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Evidence contamination– Forensic sociology findings

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Forensic sociology is the analysis of evidence and research to determine negligence in criminal or civil cases. There is only limited research going on at present. Learning from the findings in past cases leads to innovative technology, reform, and procedures for crime resolution. Evidence contamination is not isolated or a rare event, but instead arises from systemic defects. The innocence project lists misconduct of Government actors as a contributing cause. The very people who are responsible for ensuring truth and justice, law enforcement officials and prosecutors, lose sight of these obligations and instead focus solely on securing convictions. While many law enforcement officers and prosecutors are honest and trustworthy, criminal justice is a human endeavor and the possibility for negligence, misconduct, and corruption exists. Forensic sociology identifies evidence contamination that undermines our justice system, and negates the forensic science of dedicated professionals in the pursuit of crime resolution. The innocence project lists common forms of misconduct. My study will illustrate with specific examples how misconduct was applied to the unresolved 1981 Joan Webster case. Common forms of misconduct by law enforcement officials include:

1. Employing suggestion when conducting identification procedures;
2. Coercing false confessions; 3. Lying or intentionally misleading jurors about their observations;
4. Failing to turn over exculpatory evidence to prosecutors;
5. Providing incentives to secure unreliable evidence from informants.

Common forms of misconduct by prosecutors include:

1. Withholding exculpatory evidence from defense;
2. Deliberately mishandling, mistreating or destroying evidence;
3. Allowing witnesses they know or should know are not truthful to testify;
4. Pressuring defense witnesses not to testify;
5. Relying on fraudulent forensic experts;
6. Making misleading arguments that overstate the probative value of testimony.

Biography

Eve E Carson earned a BSIM from Purdue University. He volunteers on a crisis line for abuse victims, and is a speaker on criminal justice and abuse topics.

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