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OBTAINING BEST EVIDENCE FROM YOUNG EYEWITNESSES: INVESTIGATING CHANGES IN PRACTICE FOLLOWING THE VULNERABLE WITNESS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Dr Catriona Havard
Research Fellow
University of Aberdeen
E-mail: c.havard@abdn.ac.uk

Summary: The aim of this project was to investigate identification from video (VIPER) parades using both experimental and field research. The experimental research has shown that video parades can be a useful tool for identification and can sometimes reduce false identifications for adolescents, as compared to photographic lineups. Other factors that need to be considered when a witness makes an identification are how long they have seen the suspect for, whether the suspect is the same age or race as the witness, and how long ago it was that the event took place. The field research comprised of a survey of all VIPER operators in Scotland and analyses are still underway. Preliminary results have also shown that there are some issues that can influence identification, such as the age of the witness, the type of crime, and whether they were a victim.

INTRODUCTION

Under the provisions of the Vulnerable Witness Act (2004) Scotland, any person under the age of 16 years who witnesses crime where identification is an issue may have to make an identification via a video (VIPER) parade. However, no research to date has investigated how well children and adolescents can make correct identifications using these types of parades. The aim of the project is to investigate the use of VIPER parades in Scotland using a two pronged approach. This involves carrying out experimental studies in schools examining children's and adolescent's ability to identify a stranger from a VIPER parade and also a survey of VIPER users in Scotland recording the behaviour of witnesses presented with the parades. The following report will briefly summarise the results gathered so far from both the experimental and field research and also any future research.

MAJOR FINDINGS TO DATE

Experimental/Laboratory Research

Study 1

The aim of study 1 was to investigate how accurately children and adolescents could identify a stranger they have seen for a brief period of time from a video (VIPER) lineup, as compared to a static photographic lineup. Research with adults has found that showing a video parade can reduce false identifications when the suspect is absent from the parade, without reducing correct identifications when the suspect is present (Valentine, Darling & Memon, 2007). In this study a stranger (target) interrupted either a classroom or an assembly for a maximum of 3 minutes, and then 3-4 days later there was an identification task where the participants had to pick the stranger from either a lineup where the target was present, or one where the target was absent. 215 participants, aged between 7-9 and 13- 14 years, were recruited from state run primary and secondary schools in Aberdeen city centre.

The results found that when the target was present in the lineup, 63% of participants made a correct identification (ID), 15% incorrectly chose a foil i.e. someone else from the lineup (foil ID) and 22 % incorrectly rejected the lineup saying the target was not present. There were no differences in correct IDs for either age group, or for the photo or video lineups. However, when the target was absent and the correct response was to say the 'the person is not

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there' the older age group (78%) were more accurate than the younger age group (26%) for the video lineups. This study shows that using video parades can be beneficial at preventing false identifications by adolescents, but younger children were still likely to choose someone from the lineup.

Study 2

The aim of study 2 was to investigate whether the length of exposure, i.e. how long a witness sees a culprit, influences identification from a VIPER parade. Research with adults has found that seeing a person for longer can increase correct identification (Memon, Hope & Bull, 2003; Read, 1995) and when the target is absent from the lineup it can either reduce false identification (Memon et al., 2003) or increase it (Read, 1995). 164 participants were recruited from state run primary and secondary schools in Aberdeen city centre. There were two age groups, 7-9 and 13-14 years. Participants viewed a film of a staged crime with two male suspects, one of which was seen for 3 minutes and the other was seen for 1 minute.

The results for the target present lineups found that 40% of participants correctly identified both targets (correct ID), 37% incorrectly chose foils from the lineup (foil ID) and 23% incorrectly rejected the lineup saying the target was not present. There was no effect of target exposure, as both targets were identified equally regardless of how long they had been seen and there were also no differences between the two age groups. When the target was absent from the lineups, 35% of participants correctly stated the target was not present (correct rejection) and 65% chose a member from the lineup (false ID). However, participants were less likely to falsely identify someone from the lineup for the target with the long exposure, as compared to the target with the short exposure. This study showed that seeing a culprit for longer does not always increase correct identification from a lineup, but can reduce the chance that someone else is falsely identified from a VIPER lineup.

Study 3

The aim of this study was to investigate whether children are more accurate at identifying someone their own age, as compared to identifying an adult from a VIPER parade. Research from face recognition has found that people are better at recognising faces that are similar to their own age (Anastasi & Rhodes, 2005). Participants viewed two short films of a stage crime that were identical except one had an adult actor (aged 26) as the target and the other had a child (aged 9) as the target. 50 children aged between 6 to 8 years of age were recruited from Aberdeen city schools.

The results found that when the child target was present in the lineup, 80% of children made a correct ID, 20% made a foil ID and no children incorrectly rejected the lineup. When the adult was present in the lineup, only 36% of children made a correct ID, 56% made a foil ID and 8% incorrectly rejected the lineup. When the child target was absent from the lineup, 48% of children correctly rejected the lineup and 52% made a false ID. When the adult was absent from the lineup, only 28% made a correct rejection and 72% made a false ID. This study has shown that children are not only better at correctly identifying a suspect their own age as compared to an adult but are also less likely to falsely identify a suspect from their own age group.

