

Putting Research Evidence into Practice using The Mystery Face Procedure (2017)

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Executive summary

There can be little doubt that there has been both a very large amount of psychological research on eyewitness identification and that this research has had considerable impact on policing procedures and practice. There is also little doubt that a great deal more needs to be done to limit the miscarriages of justice that arise from inaccurate eyewitness identification. Part of the problem is that the results of research and the recommendations of researchers aimed at limiting the extent of miscarriages of justice are not currently reflected in policing legislation or procedural guidelines. For example, the use of double blind procedures by the world's police forces is very rare indeed, despite its prominence in APA and BPS recommendations. The current project set out to explore some of the reasons behind the disjuncture between research and practice by surveying UK police officer's knowledge of and attitudes towards eyewitness research, and also their opinions of current practice in this area. The results, that the police (even those actively involved in eyewitness identification) have a very poor knowledge of research and recommendations in the area, are similar to analysis of comparable professions, such as health workers. Perhaps problematically, the survey also showed that officers believe current procedures work well, though there also appeared to be a desire to learn more about research. Interestingly, officer's estimates of rates of choosing and identifying an innocent suspect were comparable to those from research. Taken together with responses about what changes to procedure should aim to do, this result indicates that a key potential problem remains the difference between the underlying goals of researchers and police.