

A collage of images featuring children and a woman, overlaid with a blue circular graphic. The images include a woman smiling, a young girl with yellow flowers in her hair, two boys smiling, and a woman looking directly at the camera.

**Children and Family
Research Center**

Understanding Suspect Confession in Child Sexual Abuse Cases

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Desirability of true suspect confession

- Serve the truth
- Relieve victims of burden of testifying
- Can facilitate treatment response
- Save the state time and money of a trial



Research needed on confession

- Only a handful of studies report confession rates in CSA cases
- Only one previous study has looked at factors that increase the likelihood of confession



Note on false confessions

- Some confessions can be false,
 - e.g., Central Park jogger case
- Research and advocacy suggest risk is higher than expected in felonies generally
- Little studied in relation to child abuse
 - But see, e.g. Wright, L. (1995) *Remembering Satan*
- Partial safeguard in the current study: 96% of confessions accompanied by child disclosure



Current study

- Secondary analysis of data from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Children's Advocacy Centers
- Four communities included in this study
 - 1 Alabama CAC
 - 1 Texas CAC
 - 2 Texas comparison communities



Methods

- Population of cases referred to CAC (CAC community) or prosecutors offices (non-CAC communities)
- Limited to adult suspects known to have been investigated or interrogated
- Case record review; N=282
- Multiple child, abuse, suspect and investigation variables analyzed



Questions

- What is the confession rate for CSA cases referred to prosecutors?
- What variables predict confession?
- What can jurisdictions do to increase true confessions?



Overall Confession Rate

- 30% across four communities
- Ranged from 28% to 35% -- not much variation



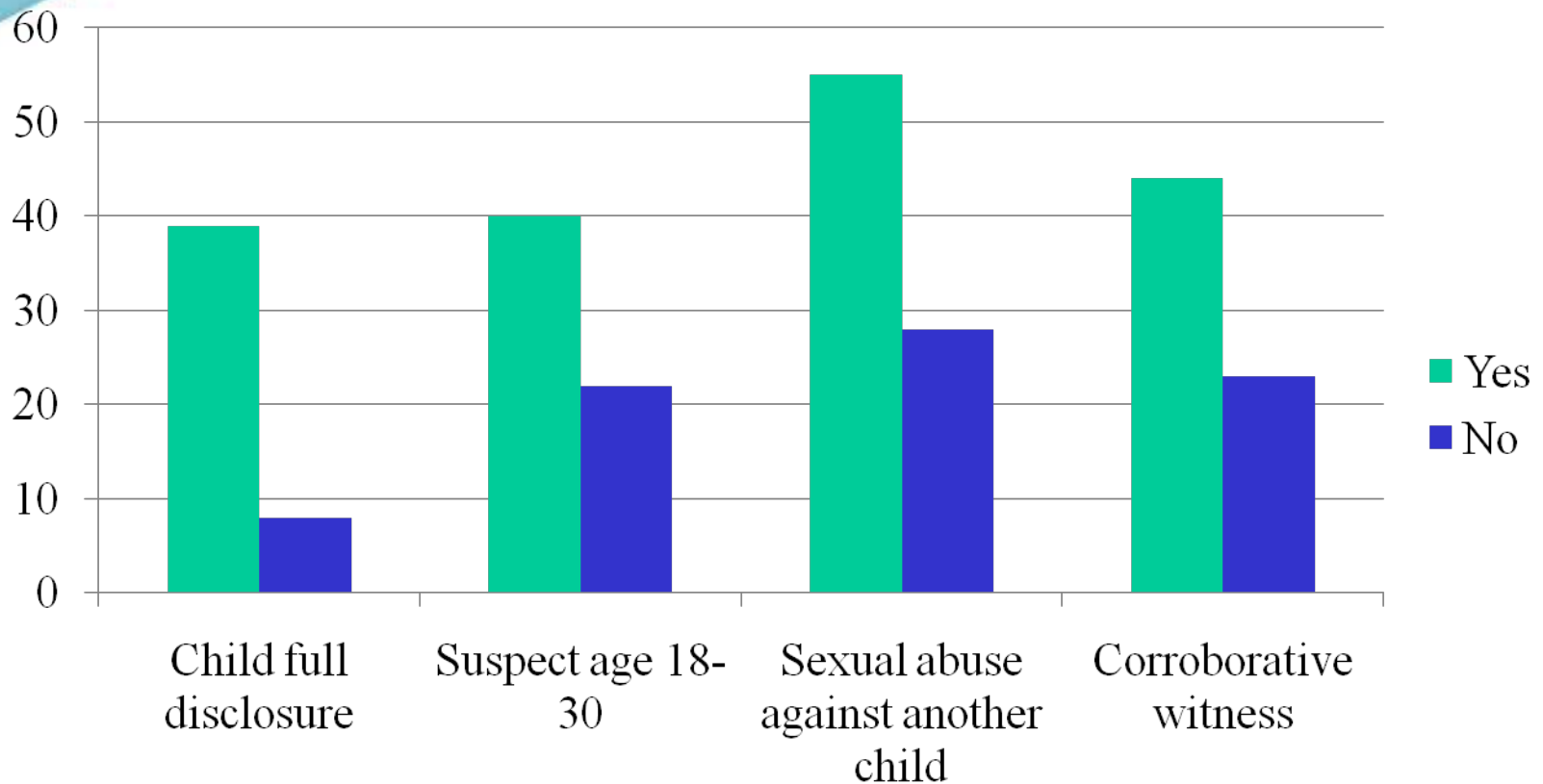
Significant Predictors of Confession

Multivariable Logistic Regression

Predictor	% of Cases	Odds Ratio	p
Full child disclosure	73%	3.54	.02
Suspect age	44% age 18-30	.96	.01
CSA against another child	8%	2.82	.06
Corroborative witness	33%	2.29	.01



Significant predictors in terms of confession rates





Implications

- Helping children disclose is even more important because of its link to suspect confession
- Seeking corroborative evidence is promising in terms of number of cases affected and impact on confession
- Evidence from a report on a 2nd victim increased confessions but occurred rarely



NCPTC methods for obtaining corroborative evidence

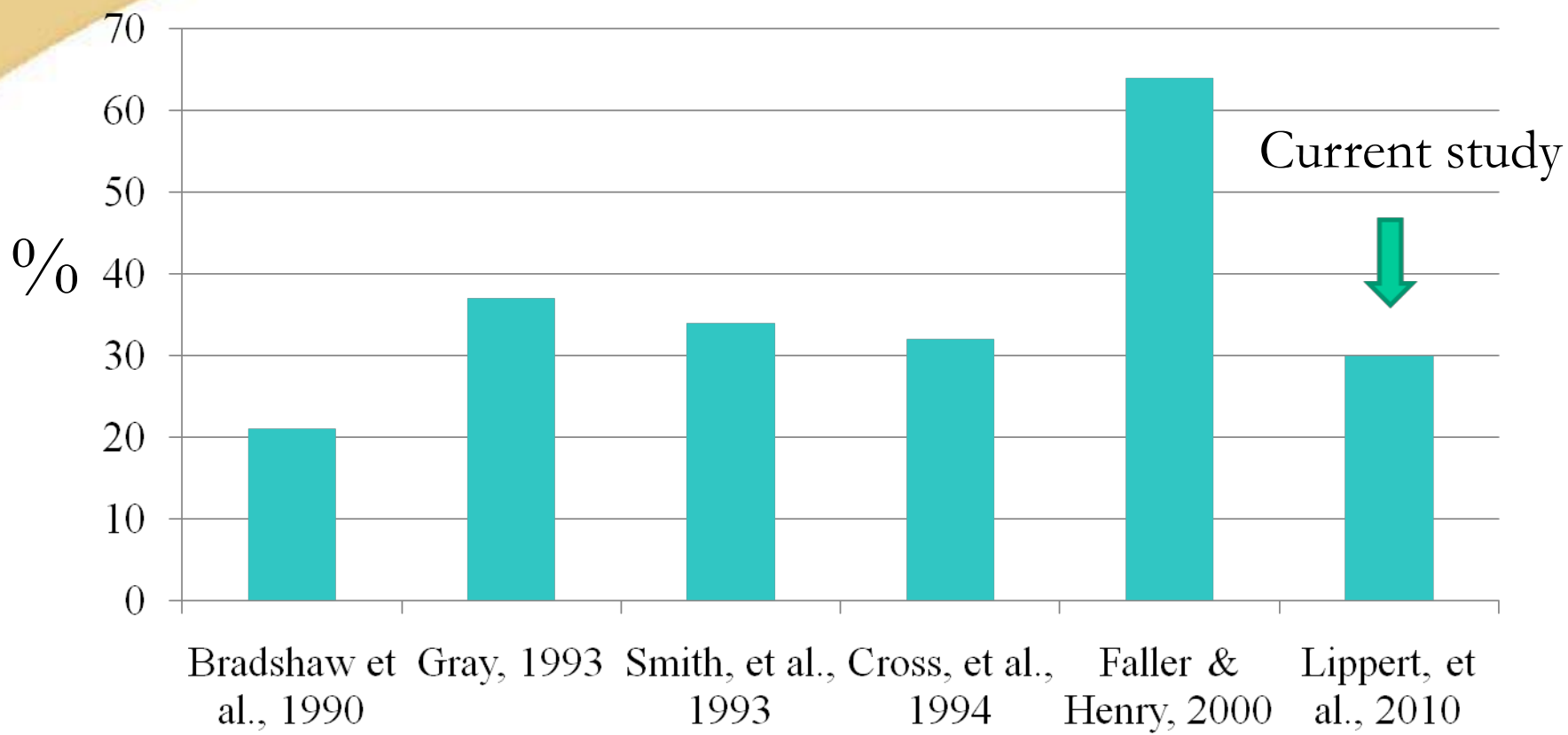
- Enhanced crime scene evaluation, esp. photos
- Seek corroboration for every detail provided by child
- Seek to corroborate child's credibility as well as abuse
- Training in interviewing suspects and obtaining self-incriminating statements
- See ncptc.org



