

Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Dr. Cynthia Lum

Todd Maxwell: Hello again listeners, this is Todd Maxwell, a member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance body-worn camera team. And today I'm speaking with Dr. Cynthia Lum, Director of the Center of Evidence-based Policing and Associate Professor in Deputy – at Department of Criminology Law Society at George Mason University.

Dr. Cynthia Lum's research is primary in area of policing security and evidence-based crime policy. Her works in this area has included valuations of the police interventions, police technology, understanding translation (interceptivity) of research and policing and assessing security efforts of federal agencies. With doctors Christopher Koper and Cody Telep, she has developed the evidence-based policing matrix and the matrix demonstration projects, translation tools designed to help police practitioners incorporate research into the strategic and tactical portfolio.

Dr. Lum has been appointed to the committee on corrective policing for the National Academy of Sciences. There's a number of the research advisory committee of ICT, the International Advisory Committee for the Scottish Institute for Police Research, the Board of Trustees for the pretrial justice entities and a full bright specialist.

She is the North American editor for Policing, a journal of policy and practice and the founding editor of Translational Criminology magazine and the Springer series on translational criminology.

Dr. Lum, thanks for taking the time to speak with us today.

Cynthia Lum: Sure.

Todd Maxwell: You and your team recently released two papers, body-worn cameras in the courts, a national survey to state prosecutors and an evidence assessment of the recommendations of the president's task force on 21st-century policing.

Let's start with the prosecutor survey paper. Can you give our listeners an overview of that paper?

Cynthia Lum: Sure. The Laura and John Arnold foundation had funded us to take a comprehensive view of the existing and ongoing research for body-worn cameras for that project. And during that review, we realized that while some, although much more research was needed on a variety of topics in law enforcement, there was really a posit of understanding about the impact of body-worn cameras in the courts.

So a part of the project with the Arnold Foundation was to carry out some basic research on the state of body-worn cameras in the courts and in particular their use and impact in the courts arena with regards to prosecutors. So we conducted a national random sample survey of about half of the 2,000 prosecutors' offices that are in the national census of state prosecutors. And we did so to better understand the use and the impact of body-worn cameras in the court system.

Todd Maxwell: Great. And what are some of the key survey results that prosecutors should take away from this paper?

Cynthia Lum: Well, generally because of the rapid adoption of body-worn cameras in law enforcement there is almost about 2/3 of the prosecutors' offices who responded, who were already using body-worn and evidence. Although many of them were still in early stages of use, the diffusion of body-worn cameras and the use of body-worn camera evidence has happened with the prosecutor's offices. This is something that they are definitely dealing with today.

And what we found was that prosecutors tend to support body-worn camera use because they feel that body-worn cameras can provide visual evidence that might have been missing in trial. The prosecutors generally believe the camera video could be beneficial to prosecutorial outcomes. They also however, despite some of these positive aspects of body-worn cameras, they acknowledge that there's going to be increases in workloads as well as things

like concerns over having enough technical resources to view, to store, to redact and also to use videos for evidence.

So overall, our findings show that body-worn camera video use is now very common in prosecutors' offices. But they are dealing with a number of technical and resource challenges that law enforcement agencies are also trying to come to grips with.

Todd Maxwell: Yes. That is true. Both have seem to have the same in issue with the storage, the review and the time management resource issues.

Cynthia Lum: Definitely.

Todd Maxwell: What would be the – what was your most surprising take away from the survey results?

Cynthia Lum: I think there's a number of findings that might surprise kind of casual followers of body-worn camera – of the body-worn camera issue. The first is that, I think there is a general belief and a push by citizens for body-worn cameras to be used in policing because I think there's a belief that they would be used to hold police accountable, to strengthen the legitimacy of police with people.

And what we actually found was that the vast majority of prosecutors' offices use video evidence not in those ways. They really mostly use video evidence to prosecute people for crimes. Now, this of course doesn't mean that videos aren't being used by the police for example to strengthen their supervision or their accountability, but I think this is a very interesting finding that a technology that was so strongly pushed by citizens is really primarily being used to prosecute people, not necessarily used to hold officers accountable per se.

Todd Maxwell: That's interesting.

Cynthia Lum: It is. And I think another interesting finding is that we also asked these lead prosecutors about whether they believed that cameras could increase police legitimacy and trust. So in their view did they think this can improve

legitimacy and trust which I think people have high hopes for with regards to cameras. And most of the prosecutors were very skeptical of this affect or they were also skeptical that cameras might improve for example police compliance with Fourth Amendment standards.

