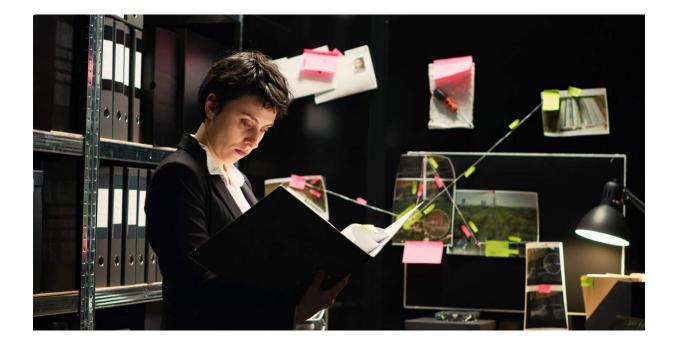iIIRG

Enhancing the Contribution of Interview Monitors to Child Forensic Interviews

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ABSTRACT

Investigative interviews with children are often conducted with the assistance of an interview monitor in an adjacent room who watches the interview live via video and can consult with the interviewer as needed. Yet, little is known about the characteristics of the most effective interviewer-monitor interactions. The aim of the present research was to explore experienced interviewers' perceptions of the interview monitor role and, ultimately, to provide guidance on effective use of the role. In the present study, 13 experienced interviewers and monitors were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences with interview monitoring. There was a general perception that the role of the interview monitor was underappreciated and had the potential to make more substantive contributions to the quality of the investigative interview. Several key elements to enhance the effectiveness of interview monitoring were identified, including the development of clear guidelines, how to effectively use within-interview consultation, and the potential for the monitoring role to enhance professional practice of both interviewers and monitors. Recommendations for clarity and guidelines surrounding the interview monitor role and considerations for future research are discussed.

Key Words: Investigative interviewing, interview monitor, child witness, child forensic interviews, interview training

Introduction

Children's statements provide critical – and often the only – evidence in cases of child physical and sexual abuse and neglect (e.g., Walsh et al., 2010). The clarity and completeness of children's statements impact the likelihood of charges, prosecution, and conviction (Westcott & Kynan, 2004). The most credible, detailed, and persuasive child statements are elicited through evidence-based investigative interviews (e.g., Lamb et al., 2007). Effective investigative interviews of children are cognitively challenging to conduct, with many concurrent considerations including monitoring the developmental appropriateness of questions, adherence to established investigative interviewing protocols, and detecting external influences on children's reports (e.g., suggestive questioning, parental coaching). Attending to these competing demands while managing a child's behaviour can be challenging for interviewers (Hanway et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2010). As a result, interviewers may have difficulty picking up and following up on many subtle, yet crucial, parts of a child's statement, including inconsistencies, disclosures that require clarification, and potential additional charges or areas of investigation to pursue.

One way to assist overtaxed interviewers is to have a trained interview monitor with whom the interviewer can collaborate before, during, and after the interview (Stewart, Katz, & La Rooy, 2011). Many investigative interviews with children are conducted with a live monitor (sometimes called an 'observer'; e.g., American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children Taskforce (APSAC), 2012), but there are few consistent guidelines or recommendations on how monitors can provide optimal support for investigative interviewers. With appropriate role understanding and training, interview monitors can assist in identifying gaps in a child's account, note points of clarification or resolution of apparently inconsistent statements, provide direction for further questioning, suggestions for behaviour management, fact-check time-sensitive details, suggest question phrasing, and ensure that the recorded interview accurately reflects the child's report and capabilities (Danby & Sharman, 2024; Scottish Government, 2011; Stewart et al., 2011). Further, an effective interview monitor can provide in-the-moment feedback to an interviewer, both during interview breaks and immediately following the interview. This immediate feedback model is crucial to ongoing interviewer development and will contribute to maintenance of skills (Stewart et al., 2011). Effective use of an interview monitor can form an important cornerstone of a peer review program. Yet, despite the many potential benefits of skilled interview monitoring, very little empirical attention has been paid to this important role.

