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The construction of a narrative space for children in an institutional interview interaction

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the space afforded to children's narratives by the phrasing of questions concerning children's experiences of domestic violence. The interview questions were posed in an institutional interactive setting in an aim to investigate the domestic violence experienced by children. The interviews were conducted in nine shelters for victims of domestic violence using the iRiSk interview method. The data includes the recorded interviews of 12 children ($N = 12$) interviewed by a shelter employee. The interviews were found to include questions linguistically constructed around the perspectives of recollection, knowledge and ability. The children primarily reacted to these questioning strategies by applying an answering strategy in which they focused only on the used questioning strategy, therefore limiting their narration. Children may also took the questioning strategy into consideration in their answers before producing their narration, or completely ignored the strategy. Based on the results, the phrasing of these questions constructed in the interaction process set a frame for children's narrative space in two ways. First, they guided children to re-examine their recollection, knowledge and ability instead of providing a narrative of their experiences of domestic violence. Second, the questions that were originally intended as open-ended ended up being closed-ended instead. The results reveal that there are vulnerabilities related to using a method that supports children's narration that may pose a challenge to children's narratives. Professionals should pay attention to any such vulnerable areas when conducting interviews with children.

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Introduction

Children's experiences of domestic violence have been traditionally investigated based on parents' interviews. However, research has shown that some aspects related to children's experiences can only be obtained by listening to children's own accounts (Eskonen 2005). Nevertheless, capturing children's experiences of domestic violence is not a straightforward process. Experiences are not always precise and clear subjects of narration. Children may also not always identify or acknowledge what constitutes violence. Based on research findings, there are many challenges associated with the role of children as narrators of their experiences in institutional interactions. These include dismissing children as informants (Callaghan et al. 2016; Helavirta 2011), perceiving them as inadequate narrators (Callaghan et al. 2017) and challenges in interaction (Korkman et al. 2008; Persson-Thunqvist, Osvaldsson, and Cromdal 2012; Roos and Rutanen 2014; Weiss 2014).

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In an aim to respond to the challenges related to children's narratives, practices have been developed in the field of social work to enable children to disclose their experiences of domestic violence. The present article examines one such practice that involves enabling children to talk about the domestic violence they have experienced. In Finland, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has been piloting the iRiSk method developed in Sweden for social work. The aim of this semi-structured interview is to systematically examine children's experiences of domestic violence and assess their risk and safety factors in a situation in which children have arrived in a shelter for victims of domestic violence with their loved ones due to exposure to violence or a threat of violence. The employees of shelters for victims of domestic violence have been trained to ask children about violence to make children's voices heard and investigate children's support needs. The employees are supported with an interview template in this process. Our research interest lies in determining how, in interviews based on the iRiSk method, children are provided with a space where they can talk about the domestic violence they have experienced. The article contributes to responding to a need expressed by Eriksson et al. (2022) for examining the approaches and models that support children's participation.

In this article, we examine how a narrative space is constructed through the phrasing of questions for children participating in an interview. A narrative space refers to a linguistic space constructed in an interaction and the opportunities children have when answering questions posed by the interviewer and giving an account of their experiences of domestic violence. Our examination is focused on the phrasing of questions that deviate from the word choices used in the original interview template. A further area of investigation is how these adapted questions affect the children's narration.

The premise of this study is that children have special ways to form information and narrate their experiences which often differ from how adults share their experiences. There are also differences between individual children regarding aspects such as gender, developmental stage, culture and prior experiences (see Åkerlund and Gottzén 2017). Children are perceived as agents capable of narrating their own experiences from their respective starting points and narration strategies. By analysing institutional discussion practices as interactive and intergenerational situations, we can give visibility to the ways children participate in institutional interactions (Iversen 2013) and promote the development of participatory practices (Ulvik 2015).

Children's narratives of their experiences of domestic violence

Children's experiences of domestic violence are not always heard or taken into consideration in services (Callaghan et al. 2016). As a topic of narration, children may perceive violence as vague. Non-normative and stigmatizing experiences, such as those related to domestic violence, are often difficult to articulate (Callaghan, Alexander, and Fellin 2016). Children's experiences of violence are individual and affected by multiple factors such as the type of violence, the children's age and gender, the time the violence occurred and the children's relationship with the perpetrator (Eriksson 2017). Children may be prevented from disclosing their experiences due to a lack of necessary linguistic resources (Callaghan et al. 2017). A challenge may also emerge if interviewers fail to adapt their language to the child's age or development stage (Korkman et al. 2008) or are unable to receive the children's narratives of their experiences of violence (Weiss 2014).

