

Junk Science Leading to Wrongful Convictions

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In the United States, wrongful convictions have been running rampant for over a century and a half, going back to the 19th century. Wrongful convictions can lead to the convicted to serve up to life in prison or in some states even death. Recently there have been calls to thoroughly examine the use of some scientific tools that many have coined as “junk science” in relation to wrongful convictions within the court system. Authors Paulina Salazar-Aguilar, Carlos Zaror-Sánchez, and Gabriel M. Fonseca in their article Forensic odontology: Wrong convictions, “bad apples” and “the innocence files” go on to explore the devastation that forensic odontology has done to the conviction rates, how it has negatively impacted the views on forensic sciences within the court system, and how risk management in the future is essential in the forensic studies field to ensure faith in the court system.

For the methodology of their article, the authors had 26 cases of a wide variety that were reported in the US National Registry of Exonerations that the forensic odontology results were found to be misleading or false forensic evidence that lead to the wrong conviction.

In their study, the authors found that of the 26 cases, 19 of them were found to contain official misconduct and 16 of those cases were perjury or false accusation cases. They emphasized that the public and courts need to know that there is a difference in forensic odontology and bite mark identification and that wrong information harms the public view and faith of the court system.

This study showed that there are false convictions within the system due to bad science that needs to be rectified but that not all forensic science fields are harmful to a conviction. But because of this bad science, the public has lost some faith in the system and to prevent that systems should be put into place for risk management. The authors also wanted to highlight that

with their research they did find a difference in bite mark identification and forensic odontology and to call them the same is harmful for the entire forensic science field in the court system.

Word Count: 357

References

Salazar-Aguilar, P., Zaror-Sánchez, C., & Fonseca, G. M. (2023). Forensic odontology: Wrong convictions, “bad apples” and “the innocence files”. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 102528. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2023.102528> ‘