The present study aimed to compile the existing knowledge base about effective interview monitoring and add to this base through conversations with experienced interviewers and monitors. A central long-term aim of this work was to provide clear guidelines to interview monitors to enhance

the contribution of monitors to the investigative interview. Improving the quality of interview monitoring will enhance the quality of the investigation and can enhance the professional skills of both interviewers and interview monitors (e.g., Stewart et al., 2011). Ultimately, improved interview monitoring should lead to enhanced quality of children's statements and thus, improve access to justice for children and families involved in investigations.

The Monitor's Role

Despite the lack of empirical study of the role, it is common practice internationally to have an interview monitor who observes a child forensic interview via live video feed from a nearby room[1] (e.g., American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2022; National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC), 2019; National Police Chiefs' Council, 2016; New Zealand Police and Child, Youth and Family (NZPCYF), 2016; Scottish Government, 2011). The role of the monitor is consistently described as a person who can operate/troubleshoot video equipment, take notes on interview content, and provide feedback to the interviewer during the interview (e.g., at a break in the interview). More recent guidelines describe the "vital" role of the interview monitor as focusing on the child's needs and emphasize that the monitor is frequently and inappropriately relegated to equipment operator (Ministry of Justice, 2022). Increasingly, there is acknowledgement that the role of interviewer is cognitively taxing and requires support

both during the interview and after the interview (Hanway et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2010) because it is too difficult to monitor one's own performance during the task, given its complexity (Bull & Milne, 2004; Wright & Powell, 2006). As a result, guidelines for child interviewing have begun to include more specific descriptions around monitor/interviewer interactions including:

- The monitor should assess child and interviewer demeanor and discussion content (Scottish Government, 2011);
- The monitor should provide constructive feedback to the interviewer on what is working/not working well in the interview – both during (i.e., at a break in the interview) and immediately after the interview – to promote interviewer skill development and maintenance (Stewart et al., 2011);
- Options for the method of communication between the interviewer and the interview monitor (e.g., conference during a break, passage of notes, signals for a need to communicate) should not be disruptive to the child (NCAC, 2019);
- Interviewer and monitor should meet after the interview to evaluate the investigation and the interviewer's performance (e.g., NZPCYF, 2016).

These expanded role descriptions may also be accompanied by the highlighting of potential benefits of effective interview monitoring that expand on those introduced earlier, including:

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[1] In some jurisdictions, there is discussion of having a second interviewer/monitor in the room with the interviewer (Ministry of Justice,

2022; Scottish Government, 2011), but in many jurisdictions, interview monitors are located in a separate room (e.g., Brubacher, Roberts, Cooper, Price, Barry, & Vanderloon, 2018).

- Reduces the pressure on the interviewer to keep track of offense elements, interviewee responses, and follow-up questions. This assistance increases the likelihood that the interviewer can be fully present in the interview;
- Increased communication about needs of all involved professionals (e.g., police, child welfare; APSAC, 2012; NCAC, 2019);
- Increased clarity will increase the statement's value in court (Ministry of Justice, 2022) and may decrease the need for a follow-up interview;
- Monitors can provide a trier of fact perspective of the child's statement, which may allow for potential remedies of areas of concern while the interview is ongoing (e.g., Duke, Uhl, Price, & Wood, 2015; Westcott & Kynan, 2006);
- Can result in the provision of new information (Hamilton, 2012);
- Contributes to professional growth – peer-review and feedback (e.g., Cyr, Dion, McDuff, & Trotier-Sylvain, 2012);
- Improves monitor's own interviewing skills through critical assessment of others' interviews (Lamb et al., 2002; Price & Roberts, 2011).

Thus, the scope of the interview monitor's contribution, and the value they can bring to the interview environment, is far beyond the role description often provided.

