

What Happens Downstream? Perceptions of Body–Worn Camera Among External Stakeholders

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Research on Body–Worn Cameras

- Core questions of prior research:
 - Use of force and citizen/internal complaints
 - Police perceptions of BWCs
 - Citizen perceptions of BWCs
 - Officer/citizen injuries
 - Assaults on officers
- What happens outside of the police department?
 - Courtroom workgroup
 - Wider criminal justice system
 - Case processing and outcomes
 - Local communities and institutions

Diffusion of Innovations

- Traces & explains spread of ideas, practices, & technologies in social systems
- Wejnert's (2002) Framework
 - Innovation: consequences for innovators & stakeholders; cost benefit analysis
 - Innovator: scope; familiarity; status; capacity; characteristics; network positions
 - External environment: geography; political climate; culture; uniformity



Methods

- Spokane (WA) and Tempe (AZ) Police Departments
 - 6 month RCT period
 - Treatment: BWCs in May 2015 (Spokane) and November 2015 (Tempe)
- Semi-structured interviews & focus groups with external stakeholders (N=42)
 - 4 months into the RCT period
- Questions covered:
 - The impact of BWCs on their job
 - The perceived strengths and weaknesses of BWCs
 - The social considerations of BWCs



Sample

Spokane

- Community activist
- City and county judges
- City and county prosecutors
- County public defender
- City and county investigators
- Citizen review board
- Victims advocate
- City council
- Mental health professional

Tempe

- Local business advocate
- City and county judges
- City prosecutor
- City and county public defender
- Victims advocate
- Fire and rescue
- School administration
- City and public transportation security
- City council

Perceived Strengths of BWCs

- Evidentiary value
- Improve police-citizen relations
- Improve working environment for police officers

"They can be very beneficial when dealing with DUI suspects because it provides [...] the visual evidence of what the officer's trying to describe when it comes to their physical impairment [...] our very first [video] was for DUI and it was fairly stunning to see what the officer saw." (Prosecutor)

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“There’s a huge lack of trust between the public and the police [...] so, if citizens know that there’s a video, and then they see the police report, they believe it [...] Eventually they’re going to give the officers the benefit of the doubt without even having to go check the video.” (Citizen Review Board Member)

Perceived Strengths of BWCs

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- Improve police-citizen relations
- Improve working environment for police officers

“They get so many false and exaggerated allegations made against them [...] my motion calendar on Monday mornings is a great example. The victims come in and [say], ‘the police are lying, I never told them that [...] they wrote it down the way they wanted to write it down’. Every Monday morning the police are getting thrown under the bus in this court. And it would be great that they could at least have something to protect themselves against allegations of false reporting [and] false arresting.” (Judge)

Perceived Weaknesses of BWCs

“The complaints I’m fielding already from our paralegal. ‘I spent half a day or a full day just trying to sort through all these body camera videos.’ And this is just the initial roll out [...] if you start adding to this exponentially where you have more and more of these officers with [BWCs ...] who’s going to be responsible for doing that? It doesn’t come with a flag saying here’s the important thing right here, this 10 minutes of 2 hours of a camera rolling.”
(Prosecutor)

- Resource burden
- Need to manage public expectations
- Lack of direction on activation and privacy protection

Perceived Weaknesses of BWCs

“People have a CSI expectation that they’re going to get this awesome video of everything unfolding and they don’t realize that when the camera’s sitting on a police officer’s body, the view is very limited [...] I’m concerned that jurors will have an unreasonable expectation and prosecutors won’t be able to flesh that out.” (Judge)

- Resource burden
- Need to manage public expectations
- Lack of direction on activation and privacy protection

Perceived Weaknesses of BWCs

“We had somebody request every moment of footage. That’s terrifying as a victim. This is your most vulnerable moment [...] If someone is left in an alley or sidewalk or park, and a patrol officer gets the call, runs to the scene, is that person going to know whether to turn on their camera or remember to turn it off? Is this footage of them in a state of undress or disrepair or trauma [...] how accessible is that to the public? That’s a concern of mine that hasn’t been fleshed out enough through lawsuits.” (Victim’s Advocate)

- Resource burden
- Need to manage public expectations
- Lack of direction on activation and privacy protection

Discussion

- High levels of support from stakeholders for BWCs
- Department/community should work to address concerns before BWC deployment if possible
 - Privacy concerns a priority for stakeholders
 - Concerns about police officer activation
- Diffusion of innovations: Communicate with stakeholders early & often
 - Time to address resource burden issues
 - Realize full benefits of technology
- Community specific planning process

Future Research Directions & Recommendations

- Identify best practices for integrating BWCs into CJ landscape
 - Follow-up interviews with downstream stakeholders once BWCs are well-established
 - Interviews in other communities
- Assessment of downstream impact
 - Impact of BWCs on case processing and outcomes in Tempe

QUESTIONS?

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