

Understanding Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory: Implications for Victim Interviewing



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Learning Objectives

1. Explain how behavior and memory processes can be impacted during a traumatic event.
2. Describe how memory **retrieval** and **disclosure** can be facilitated during victim interviews.
3. Explore the resilience and accuracy of memory.
4. Examine research identifying best practices for interviewing victims and suspects.

Polling Question

Have you already had training on trauma and the effects on victim behaviors and memories?

Yes

No

Maybe

Importance of Victim Interview

- Purpose of interview is to help victims (a) retrieve memories, and (b) share them.
- Investigator documents information, and evaluates in context of entire investigation.
- Not unlike a **crime scene...**



Traditional Approach: What *Doesn't* Work



What is Trauma?

“Traumatic events are shocking and emotionally overwhelming situations that may involve actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to physical integrity.”

- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

What is Trauma?

- Traumatic events often include actual or perceived loss of control (helplessness)
 - Used to only have experiential definition
 - Now have neuroscience to explain what happens
 - However still subjective event, varies by person

What Else is Going On?

- Dynamics of sexual assault / partner violence
 - **Internal Influence:** Victims may feel ashamed...
 - **External Influence:** Victims may feel pressure...
 - **System Influence:** Victims may not feel supported...
 - **Socio-cultural Influence:** Victims may be reluctant...



