Comparing the Attitudes of Police Body-Worn Cameras
Nate LeMahieu, Na Liu M.S., Chris Sweadner, John Klofas Ph.D., and John McCluskey, Ph.D.
Center for Public Safety Initiatives

Introduction

Resulting from instances of use-of-force between citizens and police officers, body-worn cameras have been implemented in law enforcement agencies country-wide in hopes that officer accountability, agency transparency, and police-community relationships will improve.

The Rochester Police Departments implementation of Body-Worn Cameras began in the Summer of 2016 and finished in March of 2017. Currently there are approximately 435 Body-Worn Cameras in the Rochester Police Department.

A component of CPSI’s Body-Worn Camera Project Evaluation included identifying the attitudes of officers and citizens in a variety of methods:

• Community Surveys
• Ride-Along Interviews
• Officers Surveys
• Focus Groups
• Community Forums

Research Questions

• Do the local Rochester Communities mirror the current national trend for support for police body-worn cameras?

• Does support for body-worn cameras vary for individuals of different backgrounds or interests?

• How do the officers at the Rochester Police Department Perceive body-worn cameras?

• Do perceptions of body-worn cameras vary between the community and the police?

• Do perceptions of body-worn cameras vary by RPD Patrol Section?

Quantitative & Qualitative Findings

“Body-Worn Cameras Are Good For Police-Community Relationships” (N=585)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer Surveys (Qualtrics) (n=330)</th>
<th>Community Surveys (TIPS) (n=194)</th>
<th>Focus Groups (n=61)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong> 19.7%</td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong> 80.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong> 86.1%</td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong> 13.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong> 88.5%</td>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong> 11.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community Attitudes

• Recognize that body-worn cameras are beneficial, but not a singular solution to improving police-community relations
• Body-worn cameras could improve police and citizen behavior and cooperation
• Concerns regarding tax payer associations with the project
• Concerns over footage manipulation, including editing and redaction
• Interest in body-worn camera recording and footage retention policies

Law Enforcement Attitudes

• Cameras can be used to build probable cause and secure arrests
• Community members generally like the ideas of body-worn cameras, but individuals who regularly interact with the police don’t
• Reduced intelligence from witnesses
• Police clientele do not regularly notice the body-worn cameras, thus limiting any effect on interactions
• Concerns for citizen and police privacy resulting from public disclosure laws

References


Contact

Center for Public Safety Initiatives
Department of Criminal Justice
Building 1, Room 2383
Rochester Institute of Technology
www.rit.edu/cla/criminaljustice/cpsi