Providing space for children's narration in an interactive situation offers children an opportunity to put their experiences into words (Ulvik 2015). Children's narratives can be facilitated by using language that supports children in sharing their narratives (Callaghan et al. 2017). Posing open-ended questions can be used to create a space for children to voice their experiences; the use of open questions has been found to promote more detailed and informative answers compared to other question types (Lamb et al. 2008; Orbach and Lamb 2000). Meanwhile, closed-ended questions set a narrow frame to the information in which children can engage and may contain certain terms that children will have to abide by in their answers (Iversen 2013). On the other hand, closed-ended

questions have been assessed to work better than open questions when the aim is to reveal information that children may struggle to remember (Lamb et al. 2008). Previous studies on interview methods have demonstrated that, ultimately, interviewers rarely use open-ended questions unless sticking to a structured protocol that they should follow in the interview (e.g. La Rooy, Lamb, and Memon 2011; Lamb et al. 2009). On the other hand, studies have also revealed that even when interviewers have been trained in their task, are aware of how they should act during the interview and believe that they are following the given instructions, what they do in practice may deviate from the instructions (La Rooy et al. 2015).

Children as parties to institutional interaction

An interview situation between a shelter employee and a child, defined as an institutional interaction, provides a context for examining questioning strategies in this article. Institutional interactions are characterized by an institutional task and objective, restrictions that regulate participation, and a frame of interpretation and vocabularies present in the interaction (Peräkylä 1997). These features guide the interaction process, making it partly formal. The institutional task of the children's interview data used in this study is to examine the children's experiences of domestic violence and their support needs. In this interaction, the employee represents their institution and has a role and objective determined by their work in the interview situation. Meanwhile, the child plays the role of a client, representing their life and experiences. The premise of the interview situation is that the representative of the institution asks questions based on an interview template, collects information from the child and guides the discussion. In turn, the child answers the questions, reflecting on the responses based on his or her personal experiences and thus provides the interviewer with information and participates in discussion.

Children have been found to have the ability to serve as strategic and reflective narrators of their personal experiences of violence in institutional interactions (Callaghan et al. 2017). According to Kallinen and Pirskanen (2022), involving and listening to children in matters that concern them requires situations in which children are encouraged and provided with an opportunity to produce information and serve as experts. However, representatives of institutions whose work aims at improving children's opportunities for participation in interviews actually play a part in constructing and guiding children's answers (Danby, Ewing, and Thorpe 2011). Therefore, how we ask children about their experiences of domestic violence is significant. Questions posed to children may include normative expectations about how children are expected to act or how their lives should be based on cultural norms. In practice, this emerges as making suggestions and guesses and including assumptions in questions, for instance. These can also be recognized as traditional strategies found in discussions between adults and children (Helavirta 2011). In her research, Helavirta (2007) found that the traditional question-answer setting was an inflexible conversation strategy that restricted natural interactions and children's narratives.

Challenges related to children's involvement in institutional interactions have been identified. Children are often either completely dismissed in the process of collecting information or information is collected in adults' terms (Helavirta 2011). The different ways that an interviewer and children use concepts may make it more difficult for them to build a mutual understanding in an interview. The interviewer may struggle in interpreting children's answers if they are short and unclear (Roos and Rutanen 2014). Children may lack experiences or an understanding of the established linguistic and social practices related to an interview situation or the principles of interaction, which may make their participation in the interaction appear challenging. Indeed, according to Persson-Thunqvist et al. (2012)) institutional research on children is often focused on problems in interaction which are considered to be caused by children's cognitive immaturity.

A potential solution to the challenges related to children's participation posed by Callaghan and Alexander (2015) is awareness of children's ways to disclose their experiences, their narrative strategies, how they perform disclosure in various situations, and how they manage silence.

