

# Guest editorial: Special issue exploring contemporary developments in the retrieval and evaluation of witness testimony

Dara Mojtahedi

Eyewitness testimony is a crucial element in many criminal investigations, often providing pivotal information that can shape investigative strategies and legal proceedings. The evaluation of witness memory has been a focal point of academic inquiry for over 40 years, with this growing body of evidence influencing legal practice (Glomb, 2022). This timely special issue includes ten separate articles which highlight the contemporary developments in research investigating the retrieval and evaluation of witness testimony through a modern, forward looking lens. This combination of articles thereby goes some way in helping to better inform criminal justice system's and processors understanding of the best practices available for retrieving and evaluating witness evidence. However, what is made especially clear in Riesthuis and Otgaar (2025) paper, empirical observations must be derived from research that is replicable, generalisable and applicable to practical issues to reliably inform policy and practice – an aspect not consistently demonstrated within eyewitness literature thus far (Nosek *et al.*, 2022; Otgaar *et al.*, 2022), where experimental manipulations are prioritised over realism (Ryan *et al.*, 2018; Willmott and Sherretts, 2016).

Riesthuis and Otgaar contributed to this special issue by reviewing the replicability, generalisability and practical relevance of eyewitness research previously published in the *Journal of Criminal Psychology* since the journal's inception ( $N = 158$ ). Their critical appraisal of past eyewitness research included the lack of pre-registration and minimal interpretation of effect sizes, limiting the practical interpretation of findings. Furthermore, although the reviewed literature contained diverse and generalisable samples, sample sizes were rarely validated through power calculations.

It should be noted that these methodological shortcomings extend beyond the scope of the *Journal of Criminal Psychology* and indeed the field of eyewitness research (Laraway *et al.*, 2019). In fact, in an effort to showcase the widespread nature of these methodological shortcomings within legal psychology literature, the *Journal of Criminal Psychology* welcomed the opportunity for its back catalogue to be scrutinised in this way (with the authors reporting other journals turned down such critical consideration). Nevertheless, developments in the rigour of experimental methodologies (Glomb *et al.*, 2024) and research standards have created opportunities for contemporary research in eyewitness memory to make reliable and practical contributions to knowledge. This special issue presents contemporary research developments in the evaluation and retrieval of eyewitness evidence, focusing on novel and robust methodologies that address real-world investigative

Dara Mojtahedi is based at the Department of Social and Psychological Sciences, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK.

issues. One of these recurrent issues is that broader appeals for eyewitnesses may sometimes require witnesses further removed from the main incident but may have information of value from that day (i.e. the day in question will have been unremarkable and less likely to evoke strong emotional reactions). Such circumstances have been overlooked in eyewitness research with most studies using stimuli that depict memorable incidents (e.g. criminal activity, [Gibert and Mojtahedi, 2019](#)). Building on this gap, [Harvey et al.\(2023\)](#) provide a field experiment in this special issue which compared the accuracy of different memory retrieval approaches (written, individually spoken, collaboratively spoken) for seemingly unremarkable events that participants had recently witnessed, with the findings suggesting that using individual interviews and reducing the time interval between the incident and the interview are most effective for improving recall accuracy.

One recurrent critique of past eyewitness research has been the ethical challenge of recreating realistic eyewitness simulations (i.e. inducing similar emotional responses, [Glomb, 2022](#)). However, some studies within this special issue have addressed this challenge through ecologically valid experimental designs. For example, in *Collaborative interviewing of eyewitnesses: a field study*, [Van Rosmalen and Vredeveldt \(2025\)](#) built on past research exploring collaborative memory recall, primarily laboratory-based, by analysing genuine police interviews with witnesses of serious incidents. The field study demonstrates that witnesses can remember additional details from an incident when interviewed alongside their co-witnesses. These findings offer an alternative perspective on co-witness discussion, which previous lab-based research predominantly identified as potentially detrimental to recall accuracy (e.g. [Barnoth et al., 2024](#); [Mojtahedi et al., 2018, 2019](#)).

