

EVIDENTIARY VALUE OF EXPERT OPINION IN THE INVESTIGATION OF CRIMINAL OFFENCES: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PATAN DISTRICT

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Abstract

Expert opinion has an important place in the investigation and adjudication of criminal cases. Scientific evidence, medical opinion, forensic examination, handwriting examination, digital evidence analysis, fingerprint examination and other forms of specialised knowledge can assist investigating officers and courts in understanding facts that may not be established through ordinary observation alone. The present study examines the evidentiary value of expert opinion in the investigation of criminal offences with special reference to Patan District, Gujarat. The study collects the views of five stakeholder groups: law students, law teachers, legal experts, advocates and police personnel. A total of 130 respondents are included, with 26 respondents from each group. The questionnaire-based approach is used to understand the views of these stakeholders regarding the usefulness, reliability, relevance and practical role of expert opinion in criminal investigation. The sample is equally distributed among the five groups so that no single stakeholder group dominates the overall sample. The paper presents the sample profile and a framework for analysing the questionnaire data. Since only the sample composition is available in the present dataset, the paper does not manufacture question-wise percentages or statistical results. The study is expected to provide a balanced understanding of how expert opinion is perceived by persons connected with legal education, legal practice and criminal investigation in Patan District.

Keywords: Expert Opinion, Criminal Investigation, Evidentiary Value, Forensic Evidence, Criminal Justice, Patan District, Legal Experts, Police Personnel.

1. Introduction

Criminal investigation is a systematic process through which the investigating agency attempts to discover the truth about an offence. The process normally involves receiving information about the offence, visiting the scene, collecting material evidence, examining witnesses, recording statements,



identifying suspects, preserving relevant articles and preparing the investigation record. In many cases, however, the facts cannot be fully understood through ordinary investigation alone. Certain matters require specialised scientific or technical knowledge. This is where expert opinion becomes important.

An expert is a person who possesses specialised knowledge, skill, experience, training or education in a particular field. In criminal cases, experts may be associated with forensic science, medicine, questioned documents, fingerprints, ballistics, cyber forensics, DNA analysis, toxicology, psychology and other specialised areas. Their opinion may assist the investigating officer in interpreting scientific material and may also assist the court in evaluating evidence.

The value of expert opinion does not arise merely because the opinion is given by a person described as an expert. Its usefulness depends on the expert's qualifications, the scientific method used, the quality and preservation of the material examined, the clarity of the report, the possibility of error and the consistency of the opinion with other evidence. Therefore, the evidentiary value of expert opinion needs to be examined carefully rather than treated as automatically conclusive.

The present research focuses on Patan District and attempts to understand the views of different stakeholders connected with the criminal justice system. The inclusion of law students, law teachers, legal experts, advocates and police personnel makes it possible to compare academic, professional and investigative perspectives. An equal number of respondents from each group also provides a simple and balanced sample structure for descriptive analysis.

2. Background of the Study

Modern criminal investigation increasingly depends on scientific methods. Traditional forms of evidence remain important, but scientific and technical evidence can provide additional support when properly collected and examined. For example, forensic examination may help identify biological material, establish the nature of a substance, compare physical traces or examine digital material. Medical experts may assist in understanding injuries, cause of death and other medical questions. Such evidence can become particularly important when oral testimony is incomplete, contradictory or unavailable.



At the same time, expert evidence has limitations. Experts may differ in their conclusions, scientific techniques may have limitations, samples may be contaminated, and reports may be misunderstood or over-relied upon. The investigating agency therefore needs to collect and preserve evidence according to proper procedures and communicate with experts clearly. The court also has to evaluate expert opinion together with the complete body of evidence.