Photo Credit: Life's Random Bits

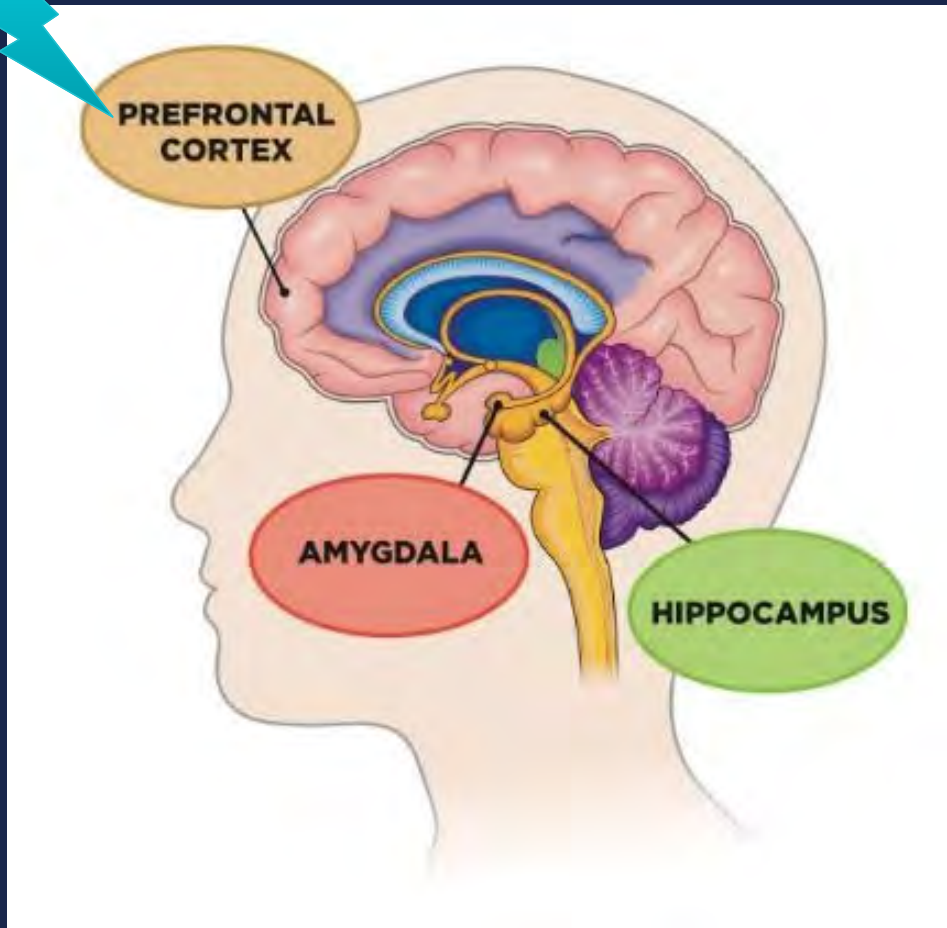


Photo Credit: REACHOUT.COM

Trauma and the Brain



Prefrontal Cortex

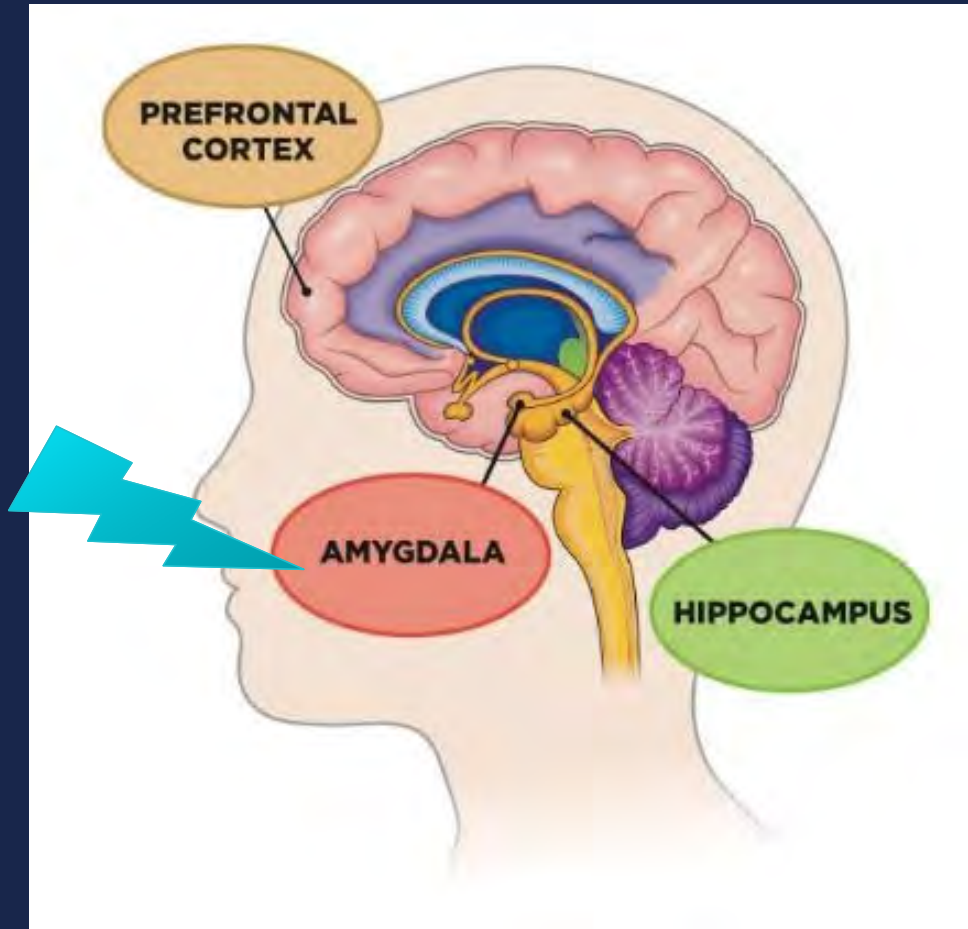


- Logical thinking and planning
- Controlling attention
- Integrating memories into "stories"

***Impaired during stress
or trauma***

<https://medium.com/@rohanpoosala/build-that-prefrontal-lobe-up-c72434186dfd> "Build that Prefrontal Lobe up", Neuro4Kidz

Defense Circuitry

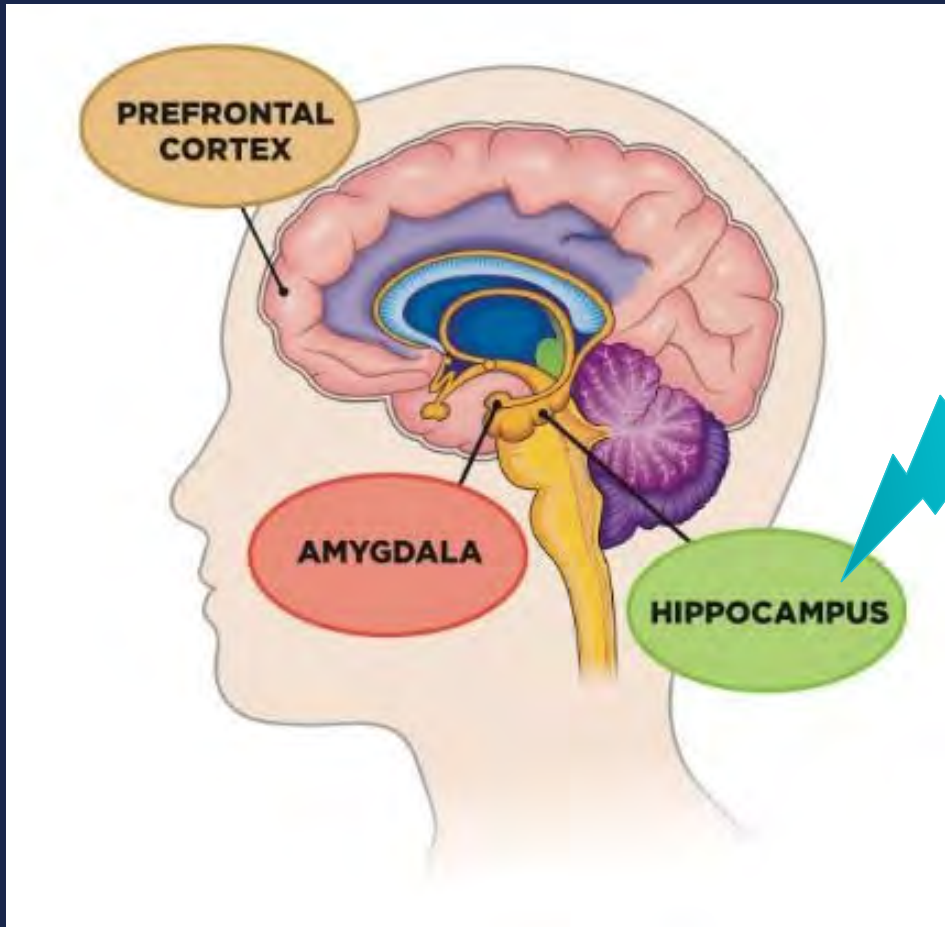


- Monitors for threat
- Activates survival responses
- Mostly automatic

Takes control when prefrontal cortex is impaired

<https://medium.com/@rohanpoosala/build-that-prefrontal-lobe-up-c72434186dfd> "Build that Prefrontal Lobe up", Neuro4Kidz