Importantly, the above role descriptions come from practical experience and logical conclusions, rather than empirical study. There is a remarkable dearth of empirical research regarding the role of the interview monitor in child forensic interviews. In a national survey of interviewers associated with Child Advocacy Centres (CACs) in the United States, Fessinger and McAuliff (2020) found that interviewers frequently took breaks to consult with interview monitors (most often police and social work/child welfare colleagues). However, the value of the break to confer with an interview monitor elicited mixed feedback. Most interviewers reported that there was a moderately positive effect of the consultation, but that advice was only sometimes consistent with best practice interviewing principles. Thus, even among regular users of interview monitors, there is room for improvement in how to enhance the value of the role. Fessinger and McAuliff (2020) called for research focusing specifically on the role of the break during an interview to confer, including a study of interviewer behaviour after a break as well as the quality of the advice provided.

More recently, Danby and Sharman (2024) reported findings from one of the only studies to explore the use of a break during a child forensic interview. In a study of 54 police child interviewers in Australia, they found that police interviewers sought information during the break about missing evidential details and the monitor's perception of whether or not the child's free recall was exhausted, or to receive general feedback. Most of these interviewers perceived the break as somewhat helpful, though many participants also noted that a monitor's lack of expertise in child forensic interviewing resulted in a less helpful break.

One reason that a break to confer with an interview monitor may not be perceived as highly positive by interviewers could be directly linked to the lack of prior research and clarity on the interview monitor's role. In several protocols, there is a warning that the role of an interview monitor is not merely to take notes (e.g., APSAC, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2022; Scottish Government, 2011). Yet, there is surprisingly little complementary detail provided throughout the relevant literature about what exactly the role entails beyond note-taking. It has also been noted that a lack of familiarity between interviewer and monitor can lead to challenges in role understanding. When a monitor is unfamiliar with the interviewer, they may be less likely to provide constructive feedback to the interviewer (Davis et al., 1999). Monitor guidelines can help to clarify the role and make clear the critical contribution of the monitor to the quality of the interview, regardless of the familiarity between parties.

METHODS

The aim in the current work was to gather information directly from experienced interviewers and monitors to more thoroughly conceptualize the role of the interview monitor in child forensic interviews. We anticipated that the shared experiences of these interviewers and monitors would contribute to the development of recommendations to enhance the contribution of monitors to interviews. Thirteen experienced interviewers and monitors (all but one had performed in both roles) were interviewed about their perceptions of interview monitoring. Participants were either police officers ($n = 9$) or social workers ($n = 4$) who specialized in

investigations related to children. Professionals had been interviewing children for an average of 11 years (range 1.5-18 years), and all but one had a current connection to a Child Advocacy Centre in Canada. Interviewers had received a wide variety of training (e.g., StepWise Interview Training, RCMP Phased Interview Model-Child, academic training and review, in-house expert training, webinars), the most recent of which had most often taken place within the last 3 years (longest duration since any type of training was 8 years). All participants who served in both roles indicated that they had been monitoring for approximately as long as they had been interviewing. Participants were recruited through invitation from participating agencies and through word of mouth from colleagues. Participants were informed that the researchers were interested in their experiences and thoughts on effective interview monitoring. The researcher explained that the conversation was not recorded, that no statements would be attributed to participants individually, and that they could end the conversation at any time without consequence. All participants completed the full interview. No compensation was offered for participation in the study.

After answering background questions related to prior interviewing/monitoring experience, each semi-structured interview focused on 4 primary areas of interest:

- Perceptions of the monitor role;
- Pre-interview communication between interviewer and monitor;
- Within-interview communication between interviewer and monitor;
- Post-interview communication between interviewer and monitor.

Interview questions were co-developed by the authors. Each interview (see Appendix for interview script) lasted between 15-20 minutes and all were conducted by the same interviewer (the first author) who took extensive notes during the conversation. Interviews took place between November 29, 2023 and February 20, 2024. Interviews were not recorded at the request of a participating agency. This project was deemed exempt from ethical board review.

