

Study probes impact of CSI-style programming on jurors

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new psychological study from the University of Leicester aims to investigate how accurate people's perceptions about forensic science are, where these beliefs come from, and how this forensic awareness may impact on jury decision making.

It will assess whether the jury system in the UK is influenced by the type of forensic-related programming potential jurors are exposed to, or whether their knowledge and understanding of forensic science through news media, literature or magazines has an impact on their courtroom decisions.

The study will investigate how jurors interpret forensic evidence in court - and how this impacts on their decision making.

Lisa Smith, from the Forensic Section of the University of Leicester School of Psychology, said: "In recent years the forensic science techniques available to police have become increasingly sophisticated and in some cases difficult to understand within the courtroom.

"The increased attention given to forensic science in both the news and fictional media has also raised awareness of these techniques in the general public. "The aim of this research is to understand how potential jurors perceive and understand various forensic science techniques, in order to determine how their attitudes and expectations may impact on their decision making in a courtroom setting."

Ms Smith added that jurors are faced with the very difficult task of evaluating many different types of evidence when reaching a final decision - which will ultimately change the lives of the defendants and victims involved in a criminal case.

"As the complexity of forensic evidence increases with recent advances in technology, it is important to determine how well jurors understand the value of the evidence.

"Forensic science is featured quite heavily in television programming and news media coverage, and this raises the public interest in forensic techniques. An important aspect of jury decision making is a juror's prior beliefs and knowledge, and this study aims to investigate how potential jurors' perceptions of forensic science impacts on their ability to evaluate different types of evidence.

"This research will improve our understanding of how potential jurors use their prior beliefs about forensic science to inform their decision making when evaluating different types of forensic evidence. This can ultimately contribute to improvements in the way evidence is presented and explained to juries to ensure effective decisions are reached in the courtroom."

Source: University of Leicester

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