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“Do you believe?”: The effects of child witness age and background on the credibility of child sexual exploitation cases

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“Do you believe”: The effects of child witness age and background on the credibility of child sexual exploitation cases

ABSTRACT

A mock child sexual exploitation trial was used to study juror’s perceptions of child victim’s credibility. The age and socioeconomic status of the child victim were tested. Results indicated that child victim age had no significant impact on the mock juror’s perceptions of their credibility. The socioeconomic status of the child victim had a significant impact on how credible the jurors perceived the child. Juror’s hearing a case of a child from a high socioeconomic status were more likely to reach a guilty verdict compared to the child from a low socioeconomic status. Additionally, jurors who perceived the child as credible were significantly more likely to pass a guilty verdict. The study concluded that the socioeconomic status of a child victim can impact how credible jurors perceive their allegations. Future research should aim to examine stereotypes surrounding victims of child sexual abuse. Specifically, what it is about child victims from low socioeconomic status’ that causes jurors to perceive their allegations as less credible.

KEY WORDS:	CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION	CREDIBILITY	JUROR PERCEPTIONS	AGE	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
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Introduction

Research into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a relatively new field, and the majority has been predominantly carried out by children's charities (Alderson, 2016). Over time, more interest into CSE has been developed through psychological research and literature. However, most of this research focuses on reducing the risk (Berry, Tully and Egan, 2017) and how to identify and assess (Firmin and Beckett, 2014) CSE.

CSE can be defined as a form of child sexual abuse involving an individual or group taking advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce (commonly seen by teachers or club leaders), manipulate or deceive a child or person under the age of 18 into sexual activity for an exchange of items wanted by the victim or for a financial advantage or status to the perpetrator (Department for Education, 2017). There are many myths and stereotypes regarding sexual abuse and exploitation of children (Somer and Szwareberg, 2001). As a result, it could be argued that due to the influence juror's attitudes and beliefs have on trial outcomes (Taylor, 2007), these myths contribute to negative consequences (Paine and Hansen, 2002; Ullman and Filipas, 2005), and legal decisions (Taylor, 2007). Collings (1997) identified three significant factors present in attitudes; blame diffusion, denial of abusiveness and restrictive stereotypes. These findings are consistent with other research (Cromer and Freyd, 2007; Rheingold et al., 2007). Additionally, Collings and Bodill (2003) suggested that these myths may be reinforced by the terminology used within the media. It is possible that these myths could influence how jurors perceive child victim's credibility and how they pass verdicts.

In a trial, jurors are required to consider all facts of a case when reaching a verdict. The reflection on facts should be the only information the jurors use to reach a verdict. However, research identified this is not the case. Jurors are influenced not only by evidence and legal guidelines but by other factors too, such as the perceived credibility of eyewitnesses (Bornstein and Greene, 2011). Jurors can also be guided by cognitive heuristics (mental shortcuts) when they have limited expertise on the matter (Bornstein and Greene, 2011). Goodman et al (1984) found support when they asked mock jurors to read a case of murder by dangerous driving, with the eyewitness of the crime ranging in age (6-year-old, 9-year-old or an adult). It was found that the adult was believed more despite judgements of the defendant's guilt being similar. Researchers suggested this occurred due to the jurors using additional evidence along with the eyewitness testimony to come to a verdict.

When a child provides a testimony in court, it places the difficult task of assessing the accuracy of their account on to the jurors, and this can be affected by their characteristics (Hobbs et al., 2014). The most documented characteristics identified within research are the victims age and gender (Hobbs et al., 2014). For justice to be effectively delivered, it is important that children and young adults are involved in criminal trials, especially in cases of child sexual abuse where they are the primary witness. Nevertheless, this poses problems in gaining accurate and full evidence within their testimonies (Andrews and Lamb, 2017; Klemfuss, Quas and Lyon, 2014). These testimonies become critical evidence, as there may be a lack of physical evidence of the sexual abuse occurring (Blackwell and Seymour, 2015), an aspect which has generated much research (Randall, Seymour, Henderson and Blackwell, 2017). Research has also shown that children are unable to provide meaningful and consistent answers to questions involving events, time, size or an explanation of motive (Peterson and Grant, 2001).