Comparing confession rates across studies offers additional insights

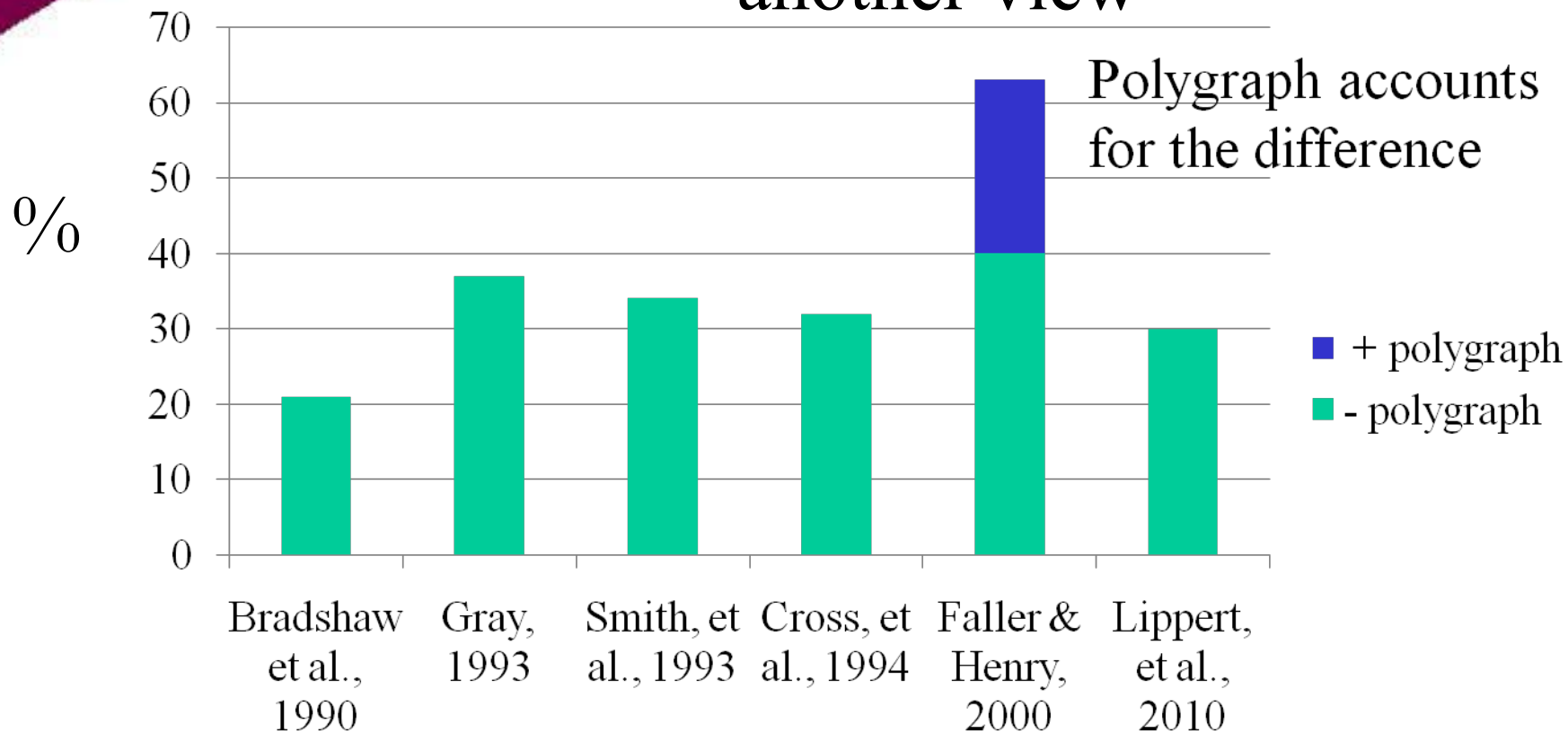


Confession rates across studies





Confession rates across studies – another view





More on role of polygraph in Faller & Henry, 2000

- The jurisdiction they studied systematically offered suspects an opportunity to take a polygraph test
- Investigation was dropped for suspects who passed polygraph test
- But polygraph added to the confession rate: 22.6% confessed after taking a polygraph test (see Lippert et al., 2010)



Complicated role of polygraph

- Ample evidence that polygraph increases likelihood of confession (Cross & Saxe, 2001), particularly when used by skilled interrogator (see, e.g., Staller & Faller, 2010)
- However, Faller (1997) found no correlation between polygraph findings and other CSA evidence, and most scientists say polygraph testing lacks validity (National Research Council, 2003)
- Yet some jurisdictions drop investigations if suspects pass a polygraph test



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