

Evaluating Police Use of Polygraph Testing with Individuals Suspected and Convicted of Sexual Offences

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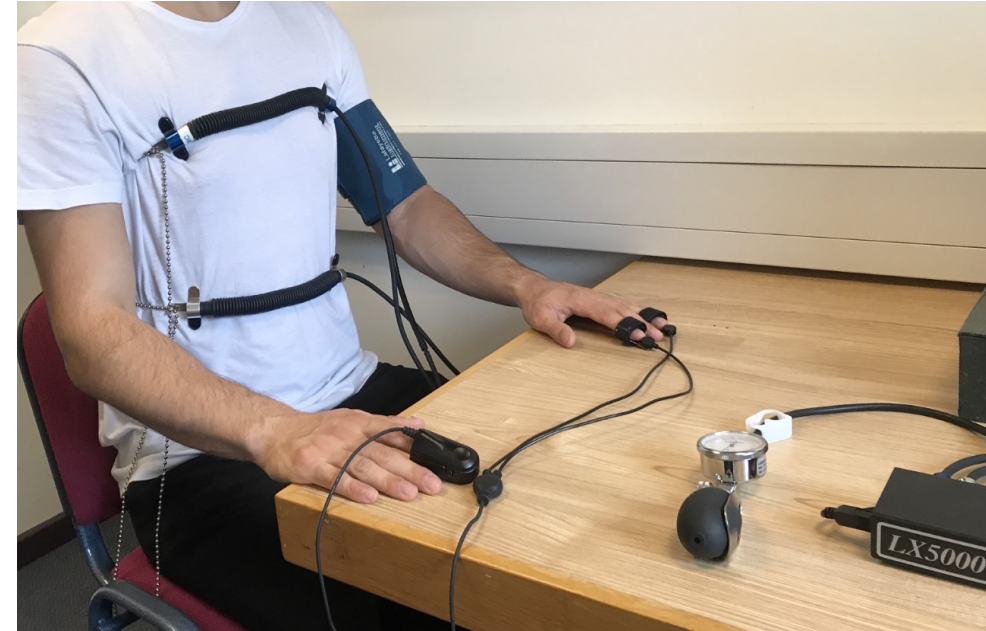
Polygraph Testing

NOT a lie detector – indicates physiological responses linked to lying - but NOT unique to deception.

Can't be used in evidence = can't convict or send people back to prison

But used to support supervision of individuals convicted of a sexual offence.

If a test is 'failed' (significant response) – opens discussion + test may be repeated



Polygraph Tests

Typically 3 stages:

1. Pre- test interview
2. Polygraph test
3. Post test interview



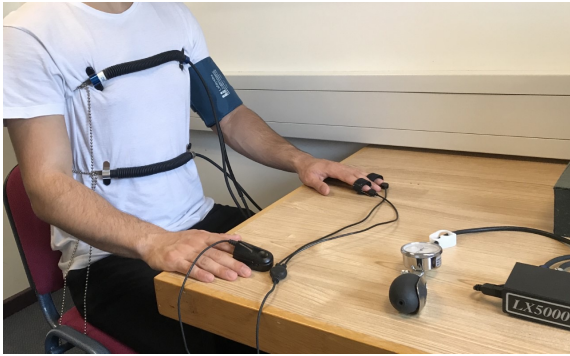


Background

Evaluation of Police Use of Polygraph

Views of key individuals

Conclusions & Recommendations



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Research Findings UK:

Polygraph testing those convicted of sexual offences disclosed more info re risk (Grubin, 2006, 2010).

But tests were **voluntary** – eager to please subgroup? (Elliot & Vollm, 2018)

Reoffended – avoid polygraph (Cook et al., 2014)

2010-12 Evaluation: University of Kent



Ministry
of Justice

Evaluate **MANDATORY**
polygraph testing

Mandatory vs comparisons.

