Report in Brief: City of Albuquerque On Body Camera System Research

Specifics & Findings

In this brief: Our review of the On Body Camera System in Albuquerque, NM focused on determining the current use of the system and information to inform the development of an auditable policy.

The full report titled *City of Albuquerque Police Department On Body Camera System Research*, can be found at: http://www.cabq.gov/police/department-of-justice-doj-reports or http://isr.unm.edu/reports/

Main Findings

- Officers were statistically more likely to video calls for service that had a higher priority level.

- We found no evidence of differences in video rates across gender or race

- Officers with fewer years of service were more likely to have video within their calls for service compared to longer serving officers.

- To track and monitor the use of the OBCS and audit a policy APD must implement a method to link video with calls for service data and note citizen involvement in calls.

- We believe the current policy is confusing and officers do not completely understand the policy. This finding is supported by our review of the official data and our review of the focus group data.

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This research study has several goals. First, to document the use of the Albuquerque Police Department (APD) On-Body Camera System (OBCS), second, to provide information useful for informing the development of a policy regarding the use of the OBCS and third, to provide information that will inform a method to audit the developed policy and the use of the system by APD personnel.

The issue of law enforcement agencies using OBCS is well documented in the news media. The issue is not nearly as well documented as a research topic. The body of research is growing as more jurisdictions embrace the idea of their police using video in their daily activities and more funding is provided for research. Research informing policy usually comes after long periods of evaluation and analysis by a wide range of researchers. We found that few evidence-based policies exist to guide OBCS. There was a large number of "check lists" available in the news media and internet blogs offered by law enforcement consultants. We found this to be the case regarding an audit-able policy as well. Consequently, our study may be one of the first on the issue of evidence-based factors guiding policy and means to audit an OBCS as well as gathering information from camera system users. At the time we began this study APD had several different camera systems. Our study only includes the users of the *Taser Axon Flex* camera system which is paired with Taser's EVIDENCE.com™ database.

Official information sources for this study included the OBCS information system, City of Albuquerque Human Resource information, Automated Reporting System (ARS) data, and APD computer aided dispatch information (CAD). City of Albuquerque and APD staff collaborated in providing access to the necessary information and provided technical information in matching and merging information from the data sources. Eleven focus groups with APD patrol officers, sergeants, and lieutenants were also conducted.

This report includes a brief literature review, a short methodology section, a brief description of the OBCS system in Albuquerque, and an analysis of CAD and video data and our focus groups, and a conclusion.

Background

Located in the southwestern United States, the city of Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico with a population of 557,169 in the city and 904,587 in the metro area (US Census, 2015). At the close of 2014, APD reported employing 711 patrol officers, 103 sergeants, and 34 lieutenants, a total of 848 officers in both field services and support services (APD HR data, 2015). The Albuquerque Police Department began testing on body camera systems during August 2010, making it one of the first major police departments to have body worn cameras. At the time of this study, APD was the only police department under a federal mandate to have their officers use camera systems.

Literature Review

Rationale for adopting OBCS for police officers stems from several recently highlighted concerns from both police departments and communities across the nation (Stanley 2013, 2015a). Recent events

Recommendations

- We recommend the policy not mandate the camera system be used for every citizen contact. A policy which mandates the videoing of all citizen contacts is not practical, or auditable. The policy should note when officers are prohibited from using their camera systems.

- The policy should include consistent and clear guidelines and language regarding missing video when a video is mandated. A progressive method to deal with officers who consistently violate the policy should be developed.

- Stakeholders in the local criminal justice system should develop policies and court rules regarding how video is shared, when video is needed in court cases, how video is used in court cases, and how to deal with missing video.

- We recommend APD provide officers two complete camera systems. This will reduce malfunctions and the time officers spend uploading data to the website.

- APD officers should receive routine training on the use of camera systems and refresher training on the technology and the benefits of the camera systems for law enforcement and the public.

- The use of on-body camera systems is a complicated matter and this complexity should not be minimized. A clear and concise policy that can be routinely monitored is necessary.

