Didee Publications International Journal, Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 56-65

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EVIDENTIARY FAILURES AND JURY BIAS IN THE CURTIS FLOWERS CASE

[1*]Daniel Ojotule Offor, Oluwaseun [2]Emmanuel Omopo

[1]Department of Clinical Psychology, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

[2]Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies, University of Ibadan

Corresponding author: danieloffor048@gmail.com

Abstract

The research investigates psychological and forensic factors along with procedural elements which result in wrongful convictions during high-profile criminal cases through studying the Flowers trial as an exemplary case. The research employed multiple methods to examine archival court records trial transcripts and appellate decisions for detecting eyewitness errors and incentivized informant testimony and forensic evidence limitations and racial bias in jury selection. The research reviewed empirical literature which examined cognitive biases and memory malleability and interrogation practices and courtroom decision-making to create a unified understanding of forensic psychology and legal scholarship. The research used thematic data evaluation to study how individual factors and situational factors and systemic factors combine to determine verdict outcomes. The analysis revealed that broken procedural safeguards which included inadequately validated forensic methods and racially biased jury selection processes created a greater risk for wrongful conviction. The investigators applied expert testimony and psychological assessment methods and Daubert standards to evaluate the trial evidence which they used to determine its authenticity and its function as legal evidence. The research study combines experimental findings with meta-analytic results and case study evidence to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the factors which lead to wrongful convictions. The research identifies crucial intervention points through its combination of qualitative document analysis and theory driven synthesis which include improving forensic standards and reducing cognitive and racial biases and developing better jury assessment methods. The research findings demonstrate that psychologists and legal professionals and forensic experts need to work together across disciplines to protect the justice system from mistakes that could lead to unfair outcomes. The research creates a complete framework which explains the mechanisms behind wrongful convictions in cases that share similarities with the Flowers trial.

Keywords: wrongful convictions, jury bias, evidentiary failures, false confessions, Curtis Flowers case

Introduction

Wrongful convictions have emerged as a central concern in criminal justice and forensic psychology, which has led to major changes in how researchers and legal experts understand wrongful conviction cases that involve serious criminal offenses (Garrett, 2020; Morgan, 2023). The findings from large exoneration databases and DNA evidence testing conducted after convictions show that police investigations and evidence collection and trial procedures contain inherent flaws which lead to wrongful convictions of innocent defendants (Garrett, 2020). Criminal procedure requires complete reevaluation and forensic science needs major changes while law enforcement and psychological science should have their established relations redefined because this recognition applies to severe violent crime cases which carry the most severe consequences for judicial mistakes.

Research across psychology, criminology, law, and forensic science has identified recurring pathways to wrongful conviction, which include mistaken eyewitness identification and false or coerced confessions and misleading forensic testimony and incentivised informant evidence and structural failures in disclosure and defence representation (Scherr et al., 2020; Gudjonsson, 2021; Morgan, 2023). High-profile cases create more dangerous conditions because public pressure and political salience and moral outrage force decision-makers to deal with greater cognitive demands while increasing institutional pressure to obtain convictions (Pearson et al., 2018; Helm, 2023). The system treats evidence ambiguity through a process that favors guilt determination while weakening procedural protections which law enforcement should use to safeguard rights during suspect interviews.

The Flowers trials serve as a clear example of how psychological factors and forensic evidence and procedural rules create overlapping points which lead to disputed convictions during multiple court proceedings and appellate processes. The study treats Flowers trial as established evidence because the case matches existing patterns from wrongful-conviction research which include cumulative disadvantage following suspect misclassification and disputed informant testimony and forensic methods which have established limitations and racially biased jury selection processes (Scherr et al., 2020; Morgan, 2023). The case serves as an analytical tool which enables researchers to study fundamental patterns that lead to legal mistakes through detailed examination.

