

Student Opinions on Police Interrogation

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Introduction

The purpose of our research project was to get a good idea of the average UVU student's understanding of common police questioning techniques. With this data, we can determine if an educational program dealing with police questioning techniques would be useful.

Introduction

We believe the public's knowledge of police procedures, coupled with personal opinions would be beneficial to police operations and interviews. Law enforcement personnel are increasingly seen in a public light. This increased pressure could be eased with increased knowledge.

We hypothesize that the average UVU student has little knowledge of current police questioning techniques and would benefit from further education. We also believe that the average UVU student does not fully understand the consequences of a false confession and the effect it can have on a trial.

Literature Review

The overarching theme considers not only police questioning techniques, but also public perception and knowledge of current practices. This leads to a review of the rights of individuals when being questioned by law enforcement officials. There are several examinations into current practices and probable changes that could be made in order to properly carry out justice while still respecting individual rights. Our intention as researchers, is to elicit a discussion of false confessions, the weight placed on confessions in court, and what can be done to improve. This supports the main theme of the survey.

Literature searches were performed utilizing websites, academic databases and scholarly resources.

One can draw several conclusions from the literature contained in these reviews. The main points being; interrogation techniques have changed over time and may require further change in order to not only obtain a proper sense of justice, but also maintain a proper recognition of human rights. As society progresses over time, police interrogation techniques must parallel said advances.

Coincidentally, the public at large is greatly uneducated concerning current practices and are ill-equipped to navigate such a murky legal area. Originating from this thought process concern could be raised with validity of confessions during questioning and trial; and what can be done to fix this problem.



Literature Review-Sources

- The English Law on Confessions, sourcing from a combination of work via the University of Leicester, UK and the University of Portsmouth, UK. The combined file is titled: “The Psychology of Interrogations and Confession.”
- Springer Link, a source of scholarly articles within a database. Within the series of “Law and Behavior,” and Article titled “Police Interviewing and Interrogation: A Self-Report Survey of Police Practices and Beliefs.”
- A scholarly Article sourced from “PsychNet.” This is a database with components of psychology and related sciences. The article we are utilizing is titled “A taxonomy of interrogation methods.”
- From the Same source as noted above, an article titled “Inducing belief in false confessions.”
- From the UVU Scholastic journal database, we have sourced an article demonstrating confessions and simulated interrogations. Article titled “ Inducing belief in false confessions.”
- From the UVU scholastic database, we have source another article. This article is titled “Juvenile Offenders’ Miranda Rights Comprehension and Self-Reported Likelihood of Offering False Confessions.”

Research Questions

- Due to the possibly sensitive nature of the topic, our goal was to conduct an anonymous survey. The participants of the survey didn't know who we were, and we didn't know who the participants were. The name and an e-mail address of the primary investigator was disclosed for purposes of questions and/or concerns during the course of the survey.
- Our survey was intended to take 5 - 15 minutes to complete. We felt that any longer and we risked losing the interest of the participants; generating less responses.
- Our survey was constructed with Qualtrics. The vast majority of questions were simple "select a singular answer." Only one question was able to have multiple answers. This was aimed to achieve simple straightforward data that could be easily interpreted and visually applied into pie/graph charts.

