Investigative interviews with alcohol-intoxicated witnesses

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Background and aim

Prior studies on intoxicated witnesses have almost exclusively used 'positive' (i.e. free recall, open-ended questions) to elicit witness recall. In contrast, police officers in the U.S., Canada and UK have been found to use mainly 'negative' interviewing techniques (i.e. closed questions, yes/no questions, leading questions). The aim of present study was to examine how different interview methods affect witness recall.

Method

Participants were recruited for a study about drinking and cognitive processing at the Department of Psychology, Florida International University, USA. After an extensive medical screening, eligible participants (N = 102) were included in the experiment. The present study examined the effects of interview methods on intoxicated witnesses' recall of a live staged event in a bar lab involving both physical and verbal interactions (a confederate searching for his items while verbally offending and touching the bar guests, i.e. the participants). Participants were randomly assigned to a 3 (Intoxication level: sober vs. placebo vs. intoxicated) x 3 (Interview method: positive vs. negative vs. mixed) between-subject design. Participants drank three beverages, were involved in the interactive event, and were then interviewed some minutes after the event using one of the three methods.







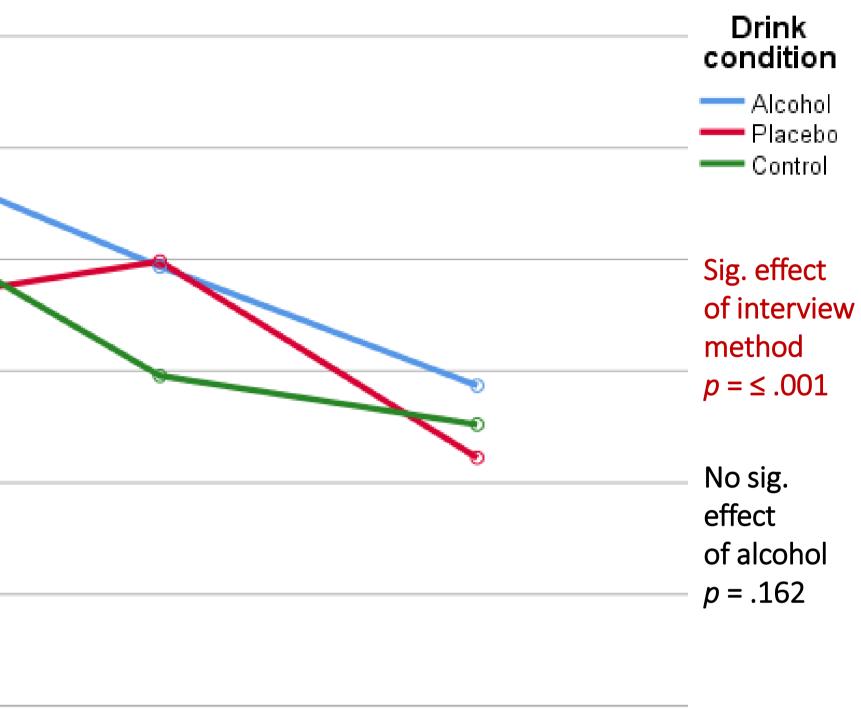
ed Positive interview Positive interview Cover art purchased from iStockphoto: ©iStock.com/A-Digit/4x6/Magcom witnesses remembered as Positive interview Positive interview



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Mixed interview

Interview method

Negative interview

Interview method

Mixed interview

Negative interview 1

Drink condition Alcohol Placebo Control
No sig. effect of interview method p = .091
No sig. effect of alcohol p = .781

Mixed interview Interview method

Interview method Mixed interview

Negative interview

Negative interview