In the absence of real crime witnesses, [Glomb \(2022\)](#) suggests that one of the best methods for inducing realistic eyewitness emotions in research is through staging criminal incidents. [Wheeler-Mundy et al. \(2024\)](#) followed this recommended practice in their article *Self-generated cues: the role of cue quality in facilitating eyewitness recall*, where unsuspecting witness participants encountered a realistic altercation in a lecture hall, which subsequently acted as the stimulus event. The authors used this realistic paradigm to examine whether self-generated mnemonic techniques (i.e. enhancing recall by encouraging witnesses to generate their own memory cues) could aid memory recall in witness interviews.

Not all the eyewitness studies included in this special issue are experimental either, with some of the articles examining interviewing strategies exploratively. This includes [Gomez-Bedoya's \(2024\)](#) linguistic analysis of real police interviews to examine the use of rapport building techniques and [Skrifvars et al. \(2025\)](#)'s interviews with individuals involved in asylum interviews to identify salient interviewing strategies (explained further below).

While the studies in this issue offer valuable insights into understanding how individuals remember criminal incidents, the focus extends far beyond criminal investigations. The special issue also includes empirical investigations into the experiences and behaviours of other types of witnesses (i.e. missing person reports and asylum seekers), as well as public attitudes towards contentious memory reports (see [Otgaar et al., 2023](#) for cross-cultural comparison on beliefs in repressed memory and dissociative amnesia). On the topic of asylum seeker interviews, behavioural parallels can be drawn between asylum interviews and investigative interviews, given that asylum interviewees are required to describe witnessed events, may have experienced traumatic events, and may have cause to avoid fully telling the truth ([Skrifvars et al., 2025](#)). Applying similar expectations from investigative interviewing best practices, [Skrifvars et al. \(2025\)](#) interviewed asylum seekers, interviewers and interpreters about their experiences and views of asylum interviews, focusing on communication styles and rapport-building techniques.

Another application of applied memory research outside of criminal offending is the utilisation of missing persons appeals. Hunt and Mojtahedi (2025) examined whether prospective person memory for missing persons was affected by own-race biases and whether this bias was moderated by real-world situational factors (e.g. exposure frequency and the number of different appeals encountered). Though these studies deviate from the criminological focus of this journal, the findings nonetheless provide valuable insights for applied criminal justice academics and practitioners. By examining how memory is shaped by context, stress and social influences, this body of research enhances our broader understanding of how people recall and report crucial information in diverse, high-stakes situations.

This editorial provides an overview of some of the novel projects included in the curated catalogue of modern eyewitness developments. The special issue encompasses ten empirical studies that embody the heightened standards of eyewitness research and illustrate the directions of contemporary research within the field.