Hippocampus



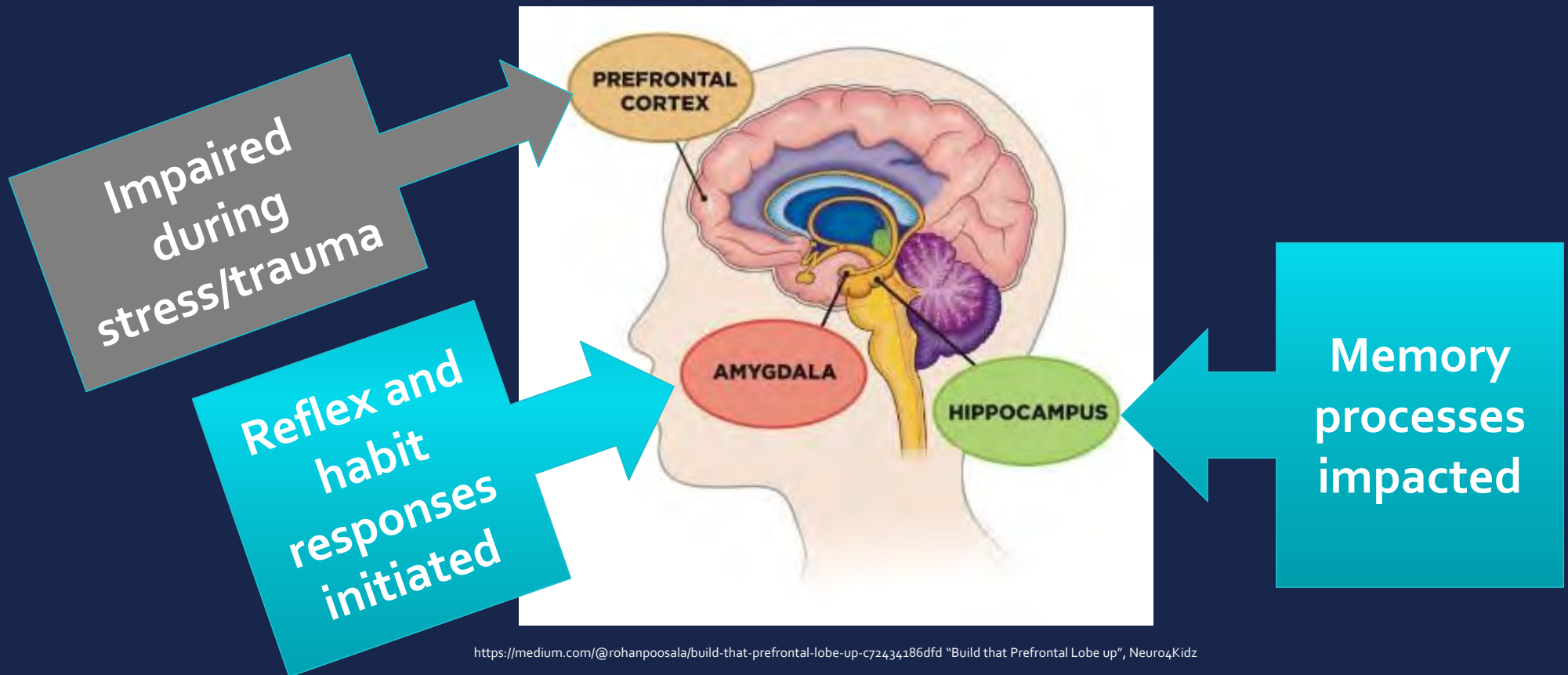
- Where memories of experiences and their details are processed
- Encodes memory data with context and time

Can produce "flashbulb memories" of event

<https://medium.com/@rohanpoosala/build-that-prefrontal-lobe-up-c72434186dfd> "Build that Prefrontal Lobe up", Neuro4Kidz

Summary

During a traumatic event: Rational part of the brain is impaired; Memory processes are significantly impacted; Reflex and habit responses are automatically initiated.



Possible Reflex Responses

- **Brief freeze response:** Threat is detected, movement stops, brain quickly assesses options
- **Tonic immobility:** Body goes rigid, not able to move or speak
- **Collapsed immobility:** Body goes limp, may faint or pass out
- **Dissociation:** Disconnection from physical and emotional experience, may be on “autopilot”

Possible Reflex Responses

*Don't Label or
Diagnose – Just
Document*



Image: <https://fr.depositphotos.com/stock-photos/embossed-question-mark.html>

What Can This Look Like?



What Can This Look Like?