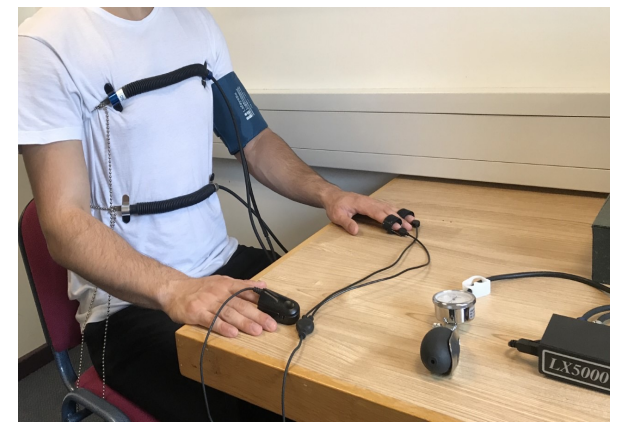
More disclosures from those
undergoing polygraph tests

2014 law changed (England &
Wales):

MANDATORY testing of high-
risk individuals introduced



Police use of polygraph testing



When licence period (parole) ends, supervision passes to police for duration of notification requirements (i.e., inclusion on sex offender register.

Within this context, several police areas began polygraph testing to support their supervision



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Police Polygraph Use Evaluation (2017-20)



**Convicted & Suspected:
1084 referrals (N=803)**

**G.M.P., Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire, South Yorkshire,
Northumbria, (Lancashire, Norfolk, Staffordshire – data on tests
conducted)**

Three Strands

1
Supervisees
N=557

Convicted of sexual offending
– being supervised by police
(Offender Managers – OMs)

Randomly assigned:

To polygraph (voluntary or mandatory) or comparison groups

2
Suspects
N=142

Suspected of possessing
indecent images of children –
undergoing police investigation

Randomly assigned (where possible & willing):

Voluntary, or comparison groups

3
Applicants
N=104

Convicted of sexual offending –
applying for removal of
notification requirements (sex
offender register)

Randomly assigned (where possible):

Voluntary, or comparison groups

Data Collected:

1
Supervisees

2
Suspects

3
Applicants

**3000+ calls
to 277 officers
98.8%
Response rate**

Risk Relevant Disclosures (RRDs)

Risk Relevant Disclosures (RRDs)

...disclosure of *new* information
leading to *change* in how individual is
managed, supervised, investigated

RRD Categories

- 1) Thoughts, feelings, attitudes (e.g., abusive sexual fantasies, motivation to offend)
- 2) Sexual behavior (e.g., with children, with adults)
- 3) Historical information (e.g., offender as prior victim of sexual abuse)
- 4) Unreported changes to circumstances (e.g., new relationship, contact with children)

