

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park

Fake "Lie Detector" Improves Reporting of Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Researchers at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) have found that persons who believed they were being monitored by a "lie detector" were more likely to report sensitive behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use. Participants in the study were randomly assigned to a control or an experimental group. Those in the control group were asked a variety of sensitive health-related questions in a face-to-face interview. Those in the experimental group completed the same interview while attached by electrodes to a "verifacitor," which they were told could detect lies by measuring physiological responses. In reality, the "verifacitor" was a computer connected to a polygraph, which produced a meaningless chart throughout the interview. Participants in the "verifacitor" group were significantly more likely to report alcohol or other drug use (see table below). While the authors acknowledge that fake machines "are not generally feasible as methods for reducing misreporting in actual surveys," they recommend that researchers "design methods that provide a similar motivation for responding accurately or that reduce the motivation to misreport" (p. 220).

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Sensitive Behaviors

	"Verifacitor" Group (n=62)	Control Group (n=58)
Ever Smoke Pot	71%	57%
Ever Use Cocaine	44	26
Ever Use Amphetamines	39	19
Ever Use Other Drugs	39	19
Ever Drink More Than Should	34	16
Smoke Cigarettes	34	21
Ever Drink and Drive	31	17
Drink More Than Average Person	21	3

NOTE: The *n*'s may vary for each behavior due to missing responses.

SOURCE: Roger Tourangeau, Tom Smith, and Kenneth Rasinski, *Motivation to Report Sensitive Behaviors on Surveys: Evidence From a Bogus Pipeline Experiment*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1997, 27(3):209-222. For more information, contact Kenneth Rasinski at 773-753-7500.

DC-METRO AREA NONPROFIT GROUPS ELIGIBLE FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION GRANTS

The Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States Region Impact Grants program has funds available for nonprofit groups in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area that support youth violence prevention activities. For more information, contact Barbara Henley at 301-816-6163 or 301-816-6404.

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