

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department BWC Study Podcast

(Todd Maxwell): Hello, again, listeners. This is (Todd Maxwell), member of the Bureau of Justice Systems Body-Worn Camera Team and today, I'm joined by Lieutenant (Dan Zehnder) of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, and Dr. (Chip Coldren), Managing Director for Justice Programs at CNA's Institute for Public Research.

As part of BJ's Body-Worn Camera Podcast series, they will speak today about a recent Body-Worn camera study conducted with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department with the collaborative effort between the police department, CNA and the University of the Nevada Las Vegas.

Lieutenant (Dan Zehnder) has 20 years' experience with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, currently directs the department's Program Management and Video Bureau, supervising the department's Body-Worn Camera Program.

Lieutenant (Zehnder) also serves as a subject matter expert for the Bureau of Justice Systems and a project manager for the Body-Worn camera research program.

Dr. (Chip Coldren) is managing director for Justice Programs at CNA. (Chip) directs the number of Justice Projects including technical systems to the Smart Policing Initiative, the Violence Reduction Network, and the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative, and currently serves as the director of the BWC Training and Technical Assistance Program on the -- by BJA.

(Chip Coldren) is also principal investigator for the BWC study at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, which is funded by the National Institute of Justice.

Lieutenant (Zehnder) and Dr. (Coldren), thank you for speaking with me today and to get started, why don't you give us a brief overview of the study itself.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): Yes, (Todd). Thanks very much. So this is a multi-year study that has us looking at the -- at the implementation and the impact of body-worn cameras on a large police agency.

It is a study that involves a randomized experimental design and we recruited 400 patrol officers into the study sample and randomly assigned cameras to about 200 of them. So we have a treatment group and a comparison -- a control group, and once the cameras were assigned, we monitored their behavior for an 18-month period.

Just recently, that 18-month period ended, so we're at the latter stages of the study and we're right now compiling the data for our final analysis, but we'll be looking at several different outcomes of impact.

We think that cameras will affect use of force incidents. We think they'll affect the frequency with which there are citizen complaints. We suspect there may be an effect on arresting behavior by police officers, and we're also including a cost benefit analysis component to this study to see if the money spent on the cameras in any way, shape matches or compares well against the money that's saved by the department with the reduction in complaints and lawsuits and things like that.

We're also doing a special analysis of the video footage, a qualitative analysis, just to see what we can learn from reviewing this new footage. So that's a general description of the study.

As I said, it's in its final months and we're just compiling the final outcome measures right now.

(Todd Maxwell): Great. Thank you. Lieutenant (Zehnder), can you explain why the Las Vegas Metropolitan P.D. decided to get involved with the research partner and be a part of this study?

(Dan Zehnder): Sure, (Todd). First of all, thanks for having me on today. It was a cooperative decision, I guess, between the National Institute of Justice, CNA and our agency, and let me explain that.

There's kind of a history and a background that got us into body cameras that's a little unique. In 2012, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department was the first agency in the country to undergo the collaborative reform model process.

And this was a culmination of about 18 months of incidents through 2010, 2011, that were controversial use of force incidents in our community, and the agency has been working on reforming its use of force policies as early as 2008, 2009, to reflect changes in best practices and use in force, but after this 18-month period, our former Sheriff (Doug Gillespie) had the foresight to realize that we didn't have all the answers ourselves, and we needed to recalc for assistance from the Department of Justice.

There was fairly intense community pressure to change our use of force policies practices and procedures. So Sherriff (Gillespie) went to DOJ and they came in and the collaborative reform process started conducted by CNA and that started in 2012 and ran throughout the year.

About the same time, or actually just before the collaborative reform process started, we had begun our feasibility study looking at body cameras and so

they corresponded this collaborative reform process and the -- our feasibility study into cameras.

One of the recommendations from the collaborative reform was that we commit as an agency to the implementation of body cameras and with all 76 of the recommendations, we were engaged with that one very, very quickly and shortly thereafter in early 2013, CNA and NIJ recognized because of the cooperative effort that we'd had with them during the collaborative reform process that we were actually a pretty great candidate for the -- for this first large scale study that (Chip) outlined.

So we agreed to participate because we saw it as an opportunity to validate what we were -- what we believe were benefits of the cameras. It would validate many of the changes that we have started ourselves and that the collaborative reform process had recommended.

And we wanted to -- we saw a need to show the benefit to the community over time of these -- of these cameras.

