The Polygraph and Lie Detection

An Assignment Submitted by

Name of Student

Name of Establishment

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Abstract

In the following essay I am going to:

1) Explain what does the term 'reliability' mean while talking about polygraph lie detection;

2) Single out several aspects of polygraph lie detection reliability;

3) Discuss pro`s and con`s of using polygraph lie detector in the light of its reliability;

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Polygraph deception detection is sometimes used in criminal trials or other life occasions. There are lots of supporters and critics of using this very device and technology, who present several arguments to support their claims and one of the hottest discussion is concerning the issue of polygraph reliability. That is the reason why we should clear up the notion of reliability in the light of polygraph lie detection.

" The term *reliability* is generally used to indicate repeatability across different times, places, subjects, and experimental conditions." (*The Polygraph and Lie Detection*, p.29). Still the very notion of reliability has several aspects or, to say so, components. They are test-retest reliability, inter-rater reliability and internal consistency. In order to characterize shortly every aspect of reliability, I would like to mention that test-retest reliability is "the extent to which the same measurement procedure used to examine the same subject for the same purpose yields the same result on repetition" (p.30); inter-rater reliability is "the extent to which different examiners would draw the same conclusions about a given subject at a given time for a given examination" (p.30); and internal consistency means that polygraph shows the same physical reactions of examinee while they answering some relevant questions. These three aspects give us a full pattern of reliability which, after clearing up its aspects, may be defined as "a property of a measure as used on a particular population of people or events being measured" (p.30). Summing it all up, one may consider reliability of polygraph lie detection as one of the most important characteristics of its success (e.g. whether to use its records as admissible evidence in court, etc.).

Reliability of polygraph lie detection depends on several factors. Among them are: the examiner, the test format, the equipment, questions which are asked, physical and mental condition of examinee and lots of others. This great amount of factors make critics of using this technology believe that too many factors can lead to stressful condition of examinee (except lying) and that it quite easy to conceal the fact that person is lying.

On the other hand, supporters of using polygraph lie detection contradict these claims and believe that, first of all, very few people are able to control all the physical processes in their body and, second, preexamination tests give examiners an opportunity to reveal person`s lying.

To sum up the above-mentioned information concerning polygraph lie detection reliability, one may affirm that this characteristic of polygraph lie detection is quite unstable and depends on many factors. Carefully examining all aspects of reliability and verifying whether real conditions suit the required ones (which were mentioned in the second paragraph of my essay) will give an opportunity to apply polygraph lie detection with better success.

References

The Polygraph and Lie Detection: National Academy of Sciences, (2003), Chapter 2.