

Sunday Mercury July 20, 2008

False memories do so much harm

IT is irresponsible to say that paedophiles will benefit from the findings on False Memory Syndrome.

The evidence against them should not be simply based on memory.

On the other hand, a large number of falsely accused adults, and the fractured families behind them, will take comfort from the fact that academic research into memory once again shows that we do well to be cautious when criminal proceedings go ahead on the basis of memories.

I would particularly welcome the day when the training of psychotherapists takes proper account of such research.

It is important to find out how memories of abuse have arisen. Individuals who have suffered abuse have always known their trauma. They live with it and try to forget. Holocaust victims are one group amongst many.

Unfortunately, all too often, there is a prurient element where interest in child abuse is concerned. Psychotherapists are not immune to this.

There have been untold numbers of cases where, perhaps unwittingly, false ideas have been planted or evidence twisted. Fathers, and sometimes mothers, have been rejected on the basis of so-called recovered memories.

A large group of people has been dragged through the courts, accused by disturbed youngsters who recount dreadful memories of things that never happened – but proving that it never happened also wrecks lives.

False memory exists. I very much welcome the work of Kimberley Wade and Cara Laney.

PAT BATCHELOR, by e-mail

Dangerous claim

THE Sunday Mercury article on False Memory Syndrome refers to a scientific review paper Dr Laney and I published in the July issue of *The Psychologist* magazine, in which we brought together current research on the malleability of human memory.

In our article we simply described recent research that adds to the existing literature on the subject.

Your story claims that our 'study' supports the psychological condition of False Memory Syndrome, a syndrome that suggests "childhood memories are not real". But the term False Memory Syndrome does not suggest that all childhood memories of abuse are false.

When our research findings and

conclusions are misrepresented, it damages our ability to work closely with the community and with our stakeholders. We did not talk about victims of abuse, repression, or recovered memories much at all.

Please be very clear: we believe that sex abuse is tragic, but so are false accusations of sex crimes. To uncritically accept every claim of a recovered memory of sexual abuse is dangerous for many people.

Perhaps more importantly, uncritically accepting all claims of recovered memories of abuse is dangerous because it trivialises the memories of real abuse victims and prolongs their suffering.

Dr KIMBERLEY WADE (University of Warwick) & Dr CARA LANEY (Leicester University)

No information

IT is a shame that your article on Sunday, headlined 'New research sparks fears over paedophile convictions' included no information on the piece on which it was apparently based.

Readers are invited to read the source article at www.bps.org.uk/wade, and make up their own minds.

**Dr JON SUTTON,
Editor, The Psychologist**