Lying within children has received much attention within psychology (Talwar and Lee, 2008) and practical applications in the legal setting (Goodman et al., 2006). Children were once thought as incapable of lying until the age of 7 years (Piaget and Inhelder, 1956), however, current studies have found that children are to understand and perform lie-telling behaviour from the age of 4 years (Bussey, 1999; Lewis, Stanger and Sullivan, 1989; Talwar and Lee, 2008).

In England it was accepted that a child's live testimony can be substituted for a videotaped testimony under The Criminal Justice Act 1991 (Wilson and Davies, 1999). Judges suggested this may allow for false allegations to be ignored (Davies et al., 1995), as a witness giving a live testimony is less likely to coverup a lie (Goodman et al., 2006). Goodman et al (2006) conducted a study to investigate the effects of child witnesses out-of-court statements on juror's perceptions of the witnesses' credibility. It was found that children who testified live were perceived as more credible compared to those testifying through a videotape or social worker. Additionally, Goodman et al (1998) found children that testified through videotapes and CCTV were perceived as less believable and less accurate. However, they were significantly less stressed than those children testifying live.

Few studies have focussed on adult's abilities to detect lies in children's testimonies (Haugaard and Reppucci, 1992; Honts, 1994). Some research has found that as children become older, it is more difficult for adults to detect their lies (Feldman, Jenkins and Popoola, 1979; Feldman and White, 1980). Recent studies have suggested that adults find it difficult to detect younger children's lies when they are motivated to hide their own wrongdoings (Talwar and Lee, 2002; Talwar, Lee, Bala and Lindsay, 2002). Nevertheless, in research looking at detection of children's lies, the children were only required to provide brief responses, in which they would lie to hide their own misbehaviours (Lewis, Stanger and Sullivan, 1989). However, if a child is to testify in court, then they are required to provide numerous details about an alleged event. Talwar et al., (2006) suggested a need for a more 'ecologically relevant' study which requires the child to report about a truthful or fictional event in their lives involving other people.

Research and literature has outlined no widespread definition of credibility. Credibility can be explained through various descriptions such as 'the extent to which a judge or jury believe that the witness is providing an honest and accurate testimony' (Nurcombe, 1986:473) and as a perceived quality suggesting believability (Fogg and Tseng, 1999). Furthermore, research has also outlined that there is no universal way to measure or form a concept of credibility. Such concepts include 'believability', 'trustworthiness', 'honesty' and 'competence' which have been argued to represent aspects of credibility (Voogt, Klettke and Thomson, 2017). However, Brodsky, Griffin and Cramer (2010) found that 'knowledge', 'likability', 'trustworthiness' and 'confidence' play a significant role in recognising a credible witness and more recent research highlighted that 'accuracy', 'believability', 'competency', 'reliability' and 'truthfulness' (Voogt, Klettke and Thomson, 2017) results in credibility. It could be argued that the term 'believability' poses issues as it has been previously defined as a child's 'willingness to lie' (Pozzulo et al., 2009), yet, Voogt, Klettke and Thomson (2017) conceptualised the term as a more emotional aspect which could relate to the belief of the child's testimony.

There is no way to be completely certain that a witness is providing an accurate account of what was seen, experienced, or heard (Bala, Ramakrishnan, Lindsay and

Lee, 2005), and within cases of alleged child sexual assault, perceived credibility is highly influential on juror decision making (Voogt, Klettke and Thomson, 2017). It has been identified that victim credibility can have a direct impact on how the trial concludes (Goodman-Delahunty, Cossins, and O'Brien, 2010; Kaufmann et al., 2003; Leippe, Eisenstadt, Rauch and Seib, 2004), for example, the lower the perceived credibility of the victim, the less likely of a guilty verdict. Within child sexual assault cases, the credibility of the victim is imperative as the victim is typically the only witness to the event (Bottoms et al., 2007). However, jurors are left to decide on the issue of credibility with little guidance (Goodman-Delahunty, Cossins and O'Brien, 2010). It could be argued that jurors should use the physical evidence given at the trial to make their decision, however, in sexual assault cases, there is typically limited physical evidence which leaves the jurors to rely on their own biases and/or extraneous factors (Bottoms et al., 2007). This creates problems as child sexual assault cases are suggested to be one of the toughest offences to prosecute (Wundersitz, 2003).