It is important to note that in the jurisdiction in which these participants worked, some interview/monitor pairings did not cross professional roles. If police were involved, they always conducted the interview: sometimes with a fellow police officer as monitor, sometimes with a social worker as monitor. When social workers conducted interviews, they were only monitored by fellow social workers. If a social worker interview began to enter a domain in which a criminal offense might be discussed, social workers are instructed to stop the interview

until a police officer can attend. Given that the latter scenario is not the norm in investigative interviewing, we do not focus on these exceptional circumstances here.

RESULTS

The first author performed thematic analysis of participant responses to each of the four primary areas of inquiry. This analysis resulted in identification of several themes per area of inquiry and three overarching themes that ran through all of the areas of inquiry. Participant responses to each area of inquiry were compiled and reviewed to extract key themes in each response. These key themes were assessed across participants to identify those that repeatedly arose. Finally, responses to all questions for all participants were reviewed holistically to identify overarching themes in effective interview monitoring. Table 1 summarizes the results of the analysis.

TABLE 1. *Themes in effective monitoring*

The monitor's role	Pre-interview communication between interview and monitor	Within-interview communication	Post-interview communication	Overarching themes
Pay attention	Pre-interview meeting	Feedback timing	Lacking time and structure	Differences in police/ social worker roles
Identify areas in need of follow-up	Familiarity	Feedback content	Possibilities for immediate feedback and peer review	Familiarity
Watch for things the interviewer missed			Dependent upon interview/monitor experience	Monitor expertise

The Monitor's Role

Participants described their understanding and hopes for the monitor role in response to several questions. Overall, participants noted that monitors allow the interviewer to focus on the interview and be present in the moment with the child, that they can assist in monitoring the comprehensibility of the child's statement (i.e., provide the perspective of a trier of fact), and that they can monitor the quality of an interview (e.g., moving away from open-ended too quickly, repeating questions). The role of the monitor in conducting an optimal child interview was described as "*underappreciated*" by almost all participants. Another participant noted that, "*It's critical to appreciate how important the monitor role is. I wish people would put more emphasis on the monitor. If both roles understood that better, the monitor would feel more confident.*" (P6) A second participant noted that, "*… just because you're not the one interviewing doesn't mean that your role as a monitor isn't important. There will still be other ways your skills can be utilized. Don't focus on how you would do things – it doesn't matter who does the interview. The monitor role is important*" (P8).

In addition to these monitor benefits, three features emerged as the most common desired roles of monitors, each of which was raised by almost all participants:

Pay attention. While seemingly obvious, monitors are often professionals whose roles pull them in many directions at once with a heavy workload. Almost all participants emphasized the need to have the undivided attention of the monitor for the duration of the interview.

Identify areas in need of follow-up. All participants discussed the critical role that monitors played in identifying areas of the child's statement and interviewer's behaviour that required additional attention. Interviewers wanted monitors to make note of observations that could lead to feedback at a break in the interview (see "Within-interview feedback" below for additional detail).

Watch for things the interviewer missed. Most participants discussed the heavy cognitive load of conducting a child forensic interview and relied on the monitor to pick up on things that the interviewer may not have noticed. As one interviewer noted, "*There is never a time when I don't miss something or couldn't go back and ask something more*" (P6). Other interviewers noted particular types of information that they experienced as often missed: First, when a child speaks quickly, or provides long narrative details about multiple offences, missing details is common. Second, behavioural nuances in the room (e.g., signs of reluctance, discomfort, the need for a break) can be difficult to track when an interviewer is focused on posing appropriate questions. In one example, P12 noted, "*Almost every interview with my police monitor, he noticed that when I moved closer to the child, the child jumped back and didn't like the physical closeness. I didn't notice that. They can physically see the reactions of the child that sometimes we don't.*"

Pre-interview communication between interviewer and monitor

Pre-interview meeting. Participants were asked about optimal practices for pre-interview communication between the interviewer and monitor. All participants

described a pre-interview meeting as important to ensuring that interviewers and monitors understood the basic background of the case (e.g., the nature of the events under investigation, names of relevant parties, history of police or child protection interaction, steps taken to date in the investigation, cultural or behavioural considerations). Without such a meeting, participants noted that the ability of the monitor to meaningfully engage in the interview was limited. Most participants also valued ensuring that monitors were aware of the interview plan and the objectives of the interview so that they could provide feedback on whether or not the interviewer was achieving the objectives. Being aware of the objectives also included awareness and familiarity with the legal elements of the offence(s). Most participants wanted as much information as they had the time and resources to obtain for both the interviewer and monitor, prior to the interview. Sharing this information was seen as a way to get the interviewer and monitor "on the same page" and working towards common goals.

