

Recantation in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

A Bibliography



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Introduction and Scope

The issues pertaining to recantation of abuse by children are among the more complex to understand psychologically and to interpret accurately. This bibliography focuses specifically on literature related to recantation of abuse experienced in childhood. The relationship between disclosure, memory, truthfulness, fantastical storytelling, suggestibility, and coaching with recantation and false allegations is complex. To the extent possible, this bibliography does not, except in passing, delve deeply into those topics, preferring instead to provide guidance to publications that specifically address the core topic of recantation.

Organization

The publications listed here are books, chapters in books, and journal articles published in English, 1996-2018. The bibliography does not include theses and dissertations, conference papers, technical reports, audiovisual materials, or ephemera. This bibliography is arranged chronologically, from most recent to oldest publication date. When possible, the abstracts that were included with the original publication are used in this bibliography. When an original abstract was not available, abstracts were written by staff of the National Children's Advocacy Center and are designated as NCAC Abstract. In some cases, abstracts are drawn from the American Psychological Association's PsycInfo® database and are used here with permission of American Psychological Association.

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Recantation in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

A Bibliography

Association of Prosecuting Attorneys. (2018). [*A multidisciplinary team approach to the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases involving recantation.*](#) Washington, DC: Author.

The purpose of this monograph is to provide information grounded in research to child abuse professionals in an effort to reduce the risk of recantation in cases of child sexual abuse, and to assist professionals in addressing recantation when it does occur. This includes the investigation of recantation cases and keys to successful prosecution.

Celik, G., Tahiroğlu, A., Yoruldu, B., Varmış, D., Çekin, N., Avci, A., ... & Nasiroğlu, S. (2018). Recantation of sexual abuse disclosure among child victims: Accommodation Syndrome. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 27*(6), 612-621.

Disclosing the sexual abuse may be related on many individual and/or environmental factors in all age groups. The sociocultural context is the most influential factor of the disclosing process especially for those living in patriarchal cultural values. This study compares the impacts of sexual abuse and other sociodemographic variables between recanting and non-recanting victimized groups in Adana city from Turkey. The samples attending our department were divided into two groups: group 1 comprised victims who recanted their first abuse disclosure, and group 2 comprised victims who insisted on the veracity of their first report at further evaluations. The characteristics of the child, family, and abuser were compared between recanting victims and non-recanting victims by retrospective data. Each group included 27 children, for a total of 54 subjects. All adverse social reactions after the sexual abuse, including keeping secrets and a repressive family attitude, were higher among group 1 victims than group 2 victims ($p < 0.0001$). Although they are victimized by protecting family integrity, victims may show a tendency to keep secrets and to not immediately disclose an abuse event.

Wyman, J., Foster, I., Lavoie, J., Tong, D., & Talwar, V. (2018). Detecting children's false allegations and recantations of a crime. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 24*(6), 652-671.

This study examined adults' abilities to detect the veracity of children's (ages 6–11) initial disclosures and their later recantations about a crime. Children ($N = 32$) were asked to make a false

denial or a false accusation of an alleged theft, while some were asked to tell the truth. Afterwards, children recanted their initial statements in a second interview; thus, children who initially denied the theft accused a researcher of the transgression in the second interview, and vice-versa. Adult raters (ages 18–25; N = 108) watched both interviews and completed a questionnaire that required them to determine the veracity (i.e. whether the report was true or false) and credibility of the disclosure. Adults accurately detected the veracity of children’s reports 53% of the time (55% of original reports, 50% of recantations). Raters were more accurate when detecting false denials than false accusations in the children’s original and recanted reports. Despite being more difficult to detect, children’s recanted denials that became accusations were rated as the least credible. Furthermore, self-reported level of experience with children and ratings confidence were not significant predictors of truth/lie detection accuracy.

Malloy, L. C., & Mugno, A. P. (2016). Children’s recantation of adult wrongdoing: An experimental investigation. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 145*, 11-21.