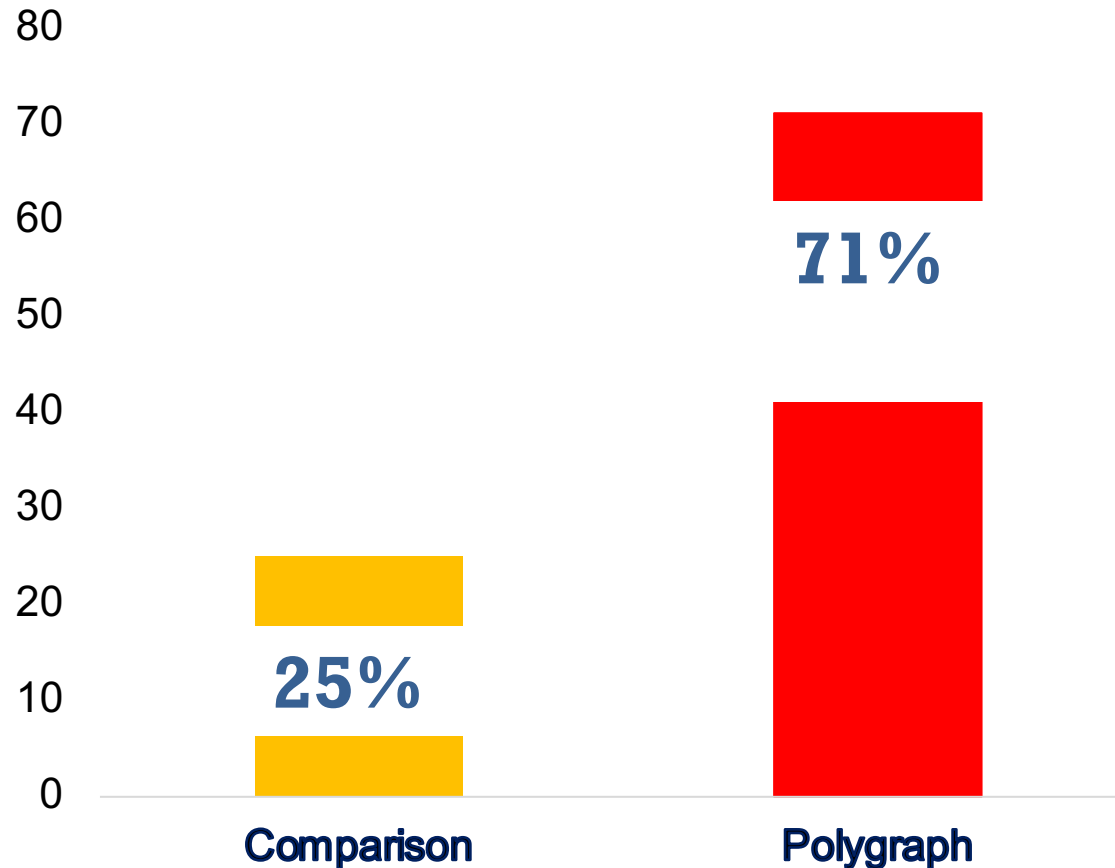
Results Strand 1

Voluntary & Mandatory = no difference

Polygraphed = 6 x More Likely To Make 1 RRD

1
Supervisees
N=557

% one or
more RRDs



1
Supervisees
N=557

Polygraphed made more RRDs about

- Sexual interest in children
- Access to children

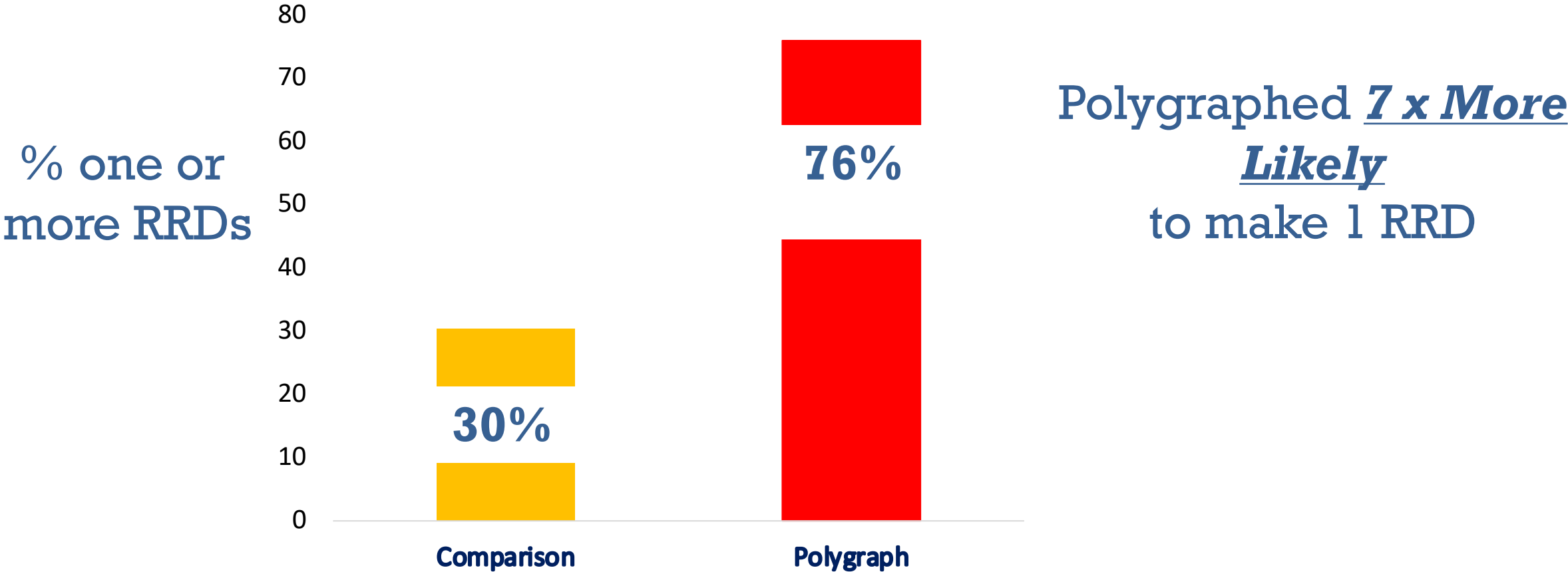
Most RRDs occurred in pre-polygraph interview.