Children are defined as a particular social group culturally and a special communication method is associated with them (Ulvik 2015). Children regulate their participation in discussions by staying quiet and presenting their own topics (Evang and Øverlien 2015). If we fail to understand the mechanisms underlying children's participation, narration and disclosure, we may underestimate their narrative capacities.

Research question, data and methods

The purpose of this article is to describe the questioning strategies emerging in interviews and formed in interactions that deviate from the phrasing of questions in the interview template, and to examine how these changes in phrasing made by the interviewer affect children's narration. The article sets out to answer the following question:

what kind of a narrative space is provided to children with the phrasing of questions constructed in interaction?

The data were collected as a part of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare's iRiSk project which piloted and examined the iRiSk interview method developed in Sweden in nine shelters for victims of domestic violence located in Finland in the period 2019–2020. The data includes the recorded and transcribed interviews of 12 children ($N=12$). Three of the children were aged between 5 and 8 years and nine of them were aged between 9 and 17. The interviewed child and the shelter employee carrying out the interviews were present at the interviews. As children and their parents spent a relatively short period in the shelter, on average 17 days (Nipuli and Mielikäinen 2023), the interviewer and interviewed children were not closely familiar with each other. An interpreter also participated in two of the interviews via telephone. The impact of the use of an interpreter on the reliability of the study was assessed in connection with the analysis and the presence of the interpreter in the interview situation was not considered an exclusion criterion. The children whose interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter had enough Finnish language skills for the interpreter's role to be insignificant. The shelter employees had prior experience in working with children exposed to violence. The employees also received a separate orientation session for conducting the interviews from the project workers as well as written instructions on conducting the interviews. The duration of the interviews varied from 29 to 90 minutes.

The iRiSk interview method aims to systematically assess children's experiences of violence and evaluate potential risk for violence and threat to safety in the family (Koivula et al. 2021). The interview method provides employees with an opportunity to discuss domestic violence with their clients and form an understanding of their client's experiences. The parent and child residing at the shelter are interviewed separately. The interview template contains both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Separate versions have been developed for older children (aged 9–17) and younger children (aged 5–8). The interview template aimed at younger children contains 52 and the one for older children 87 questions. Some of the interview questions also include additional questions employed as necessary if they are deemed useful. The questions on the interview template are focused on violence against children, violence against adults, risk assessment, the parenting methods employed by the parents and the child's involvement in the parents' conflicts. While this is a structured interview, the interviewer can adapt it on a case-by-case basis, for instance by ignoring questions that have been asked earlier or are irrelevant to the child's situation (Socialstyrelsen website 2023).

The interviews were carried out with families selected by the shelter employees on the basis that the interview method was considered to suit them. Exclusion criteria included an acute crisis in the family or having spent a brief amount of time at the shelter. The interviews whose participants had consented to participate in the study and allowed their interviews to be recorded were selected as data for this study. The shelter employees may have favoured certain kinds of families or situations in selecting the research sample, but

we are unable to assess this matter in more detail. The article is exclusively focused on verbal communication, as the recorded interview material did not lend itself to an analysis of non-verbal communication. Both the interviewer's and the children's sections in the data were analysed.

Ethical aspects of the study

The data has been collected as a part of the iRiSk project and the Ethics Committee of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare granted a favourable statement and research permit for this purpose (THL/1404/6.02.01/2019). In addition, the shelters participating in this project gave their consent for participating in the study. The participation of the shelter employees and their child clients in the interviews was voluntary. The employees were considered to have given their consent by conducting the interviews with the children and also recording them if consent had been obtained from the children and their guardians. Children's consent was obtained in writing and the children's parents residing with them in the shelter were also asked to give their consent for participating in the study.

The research participants were informed about the study both verbally and in writing. The child's guardian was also asked to inform the child about the interview. The children's willingness to participate was taken into consideration throughout the study. If, during the interview, the shelter employees discovered any reason to suspect a criminal offence, they were bound by the duty to notify under the Child Welfare Act (417/2007). This obligation related to filing a child welfare notification or a police report may have restricted the children's narratives of their experiences of violence. The data was obtained in a transcribed format containing no identifying data. Any names or other identifiers included in the data excerpts were changed and, in analysing the research data and presenting the findings, it was ensured that no participants can be identified based on the text. In the analysis, overinterpretation was avoided and excerpts from the data were only used for valid reasons. All stages of the research process were carried out in compliance with the ethical principles of research of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (see TENK 2019).

