Police perceptions of eyewitness evidence and research

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Overview

• Why is eyewitness research important?

• What do police know about research and recommendations?

• What are their thoughts about the relationship between police and researchers?

• What is their access to research and recommendations?

• What are their thoughts on current practices?
Eyewitness research...
Why?

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Years in Prison:

1-3  4-6  7-9  10-12  13-15  16-18  19-21  22-24  25-27
Wrongful convictions:

- 311 people exonerated to date
- 18 people had been sentenced to death before DNA proved their innocence and led to their release
- The average sentence served is 13.6 years
- Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions, accounting for more than 70% of convictions overturned
Exploring the relationship between research and practice

Forensic and Police Psychology are expanding research fields

Eyewitness research accounts for around a third of this (Snook et al, 2009)

Wide array of topics:
• System variables – within CJS control
  • ID procedures: double blind, instructions, feedback
  • Line-up format: choice/number or foils, presentation

• Estimator variables – outside of CJS control
  • Demographic factors, encoding conditions, crime type
Exploring the relationship between research and practice

Plenty of research, but the uptake of evidence based practice is varied between and within countries

Aim was to explore barriers preventing implementation of research evidence, and to determine whether:

- research findings are being communicated effectively
- research methods are deemed suitable by police
The Survey

Method
- Web based survey
- Focus Groups with Met and GMP

Respondents
- 32 have worked in ID suites
- 121 staff who have never worked in an ID suite

![ID Experience Graph]
Knowledge of existing research evidence
Knowledge of research

1 = I try to keep up to date by reading relevant material and attending conferences
2 = I occasionally read relevant material
3 = I have read some research
4 = I have heard about research from other policing staff
5 = I don’t know anything

$\chi^2(4) = 20.5, \ p < .001$
Knowledge of recommendations

χ²(4) = 23.4, p < .001

1 = Very familiar
2 = Some idea
3 = Vague idea
4 = No idea
5 = Didn’t know they existed
Familiarity with techniques

1 = Sequential presentation
2 = Double blind testing
3 = Confidence ratings
4 = Mystery person
5 = Elimination lineups

All at $p < .001$
Evaluation of current researcher/police relationship
Involvement in research?

- No:
  - Other: 80
  - ID Staff: 70

- Yes:
  - Other: 10
  - ID Staff: 20

Did the research lead to any practical outcomes?

- No:
  - Other: 90
  - ID Staff: 80

- Yes:
  - Other: 10
  - ID Staff: 20
What prevents research evidence being put into practice

1 = Questions too academic
2 = Methods not applied enough
3 = Analysis too complex
4 = Conclusions too complex
5 = Project went well, but then nothing happens
Effectiveness of researcher/police relationship

- Very effective:
  - ID Staff
  - Other

- Very ineffective:
  - ID Staff
  - Other

NS
What should the relationship be?

1 = Researchers and police should work separately

2 = Police should not be involved in conducting research and researchers should keep them up to date

3 = Police should not be involved in conducting research and their force should keep them up to date

4 = Police and researchers should work together as much as possible

---

1

2

3

4

%
Access to research
Police access to research findings

No access at all

Ok access

Excellent access

Other

ID Staff

NS
Methods for disseminating research evidence

Social media sites/blogs

Subscription to paper based research articles

Online discussion forums

All NS
Methods for disseminating research evidence

Online access to original research articles

Online access to plain English summaries
Evaluation of current ID practice
Effectiveness of current ID practice

1 = They work very well
2 = They generally work well, and don't need much improvement
3 = Some aspects work well, but changes are needed
4 = They don't work that well, and significant changes are needed
5 = They are in need of a complete overhaul

\[ \chi^2(4) = 11.8, \ p < .05 \]
What should changes aim to do?

1 = Increase positive identifications
2 = Reduce misidentifications
3 = Increase positive, but not at cost of also increasing misidentifications
4 = Reduce misidentifications, but not at cost of also reducing positive identifications

ID Staff
Other

NS
Our guess at what researchers would answer

1 = Increase positive identifications
2 = Reduce misidentifications
3 = Increase positive, but not at cost of also increasing misidentifications
4 = Reduce misidentifications, but not at cost of also reducing positive identifications
In what percentage of ID procedures do you think the witness makes a positive identification?

- Research suggests around 36% - 48% (Slater, 1994; Behrman & Davey, 2001)
- Our survey: Mean = 40.56

In what % is the suspect in the parade not the perpetrator

- Research suggests around 20% (Clark and Godfrey, 2009)
- Our survey: Mean = 20.76 (or 1 in 5 suspects are not guilty)
- Range = 0% to 80 % (only 10% believe it is more than 50%)
Speed

• “the process time between offence and ID is too long”

• “they take too long to arrange, the procedure is difficult and time consuming”

• “The time taken to run an ID parade - from arrest to parade - is often quite an issue, with victims viewing a parade sometimes weeks after an incident. This obviously impacts on the likelihood of success.”
Stacked in favour of suspect (in terms of appearance)

- “Solicitors are allowed to choose people who look almost identical.”

- “The 'line up' is usually chosen by the solicitor and made up of people who look extremely similar to the suspect. The 'covering up' of distinctive marks/scars is frankly crazy.”

- “The odds appear to be stacked in favour of the suspect. e.g male with tattoo on face, the tattoo was edited out so the id parade could take place the victim could not id the suspect.”
• Fundamental difference in goals of police (pos ID) and research (mis ID)

• Knowledge of research, techniques and particularly recommendations are poor

• Current collaborations do not lead to practical outcomes and the complexity of analysis and conclusions is one barrier

• Police believe they should collaborate with researchers as much as possible

• Current access to research is very poor

• Police would like access to plain English summaries of research