Familiarity. Several participants emphasized the value of familiarity between the interviewer and monitor and noted that such familiarity (e.g., through regular participation on a multi-disciplinary team) made communication efficient and expectations clear. Ultimately, this familiarity resulted in higher quality contributions to the interview from the monitor. As P9 described, "*I was asking questions like 'tell me what' or 'tell me when' and my partner told me I was asking questions in a way I don't normally ask. This can happen out of fatigue or stress and having someone who knows what you want to accomplish in there is valuable.*"

Within-interviewer communication

Feedback timing. All participants preferred a break, taken at a time of the interviewer's discretion, for within-interview communication between the monitor and the interviewer. With the exception of circumstances that were considered "fatal" to the interview (e.g., video equipment failure), both interviewers and monitors agreed that children's statements should not be interrupted. Some participants found the potential for interruptions to be disrespectful to both the child and interviewer and noted that many times, issues that may have been raised through interruption would have been addressed simply by allowing the interviewer to "get there themselves". Knowing that a break would be taken allows both the interviewer and the monitor to anticipate the opportunity for input. Only one of the 13 participants expressed a positive interest (though mild) in the use of any interruption strategies (e.g., smartwatches with texting, phones, knocking on doors, earpieces). All participants noted that such strategies would divert interviewer attention from the child and communicate to the child that they did not have the interviewer's full attention. Importantly, all participants noted that the method of communication between the interviewer and monitor should be established prior to the interview.

Feedback content. Participants emphasized the importance of the monitor being prepared with organized thoughts and feedback during the break. Several participants also noted a desire for critical feedback, rather than a simple "keep going". One participant noted that it would be ideal "*…if the monitor and interviewer both agree there's no perfect child statement*" (P6).

Another participant summed up their hopes for critical feedback "*I don't mind constructive criticism, not offended. It's a partnership, we're working as a team*" (P11).

In terms of specific feedback content, participants provided several examples that focused on desiring:

(i) Identification of unclear statements made by children that require interviewer assistance to clarify;

(ii) What is going well, so the interviewer can continue successful behaviours;

(iii) Details that the interviewer may have missed and that require follow-up;

(iv) New avenues to explore;

(v) Additional options for approaching particular topics;

(vi) Suggestions for follow-up question topics and question wording;

(vii) Holistic impression of how the interview appears to be going;

(viii) Evaluation of whether or not legal requirements are met/elements of the offence are covered;

(ix) Assistance in focusing on the primary aims of the interview;

(x) Identification of the potential for corroborating evidence (e.g., a child mentions a bedroom and interviewer fails to get a description of the bedroom);

(xi) In-the-moment feedback so mistakes can be fixed before it's too late;

(xii) Thoughtful two-way consultation during the break (e.g., the interviewer may also raise questions for the monitor's feedback);

(xiii) An to answer the question, "*Have we covered everything*?"

Interestingly, several participants also raised the issue of the monitor's role in improving morale during tough interviews. Encouragement and emotional support were discussed as helping interviewers gather themselves during a break. As one interviewer noted, "*We're all human. It's a lot in the moment. You forget things, get rattled, are exhausted. Know that there's a human component...someone help me out*" (P1).

Post-interview communication

All participants indicated that they engaged in some form of interview/monitor post-interview communication, but most were dissatisfied with their current practices. Several participants indicated that the focus of the conversation was on case processes or "next steps" in the investigation. However, all but one police participant and only one social work participant noted that they wished they had a more deliberate process in place for evaluation of the interview and feedback on what went well and what could be improved. This difference appeared to reflect the varying goals of these two positions: Police were more likely to be focused on the potential for criminal charges and a desire to conduct the quality of interview that would support charging (as appropriate), and social workers focused largely on the need for making timely child safety decision.