Target Audience:

Mayor's Office, City of Albuquerque; Albuquerque City Council; Albuquerque citizens; other local and state government policymakers; law enforcement agencies; and researchers.

in Ferguson, MO and Cleveland, OH have put police use of force in the spotlight and have received much attention in the media. Police use-of-force and police legitimacy are concepts discussed in the news almost every day. On the other side of the equation, police officers put themselves at risk while patrolling and the adoption of OBCS may increase safety for police officers. Furthermore, cameras may help settle differential accounts of interactions police have with citizens. Many topics need to be considered when implementing and using on-body camera systems. This includes the rationale for using camera systems, implementation considerations, technological considerations, policy concerns, empirical evidence, and future policy concerns.

One concern recurs consistently throughout the literature that is very relevant to our study: there have yet to be established 'best-practices' when it comes to creating and implementing a comprehensive policy departments can adapt to the use of OBCS. This is not due to a lack of attention to the procedure, but rather the adoption of OBCS in police departments is relatively new. Some departments are simply piloting the new technology while other departments have been required to implement a program such as the Albuquerque Police Department. There is a need for research in this area to determine the best practices that departments should adopt.

Official Data

Our analysis used data from 2014. There were 573,199 Taser videos uploaded to the EVIDENCE.com™ server in 2014. During the same year there were 723,172 calls for service. The large majority of videos were less than twenty minutes long and slightly more than 5% were 30 minutes long. The median duration was 5.44 minutes and the mean was 8.61 minutes long. A total of 684 individuals uploaded at least one video in 2014.

We found that male officers (56.6%) were slightly more likely than female officers (53.9%) to have video within the call time frame. Hispanic officers (55.3%) were the least likely to have video within the call, non-Hispanic, non-white officers (56.6%) were the most likely (Asian, Black, Indian, etc.), and White officers (55.4%) were in between the two. Officers with fewer years of service were more likely to have video within their calls for service compared to longer serving officers. Specifically, officers with 2-4.9 years of experience (64.3%) were the most likely to have video, while those with 15 years or more of service (47.3%) were the least likely to have video.

We found evidence that officers were more likely to turn on their cameras during the highest priority calls for service compared to lower priority calls for service. Specifically, we found 75.6% of priority 1 calls for service had video within the duration on scene, 63.7% for priority 2, and 52.4% for priority 3.

Methodology

This research uses two methods to study the use of OBCS.

Review of official data. Five sources of information were provided by APD. The Calls For Service computer aided dispatch data (CAD) and the OBCS data is the backbone of our official data analysis. These data contain the primary number of the call, the time each call was created, the time dispatched to the officer, when the officer arrived on-scene, and when the officer closed each call. CAD also includes the type of call, the priority of the call, the address of the call, the beat of the primary officer on the call, as well as any other officer(s) answering the call.

The EVIDENCE.com™ website holds the Taser camera system video data and contains all the identifying information for the video recordings, EVIDENCE.com™ data was linked to CAD data.

The EVIDENCE.com™ data included the time and length of the call, the description of the call and report number, and also the officer identifying information.

Focus groups. We conducted focus groups with sworn staff from three different bureaus Field Service Bureau (FSB), Investigative Bureau (IB), and Special Service Bureau (SSB), including patrol officers, sergeants and lieutenants. There was variety in the age of the participants, years of service, and gender. Patrol officers, sergeants, and lieutenants contributed information about when cameras were actually being used, how camera equipment was used, the pros and cons about using the camera system, their approach to a new policy, and "out-of-the-box" suggestions for improving the OBCS. Moreover, they gave their opinions, regarding the review of video footage, realistic policies, auditing cameras usage, the benefits of OBCS, the impact of OBCS on officer performance, and police transparency.