So there were -- as you know, there was many smaller scale studies that have been done previous to that, but none of them were conclusive. So we felt this decision was a win-win for everybody. It was a win for us as an agency to partner with researchers to validate many of the things that we believe with -- for body cameras, and we thought it was a win for NIJ in that we would provide this kind of Petri dish, if you will, for this first large scale study.

(Todd Maxwell): Well, that sort of goes in and explains what you guys are trying to get out of that partnership. What are you guys planning to do with the -- what's your agency planning to do with the outcomes of the study?

(Dan Zehnder): Well, there's a lot of things that we want to do. First of all, once we look at the results of the study, we're trying to determine if these -- if the cameras validate those things that we think we do. ...

We want to leverage the lessons learned and figure out ways to take those lessons and apply them to changes in our use of force policy, in our operational procedures. It's going to be interesting to see what those things are.

There is, I think, huge implications once the research is done as to deployment strategies, management practices, and those things that I think are important for an agency to know as they begin to certainly the agencies that have -- that have deployed cameras already can make adjustments based off of some of the lessons learned, but those agencies that are getting into cameras can learn from this experience as well.

So they're -- we believe there's a lot of practices, so business practices that we can modify and deployment strategies that we can revise based on some of the information that's -- we hope is going to be forthcoming from the study.

The final part of that is also a community education process, you know? The -
- I think most communities, citizens believe that this -- the cameras exist for one purpose and that there's a host of other things that they can -- that they will be a benefit to the community for especially in this accountability piece and this transparency and validating an agency's competencies to the community.

(Todd Maxwell): Well, I think a lot of people give the -- a lot of different agencies to be able to learn from the outcomes and pick up some information from the -- this research. And this next question is for both of you is that I read the study, the abstract of the study, and Dr. (Coldren) is what gave us the overview of the study. Were there any other benefits to the partnership side for the one spelled out in the abstract like either given advice on policy or feedback on implementations or any other type of things along the way that you could share with us?

(Dr. Chip Coldren): (Todd), this is (Chip). I want to just go back to the research questions for a second, and then I'll talk about the benefits of the partnership. They -- but thinking of, there are still some open questions about what the impact of cameras will be.

There are several prior studies that have been done that were, you know -- a lot of us are familiar with it, demonstrates and strongly suggest that cameras will reduce complaints and reduce use of force, and we expect that we'll find that with this study, too.

But there's also some speculation about whether the cameras will either dampen or increase police arrest and citation behavior. So some people think that the presence of cameras will make the policy more tentative that they'll do less of that activity.

Other people think that the cameras essentially reduce the discretion that officers have regarding making a stop or an arrest in that the loss or the lessening of that discretion will push them towards more frequently arresting and stopping folks, which would be the opposite of what is hoped for.

So there's still some open questions that this -- that this study will address in addition to what (Dan) mentioned regarding the things that the agency's going to learn about the operational impact of cameras, you know?

We're looking at things around how the police accept the camera technology, what impacts their acceptance of it, how well do they comply with the camera

policy and when do they deviate from that, how they deal with equipment problems.

So there's an awful lot to be learned from this, and maybe more than just the obvious. You know -- yes, go ahead.

(Todd Maxwell): Just recently, I was speaking with some representatives from Edmonton Police, and so there's three different things that can happen, right? You expressed that they'll -- the -- they can meet expectations, they can lower expectations and Edmonton was basically saying in their pilot program that nothing was changed on their use of force, nothing was changed on their complaints, so it overall did not have an effect. Of course, that's Canada and they have different policing there.

Would you be surprised if you didn't see an effect here in this study?

(Dr. Chip Coldren): I will not be surprised if there's no effect on officer arresting and citation and stopping behavior. That would not surprise me. I don't think, and from why -- you know, what I understand from prior research, I don't see that happening, but Las Vegas is in a different place than Edmonton regarding its history of use of force and constitutional policing.

So I -- we expect to see some differences in complaints and use of force incidents. And I've got a real interesting twist to the complaint issues that I'll mention in a little bit.

(Narrator): This concludes part 1 of BJA's Body Worn Camera Podcast with Lieutenant Dan Zehnder from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and Dr. Chip Coldren from CNA. Part 2 of this podcast will be broadcast in the next episode so be sure to tune in next time for the conclusion of this podcast. And as always, please remember to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc and submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. Thank you for listening today.

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