Research has been conducted with regards to a child's age and how this impacts on juror's perceptions of credibility (Goodman and Schaaf, 1999). Some research has shown older children generate more accurate information when testifying, maybe due to their advanced cognitive ability (Myers et al., 1999; Sutherland, Gross and Hayne, 1996). It is believed that as children grow older the less likely their testimony will be affected by suggestibility (Goodman and Schaaf, 1999). In a mock theft trial, Nikonova and Ogloff (2005) found that jurors perceived 7-year-old child witness as less trustworthy with lower competency compared to the account from the 10-year-old and 23-year-old witness's. Thus, supporting the notion that older children are perceived as more credible in the judgements of juror's. Conversely, Bottoms and Goodman (1994) examined juror's perceptions of child eyewitnesses/victims in cases of sexual assault perpetrated by a teacher. It was found that mock jurors perceived the younger child as more honest than the older child.

Some research has failed to either support or contradict that age impacts on juror's perceived credibility of child victims. Bidrose and Goodman (2000) published a case study of a male who had been prostituting young girls to other men. The oldest victim (15-years-old) made multiple mistakes and errors within her testimony and interviews compared to the younger girls. However, it was found that her testimony was not perceived as any less accurate than those of the younger girls. A possible explanation for this could be that the oldest girl is perceived as more believable due to her higher cognitive ability, yet she did make more mistakes than those children who were of a younger age (Holcomb and Jacquin, 2007). Additionally, it could be explained that older children are less likely to be believed compared to younger children. However, jurors did not rate the older girl's testimony as any less convincing than the younger children (Holcomb and Jacquin, 2007). Holcomb and Jaquin (2007) found that jurors gave higher guilt ratings to defendant that were accused of abusing a 5-year-old compared to those accused of abusing 11/16-year-old. This supports findings generated by Bottoms and Goodman (1994) and contrasts findings reached by Nikonova and Ogloff (2005). These findings could be due to jurors perceiving the younger children as more innocent and less likely to have a reason for lying (Holcomb and Jacquin, 2007).

One study even identified that licensed practicing psychologists placed more responsibility for sexual abuse towards the adolescent victim compared to the 7-year-old (Kalichman, 1992). Kalichman (1992) suggested this could be due to adolescents

appearing as less sexually naïve and having the ability to initiate sexual interactions. This was later supported in a study using non-qualified members of the public (Davies and Rogers, 2009). Nightingale (1993) also found that older children were perceived as more responsible in sexual abuse cases than younger children.

Therefore, how a juror perceives a child's age as an indicator of believability is not concrete. There appears to be no definitive age which jurors settle at when assessing the believability of a child victim.

Few studies have examined how other factors, besides age, of a child eyewitness will influence juror perceptions of credibility (Leippe and Romanczyk, 1989). Although limited, some research has set out to investigate whether socioeconomic status has an impact on juror decision making. However, much of this research focuses on the socioeconomic status (SES) of the defendant rather than the victim and involves murder trials opposed to sexual abuse trials. Mazzella and Feingold (1994) found that victims SES had no influence on juror decision making. On the other hand, Mainwaring and Scully (2010) found that the conviction rate increased from 33% to 79% when the victim's SES changed from low to middle. Schweitzer and Nunez (2017) conducted a study focussing on the effect victim impact statements and SES had on juror decision making. It was found that jurors were less likely to sentence a defendant when listening to the victim impact statement from the victim with the low socioeconomic status. Highlighting the influence SES information has on jurors. Phillips (2009) also found that victims with high SES, the defendant was more likely to be sentenced

As research into SES is limited with regards to how it can influence juror's perceptions of child victim credibility, social psychology could be a potential explanation.