## References

- Barnoth, D., Brown, S., Saraiva, R., Wagner, M. and Cullen, H.J. (2024), "The effect of volition and memory distrust on eyewitness suggestibility", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-08-2024-0067](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-08-2024-0067).
- Gibert, C. and Mojtahedi, D. (2019), "A preliminary investigation on the performance of brain-injured witnesses on target-absent line-up procedures", *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 480-495, doi: [10.1080/13218719.2018.1507847](https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2018.1507847).
- Glomb, K. (2022), "How to improve eyewitness testimony research: theoretical and methodological concerns about experiments on the impact of emotions on memory performance", *Psychological Research*, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 1-11, doi: [10.1007/s00426-021-01488-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-021-01488-4).
- Glomb, K., Piotrowski, P. and Romanowska, I.A. (2024), "It is not real until it feels real: testing a new method for simulation of eyewitness experience with virtual reality technology and equipment", *Behavior Research Methods*, Vol. 56 No. 5, pp. 4336-4350.
- Gomez-Bedoya, M. (2024), "Rapport in police interviews with victims: a linguistic comparison between UK and Spain", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-08-2024-0082](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-08-2024-0082).
- Harvey, M.B., Price, H.L. and Luther, K. (2023), "What happened that day? Recall for events of a day that later became important", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-06-2023-0040](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-06-2023-0040).
- Hunt, D. and Mojtahedi, D. (2025), "Prospective person memory and own-race bias of missing person appeals", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-07-2024-0052](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-07-2024-0052).
- Laraway, S., Snyckerski, S., Pradhan, S. and Huitema, B.E. (2019), "An overview of scientific reproducibility: consideration of relevant issues for behavior science/analysis", *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 33-57, doi: [10.1007/s40614-019-00193-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40614-019-00193-3).
- Mojtahedi, D., Ioannou, M. and Hammond, L. (2018), "Group size, misinformation and unanimity influences on co-witness judgments", *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 844-865, doi: [10.1080/14789949.2018.1439990](https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2018.1439990).
- Mojtahedi, D., Ioannou, M., Hammond, L. and Synnott, J.P. (2019), "Investigating the effects of age and gender on co-witness suggestibility during blame attribution", *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 153-168, doi: [10.1002/jip.1533](https://doi.org/10.1002/jip.1533).
- Nosek, B.A., Hardwicke, T.E., Moshontz, H., Allard, A., Corker, K.S., Dreber, A., Fidler, F., Hilgard, J., Kline Struhl, M., Nuijten, M.B., Rohrer, J.M., Romero, F., Scheel, A.M., Scherer, L.D., Schönbrodt, F.D. and Vazire, S. (2022), "Replicability, robustness, and reproducibility in psychological science", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 73 No. 1, pp. 719-748, doi: [10.1146/annurev-psych-020821-114157](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020821-114157).
- Otgaar, H., Howe, M.L. and Dodier, O. (2022), "What can expert witnesses reliably say about memory in the courtroom?", *Forensic Science International: Mind and Law*, Vol. 3, p. 100106, doi: [10.1016/j.fsimpl.2022.100106](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsimpl.2022.100106).
- Otgaar, H., Zhang, Y., Li, C. and Wang, J. (2023), "Beliefs in repressed memory and dissociative amnesia from a cross-cultural lens", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-06-2023-0037](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-06-2023-0037).

Riesthuis, P. and Otgaar, H. (2025), "An overview of the replicability, generalizability and practical relevance of eyewitness testimony research in the Journal of Criminal Psychology", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*.

Ryan, S., Sherretts, N., Willmott, D., Mojtahedi, D. and Baughman, B. (2018), "The missing link in training to detect deception and its implications for justice", *Safer Communities*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 33-46, doi: [10.1108/SC-07-2017-0027](https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-07-2017-0027).

Skrifvars, J., Ilmoni, A., Siegrifds, L., Galán, M., Stevens, L., Selim, H., Korkman, J. and Antfolk, J. (2025), "Experiences of asylum interviews by asylum officials, interpreters and asylum seekers in Finland", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*.

van Rosmalen, E.A. and Vredeveltdt, A. (2025), "Collaborative interviewing of eyewitnesses: a field study", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, doi: [10.1108/JCP-04-2024-0028](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-04-2024-0028).

Wheeler-Mundy, R.L., Gabbert, F. and Hope, L. (2024), "Self-generated cues: the role of cue quality in facilitating eyewitness recall", *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print, doi: [10.1108/JCP-05-2024-0036](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-05-2024-0036).

Willmott, D. and Sherretts, N. (2016), "Individual differences in eyewitness identification accuracy between sequential and simultaneous line-ups: consequences for police practice and jury decisions", *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 228-239, doi: [10.5114/cipp.2016.62701](https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2016.62701).

### Further reading

Hope, L., Ost, J., Gabbert, F., Healey, S. and Lenton, E. (2008), "With a little help from my friends...": the role of co-witness relationship in susceptibility to misinformation", *Acta Psychologica*, Vol. 127 No. 2, pp. 476-484, doi: [10.1016/j.actpsy.2007.08.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2007.08.010).