M

Jukin Media



Habit Responses

- **Social conditioning:** Including how girls/women respond differently than boys/men
- **Learned responses:** Including responses to dominance/aggression and past abuse

Automatic responses do not
“go away”

“Reflexes and Habits”

*Not “Fight
or Flight”*



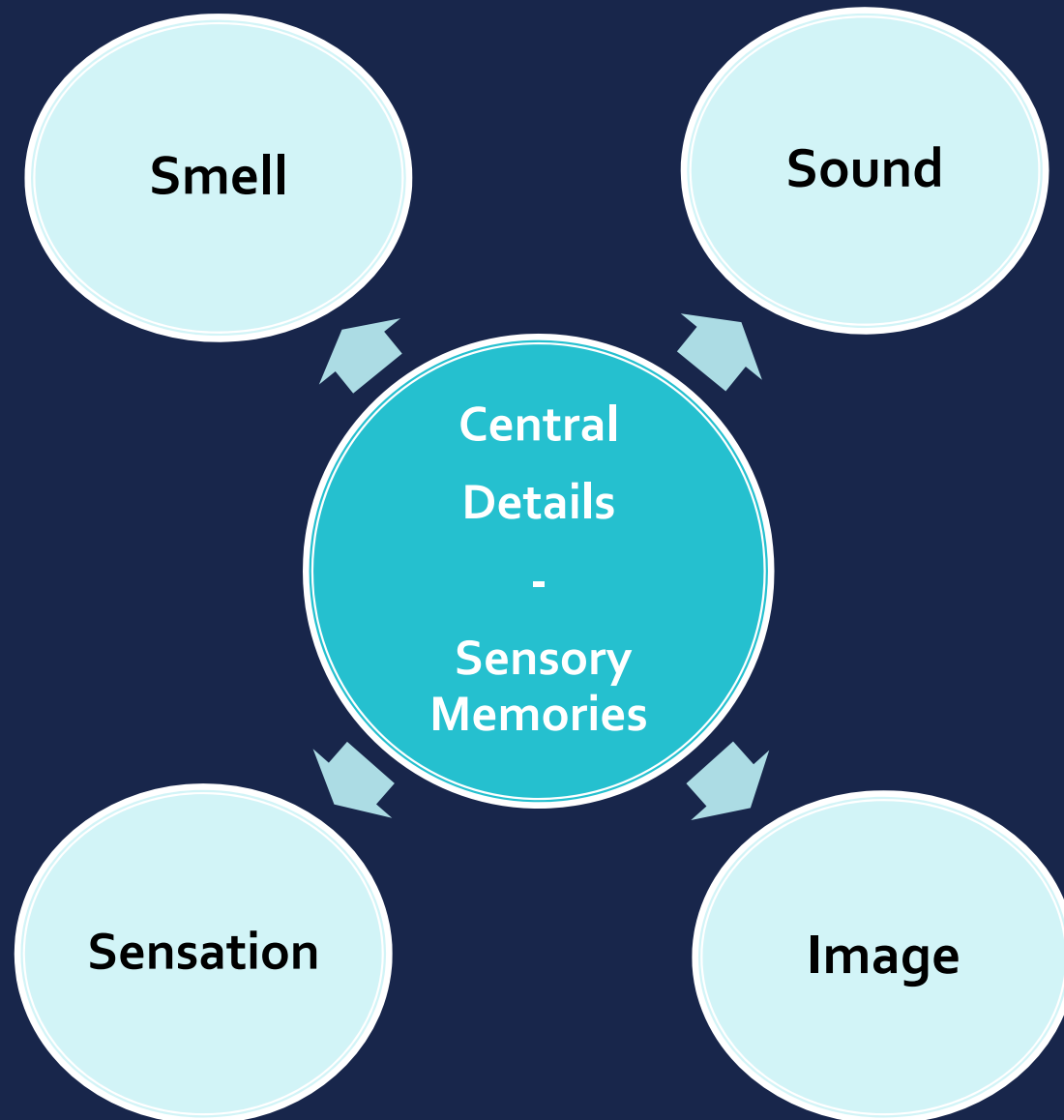
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Memory: Central vs. Peripheral Details

- **Central details:** Parts of experience given attention / emotional significance by the brain
- **Peripheral details:** Parts of experiences that receive little or no attention by the brain



Central Details: Often Sensory Memories



Impact of Alcohol or Drugs



Alcohol and Memory

- At higher levels of intoxication, may prevent storage of most or all details of experience
- But central details that DO get into long-term memory storage can be very accurate

Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory

Kellie Balentine via TMX.news

The
Guardian



Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory



Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory



Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory

- Automatic **reflex** responses?
- Responses based in **habit** or learning?
- Simplistic **language** (words or phrases)?

Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory

- What would her narrative sound like?
- What details could she provide?

Example: Bringing Together Trauma Impacts on Behavior and Memory

- Would we question her story?
- How would you document it?

Summary: Theory to Practice

- How can understanding the neurobiology of trauma improve our interviewing skills?
 - More realistic expectations
 - More perceptive listening
 - More effective information-gathering

Support Memory Retrieval and Disclosure

Quick Review!

Which part of your brain is running the show right now?

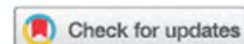
Prefrontal Cortex Amygdala Hippocampus

Resilience of Memory



Photo Credit: wildpixel from Getty Images

REVIEW ARTICLE



Is the study of memory unduly preoccupied with its sins?

