



Wiley Series in the Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law

# The Use of the Polygraph in Assessing, Treating and Supervising Sex Offenders

## A Practitioner's Guide



Edited by Daniel T. Wilcox

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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Edited by

**Daniel T. Wilcox**

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**Wiley Series in**  
**The Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law**

Series Editors  
**Graham Davies and Ray Bull**  
*University of Leicester, UK*

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The Wiley Series in the Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law publishes concise and integrative reviews on important emerging areas of contemporary research. The purpose of the series is not merely to present research findings in a clear and readable form, but also to bring out their implications for both practice and policy. In this way, it is hoped the series will not only be useful to psychologists but also to all those concerned with crime detection and prevention, policing, and the judicial process.

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For my wife, Helen, and my daughters, Tara and Roz.

## About the Editor

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**Dr Daniel T. Wilcox** is a Chartered Clinical and Forensic Psychologist with the British Psychological Society. He grew up in Up-State New York obtaining a BA and an MA from the State University of New York, College at Geneseo and worked as a Psychologist in Rochester, New York for a number of years before moving to the UK. Dr Wilcox holds a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the University of Surrey and is an Honorary Research Fellow with the University of Birmingham, Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology. He is an active member of the National Organization for the Treatment of Abusers. Dr Wilcox is also on the International Advisory Board for the *Journal of Sexual Aggression* and the Editorial Board of the *Child Abuse Review*. Dr Wilcox has frequently presented at conferences and published papers in areas such as risk assessment; offender management, assessment and treatment; working with intellectually disabled sex offenders; resilience and risk factors associated with child sexual abuse; applications of psychometric measures to care and family proceedings and the employment of the polygraph with sex offenders. Dr Wilcox is Managing Director of Wilcox Psychological Associates (WPA), an independent practice that provides psychological reports for Court purposes and he is frequently called upon to give testimony as an expert witness. WPA has delivered assessment, treatment and consultancy to a range of adult and children's services for many years. Dan also contributed to the development of the first Home Office accredited, Community Sex Offender Groupwork Program, through WPA's partnership arrangement with the National Probation Service in the West Midlands, UK.

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# Series Preface

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The Wiley Series in the Psychology of Crime, Policing and the Law publishes both single and multi-authored monographs and edited reviews of emerging areas of contemporary research. The purpose of this series is not merely to present research findings in a clear and readable form, but also to bring out their implications for both practice and policy. Books in this series are useful not only to psychologists, but also to all those involved in crime detection and prevention, child protection, policing and judicial processes.

The original idea for a device to measure bodily changes such as heart rate and respiration as indices of deception is usually credited to the pioneering Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso in 1895, but it was the Americans, particularly John Larson and Leonarde Keeler, who developed the polygraph as a working tool for law enforcement (Alder, 2007). The subsequent history of the use of the polygraph is a controversial one. The conventional polygraph machine in itself does not register lying, but requires the operator to interpret the output as reflecting concealment by the testee. The lack of requirement in the United States for any formal training and accreditation of operators led to a mushrooming of unlicensed operatives in the last century. Polygraphs were used not merely on criminal suspects in the US, but also on applicants and existing staff employed in the public and private sectors as a test of their honesty. A belief in the infallibility of the machine combined with unskilled interpretation of output led to many injustices which were only curtailed by the Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1988, which limited the commercial applications of the machine. However, the polygraph continues to be widely used by the Secret Service and law enforcement agencies in North America as well as by police in other countries, particularly Israel and Japan. Today, the use of the machine as the ultimate arbiter of a defendant's guilt or

innocence is discouraged, particularly in the light of the negative assessments of professional bodies such as the US National Academy of Sciences (2003) and the British Psychological Society (2004). Instead, it is increasingly seen as a screening tool to identify from a potential range of suspects, those on whom greatest investigative attention should be focused.

This book describes a range of work on a new and potentially valuable application of the polygraph, which is summarised in its title: *The Use of the Polygraph in Assessing, Treating and Supervising Sex Offenders*. Concern over the activities of such offenders subsequent to their release into the community is a matter of great public concern, both in Britain and the United States. Society places a heavy burden of responsibility on those who are required to monitor the movements and behavior of sex offenders post-conviction to ensure that they do not reoffend. Any procedure which can improve the quality and reliability of information supplied by offenders is of considerable practical importance. As the editor, Daniel Wilcox, makes clear, the results both from the pioneering studies in the US and the later national pilot scheme in the UK have produced promising results which have paved the way for polygraph testing to now become a routine feature in the post-conviction management of sex offenders in Britain.

Dr Daniel Wilcox is a forensic and clinical psychologist in private practice, with considerable practical experience of treating sex offenders. He was one of the first in the UK to appreciate the potential of the polygraph for monitoring offenders' post-release behavior and this in turn brought him into contact with other pioneers of the field, such as Daniel Sosnowski, Don Grubin and Tony Beech. This book has brought together their contributions and that of other leading researchers in the field from Britain, continental Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States to outline their latest findings and to describe the practical applications and potential of this new and controversial technique. *The Use of the Polygraph in Assessing, Treating and Supervising Sex Offenders: A Practitioners' Guide* will be of interest not just to researchers and practitioners whose work brings them into contact with sexual offenders, but to all those who wish for an informed and informative account of a new weapon in the struggle to regulate and control the behavior of some of society's most feared and reviled offenders.

