scientific estimate, but many youth involved in prostitution may not be arrested/identified, so this estimate is likely somewhat low.

# Youth Involvement in the Sex Trade

- Interviewed 949 youth in six sites which were considered high-risk locales
  - Youth involved other youth whom they knew to be involved
- Found that 10-13% of the youth engaged in prostitution had been arrested
- Combining this with the National Juvenile Prostitution Survey, they estimate that about 10,500 youth were engaged in prostitution nationwide in 2009.

# “Average age of entry into prostitution for juveniles is 12-14”

- *“There is no credible source in the research literature for this estimate”*
- Polaris Project has disavowed this statistic, saying “this stat is not actually supported by any data”

# “1 in 6 runaways are likely sex trafficking victims”

- This estimate came from 18,500 runaway cases reported to NCMEC in 2016
- However, not all runaway cases are reported to NCMEC, and an estimated 357,000 youth are considered runaways each year.
- NISMART data suggests that less than 1% of runaways were thought to have engaged in commercial sex



## **Adams, W., & Flynn, A. (2017).**

Federal prosecution of commercial sexual exploitation of children cases, 2004-2013, U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions

- **Purpose** – identify the frequency and relative pattern changes in the federal prosecution of child pornography possession, child pornography production, and child sex trafficking between 2004 and 2013.
- **Data for this report came from three agencies:**
  - Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys National Legal Information Office Network System
  - Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts Criminal Master File
  - Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts' Probation and Pretrial Services Automated Case Tracking System

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions

- From 2004-2013, a total of 37,105 suspects referred to U.S. Attorneys' for prosecution had a lead charge of CSEC
  - Possession of Child Pornography – 72%
  - Child Sex Trafficking – 18%
  - Child Pornography Production – 10%
- Growth in cases between 2004-2013
  - Production of Child Pornography – 195% (218 to 643)
  - Child Sex Trafficking – 111% (488 to 1,031)
  - Possession of Child Pornography – 28%
    - No growth since 2007

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions

- 2013 Cases
  - Child Pornography Possession – 2,140
  - Child Pornography Production - 528
  - Child Sex Trafficking - 586

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions– Suspect Profiles

- Possession of Child Pornography
  - Male (99%)
  - White (87%)
  - U.S. Citizens (98%)
  - Older than other CSEC suspects
  - No prior felony convictions (82%)

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions– Suspect Profiles

- Production of Child Pornography
  - Male (93.5%)
  - White (81.1%)
  - U.S. Citizen (97.6%)
  - No prior felony conviction (71.7%)

# Federal CSEC Prosecutions– Suspect Profiles

- Child Sex Trafficking
  - Male (89%)
  - Race
    - White – 60%
    - Black – 25%
    - Hispanic – 12%
  - Younger than other CSEC suspects
  - U.S. Citizens (94%)
  - Prior felony conviction (30%)

## Hurst, T. E. (2019).

Prevention of child sexual exploitation: Insights from adult survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, DOI: 10.1177/0886260519825881, 1-23.



# Prevention of Sexual Exploitation

**Purpose** – explore the concept of prevention of sexual exploitation through experiences of adult survivors.

## **Subjects/Design:**

- 17 adult female survivors of sexual exploitation were interviewed as part of a larger study concerning childhood emotional maltreatment and the prevention of sexual exploitation.
  - 18 years or older and had experienced sexual exploitation before age 18
  - Had been out of an exploitive relationship for at least one year.
  - Ethnicity:
    - African-American – 9
    - Caucasian – 6
    - Hispanic – 1
    - Mixed – 1

# Prevention of Sexual Exploitation

## Subjects/Design:

- Asked 25 open-ended questions about childhood experiences with:
  - Caregivers
  - Extended family
  - Neighborhoods
  - Communities
  - Past interactions with helping professionals
    - Educators
    - Law enforcement
    - Mental health professionals
    - Medical professionals

# Prevention of Sexual Exploitation

- Exploiter Relationship
  - Biological family members – 6
  - Extended family members – 6
  - Boyfriends – 2
  - Acquaintances – 2
  - Adoptive parents - 1

# Prevention of Sexual Exploitation

## Six Themes for Prevention

- Difficulty trusting medical and mental health professionals
- Difficulty trusting law enforcement officials
- Protection of family members, especially mothers
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Sexual exploitation awareness in academic settings
- Sexual exploitation awareness for at-risk youth