Child maltreatment cases often hinge on a child’s word versus a defendant’s word, making children’s disclosures crucially important. There is considerable debate concerning why children recant allegations, and it is imperative to examine recantation experimentally. The purpose of this laboratory analogue investigation was to test (a) how often children recant true allegations of an adult’s wrongdoing after disclosing and (b) whether children’s age and caregiver supportiveness predict recantation. During an interactive event, 6- to 9-year-olds witnessed an experimenter break a puppet and were asked to keep the transgression a secret. Children were then interviewed to elicit a disclosure of the transgression. Mothers were randomly assigned to react supportively or unsupportively to this disclosure, and children were interviewed again. We coded children’s recantations (explicit denials of the broken puppet after disclosing) and changes in their forthcomingness (shifts from denial or claims of lack of knowledge/memory to disclosure and vice versa) in free recall and in response to focused questions about the transgression. Overall, 23.3% of the children recanted their prior disclosures (46% and 0% in the unsupportive and supportive conditions, respectively). No age differences in recantation rates emerged, but 8- and 9-year-olds were more likely than 6- and 7-year-olds to maintain their recantation throughout Interview 2. Children whose mothers reacted supportively to disclosure became more forthcoming in Interview

2, and those whose mothers reacted unsupportively became less forthcoming. Results advance theoretical understanding of how children disclose negative experiences, including sociomotivational influences on their reports, and have practical implications for the legal system. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Malloy, L. C., Mugno, A. P., Rivard, J. R., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2016). [Familial influences on recantation in substantiated child sexual abuse cases](#). *Child Maltreatment, 21*(3), 256-261.

The underlying reasons for recantation in children's disclosure of child sexual abuse (CSA) have been debated in recent years. In the present study, we examined the largest sample of substantiated CSA cases involving recantations to date (n = 58 cases). We specifically matched those cases to 58 nonrecanters on key variables found to predict recantation in prior research (i.e., child age, alleged parent figure perpetrator, and caregiver unsupportiveness). Bivariate analyses revealed that children were less likely to recant when they were (1) initially removed from home postdisclosure and (2) initially separated from siblings postdisclosure. Multivariate analyses revealed that children were less likely to recant when family members (other than the nonoffending caregiver) expressed belief in the children's allegations and more likely to recant when family members (other than the nonoffending caregiver) expressed disbelief in the allegations and when visitations with the alleged perpetrator were recommended at their first hearing. Results have implications for understanding the complex ways in which social processes may motivate some children to retract previous reports of sexual abuse.

Katz, C. (2014). "Please believe me; I am the biggest liar that exists": Characterising children's recantations during forensic investigations. *Children and Youth Services Review, 43*, 160-166.

The current study seeks to characterise the way that children recant previously reported alleged abuse during forensic investigations. Through thematic analysis, the current study aims to examine the challenging phenomenon of recantation in children's narratives, their interactions with forensic interviewers and additional external information from the sample. Twelve investigative interviews with children were sampled for the purposes of the current study. The study inclusion criteria

included the following: a forensic investigation performed when the child discloses the alleged abuse, a forensic investigation when the child recants the alleged abuse, external evidence suggesting that abuse occurred (e.g., suspect admission or medical evidence) and no reported developmental disabilities in children. From the phenomenological paradigm, thorough thematic analysis was performed on all materials in the current study. The quality of the forensic investigations was also analysed in all the 24 investigations. Six key categories were identified from the children's narratives and the external materials: the children's disclosure patterns, their first testimonies, their recantations, the familial and cultural contexts of the recantation and the professional's decision-making. In addition, the results addressed the quality of all 24 forensic investigations. Using the children's narratives and perceptions, the current study provides a unique opportunity to explore recantation. This information is highly significant for policymakers, practitioners and researchers who want to enhance their understanding of this phenomenon to assess it better and attempt to minimise its occurrence.

O'Donohue, W., Benuto, L. T., Fondren, R. N., Tolle, L., Vijay, A., & Fanetti, M. (2013). Dimensions of child sexual abuse allegations: What is unusual and what is not?. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice, 13*(5), 456-475.

Summit claimed via his child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CSAAS) that children often (a) recant; (b) make disclosures that are unconvincing (i.e., “illogical” and “incredible”); (c) make contradictory claims; and (d) make delayed claims. In this study, 97 substantiated cases of child sexual abuse were examined for both the key properties outlined by Summit and also for other key properties that have been discussed by experts. Results indicate that some of the key properties of CSASS (recantation and contradictions) are rare in substantiated cases. While delayed claims were common, the delays in this sample were generally shorter than proposed in CSAAS. Results also revealed that allegations rarely contained logistical implausibilities, impoverished details, a stake factor, strange elements in the context of the outcry, fantastical details, or reports of repressed memories.

Bonomi, A. E., Gangamma, R., Locke, C. R., Katafiasz, H., & Martin, D. (2011). “Meet me at the hill where we used to park”: Interpersonal processes associated with victim recantation. *Social Science & Medicine, 73*(7), 1054-1061.

