

**Genesee Section Officers' Perception of Body-Worn Cameras in Policing
After Implementation: An Executive Summary**

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Executive Summary

- I. Generally, Genesee Section officers held more positive perceptions of their Body Worn Cameras (BWCs).
 - a. They reported comfort with and a belief that the BWC was easy to utilize.
 - b. They perceived improved accuracy in evidence collection, leading to improvements in report writing.
 - c. They felt that the BWCs would provide utility when identifying false or untrue statements during incidents.
- II. Officers believed that the deployment of BWCs may have been excessive.
 - a. This was related to the belief that BWCs are being utilized to minimize officer misconduct, which officers thought was not prevalent in the RPD.
- III. Officers believed that patrol officer input was lacking during implementation.
- IV. Concerns pertaining to BWC usage still exist amongst Genesee Section officers.
 - a. Officers expressed beliefs that FOIL laws are unrestrictive, and give open access to BWC video.
 - i. This led to increases in concerns regarding violations of civilian and officer privacy rights.
 - b. They observed stricter appliance of domestic violence laws with the addition of BWCs
- V. Technological issues of the BWC were discussed, but not a focal point of discussion.
 - a. Issues with docking stations and camera detachment were still prevalent
 - b. Concerns that BWC placement being lower than eye level may lead to viewer misinterpretation of BWC footage
- VI. Officers have not noticed BWCs influencing police-citizen encounters, due to citizen's lack of awareness in its usage.
 - a. Officers often inform individuals they are recording in order to de-escalate situations.
- VII. Officers appreciate the level of discretion provided over BWC usage, as it may be a determinant factor in acquiring witness statements.

Report Summary

Introduction

This report serves as an executive summary of a larger report by identifying and summarizing the key findings of the larger report herein. Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) have recently been adopted by police departments nationwide in order to redefine policing, accountability, and transparency. Although expectations of BWCs are high, they are speculated to encourage constructive encounters between police and community members, enhance police legitimacy, improve evidence collection for arrest and prosecution, and expedite the resolution of internal and external complaints (White, 2014). After receiving broad support from the local communities in Rochester, the Rochester City Council invested in BWCs with additional support in the form of a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). A stipulation of receiving federal assistance from the BJA included an independent evaluation conducted by the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI). CPSI's evaluation of the Rochester Police Department's (RPD) implementation of BWCs is multi-faceted, including a variety of qualitative and quantitative data to assess the impact of BWCs on policing processes and outcomes.

This assessment includes, but is not limited to, changes in crime occurrence, complaints against police, and criminal justice processes (including criminal and internal investigations). A component of CPSI's evaluative strategy was to include ride-along interviews with RPD officers in order to collect qualitative data on officers' perceptions and expectations of body-worn cameras. For these interviews, researchers developed a semi-structured interview to collect information that reflects changes in police work after BWC adoption (See Appendix A). The researchers interviewed RPD officers from six beats in the Genesee Section in the form of a ride-along (See Appendix B). This report summary focuses on the results of the Genesee Section officer interviews.

Key Findings

BWC Comfort, Ease of Use, & Benefits

Seven of nine officers held positive perceptions regarding the use of BWCs, stating they were generally comfortable with its implementation. Most officers believed BWCs to be a substantial improvement in report writing, by: comparing footage to future statements and stories, allowing officers to revisit particular incidents, and providing a reference point when faced with allegations.

Officers described in detail how having a BWC is a useful tool when identifying false allegations made during incidents. Occasionally during incidents, involved parties are believed to have inconsistent statements. By having BWCs, officers have stated that it helps point out the discrepancies within these statements to determine the truth behind the circumstances of the incident at hand.

Perceptions of the BWC Implementation

Generally, officers believed BWC implementation was unnecessary. This was rooted in the perception that BWCs are used to prevent officer misconduct, and it was the belief of the officers that such issues aren't prevalent in the RPD. Thus, the officers believed the implementation of BWCs were to more adhere to a national trend.