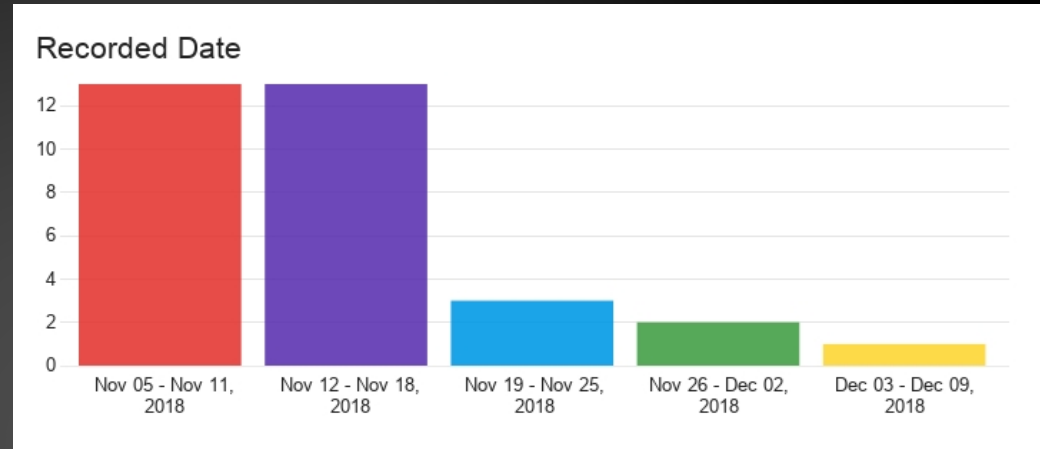
Research Design

- We collected our data via Qualtrics; where our survey was located. By utilization of Qualtrics, we were able to circulate individual emails to all of our randomly selected participants.
- Our survey consisted of a consent form, a description of what “Police Interrogation” was, 19 questions on personal opinion of police interrogation and 15 questions of personal experiences of police interrogation (35 questions total).
- After our survey was distributed to the 499 participants, an additional email was sent to all participants who had not participated every 3-4 days.
- Our survey was sent to 499 students. We had 32 responses. Out of the 32, we had 2 responses where students did not consent and left the survey, 1 respondent opened the survey and did not complete; making total responses 30. ($29/500 = 5.8\%$ response rate)
- Our time frame was limited due to fall break and IRB response time.
- Risk of possible “fake answers” by participants.

Response Rate

Dates and number of responses

The initial survey was distributed the first week of November. 3 follow-up reminders with the survey link were distributed every 3-4 days



94%
I consent, and wish to participate in the survey

I consent, and wish to participate in the survey

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

2 Respondents did not consent.

(30 Participants opened the survey, 2 participants did not consent, 1 did not complete)

Confidence interval

- UVU has a current student population of 39,931

https://www.uvu.edu/news/newsarchive/october2018/enrollment_10042018.html

- We received a sample population of 499

Set by IRI, maximum of 500

- Our confidence interval is staged at 4.36

Low probability of accuracy

Find Confidence Interval

Confidence Level: 95% 99%

Sample Size:

Population:

Percentage:

Confidence Interval:

Research Findings

Questions 1-19 consisted of personal opinions of police interrogation. The questions used in our survey were intended for a general population with a wide range of experience in police interrogation.

Examples within our survey:

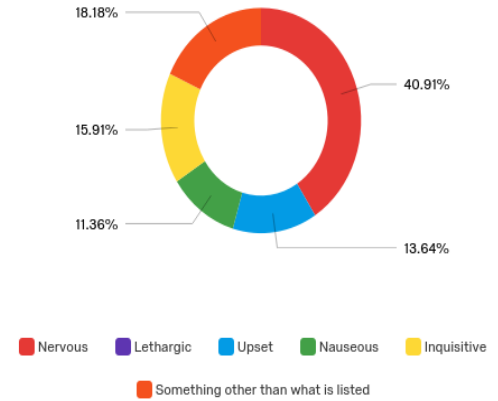
- How well do you feel you understand the legal issues surrounding police interrogation?
- Can legal interrogation techniques still lead to false confessions.
- I feel as if I understand "Miranda" rights
- I feel as if have a general sense of police interrogation techniques

Research Findings

Question 2 was our only outlier of a scoring system. Participants were able to check multiple boxes as a response.

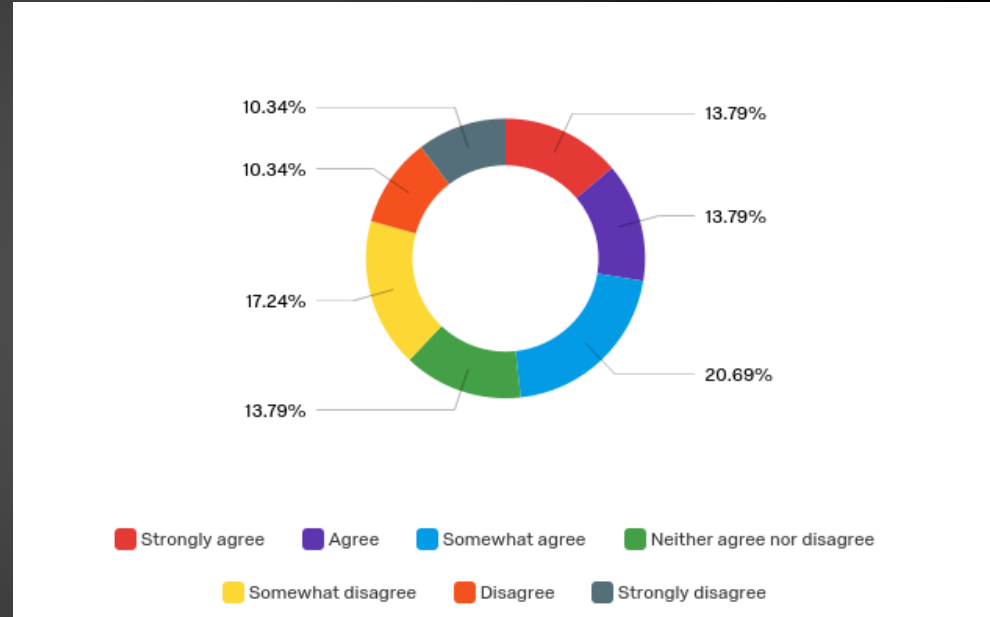
When I think of being the subject of police interrogation; I generally feel:
(Check all that apply)

