



BODY-WORN CAMERAS CUT COSTS, COMPLAINTS, USE OF FORCE

Body-worn cameras can lead to large reductions in the use of force by police and also in civilian complaints. In addition, they appear to contribute to increases in citations and arrests. And the savings they generate in simplifying complaint resolution can add up to millions of dollars for a major city police department.

These are the conclusions of a randomized, controlled trial of body-worn cameras involving hundreds of Las Vegas police officers. The study was conducted by CNA, a nonprofit research and analysis organization, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas for the National Institute of Justice, the research agency of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The randomized experiment assigned body-worn cameras to about half of a group of more than 400 volunteers from the patrol division of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. The other half functioned as a control group. The analysts monitored results over 20 months. In addition to tracking police statistics, CNA researchers conducted surveys, interviews, focus groups and ride-alongs in order to better understand the real-world effectiveness of body-worn cameras.

The introduction of body-worn cameras into police forces has been dramatic in its speed. An estimated one-third of law-enforcement agencies have begun using the new technology to record police interactions with the public.

The study found that the most dramatic change was seen in the number of officers reporting at least one use-of-force incident, which fell by 37 percent over the study period for police using cameras, even as it rose slightly in the control group. Examples of use of force against a suspect include batons, Tasers, pepper spray and firearms.

Camera-wearing police officers were also much less likely to be named in one or more citizen complaints, a reduction of 30 percent, compared to a decline of just 5 percent for the control group. “These results support the position that body-worn cameras may de-escalate aggression or have a ‘civilizing’ effect on the nature of police-citizen encounters,” the report concludes.

Not only are complaints a sign of poor community relations, investigations of those complaints are costly for police departments. The CNA analysts conducted a cost-benefit analysis based on their results. They determined that even as the cameras lead to fewer investigations of civilian complaints, their video evidence also allows those investigations to be completed in less than one-tenth the time: 6 hours instead of 80 hours on average.

Since investigation time is costly, the researchers calculated that Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department saves about \$4,000 per camera user annually. By comparison, less than \$850 per year pays for the cost of buying and operating new cameras. Total estimated annual net savings for Las Vegas were in the range of \$4.1 to \$4.4 million. The study notes that savings will be highest wherever pre-existing problems in police-community relations generate large numbers of complaints. Las Vegas is a city that has been pro-actively addressing long-standing tensions between officers and citizens.

Perhaps even more surprising was the conclusion that body-worn cameras seem to make officers more productive. The study noted a slight increase—less than 10 percent—in citations and arrests per callout among camera users. The reasons for this extra productivity are uncertain, but one possibility is that officers felt confident that video evidence would substantiate the reason for their proactive enforcement.

ABOUT CNA CORPORATION

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