This study examines a sensitive topic and the research population consists of vulnerable children. Their vulnerability is further enhanced by their personal experiences of domestic violence (Kallinen and Pirskanen 2022). The shelter employees observed the children during and after the interviews to ensure the children's welfare and provide the children with any necessary support. While the interview was perceived as an intervention that enabled making the children's experiences visible (see Kallinen and Pirskanen 2022), it also involved a comparison between any harm caused to the children and the benefits brought by research.

Analysis

A discourse analytical approach in which language is considered to construct social reality was utilized in the analysis. We explored culturally distinctive semantic content that emerges in interaction, i.e. what is done with language use and what it produces in an interactive situation (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 2016). Examining the consequences of language use emerged as a key area in the analysis. This was carried out by paying attention to the interactive context and the process of interaction, namely what has been said before and what is said after (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 2016; Molder 2015).

We initially familiarized ourselves with the data. This process was guided by our interest in finding out how the interviewers asked questions and how the children answered them. Initially, we selected interview episodes from the data that included references to domestic violence and where both the child and the interviewer were speaking. As we were examining the data, we noticed that, at times, the interviewers deviated from the phrasing of questions used in the interview template and

adapted the questions in the interaction. As a result, we ended up focusing on determining how the interviewer adapts the questions in the interaction and how this affects the child's narration.

Selected interview episodes were analysed to find, organize and code the phrasing of questions that differed from the formatting of the questions included in the interview template. Recurring features, i.e. questioning strategies, were identified in the phrasing of questions. We then categorized these strategies, which resulted in the questioning strategies of recollection, knowledge and ability. It is worth noting that the interview templates aimed at both the younger and the older children included two questions that followed the questioning strategy of knowledge. As the interviewer did not deviate from the original phrasing of these questions, we excluded them from our analysis.

These recurring questioning strategies were considered to represent ways to address topics established in interaction in the data. We examined both how these strategies were structured as well as the effect that the questioning strategies that deviated from the interview template had on the children's narratives. Analysing the interaction constructed around the questioning strategies enabled us to make observations on the connection between the questioning strategies and the children's narratives, i.e. how the children responded to these questions. Similar features were also identified in the children's answers, which were then categorized into three different answering strategies based on these features. The different strategies were used as a basis for interpreting how the questioning strategies constructed the children's narrative space. The children had access to this narrative space in answering the questions and relating their experiences.

Results

Three reoccurring questioning strategies that differed from the original phrasing of questions in the iRiSk interview template were found in the data. In the questioning strategy related to recollection, the interviewer asks the child whether they can recall the topic that is being asked about in the interview template. Meanwhile, in the questioning strategy of knowledge, the interviewer asks the child whether they know about the topic that is being asked about in the interview template. In the questioning strategy related to ability, the interviewer asks the child whether they are able to talk about the topic they are being asked about.

The above figure illustrates the interviewer's questioning strategies and the answering strategies used by the children in response to these (Figure 1). The children responded to the questioning strategies by employing various answering strategies. In answering the questions, the children's

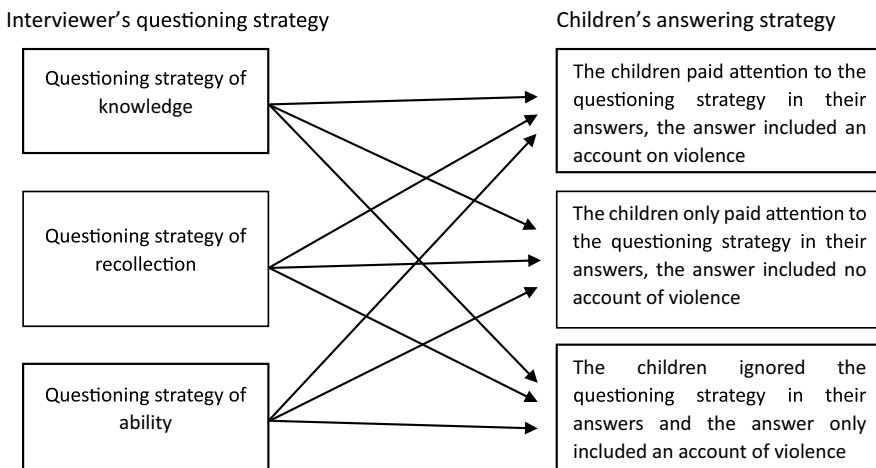


Figure 1. The interviewer's questioning strategies and the children's answering strategies.

