

Principal Researcher

Gurjiwan Kaila

Project Sponsor

Gary Schenk

Instructor

Marie E. Graf

Research Field

Law Enforcement and
Public Safety

Program

Bachelor of Law
Enforcement Studies

Course

LAWS
4003

Funding Sources

N/A: Course-based
Project.

Use and Implementation of Body Worn Cameras in Policing

The use of body worn cameras (BWCs) is becoming increasingly prevalent in policing within numerous police departments all across the world. Today, many police officer encounters are being recorded and posted on media daily criticizing officers and portraying them in a negative way. As a result, due to high public demand, BWCs are being implemented in numerous departments in the hopes that they will increase police transparency and accountability. This study was conducted to come up with a report to help police agencies determine whether or not there is any value for BWCs in their police departments by examining the benefits and challenges of this emerging technology.

To conduct this research, a qualitative research methodology design was used to help make interpretations of the data. Secondary data was collected from academic literature using multiple library databases. This data was then compared to reports obtained from the New York Police Department (NYPD), Toronto Police Service (TPS), Edmonton Police Service (EPS), and Calgary Police Service (CPS).

The findings determined that BWCs significantly reduce the number of citizens' complaints against the police. Police officers generally have mixed reviews towards BWCs and a major reason departments are not implementing these programs is the high cost of training officers, BWC equipment, and data storage. Implementing a BWC program requires millions of dollars and many police departments cannot afford that. These recording devices also raise concerns with regards to the privacy rights of members of the public. BWCs have multiple benefits; however, implementing them into police agencies may not be a suitable decision for all departments.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that prior to implementing a BWC program, agencies should identify their objectives for using this technology and consider the costs and benefits of BWC programs. If there is a considerable need for this program, it is suggested that pilot projects be conducted to test the technology and see if it is a good fit for the department. Written policies should layout how cameras will be used and how footage will be stored. An organization should ensure proper safeguards, retention, destruction, and storage of recordings captured on BWCs. These policies should also determine when recording is required, whether officers have to announce that an encounter is being recorded, video download procedures, and how long video is to be retained. It is recommended that officers inform subjects when they are being recorded unless it is a situation where it would be impossible, or the situation is unsafe. Police departments must also ensure that they are consistent with applicable privacy laws and the legal constraints that may apply in their jurisdictions.

Structured Abstract

Introduction: Ever since there was a rise in police use of force incidents against minorities in the U.S. in 2014, there has been a high public demand for an increase in police accountability and transparency. Thousands of U.S. police agencies rushed to implement body worn camera (BWC) programs into their departments to record their interactions with citizens in the hopes that this will reduce the number of complaints against the police and hold police officers accountable; however, a BWC program may bring significant financial costs for a police department. This research was conducted to answer the following question: How might the implementation of body worn cameras support police officers in their line of duty?

Methods: The research was conducted using a qualitative research methodology design. Conducting a qualitative research methodology helped to offer interpretations upon collecting and analyzing existing data. A literature review was conducted collecting information from 18 peer reviewed and scholarly journal articles pertinent to the research project topic. This anonymized secondary data was compared to reports obtained from the New York Police Department (NYPD), Toronto Police Service (TPS), Edmonton Police Service (EPS), and Calgary Police Service (CPS).

Results/Findings: The findings determined that the adoption of BWC programs can improve transparency, provide great evidence for investigations, and correct many internal problems police agencies exhibit (Miller & Toliver, 2014). Other benefits included the reduction of citizen complaints and the resolving of complaint cases against officers using recorded video evidence (IACP, 2012). Following a 12 month study in a California police department, there was a 60% reduction in officer use of force incidents. The shifts without cameras experienced twice as many use of force incidents as the shifts that were using cameras. The study also found that the use of BWCs reduced citizens' complaints by 88% (Miller & Toliver, 2014). Invasion of privacy is a major concern and to date, there is no freedom of information and privacy legislation in Canada that specifically refers to police use of BWCs (Edmonton Police Service, 2015). Officers have mixed perceptions about BWCs, while the general public maintains a positive view. Katz, Choate, Ready, and Nuño (2014) revealed that officers found the cameras to be comfortable, but downloading the data and completing the reports took too long, and there were concerns the footage could be used against them. Lastly, the high cost is preventing many agencies from implementing BWC programs. However, some studies have stated it is worth it to implement BWC programs, because BWCs would save costs on complaint investigations, use of force investigations, use of force lawsuits, and court cases.

Discussion: BWCs are important for the public to feel safe, for police to be held accountable, and for video evidence to refute false complaints against officers.

Practical Applications: There is a need for more evidence and more studies to be conducted on this topic. This emerging technology can help increase police accountability, transparency, and the public's trust in the police.

References:

- Edmonton Police Service. (2015). *Body worn video: Considering the evidence* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://www.bwvsg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Edmonton-Police-BWV-Final-Report.pdf>
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2014). *Body worn cameras model policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.iacp.org/model-policy/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/07/BodyWornCamerasPaper.pdf>
- Katz, C. M., Choate, D. E., Ready, J. R., & Nuño, L. (2014). *Evaluating the impact of officer worn body cameras in the Phoenix Police Department*. Retrieved from https://www.bja.gov/bwc/pdfs/Evaluating-the-Impact-of_officer-Worn-Body-Cameras.pdf
- Miller, L., & Toliver, J. (2014). *Implementing a body worn camera program: Recommendations and lessons learned*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/472014912134715246869.pdf>