

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

Working Paper #2017-13

September 2017



Nate LeMahieu
Research Assistant

Na Liu, M.S.
Research Associate

Chris Sweadner
Research Assistant

John Klofas, Ph.D.
Director
jmkgcj@rit.edu

John McCluskey, Ph.D.
Department Chairperson
jdmgcj@rit.edu

Irshad Altheimer, Ph.D.
Deputy Director
ixagcj@rit.edu

www.rit.edu/cpsi/

Executive Summary

- I. Genesee and Goodman Patrol Section officers frequently based their feelings and predictions for the body-worn camera (BWC) on the current BWC roll-out in the Clinton Section
- II. On average, most officers were comfortable using BWCs and believed that department adaptation would be swift
- III. Clinton Section officers believed that the BWCs would create a larger impact on police-citizen encounters, whereas Genesee Section officers did not
- IV. Officers predicted three major benefits of BWC implementation:
 - a. The provision of visual evidence that would support the decisions made by officers in a case
 - b. The enhancement of police transparency by providing the community with a contemporary picture of police work
 - c. May potentially expedite case resolution by enhancing the completeness and clarity of report writing, while also aiding testimonies
- V. Officers expressed four major concerns about BWC implementation:
 - a. Reduced information gathered from witnesses due to privacy concerns
 - b. Attachment clip issues that often lead to the detachment of BWCs
 - c. Increased workload due to BWC-related responsibilities (e.g. uploading footage, camera activation, etc.)
 - d. Mandatory recording policies dealing with sensitive incidents or environments

Report Summary

Introduction

*This report serves as an executive summary of a larger report by both identifying and summarizing the key findings of the larger report herein.*¹ Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) have recently been adopted by police departments nationwide in order to redefine policing, accountability, and transparency. BWCs are argued 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 local communities in Rochester, the Rochester City Council invested financial support for 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 to collect qualitative data on officers' perceptions and expectations of body-worn cameras. For these interviews, researchers developed a semi-structured interview that was designed around anticipated changes in policing and police processes after BWC adoption (See Appendix A). The researchers interviewed RPD officers from four of seven beats in Goodman Section, as well as four officers in seven beats of the Genesee Section (See Appendix B). The key findings of the report are summarized in the following sections. This report summary focuses on the results of the Goodman and Genesee Sections officer interviews that occurred pre-implementation of BWCs in these respective sections.

¹ For additional information, please contact: jmkgcj@rit.edu or www.rit.edu/cpsi

Key Findings

Second-hand Knowledge Acquired from Clinton Rollout

During the ride-along interviews, Genesee and Goodman Section officers frequently based their discussions pertaining to BWCs around what they had heard about the experiences of Clinton Section officers. During the time of the interviews held in the Genesee and Goodman Sections, the officers in the Clinton Section began to receive their BWCs. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that the perceptions and expectations of Genesee and Goodman officers may have adapted in relation to the experiences of the Clinton Section officers.

Receptiveness to Adopting New Technologies

Both Genesee and Goodman Section officers declared that they were comfortable utilizing the BWC technology in patrol. These officers stated that, much like with other technological additions to policing such as dash-cams and Mobile Data Terminals (MDT), the officers would quickly adapt to the implementation of BWCs. Only one officer did not support the utilization of BWCs.

Anticipated Changes in Policing

Generally, the officers of the Goodman and the Genesee Sections had similar expectations when discussing anticipated changes in policing. A key distinction that researchers identified were the Sections' differences in belief as to whether the BWC could positively impact interactions between law enforcement personnel and community members. Officers in the Goodman Section believed BWCs would positively influence police-community interactions, citing expected behavioral changes in both police and civilians. In contrast, the officers in the Genesee Section expressed reservations with this idea, stating that changes in officer or citizen behavior are unlikely with the added presence of a camera.

Perceived Benefits in Implementing BWCs

Among the Goodman and Genesee Sections, officers cited three major benefits: *evidence that supports officer decisions*, *transparency in policing*, and *expedited case resolution*. The benefit that officers perceived as most impactful was that the BWCs could provide evidence

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from their perspective. It was expected that evidence from the perspective of the officer would be used to provide a rationale for discretionary decisions and support the claims of officers when adjudicating complaints.

Officers also believed that BWC footage could potentially enhance policing transparency. The officers explained that the public may be misinformed in terms of the daily reality of policing, and that the BWC video would provide additional insight into the day-to-day functions of policing. These same officers hoped that community members would have the chance to watch BWC video to help understand the reality of policing rather than what social media has portrayed.

Lastly, officers believed that the additional evidence that BWCs provide could assist with expedited case resolution. Particularly, officers stated that BWC video would enhance the completeness and accuracy of report writing, especially in cases where a lot of dialogue is exchanged, such as in domestic disputes. Officers believed that having BWC video of these incidents would provide enhanced clarity, and potentially resolve cases more quickly.