primary focus was on the questioning strategy. The children primarily focused their answers to match the used questioning strategy, which led to limiting the accounts in their answers to concern only the perspective contained by the questioning strategy, therefore commenting on either recollection, knowledge or ability. Here, commenting means that when answering a question posed using the strategy of recollection, the children first addressed whether they could remember the incident. Meanwhile, the questioning strategy of knowledge made the children first reflect on whether they knew the answer to the asked question. When answering a question posed using the questioning strategy of ability, the children paid attention to whether they were able to answer the question. The answers applying this answering strategy contained no accounts of violence.

The data also contained instances where the children took the questioning strategy into account as some part of their answer or fully ignored it. In such cases, the children first commented on the questioning strategy before giving an account of violence. The children could also ignore the questioning strategy, in which case the child's answer included an account of violence without commenting on recollection, knowledge or ability. In the below data excerpts, 'Q' refers to the interviewer and 'A' to the child.

Interviewer's questioning strategies

The questioning strategy most commonly used in the data was **the questioning strategy of recollection**. In the below excerpt, the interviewer intended to ask a question according to the interview template '*What happened then?*'. The interviewer had supplemented the phrasing of the template with the words '*can you recall*' and, as a result, uses the questioning strategy of recollection in asking the child whether they can remember what happened at a specific moment.

Q: — *Hmmm, can you recall what happened then?*

A: *Hmm, no. It just... I can't remember what like hap... ah, now I remember! Uhh, my stepdad, he like told me to go to sleep, but then my mum, she like needed my help because uhh, they (-) and (-) had to put on their nightclothes and such and then, umm, when I was helping them, then like, uhh, my s-, uhh, [stepfather]. He like came over but then he started yelling cause I hadn't like gone to bed when he had told me to.*

(Interview 10.)

In this example, the child reacts to the strategy by paying attention to it and responding in the negative from the perspective of recollection. In this example, the questioning strategy of recollection directs the child's attention to recollection and its assessment, taking up space from the child's narration concerning domestic violence. Subsequently, the child realizes that they remember the incident and move on to disclosing it even though the narration was initially about to be restricted based on forgetfulness. Here, the child's answering strategy is paying attention to the questioning strategy before giving an account of violence.

At times, the theme of recollection even dominated the interviews, especially when a lot of attention was paid to it in the questions. In these instances, the child also paid a lot of attention to recollection and began to doubt what they were able to recall concerning their experiences and life.

Q: *Yes. Is there anything else that would be even worse?*

A: *Hmm, no.*

Q: *No.*

A: *If I can remember correctly. Again.*

(Interview 6.)

In the above excerpt, the 'again' comment by the child demonstrates how the perspective of recollection played an essential part earlier in the interview and the child is again focusing on reflecting on their experiences from the perspective of recollection. The child has thus adopted the

questioning strategy of recollection as their answering strategy. Therefore, we may argue that the perspective provided in the phrasing of the question and the narrative space it provides may not be limited to an individual question. In fact, children may end up scrutinizing their recollection also when answering other questions even when the phrasing does not refer to their ability to recall events. The child's narrative remains to be centred around the perspective of recollection and their narrative space is determined by the phrasing used in previous questions.

The second questioning strategy found in the data was **the questioning strategy of knowledge**, which the interviewer uses in the below excerpt. The question *"Have your siblings been subjected to violence by your father"* on the interview template is adapted in the interaction to concern the interviewee's knowledge of the violence possibly encountered by their sister. The interviewer adds the words *"do you know"* to the question, and with this question strategy, ends up providing the child with a narrative space where the focus is on knowledge.

Q: *Yes, right, exactly. Well, do you know whether your sister has been subjected to violence by your father?*

A: *I don't know but I suspect that she has.*

(Interview 8.)

