



Police Fitness for Providing Witness Testimony in Criminal Cases

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Introduction

- This presentation discusses police credibility to testify as witnesses. Police officers are assumed competent to testify in criminal cases unless there is a reason to question their competence (Guller, 2010).
- Witnesses need to meet only minimal requirements to qualify as fact witnesses in a criminal court case (Guller, 2010).
- Hard evidence is essential in trials but witness testimony is favored by judges in criminal court cases (Guller, 2010).

Forensic Implications

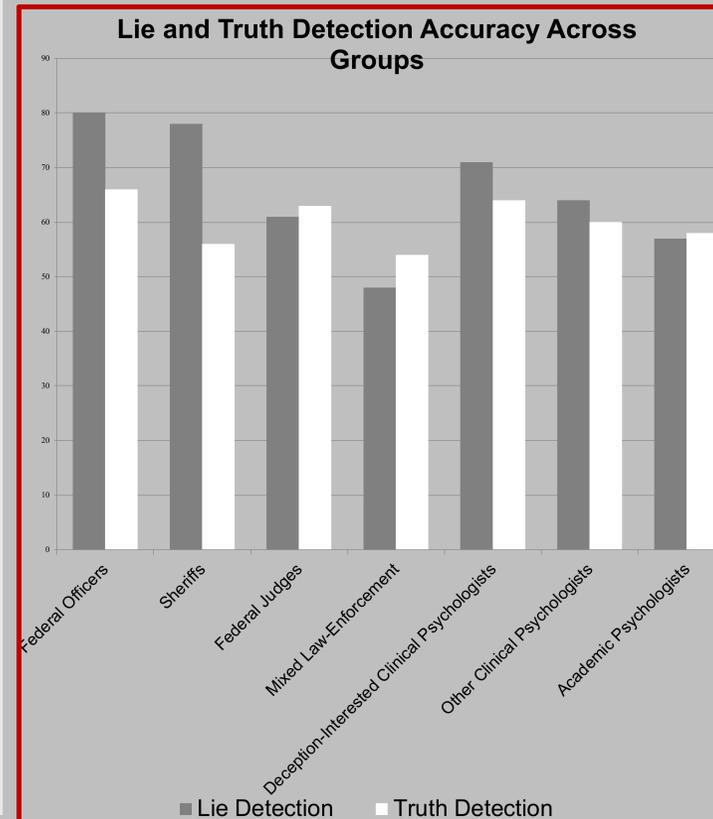
- Lasting effects resulting from working in a stressful environment include law enforcement officers experiencing PTSD and anxiety (Seigfried-Speller, 2017).
- Police officers experience exposure to violence, long work shifts, inadequate resources, sleep disturbances, and aggressive behavior (Galatzer-Levy, Brown, Henn-Haase, Metzler, Neylan, & Marmar, 2013).
- In addition, officers may experience work-related stress and job dissatisfaction (Seigfried-Speller, 2017).
- Stress and job hazards have been shown to affect police testimony (Guller, 2010).

Police Fitness to Testify

- Police sometimes lie under oath while testifying (Goldschmidt, 2008; Wilson, 2010).
- Therefore, judges would ideally be able to distinguish lying witnesses from truthful witnesses.
- However, research suggests that judges may not be effective at detecting lies.
- Ekman, O'Sullivan, and Frank (1999) conducted studies to determine if law enforcers, federal judges, CIA agents, and college students were able to detect liars using the Facial Action Coding System.
- The results determined that the CIA agents were the best at detecting liars.
- In a similar study, Garrido, Masip, and Herrero (2004) found that judges were the least able to discern a liar.
- Thus, the research suggests that police officers sometimes lie when providing testimony and the lying is not detected by judges.

Conclusions

- Although law enforcement testimony is an essential part of criminal trials, research suggests that police officers sometimes lie in their testimony and the lying may remain undetected.
- Additional research is needed to better understand the circumstances in which police may lie and how others (e.g., judges, attorneys, forensic psychologists) can detect lying.



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