Perceived Concerns in Implementing BWCs

The Genesee and Goodman Section officers provided information pertaining to their concerns for BWC implementation. The primary concerns were: *reduction in information gathered, attachment clip issues, increases in workload, and mandatory recording policies*. Officers commonly cited concerns pertaining to decreased quantity and quality of information gathered from individuals. The officers believed that due to privacy concerns, civilians may be reluctant to share information with officers which could potentially hamper the efficiency of field investigations.

Officers frequently indicated concerns related to the BWC attachment clip, which was also considered a common issue in the Clinton Section. The officers had overheard that the BWCs had issues with being securely fastened to the uniform and would commonly fall off in circumstances that required physical engagement.

Officers also believed that the BWCs would substantially increase their workload. Officers adapted this belief based on how the BWCs had impacted the Clinton Section officers.

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As BWCs require uploading, downloading, and tagging the footage after each call, officers felt that the BWCs could lead them to potentially spend less time patrolling as a result of prioritizing BWC-related processes.

The last concern that officers described is related mandatory recording policies. Officers were not certain whether the policy covered incidents involving hospital environments, victims, or minors. As a result of this uncertainty, officers anticipated possible complications in their patrol work involving these locations and individuals.

Conclusion

As the body-worn camera roll-out phase has been incremental, the discussions that researchers had with Genesee and Goodman Section officers were inevitably influenced by the use of BWCs in other sections. The ride-along interviews, however, were able to provide an informative depiction of the beliefs that officers have pertaining to BWC implementation. While officers perceived that the BWCs will improve policing by providing substantial benefits in electronic evidence, policing transparency, and quicker case resolution, the expected benefits were not without anticipated complications. Reduced witness information, issues with physical attachment, increased workload, and mandatory recording policies were among the primary concerns that officers expressed.

References

White, M. D. (2014). *Police officer body-worn cameras: Assessing the evidence*. Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.

Appendix A:

A Framework of Interview for Ride-along

1. What does a typical work today look like?
 - a. How long have you been a police officer?
 - b. How long have you been patrolling this area? And how long have you been working on this shift?
 - c. What's your patrol area?
 - d. What are the major crime concerns of this area based on your experience working here?
 - e. What time of your shift and what days of the week do you have larger workload (Calls for service etc.)?
 - f. How often do you have to call your supervisor? (Use of force report, major crime scene or other issues)
 - g. Overall, what do you think the police/citizen encounter right now? Are citizens cooperative? How much trust do you think you receive from the community you are patrolling (not trusted vs. trusted)?
 - h. What are the type of crimes in this area that need citizen input the most?
 - i. How often do you have to use force to solve the problem?
 - j. How comfortable are you with the idea of using BWC in policing? (Based on your personal experience and the national trend)
 - k. What issues do you want the BWC study to address?
 - l. Was there any situation where you thought having a BWC could have helped?
2. In what ways do you think BWC are going to affect the nature of police work and why?
 - a. Do you think there would be a detectable change in policing with the addition of BWC? (Example: Police citizen encounter,
 - (1) What are the common crimes in this patrol section? In what ways do you think BWC will change your job in this particular patrol area?
 - Do you think BWC will change the likelihood of proactive encounters?
 - Do you think BWC will change response to reactive encounters?
 - Do you think BWC will bring more reliance on supervisor consultation?
 - (2) Possible changes in different kinds of encounters/calls?
 - Mentally ill
 - Family disturbance/domestic dispute
 - Any early investigative activities (calls to assaults)
 - Dealing with juveniles
 - Drug dealing
 - Gang
 - (3) How's BWC going to change citizen's view/cooperation of police work?
 - Do you think BWC will help increase public's trust to police? (Justify certain cases?)
 - Do you think that the BWC will affect the quality of police/citizen encounter?
 - What's your expectation of whether or not citizens would question the camera usage? Why?

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- How do you think the appearance of the BWC would affect the quality/quantity of informational communication between police and concerned citizens?
 - How will BWC affect police interaction with witnesses?
 - How will BWC affect evidentiary usage?
 - How will BWC affect the possibility of follow-up investigative interviews?
- (4) In what ways do you think BWC would affect domestic violence cases? (Victim cooperation, criminal charge, etc.)
3. Police perception of the BWC (Positive, Neutral or Negative)
- (1) Do you think BWC going to be an extra burden or do you tend to perceive it as an improvement that will make your job easier? Why do you think so?
- If Concern > Benefit:
- What's your major concern with using/implementing BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how BWC could cause a problem in your work?
- If Benefit > Concern:
- What's your expected benefit of using/implementing BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how BWC could solve a problem in your work?
- (2) How comfortable are you with BWC as a new policing technology?
- (3) Would the amount of time you'll have to spend on BWC related work affect your role as an officer?
- (4) Are there locations/situations/encounters where you believe the camera may present issues, regardless of policy? (e.g., in homes, schools, with minors, in extreme weathers, particular kinds of events/witnesses)
- (5) What's your thought on BWC vs. officer vision/reaction?

Appendix B:

