Abstract

JUROR TARGET MONITORING ERRORS IN MULTIPLE DEFENDANT TRIALS

by

LINDSEY M. RHEAD

Advisor: Margaret Bull Kovera

When defendants are charged with interrelated crimes it is efficient to join their cases into a single trial; however, a defendant’s right to a fair trial may be abrogated by this practice. In multiple defendant trials, jurors may be subject to target monitoring errors – an inability to accurately assign evidence to the correct defendant, much like they are prone to source monitoring errors (i.e., difficulty identifying the specific source of a memory, Johnson, Hashtroudi, & Lindsay, 1993). This research study tested whether target monitoring errors moderated the influence of joining defendants’ on juror decisions by varying number of defendants, charge similarity and judicial admonitions. I predicted a linear trend of charge similarity and judicial admonitions for both evidence memory and perceived evidence strength, with a decrease in accuracy as the number of defendants increased. I also predicted fewer guilty verdicts in a single defendant trial than in multiple defendant trials. Jurors failed the manipulation check assessing jurors’ memory for judicial multiple defendant admonitions. Contrary to predictions, increasing number of defendants at trial did not increase guilty verdicts or reduce evidence memory or perceived evidence strength. Charge similarity among defendants had no impact on juror verdict decisions or juror memory and recall. The presence of judicial admonitions did influence guilty verdicts or memory recall accuracy. The only moderation effect to emerge was on admonished jurors “knowing” information not presented at trial was presented
when viewing a similar charge trial. Overall, no hypotheses were supported. Thus, the joining of defendants at trial may not abrogate a defendant’s right to a fair trial.