

The effect of profiler expertise and additional profiling information on juror verdicts and perceptions of guilt.

Introduction

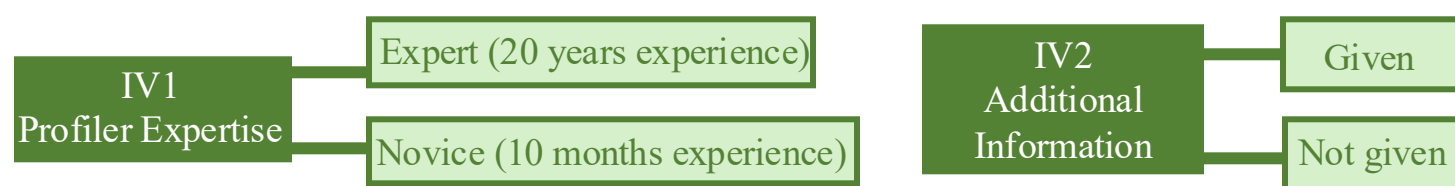
- Profiling is a technique used to identify personality and behavioural characteristics of individuals (Douglas *et al*, 1986)
- Previous research has investigated profiling accuracy (Kocsis, Hayes & Irwin, 2002), the influence of expert testimony (Penrod & Cutler, 1989) and the influence of author expertise (Kocsis & Hayes, 2004)
- Bandura (2008) suggested that the public are significantly influenced by the beliefs and cognitions surrounding offender profiling, and De Beuf *et al* (2025) found that additional information has an influence on the verdicts given by jurors
- These studies all considered different elements of offender profiles, but the combination of them has never been tested



- This study addressed this gap by testing how additional information (strengths and weaknesses and perceived expertise) likely to be presented alongside a profile in a trial, influenced juror verdicts and perceptions of guilt, with the aim of testing whether offender profiles should be accepted as evidence in court
- **Hypothesis 1:** There will be an effect of the expertise of the profiler on the perceived percentage of guilt of the defendant in the case.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There will be an effect of whether additional information about profiling is provided or not on the perceived percentage of guilt of the defendant in the case.
- **Hypothesis 3:** There will be an interaction between the profiler expertise and the provision of additional information on the perceived percentage guilt of the defendant in the case.

Method

- This study used a between-groups design and had 2 IVs, each with 2 levels



- There were 3 DVs: verdict given (guilty or not guilty), percentage likelihood of guilt (0-100%) and weight given to profile (0-100%)

- There were 4 conditions for the study:

- 1) Novice profiler + additional information
- 2) Novice profiler + no additional information
- 3) Expert profiler + additional information
- 4) Expert profiler + no additional information



- There was a total of 124 participants (mean age = 26, SD = 10.98) recruited via opportunity and snowball sampling
- The only exclusion criteria was age (18-76) to fit within the age parameters of UK jurors
- The study took place on the online platform Qualtrics, where participants were randomly allocated to one condition
- Participants were shown an information sheet and consent form before taking part, then filled out demographic questions (age, gender and unique identifier)
- All participants were then given details of a non-graphic sexual assault case based on a real case where the defendant was wrongfully found guilty
- They then read an offender profile, then depending on their condition were given a combination of profiler expertise and additional information
- Participants then answered 3 questions (verdict, likelihood of guilt and weight given to profile), then justified their responses before being debriefed
- Ethical considerations – The study involved deception and risk of discomfort due to the nature of the case. The deception was fully explained in the debrief, and participants could self-exclude from the study if uncomfortable with the study themes

Discussion



Key findings:

- Only additional information had a significant effect on decision making - Seemed to make participants more cautious of the case evidence as levels of guilt were lowered, however they were still generally high
- The level of author expertise had no effect which suggests the label of 'expert' was enough for them to be trusted - Supports Penrod & Culter's (1989) findings that the presence of an expert sways juror decisions

Interpretations:

- Participants answered with a prosecution mindset and looked for proof of guilt rather than innocence - May explain why most verdicts remained incorrect
- The offender profile may have contributed to incorrect guilty verdicts as 26 participants used it to solidify a guilty verdict - Suggests profiles may increase the risk of miscarriages of justice

Limitations:

- High attrition rates - May be due to emotional relevance of case, lots of required reading
- Student and young adult heavy sample - Participants had a mean age of 26, which is not representative of a UK jury

Future research:

- Use juror bias scales to measure pre-existing attitudes
- Present evidence in a more realistic format such as recorded trials
- Test the effects of additional information on other evidence types such as DNA



Results

- Table 1 demonstrates that most participants gave incorrect guilty verdicts

Table 1 – Verdicts given

Verdict	No. of participants
Guilty	103
Not guilty	21

- Before analysis, results were screened for parametric assumptions
- Data from one participant was removed, as their scores were an outlier

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics of percentage guilt

Expertise of the Profiler	Additional Profile Information	Percentage guilt	
		Mean	Standard Deviation
Novice	Information Provided	65.88	17.95
	Information not Provided	72.07	22.71
Expert	Information Provided	64.78	23.96
	Information not Provided	74.97	22.79

- Table 2 shows that participants in the expert condition showed the highest level of guilt when additional information was given, and the lowest level of guilt when information was not given

- In both conditions where additional information was given, lower mean percentages of guilt were provided than in conditions with no additional information
- Excluding the outlier, all z-scores fell between -3 and 3 and homogeneity of variance was met
- The results were not normally distributed, however as there is no non-parametric equivalent, a 2-way ANOVA was conducted

- **Main effect of profiler:** $F(1,120) = 0.008, p = .928, \eta^2 = .000$
- **Main effect of additional information:** $F(1,120) = .041, p = .014, \eta^2 = .050$
- **Interaction:** $F(1,120) = .041, p = .840, \eta^2 = .000$

Qualitative data

- Participants relied heavily on case data with 52 mentioning specific evidence items and 54 mentioning victim testimony

The case details convinced me he was guilty.

The profile played a significant role in my decision.

There isn't enough evidence to prove he is guilty.

- Only 26 used the profile to make their decision
- Of the 21 who gave non-guilty verdicts, 12 attributed this to a lack of evidence

References

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