



Book Review of the use of the polygraph in assessing, treating and supervising sex offenders - a practitioner's guide

J. Sasi Kumar¹

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, India

Daniel T. Wilcox (Ed.), (2009). *The Use of the Polygraph in Assessing, Treating and Supervising Sex Offenders: A Practitioner's Guide* (Wiley Series in Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing. 332 pp, ISBN 987-0-470-74223-5.

Globally, sexual offences are a threat not only to the society but also a big challenge to the criminal justice systems. Due to the growth of various technologies like internet, mobile and wireless, sexual offences have spread its ugly tentacles. Various new forms of sexual offences have emerged. This emergence of new forms of sexual offences is not mitigated much, as the conviction rates of such offences are comparatively less than their occurrences. In the court of law, there is a need to produce strong evidence against sexual offences. Also in these types of offences there is a less possibility to collect evidence against the suspects. The contemporary developments of multifarious truth finding technologies such as narco analysis, polygraphs and DNA fingerprinting and profiling show some promise in detecting the sexual offences.

Interviewing and interrogation plays a vital role in finding the facts during police investigation. Traditional police personnel use third degree methods to get authentic information from the offenders. Extracting confession by third degree methods are human rights violation and sometimes it leads to false conviction and the real offender escapes the clutches of laws. In these instances, polygraph examination comes in handy for the assistance of the modern law enforcement agencies. The polygraph examination will clearly show the true or deceptive nature of confessions or statements of the offenders. Though polygraph is not recognized as an investigative/evidence tool by many juridical systems, it is significantly of use in certain cases. The edited volume by Daniel T. Wilcox is an effort to highlight the importance of polygraph in assessing, treating and supervising sexual offenders.

This book describes three types of evaluation such as sexual history (SH), maintenance and monitoring examinations and specific issue (SI) examination in the polygraph examination. All are representing the pre-treatment, during treatment and post treatment (evaluation of treatment). The advantages of polygraph are emphasized in this book by

¹ Bureau of Police Research & Development Research Fellow, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: sasikara19@gmail.com

several studies supporting the post convictions polygraph examination. The author(s) have either focused on the examination or assessment of the offenders. The author(s) have examined the advantages of several types of post conviction polygraph examination that are used at different times and stages of treatment and supervision. The author(s) of the book chapters have provided empirical studies which are conducted with control groups. The studies show the value of polygraph examination in the treatment of sexual offenders. The author(s) strongly explained the sexual disclosure examination, specific issues test and maintenance and monitoring examination with the evidence from the questionnaire studies. The author(s) assists the reader to understand the usage of polygraph by placement of various case examples and the comparison studies of polygraph examination with pre-sentence report. In a study, they have mentioned the variation in identifying sexual offences (against child and adults) in pre-sentence and polygraph examination is 7% to 70%.

In this book, the author(s) mostly covers the use of the polygraph examination on post conviction in sexual offending which including treatment to the offenders and reduce the sexual crime rate. The author(s) not only cover the polygraph device on detection of the deception but they also cover the other devices such as Voice Stress Analysis (VSA), Thermal Imaging (TI), Pupillometry etc; for detection of deception. In this book the author(s) have not only listed out the sexual interests, behaviors and the risk factors of the sexual offenders, but also placed the techniques to identify these factors through polygraph examination. Besides, the author(s) have mainly focused on the post conviction sexual offending and reduce the likelihood of recidivism through explicitly linking the identified internal external risk factors to the sexual offences. The author(s) briefly explained the use of polygraph examination on offenders in post-conviction of domestic violence, stalking and general violence. The author(s) also mentioned the error of the polygraph examinations such as false positive and false negative. Also, in this book the author(s) enlighten the readers of the usage of polygraph examination to the post-conviction sexual offending.

The author of chapter 6 covers various forms of sexual offence against the children. He placed lot of findings of various studies on internet pornography, using downloaded child images, and has examined child abuses, behavior and characteristics of child molesters. The author (J. B. Blair) has briefly explained the interviewing and interrogation methods in this book. And he clearly mentioned how to interview the victims and witnesses and suspects and he differentiated the interviewing method from the interrogation method. It is very helpful to the reader especially the law enforcement personnel to get more ideas on the methods of interviewing the victims and witnesses and interrogating the suspects.

Though the book has concentrated on many aspects, it has missed certain important features of polygraph examination. Only in few instances, the author(s) have focused on the screening test. The screening test is vital one in the prevention of sexual offences. When we conduct the screening test by utilization of the polygraph, we can prevent the sexual offences at least to some extent. Another aspect the book failed to note is the application of polygraph to victims. If we want to find the real and exact causes of the sexual offences, victims also should be subjected to polygraph. Some victims precipitate (wearing obscene dresses, showing unwelcome gestures, victim under the influence of alcohol, etc.) sexual offences and there is a need to subject the victims also to polygraph examination.

In 1979, the results of polygraph examination were accepted in U.S. courts as new scientific evidence. However, recently in India, the Supreme Court announced that the result of examinations conducted through the truth finding devices such as narco analysis, polygraph examination etc; not accepted as evidence in court, but the law enforcement personnel can use such results for further investigation process. The author(s) did not highlight the acceptance of polygraph as evidence in various countries. In chapter 8, the author(s) have left some other traits which lead to sexual offences such as personnel traits, historical facts, contextual antecedents and clinical facts. Basically, not only the above mentioned traits lead to the sexual offences but the biological factors also lead to the sexual offences. Also the external sources like alcoholism, substance abuse and influence of pornography images and film also induce person to commit such offences. So there is the need to identify and access all the traits which lead to the sexual offences through the polygraph examination.

Excluding the above said gaps, this book will be of great interest to the readers. The reader will get a different perspective of polygraph examination and get more knowledge of the assessment of sexual interest in offenders through physiological measurement and non physiological measurement. The reader can easily absorb the facts of post-conviction usage of polygraph in the treatment of sexual offenders and can simply understand various sexual interests, behaviors, and characteristics of the sexual offenders. The readers can easily appreciate the effect of polygraph examination, because the author(s) placed the premises with findings of various studies. Overall, this book will be valuable to all the readers, especially to criminal justice professionals like judges, prosecutors, lawyers, law enforcement personnel and probation officers. And it will also very useful to psychologists, criminologists and researchers working in the areas of sexual offending.