Our study used live telephone conversations between domestic violence perpetrators and victims to answer novel questions about how and why victims arrive at their decision to recant and/or refuse prosecution efforts. From October 2008 to June 2011, we conducted a qualitative study involving 25 heterosexual couples, where the male perpetrator was being held in a Detention Facility (in the U.S.) for felony-level domestic violence and made telephone calls to his female victim during the pre-prosecution period. We used 30e192 min of conversational data for each couple to examine: 1) interpersonal processes associated with the victim's intention to recant; and 2) the couple's construction of the recantation plan once the victim intended to recant. We used constructivist grounded theory to guide data analysis, which allowed for the construction of a novel recantation framework, while acknowledging the underlying coercive interpersonal dynamic. Our results showed that consistently across couples, a victim's recantation intention was foremost influenced by the perpetrator's appeals to the victim's sympathy through descriptions of his suffering from mental and physical problems, intolerable jail conditions, and life without her. The intention was solidified by the perpetrator's minimization of the abuse, and the couple invoking images of life without each other. Once the victim arrived at her decision to recant, the couple constructed the recantation plan by redefining the abuse event to protect the perpetrator, blaming the State for the couple's separation, and exchanging specific instructions on what should be said or done. Our findings advance scientific knowledge through identifying, in the context of ongoing interactions, strategies perpetrators used sympathy appeals and minimization to successfully persuade their victim and strategies the couple used to preserve their relationship. Practitioners must double their efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and efforts made to link victims to trusted advocates who can help them defend against perpetrators' sophisticated techniques. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Kuehnle, K. & Connell, M. (Eds). (2009). *The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony is an in-depth and practical guide for forensic psychologists and other mental health professionals working on child sexual abuse cases. It reflects the current knowledge in this field through contributions written by nationally and internationally recognized experts in applied research and practice. Applying empirically based clinical decision-making to child sexual abuse evaluations, this timely book orients readers to the extraordinary catastrophes that can unfold when children are interviewed with faulty

techniques and provides vital assistance to understanding the research that guides the work of all well-trained clinicians. This thorough yet accessible guide explores: (a) Well-established empirical findings on decision-making and the relationship to false negative and positive errors in cases of alleged child sexual abuse; (b) The difficulties in conducting reliable and meaningful research; (c) Children's behavior and the fallacy of symptoms as markers when child sexual abuse is suspected; (d) The impact of Megan's Law on children with sexual behavior problems; (e) The literature concerning children's susceptibility to suggestibility; (f) Controversies within the field including repeated interviews, inconsistencies in children's statements, and recantations of sexual abuse allegations; and (g) The effectiveness of using props, including dolls, drawings, and photographs, to make memory more accessible for verbal reporting. Providing guidance for mental health professionals working to protect children, *The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony* offers practical and important measures for the accurate and thoughtful evaluation and assessment of children who are possible victims of sexual abuse. (Author Abstract)

London, K., Bruck, M., Wright, D. B., & Ceci, S. J. (2008). Review of the contemporary literature on how children report sexual abuse to others: Findings, methodological issues, and implications for forensic interviewers. *Memory*, *16*(1), 29-47.

Methods used during forensic interviews with children are driven by beliefs about how children recall and report child sexual abuse (CSA) to others. Summit (1983) proposed a theory (Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome) contending that, due to the specific traumatic characteristics of CSA, children will often delay disclosing abuse or altogether fail to disclose during childhood, deny abuse when asked, and often recant abuse allegations. His theory has had a tremendous impact on the field of CSA forensic evaluations, despite its dearth of empirical support. In this paper, we review and critique the contemporary literature from two main sources: retrospective accounts from adults reporting CSA experiences and studies of children undergoing forensic evaluation for CSA. We conclude that data support the notion that children often delay abuse disclosure, but that among valid abuse cases undergoing forensic evaluation, denial and recantation are not common. Methodological issues and implications for forensic interviewers are discussed. (Author Abstract)

Malloy, L. C., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2007). Filial dependency and recantation of child sexual abuse allegations. *Journal of the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 46(2), 162-170.

