

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

(Narrator): Hello and welcome to part 2 of BJA's Body Worn Camera podcast with 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. In this segment, our speakers discuss the research partnership between the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, CNA's Institute for Public Research, and the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): So can I talk a little bit about the benefits of the research partnership at least from the CNA perspective?

(Todd Maxwell): Definitely

(Dr. Chip Coldren): So one of the things that I see from this research partnership, and I think (Dan) would agree with me, is a rapid development of skills and new knowledge on both sides.

So Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department has emerged now as a national leader and a model for how it handles use of force issues and for its body-worn camera policy and implementation process.

Other agencies now come to the Vegas department with questions and seeking advice in these areas, and (Dan) will probably agree with me that what -- it wasn't so much that way in the past.

And similarly, CNA has emerged as one of the country's leading research and analyst organizations in the area of body-worn cameras. So CNA is now in a position to be more helpful to police agencies that are getting involved with body-worn cameras, and as we know, both (Dan) and I and CNA are partnering with BJA on the -- on the development of some national technical assistance and training resources around body-worn cameras.

So in addition to the direct benefits of the research study that we're going to realize, and I think organizationally this has been a very mutually beneficial relationship, and I'll turn it over to (Dan).

(Dan Zehnder): Yes, I know, I absolutely agree with (Chip). These body cameras are revolutionizing policing, and I think in ways that we're only just now beginning to understand and I think we're going to be surprised for many years as to the impact these little devices will have on our profession.

I cannot think of any other technology that has come on so quickly or so extensively in policing as these body cameras, and navigating the complexities of the implementations is like running through a maze with

multiple pathways and potential exits while the maze is still under construction.

You know, we've only begun to realize the impact of the devices and 10 years from now, I think this technology will be exponentially more powerful and impactful than the capabilities we have now.

And we as a profession I think are challenged from a -- from a technology standpoint, our abilities to purchase the technology as quickly as it's being developed to be able to budget for it.

Those are challenges that we've always had and we'll continue to have in the future and it probably will be more difficult for agencies to stay ahead of this technological curve, but the one thing we can do is we can educate ourselves and these partnerships like the one that we have with CNA through this study allows us to develop for essentially free, some knowledge on the impact of this technology.

And it -- you know, with this relationship with the research partners, something I hardly endorse for agencies because I think this is going to be a combat multiplier, as they say, and something that an agency needs to have in place with their agency over time, this relationship.

Because we many times especially our small agencies and mid-sized agencies, don't have the capacity or the capability to keep up with the changes in the technology and have the research capabilities that our universities and private organizations have, and we're going to have to leverage that knowledge in the future with this technology, and especially these body cameras.

And we say body cameras, but I think of them as a -- as these collection devices of images, and the future of that is going to change greatly as I said in the next 10 years, and we have to as a profession stay ahead of that.

(Todd Maxwell): Well, thank you. One of the questions I was going to end with was whether or not you recommended law enforcement agencies partner with researchers and I know as part of our policy and implementation program, BJA grant funding definitely encourages collaboration, but it sounds like you're definitely in favor of it.

So I will sort of go onto a different closing and see -- I know you guys mentioned that you are in the process of compiling all the data that I don't want to have you guys reveal any potential outcomes especially since you're reporting to the National Institute of Justice, but you guys, have you found any surprises about this evaluation or the partnership that you weren't expecting?

(Dr. Chip Coldren): (Todd), there's two things I want to talk about in that regard. So number one, a lot of the interest and concern and a lot of the research questions being asked about body-worn cameras have to do with policy officer behavior, right?

So we think it's going to affect complaints, we think it's going to affect use of force in those kinds of things. We've learned some interesting things about community member behavior through these cameras, and I'll explain it this way. It has to do with citizen complaints.

We know that for the 188 or so officers that have been wearing cameras for the last 18 months that of all the officers in that sample that had citizen complaints filed against them, about 70 percent of those complaints are almost immediately resolved in the officer's favor with the complainant voluntarily withdrawing the complaint based on a review of the video file.

So number one, if agencies are anticipating having difficulty with officers warming up to this technology, this kind of finding helps tremendously.