Lacking time and structure. Although most participants discussed a desire to review the interview in-depth immediately after the interview, many also discussed resource pressures that often made that difficult. When participants were able to engage in meaningful discussion about the interview quality, it was described as informal or unstructured, and often took place while walking to another location or getting coffee. Several participants wanted a more formal process with record-keeping, and one noted how beneficial a formalized process would be for new interviewers, "*I wish we had*

something more formal for new people that came into the unit" (P12).

Possibilities for immediate feedback and peer review. Several participants noted the potential for post-interview communication to provide immediate feedback on interview quality, when the interviewer still remembered the justification for particular decisions or what they were thinking in the moment (see Stewart et al., 2011 for a discussion). Participants noted how beneficial this timely form of peer review would be to enhancing their overall interview skills. They discussed the potential for reviewing question types, developmental considerations, different styles or strategies, and how to be more efficient in getting to their objectives. A breakdown of the full interview was noted as very important in developing interviewers. One participant described it as, "*Real scrutiny in a constructive way so I can do better next time*" (P9). Another participant noted the importance of regularly embedding such practice in their work, "*You can't do too many of these – really valuable even if you are experienced*" (P3). Finally, one interviewer noted the benefits of such discussion, "*Almost every interview we talk about what was good and what was bad about that interview – my confidence has skyrocketed*" (P9).

Dependent upon interviewer/monitor experience. For many participants, the opportunity and desire to work collaboratively on developing interview skills after the interview depended on who was in the role of interviewer and monitor. Several participants again noted the difference in interview training between police and social workers and between police with varying training and backgrounds (e.g., some with

specific child interview training, other general duty members that had been assigned as lead investigators on a child file). Given the substantial variability in background knowledge about child interviewing, many interviewers noted that only monitors with appropriate training backgrounds would be valuable in critical evaluation of the interviews.

Overarching themes

In addition to the primary areas of interest described above, there were several themes observed throughout participant responses.

Differences in police/ social worker roles. Social workers noted the importance of note-taking for monitors of interviews they conducted. In the jurisdiction in which they worked, recording of interviews was not routine and thus, they relied on written notes. However, there were similarities in the overall aim of a monitor: to allow the interviewer to focus on the interview. Police often indicated that because all of their interviews were video recorded, their preference was that the monitor avoid extensive note-taking and instead, pay close attention to the interview and provide a perspective on issues that could be addressed and problems that could be remedied during the interview. It was noted that having a monitor both take notes and provide helpful feedback was a challenge. A monitor that focused primarily on the provision of feedback was desired.

Familiarity. Working regularly with the same colleagues was a frequent desire expressed by participants. Participants noted that familiarity increased the efficiency of pre-interview meetings, the value of the

contributions within-interview, and the quality of the feedback provided following an interview. As one participant noted, "*My partner and I are so familiar with each other, we know when we're off our game or doing something different*" (P9). The comfort and background knowledge of familiar colleagues was reported to substantially enhance the quality of the interview.

Participants also noted the benefits of working with familiar others in understanding the needs of various partners. For example, one Child Advocacy Centre multi-disciplinary team member social worker noted that the police interviewers on their team were so familiar with what social workers needed for their investigations, that police were able to embed those questions within their standard interview plan, thus reducing the likelihood that the child would need to be questioned by another person.

Monitor expertise. Interviews were described as being monitored by highly trained child forensic interviewing specialists, colleagues with similar levels of training (either police or social workers), trainees who were learning about child interviewing, or patrol officers with no specialization in interviewing children. Thus, it is understandable that the issue of the knowledge level of the monitor was raised as being critical in determining how the interviewer would interact with the monitor. As one interviewer noted, an inexperienced monitor may well waste time during a break in the interview by providing suggestions that did not help to focus on essential details, or by suggesting gathering information that was not relevant to the investigation or unlikely to be reported accurately (e.g., time details). This comment, foreshadowed by the findings of both Danby

and Sharman (2024) and Fessinger and McAuliff (2020), demonstrates interviewers' sensitivity to the quality of interview monitor feedback.