Controversy abounds regarding the process by which child sexual abuse victims disclose their experiences, particularly the extent to which and the reasons why some children, once having disclosed abuse, later recant their allegations. This study examined the prevalence and predictors of recantation among 2- to 17-year-old child sexual abuse victims. Case files (n = 257) were randomly selected from all substantiated cases resulting in a dependency court filing in a large urban county between 1999 and 2000. Recantation (i.e., denial of abuse postdisclosure) was scored across formal and informal interviews. Cases were also coded for characteristics of the child, family, and abuse. A 23.1% recantation rate was observed. Multivariate analyses supported a filial dependency model of recantation, whereby abuse victims who were more vulnerable to familial adult influences (i.e., younger children, those abused by a parent figure and who lacked support from the nonoffending caregiver) were more likely to recant. An alternative hypothesis, that recantations resulted from potential inclusion of cases involving false allegations, was not supported. Results provide new insight into the process by which children reveal interpersonal trauma and have implications for debates concerning the credibility of child sexual abuse allegations and treatment in dependency samples. (Author Abstract).

Parga, C. C. (2007). Legal and scientific issues surrounding victim recantation in child sexual abuse cases. *Georgia State University Law Review*, 24(3), 779-812.

This Note will attempt to define and clarify the issues that ultimately lead to the feeling of helplessness experienced by many recanting victims. It will also suggest ways in which the legal system could better address the recanting person's legitimate concerns that an injustice has been perpetrated while still striving to protect child victims of sexual abuse.

Lyon, T. D., & Saywitz, K. J. (2006). From post-mortem to preventive medicine: Next steps for research on child witnesses. *Journal of Social Issues*, 62(4), 833-861.

We propose five directions for future child witness research, inspired by recognition of the day-to-day realities of the legal system and the opportunities of psychology to react proactively to challenges child witnesses face. These directions include (1) the refinement of developmentally sensitive questioning

aids that increase completeness without increasing suggestibility, (2) the development of approaches to non-disclosure and recantation, including understanding of the reasons underlying non-disclosure and the potential for building rapport and increasing trust, (3) the construction of interventions that meet mental health needs of child-victim witnesses without creating false memories or tainting testimony, (4) a focus on details of children's narratives that are often lacking, including temporal information and emotional reactions, and (5) expanding our attention beyond child sexual abuse allegations in criminal court and considering the many contexts in which child witnesses are questioned, including areas in which preferences rather than memories are elicited. (Author Abstract)

Malloy, L. C., & Lyon, T. D. (2006). Caregiver support and child sexual abuse: Why does it matter? *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 15*(4), 97-103.

The article focuses on the importance of a caregiver's supportiveness and his or her relation to a child's disclosure, recantation and adjustment after being sexually abused. It has been noted that maternal reactions to abuse, including whether the mother believed the child's allegations and, whether she acted in a protective manner or supportive manner, are important not only in the aftermath of child sexual abuse discovery, but also in terms of children's willingness to disclose. A mother should carefully assessed the situation after the child has reported such crime so that she could impose proper measures. On the other hand, nonsupportiveness may lead the child to fail to disclose the abuse when questioned by social services. (Author Abstract)

Olafson, E., & Lederman, C. S. (2006). The state of the debate about children's disclosure patterns in child sexual abuse cases. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal, Winter, 27-40*.

In current research studies about the disclosure patterns of sexually abused children, experts agree that most victims delay disclosure for years, often until adulthood. Researchers disagree about disclosure rates and recantation rates among children during formal interviews. Studies of children who had not previously disclosed but are known through corroborative evidence to have been sexually abused show lower rates of disclosure than do studies of children who had disclosed prior to the formal interview. Gradual disclosures among children are common, and more than a single interview may be necessary in some cases. Prior disclosure, level of support by non-offending parents, developmental level, and relationship to perpetrator affect children's rates of disclosure and their disclosure patterns. More

research is necessary to clarify children's post-disclosure recantation rates and predictors. (Author Abstract)

London, K., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Shuman, D. W. (2005). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell? *Psychology, Public Policy, & Law*, *11*(1), 194-226.

The empirical basis for the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CSAAS), a theoretical model that posits that sexually abused children frequently display secrecy, tentative disclosures, and retractions of abuse statements, was reviewed. Two data sources were evaluated: retrospective studies of adults' reports of having been abused as children and concurrent or chart-review studies of children undergoing evaluation or treatment for sexual abuse. The evidence indicates that the majority of abused children do not reveal abuse during childhood. However, the evidence fails to support the notion that denials, tentative disclosures, and recantations characterize the disclosure patterns of children with validated histories of sexual abuse. These results are discussed in terms of their implications governing the admissibility of expert testimony on CSAAS. (Author Abstract)

Lovett, B. B. (2004). Child sexual abuse disclosure: Maternal response and other variables impacting the victim. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *21*(4), 355-371.