Alan D. Baddeley

Department of Psychology, University of York, York, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

A broad functional approach is taken to the analysis of human memory. The overall importance of episodic memory, the capacity to remember specific events, is illustrated by the devastating effect that loss of this aspect of memory has on the capacity to cope in the case of densely amnesic patients. Recent applied research has however focussed heavily on factors compromising the reliability of eyewitness testimony in the forensic field and on the creation of false memories. While acknowledging the progress made on this issue, it presents two dangers. The first is practical, the danger of generalising too readily from laboratory-influenced simulations that differ in important ways from the context to which they are applied. This suggests a need for fewer but more realistically representative studies. The second is a broad theoretical issue, that of extending the findings from this important but limited applied area, within which precise detail may be crucial, to the whole of memory, consequently failing to appreciate its many strengths.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 January 2021
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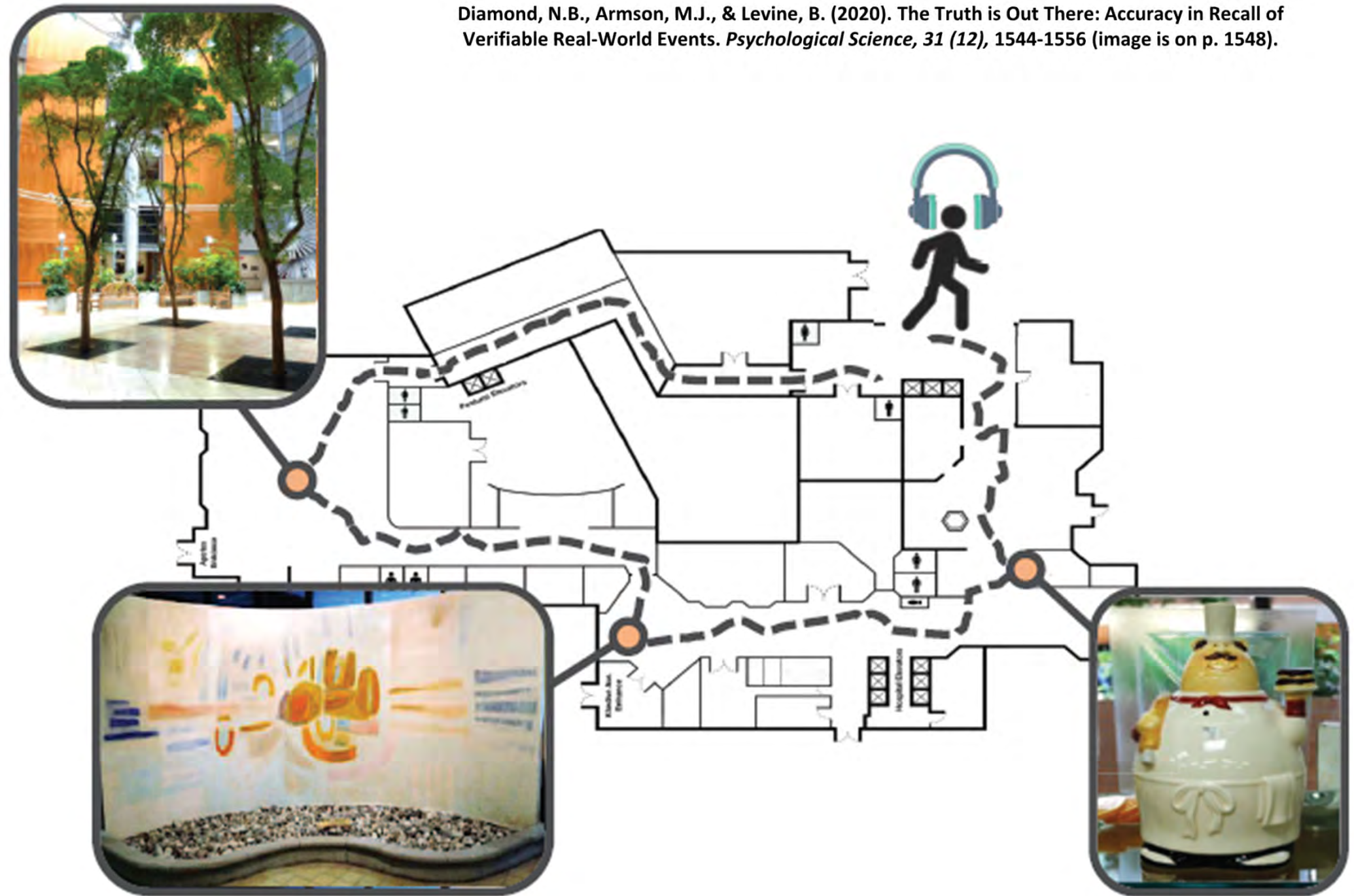
KEYWORDS

Amnesia; false memory;
eyewitness testimony;
everyday memory; retrieval



Photo Credit: Canva

Diamond, N.B., Armson, M.J., & Levine, B. (2020). The Truth is Out There: Accuracy in Recall of Verifiable Real-World Events. *Psychological Science*, 31 (12), 1544-1556 (image is on p. 1548).