Stereotypes can be defined as naïve theories about a person's characteristics that impact an individual's experience by guiding them to look for expectancies in their environment (Leichtman and Ceci, 1995). Stereotypes can create many social problems due to their inaccuracy and powerful influence on perceptions (Madon et al., 1998). However, it cannot be ignored that some stereotypes are accurate (Swim, 1994) and can be linked to differences in ethical behaviour (Piff et al., 2012). Research around stereotypes typically focuses adult survivors of child sexual abuse (O'Conner, 2008), how these stereotypes affect them later in life (Zafar and Ross, 2013) and stereotypes around the perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Sanghara and Wilson, 2010). There is little research on stereotypes affecting how jurors perceive the credibility of children in trials of child sexual abuse. However, it could be argued that, as stated by Bornstein and Greene (2011), jurors can be guided by cognitive heuristics and it could be argued that these heuristics are stereotypes or pre-judgements they have made about victims of sexual abuse. Overman et al (2013) found that adults appear to be susceptible to stereotype and schema-based processing of crime information. This could be a possible explanation as to why jurors perceive older children as less credible eyewitnesses/victims (Bottoms and Goodman, 1994; Holcomb and Jacquin, 2007).

With regards to SES, a small amount of research has identified the use of stereotypes. Miller and colleagues (1968) examined class bias within teachers and found that children perceived to be from a low SES were believed to have a lower overall life attainment compared to children perceived as higher SES. Darley and Gross (1983) supported this when they found that participants that viewed a child to be from a high SES to be performing above grade level on academics compared to the child from a

perceived low socioeconomic status that was labelled as performing below grade level.

A current stereotype within children in sexual assault trials is the increased sexual promiscuity and experience (Alley, 2012). This could mean that mock jurors perceive the sexual abuse of children as less terrible and potentially hold the victim as responsible (Hobbs et al., 2014). A possible explanation as to why individuals may hold stereotypes towards victims of sexual abuse may be the prevalence of false allegations and wrongful convictions. Given that in cases of child sexual assault there are no definitive indicators of the abuse occurring, it is possible that false allegations may occur (Finkelhor, 1994).

There is a gap within the research into child credibility within CSE. If it can be identified that certain aspects of a child witness, in this case, their age and socioeconomic background, have an impact on how the jurors perceive their claims as credible, then this research could allow steps to be put in place which aims to reduce these credibility issues and provide all child witnesses a fair court trial which will eliminate or reduce juror stereotypes within the court.

The aim of this study is to identify whether mock juror's perceptions of a child's credibility in their reports of an alleged case of child sexual exploitation (CSE) is impacted based on characteristics of the child. The mock juror's perceived credibility of the child victim/eyewitness will be measured in conjunction with the manipulation of age of the child and the socioeconomic status of the child.

This research is set out to investigate whether the age (5-year-old or 15-year-old) and background (low socioeconomic status or high socioeconomic status) of an alleged child victim of CSE affect how the jury perceive their credibility. It is proposed based on previous research that children who are of a younger age are likely to be perceived as more credible compared to older children. Additionally, based on previous research and stereotypes, victims from a higher socio-economic background will be perceived as more credible in their claims compared to those from a lower background.

Method

Design

This quantitative study used a 2x2 between participant design. The study had two independent variables; child witness/victim age and child witness/victim socioeconomic status (SES), each with two levels (age: 5 and 15 years; socioeconomic status: low and high). This gave four conditions; low socioeconomic status aged 5, low socioeconomic status aged 15, high socioeconomic status aged 5 and high socioeconomic status aged 15. The dependent variable was the verdict (guilty/not guilty) and the total WCS scores.

Participants

The participants in this study were enlisted based on their availability and eligibility to take part. Using a power analysis calculator to generate the sample size, it was suggested a total of 20 participants within each condition. This allows a medium effect size (Cohen, 1969, 1988, 1992) and a confidence level of 0.05 to be generated. However, due to incomplete responses, the total number of participants used was 66 (age 5: 36 participants; age 15: 30 participants; low SES: 47; high SES: 19).

