

A field evaluation of the VIPER system in Scotland

Contact: Amina Memon (amemon@abdn.ac.uk until 1 October)

One of the most important recent developments in the Scottish legal system has been in the manner in which evidence is gathered from eyewitnesses. Live parades have now been largely replaced by video parades, this has been made possible by development of the Video Identification Parade Electronic Recording (VIPER) system. With the assistance of the Scottish VIPER user group (led by Moray Watt) and funds from SIPR, Amina Memon, Catriona Havard, Brian Clifford and Fiona Gabbert analysed the responses of 1718 real witnesses who viewed video parades conducted in Scotland in 2008.

The major variables of interest were; characteristics of the witness, characteristics of the suspect, offence type, delay since incident and aspects of the VIPER procedure. All police forces in Scotland participated in this study. Below are the results of *preliminary* analysis of the data, a full report of findings will be available later in the year.

Of the 1044 witnesses who did *not* know the suspect, the rate of identification was 44% and foils (stand-ins) were chosen on 42% of occasions. The suspect identification rates are comparable with earlier field studies conducted in the UK, but the foil identification rates are somewhat higher possibly reflecting an increased tendency to choose with VIPER. The implications of this will be discussed in the full report.

In terms of identification outcome, the under 16s (as compared to over 16s) made more suspect identifications (81% vs. 67%) and fewer foil identifications (15% vs. 24%). Overall, children (there were 32 children under the age of 9 years) and young adults (Under 16s and the 16-25 year-olds) made more suspect identifications and fewer foil identifications than adults aged 26 to 40; middle aged adults and adults over the age of 61.

Most of the suspect and foil identifications were in the category of *violent crime* with no difference in this category and *crimes of indecency* in suspect identification rates (43% vs. 46%) or foil identification rates (43% vs. 39% respectively). As expected, *crimes of dishonesty* were associated with lower suspect identification rates.

The procedure for administering VIPER is to show the entire lineup twice, unless there is unequivocal identification and showing the witness the lineup again would cause distress to the witness. In 6.3% of lineups witnesses requested to view the identification parade or part of it again. On those occasions, there were more foil identifications.

Turning to the effects of delay on identification outcome, the most common delay was less than one month (35.8%) and there was no difference in identification outcome comparing the one month period with the one week period. However suspect identification rates did drop after the one month delay and there were clearly fewer picks being made at the six month delay.