

PURPOSE

This study originally sought to replicate the Loftus, Loftus, & Messo study on “Weapon Focus” (1987). Instead of focusing on specific details, our experiment looked at the thoroughness (as measured with noun and adjective usage) with which participants described peripheral details on a standard police report form.

HYPOTHESES

- When a weapon is presented in a scene, peripheral details of that scene will be less thoroughly described
- When a non-weapon is presented in a scene, peripheral details in a scene will be more thoroughly described

BACKGROUND

Weapon focus is a phenomena which takes place when a weapon is present in a scene

- Details of the scene are not accurately recalled
- Details of the weapon are accurately recalled
- It is less likely the perpetrator will be correctly identified in a line-up

This applies to both law enforcement professionals and civilians

Weapons are representations of an unexpected items

- Nonthreatening, unexpected items have a similar effect

Experiment I Methods

Participants (n = 99) were shown a video of an irritated male stepping out of a vehicle and pointing either a **gun** or a **phone** towards the camera.

After viewing the video, participants completed
15-minute filter task
a handwritten witness statement
a demographics questionnaire



Statement Form

Participant Number: _____
Date of Statement: _____

I UNDERSTAND THAT I AM VOLUNTARILY PROVIDING THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Statement: _____

Statement Form



Experiment II

The results were not conclusive with the Loftus, Loftus, & Messo findings. This called in to question the quality of the stimuli.

- Participants (n =30) were repeatedly shown the stimuli for both conditions side-by-side
- 75.86% of individuals were able to correctly differentiate the two conditions
- Though there may be issues with the stimuli, it is unlikely that entirely accounts for the trend

DISCUSSION

The factors that underlie mental processes are complex and multifaceted.

Examinations of weapon focus provide important insight into major issues of eyewitness testimonies.

Human error is significant

The innocent may be punished

The guilty may not be charged for crimes

Future studies aim to examine a variety of possible contributors to weapon focus.

- Location
- Characteristics of the perpetrator
- Characteristics of the witnesses
- The availability heuristic
- Nonverbal language

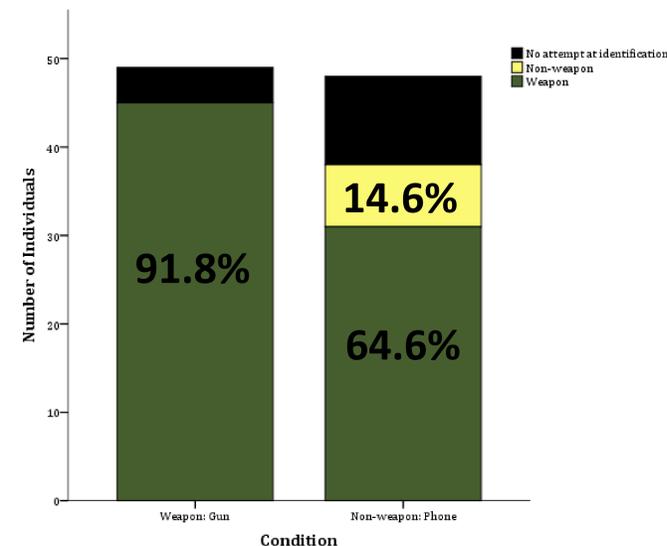
SELECTED REFERENCES

- Hulse, L. M., Memon, A. (2006). Fatal Impact? The effects of emotional arousal and weapon presence on police officers’ memories for a simulated crime. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 11(2), 313-325.
- Loftus, E. F., Loftus G. R., Messo, J. (1987). Some Facts about “weapon focus.” *Law and Human Behavior*, 11(1), 55-82.
- Mitchell, K. J., Livosky, M., Mather, M. (1998). The weapon focus effect revisited: The role of novelty. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*. 3, 287-303.

Results

Neither the number of nouns ($M = 8.27, SD = 3.80; t(97) = 1.07, p > .025$), nor the number of adjectives ($M = 6.08, SD = 3.85; t(96) = 0.88, p > .025$) have a significant relationship with condition.

This study did not produce the same findings as the Loftus, Loftus, & Messo study. A significant percentage of participants in both conditions identified the item as a weapon.



This may be due to ambiguity in the stimuli.

We found that the condition has a small effect on object identification.

$$\chi^2 (2, N = 99) = 12.14, p < .01, \Phi_{\text{Cramer}} = .168$$

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