Psychological, Forensic, and Procedural Factors in Wrongful Convictions

The most unreliable evidence in high-profile criminal cases comes from eyewitness memory, which remains their least trustworthy form of evidence. Scientific research spanning multiple decades demonstrates that human memory functions through reconstructive processes which enable eyewitness testimonies to suffer from both external suggestions and internal stress and the effects of post-event information contamination (Mickes et al., 2025). Jurors believe that confident eyewitness identification produces correct results which occurs most frequently during violent crime cases that elicit intense emotional responses (Helm, 2021; Shi, 2023). The misperceptions about eyewitness identification create exaggerated impacts because incorrect identifications will unduly influence verdicts through their impact on identification results.

The study of wrongful convictions requires two distinct functions from forensic science. DNA analysis has exposed numerous justice system errors which lead to wrongful convictions although many forensic disciplines need both empirical validation and error-rate transparency across their operations (Garrett, 2020; Morgan, 2023). The presentation of forensic evidence through unneeded confidence will mislead judges and juries about its scientific basis because adversarial environments make it hard for people to assess the weaknesses in research methods.

The procedural elements of the system create additional dangers which make the situation worse. The use of incentivised informant testimony together with racially biased jury selection and improper evidentiary standard application leads to trial unfairness which negatively impacts defendants in high-salience cases (Helm, 2023; Weinsheimer et al., 2025). The combination of psychological factors and forensic evidence and legal procedures establishes an environment which guarantees that wrongful convictions will occur.

Methodological Framework and Secondary Data Sources

The research uses a secondary multi-method approach which combines qualitative document examination with theory-based empirical literature synthesis to conduct its study. The Flowers prosecutions provide the essential case materials through their archival court records and trial transcripts and appellate decisions which enable researchers to study evidentiary practices and judicial reasoning and procedural protections throughout different time periods. The research team

examined the documents to find recurrent themes which related to eyewitness accounts and informant testimony and forensic investigation techniques and the processes used to choose jurors.

Thematic analysis was used to evaluate how individual-level psychological factors and situational pressures and systemic legal structures interacted to shape verdict outcomes. The approach permits researchers to connect case-specific results to existing experimental studies and research which examines cognitive bias and memory malleability and forensic reliability through meta-analytic methods. The analysis follows a theoretical framework which uses cumulative disadvantage models and forensic psychology decision-making frameworks to organize its findings (Scherr et al., 2020).

The study uses expert testimony research principles together with Daubert standards to assess forensic evidence from the Flowers trial by examining method validation and error rate knowledge and court-approved conclusion validity. The method uses archival analysis together with established psychological and legal knowledge to create a complete assessment of wrongful conviction processes which maintains internal consistency while not introducing new primary data.

Thematic Analysis of Factors Contributing to Wrongful Convictions

The Flowers prosecutions show through thematic analysis of court records and trial transcripts and appellate decisions that wrongful conviction risk developed from psychological and forensic and procedural factors which interacted with each other instead of occurring from separate evidentiary mistakes. The case presented multiple stages which created an environment that combined individual cognitive vulnerabilities with institutional pressures and structural safeguards to produce an increased risk of mistakes. The current discovery matches the findings of wrongful conviction research which shows that wrongful convictions occur through a series of events which build upon each other and form a continuous sequence of mistakes during the investigative and courtroom processes (Garrett, 2020; Morgan, 2023). The legal processes of the Flowers case took place during multiple trials and appeals which showed that once an error trajectory starts, it becomes permanent in the legal system and is impossible to fix. The identified thematic patterns demonstrate that case-specific challenges align with established mechanisms that commonly operate in prominent criminal court cases (Scherr et al., 2020; Helm, 2023).