GRAHAM DAVIES  
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# Preface

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Over the years professionals have become more aware of the impact of polygraphy on sex offender work. However, these developments have generally been in quite discreet areas including the North West of the United States, Texas and Colorado. Its wider spread use has been a much more gradual process. In Great Britain, for example, the application of polygraphy to this field began to emerge during the current decade, while in the Netherlands there has been some support over the past few years following research by Jos Buschman and colleagues, (Buschman, Wilcox, Foulger, Sosnowski, Bogaerts, & Mulder, 2008) though the political determination to employ this technology there still remains somewhat uncertain. In contrast to these recent developments Stan Abrams' early research and professional practice in this area has spanned over a quarter of a century (Abrams, 1991; Abrams & Abrams, 1993; Abrams, Hoyt & Jewell, 1991; Abrams & Ogard, 1986 ) and in his book, the US Judges who pioneered the earliest post conviction use of the polygraph in the late 60s and early 70s (Partee, 1975; Schmidt, Soloman & Johnson, 1973; Tuttle, 1969).

Even so, the field of polygraphy remains a subject of controversy though my particular interest in this tool has perhaps a stronger, evolving base of support relating to the assessment, treatment and supervision of convicted sex offenders.

My pursuit of polygraph development in Britain was directly influenced by Anna Salter in 1997 at a conference in San Diego. In fact her comments and references to her friend and polygraph trained colleague, Eric Holden, prompted me to contact him and the American Polygraph Association. I wanted to find out whether there was some potential for adding polygraphy to the range of techniques and intervention strategies that we had consolidated at that time to create the first Home Office Accredited Community Sex Offender Treatment Program in the

UK (West Midlands Probation Service, Sex Offender Unit; 1996–2000). In 1999 I subsequently met with Eric in Orlando, Florida at the Annual Police Polygraph Association Conference though due to scheduling difficulties he was unable to assist us with the UK trials. I also contacted Stan Abrams on a couple of occasions. He had generously sent me a range of materials explaining PCSOT early in my investigations and at this stage he gave me helpful guidance about how to design our study. From this point a combination of determination and good fortune followed, with Dave Middleton, Manager of the West Midlands Probation Services' Sex Offender Unit offering great support and encouragement to develop research in this area. Further, Dan Sosnowski, a senior member of the American Polygraph Association (now President incumbent), generously offered his time and considerable expertise to help move the plan forward and conduct two initial, small UK based polygraph trials (Wilcox, Middleton & Sosnowski, 1999; Wilcox & Sosnowski, 2002).

Don Grubin's subsequent involvement was pivotal and within a short time he and Dave Middleton were to play key roles in getting agreement for a large-scale, national pilot study to be undertaken in selected probation areas in England with convicted sex offenders. After the conclusion of Grubin's extensive research (with voluntarily polygraphed British sex offenders) spanning more than five years, the Offender Management Act (2007) was passed and included a provision for mandatory polygraph testing of convicted sex offenders in the UK who were on parole/license having received custodial sentences of a year or more. As such, the further acceptance of polygraphy as a tool in sex offender work has, in Great Britain, now taken a great step forward. The assessment, treatment and public protection implications for using polygraphy, in combination with other tools at our disposal are, in my opinion, very substantial and it is my hope that this book will provide professionals in this very challenging field, a better understanding of how polygraphy can be integrated into their work successfully to augment and further improve the effectiveness of their practice. I would in particular like to recognize these professionals for the important work they do and commend those men convicted of sexual offences whose willingness to voluntarily be polygraphed was critical to the formal establishment of polygraphy as an accepted tool in sex offender work in Britain today.

A wide range of acknowledged experts have made essential contributions to the production of this book and I am enormously grateful for their support. At the outset Tanya Garrett's encouragement and typically pro-active attitude provided the necessary catalyst for me to begin this project. Thanks also to Bill Marshall who quite unknowingly has had a tremendous impact on the approach I have taken to working in this field. A special thanks to my friend and colleague, Lars Madsen,



who was extensively involved in developing and conceptualizing the book as well as writing and reviewing early draft chapters. In addition, Zerine O'Keeffe deserves a special mention for assisting me in editing chapters relating to polygraph administration. Thanks to Rita Donathy for her ongoing, steadfast support in typing and amending the chapters. Many other individuals have also contributed to this book including Sally Harley, Carrie-Ann Pash, Sandra Callander, Sarah Foulger, Helena Markall, Roz Wilcox and Tony Axford. Very special thanks to Kathryn Law who helped proof the final manuscript before submission to the publishers. The encouragement of Gillian Leslie, Ally Dunnett, Andrew Peart and Karen Shield from Wiley-Blackwell and Suresh Kumar and Seema Koul from Aptara Inc. was immensely helpful through the latter stages, as was the supportive guidance from the series editors, Ray Bull and Graham Davies. Further, unreserved appreciation and praise is extended to my wife, Helen, and my daughters, Tara, and Roz. Helen, in particular has given me moral support and practical help throughout, as well as being understanding about my frequent lack of availability while I have been involved in this project. Lastly, everything we do starts somewhere so I would like to thank the rest of my family including my brothers Tim, Don, Mike and Tom who, like my parents before them, continue to provide another dimension of support, meaning and enthusiasm that enriches my work and my life.

DANIEL T. WILCOX

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