Two methods of sampling were used allowing for a representative sample. The first way was opportunity sampling through Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) participation pool (Sona-System website). Those recruited through this system received module credits for their participation. The second way involved contacting family members and friends of the lead researcher and creating a snowball sample. This means primary data sources nominated other potential primary data sources, allowing the researcher to access participants through contact information provided by other participants (Noy, 2008). Participation was dependent on eligibility (eligible for U.K. jury service). Participants must be aged between 18 to 75 years, registered to vote within the U.K, be a registered citizen in the U.K and must not have been disqualified from previous jury service (Gov.uk, 2016; In Brief, n.d.).

Materials

Invitation Letter

All participants that were eligible to take part in the study received an invitation letter (Appendix 1). Those partaking from MMU participation pool, this was presented as an introduction, and those outside of the university, completing the study on the Qualtrics system, the invitation letter was sent by email, separately from the questionnaire system containing the study URL link (presented on Qualtrics). Ensuring all participants complete the consent form and other materials the same way.

Participant Information Sheet

All participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix 2) stating their eligibility (qualified for UK Jury service). The information sheet gave a detailed explanation regarding what happens if they take part in the study. The confidentiality and voluntary nature of the study was also explained. Contact details of the researcher and any relevant support services were provided.

Consent Form

Participants that were eligible and wished to take part were presented with a consent form (Appendix 3). Participants were required to read and sign if they understood and agreed to the information they had been provided with, before they proceeded.

Scenario

The scenarios (Appendix 4) used are compiled with fictional allegations of CSE and allegations from real-life cases which were publicised through the media (Scheerhout, 2017; Siddique and Tran, 2014). This reduces any chances of participants knowing the outcome of the real-life cases, which could affect reliability.

Each scenario was randomly presented. Statutory guidelines on sentencing and what constitutes a guilty verdict were presented before the case was explained. These were developed from the Sentencing Council's Sexual Offences Definitive Guideline (2014). Each condition contained information on the charges the defendant is accused of, information of the victim and defendant (age, socioeconomic status, education/employment), how the victim met the defendant, the account of the offence and comments made by both the victim and defendant addressing the alleged offence and surrounding circumstances.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 5) asked participants to pass a verdict. Those in the 5-year-old conditions were passing a verdict on alleged accounts of rape arranging or facilitating sexual exploitation of a child. Those in the 15-year-old conditions were passing a verdict on alleged accounts of rape and inciting prostitution for gain. The questions were focussed around how the participants perceived the child in terms of factors such as; credibility, accuracy and consistency.

Adapted Witness Credibility Scale

The study used an established questionnaire that scores questions on a Likert-scale. This is the Witness Credibility Scale (WCS) (Appendix 6), developed by Brodsky, Griffin and Cramer (2010). The WCS was originally developed to bridge the gap of the assessment of expert credibility. As this current study is focussed on child victims/witnesses rather than expert witnesses, it appears unnecessary to use. However, research investigating witness confidence (Cramer, Brodsky and DeCoster, 2009) produced similar results. To fit into the context of this current study, the scale was adapted to measure participant's confidence in the perception child victim's credibility. The items which were removed from the original scale to create the adapted version are; dressed formally/informally, scientific/unscientific and friendly/unfriendly. Previous research using different scenarios and dissimilar scripts also found similar results suggesting generalisability for different scenarios (Brodsky, Griffin and Cramer, 2010). To use this scale, an email requesting permission to adapt and use as a method of data collection was sent to Brodsky. Permission was granted and a copy of this email is attached to the appendices (Appendix 7). The adapted WCS aimed to gain information on certain attributes of the child victim to assess how credible they believed the child to be.

Debrief Sheet

After completing the questionnaire and likert-scale, all participants received a debrief sheet (Appendix 8). This provided them with information regarding the content of the scenarios and their combined fictional and non-fictional nature. It reminded participants of the process regarding withdrawing their data, relevant support services and the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

Procedure

Participants completing the study directly from the URL link were initially invited to take part in the study by an invitation email. This email contained the URL link to the study. Once clicked, the participants were taken to the Qualtrics system. They were then shown the participant information sheet. The consent form was then presented to them. If participants gave consent, they were presented with a scenario. Once read, the participants were presented with the questionnaire, followed by the adapted WCS. After completion, the participants were presented with a debrief sheet and thanked for their time. This applies to participants that were recommended by other participants (snowball sample).