3. Significance of the Study

- The study is significant because criminal investigation increasingly involves scientific and technical evidence.
- It helps understand how different stakeholders connected with law and criminal investigation perceive the role of expert opinion.
- The views of police personnel are important because they are directly involved in collecting and forwarding evidence for expert examination.
- The views of advocates and legal experts help understand the practical and legal interpretation of expert evidence.
- The views of law teachers and students provide an academic perspective and may indicate areas where legal education can give greater attention to forensic and scientific evidence.
- The study may help identify the perceived strengths and practical difficulties associated with expert opinion in criminal investigation.
- The Patan District focus provides a local and contextual dimension to the study.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the concept and role of expert opinion in criminal investigation.
2. To understand the perceived evidentiary value of expert opinion among selected stakeholders in Patan District.
3. To study the views of law students regarding expert opinion in criminal cases.
4. To study the views of law teachers regarding the usefulness and reliability of expert opinion.
5. To study the views of legal experts regarding the evidentiary value of expert opinion.
6. To study the views of advocates regarding the practical use of expert opinion in criminal proceedings.



7. To study the views of police personnel regarding the role of expert opinion during criminal investigation.
8. To provide a comparative description of the five stakeholder groups.

5. Research Questions

1. How do selected stakeholders perceive the evidentiary value of expert opinion in criminal investigation?
2. Do the views of law students, law teachers, legal experts, advocates and police personnel show meaningful differences?
3. What role is perceived for expert opinion in strengthening criminal investigation?
4. What practical difficulties may affect the effective use of expert opinion?

6. Research Methodology

The study follows a descriptive survey approach. The questionnaire is used as the main instrument for collecting the opinions of selected respondents. The study is focused on stakeholders who have an academic, professional or practical connection with law and criminal investigation.

The study is conducted with reference to Patan District, Gujarat. The respondents are selected from five stakeholder categories connected with legal education, legal practice and criminal investigation. The total sample consists of 130 respondents. Equal representation is provided to all five categories. Twenty-six respondents are selected from each category. This balanced structure permits comparison among the groups without allowing one category to have a larger numerical influence simply because of sample size.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample

Sr. No.	Respondent Category	Sample (N)
1	Law Students	26
2	Law Teachers	26
3	Legal Experts	26
4	Advocates	26
5	Police Personnel	26
	Total	130

The table shows that each stakeholder group contributes 26 respondents. Thus, each group represents 20.00% of the total sample and the five groups together represent 100.00% of the sample.



A structured questionnaire is used for collecting respondents' opinions. The questionnaire is attributed to Prajapati, Varsha and Hemangini Arya (2026), in the context of their study titled “A Legal Study on the Evidentiary Value of Expert Opinion in the Investigation of Criminal Offences in India – With Special Reference to Patan District,” Gokul Global University, Siddhpur. The present paper uses the sample information supplied by the researcher and does not add unreported questionnaire responses. The basic sample information is analysed through frequency and percentage. For the complete questionnaire dataset, question-wise frequencies, percentages, mean scores and other suitable statistical tests may be applied depending on the response scale and research hypotheses. Because the present data contain only the group-wise sample distribution, question-wise inferential results are not reported in this paper.

7. Concept of Expert Opinion

Expert opinion refers to the opinion of a person having specialised knowledge in a field relevant to an issue under investigation or adjudication. The expert does not replace the investigating officer or the court. Rather, the expert provides specialised assistance on matters that require technical or scientific understanding.

In criminal investigation, expert opinion may arise from different fields. Forensic science can examine physical traces and biological material. Medical experts can interpret injuries or medical conditions. Questioned-document experts may examine handwriting, signatures or documents. Fingerprint experts may compare impressions. Digital forensic experts may examine electronic devices and digital records. The precise relevance of an expert opinion depends on the facts and issues of the particular case.

8. Evidentiary Value of Expert Opinion

The evidentiary value of expert opinion should be understood in a balanced manner. Expert evidence can be highly useful where specialised knowledge is necessary, but it generally requires careful evaluation. The credibility of the opinion may depend on the expert's qualifications, the reliability of the scientific method, the condition and identity of the sample, the chain of custody, the quality of examination and the reasoning supporting the conclusion.



An expert report should therefore be clear and capable of being understood by the investigating officer, lawyers and the court. The report should explain the material examined, the method applied, the observations made and the basis of the conclusion. Where limitations or uncertainty exist, they should also be stated. This approach reduces the risk of treating an expert conclusion as an unquestionable fact.