Study 4

The aim of this study was to investigate whether children and adolescents are better at correctly identifying someone who is the same race (Caucasian) as compared to a different race (Asian). Research has shown that we are better at recognising faces that belong to our own race compared to other races, this has been called the Cross Race Effect (CRE); see Meissner & Brigham (2001) and Sporer (2001) for reviews. Participants viewed two short films of a staged crime that were identical except that one had a Caucasian target and the other had an Asian target. 142 participants were recruited from state run primary and secondary schools in Aberdeen city centre. 84 were from older age group (12-14 yrs), and 58 were from the younger age group (7-9 yrs), the data collection for the remaining participants is due to take place in April 2009.

The results gathered so far have found that for the target present lineups with the Caucasian target, the correct ID rate was 54%, the Foil ID rate was 30% and the incorrect reject rate was 16%. For the target present lineups with the Asian actor, the correct ID rate was 21%, the foil ID was 59% and the incorrect rejection rate was 9%. When the Caucasian target was absent from the lineup, the correct rejection rate was 53% and 47% of the participants

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made a false ID. When the Asian actor was absent from the lineup 31% of participants correctly rejected the lineup and 69% made a false ID. The preliminary results appear to show that the Asian target was significantly less likely to be correctly identified than the Caucasian target and when the Asian target was absent from the lineup there was a higher false ID rate as compared to the Caucasian lineups.

Study 5

The aim of this study was to examine whether increasing the delay between witnessing an event and carrying out an identification task would decrease correct identification. Some field research has found that a longer delay between witnessing an event and carrying out an identification task decreases the chance the witness will identify a suspect (Behrman & Davey, 2001), however not all field studies have found an effect of delay (Valentine, Pickering & Darling, 2003). Participants witnessed a short live presentation and then after either a delay of 2 days or 2 weeks made an identification from either a TP or TA lineup. 164 participants were recruited, 114 were from the younger age group (7-8 years) and 50 from the older age group (13-14 years), data collection for the remaining participants will take place in April 2009.

The preliminary results have found that for the TP lineups after a 2 day delay, 62% of participants correctly identified the target, but after a 2 week delay this dropped to 49%. For the TA lineups participants after a 2 day delay, 51% of participants correctly said the target wasn't present, whereas after 2 weeks this dropped to 26%. The data collected thus far appears to show that increasing the delay can not only decrease correct identification, but when the target is not present in the lineup it can increase the false identification rate.

Field Research

The questionnaire for the VIPER operators was distributed to all the Scottish Police Forces and we received 1719 completed questionnaires from all the forces for VIPER parades conducted from January until December 2008. The questionnaire recorded a variety of details such as the demographics of the witness and suspect, also whether the witness was a victim of the crime, what the type of crime was and whether the suspect was known to the witness. There were also procedural details such as the delay between witnessing the event and seeing the lineup, number of members in the lineup, and the type of identification made. Analyses are still ongoing, but here are some preliminary results.

Table 1.The identification outcomes for witness variables (number of witnesses in parentheses)

	Suspect ID	Foil ID	No ID
Gender of witness			
Female	64.7% (531)	26.2% (215)	9.1% (75)
Male	59.7% (531)	30.3% (269)	10% (89)
Age of witness			
<16	79.1% (450)	16.2% (92)	4.7% (27)
17-25	61.6% (257)	30.9% (129)	7.4% (31)
26-40	55.5% (187)	34.1% (115)	10.4% (35)
41-60	49.3% (138)	34.6 %(97)	16.1% (45)
>61	27.8% (30)	48.1% (52)	24.1% (26)
Role of witness			
Victim	72.3% (487)	21.4% (144)	6.4% (43)
Bystander	56.2% (510)	32.7% (297)	11% (100)
Is the suspect known to the witness			
Known	92.5%	6.1%	1.4%
Unknown	43.6%	41.9%	14.5%
All	62%	28.4%	9.6%

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Table 2. The identification outcomes as a function of the crime the suspect was charged with.

Crime group	Suspect ID	Foil ID	No ID
Violence	61.6% (674)	28.6% (313)	9.9% (108)
Indecency	79.1% (182)	16.5% (38)	4.3% (10)
Dishonesty	31.8% (56)	50% (88)	18.2% (32)
Other crimes	71.1% (140)	21.8% (43)	7.1% (14)

NB The crime categories were also collapsed so that groups 4 (fire-raising) 5 (other crimes), 6 (miscellaneous offences) and 7 (offences relating to motor vehicles) were combined into one group, due to low cell values.

Table 3. Identification Outcome and delay

Delay	Suspect ID	Foil ID	No ID
< 1 week	56.6 % (146)	31.8 % (82)	11.6 % (30)
< 1 month	58.8 % (368)	33.1 % (207)	8.1 % (51)
< 2 month	64.3 % (108)	23.2 % (39)	12.5 % (21)
< 3 month	67.8 % (97)	24.5 % (35)	7.7 % (11)
< 4 month	60.8 % (73)	31.7 % (38)	7.5% (9)
< 5 month	58.5% (38)	16.9% (11)	24.6%(16)
< 6 month	84.6% (33)	12.8% (5)	9.7% (25)
> 6 month	67.4 % (174)	22.9% (59)	9.7% (25)

FUTURE WORK

Future work will involve completing the experimental research by completing data collection for study 4 & 5 and also conducting study 6 which will investigate how a change in appearance can influence identification. These studies will then be written up to be published in peer reviewed journals. The data collected from the questionnaires will also be fully analysed and written up in both academic and police journals.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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