

**Centennial Honors College  
Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day 2024**

**ABSTRACT**

Major: Psychology

Poster

Faculty Mentor(s): Kathy McGuire

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**The Effects of Age and Disability Status on Jurors' Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse Victims**

**Jayla Carle**

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The purpose of this study was to examine how age and disability status interact to influence the perceived credibility of child testimony of child sexual abuse (CSA). While CSA victim age has been studied, there is little to no research examining how being a typically developing child, having an intellectual disability, or having a physical disability impacts perceptions of CSA victims. This is important because younger CSA victims have been found to be perceived as more credible due to their sexual naivety. Intellectually disabled CSA victims have also been found to be more credible because of their perceived sexual naivety. For physically disabled CSA victims, there has been not much research but the little there is suggests that they may be viewed similarly to either of the two previously mentioned groups. Participants of this study were assigned to one of six groups and read the corresponding vignette. After, they completed a survey asking about credibility, blame, and attitudes towards disabled persons. Results of this study suggest that age nor disability status does not significantly influence the perceived victim's overall credibility. However, it was found that disability status does influence perceived victim believability. Finally, it was found that participant gender impacted perceived victim credibility. From the results, it can be concluded that disability status may influence victim credibility. Lastly, the age of child victims may not have much of an impact if the child is still being perceived as very young by the observer.