9. Role of the Five Stakeholder Groups

Law students represent the academic-learning perspective. Their views may show how future legal professionals understand scientific evidence, expert testimony and the relationship between expert opinion and other forms of evidence.

Law teachers contribute an academic and pedagogical perspective. Their opinions can help identify the importance of forensic evidence, expert evidence and scientific investigation in legal education.

Legal experts provide a specialised legal perspective on the interpretation, admissibility, reliability and practical evidentiary significance of expert opinion.

Advocates experience expert evidence in legal practice. Their views can provide insight into how expert reports are used, challenged, explained and connected with other evidence in criminal cases.

Police personnel are directly connected with criminal investigation. Their views are important for understanding practical issues such as identification of the need for expert examination, collection and preservation of material, forwarding samples, communication with laboratories and use of expert reports during investigation.

10. Analysis of the Available Sample Data

The available sample data show a completely equal distribution across all five respondent categories. Each category contains 26 respondents. Therefore, the study does not give numerical priority to any single group. The equal allocation is useful for comparative analysis because differences observed in the questionnaire responses can be examined across groups with the same sample size.

The total sample is 130 respondents. Each group contributes 20.00% of the total sample. This structure provides a clear basis for presenting group-wise frequencies and percentages in subsequent tables when the individual questionnaire responses are available.



Table 2: Group-wise Percentage Distribution

Respondent Category	Frequency	Percentage
Law Students	26	20.00%
Law Teachers	26	20.00%
Legal Experts	26	20.00%
Advocates	26	20.00%
Police Personnel	26	20.00%
Total	130	100.00%

Interpretation: The sample is evenly distributed. There are 26 respondents in every category, which means that every stakeholder group has the same representation. This is particularly suitable for a comparative survey because the frequency of one group is not larger than another group.

11. Analysis

When the completed questionnaire responses are available, the following analysis can be presented in a systematic manner:

- Question-wise frequency and percentage for each response option.
- Group-wise comparison of law students, law teachers, legal experts, advocates and police personnel.
- Mean and standard deviation for Likert-type items, where appropriate.
- Comparison of stakeholder groups through suitable statistical tests if the assumptions and measurement level permit.
- Identification of areas of agreement and disagreement among the five groups.
- Interpretation of findings with reference to the role and limitations of expert opinion in criminal investigation.

12. Discussion

The balanced sample design indicates that the study attempts to capture the issue from more than one professional viewpoint. The views of police personnel are likely to reflect the investigation stage, while advocates and legal experts can provide a courtroom and legal-practice perspective. Law teachers and students can contribute an educational perspective. Such diversity is useful because expert opinion operates across different stages of the criminal justice process.

At the same time, the value of the findings depends on the quality of the questionnaire and the completeness of the individual responses. The sample distribution alone can describe who



participated in the study, but it cannot establish whether respondents consider expert opinion highly reliable, moderately useful or limited in particular circumstances. Those conclusions require the actual question-wise responses. Accordingly, this paper separates the confirmed sample findings from conclusions that require additional data.

13. Conclusion

The present study examines the evidentiary value of expert opinion in the investigation of criminal offences with special reference to Patan District. The study includes 130 respondents divided equally among five stakeholder groups: law students, law teachers, legal experts, advocates and police personnel. Each group contains 26 respondents and therefore represents 20.00% of the total sample. The equal distribution provides a useful foundation for comparative analysis of professional and academic perceptions. Expert opinion can support criminal investigation when specialised knowledge is required, but its value depends on the quality of the expert, the scientific method, the integrity of the material examined, proper preservation and the consistency of the opinion with the complete evidence. The final assessment of the questionnaire findings should therefore consider both the usefulness and the limitations of expert opinion.

On the basis of the available data, the major confirmed finding is the balanced representation of the five stakeholder groups. For a complete empirical research paper, the next stage should incorporate the actual questionnaire responses so that question-wise tables, percentages, mean scores, group comparisons and statistical interpretations can be reported without introducing unsupported values.

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