



Jury prejudice in court put in the dock

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AT A terrorism trial in 2008, a judge ordered a security-glass pane in front of their dock be removed for fears it would prejudice the jury against them.

Now a three-year research project is trying to find out if juries are influenced by the location of the accused in a court by subjecting 100 mock juries to the same simulated trial.

The only difference in the cases, performed by actors, will be that the accused is either

behind glass, in a traditional dock or at the bar table next to their lawyers.

“If there’s any difference [in their verdicts] it will be because of the only thing we will change,” said Dr Meredith Rossner from the University of Western Sydney.

There had been no research into the issue, but past studies showed juries could be more likely to convict people of certain ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds, said Dr Blake McKimmie, a lecturer in psychology at the University of Queens-

land. “I think it is to do with the context they are in. The context can cue stereotypes,” he said.

In Canberra, where the accused usually sits in the public gallery, the issue is being hotly debated amid plans to install a dock for security reasons. Dr Rossner said in the US, accused people always sat with their lawyers at the bar table.

However, to ensure security, they often wore stun-belts under their clothing and these could be activated by security officers. This raised other issues, she said.