

The Role of Threat on the Weapon Focus Effect

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The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not threat effects the weapon focus effect. The weapon focus effect (WFE) is defined as the focusing on a weapon while a crime is being committed that results in the inability to accurately identify the perpetrator. This research is significant because eyewitness testimony has resulted in false convictions and the more research about the variables that influence our memory can help decrease these false convictions. Due to conflicting research, I could not predict threat's effect on the WFE. I had 40 undergraduate students (28 females and 12 males), from ages 18 to 54 enrolled in a midwestern, midsized, public university participate in this study. These participants watched a thirty second video of a man rummaging around a room holding either no object, a knife, a handgun, or a shotgun. After watching one of these videos, participants completed a threat survey, worked on a word search, and tried to identify the man in the video from a lineup. I did not find a statistically significant effect of threat on the WFE, $\chi^2(3) = 1.13, p = .771$. Due to not finding a statistically significant effect, I have failed to reject the null hypothesis and cannot conclude that threat effects the WFE.