In this example, the child's initial response to the perspective of knowledge is that they "don't know" but they subsequently supplement their answer with narration concerning their suspicion. If the child had solely focused on the perspective of knowledge and the narrative space it provides, their response would have been only limited to their knowledge. However, in the below example, the child reports that their sister may also have been exposed to violence. If the child's narrative had been limited to the provided narrative space, the child would not have disclosed the violence against their sister as the child was not fully certain about it but instead disclosed information based on suspicion.

The third questioning strategy recurring in the data was **the questioning strategy of ability**. In the following excerpt, the interviewer and child are addressing feelings of fear associated with the child's stepfather's actions.

Q: *Uhh, have you discussed it with, umm, Jere [stepfather]?*

A: *Umm, no.*

Q: *Yes. Hmm. Well, as you haven't spoken about it, are you able to say why you haven't addressed it with him?*

A: *Hmm. I don't know [laughs].*

Q: *Mm. What about talking about it with him, what kinds of thoughts does that bring to mind?*

A: *Hmm, well maybe it would bring this weird, like, feeling.*

(Interview 10.)

The interviewer asks the child whether they have talked about the issue with their stepfather. The child denies that they have, after which the interviewer asks the reason for this using the questioning strategy of ability. Here, the interviewer deviates from the question on the interview template of *"Why have you not addressed it with your stepfather"* by supplementing it with the words *'are you able to say'*. The child initially takes some time to reflect ('Hmmm'), but then answers, citing their lack of knowledge. The child's narrative space is focused on ability related to verbalization and therefore restricted. On the other hand, the interviewer's 'why' question obligates the child to explain why they have not discussed the topic with their stepfather, which, in turn, influences the narrative space. The interviewer continues to investigate the topic by constructing a mental image that involves the child addressing the issue with their stepfather and asking the child about their thoughts related to such a situation. Here, the interviewer does not apply the questioning strategy of ability but uses an open-ended question instead. The child answers, referring to the emotions they might experience if the situation described by the interviewer was to happen.

Children's answering strategies

Three different answering strategies could be identified in the children's interview situations. The children applied the strategies to respond to the aforementioned questioning strategies used by the interviewers. The children primarily used **answering strategies in which they only focused on the perspective of recollection, knowledge or ability** in line with the interviewer's questioning strategy. In such cases, the children gave no account beyond this perspective. The below example illustrates such a situation; the child is asked to talk about the arguments they have previously referred to in the interview.

Q: *Yeah, yes. So, could you tell me what those fights were like?*

A: *I can't cause I don't know.*

Q: *You don't know, okay?*

A: *Anymore, I don't remember anymore.*

Q: *Yeah, it's been a pretty long time since then. What can you remember about it, when you were there at your [stepmother's] place?*

A: *I can't remember.*

Q: *Okay*

(Interview 1.)

In this example, the child refuses to elaborate on the topic and justifies their response based on a lack of knowledge. The interviewer then repeats what the child has said and accepts it by saying 'okay'. After this, the child further justifies their decision not to answer with their inability to recall the situation. At this point, the interviewer adopts their next question to the questioning strategy of recollection. As a result, the child's narrative space is limited to the perspective of recollection and the child's answer reflects forgetfulness. Earlier in the interview, the child talked about what had happened at their stepmother's place and the fights that occurred there.

The above example describes a situation in which the interviewer adopted the child's answering strategy as their questioning strategy. In this case, when the child refers to their ignorance, forgetfulness or inability in their answer, the interviewer then adopts the following questions based on this perspective expressed by the child. As a result, the interviewer adopts the questioning strategy of recollection, knowledge or ability, which further reinforces the perspective throughout the rest of the interview. The following excerpts are from the same interview as the above example, but from later on. The perspective of recollection remains strongly present.

Q: *So has your [stepmother] ever yelled at you, can you recall?*

A: *I can't.*

Q: *Yeah, mm. Well ha- can you recall whether your [stepmother] has hurt you in any other way?*

A: *I can't.*

(Interview 1.)

