

Police professionals are better observers than ordinary civilians

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Dutch research shows that trained detectives of specialized observation teams are much better at registering details of a drug deal than ordinary civilians. Previous legal-psychological research revealed no relevant differences in observation skills between police professionals and civilians. The findings have been published in *Legal and Criminological Psychology*.

Judges and juries often assume that police officers' statements are more reliable than those of regular eyewitnesses. Because of this assumption, [police officers'](#) statements typically carry more weight in legal cases. Now this assumption is supported by scientific evidence.

In a unique collaboration between VU University Amsterdam and the Haarlem Police Force, researchers asked [civilians](#) and detectives of specialized observation teams to observe a drug deal near a hotel, which had been recorded on video. Both groups had received identical instructions prior to observation. Prosecutors had also given them a detailed description of the type of details in which they were interested.

Police officers' reports are more reliable

Observation team detectives reported many more details about the deal than civilians, and their information was much more reliable. The detectives were also better at identifying drug dealers. Civilians, on the other hand, paid more attention to details that were completely unrelated

to the drug deal. Specifically, they were better at identifying a painting they saw in the hotel lobby than the police.

Surprising results

"The research findings were very surprising to us as well", the researchers said. "Until now, most legal psychologists assumed that police professionals are no better at observing crimes than ordinary civilians, but that does not seem to apply to these Dutch observation detectives. Perhaps this is due to their specialized training." The researchers, Annelies Vredeveldt and Peter van Koppen from VU University Amsterdam and Joris Knol from the Haarlem Police Force, expect that this study will lead to a great deal of international academic interest in differences between civilians and police professionals in observation and memory.

More information: *Legal and Criminological Psychology*:
[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... /lcrp.12087/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lcrp.12087/abstract).

Provided by VU University Amsterdam

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