Participants completing the study through MMU's Participation Pool were presented with the same materials as those completing by the URL link, however, the process differed slightly. The invitation letter was presented to MMU students as an introduction on the Sona-System. Participants were then automatically transferred to the Qualtrics system where they followed the same process as those participants completing via the link.

Once results were gathered, they were entered into SPSS version 24. The appropriate analyses were carried out (IBM Corporation, 2016).

Ethical Issues

Prior to taking part in this study, participants received a participant information sheet explaining details about the study. Participants provided their consent to take part by completing a consent_form explaining what they are agreeing to, prior to starting the study. The consent form explained confidentiality of their information. However, they were made aware that this research could lead to a publication which may result in their data being shared outside the university. Although these results may be shared, anonymity within this study is guaranteed. Participants were provided a unique personal identification code (Appendix 8) to replace their name. Participants were given the right to withdraw. This is explained in the participant information sheet, consent form and the invitation for the study. Those who wished to be withdrawn were asked to contact the lead researcher or supervisor through their provided contact details before the deadline (05/03/2018) so no withdrawals were made while results were being analysed. Participants were invited to take part in this study through an invitation letter either emailed to them or presented on the Manchester Metropolitan University's participation pool system. As this study uses a scenario which some participants may find distressing, a debrief sheet was provided once the study had been completed. This allowed any questions from participants to be answered, provide them once again with the true aims of the study and provide any contact details or support they may need.

As the study contains graphic content of sexual abuse against children, it is possible that participants may become distressed. The mentioning of sexual abuse against children may result in participants experiencing psychological distress. Nevertheless, it is important that the potential for distress is considered. To address this a pre-warning of what to expect was added into the participant information sheet. The debrief letter also explained that the content described is that of fiction and true events. These true events have occurred over the past 10 years and have been widely publicised, so it is a possibility they have already been exposed to the distressing content. As the research focuses on the victim's age, be it under the age of 16, it could be argued this is culturally sensitive. However, it is outlined in the participant information sheet and the debrief letter that the victim of the alleged sexual assault is a child. This gives the participant's the choice as to whether they no longer want to take part.

The completed application for ethics approval form (AEAF) is attached to the appendices (Appendix 9).

Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis for the study was a 2x2 Independent ANOVA, a Chi Square analysis and an Independent T-test using SPSS version 24 (IBM Corporation, 2016). The 2x2 between participants Independent ANOVA was carried out on the verdict and the age and socioeconomic status of the child witness/victim. This will highlight any interactions between the independent variables (Brace, Kemp and Snelgar, 2016). This analysis has been used in much research into child sexual abuse uncertainties and misconceptions (Cossins, Goodman-Delahunty and O'Brien, 2009). The Chi Square analysis was carried out to examine whether there was a significant association between the verdicts given by the mock jurors. A technique previously used to analyse the relationship between mock juror's verdicts (Dillehay and Nietzel,

1985; London and Nunez, 2000; Rotzien, 2002). The Independent T-test was carried out on the WCS and the verdicts. This allows for a comparison of performances in the WCS and performances on the verdict (Brace, Kemp and Snelgar, 2016).

Results

The data gathered from the questionnaire and WCS was inputted into SPSS v.24.0.

Preparation of Data

The data was pre-screened and met the parametric test assumptions. Fourteen participants were removed from the data analysis due to incomplete responses. This gave a total of N=66 participants. A total number of participants for each group was 36 aged 5, 30 aged 15, 47 low SES and 19 high SES.

Analysis

An Independent 2x2 ANOVA was used. The first independent variable (IV1) was the age of the child which had two levels, age 5 vs age 15. The second independent variable (IV2) was the SES of child, again with two levels, low SES vs high SES. Both IVs used a between-subjects.

