



A Decade Later: Adolescents' Memory for Medical Emergencies

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Introduction

- This study explores children's ability to recall highly salient, emotional events (injuries & subsequent hospital treatment) many years after they occurred.
- Children recall the details of salient injuries very well shortly after they occurred, as well as after 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, and 5 years (Peterson, 1999, 2012; Peterson & Whalen, 2001).
- Their recall of hospital treatment events however is poorer, and deteriorates.

Methods

Participants

- 39 adolescents had been recruited a decade earlier from the Emergency Room of a children's hospital.
 - Initial age of children was 3-5 years old at time of injury
 - All suffered trauma injuries requiring out-patient treatment (broken bones, lacerations, etc.)
- ### Procedure
- Adolescents initially interviewed shortly after injury (Peterson & Bell, 1996).
 - Adult eyewitnesses also interviewed.
 - Adolescents had had varying numbers of interviews (2-5), occurring after 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, or 5 years.
 - Half had been re-interviewed after 5 years, and the rest had not been interviewed for 8+ years.

Data Coding (Peterson, 2011)

- Recall completeness: % of components recalled of standardized injury/treatment prototypes.
- Accuracy of completeness components (%).
- Unique narrative detail: number of new information units recalled.
- Accuracy of unique narrative detail (%).
- Injury and hospital treatment coded & analyzed separately

Results

Injury recall:

- Completeness - NO CHANGE
- Unique information - MORE/BETTER
- Accuracy - slightly worse

Hospital recall:

- Completeness - WORSE
- Unique info - WORSE
- Accuracy - WORSE (compl.) & same (detail)

Number of Interviews - NO EFFECT

Reminder after 5 years - NO EFFECT

Table 1. Comparing Initial & 10-Year Recall: Means for Completeness, Completeness Accuracy, Number of Unique Details, and Accuracy of Details

Measure	Initial Interview	10-Year Interview	Sig. Different
Injury			
% Completeness	72.2	70.2	ns
% Completeness Accuracy	90.5	86.6	.035
Number of Unique Details	37.6	44.6	.047
% Unique Detail Accuracy	91.6	84.6	.001
Hospital			
% Completeness	58.2	31.5	<.001
% Completeness Accuracy	92.6	81.5	.007
Number of Unique Details	34.2	21.1	.001
% Unique Detail Accuracy	92.8	87.2	ns

Discussion

Recall of injury surprisingly good after a decade: Just as complete, and even more detailed, with only slight decreases in accuracy.

Recall of hospital treatment is considerably worse. But this event is much less unique, less coherently understood, and less likely to be talked about at the time of injury.

The number of times children had been reminded through detailed interviews as well as the recency of the final interview were irrelevant.

Conclusion

Children and adolescents can have excellent long-term recall of highly significant emotional events. This has important implications for forensic situations.

References

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