Disclosure of childhood sexual abuse is a process unique to each victim and may be influenced by factors of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and gender, as well as by abuse specific factors. The response by caregivers and professionals effects disclosure and can be responsible for recantation. Maternal responses that convey protection and support have been found to be associated with victims' improved mental health and social functioning. Non-abusive caregivers are often marginalized by the child welfare system in its attempt to secure physical safety for the child. This article summarizes the literature regarding sexual abuse disclosure and maternal response. Areas for future research are discussed. (Author Abstract)

Ost, J., Costall, A., & Bull, R. (2002). A perfect symmetry? A study of retractors' experiences of making and then repudiating claims of early sexual abuse. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 8(2), 155-181.

The aim of recent research has been to contribute new information to the false memory/recovered memory debate by studying the circumstances of retractors' experiences and their initial claims of abuse. The limited research available has been heavily criticized because the experiences of retractors are not considered reliable evidence; these individuals may just be highly suggestible or unreliable witnesses. The study's aim was to examine this criticism by comparing retractors' experiences as they reported and recanted allegations of abuse. Two males and 18 females ages 28-60 years completed a detailed questionnaire concerning their abuse charges. Results of the questionnaire showed a disparity between the processes of recovery and retraction, for the majority of respondents' retractions took much longer than recovery and involved far less social pressure. Also, respondents said several factors were more important than social pressure in deciding to question their abuse allegations. (NCAC Abstract)

Tully, B. (2002). The evaluation of retractions in sexual abuse cases. *Child Abuse Review*, 11(2), 94-102.

In some cases of alleged sexual abuse, the child or adult retracts allegations made. This poses problems for both civil and criminal legal proceedings. It is argued that the collection and examination of retraction statements often does not receive the same careful attention as is the case with the investigation of the original allegations. Logically, depending on whether the original complaints were true or false or a mixture, so the meaning of a retraction may vary. Where retractions are examined and evaluated with care they may be shown to add to the confidence of the final conclusion rather than simply throwing doubt on that. A systematic approach is described, followed by three cases where such application assisted and paradoxically added to the probative value of earlier statements. (Author Abstract)

Perlis Marx, S. (1999). Victim recantation in child sexual abuse cases: A team approach to prevention, investigation, and trial. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 2(2), 105-140.

This article explores the reasons for victim recantation in child sexual abuse cases, problems that surface with a recantation, and practical steps multidisciplinary professionals can take to prevent the recantation

of truthful allegations. Secondly, the article discusses the roles of investigative team members in the investigation and evaluation of a victim's recantation and in the trial which may follow. Finally, the article addresses possible final outcomes of criminal court intervention and the team's role in continued support for the child. (Author Abstract)

Bradley, A. R., & Wood, J. M. (1996). How do children tell? The disclosure process in child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 20(9), 881-891.

Children's disclosure of sexual abuse has been described as a quasi-developmental process that includes stages of denial, reluctance, disclosure, recantation, and reaffirmation (Sorenson & Snow, 1991, Summit, 1983). It has been reported that nearly 75% of sexual abuse victims initially deny abuse, and that nearly 25% eventually recant their allegations (Sorenson & Snow, 1991). The present study examined disclosures in 234 sexual abuse cases validated by Protective Services in El Paso, Texas. Denial of abuse occurred in 6% of cases, and recantation in 4% of cases in which a child had already disclosed abuse. Four of the eight victims who recanted appeared to do so in response to pressure from a caretaker. The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome described by Summit (1983) seems to be infrequent among the types of cases seen by child protection agencies. The present findings do not support the view that disclosure is a quasi-developmental process that follows sequential stages. (Author Abstract)

Marx, S. P. (1996). Victim recantation in child sexual abuse cases: The prosecutor's role in prevention. *Child Welfare*, 75(3), 219-233.

Recantation by a child who has been abused and has disclosed the abuse is a common phenomenon. Reasons for recantation and the problems recantation presents for the continued safety of the child and for the efficacy of child protective services and criminal justice interventions are explored. Although not in itself diagnostic of abuse, recantation by a child who has been abused and has disclosed the abuse is a common phenomenon. This article explores reasons for recantation and the problems recantation presents for the continued safety of the child and for the efficacy of child protective services and criminal justice interventions. Practical steps are offered for prosecutors, child protective services workers, CPS attorneys, law enforcement investigators, and members of multidisciplinary teams to prevent recantation of truthful allegations of child sexual abuse. (NCAC Abstract)

