

Explore and evaluate the use of body worn cameras in evidence based policing

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Body worn cameras are a significant tool that is used by the police. All officers who come into contact with the public use them, which makes it a useful tool in evidence-based policing (College of Policing, 2021). Evidence-based policing is based off police using practices and decisions through the best available evidence. Best available evidence is means that appropriate research methods and sources have been used in a carefully conducted, peer reviewed, relevant and appropriate way when asking questions. All conclusions that have been reached should be transparent, and clear about any limitations present (College of Policing, 2023). Body worn cameras are used to increase self-awareness, through the knowledge that both the public and the officers are being recorded (College of Policing, 2021).

In relation to criminological theories, deterrence theory suggests that a message is relayed to a target group, and the target group receives the message and perceives it as a threat; and the group makes rational choices based on the information that they received (Tomlinson, 2016). Through the presence of body-worn cameras both police officers and members of the public are deterred from engaging in unlawful or aggressive behavior, as the knowledge that their actions are being recorded is the information received. Routine activities theory relates to the presence of an opportunity of crime. First there must be a suitable target, which is any type of individual or property, which is easily attainable. Then, there must be a motivated offender, who is capable of committing a crime and is willing to do so. Lastly, there needs to be the absence of a suitable guardian, which is someone or something that deters the crime from happening (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Body-worn cameras can serve as guardians by increasing the perceived risk for offenders, making officers less vulnerable targets and potentially reducing criminal opportunities. Body-worn cameras align with the principles of evidence-based policing, as the law enforcement practices through empirical research. The use of cameras allows moderators to collect data on officer behavior, evaluate interventions, and make informed decisions based on the evidence that has been gathered (College of Policing, 2021).

Through the use of body worn cameras, there is enhanced accountability and transparency as there is the potential to promote accountability among law enforcement officers by providing an objective record of their interactions with the public. The presence of cameras can deter misconduct and encourage officers to adhere to professional standards. Moreover, body worn camera's footage can serve as an unbiased source of evidence in cases of alleged officer misconduct, resolving disputes and reducing public skepticism. In addition, the knowledge of the camera, the public may be deterred from acting poorly or in a criminal manner. Body worn cameras are also reliable evidence collectors, as they capture events from an officer's perspective, which provides an accurate and objective account of incidents and acts as an independent witness. The body camera records the footage onto an internal storage device and when the officer's shift ends, the footage is uploaded to a secure location so it can be used as evidence at court or other legal proceedings. Otherwise it is deleted if it's not needed (Metropolitan Police, nd). This can be invaluable for evidence collection, ensuring that critical details are accurately recorded and reducing the reliance on subjective recollections. Body worn camera's footage can strengthen investigations, increase the likelihood of successful prosecutions, and protect both law enforcement and the community. Body worn camera footage can also be used for training and professional development purposes (NPCC, 2022). The recorded footage can be used to review officer performance, identify areas for improvement, and enhance training programs, or show new officers examples of how to handle a situation. This

technology allows agencies to develop evidence-based training protocols, leading to more effective policing strategies and better-equipped officers.

However, one challenge associated with body worn camera's is the potential for selective recording. Officers have the discretion to activate or deactivate the cameras, which may raise questions about bias or deliberate omission of certain incidents. Additionally, concerns about privacy arise, as body worn camera's capture footage of both victims and bystanders, potentially infringing on their rights. While body worn camera's footage provides an objective account of events, interpretation bias can still arise. Different individuals may perceive the same footage differently, leading to varying conclusions about an incident. The context, camera angle, and limited field of view can influence how events are perceived, highlighting the importance of comprehensive investigation procedures. Implementing body worn camera programs can be costly for law enforcement. For example, Cambridgeshire police spent almost half a million pounds on body worn cameras in three years (Cox, 2017). Expenses include not only the cameras themselves but also storage infrastructure, data management systems, and the necessary personnel for video review and redaction. Maintaining secure data storage and addressing technical challenges, such as battery life and camera reliability, can pose additional hurdles.

A stop and search is a power police may use, to search someone, in order to confirm suspicions of criminality, without arresting them (College of Policing, 2016). Body worn cameras can promote accountability by documenting interactions between police officers and individuals during stop and search encounters. The presence of cameras can discourage misconduct and provide an objective record of events, reducing the likelihood of false accusations from either party (University of Cambridge, 2016). The knowledge that their actions are being recorded may encourage officers to adhere to professional standards and guidelines. The presence of body worn cameras can potentially lead to improved officer behavior, de-escalation of situations, and more respectful interactions during stop and search procedures. Body worn camera footage can serve as valuable evidence in criminal investigations, ensuring a more accurate account of events. The recorded video and audio can be used to corroborate the officer's version of events or provide evidence of potential misconduct or violations of individuals' rights. When properly implemented and managed, body worn camera's can contribute to building public trust in law enforcement. The transparency and visibility provided by body worn camera's may improve community perceptions of fairness and legitimacy in stop and search practices, which is crucial for maintaining positive police-community relations. However, the use of body worn camera's raises concerns regarding privacy, especially during sensitive encounters such as stop and search procedures. Proper policies should be in place to address privacy concerns and ensure that body worn camera's are used responsibly, with strict guidelines for footage retention, access, and use. Body worn camera's can potentially improve police-community relations by reducing complaints against officers and mitigating the perception of bias in stop and search practices (University of Cambridge, 2016). However, their effectiveness in building trust depends on the implementation of clear policies, adequate training, and community engagement efforts. In summary, the use of body-worn cameras in stop and search encounters can enhance accountability, promote transparency, and contribute to more accurate evidence collection. However, their effectiveness relies on comprehensive policies, training, and addressing privacy concerns to ensure they are used ethically and respect individuals' rights.

Evidence-based policing is based off police using practices and decisions through the best available evidence (College of Policing, 2023). Body worn cameras are an important aspect of evidence based policing by improving accountability, enhancing transparency, and facilitating the collection of reliable evidence. Despite the benefits, challenges remain, including privacy concerns, interpretation bias, and associated costs. Careful consideration of policies, training, and oversight is necessary to ensure the effective and ethical use of body worn camera's within the police. When implemented correctly, body worn camera's can contribute positively to evidence-based policing, fostering trust between law enforcement and the community while enhancing the overall integrity of the criminal justice system.

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