The primary theme demonstrated how investigators who misidentified suspects created cumulative disadvantage because their early assumptions about the investigation determined how they interpreted evidence and made choices about their actions. The archival materials show that once Flowers became the main suspect, investigators began to focus their efforts on investigating the case by dismissing most information which didn't support their theory while they increasingly accepted ambiguous evidence as reliable proof. Psychological research demonstrates that confirmation-driven reasoning develops as a normal result of cognitive bias because investigators who face strong motivation to solve crimes will experience this reasoning pattern during serious cases (Scherr et al., 2020). The cumulative disadvantage framework shows how initial mistakes can progress into total system breakdowns which boost the risk of encountering false testimony and aggressive interrogation techniques and evidential focus restrictions (Gudjonsson, 2021). The Flowers trial revealed that the prosecution could maintain their case through the whole process even when new evidence showed that their case had become physically weaker.

The second major theme showed how eyewitness identification and compensated informant testimony both suffered from dangerous weaknesses which led to their unnecessary value estimation as testimonial evidence. The case record showed inconsistent evidence which included stress and delay and possible contamination as contextual elements that made memory unreliable. Extensive research in cognitive science shows that people preserve memories through reconstructive processes which become highly prone to distortion when they recall emotionally charged events that usually happen during violent crimes (Mickes et al., 2025; Shi, 2023). Jurors however mistakenly believe that confident witnesses always provide correct identifications resulting in them overestimating the reliability of incorrect eyewitness testimonies (Helm, 2021). Informant testimony introduced more risks because informants who received incentives would feel driven to either invent false information or make things sound worse than they actually were, which has been documented as a common problem in wrongful conviction cases (Garrett, 2020; Weinsheimer et al., 2025).

The analysis discovered that both forensic evidence and expert testimony limitations produced critical wrongful conviction risk components. The forensic techniques that scientists have yet to confirm as valid were presented as scientifically definitive techniques although existing validation research has proven otherwise. The Daubert-informed criteria uncovered three key deficiencies in

the control of error rates and the disclosure of research methods and the establishment of scientific agreement, which mirrored the problems documented in forensic science research (Garrett, 2020; Morgan, 2023). Jurors tend to give excessive importance to evidence when it is presented as certain because it can confirm the witness evidence they already believe to be accurate. The Flowers case demonstrates that forensic evidence can both serve as a tool for correcting wrongful convictions and lead to more wrongful convictions when its limitations become hidden or exaggerated (Morgan, 2023).

Another theme examined how jury selection processes and structural bias lead to procedural failures which resulted in appellate court decisions that revealed evidence of racially biased exclusion practices. Racial bias exclusion practices create jury pools which lack complete representation and impair decision-making processes which handle cases involving defendants from groups that have historically faced discrimination. Research in wrongful conviction scholarship finds that racial bias operates with cognitive heuristics to increase the risk that evidence which remains unclear will be treated as evidence against minority defendants (Helm, 2023; Pearson et al., 2018). The procedural safeguards which protect fair trials face greater threats from high-profile cases because community members expect prosecutors to win their cases (The Flowers trial exemplifies how systemic bias can operate alongside psychological and evidentiary vulnerabilities to shape verdict outcomes.

Thematic analysis shows that Flowers case created wrongful conviction risk because different cognitive processes in individuals combined with external situational demands and multiple failures in criminal justice system procedures. The interacting processes created verdicts which remained intact despite mounting evidence that potentially indicated judicial errors, which mirrors the patterns discovered in exoneration studies from different regions (Garrett, 2020; Weinsheimer et al., 2025). The study shows that anti-wrongful conviction efforts require more than separate fixes; they demand comprehensive work from various disciplines which must tackle cognitive bias and forensic validity and procedural equity all at once. The study establishes how the Flowers trial links to key judicial processes, which lead to wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice in prominent criminal cases.

