
To: Chief Rick Dobrow & Director Tim Schwering, Spokane Police Department
From: Michael White, Janne Gaub, and Natalie Todak, Arizona State University
Date: February 2, 2016
Re: Results from Citizen Survey Research

This memo summarizes the research design and results from our study examining citizen perceptions of body-worn cameras (BWCs) in Spokane.

Research Questions

1. How do citizens feel about having their police encounters recorded by BWCs?
2. Is there evidence supporting a BWC-generated “civilizing effect”¹ on citizen behavior?
3. Does citizen awareness of the BWC influence perceptions of how they were treated by police (i.e., how procedurally just was the encounter)?

Methods

The citizen survey research was conducted from June-December 2015. Every week, the authors randomly selected five officers from the Treatment group (group with BWCs). The names of the five BWC officers were sent to SPD, and Records Unit staff reviewed videos on Evidence.com and accessed other data sources to produce a list of names and phone numbers for all citizens who had recorded encounters with the five officers during the previous seven days.² Records Unit staff sent the citizen contact lists back to the research team, who conducted the phone surveys. Weekly citizen contact lists ranged from 70 to more than 200 names, representing 1,908 separate police-citizen contacts during the study period. The overall response rate was 27.8% though it varied significantly by week (from 9.1% to 57.1%). The research team completed 298 interviews (249 with citizens who had direct encounters with Spokane police).

The citizen perception survey includes more than 40 questions across a range of areas:

- Citizen demographics
- Citizen satisfaction with the encounter
- General perceptions of BWCs
- Citizen awareness of the BWC during the encounter
- Citizen attitudes about being recorded
- How the BWC may have influenced the citizen’s behavior during the encounter
- The survey also captured indicators of the four core components of procedural justice: citizen participation or voice, fairness/neutrality, dignity/respect, and trustworthy motives

¹ Advocates of the technology have argued that BWCs produce better behavior during encounters between police and citizens. This is often referred to as a “civilizing effect.”

² In the event that any of the five randomly selected officers produced no contacts (e.g., an officer was on vacation), the authors also forwarded randomly selected alternates.

Results

Attitudes about BWCs

Table 1 shows demographics for the 298 survey respondents. Table 2 presents citizens' general attitudes about BWCs among the 298 respondents, and findings indicate that citizens' attitudes towards BWCs are largely positive. For example, 86.3% agreed/strongly agreed that all Spokane police officers should wear BWCs. Three-quarters (76.7%) agreed/strongly agreed that the benefits of BWCs outweigh the costs.

Satisfaction with the Encounter

The survey gathered attitudes about the encounter among the 249 respondents who had direct interactions with Spokane police officers. Table 3 shows that respondents were satisfied with how they were treated during the encounter, as well as how the situation was resolved. More than 80% agreed/strongly agreed that the officer acted professionally (82.6%). Respondent agreement on the procedural justice aspects of the encounter exceeded 80% for three of the four items that make up the measure: officer treated you with respect (81.9%), officer treated you fairly (81.6%), officer was honest (83.5%), and the officer listened carefully to what you had to say (74.5%).

Awareness and Impact of BWCs

Only 70 (28.5%) respondents stated that they were aware that an officer was wearing a camera (see Table 4). The SPD administrative policy does not require that officers advise citizens of the recording, unless the conversation is private or involves a citizen who is in custody. The interview data reported here indicate that many officers do not make the citizen advisement (or if they do, citizens are not understanding it).

The researchers also collected citizen attitudes about a BWC-generated "civilizing effect" (Table 4). Notably, only 7 respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they were more cooperative during the encounter because of the BWC. Although the evidence supporting a civilizing effect is weak, citizens who were aware of the BWC reported mostly positive views about its presence during the encounter. From 10-11% agreed/strongly agreed that it made them uncomfortable, more cautious about what they said or did, or angry/annoyed. Alternatively, from 59-61% agreed/strongly agreed that they felt safer because of the BWC, and that the BWC made them feel more confident in the police.

Effect of BWC on Procedural Justice

Table 5 presents an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that examines the effect of BWC awareness on citizens' perceptions of procedural justice during the police-citizen encounter. The dependent variable, *procedural justice*, signifies a citizen's assessment of how procedurally just he or she was treated during the encounter. The key independent variable is whether or not the citizen was aware he or she was being recorded on a body camera during the incident (*BWC knowledge*). Table 5 shows that citizens who were aware of the BWC during the encounter reported significantly higher assessments of procedural justice than citizens who were not aware

of the BWC. This is an important finding that suggests a connection between the use of BWCs and citizens' perceptions of how they are treated by police.

Conclusions

1. Citizens who had recorded interactions with Spokane police officers were very satisfied with how they were treated during those interactions.
2. Overall, citizens had positive views about the use of BWCs by police.
3. The potential for a BWC-generated civilizing effect for citizens appears to be weak. Only seven citizens were aware of the BWC and indicated that they became more cooperative as a consequence of being recorded. Based on this self-report measure of behavior change, the hypothesized civilizing effect for citizens occurred in less than three percent of the encounters captured by the current study (7 of 249).