In this excerpt, the interviewer has modified two questions on the interview template, 'Has your stepmother ever yelled at you?' and 'has your stepmother hurt you in any other way?' by supplementing them with the words 'can you recall'. The child answers both of the questions with the word 'No', referring to their inability to recall this. The strategy employed by the child in this answer comments on the questioning strategy but does not produce an account of domestic violence. In this case, the narrative space related to the child's answer has been limited to examining what the child is able to recall and the response alternatives offered by the close-ended question.

Meanwhile, in the second answering strategy, the children **ignored the perspective presented in the questioning strategy in their answers**. In this case, they dismissed the part about their recollection, knowledge or ability, instead providing an answer containing a narrative of violence which the question had been used to probe. When using this answering strategy, the children did not pay attention to the narrative space restricted by the questioning strategy. In the below example, the child applies this answering strategy.

Q: *So, do you know what it's been like for your dad to live with Pirjo [stepmom]?*

A:

Q: *Yeah. What do you know about it, what has it been like for your dad and Pirjo [stepmom]?*

A: *A bit fun and a bit, a bit sad.*

(Interview 1.)

In the above excerpt, the interviewer asks a question using the questioning strategy of knowledge. The child does not respond to the question but remains silent instead. The perspective of knowledge and the more limited response alternatives allowed by the closed-ended question restrict the child's narrative space. Subsequently, the interviewer tries to inquire about the topic again from the perspective of knowledge but by turning the closed question into an open one. As a result, the child ignores the perspective of knowledge and explains what it has been like to live with their father and stepmother. The open question provides the child with a broader narrative space where knowledge plays a minor role.

In the third answering strategy used by the children, **the children commented on the perspectives of recollection, knowledge and ability and subsequently produced narration**. In the below example, the child is asked a closed-ended question in line with the questioning strategy of ability related to a traumatic incident involving violence, during which the child's phone was broken.

Q: *Okay. So are you able to tell me what happened then? So your phone was broken, why did it break?* A: *Yeah, because I was in my room then, it was probably midnight, I couldn't sleep, I was under the cover, I was playing on my phone. Then my stepdad came there, he pulled the covers from me, then he took my phone, looked at it a bit, something like that, I'm not even sure what he did. Then suddenly he just threw it on the ground and then it broke. The- there was this, like, if the phone is like this, like this side here and then from there it, like curved up like this.*

(Interview 9)

The interviewer follows the question concerning ability with a further question that guides the child's narration and offers a narrative space. At the start of their answer, the child says 'Yeah', which can be interpreted as their response to the question on their ability. Subsequently, the child produces narration using the subjugating conjunction 'because', which expresses an explanation of the topic of inquiry. The child explains why and how the phone had broken. In this interview excerpt, the follow-up question asked by the interviewer enables the child to answer more broadly than the closed question concerning the child's ability, thus also creating a space for the child's narrative. Indeed, the child utilizes this space in their response.

Discussion and conclusions

Thus far, no uniform approach has been applied in the shelters for victims of domestic violence in Finland to investigate children's experiences of domestic violence. The challenges of the previously used approaches have included failing to make children's voices heard (Koivula et al. 2021) and ignoring their agency and perspectives (Eriksson 2017). The present article is concerned with a situation in which a new interview method is tested and developed in the field of social services to promote children's right to participate and provide information in the work with the victims of domestic violence. The iRiSk method is applied to support making children's voices heard. The

method aims to support professionals in interviewing children about domestic violence and help them gain access to the knowledge that children have. The article provides an answer to the question of what kind of narrative space is given to the children with the phrasing of questions formed in the interaction. Three different questioning strategies used in the interactions keep re-emerging in the data, constructed using word choices related to recollection, knowledge and ability.

As a rule, these strategies are applied to obtain information that has been defined as crucial in the interview template. However, due to the word choices made in interacting with the children, the questions are ultimately built on the perspectives of recollection, knowledge and ability, which are secondary compared to the information that the interview actually aims to obtain. The aim of the interview template is not to obtain information on what the children recall, know or are able to do but, instead, to uncover children's experiences of domestic violence. The children primarily reacted to these three strategies by applying three answering strategies. Primarily the children used an answering strategy in which they focused only on the used questioning strategy, therefore limiting their narration. The data also contained two further answering strategies where the children took the questioning strategy into consideration in their answers before producing their narration, or completely ignored the strategy.