Implications and Framework for Preventing Wrongful Convictions

The Flowers trial demonstrates the need for systemic changes which should solve the psychological and forensic and procedural issues that cause wrongful convictions. The beginning of an investigation can lead to a series of mistakes because cognitive biases and public interest and emotional impact of the case will change how evidence is understood. Law enforcement officials and legal practitioners need to use established investigative methods and techniques to reduce their biases and perpetual education about memory and perception and judgment during intense situations. The legal system needs eyewitness and informant testimony to present accurate contextual information which reveals possible mistakes and forensic evidence requires rigorous examination together with clear evidence display to explain its boundaries to jurors and judges. Expert witnesses must provide educational content to the court because uncertain scientific evidence needs to stay neutral and not sway jury decisions. The legal system depends on two fundamental elements which establish fair trial procedures through their implementation of procedural safeguards that protect against unfair treatment and discrimination.

The legal system can decrease wrongful conviction risks through processes which select jurors without bias while tracking racial and socio-economic differences and conducting thorough supervisory control procedures. The judicial system needs to identify cumulative errors and procedural failures at an early stage to prevent them from reaching a final verdict. The implementation of these measures establishes a complete framework which tackles human cognitive weaknesses and maintains evidentiary reliability and upholds fair legal procedures. The framework implementation will improve legal processes while protecting defendant rights and boosting public trust in the justice system that helps prevent wrongful convictions from occurring in both major and everyday cases.

Conclusion

The research shows that the wrongful convictions which happen in major criminal cases through the Flowers trial happen because three main factors interact with each other to create psychological vulnerabilities and forensic limitations and procedural weaknesses. The combination of cognitive biases and memory malleability and flawed forensic practices and racial discrimination during jury selection creates conditions which increase the chances of convicting innocent people. The study shows that these factors create a cycle which pushes a case toward conviction which continues from one trial to another through multiple appeals. The study demonstrates the need for criminal

justice reform through its investigation of these mechanisms which need to combine research on investigative decision-making with evidence assessment and procedural security measures. The implementation of all preventive measures will enhance legal outcomes by making them more accurate and fair while defending defendant rights and boosting public trust in the justice system which helps prevent wrongful convictions in major cases and everyday situations.

References

Garrett, B. L. (2020). Wrongful convictions. *Annual Review of Criminology, 3*, 245–269. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-011518-024739

Gudjonsson, G. H. (2021). The science-based pathways to understanding false confessions and wrongful convictions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, Article 633936. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.633936

Helm, R. K. (2021). *Evaluating witness testimony: Juror knowledge, false memory, and the utility of evidence-based directions.* The International Journal of Evidence & Proof, *25*(4), 264–285. https://doi.org/10.1177/13657127211031018

Helm, R. K. (2023). *Wrongful conviction in England and Wales: An assessment of successful appeals and key contributors.* The Wrongful Conviction Law Review, *4*(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.29173/wclawr79

Mickes, L., Wilson, B. M., & Wixted, J. T. (2025). The cognitive science of eyewitness memory. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 29*(7), 655–668. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2025.01.008

Morgan, J. (2023). *Wrongful convictions and claims of false or misleading forensic evidence.* Journal of Forensic Sciences, *68*(3), 908–961. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.15233

Pearson, J. M., Law, J. R., Skene, J. H. P., Beskind, D. H., Vidmar, N., Ball, D. A., Malekpour, A., & Carter, R. M. (2018). *Modelling the effects of crime type and evidence on judgments about guilt.* Nature Human Behaviour, *2*(11), 856–866. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0451-z

Scherr, K. C., Redlich, A. D., & Kassin, S. M. (2020). *Cumulative disadvantage: A psychological framework for understanding how innocence can lead to confession, wrongful conviction, and beyond.* Perspectives on Psychological Science, *15*(2), 353–383. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619896608

Shi, I. (2023). *False memory syndrome: Children's eyewitness testimonies.* Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, *7*(1), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.26855/jhass.2023.01.030

Weinsheimer, C., Giroux, M., Levy, T., & Connolly, D. (2025). *Reasons for exoneration among fresh evidence cases in Canada.* The Wrongful Conviction Law Review, *6*(1), 45–78. https://doi.org/10.29173/wclawr125