At the same time, prosecutors didn't necessarily believe that cameras would make citizens more weary of speaking to the police or to prosecutors. And some prosecutors also felt that it could improve citizen behavior towards police officers in a given situation – in any given situation.

Todd Maxwell: Interesting. So I know in the – when talking to some of the counterpart in the U.K., their law enforcement has sort of focus on the evidence gathering and documentation of the body-worn cameras. And it seems to sort of fall in line where the prosecutors are looking at it and then transparency became a secondary there.

Cynthia Lum: OK. That's right. And I think that's a really important point to emphasize that often we put a lot of hopes into technologies in terms of what we think technology can achieve for us. But often times the results are not – they're unintended consequences as I like to call them. They are just the things that you might not expect, that the technology would create.

Todd Maxwell: Let's switch to the assessment of the 21st century policing recommendations. Can you give an overview of the reason behind the assessment along with an overview of the pillar three technology section since it directly involves body-worn cameras?

Cynthia Lum: Sure. The assessment of the 21st century policing recommendations was a project that had also been funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. And it was one in which we have partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to carry out. The task force recommendations are many and the ICP felt that it would be important to try and provide agencies with some guidance on how to prioritize tackling these recommendations because there are many of them across six pillars.

So one perspective that we wanted to provide and one that is our area of expertise here at the Center for evidence-based crime policy is an evidence of

informed approach using a strategy called evidence assessments. So in evidence assessments we review existing research knowledge about various recommendations and then we provide suggestions on those recommendations that are supported by the evidence that can be implemented with some confidence with regards to the research and we also make recommendations on where are some of the gaps that need more research in order to better implement with confidence.

The findings are much too lengthy to go into here but we provide some short summaries of the state of the research evidence in this report and what that evidence currently says about each pillar of the task force recommendations. For those of your listeners who may not be familiar with these pillars they are on things such as training, community policing, accountability, policy office and wellness and of course pillar three which is the technology recommendations of the task force.

Now, the task force of 21st century policing does not make any specific recommendation for law enforcement agencies to adopt body-worn cameras but they do – the recommendations do state that they acknowledged that agencies are now rapidly adopting body-worn cameras and this diffusion is very fluid and there's quite a bit of body-worn camera usage out there now. So the task force really recommended for agencies to stay abreast of the research on body-worn cameras and to think about some of the consequences that body-worn cameras might have in the police agency and also in the community.

Some of the findings that we discovered with body-worn cameras from the existing – ongoing and existing research report that I spoke about previously were very – was very relevant in some of our discussions here in pillar three. The research while we have some research on body-worn cameras we still need more, the research is a bit evolving and let me give you just an example of what I mean by this.

The – we know for instance the body-worn cameras can help reduce complaints and also use of force among police officers. However some recent research that just came out by Barak Ariel from Cambridge University and his

colleagues found that when officers have discretion to turn on and off the cameras that could potentially lead to a finding of increased use of force. Now we have to be careful here the causal connection is not clear.

For example officers might who have discretion on turning on and off their cameras might decide to turn on their camera right before every instance that they are about to use of force. So it seems like there – the body-worn cameras are associated with use of force. But the reason why I mentioned that very specific finding is that, that type of research knowledge that is building in the area of body-worn cameras is important in developing very specific policy around cameras.

So for example agencies might decide it might be good idea to restrict the discretion of officers as to when and they can turn on and off the cameras or find some policy in which they can more systematically turn on and off the cameras for things that they are doing. The reason why I point this out is because in pillar three of the task force recommendations we not only talk about body-worn cameras but we also talk about things like the use of social media technology other technologies such as LPR and those types of technologies all potentially have unintended consequences that really need to be examined and kind of brought to life through research in order for us to more effectively implement cameras in practice.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you for going into detail and bringing up that – the Dr. Ariel’s report. He has been a contributor to the podcast series and will be coming in the upcoming series to explain the paper you mentioned and how it touched basically three countries. So thank you for that reference also, a little commercial on our part.

It is interesting that the research base behind this and I think the law enforcement agencies will find that useful because there’s research on how to back it up and then how to best implement it. So I really enjoyed reading that report.

Cynthia Lum: Yes.

Dominique Burton: This concludes part 1 of our podcast with Dr. Cynthia Lum, Associate Professor, and Director for the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University