Int – event – accurate

Int – event – accurate

Int – event – accurate

“...I was told to look at the piano and then walk further and look at the market that was

Int – perceptual – inaccurate³

Int – event – accurate

Int – perceptual – accurate

going on at the left... I looked around the gift shop and then on the shelf at the back

Int – perceptual – accurate

Int – perceptual – accurate

Int – event – accurate

left – not the very last one, but the second or third last, was a cookie jar or a ceramic

Int – perceptual – accurate

Int – perceptual – accurate x3

Int – perceptual – accurate

figure of a, uh, large chef with a hat and an apron, both white, holding a cake I believe

Int – perceptual – inaccurate⁴

Int – event – accurate

Ext - other

with a cake lift in the other hand...I walked down the hallway...I don't remember this

Int – thought – unconfirmable

chunk of the tour. I was still thinking about the Andy Warhol portraits”

Accuracy of Recall

- Number of details recalled, on average:
 - 80 for younger people (19-35)
 - 52 for older people (65-75)
 - Many recalled more than 100
- Accuracy of recall, on average:
 - **93-95%** across age groups

“Memory for remote (days to years old) real-world episodes is more accurate than expected.”

Diamond, N.B., Armson, M.J., & Levine, B. (2020). The Truth is Out There: Accuracy in Recall of Verifiable Real-World Events. *Psychological Science*, 31 (12), 1544-1556 (quote is on p. 1552).

Memory Errors

- At least one error in most people's recollections
- But errors were typically not essential details (e.g., dates and specific locations of objects)

“Grain Size” of Memories

1. Surface information (verbatim)
2. Central / perceptual features (“gist”)
3. Judgments / inferences from knowledge base

“Grain Size” of Memories

1. Surface information
2. Semantic content (“gist”)
3. Judgments or inferences from knowledge base



Photo Credit: Wikilimages from pixabay

“Satisficing” Model

- Use cognitive monitoring to decide whether to report an item (or not)
- And if so, what level of detail (grain size)
- **To maintain accuracy**



Photo Credit: Jacob Lund



Photo Credit: A and N Photography

Interviewing Research



Photo Credit: Atstock Productions from Getty Images

“Trauma Informed” Interviewing

- Establish safety, trust, rapport, comfort
- Encourage disclosure, as much as possible
- Use non-leading, open-ended prompts
- Encourage narrative, active generation
- Allow pauses, silence to gather thoughts
- Not rushing, interrupting responses
- Focus on thoughts, feelings in experience
- Express patience, empathy, understanding

“Trauma Informed” Interviewing

- No need for sequential, chronological order
- Advise not to guess, say “I don’t know”
- Avoid “why” questions
- May recall more information in the future

Rapport

“A positive and productive affect between people that facilitates mutuality of attention and harmony”

Bernieri, F.J. & Gillis, J.S. (2001). Judging Rapport: Employing Brunswik's Lens Model to Study Interpersonal Sensitivity. In J. A. Hall & F. J. Bernieri (Eds.), *Interpersonal Sensitivity: Theory and Measurement* (pp. 67–88). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (p. 69).

Rapport

Communicate respect Personalizing Address concerns

Acknowledge autonomy Humanizing Instill calm

Show real interest Attentiveness Establish common ground

Express genuine empathy Friendliness Permit "I don't know"

Avoid judgment Openness Collaborative,
not
confrontational

Drawing out Explain the process

Elements of Rapport

1. Mutual attention
 - Involvement, immediacy, active listening
2. Coordination
 - Reciprocal responses, matching, “in sync”
3. Positivity
 - Pleasant, encouraging, smiling, avoid judgments

Rapport Works!

- Cognitive Interviewing (Fisher & Geiselman)
 - Elicits 35-50% more information than typical police interviews, rapport is key element
- Holmberg & Christianson (2002)
 - 83 sexual offenders more likely to give full confessions with “empathic and humanitarian” approach, not “judgmental and dominant”

Rapport Works!

- Kelly et al. (2015)
 - Suspect interviews with “rapport and relationship tactics,” greater cooperation, more confessions
- Alison et al (2013, 2014)
 - 418 interviews with 29 terrorism suspects in UK
 - Investigators with “conversational rapport and adaptative interpersonal skills,” reduced resistance and increased information provided

Elements of Good Interview

- No matter who is being interviewed!
 - Establish rapport
 - Clear description of rules, expectations
 - Start the conversation, and then LISTEN
 - Open-ended questioning style
 - Encourage future disclosures

Other Recommendations

- Refer to person by name, preferred title
 - Make sure you are pronouncing it correctly!
- Avoid “chit chat”
 - Person is anxious, conversation has a purpose
- Self disclosure of personal information
 - Be careful!
 - Personalize, but not too much, can backfire
 - Limited, sensitive to context, for common ground

Other Recommendations

- Repeated contact, more positive over time
 - Assuming initial contact is positive or neutral
- Don't lie!
- Avoid techniques to influence a suspect's perception of consequences of confessing
 - Minimizing (implying leniency)
 - Maximizing (inducing fear of harsh punishment)

Conceptual Priming

- Certain concepts increase disclosure:
 - **Self-worth:** Positive values, traits, experiences
 - **Autonomy:** Options, words like “choice,” “free”
 - **Attachment security:** Thinking of loved ones
 - **Openness:** Room, objects, symbols

Takeaways: **Memory**

- Recalled memories are typically accurate
 - Some things impair memory encoding
 - But these factors don't typically affect accuracy
 - If detail DOES get encoded , it is likely accurate
 - We maintain accuracy over time by deciding whether to report detail, and adjusting "grain size"
- Interviews can facilitate accurate recall by encouraging free-flowing, narrative responses without interference (e.g., leading questions)