In addition, officers felt that the implementation was rushed, and lacked the inclusion of the RPD patrol officers and their input. Officers believed this expeditious implementation colored their perceptions of the overall project, due to the roll-out moving forward without having first addressed technical issues. Furthermore, excluding the patrol officers from the process was thought to be detrimental to officer perceptions of the BWC.

Technological Difficulties

While officers reaffirmed the technological issues that the officers in the Clinton Section faced (docking station issues and camera detachment), it was not a focal point of conversation with the officers of the Genesee Section. The officers did discuss issues pertaining to the angle that the camera records to the placement on the chest. Due to the placement being lower than eye

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level, officers believed that the camera wouldn't be able to record the entirety of a situation, and leave the content of the footage subject to misinterpretation.

Privacy Concerns

Issues with privacy related to being filmed on BWC were not a central concern to the officers of the Genesee Section. However, the officers expressed aversion regarding FOIL (Freedom of Information Laws) that allow public access to government records¹, which includes BWC footage. Officers had stated direct concerns for their own privacy due to FOIL, such as in cases their footage, or footage that they were on, have been FOIL-ed and hadn't been informed about that. Additionally, officers were concerned for citizen privacy pertaining to FOIL laws. Officers believed that once the knowledge of the ability to access BWC footage was prevalent, FOIL might create concern for witness safety and privacy.

Changes in Case Outcome

The sample of officers who were interviewed expressed concerns related to the BWC making significant impacts on how they handle domestic violence calls. Prior to the use of BWCs, officers stated that they would exercise their discretion in handling the outcomes of these calls. Such discretion would often consist of granting involved parties the opportunity to work through their dispute without arresting anyone. However, officers in the Genesee Section stated that BWCs, coupled with strict domestic violence laws, have resulted in them issuing more arrests than prior to BWC implementation. This was apparent even when they felt an arrest is inappropriate for the dispute at hand.

Identifying False Statements

False statements made by citizens towards law enforcement officers are often hard to refute or verify without witnesses or video evidence that can show what actually happened at a scene. However, according to officers in the Genesee Section, BWCs have helped them compare the written statements of victims, witnesses and/or suspects to video footage from their cameras. Thus, BWCs have served as a useful tool that police officers can utilize in their quest of discovering truth and identifying false statements. Ultimately, officers thought that BWCs

¹ www.nysed.org

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benefit all actors within the legal system and those interacting with them by showing viewers the facts of the case.

Citizens' Awareness of BWC and Officer Discretion

Officers have stated that rarely, if ever, civilians are aware of the usage of BWCs. As a result, their interactions with the public have not experienced substantial changes. However, officers reported using the lack of awareness to their advantage, and inform civilians when they are recording in order to utilize the camera as a de-escalation tool.

Officers also have stated that it is common for them to use their discretion when deciding to record. One common situation where officers exercise their discretion when deciding to record are during witness statements. In these situations, officers sometimes decide to turn off their cameras to alleviate witness privacy concerns and collect a statement.

Conclusion

The officers of the Genesee Section offered insight to many aspects related to BWCs. The officers discussed their comfort with the technology, acknowledged a variety of evidential benefits, and held positive perceptions regarding its usage. Additionally, officers identified potential concerns in its usage, specifically regarding privacy issues with FOIL laws and unintended effects that BWCs have on case outcomes.

While generally civilians are not aware of BWC usage, officers used this unawareness as a de-escalation tool when necessary. Furthermore, officers considered the level of discretion provided as useful when recording incidents as it is an influential factor in collecting witness statements.