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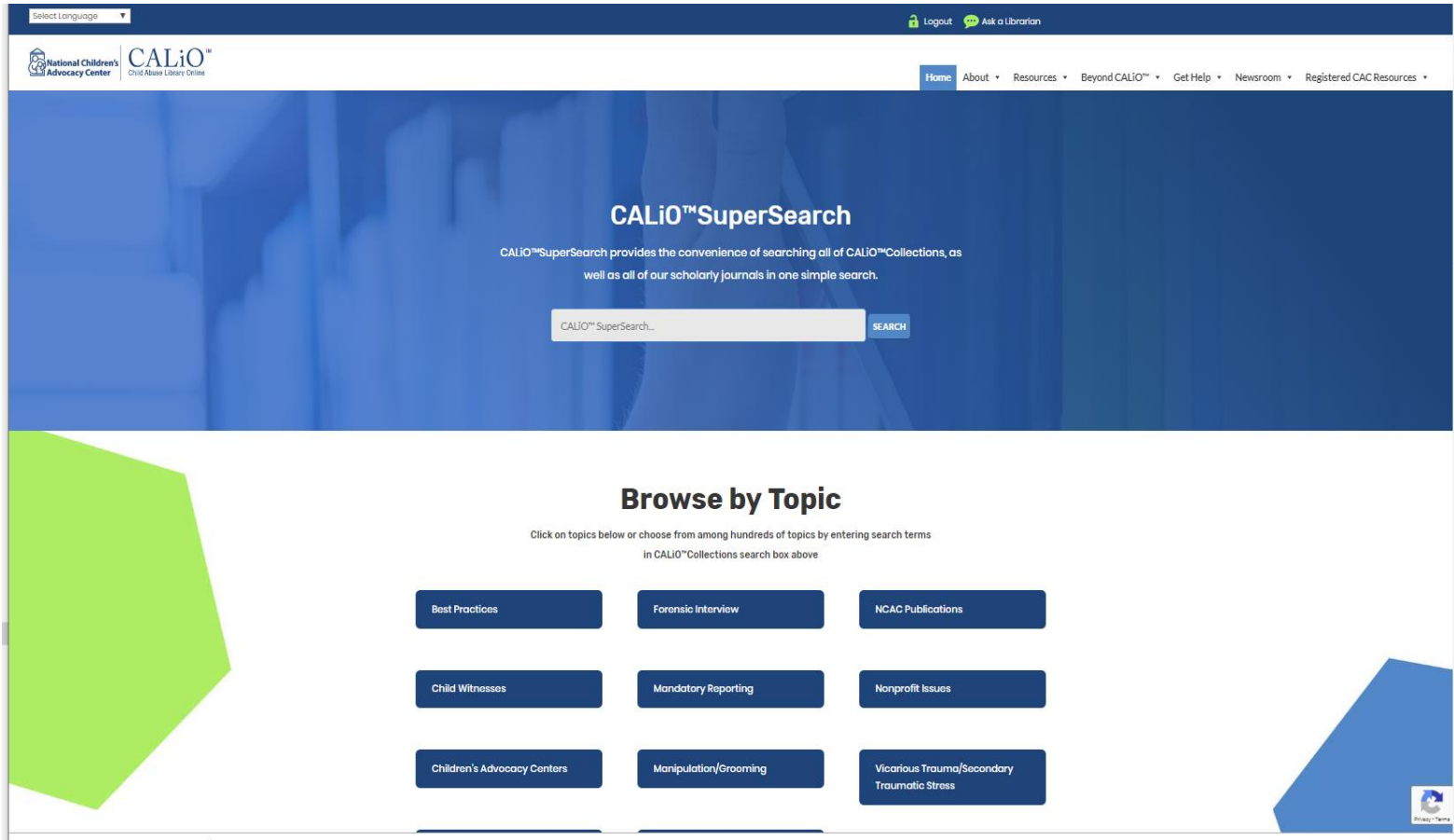


### Our Mission:

The NCAC models, promotes, and delivers excellence in child abuse response and prevention through service, education, and leadership.

# Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO)

[www.calio.org](http://www.calio.org)



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO). The top navigation bar includes a language selector, a login link, and a link to ask a librarian. The main header features the National Children's Advocacy Center logo and the CALiO logo. A navigation menu contains links for Home, About, Resources, Beyond CALiO, Get Help, Newsroom, and Registered CAC Resources. The central section is titled "CALiO™ SuperSearch" and includes a search box with the placeholder text "CALiO™ SuperSearch..." and a "SEARCH" button. Below this, the "Browse by Topic" section is displayed, featuring a grid of nine topic buttons: Best Practices, Forensic Interview, NCAC Publications, Child Witnesses, Mandatory Reporting, Nonprofit Issues, Children's Advocacy Centers, Manipulation/Grooming, and Vicarious Trauma/Secondary Traumatic Stress. The page is decorated with green and blue geometric shapes on the left and right sides.

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