Some participants described inexperienced monitors as most often unhelpful and, at times, a distraction. Participants noted that inexperienced monitors raised ideas that were irrelevant, but that seemed intuitively interesting. They noted that an experienced person would know both what feedback to provide, but also why we may not ask particular questions (e.g., not necessary, leading, we have enough information, we don't need to go that much further): "*An inexperienced person will come up with ideas that are not relevant – things they think need to be done, but an experienced person will know not to do that for a number of reasons*" (P3). As one interviewer noted, "*When I know more than the monitor, it's hard – need to have someone experienced in interviewing to give good feedback*" (P2). Participants also noted that inexperienced monitors were often not aware that the role of a monitor extended beyond note-taking and a "thumbs up", with some interviewers suggesting that this lack of knowledge might result in insufficient confidence to tell the interviewer that a question was not clear or that they may have missed something.

DISCUSSION

Prior understanding of the role of the interview monitor in child forensic interviews has been extremely limited. Yet, this role has great potential to enhance interview quality. The limited previous research has been consistent in its conclusion that although consultation with an interview monitor

produces mixed results, it can be incredibly valuable to interviewers (e.g., Danby & Sharman, 2024; Fessinger & McAuliff, 2020). The thirteen experienced child interviewers and monitors in the present study were largely consistent in their description of the optimal roles and guidelines for interview monitors. All participants emphasized the critical importance of the monitor in helping an overloaded interviewer ensure that they were thorough and appropriate during the interview, and to help the interviewer in obtaining as much reliable information as possible. Participants also noted how the monitor could enhance professional development and provide important learnings for the interviewer. However, a frequent concern expressed by participants was that the current systems in place did not facilitate the monitor role to the extent that the monitor was able to consistently contribute to the interview. At least part of the underutilization of monitors purportedly comes from a lack of guidelines related to the role. The thoughtful responses received by the present participants lead to several recommendations going forward.

Recommendations

1. Provide clear guidelines for interview monitors. Ensure interviewers and monitors are familiar with these guidelines.
Clear and open communication between the interviewer and monitor is essential to success. Any barrier to communication – such as confusion about what topics are 'appropriate' for monitors to raise – can reduce the effectiveness of the interview monitor.

2. Ensure sufficient time for a pre-interview meeting in which expectations for the monitor

and interviewer are clear and the objectives of the interview are understood by all parties.
Getting both interviewer and monitor "on the same page" prior to the interview will help to ensure that the needs of both are met, and will also increase familiarity and comfort between parties.

3. Discuss method of within-interview communication prior to the interview.
In the present sample of interviewers and monitors, it was clear that the optimal method of interviewer/monitor communication was a break in the interview at a time determined by the interviewer. Regardless of which method is chosen, it should be established prior to the interview.

4. Break for conference should focus on actionable items that enhance the quality of the child's statement.
The interviewer should seek advice on difficult issues from the monitor and the monitor should be prepared to share important observations and potential remedies. Importantly, though the break for the interviewer and monitor to confer will provide the interviewer with feedback that will enhance their professional skills, the break should not be used for this purpose. The break should be used to communicate about issues that will help the child convey information in the present interview.

5. Allow time for immediate feedback on interview and interview monitoring after the interview.
The opportunity for professional development is maximized immediately after the interview. Feedback should be bidirectional – both on the interview quality and on the utility of feedback provided by the monitor.

6. Integrate peer review feedback from monitors into regular practice.

Establish a regular peer-review system that includes both interviewers and monitors. This system will increase familiarity and comfort in giving feedback in the moment and will sensitize monitors to areas for potential feedback during the interview break. Importantly, it will improve the skills of all professionals involved. See Stewart et al. (2011) for an extensive review of such arrangements.