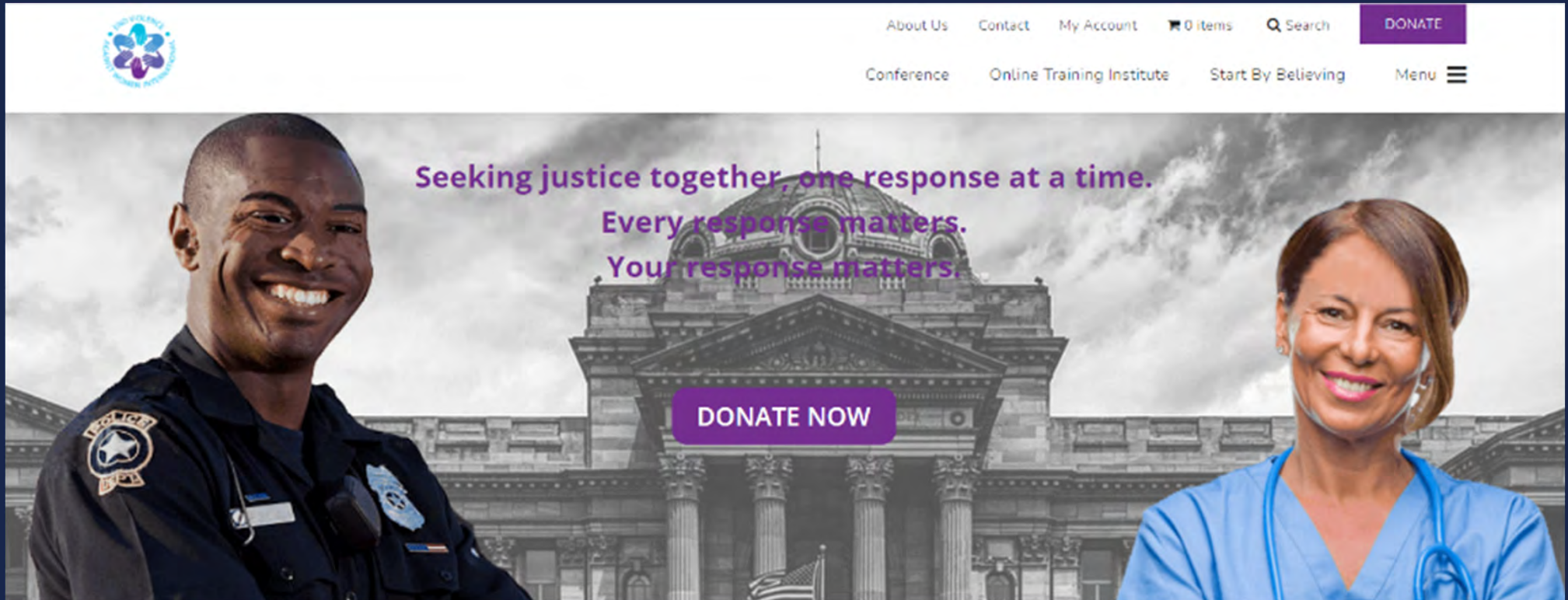
Takeaways: Trauma

- Stress and trauma affect brains and behaviors
 - Responses best summarized as “reflexes and habits”
 - Understanding helps set realistic expectations
 - Listen and document, don’t label or diagnose
- Interviews can facilitate accurate recall by focusing on central details, not peripheral
 - These will often be sensory and emotional details

Takeaways: **Interviewing**

- Traditional strategies are often ineffective
- Research documents effectiveness of many techniques often described as “trauma-informed”
 - Rapport, autonomy, open-ended prompts, etc.
- Same techniques work for suspects AND victims

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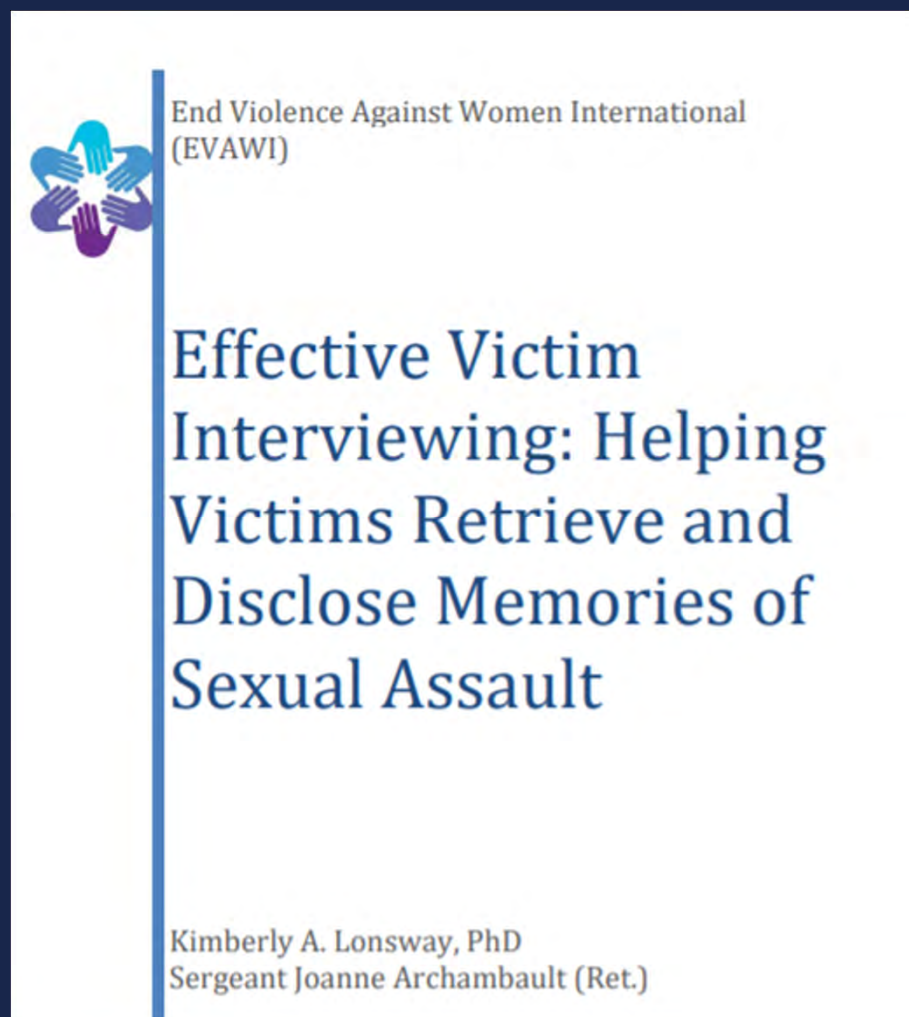
Dynamics of Sexual Assault: What Does Sexual Assault Really Look Like?

