

14 - 16 August 2026

Berlin , Germany

The Evidentiary Value of Confessions in Criminal Justice: Legal Risks of False Self-Incrimination

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Abstract

Confessions have traditionally been regarded as one of the most persuasive forms of evidence in criminal proceedings. However, contemporary research in criminal law, forensic psychology, and criminology has demonstrated that confessions are not inherently reliable and, in certain circumstances, may result from coercion, psychological pressure, or cognitive vulnerability rather than actual guilt. This paper examines the evidentiary value of confessions within the framework of criminal justice, with particular emphasis on the legal risks associated with false self-incrimination.

The study analyzes the procedural safeguards designed to protect suspects against involuntary or unreliable confessions, including the right to remain silent, the privilege against self-incrimination, access to legal counsel, and the requirement that confessions be voluntary and corroborated by additional evidence. Furthermore, the paper explores the psychological and situational factors that contribute to false confessions, such as prolonged interrogations, suggestive questioning, stress, fatigue, youth, intellectual disabilities, and mental health disorders. Particular attention is given to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and international human rights standards, which emphasize the necessity of ensuring fairness in criminal proceedings and preventing miscarriages of justice. By integrating legal analysis with empirical findings from forensic psychology, the paper highlights the limitations of relying exclusively on confession evidence and argues for the adoption of evidence-based interrogation methods, mandatory electronic recording of interviews, and stronger procedural safeguards for vulnerable individuals. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the pursuit of justice requires not only effective criminal investigations but also robust legal mechanisms that protect individuals from wrongful convictions based on false self-incrimination.

Keywords: Confession Evidence; False Self-Incrimination; Criminal Justice; Evidentiary Value; Criminal Procedure; Wrongful Convictions; Procedural Safeguards; Human Rights; Forensic Psychology; European Court of Human Rights