Limitations

Given the context within these interviews were conducted, recording was not possible. Thus, there is potential loss of the complexity of participant contributions, and subtle points that may not have been fully captured. Certainly, accessing the experiences of these professionals is valuable in any form, but in the future, recording the interviews may provide additional opportunity for richer quotations and analysis. It is important to note that the participants in the present study were all Canadian police and child protection workers, most of whom had access to a Child Advocacy Centre, and who were able to conduct interviews in a room with video equipment that allowed for a live monitor in a nearby room watching the video within a facility that was designed to be child-friendly. In Canada, this is an optimal interviewing environment and, unfortunately, one that not all interviewers can access. Thus, we cannot speak to the experience of interviewers without such resources, nor to the generalizability of the findings beyond this select group. Further, all of the professionals interviewed reported taking a break as a means to communicate with their interview monitor. As a result, the findings

are restricted to that context. However, the basic monitor practices described in the findings and recommendations have application to the circumstances of investigative interviewers around the world. Of course, it is critically important that additional research in different jurisdictions further explores the role of the interview monitor. It is our hope that this work provides a starting point for articulation and maximization of this underappreciated, and under-researched, role in investigative interviewing.

Moving forward

As the interview monitoring literature moves forward, it is worth considering ways in which the present findings can enhance overall child forensic interviewing practices. We have known for a long time that immediate feedback is most helpful to behaviour change and learning (e.g., Barker, et al., 2019; Dihoff et al., 2004). Thus, even when within-interview feedback is not provided with that purpose (but rather the purpose of improving the present child's statement), the opportunity for professional development is maximized with timely feedback. Of course, the present participants also noted that deliberate feedback immediately following the interview was possible (and desirable) with expert interview monitors. This latter clause is critical: For many reasons, monitors with *expertise* will be able to provide the effective and useful feedback. In contrast, monitors without expertise can derail the break and may even result in negative effects on the interviewer. As in Danby and Sharman (2024), these findings emphasize the crucial role of expertise in effective interview monitoring.

Finally, recording of interviews as regular practice is already recognized as a best practice for obtaining statements, given what we know about the limited completeness of 'verbatim' notes (e.g., Lamb et al., 2000), but is also critical step in improving investigative interviewing (i.e., having a video that can be used for review). However, the present study extends this observation into interview monitoring. As noted more than a decade ago by the Scottish Government, "Visual recording provides a far superior record of an interview than 'verbatim' note taking, and frees the second interviewer [monitor] to devote more attention to the child and interview" (2011, p. 20). The job of the monitor is much easier – and likely much more effective – when they can focus on attending to the interview and watching the interactions, rather than when their attention is divided between taking notes and watching the interview.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the present study confirm earlier research (Danby & Sharman, 2024; Fessinger & McAuliff, 2020) about the promise of the interview monitor role. However, there is much work to do to further define this role for both interviewers and monitors. Clearly articulating the monitor role and interviewer/monitor relationship prior to the interview, ensuring that the monitor has expertise in child forensic interviewing, and implementing thoughtful and systematic practices around the interview monitor role will capitalize on what is a potentially extremely effective contribution to a child forensic interview.

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When you are a monitor:
1. What do you believe your key role is?
2. What do you think is the most effective way of communicating information to the interviewer during the interview?
3. What information do you need prior to the interview to be an effective monitor?

When you interview with a monitor:
1. What is the most important thing you want from the monitor?
2. Provide an example of when your monitor provided you with info that was very helpful.
3. Provide an example of when a monitor did not provide you with info you could have used/needed.
4. If you could give instructions to your monitor before the beginning of the interview, what would those instructions be?
5. What information do you want your monitor to have before the interview?
6. What do you think is the most effective way of receiving information from a monitor during the interview? (light in room, break, ear piece etc.)

Post-interview:

1. What communication takes place between the monitor and the interviewer after the interview? Formal? Informal?

Do you have anything else to add that might help us make recommendations about interview monitoring?