While technological issues and concerns around these were still present, it was not a focal point of conversation such as it was in the Clinton Section. Furthermore, in comparison to the results of the Clinton Section interviews, it was apparent to the researchers that the experiences with the BWC in the Genesee Section have been more positive. This is possibly due to increased familiarity in its usage (Gaub, Todak, Katz, & White, 2016). This increased acclimation may have allowed officers to experience the positive functions that BWCs offer. This qualitative research provides valuable insight and analysis regarding RPD officers' perceptions of BWCs

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and, while future ride-along interviews are not scheduled at this time, quantitative interviews can be used to gauge changes in officers' perceptions of BWCs and make comparisons to their perceptions prior to implementation.

References

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Appendix A:

A Framework Interview for Post-Implementation Ride Along

- a. What does a typical work day look like?
 - a. How long have you been a police officer?
 - b. How long have you been patrolling this area?
 - c. How long have you been working on this shift?
 - d. How long have you used a BWC?
 - e. How long do you spend on BWC related work per day (downloading footage, activating the camera)? Have BWC related processes contributed significantly to your workload? If so—has this interfered with patrol operations, and how?
 - f. Have you had to contact your supervisor more since using BWC?
 - g. How has your attitude towards BWC changed since its first deployment? What part of the process was difficult for you to get used to? (Ease of use, downloading and uploading data, camera activation, etc.)
 - h. Did you notice other changes after the BWC deployment?
2. Do you think BWC has changed the nature of police work?
 - a. Have you experienced changes in the nature of policing with the addition of BWC?
 - i. Do you think BWC made a change on your policing style? Or did you notice that you become more/less proactive because of BWC?
 - ii. When you have your BWC on, do citizens you encounter during calls for service tend to be more compliant/cooperative? Do citizens acknowledge the presence of BWC during interactions?
 - iii. Do you think BWC has affected your discretion? Example: whether or not make an arrest, give a traffic ticket, stop a person, use force, pay more attention to language etc.,
 - iv. Has the BWC presented any privacy concerns for yourself? If yes, could you explain?
 - b. Possible changes in different kinds of encounters or calls due to BWC?
 - v. Family disturbances/domestic disputes?
 - vi. Repeated calls on same individuals?
 - vii. Early investigative activities
 - viii. Dealing with juveniles? (Especially in school settings)
 - i. How has BWC changed the citizens' view of cooperation with police work?
 - i. Do you think there's a change in citizen's trust in police after BWC's deployment? (Justify certain cases?)
 - ii. Have you experienced circumstances where citizens questioned the camera and how the footage is being used or asked you to turn it off?
 - iii. Has the BWC affected police interactions with *witnesses or person with knowledge*? (not general police-citizen interactions) Has the BWC effected the quality of follow up investigative interviews?
 - iv. Has any of your BWC footage been used as evidence in court? Or have you heard of other officers' footage being used as evidence, what kinds of cases are they used for?
- b. Police Perception of BWC (Positive, Neutral, or Negative)
 - a. Do you perceive the BWC as an improvement of policing or do you tend to perceive it as a burden in your daily work? Why do you think so?
If Burden > Improvement

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- What was the most difficult part with using/implementing the BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Privacy Etc.). Can you give an example?

If Improvement > Burden

- In what aspects has BWC improved policing? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example?
- b. Now that you have had the chance to use a BWC, how do you feel about the expanding usage of BWCs nationwide?
 - c. Based on your knowledge of RPD's BWC implementation and nation-wide BWC implementation, how do you think RPD's BWC project could have been improved?
 - d. Do you think the amount of time and effort you spend on BWC related work affect your role as a police officer?
 - e.
 - f. Can you give me some examples of circumstances/locations/encounters where the presence of BWC (whether it's on or off) posed a major problem regardless of policy? (e.g., in homes, schools, with minors, in extreme weathers, particular kinds of events/witnesses)
 - g. Can you give me some examples of circumstances/locations/encounters where the presence of BWC (whether it's on or off) helped you solve the problem easily?
 - h. Is your opinion of body-worn cameras different now in comparison to when they first rolled out?
 - i. Are there any shifts or patrol areas that the BWC would provide more utility?

Appendix B:

