

Research Raises Questions About Age Progression Photographs of Missing Children

April 30 2009

(PhysOrg.com) -- When a child goes missing, law enforcement agencies often digitally alter old photos to show how the child might have aged. In one of the first laboratory studies to test the effectiveness of these photographs, researchers at the University of Arkansas came away with troubling findings and more questions for an ongoing study of computerized age progression.

Their initial research found that the [photos](#) did not improve recognition of children's faces.

“The good news was that in all three situations tested, people were able to spot the child's face at a rate better than chance, with or without seeing the age progression photos,” psychology professor James M. Lampinen said. “This suggests that people have an intuition about age progression.”

Lampinen and colleagues Jack D. Arnal and Jason L. Hicks conducted a series of laboratory exercises in which participants were asked to imagine that four children had gone missing several years ago. They were shown photos of the children that had been age-progressed from a photo taken at age 7 to what the child might look like at age 12. Later they were asked to identify the children from a photo line-up using actual photographs of the 12-year-old child.

Seeing age-progressed photos did not lead to better identification of the children, findings the researchers called troubling, since in many cases a current photo of a missing child is not available.

This study is an initial look at age progression and is part of a larger ongoing program of research aimed at improving the chances of recovering missing individuals. Noting that this study focused on only one age progression, from age 7 to age 12, the researchers suggested that success of the technique “may depend crucially on how much the pictures are age progressed, as well as the starting points and end points of the age progression and the particular age progression techniques used.” The researchers also noted the importance of examining [children](#) of different races and ethnicities. All of these issues will be addressed in future work.

The results of the initial study of age-progressed photos were included in “Prospective Person Memory,” a chapter in Applied Memory, edited by Matthew R. Kelley and published by Nova Science Publishers.

Provided by University of Arkansas ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Research Raises Questions About Age Progression Photographs of Missing Children (2009, April 30) retrieved 16 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-age-children.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.