(Todd Maxwell): Right.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): But it also suggests, and I've had independent verification of this from some other police that I've talked to, that citizens, community members lie or exaggerate in the complaints that they file.

And so the cameras, they may change community behavior as much as they change officer behaviors once those who are inclined to embellish or exaggerate or actually outright lie on a citizen complaint they now, you know -- they have less opportunity to do that.

So I find that very interesting, and when I've talked to my colleagues in the research and the policing world, they all nod their heads vigorously when I start talking about this. So I think it's been something that's been understood in the police world, you know that the nature of these complaints that are filed against officers and not always absolutely true.

So that's one thing that I have found very interesting. A little bit surprising from my naïve social scientist perspective, but it wasn't so surprising probably to (Dan). The other thing...

(off-mic)

(Dr. Chip Coldren): I want to talk about is this thing that we talk about in randomized experiments, called contamination. So one of the things that we're concerned about, if we have a nicely defined treatment group and a control group and experimental study, there's still a possibility that the people in the treatment group will have contact with the people in the control group.

Then if the people in the control group start getting wind of what the people in the treatment group are doing and start changing their behavior based on their interaction with the people in the treatment group, then you have this contamination effect and the control group starts to behave like the treatment group, and that can -- that can interfere with the analysis of your results of the experiment.

So one of the things that we've been able to do with the data that Vegas provides us is actually look at this issue specifically. So when we do our final analysis, we'll be -- we will know how often officers in the control group had contact with officers in the treatment group who were camera wearers, you know?

For example, when they -- when multiple units respond to a call, we'll be able to measure if the people in the control group who had contact with the camera wearers, if their behavior is marketed different from the people in the control group who had very little contact with the camera wearers, so it's a little -- it's a scientific issue that we experimenters are concerned with that I think this study is going to provide a closer and a more precise look at the contamination -- at the contamination issue than other studies have done.

(Todd Maxwell): Right. And I was about to say I've heard that issue come up especially around Rialto and some of the other studies of how much contamination played a part in the end result. So it's good to see some evaluation of that.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): Yes, we will have a direct measure of contamination and a direct measure of its impacts on the outcomes.

(Dan Zehnder): (Todd), if I could, I'd like to just quickly echo what (Chip) said. I think you asked a question what was unexpected for us as a -- as a police agency, and my team especially as we -- as we were supporting the research initiative, when we got involved in it, I don't think we realized first of all the magnitude of what -- of the study and the work that is required on both sides, and while the -- while the number crunching is being done by the folks at CNA an agency that enters into a research partnership has to understand that there is -- there's work to be -- to be done from their end in providing the data and the support for on-site visits.

And that's something that an agency it shouldn't dissuade them from that partnership, but they should -- it's just not something unless you're a smaller agency and an agency in Las Vegas couldn't do it with just one -- you know, one person in charge of -- in charge of this.

It takes a team effort, and so any agency of any size or study of any size requires a commitment by the agency for full support to the research partner and I believe that's going to pay -- certainly pay dividends and I kind of want

to go back to a question you asked earlier about what we want hope to find out and what we want to do with the outcomes, you know?

We -- when this is done, we want to look very, very closely at the findings and to learn some operational and management efficiencies, things that'll guide our program and our policies in the future as I stated, and I wanted to give some examples, you know?

For example, operationally if cameras do modify citizens' behaviors as (Chip) alluded to, how is that going to impact and correlate with where we deploy our cameras if an agency can't afford to purchase cameras for its entire agency in one -- at one shot? The information that comes out of the study may help agencies make that -- those decisions and certainly would help us when we're -- when we're looking at hot spot policing, for example, do the presence of the cameras themselves potentially impact crime specific geographical area?

That would be a great insight into aiding police operations in this -- in crime hotspots. From a management perspective besides things, like, the reduction in use of force and complaints that we believe the cameras will impact how can these -- how can the cameras make us better at what we do?

Assuming the study validates the things that we believe it will, how will we leverage those lessons to rapidly affect internal processes while that video still is in existence? Because the video doesn't stay forever.

So the ability to, you know -- to learn from positive things and from shortcomings that are made available to us through the review of the video, it is -- it's getting those lessons and learning those things and correcting policy shortcomings or training or procedural shortcomings that I think is a huge area of potential growth for agencies in the use of these cameras.

