Does veiling hamper lie detection?

Background

Judges in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have ruled that witnesses may not wear the niqab–a type of face veil–when testifying, in part because they believed that it was necessary to see a person's face to detect deception.
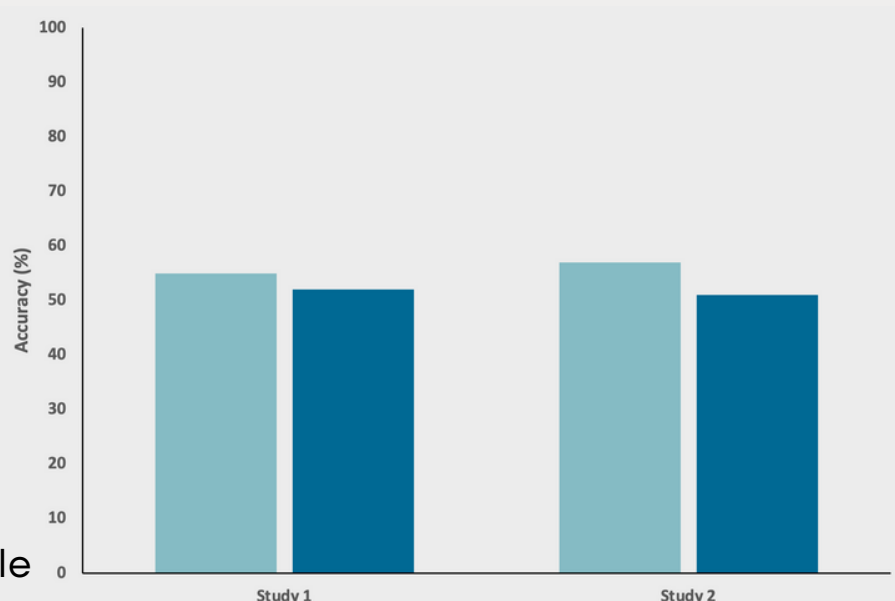
Method

Females witnesses – who wore a hijab, a niqab, or no veil – lied or told the truth about a theft. Over 500 people in 3 countries watched the witnesses' accounts and attempted to determine who was lying and who was telling the truth.

Results

1. Lie detection accuracy was higher when witnesses wore **niqabs** (vs. **did not veil**).

2. People did not exhibit negative response biases toward witnesses who wore niqabs.

3. Niqabs encouraged people to base their judgments on **verbal cues**, which are, on the whole, more diagnostic of deception.

Conclusions

1. Niqabs do not interfere with – and, in fact, may improve – lie detection.

2. Banning the niqab in courts because judges must see a witness's entire face to assess truthfulness is not supported by scientific evidence.

References

Leach, A.-M., Ammar, N., England, D. N., Remigio, L. M., Kleinberg, B., & Verschuere, B. (2016). Less is more?: Detecting lies in veiled witnesses. *Law and Human Behavior, 40,* 401-410. https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000189

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