

Polygraphy in Singapore: An Overview of History and Current Developments

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History

Polygraph testing was introduced to Singapore in the mid 1970s when a government agency trained a solitary examiner who attended a 12-week basic polygraph course at the American Institute of Polygraph, in Dearborn, Michigan.

Very little was known about the work done by the polygraph examiner when he returned to Singapore as he had almost no contact with the other government agencies. The agency subsequently trained another polygraph examiner in 1991.

Training

Toward the late 1980s, interest in the polygraph was stirred and several government agencies, including the Singapore Police Force, considered adding the polygraph to their investigation tool kit. The first batch of five officers from the Singapore Police Force was trained in 1989. Since then, many other polygraph schools have also ventured to Singapore and trained officers from the various government agencies including the Singapore Police Force (SPF), the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), the Prisons Department and the Ministry of Manpower.

None of the polygraph schools have a permanent training facility in Singapore.

Examiners

Since the 1970s, an estimated 200 officers from the various government agencies have been trained. However, only about 100 are currently in practice due to high attrition.

The SPF, which is the national law enforcement agency, started using the polygraph in 1991 with a team of five examiners. Since then, more examiners have been trained to cater to the increased case

load and the SPF currently has ten examiners. The examiners consist of six males and four females, out of which four (three males and one female) are based at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and engage in polygraph work on a full time basis. The remaining six examiners conduct examinations as a secondary responsibility in addition to their primary posting in the police force and they form the talent pool for succession for the polygraph profession in the police force.

Due to their racial mix, the examiners from SPF are able to conduct examinations in five languages, English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and Hindi and five different dialects without interpreters. For examinations involving foreign subjects from countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Bangladesh, Korean, Japan, Vietnam and some others, interpreters are engaged to assist in conducting the examinations.

Examinations

When the SPF started using the polygraph, the case load was a mere twenty-one examinations. With its proven utility in aiding criminal investigations, the polygraph gained popularity resulting in an exponential increase of the case load over the years. The current caseload stands at between 500 and 600 examinations annually.

The majority of the cases relate to assaults in domestic situations and sexual allegations where there are no witnesses and very little evidence either way. The results of the polygraph examination provide a critical input for decision-making.

Examination Types and Techniques

Singapore examiners are trained or have been exposed to a variety of testing techniques including the Comparison Question Technique (CQT), Relevant/Irrelevant

Technique (R&I), the Modified Zone Comparison Technique (MZCT) and the All Relevant Technique (ART). Different agencies use different techniques depending on whether the tests relate to a criminal issue, applicant or employee screening.

The SPF examiners conduct polygraph examinations solely for criminal or specific issues using the Modified General Questioning Technique (MGQT), which is a form of CQT. A standard examination would include a stimulation or acquaintance test and at least three mandatory tests where the examinee is asked the agreed question set. Whenever feasible, the examiners also conduct the Concealed Information Tests (CIT) in the form of Searching Peak of Tension (SPOT) Tests and Known Peak of Tension (KPOT) Tests. CITs are invariably conducted in additional mandatory tests.

Polygraph Legislation

Currently, there is no requirement for polygraph examiners in the government service or private sector to be licensed. The results of polygraph examinations are used solely as an aid to investigation and decision-making and are not used as evidence in the court of law. In conducting polygraph examinations, examiners of the SPF are guided by the same rules that govern the interviewing of witnesses and suspects.

Association

The professional association for polygraph examiners in Singapore is known as the Singapore Association of Polygraphers (SAP). The formation of the association was a joint effort by examiners from the SPF, CPIB and some other government agencies in 2004. Its membership currently stands at about 40 and includes examiners from the SPF, CPIB and some other government agencies. In addition to setting ethical and practice standards for members, the association also strives to provide continual training and act as a regulatory body for them.

Members of the SAP are also encouraged to be members of the American Polygraph Association. A delegation of between five to ten examiners from Singapore attend the APA annual seminar each year for

continual training and to network with their counterparts from the United States and other parts of the world.

Countermeasures

Countermeasures are encountered from time to time, as a high percentage of the Singapore population are well educated, speak English and are very computer literate. It is easy for them to access polygraph-related sites on the Internet and to learn what information is available there which purports to help them defeat testing. However, the percentage of polygraph subjects who engage in countermeasures is estimated to be only about 1% based on data collated by the SPF.

Examiners of the SPF routinely include anti-countermeasure tests in their testing protocol. In instances where there are indications of countermeasures being employed by the subject, the examiners conduct counter-countermeasure tests to confirm and expose such acts.

Research Efforts

The SPF conducted a research study on countermeasures between 2001 and 2002. The result was shared with polygraph examiners at the APA annual seminar in New Mexico in 2002 and at the International Workshop on the Use of Polygraphy in Counterterrorism, held in Rome in 2005.

An examiner from Singapore also conducted a countermeasure related research project at Michigan State University between 2000 and 2002. The result of the research was also shared with polygraph examiners during the APA annual seminar in New Mexico in 2002.

Instrumentation

Polygraph examiners in Singapore started using computerized polygraph systems to conduct tests in 2000. Before that, a majority of the examiners were using analog instruments. Over the last two years, about 80% of the polygraph examiners have migrated to computerized systems and the rest are expected to follow suit in the next one or two years. The instruments used by the examiners are manufactured by the Lafayette

Instrument Company or by Limestone Technologies, Inc.

The examiners in Singapore are very computer literate and those who use computerized systems to conduct examinations also use peripherals such as movement sensors and the photoplethysmograph (PPG). A special polygraph chair with movement sensors embedded in the arm rest, seat and leg board was recently developed in Singapore and is used by many of the examiners.

Legal Issues

There are no laws in Singapore governing the use of the polygraph or its results. However, the SPF uses the polygraph solely to aid investigations and examination results are strictly not used as evidence in

court. Polygraph examinations are considered as a forensic interviewing method and the rules on interviewing of witnesses and suspects as detailed in the local laws are applied to such examinations.

Challenges

The problem of regulating the polygraph profession and ensuring standards of practice does not arise as the polygraph is currently used almost exclusively by government agencies which have strict quality control. However, it is anticipated that some regulations on quality control and professional and ethical standards may be necessary in the future if the demand for private polygraph testing increases and more examiners join private practice.