So I -- there's a lot of exciting things that we're looking forward to, and I think there's going to be a lot of results that come out of this study that are going to be very insightful for us in changing our future operational procedures.

(Todd Maxwell): Thank you very much.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): (Todd), I'm -- yes, I'm going to add one other comment, if that's OK. One of the things I was -- it's one thing to engage with a police agency the size of Las Vegas Metro and set up the conditions for an experiment like this and remember that we had -- we had to recruit officer volunteers that couldn't mandated to wear the cameras, and we had to ask them for a commitment to wear the camera on their person for -- on each shift that they worked for a full year.

And it's difficult enough to set up those conditions. It's even more difficult to maintain those conditions over an 18-month period, and quite frankly that happened successfully in Las Vegas with this study. ...

We lost, I think, out of a total of 400 officers recruited, we lost maybe 13 or 15 officers from the sample for things like reassignment or retirement or whatever. That's highly unusual. That's a, you know -- that's a very, very low attrition rate and it's going to -- it's going to give us a lot more confidence in our findings when we publish them, but the effort that (Dan) and his team and the Vegas Metro Department had to put forth to not just set this up, but to maintain those conditions faithfully over 18 months is nothing short of stupendous.

So we're all going to benefit from this cooperation and obviously you've heard that the -- you know, they valued this for the things that they're going to learn. So that was at least in part their incentive to help this experiment stand up.

(Todd Maxwell): Right. Well, it sounds like both of you are doing a great job. As part of the closing I had mentioned earlier is that the BJA recommends collaboration and Lieutenant (Zander) mentioned some of the -- that he would recommend agency partner with researchers, but he also went in and talked about how important it is to evaluate what that partnership's going to require and how much time and effort there is that's not to deter you from it, but just be aware and do your research on it.

(Dr. Chip Coldren): Yes.

(Todd Maxwell): Do you guys have any closing thoughts on the benefits of partnering, doing a collaborative effort and doing these research studies and the ...

(Dr. Chip Coldren): Yes, (Todd) I've been working on police research partnerships either as a research partner myself or as an evaluator with them for the better part of the last 20 years, and I think, number 1, a successful partnership like this for the agency itself, it raises the bar in terms of the sophistication to which they assess their own operations and they evaluate the effectiveness of what they're doing, and that's highly beneficial for the agency.

Not every agency and not every agency executive regularly sees that benefit and understands that, but Vegas sure got it and as you've heard, they're going to benefit tremendously from it.

But I have seen overall in the field of policing a raising of the bar in terms of the scientific rigor with which policing practices are evaluated. And that has happened largely, not solely, but largely because of the proliferation of research partnerships around the country.

(Dan Zehnder): And (Todd), I'd like to add too in kind of a closing statement with the -- with the -- about these partnerships is that many agencies, I think, around the country are beginning to understand the importance of developing these partnerships.

Out -- and not just for research, but just for kind of a cross-fertilization of a knowledge exchange between the profession and the academic world or the research world. We've had a longstanding partnership with the University of Nevada Las Vegas and Dr. (Bill Sousa) for close to 18 years, I believe, and I cannot tell you how many times this agency and whether it was a smart policing initiative or the collaborative reform or as part of the current study with CNA have had to lean on the expertise of our friends at UNLV and Dr. (Sousa) especially to help us understand things that we just didn't have the capacity to do ourselves.

And as I said earlier, it's about leveraging that expertise and so again, I would highly recommend that agencies, big or small, that you have -- develop these longstanding relationships with a research partner or academic partner because it's truly, we're entering an age where you can't operate as a police agency in a vacuum anymore. It just -- it just does not the way you're going to be able to get business done especially in the technology field.

(Todd Maxwell): Thank you, Lieutenant (Zehnder) and Dr. (Coldren). I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today and share your knowledge on the body-worn camera study or participation.

We encourage law enforcement, justice and public safety leaders who's agencies are interest in learning more of the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.BJA.gov/BWC. This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use with the adoption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes.

We also encourage the listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of these resources in especially the body-worn toolkit have been designed as a national resource, your resource.

Please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. This is (Todd Maxwell), Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team, signing off. Thank you for listening today.

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