Nearly all post-polygraph RRDs = after significant response result

More changes to management (e.g., increased house visits)

2
Suspects
N=142

Results Strand 2



2

Suspects

N=142

Most RRDs occurred in pre-polygraph interview.

Not much difference in content

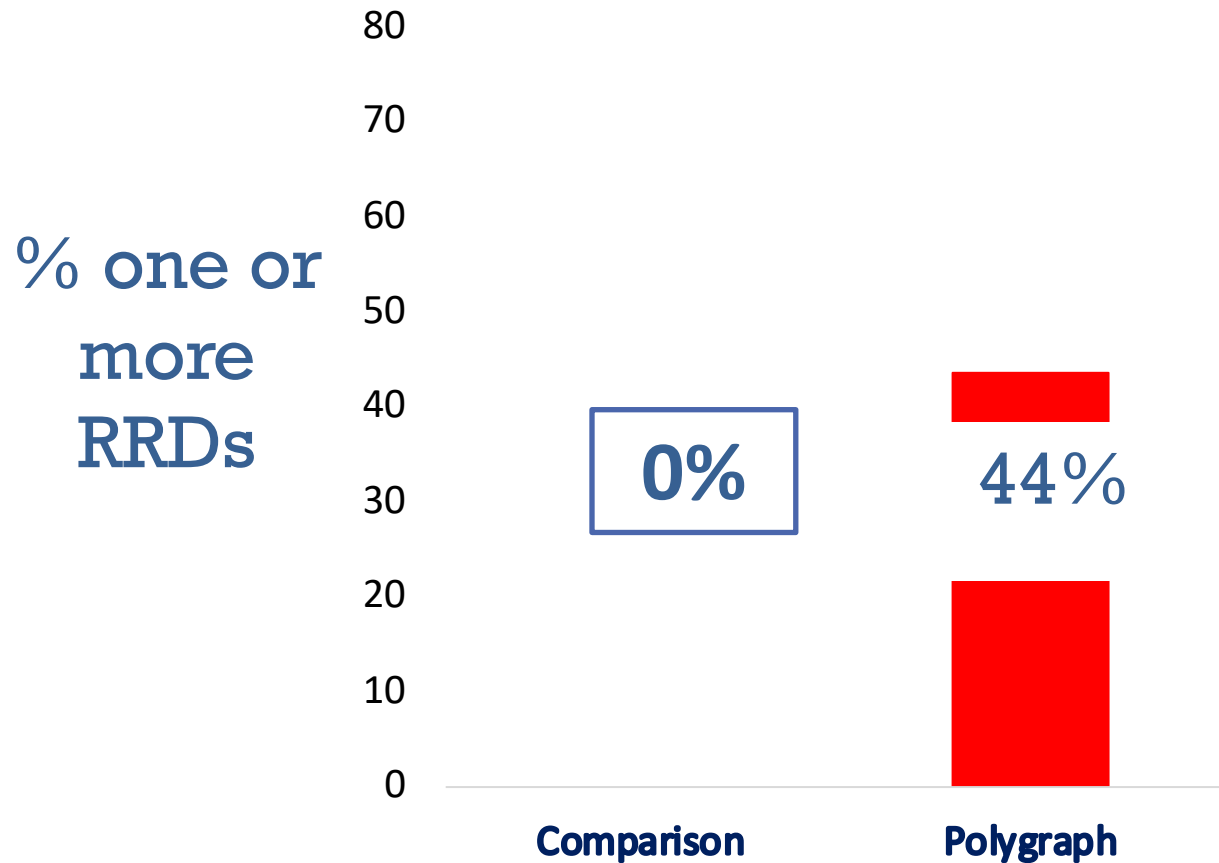
Polygraphed = more RRDs about masturbation