Much of the thinking about sexual assault has not changed in the last 20-30 years, because this thinking continues to reflect a number of myths and misconceptions about rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators. This module will examine those myths and misconceptions, the reasons for them, and how they affect the investigation of sexual assault. It will conclude with an examination of the actual characteristics of sexual assaults.

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On EVAWI website: evawintl.org/olti

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LAW ENFORCEMENT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT: INTRODUCING A MODEL POLICY RESOURCE FOR PREVENTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

November 23, 2020 10:00 am

The overwhelming majority of those who serve in the noble profession of law enforcement are professionals who uphold their oath of office. However, we cannot ignore the numerous headlines, arrests, convictions, and lawsuits describing horrific acts of sexual misconduct perpetrated by law enforcement officers. When a predatory sexual offender has the power and authority of the police, this creates an extremely serious breach of the ethics of the profession, a violation of the color of law, and a traumatic victimization of a colleague or citizen whom law enforcement has sworn to protect.

Speakers:



NEW FRONTIERS IN INVESTIGATING AND PROSECUTING SEXUAL ASSAULT BY INTOXICATION

December 9, 2020 10:00 am

This presentation addresses the issues that investigators, prosecutors, victim advocates, and medical personnel often encounter in alcohol-facilitated sexual assaults. Investigators and prosecutors face many hurdles, including the consent defense, perceptions about the "sold/one sold" cases, and victims suffering from memory loss, as well as challenges related to victim shame, embarrassment, and lack of trust in law enforcement.

Speakers:



Webinars: Victim Interviews

- *Neurobiology of Sexual Assault (2-part series)*
- *Effective Victim Interviewing*
- *Trauma Informed Interviewing – Turning Understanding Into Outcomes*
- *After the Interview – Now the Work Begins: Corroborating Evidence and Case Review*

On EVAWI website: evawintl.org/past-webinars

Training Bulletins

The screenshot shows a web interface for a 'Resource Library'. At the top, there is a blue header with the text 'Resource Library'. Below the header, on the right side, are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a plus sign. On the left side, there is a search bar and several filter sections: 'RESOURCE TYPE' with checkboxes for Articles or Reports, Book, Other, Press Releases, Protocols, Tools & Templates, Training Bulletins, Training Modules, Videos, Web Links, and Webinars; 'TOPIC' with a dropdown menu; 'AUTHOR' with a dropdown menu; and 'PUBLICATION DATE (DATE RANGE)' with a date range input field. The main content area displays a list of resources under the heading '1017 resources'. The first resource is '12 Key Questions to Guide Victim Notification Protocols', categorized as 'Articles or Reports' by 'Author: Other', with a 'View document' link and a 'Favorite' star icon. The second resource is '1in6', categorized as 'Web Links' by 'Author: 1in6', with a 'Read more' link and a 'Visit link | Favorite' option. The third resource is '2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design', categorized as 'Tools & Templates' from 'September 15, 2010' by 'Author: [icon]', with a 'View document' link and a 'Favorite' star icon. The fourth resource is '2014 Sexual Violence Research Review', categorized as 'Articles or Reports' from 'January 1, 2014' by 'Author: Other', with a 'Read more' link and a 'View document | Favorite' option.

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- *Important Things to Get Right About the 'Neurobiology of Trauma' (3-part series – in handouts)*
- *Understanding the Neurobiology of Trauma and Implications for Interviewing Victims*
- *Becoming Trauma-Informed: Learning and Appropriately Applying the Neurobiology of Trauma to Victim Interviews*
- *Trauma-Informed Interviewing and the Criminal Sexual Assault Case: Where Investigative Technique Meets Evidentiary Value*

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Training content is based on the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations (2013)*.



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Sexual Assault: The Medical Forensic Examination



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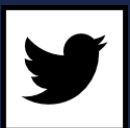
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