- Nervous
- Lethargic
- Upset
- Nauseous
- Inquisitive
- Something other than what is listed



Research Findings

Interestingly, though more than half of those surveyed answered that they would be nervous, upset or nauseous when faced with police questioning, half of those surveyed said they felt as if they had a general sense of police questioning techniques.



Research Findings

If almost half of those surveyed felt they were comfortable with their knowledge of police questioning, why would more than half feel uncomfortable being questioned? Perhaps it is the knowledge that makes them uncomfortable. When asked about particular questioning techniques, the survey takers were asked what they knew about police being able to lie during a questioning.

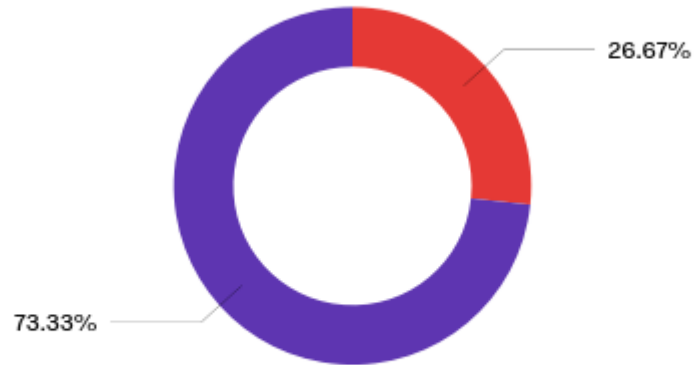


Research Findings

Question 16

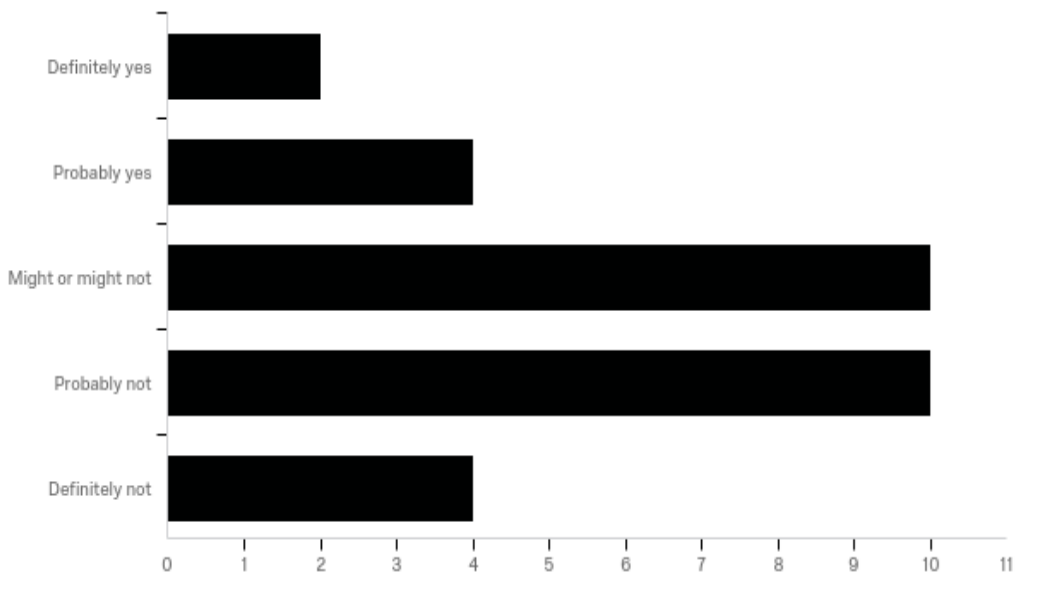
I know someone personally, who as a law enforcement officer, interrogates others

Roughly a quarter of our respondents knew a LEO, giving some insight into interrogation techniques



Yes No

Research Findings



Question 17

In your opinion, should it be legal for officers to question a suspect without the suspect's legal representation present?

The majority of respondents indicated that counsel should be present during interrogation.

Research Findings

Question 20 switched gears from student opinions to student familiarity with interrogation. Our survey noted that any experience is relevant (media, friends and family, self-experience, etc...)

The following are a number of police interrogation techniques. Please indicate how familiar you are with these techniques.