3

Applicants

N=104

Results Strand 3



Polygraphed 42.5 times **More**
Likely to make 1 RRD (*applying*
Haldane-Anscombe correction)

3

Applicants

$N=104$

Polygraphed made more RRDs about access to children

Most RRDs = pre-test interview

Actions

- 3rd party informed (family/partner, police (for investigation))
- Application unsuccessful

Comparison applications – *5x more likely to succeed* despite that over 40% would be expected to make RRDs if tested



Background

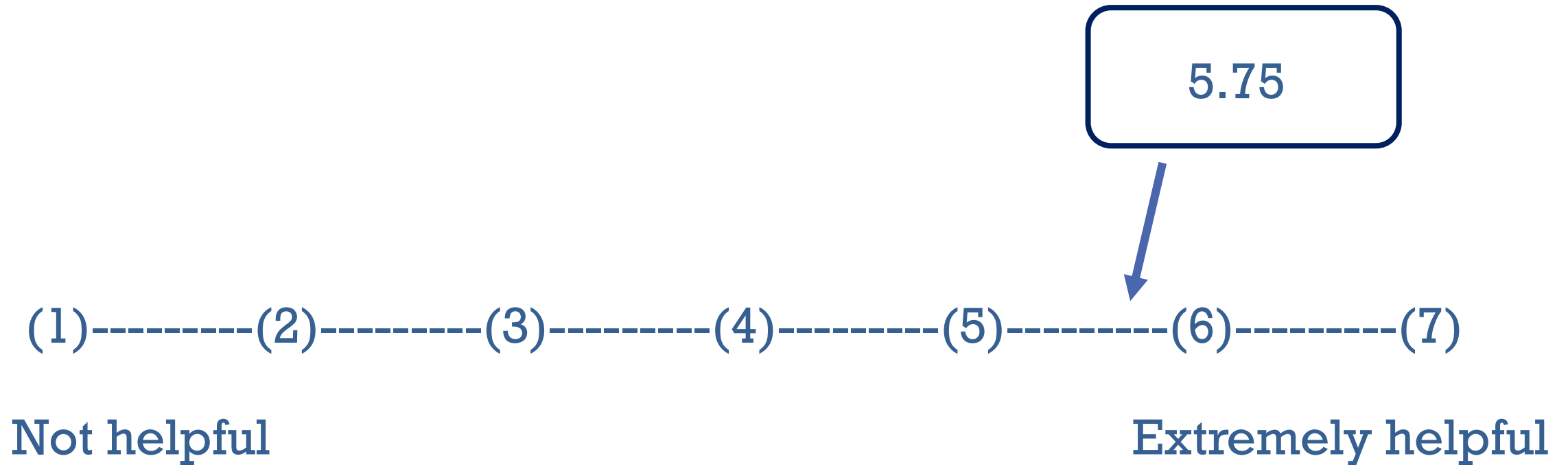
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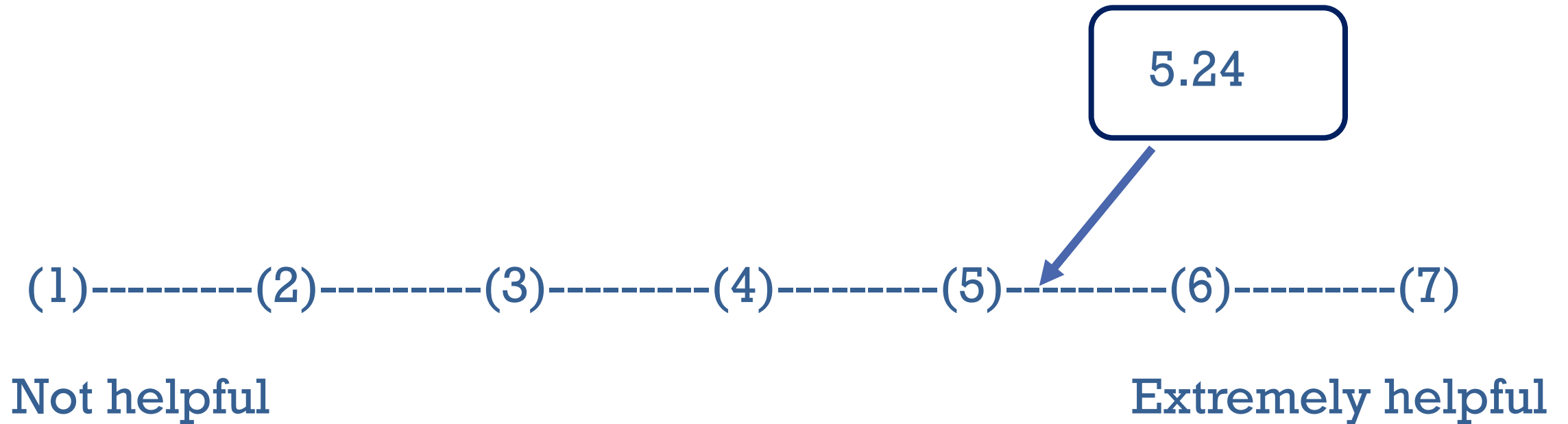
Police Views: Overall Helpfulness of Polygraph:

