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Research in Eyewitness Memory: Issues and Challenges



Gyanesh Kumar Tiwari, Ph.D.*

The present review aims to present a brief discussion of the various aspects and issues concerned with accuracy of eyewitness memory. It focuses on the susceptibility of eyewitness memory. It has been emphasised by many researchers that emotionality inherent in eyewitness events is a major cause of distortions in its later recollection. The study of eyewitness memory encompasses various methods viz., clinical method, interview method, simulation method etc... The distortions and inaccuracies in eyewitness memory are caused by many factors. Out of these, the post event information affects the accuracy to the great length. Other factors are: personal characteristics of the eyewitnesses i.e., age, sex, mood, confidence, suggestibility, intelligence of the witnesses; the method of interrogation and the level of arousal involved in the witnessed events. The artificiality of eyewitness material used in the most of the simulation studies creates a major problem in generalization of the findings to real life. The Yerkes-Dodson law and Easterbrook's Cue utilization hypothesis are generally used to interpret the performance in an eyewitness testimony.

Any event seen by us is registered, encoded and stored in its specific pattern and when we are asked to reproduce or report about it at a later date many vital information are either glossed over or sharpened. The dynamics of this behaviour has often posed insurmountable riddle before psychologists who have wondered as to how accurate is a person's recollection of details of a witnessed event? Loftus and Loftus (1980) argued that memory of a witnessed event is often inaccurate. Sometimes details of an event are forgotten and an imperfect memory about the event is created by adding other information during the recall. Alternately, an actually witnessed experience may not make sense to an individual and some information may be deleted; or some new information may be added to establish a memory consistent with an individual's reconstructed view of the world.

There are many details in an event which people actually encounter. They accordingly register, encode and store these details and reproduce or recognize them when required to do so. The

* Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, M. L. K. P. G. College, Balrampur, U.P.