

# Inside Grants: National Institute of Justice Grant Funding

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The [National Institute of Justice \(NIJ\)](#) is an agency in the U.S. Department of Justice that uses science to improve knowledge and understanding of crime and justice issues to create tools for decision makers to reduce crime and advance justice.



Gail S. Goodman, University of California, Davis

APS James McKeen Cattell Award recipient Gail S. Goodman is a distinguished professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis. Her doctoral training is in developmental psychology. She obtained her degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles and was a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Denver and the Université René Descartes in Paris. Her NIH-funded research project is titled “Long-Term Eyewitness Memory in Children Exposed to Violence.”

### **What are you researching?**

The research concerns a longitudinal study of child maltreatment and memory. I had conducted a study with Dr. Mitchell Eisen on maltreated children’s memory and suggestibility in the mid-1990s. It was published in *Developmental Psychology* and funded by the [National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect \(NCCAN\)](#), which was part of the U.S. Administration for Children and Families. NCCAN was devoted to research on child maltreatment, but unfortunately their broad research mission ended; more research on child maltreatment is still badly needed today. We were delighted to receive the NCCAN grant because, at that time, there was no study like it on maltreated children involved in actual forensic interviews. We collected data on memory and suggestibility (e.g., about a forensic medical examination), disclosure of maltreatment, IQ, and more.

### **Grant Information**

- Country/region: United States
- Organization: National Institute of Justice
- Grant Mechanism: NIJ FY13 Research and Evaluation of Children Exposed to Violence
- Amount: \$439,989

I had always wanted to follow-up with the maltreated children we had studied, but it took years before several crucial factors came together to obtain the NIJ grant:

1. The maltreated children had turned 18 years old or older and thus could give their own consent to participate in research.
2. Dr. Eisen handed me a surprise videotape he had made of the facility where the initial study had taken place (a 5-day residential forensic unit for evaluation of child maltreatment). I realized that with that videotape, I could propose interviewing the past participants using random assignment-to-interview conditions, with one condition being showing the videotape to reignite childhood memories of the forensic unit, something no one in science had accomplished before.
3. A psychology doctoral student in my lab, now Dr. Deborah Goldfarb, J.D., showed special interest in the longitudinal project. As she already had a law degree, she was the right person to help write law-related parts of the grant proposal and oversee the study.
4. Debbie and I collected pilot data on a small subset of the past participants and obtained fascinating results (see Goldfarb et al., 2019 in *Clinical Psychological Science*), so we could write into the NIJ grant proposal that the study could be fruitfully conducted.
5. Eric Holder was the U.S. Attorney General at the time, and, as such, he oversaw NIJ. He and the NIJ director put in place a special unit to support research on children exposed to violence. Without Holder's insight, funding from NIJ might not have been forthcoming.

In short, many forces had to be in place to obtain the funding needed to conduct what turned out to be a demanding longitudinal project.

It took years to plan the study, get Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (the study was reviewed by UC Davis's IRB and also an IRB at NIJ), obtain the training we needed (a shout-out to Dr. Ron Fisher who trained us on the Cognitive Interview), and recruit participants. The hardest part was tracking down the former participants and convincing them to be involved in our research project.

This kind of study is not for everyone as it is emotionally challenging: We often cried with the participants as they recounted their pasts and why they ended up at the forensic unit all those years before. As children, many had tried to protect their parents and just wanted to return home, despite the abuse and neglect. In interviewing them as adults, we found overall that there was more maltreatment than we ever knew about from what little they disclosed as children.

[\*See all Inside Grants columns\*](#)

Scoring the study also was a large endeavor because we had to devise scoring systems, obtain reliability

of coding, and then analyze the data. Several publications ensued (e.g., [Goldfarb et al., 2022 in \*Clinical Psychological Science\*](#); [Wu et al., 2023 in \*Child Maltreatment\*](#)), and more will be coming out soon. The Goldfarb et al. (2022) study used the videotape Mitch had made in the 1990s, along with the Cognitive Interview, in an attempt to reawaken the childhood memories. It turned out that the Cognitive Interview—with or without the videotape—was especially helpful in supporting the participants' focus on what really happened at the forensic unit (during the forensic medical examination) as opposed to relying on “scripts” of what was expected but did not take place.

### **How has your grant from the National Institute of Justice supported your work?**

Federal government funding was crucial for the success of this project. The NIJ portion was part of Attorney General Eric Holder's focus on the contribution of childhood trauma to later outcomes. Of importance, a grant from the [Law and Science section of the National Science Foundation](#) also supported the study. Longitudinal research on low-income, hard-to-reach samples who live in another state is time-consuming but well worth the investment.

### **What was the application process like?**

We were fortunate to receive NIJ funding. It helped that we had collected pilot data and obtained interesting findings that we could report in the grant proposal. The initial application was much like any federal grant but with a focus on applied issues as well as theoretical ones, and with a flashy cover page. However, during the review process, we were asked to prepare three different budgets, in case the agency ran short of money to fund the full project. They then funded the amount we originally asked for, thank goodness. UC Davis's IRB took a year to approve the study, and then NIJ's review of the budget and ethics took another year. We were more than ready to start. The initial program officer was a terrific advocate, and the budget person assigned became a good friend. They recognized the study's importance.

When I submit a grant application, it is almost always a huge effort, and everything else goes by the wayside. Then I try hard to forget about the application, assuming I will not obtain funding. I move on to all the overdue work that has piled up (e.g., overdue reviews, student papers, publications) and the next project and deadline. Sometimes I use the first grant as a practice, and revise and submit it elsewhere. In any case, when a federal agency calls with good news, usually after many months, I am totally surprised—thrilled, really—and incredibly grateful.

### **What advice do you have for other researchers applying for grants from the National Institute of Justice?**

Go with your strengths. If you have a track record for a certain type of research, that helps. Also, NIJ has certain topics they want to fund. Pick a topic that fits with the NIJ call and make sure you have strong methodology. It also helps to have co-investigators who add expertise (e.g., a quantitative expert, a legal expert). NIJ focuses on applied research, so emphasize your intended application, even though there may be important theoretical implications behind the research.

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### **Anything else you wish to add?**

Don't give up. If you have an important topic, find the right audience. You may need to look beyond the typical funding bodies.

A bit more: The study NIH and NSF funded builds on a special sample of children who had been involved in child maltreatment investigations. It can help tremendously to have a collaborator who is closely tied to the agency of interest. The initial study was based on research Dr. Karen Saywitz and I published in 1991 on children's memory for anogenital examinations. This research was the first of its kind. Dr. Eisen read that study and realized an important take off on that research could be conducted where he worked in a child maltreatment evaluation center. Fortunately, he called me (back in the early 1990s) and left a voice message. About a month later, I remembered to return the call. I have been devoted to that project ever since.

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