

# Benefit or Burden? The Impact of Body-Worn Cameras on Police Officers' Operational Efficiency

Tara Javaheri

## Introduction

Body-worn cameras (BWCs) have gained widespread adoption in law enforcement worldwide, starting with their first known use in the United Kingdom between 2005 and 2006 (Boivin & Gendron, 2022). These devices aim to document interactions between law enforcement personnel and the public while on duty, offering benefits such as improving police accountability and safeguarding officers from false accusations of misconduct. However, the impact of BWCs on police officers' daily operations remains underexplored. While BWCs are seen as a way to improve evidence collection and transparency, their potential to either enhance operational efficiency or add bureaucratic and technological challenges remains unclear.

## Background

The Delta Police Department in British Columbia, as the first agency in the province to implement BWCs, offers key insights into the practical benefits and challenges of BWC integration. During a discussion with Sgt. Ingram, the department's BWC coordinator, it became clear that while BWCs have improved evidence collection and increased transparency, they also present challenges such as the need for transcriptions of video evidence for court use and the administrative burden of video retention and legal compliance. These challenges raise the question: do BWCs contribute to operational efficiency, or do they add additional workload and complexities? My research is motivated by these real-world challenges and tries to focus on police officers' experiences and perspective.

## Methods

I used secondary data to examine the impact of BWCs on Canadian police officers' operational tasks. Due to limited research in Canada and varying adoption of BWCs across departments, my study also incorporates literature from the U.S. and other countries with more extensive use of this technology. A qualitative approach was chosen to analyze existing studies, case reports, and data on BWCs in Canadian police forces. Secondary research was necessary due to time constraints and allowed for a review of available literature. I conducted a search through the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) library, focusing on databases like "Criminal Justice Abstracts," "JSTOR Journals," and "eBook Index." I also used government reports, guidelines, and cross-referenced sources via Google Scholar.

## Results/Findings

Research shows that BWCs enhance internal accountability by reducing incidents of force and citizen complaints, as officers behave more appropriately when they know they are being recorded (Stanley, 2015; Ariel et al., 2020). However, BWCs often fail to provide external transparency, as footage cannot be released to the public until a case is closed, which may take years, undermining their potential to build public trust (Guzik, 2020). While BWCs promote accountability within departments, their delayed release limits the public's ability to understand police actions in real-time, questioning their impact on trust. The introduction of BWCs has sparked mixed reactions among officers. Some see them as helpful tools for professionalism, but others view them as invasive surveillance devices that can affect morale and privacy (Boivin & Gendron, 2022). The constant monitoring created by BWCs may lead to a sense of mistrust among officers, which could result in "de-policing," where officers limit their proactive policing to avoid negative evaluations (Ariel et al., 2020). Research suggests that, with proper support, BWCs can balance accountability and efficiency without hindering officer performance. Despite the benefits, BWCs also present operational challenges. While they improve report accuracy and ensure adherence to protocols, managing and reviewing the footage requires significant time and resources (Guzik, 2020). Smaller police departments struggle with the costs of purchasing and maintaining BWCs, and the need for secure data storage adds to the burden (Boivin & Gendron, 2022). Privacy concerns also arise, as recording sensitive interactions raises ethical dilemmas about misuse of the footage (Guzik, 2020). Additionally, some Canadian agencies, such as the RCMP, remain hesitant to adopt BWCs due to uncertainties about their effectiveness and lack of federal financial support (Guzik, 2020).

## Discussion

My study revealed several challenges related to BWCs and their impact on policing, shedding light on both the strengths and limitations in the available resources. Access to insights from Sgt. Ingram was instrumental. Additional resources, such as the JIBC library and Writing Center, were invaluable in refining my research, while the structured guidance from my instructor, Kelsea, helped manage the workload of this complex project. Despite these supports, the project faced challenges, notably due to the limited time frame, which restricted the depth of analysis on such a complex issue. Additionally, a critical limitation was the scarcity of Canadian-focused research on BWCs, especially concerning officers' personal experiences. Canadian studies primarily cover pilot programs rather than long-term impacts, making it difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions. Reflecting on these gaps, I would prioritize conducting primary qualitative research if given more time and resources.

## Conclusions or Recommendations

To address the knowledge gaps surrounding BWCs in Canadian policing, further research specific to Canadian law enforcement is essential. Studies focusing on Canadian contexts will help to capture the unique challenges and benefits Canadian agencies face and provide a clearer picture of how BWCs integrate into local policing. A qualitative approach in future studies, such as interviews and surveys with officers, would bring critical insights into their experiences, showing how BWCs impact their daily tasks, time management, and overall job satisfaction. Such research could reveal the practical challenges that BWCs may pose, like the administrative demands of managing footage, and explore effects on officers' well-being, job-related stress, and even their sense of autonomy or accountability on duty. Developing clear policies on BWC use is crucial, alongside robust training that helps officers understand legal implications and manage this technology effectively. My research suggests that thoughtful integration of BWCs can enhance public trust and procedural justice while supporting officers' operational needs.

