



B95 A Case Impact and Operational Cost Analysis of Blind Verifications in Latent Print Examinations

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the case impact (as defined by conflict or non-consensus conclusions) as well as impact on operational costs (as defined by time spent verifying) of blind verification procedures.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting data and general observations accumulated during blind verifications of all latent print comparison conclusions at the United States Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory's (USACIL) Latent Print Branch.

Blind verifications have been advocated as a panacea for many of the concerns related to latent print examinations. Error rate studies demonstrate the potential for blind verifications to both uncover non-consensus conclusions as well as limit examiner errors. Other stakeholders believe blind verifications would mitigate contextual bias that standard verifications (non-blind) would not. Although both ideas hold merit, there has been a surprising lack of research data to understand the impact of blind verification procedures on actual casework operations and in which scenarios the procedures would yield the most impact.

For six months, USACIL's Latent Print Branch completed blind verifications of all comparison conclusions in live casework. Typical latent print examinations comprise three main phases: Analysis, Comparison, and Evaluation (or ACE). The fourth phase, referred to as Verification, is typically a repeat of the previous phases of ACE. In most laboratories, the verifying examiner will have access to all the work previously completed by the original examiner, including resulting conclusions from a comparison between an unknown impression (a latent print) and a known impression (or a set of known standards). In blinded situations, the verifying examiner will only be supplied with the compared latent print(s) and the known standard(s) these were compared to. Task irrelevant information, such as the original examiner's annotations or conclusions, the source of the known standards (e.g., an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) "hit"), and the relationship between the known standards and the case (e.g., "victim") are not available to the blind verifier; however, task relevant information, such as substrate or matrix, may be requested by the blind verifier. At the completion of the blind verification, the two examiners compared conclusions. Differences in opinion were noted and resolved in accordance with laboratory conflict-resolution procedures and documented for purposes of this evaluation.

This presentation will discuss the data and general observations accumulated when comparing blind verification procedures to non-blind verification procedures in terms of case impact (rates of conflicting conclusions) and operational costs (time required to conduct verifications) as well as incidental observations related to interpersonal dynamics that were displayed during the evaluation period.

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Blind, Verification, Impact