Strand 1 - Supervision



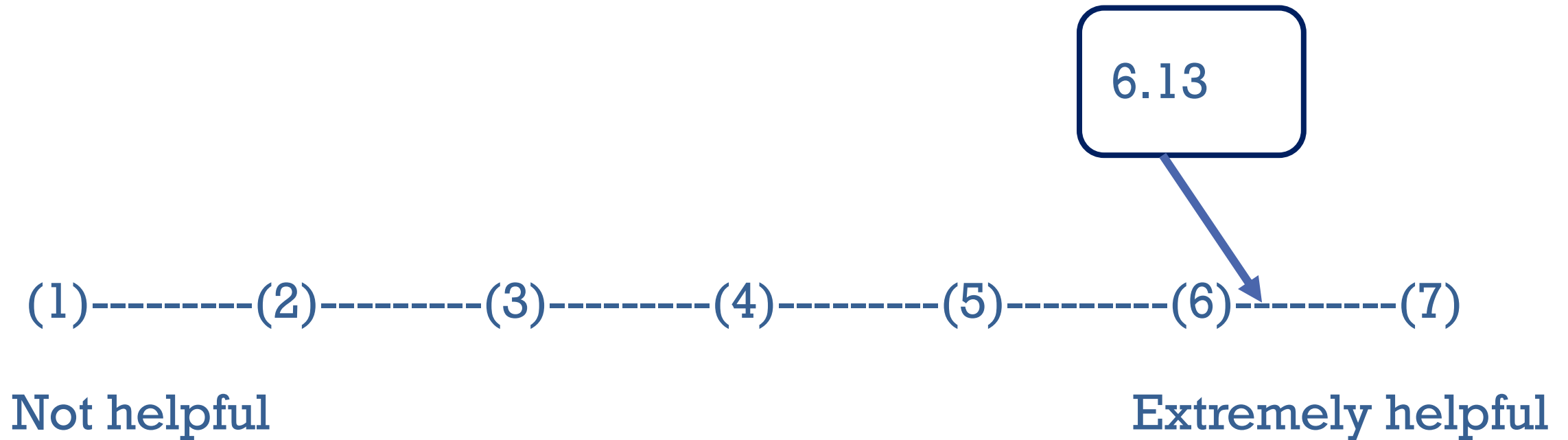
Police Views: Overall Helpfulness of Polygraph:

Strand 2 - Suspects



Police Views: Overall Helpfulness of Polygraph:

Strand 3 - Applicants



Views on Polygraph Testing

73 In-Depth Interviews & One Opinion Poll:

- 20 Police Supervisors
- 20 Police Investigators
- 10 Polygraphers
- 20 Convicted Individuals
- 3 Suspects (polygraph group)
- 2091 Members of Public Opinion (Policing by Consent)

Views on Polygraph Testing: Police Officers

Positive

- Access truth
- Improves risk assessment/management
- Opens up new investigations/safeguarding

Negative

- Voluntary – so don't do it
- Increases workload
- Can't be used as evidence

Police Officers' Views

...they sort of think well she believes me now, so it does seem to help a better working relationship, a better trust between us and that's vice versa as well.

(OM Strand 1)

...if I'm being entirely honest it causes more problems than it solves... because it's not evidential.

(Investigative Officer
Strand 2)

Views on Polygraph Testing: Convicted and Suspects

Positive

- **Confirms truthfulness**
- **Generates trust**
- **Professionally conducted**

Negative

- **Stressful**
- **Need external support**
- **Need clarity over results – face-to-face with OM**

Convicted and Suspects' Views

...so, polygraphs are good, this is against my general opinion of the polygraphs, they are good to use as poking sticks almost... Supervisee 13

I'm not sure it should be used for anyone at all. I mean it's, isn't it on par with reading tea leaves or tarot cards...? Suspect 1

Views on Polygraph Testing: Polygraphers

Positive Aspects

- Interview expertise enabled rapport
- Justifies police decisions
- People open up & tell truth

Negative Aspects

- Voluntary
- Noisy police stations
- Managing workload

Polygraphers' Views

... it really helps you identify risk where in the first instance it's not identified and it's invaluable in that case... with risk management of sex offenders. Polygrapher 5.

"It's a full time role. 100%... I couldn't manage both roles, it was impossible to do both at a time. Polygrapher 4.

Public Opinion ($N = 2091$)

Most (approx. $\frac{2}{3}$) thought police should use polygraph to:

Monitor those convicted of a sexual offence (**Strand 1**)

Assess applicants' removal (**Strand 3**)

Investigate suspects of a sexual offence (**Strand 2**).



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Conclusions Convicted

Strand 1: Supervisees

Mandatory & voluntary polygraph testing equally:

Elicit *more* risk-relevant information across all *categories* of risk.

Elicit more in-depth information (e.g., contact & sexual interest in children).

Lead to more action by police to protect public (e.g. more supervision).

But only if tests go ahead; many refuse to take tests – 281 – allocated to polygraph testing didn't take test.

Recommendation

Most effective police use of polygraph would be mandatory testing across *all categories of risk*.

Would potentially:

Maximise number making RRDs & number of RRDs made across time

Reduce harm to the public.

Conclusions Convicted

Strand 3: Applicants

Polygraph testing applicants leads to:

More RRDs (43% - mostly about access to children).

Non tested applicants make 0 RRDs & highly likely to be successful in applications for removal from notification requirements.

Recommendation

All applicants should undergo mandatory polygraph testing to maximise protection of the public.

Conclusions Suspects: Strand 2

Polygraph testing = more RRDs, but not more meaningful

Public & investigative officers support polygraph testing
suspects

Recommendation

We recommend that polygraph testing suspects should continue on a voluntary basis

Conclusions: Test Procedures & Outcomes

Polygraph testing is conducted professionally, but still creates:

Anxiety regarding upcoming test.

Confusion about what test results mean.

Recommendation

Those undergoing polygraph testing should be allowed support.

Meet with OM as soon as possible after test to clarify findings.

Conclusions:

Support for Police use of Polygraph Testing

Police officers positive about polygraph testing –
some reservations re use with suspects

Public support polygraph testing those
convicted or suspected of committing a sexual offence

Tested individuals recognise its use in determining that they
are telling the truth

Thank You

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