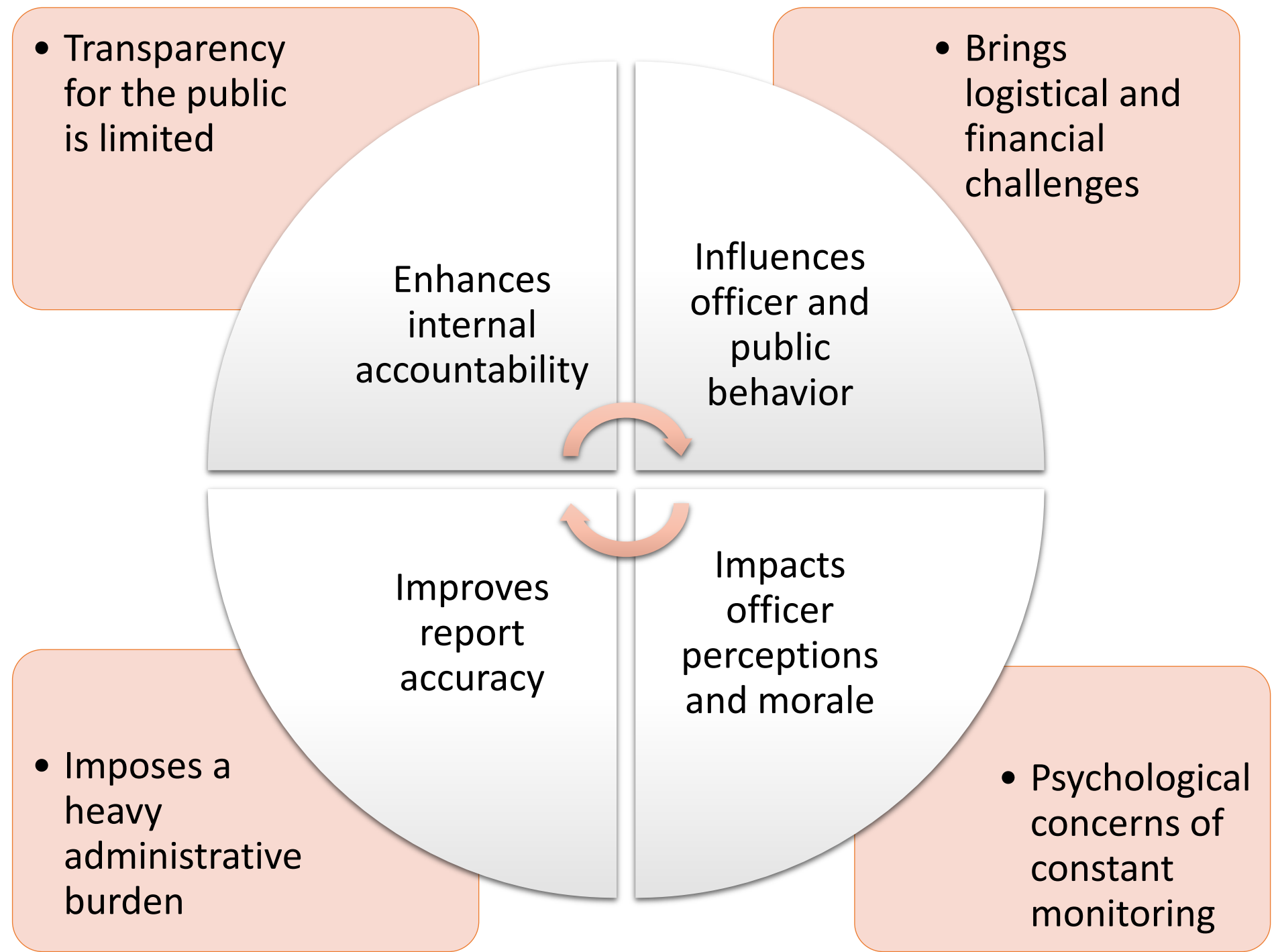
## References

Ariel, B., Mitchell, R. J., Firpo, M. E., Fraiman, R., Hyatt, J. M., & Harinam, V. (2020). Does surveillance of officers lead to de-policing? Police on Camera: Surveillance, Privacy, and Accountability, 3.

Boivin, R., & Gendron, A. (2022). An experimental study of the impact of body-worn cameras on police report writing. Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18(4), 747–764.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-021-09469-8>

Guzik, K. (2020). Can we count on the police? Definitional issues in considering the promise of body-worn cameras to increase police accountability. Police on camera (pp. 64–79). Routledge.

Stanley, J. (2015). Police body-mounted cameras: With right policies in place, a win for all. American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn34517-eng.pdf>



Note. Key findings and trade-offs of body-worn cameras