The potential for a BWC-generated civilizing effect for citizens rests on two important pre-conditions: (1) *the citizen must be aware of the camera's presence during the encounter*; (2) *the citizen must be able to process the implications of being recorded, and then make a rational decision to change his or her behavior as a consequence of the BWC*. The results from the current study highlight the challenges with achieving the pre-conditions necessary for a civilizing effect. First, many departments, including the Spokane Police Department, do not require that officers routinely advise citizens that the encounter is being recorded. Second, police frequently deal with citizens who are upset, traumatized, angry, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and mentally ill and in crisis. That is, police interact with citizens who may not be thinking rationally. In short, the required pre-conditions for a BWC-generated civilizing effect on citizens are complex and difficult to achieve.

4. The results from our regression analysis showed an intriguing connection between citizen awareness of a BWC at the encounter and enhanced perceptions of procedural justice. This finding represents an early, important piece of evidence that BWCs may be able to deliver on the claim that the technology can enhance police legitimacy. Additional research is needed to explore this relationship.

TABLES

Table 1: Demographics of Citizen Survey Participants (n=298)

Variables	Percent (n)
Sex	
Female	46.4 (135)
Male	53.6 (156)
Race	
African American	4.3 (12)
Asian	1.4 (4)
Native American	6.8 (19)
White	86.3 (240)
Other	1.1 (3)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	7.0 (18)
Age	
18-25	18.8 (54)
26-30	12.8 (37)
31-40	26.7 (77)
41+	41.7 (120)
Education level	
Some high school	10.2 (29)
High school diploma/GED	23.2 (66)
Some college	34.9 (99)
College degree	31.7 (90)
Employment status	
Working full-time	40.8 (116)
Working part-time	13.7 (39)
Not working	29.9 (85)
Not working/full-time student	4.9 (14)
Retired	10.6 (30)
Marital status	
Single (never married)	37.4 (107)
Married/cohabitating	39.5 (113)
Divorced/separated/widowed	23.1 (66)

Table 2 Citizen Attitudes about BWCs (n=297)

	Percent Agree/Strongly Agree
Video cameras should be worn by all officers in Spokane PD.	86.3
Using video cameras will make officers act more professionally.	77.5
The use of video cameras will hurt police-community relations.	14.4
Citizens will be more cooperative when they become aware that an officer is wearing a video camera.	71.0
Police will be more respectful to citizens when wearing video cameras.	77.4
The use of video cameras will reduce complaints against officers.	64.6
The benefits of police using video cameras outweigh the costs.	76.7

Table 3 Citizen Satisfaction with Police (n=249)

	Percent Agree/Strongly Agree
The officer acted professionally.	82.6
The officer cared about your well-being.	72.9
The officer threatened to use or used force against you.	8.9
You are satisfied with how you were treated by the police.	74.8
You are satisfied with how your situation was resolved.	63.6
The police officer you spoke with treated you with respect.	81.9
The officer treated you fairly.	81.6
The officer was honest with you.	83.5
The officer listened carefully to what you had to say.	74.5

Table 4 Awareness and Impact of the BWC on the Encounter

Awareness of the BWC (n=249)	Percent (n)
To the best of your knowledge, were any of the officers wearing a video camera on his or her body?	28.5 (70)

Impact of the BWC (n=70)	Percent Agree/Strongly Agree
You felt safer knowing the police were wearing video cameras.	61.4 (43)
The video camera made you feel uncomfortable.	11.4 (8)
You were more cooperative because the camera was on.	10.1 (7)
You were more cautious about what you said or did in front of the officer.	10.0 (7)
You felt angry or annoyed that you were being recorded.	10.0 (7)
The video camera made you feel more confident in the police.	58.6 (41)

Table 5 OLS Regression Predicting Procedural Justice (N=210)³

Variables ^a	Procedural Justice		
	β	SE	<i>t</i> -ratio
BWC Knowledge	1.13*	0.51	2.19
Sex (male)	-0.22	0.47	-0.47
Race (white)	1.41*	0.65	2.18
Age			
26-30	-0.58	0.54	-0.69
31-40	-0.80	0.73	-1.08
41+	-0.04	0.70	-0.06
Education			
High school diploma	-0.91	0.97	-0.94
Some college	0.53	0.94	0.57
College degree or higher	0.19	0.95	0.20
Work			
Working part time	0.09	0.76	0.12
Not working	-0.80	0.58	-1.38
Full time student	0.52	1.01	0.51
Retired	-0.55	0.94	-0.59
Marital Status			
Married/Cohabiting	1.11	0.58	1.90
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.79	0.65	1.20
Constant	11.24***	1.27	8.83
<i>F</i> -test	1.83*		
R-squared	0.12		
Adjusted R-squared	0.06		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

a. Reference categories for the predictor variables are as follows: Age (18-25); Education (Some high school); Work (Working full time); Marital status (Never married).

³ Ethnicity was removed from final analysis due to a large number of missing cases. Analyses were run with ethnicity included and it was non-significant. There was little difference in model fit, so it was ultimately removed for parsimony.