Figure 1. Mean (SD) for guilty verdicts of child age and child SES

Group	Level	Guilty	95% CI	
		Verdict	LL	UL
		M (SD)		
Age	5-years-old	1.250 (.069)	1.112	1.388
	15-years-old	1.167 (.075)	1.016	1.317
SES	Low SES	1.277 (.059)	1.159	1.394
	High SES	1.053 (.092)	.868	1.237

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

Whether the age of the child was 5 or 15, it did not affect the verdict given $f(1,64) = .67$, $p = .417$, $\eta^2 = .010$. However, the information about the SES of the child did influence juror's verdicts. There was a significant interaction between the SES of the child and the verdict given $f(1,64) = 4.20$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .061$. No Post Hoc tests were conducted. As there were only two levels of each IV, Post Hoc tests within the ANOVA are not possible.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the WCS and the verdict for differences in credibility. More guilty verdicts were made when the witness was perceived as more credible ($M = 123.75$, $SD = 22.83$) compared to not guilty verdicts ($M = 99.21$, $SD = 26.21$). An independent t-test showed that the difference was

significant and the size of the effect size¹ was large (Cohen, 1992) ($t(64) = 3.46, p = .001, d = 1.00$).

Two Pearson's Chi-square test of independence were performed to examine the association between the verdict (guilty) and age of the child and the verdict and the SES of the child. There was no relationship between child age and verdict $\chi^2(1, N = 66) = .680, p = .410$. The effect size reported by Cramer's V was .101 which equates to a small effect (Cohen, 1992). The association between child SES and verdict was significant $\chi^2(1, N = 66) = 4.06, p = .044$. Child victims from a high SES were perceived as more credible than those from a low SES. The effect size reported by Cramer's V was .248 which equates to a small to medium effect (Cohen, 1992).

Discussion

The current study examined the influence of a child victim's age and socioeconomic status on mock juror's verdicts and perceived credibility of the allegations made in a CSE trial. This study was the first to manipulate both child age and SES, adding to the current body of literature around juror perceptions of child sexual abuse victims. The results of the study revealed that the SES of the child affected how the jurors passed their verdict. There was no effect or influence from the age of child victim. Each factor is examined separately in the following discussion.

Age

Research has shown inconsistent results for the age of a child victim as an influential factor towards juror's perceptions of credibility (Bottoms and Goodman, 1994; Holcomb and Jacquin, 2007; Nikonova and Ogloff, 2005). The current results add to this debate.

The study found the age of the child victim had no impact on the verdict. There was no evidence that the younger child was perceived as more credible or vice versa. This goes against existing literature which identifies that age, whether it be younger or older, plays a significant role in juror's perceptions of credibility. These current results also contradict stereotypes around children involved in sexual abuse. Alley (2012) found that people perceive children with a higher level sexual promiscuity and therefore more responsible for their actions (Hobbs et al., 2014). There was no evidence in the current results to suggest this is the case. No difference in age was found regarding a guilty verdict.

It could be argued that the results are consistent with research regarding adult's abilities to detect lies in children's reports. Feldman, Jenkins and Popoola (1979) and Feldman and White (1980) suggested that adults struggle to identify lying as the child becomes older. This could be applied to the results as it is possible that no relationship between age and guilty verdicts occurred because the participants could not highlight anything in the child's account that appeared to be untruthful.

SES

¹ Small Effect Size = 0.20, Medium Effect Size = 0.50, Large Effect Size = 0.80. These are recommended by Cohen (1988, 1992)

Research in this limited area has identified that there is an impact on juror's perceptions of credibility caused by SES (Mazzella and Feingold, 1994; Schweitzer and Nunez, 2017).

The results found the SES of an alleged child victim of CSE has the potential to influence how jurors perceive their credibility and pass verdicts. A child from a high SES was perceived as more credible by mock jurors. This supports research findings from Phillips (2009) and contradicts Mazzella and Feingold (1994) findings suggesting SES has no influence. The results also highlighted that more guilty verdicts were reported in the cases where the child was from a high SES. This backs up findings gathered from Phillips (2009) which shows that a victim of a high SES is more likely to have an outcome of a guilty verdict towards the defendant, and findings from Schweitzer and Nunez (2017) that a case involving a victim from a low SES is more likely to receive a not guilty verdict.

It is possible that these decisions were based on stereotypes around social class. Research has highlighted adults are more susceptible to stereotypes (Overman et al., 2013), this makes it more likely that the participants in this study were basing their decisions on their already established beliefs of children from low SES. It is possible the participants developed stereotypes from a cognitive need to simplify the environment by categorising individuals into certain groups (Augoustinos and Walker, 1998). The stereotypes developed, then generate behaviour expectancies that explain in-group and out-group behaviours (Pettigrew, 1979) and it could be these expected behaviours which guided the juror decision making. However, it has been highlighted that stereotypes do not solely form based on just cognitive aspects, there is also influence from psychological and social representations (Augoustinos and Walker, 1998; Collings and Bodill, 2003). Yet, as this was not explored in the analysis, it cannot be exclusively reported that this was how they reached their verdict. Future research into this area is recommended.

A limitation of this current research is that was 'underpowered'. Having an underpowered study refers to the sampling. An underpowered study does not have a large enough sample size to answer the research question (Case and Ambrosius, 2007). Additionally, this underpowering may have led to overestimations of the effects sizes (independent t-test: $d = 1.00$) found and low reproducibility of the results (Button et al., 2013). This could potentially impact the study's generalisability. Additionally, having a small sample also prevented use of correlations to measure the degree of relationship between the SES of the child and the juror's verdicts. Conducting a correlation with less than 100 participants could skew the data and prevent a correlation that does exist or cause a correlation that does not exist (Brace, Kemp and Snelgar, 2016).

The current findings suggest that the age of the victim in CSE cases had no impact on the verdict jurors provided. Much of research conducted into juror's perceptions of child victim's credibility, typically regarding their age, is predominantly taken place outside of the UK (Bala et al., 2005; Randell et al., 2017; Voogt, Klettke and Thomson, 2017). This current study supports that age appears to be less of a contributing factor in the UK than it is documented in research carried out with Australian participants.

Much of the research carried out into SES and stereotypes is carried out on student populations (Piff et al., 2012; Zafar and Ross, 2013). The study supports stereotypes surrounding SES affect perceptions of credibility similarly in non-student populations

as it does student populations. However, there is no explanation of what the stereotypes are. Future research could analyse what is about individuals from a low SES that makes them appear less credible.

The current findings indicate victims of CSE from low SES are at an increased risk of not being believed. This poses implications for the criminal justice system. Authorities within the legal system may wish to consider these factors when selecting a jury for a CSE trial.

As this current research used not only students eligible for UK jury service but also other members of the public eligible for UK jury service, it could be implied that it represents a typical jury. This allows the results to be generalised to a wider population. However, although findings suggest that SES impacts on how jurors perceive child victim's credibility, jurors in a real-life CSE trials will have access to a lot more information. Therefore, the extent to which the current study's results can predict participants perceptions in real-life situations is unknown. Additionally, the underpowered sample may also affect the application of these findings in other settings.

Future research could consider how the SES of a victim influences how they perceive credibility. It is suggested that people have preconceptions of victims of child sexual abuse (Alley, 2012) and it is possible these stereotypes interact with those about SES (Darley and Gross, 1983). As there is already an underreporting of CSE due the children's allegations not being believed (Pasha-Robinson, 2017; Csaky, 2008), a study which examines if there is an interaction between the two (stereotypes and SES) could allow for a better understanding of why jurors do not believe the credibility of children bringing forth CSE allegations. This could help increase the reporting of CSE. Additionally, educating society on their stereotypes and how they impact their decision making on allegations of CSE could help to reduce the negative beliefs they have and increase their understanding of victims of CSE.

Overall, the current study has extended the literature into juror's perceived credibility of alleged CSE victims in trials. The results support existing literature that victims of sexual abuse are perceived as more credible if they are from a high SES and that it is more likely that a guilty verdict will be passed if the victim is from a high SES. This suggests that jurors base their decisions on their existing beliefs rather than solely basing it on the evidence provided. The current study adds to the prior and growing body of literature into predicting the perceptions of jurors on victim credibility in child sexual abuse trials. Understanding the influence of these stereotypes has implications for the criminal justice system and victims of CSE. Continued research is needed to distinguish the impact of these beliefs to help educate society and disregard the false stereotypes associated with low SES.

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