By changing the wording of the original questions, the interviewers may have aimed to make it easier to address a difficult topic and therefore support the children's narration. Supporting children in various ways has been revealed as a factor promoting children's narration, particularly in the context of forensic interviews (Hershkowitz, Lamb, and Katz 2014). Adapting Helavirta (2007), it may be that the traditional question-answer setting of the interview template may have proven to work poorly when interacting with children. This may have led the interviewer to abandon the exact phrasing used in the template and supplement it with words related to the child's recollection, knowledge or ability, deemed more appropriate for the situation. The intention may have been to support the children's narrative space. However, our analysis reveals that the interaction that aimed to create space for the children's accounts actually restricted their narrative space. The questioning strategies of recollection, knowledge and ability had a two-fold impact on restricting the space afforded to the children's narratives. First, the strategies guided the children to assess their memory, knowledge and ability, which restricted their narrative space. Second, it is typical for the strategies to turn open-ended questions into closed-ended ones, therefore limiting potential answers. Closed-ended questions can be considered to pose a challenge to investigating experiences as respondents will only be able to either confirm or deny the statement. Indeed, questions with just two, pre-determined response alternatives strongly restrict the information that the recipient can provide (Iversen 2013). Eriksson (2023) obtained similar results in her study, in which closed-ended questions diminished children's participation and answers to questions. It is up to the respondent whether they will give further justifications for their answers to closed-ended questions. One explanatory factor for this is children's narrative agency (Kemppainen, Simola, and Koivula 2023).

It is feasible that the three questioning strategies are cultural ways used in posing questions to children. As a result, the interviewer did not expect the children to actually pay attention to or evaluate their recollection, knowledge or ability in their answers. On the other hand, the interview template included two closed-ended questions constructed on the questioning strategy of knowledge that may have served as a model for adopting the questions in an interaction. The analysis revealed how children understand the questions of recollection, knowledge and ability very literally. Children may not have enough experience with cultural and social interaction strategies and the ways adults ask questions of children.

Heritage (2012) considers it possible that the children's 'I don't know' and 'I can't remember' responses are ways in which children speak and contribute to an interaction that does not, as such, refer to any lack of cognitive competence. Indeed, we should recognize such answering strategies as children's ways to participate using an approach they have determined for themselves. The data also revealed that if, in answering a question that followed the phrasing used on the template, the child

referred to their forgetfulness, lack of knowledge or inability, the interviewer adapted their following questions to include this perspective. The children similarly adopted the questioning strategies used by the interviewer as their answering strategies. This phenomenon is known as intertextuality, in which linguistic choices are adopted or loaned from another person's speech (see Blommaert 2005). In interviews, intertextuality should be avoided as the function of a word choice will change as it is transferred from the respondent to the interviewer and vice versa. Participation strategies typical of children may have led to restricting their narrative space as a word choice used by the child related to recollection, knowledge or ability was adopted by the interviewer and then applied to the next question. Moreover, children's responses regarding forgetfulness and a lack of knowledge or ability should be examined both as a strategy applied by children in interactions as well as a potential outcome of intertextuality.

Previous studies have shown that children's narration in institutional interaction has been challenged by multiple factors, but a particular focus has been on children's inability or lack of linguistic skills. Based on this article, attention should be paid to the parts of interaction between interviewers and children that challenge children's opportunities for narration. The challenges described here emerged despite the use of an interview method developed to support employees and related instruction and training provided to them, all of which aim to make children's experiences heard. When the interview template was applied in an interactive situation, close-ended question chains emerged, restricting the children's narratives.

When asking children to report their experiences of domestic violence, increasing attention should be paid to the questioning strategies used in interaction, also when using a ready-made interview method. There is also reason to consider whether children should be provided with other ways to share their narratives (see Nikupeteri, Laitinen, and Kallinen 2022). Children's narration could be supported by creative methods that enable taking children's participatory and narrative strategies into account. The results of this article are considered to be transferable and applicable to similar situations in which representatives of an institution discuss children's experiences with them. The discussion may also concern topics other than domestic violence related to the children's experiences, and our findings are not solely confined to the context of a shelter but can also be applied to other institutional contexts.

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