Any, and all experience is relevant (self-experience, freinds and family, literature, media etc..)

The questions are of actual LEO practices for interrogation.

Examples of questions

Threatening the suspect with consequences for not cooperating

Showing the suspect photographs of the crime scene or victim

Offering the suspect sympathy, moral justifications and excuses

Confronting the suspect with evidence of his/her guilt

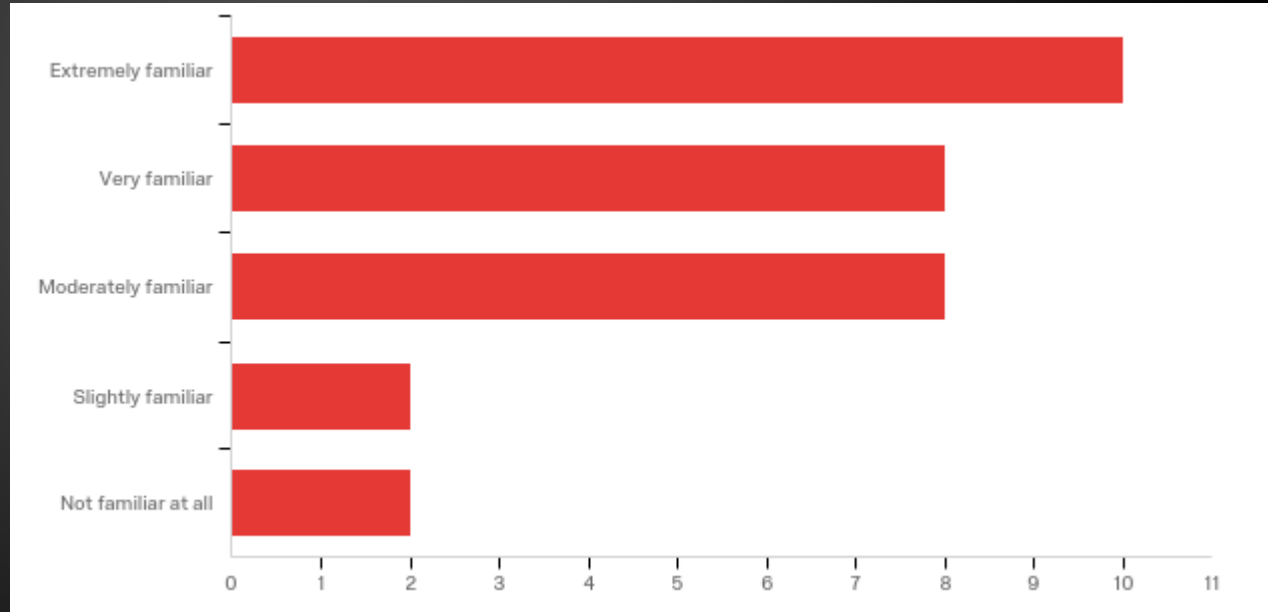
Expressing impatience, frustration or anger at the suspect

Conducting the interrogation in a small, private room

Research Findings

The main theme of respondents seemed to follow a diagram similar to this.

Only 3 responses were reversed



Research Findings

Though the majority of participants understood that a LEO could lie to a suspect, there seems to be a split in a scenario where a polygraph is used.

		Are police officers allowed to lie to a suspect during an interrogation?			Total
		Yes	No	Maybe	
Having the suspect take a polygraph and telling him he failed it	Extremely familiar	5	1	1	7
	Very familiar	2	1	0	3
	Moderately familiar	1	1	3	5
	Slightly familiar	2	1	3	6
	Not familiar at all	6	3	0	9
Total		16	7	7	30

		Are police officers allowed to lie to a suspect during an interrogation?
Having the suspect take a polygraph and telling him he failed it	Chi Square	10.97*
	Degrees of Freedom	8
	p-value	0.20

Research Findings

Questions 21-36 dealt with all experience relevant to police interrogation. We believe the techniques listed in our survey questions are common, utilized by all levels of LEO professionals within all agencies.

Examples within our survey:

- Isolating suspect from family and friends
- Establishing a rapport and gaining the suspect's trust
- Offering the suspect sympathy, moral justifications and excuses
- Minimizing the moral seriousness of the offense

Conclusion

From our data, subject to the respondent, uvu sample size and student demographic/ population:

This is a wide range of feelings concerning police interrogation. A minority of student have had actual experience with interrogation, and another minority know an actual LEO. A fair amount of student know of techniques that are used today.

Out of our respondent population, roughly half felt comfortable with their knowledge of interrogation. A large portion of our population felt that there is not enough legal defense for suspects.