Table 1. Percent and number of calls for service with video and percent and total number of calls for service by call types

Call Type	Percent of Calls for service with Video	Number of Calls for service with Video	Percent of Calls for service	Total Number of Calls for service
Auto Theft	70.2%	3,954	1.4%	5,630
DWI	69.5%	787	0.3%	1,133
Drugs	61.7%	451	0.2%	731
Other*	45.2%	24,388	13.7%	53,998
Property	73.2%	22,267	7.7%	30,434
Public Order	61.0%	117,723	48.9%	192,911
Sex	64.1%	752	0.3%	1,174
Traffic	66.9%	56,118	21.3%	83,942
Violent	83.2%	18,210	5.6%	21,885
Weapons	34.5%	905	0.7%	2,626
Total	62.3%	245,555	100.0%	394,464

Table 1 presents the percent of call types with video within the call for services, the percent with video during the call for service for each type of call, the number of calls for service with video, the percent of calls for service, and the total number of calls for service. We found weapons calls for service (34.5%) displayed the lowest percent and violent calls for service (83.2%) had the highest percent with video. The public order calls accounted for 48.9% of all calls for service, traffic calls accounted for 21.3%, and other calls accounted for 13.7% of all calls. Together these calls accounted for 83.9% of all calls. The other call type accounted for the third highest percent of calls (13.7%) and the second lowest percent of calls matched with video (45.2%).

Focus Groups

Without exception participants whether they were patrol officers, sergeants, or lieutenants recognized that on body camera systems have become a regular piece of their police equipment.

Focus group participants supported the use of a camera system. This support varied among officers and the support was often tempered by a large variety of concerns. These concerns included reliability of the technology, how the video is released to and used by the media, how the video is used by the local court system, the current policy, privacy concerns, the current situation in the department regarding the settlement agreement with the federal Department of Justice, and morale.

There was variation in how officers noted they use their camera systems. This included the type of calls and situations in which they use their systems, when they turn on and turn off their camera systems during calls/situations, and what they video record. Despite this variation, there was general agreement that certain types of calls and situations should be routinely recorded.

The use of OBCSs in the Investigative Bureau (IB) are currently used in a more limited fashion and were seen as having a more limited use compared to use by uniform officers. This is primarily a function of the difference in how IB officers perform their job, their more limited contacts with citizens, and the

variety of camera systems they use.

Participants almost unanimously, whether they were patrol officers, sergeants or lieutenants noted a policy should include mandatory aspects and discretionary aspects. Mandatory aspects centered on types of calls and situations. This included traffic calls, use of force situations, contacts that might lead to an arrest, warrant situations, violent crimes, and domestic disputes. Discretionary aspects were more complicated and nuanced. Discretionary aspects not only included types of calls and situations (i.e. alarm call, commercial burglaries, and residential burglaries where the citizen is the only contact). Participants related incidents when they could not continue interviews because another agency, i.e., the Fire Department, asked the officer to leave since they were videotaping. Additionally, participants noted that since using camera they are more likely to write a citation for minor violations. Prior to the cameras participants noted they at times gave warnings for minor infractions and released the individual.

Participants also noted privacy issues regarding the use of camera systems. This includes places where there may be a greater expectation of privacy such as a person's home, the recording of juveniles, the recording of situations where there is no crime involved, and the recording of victims and witnesses.

In regard to future policy, participants in every focus group mentioned the previous APD belt tape/digital policy. This policy generally listed types of calls, contacts and situations (i.e. resisting arrest, disorderly conduct arrests, refusing to obey an officer arrests, search warrants, domestic violence calls, and contacts where there is reason to believe a complaint could result). Participants also suggested any future policy should cover the release of video, the use of video both in the department and outside of the department (i.e., the media and the courts), the technology, training on the equipment, and monitoring the policy. Responses regarding future OBCS policy prompted one distinctive idea. The suggestion was made for a "split policy." This term describes the suggestion that FSB officers would have an OBCS policy and IB officers would have an OBCS policy.

It was suggested that reviewing camera footage be used as not only a way to monitor officer performance, but also to monitor policy efficiency. Participants suggested that minor acts of misconduct not be the focus when reviewing footage, such as occasional vulgar language, especially when the act is unrelated to the reason for review. Participants also suggested that identifying the cause of recurring problems through reviewing camera footage could allow for proactive solutions, such as refresher trainings. Participants expressed that training would be useful and currently there is a lack of training.

Generally participants agreed there are a variety of problems with the technology regarding the camera systems. This included upload times from the cameras to the cloud based website. According to participants it is often necessary to upload video

during their off hours from their homes using their personal internet connections. Participants also noted the equipment sometimes malfunctions or breaks.

The release of video to the media was a large concern of participants. Participants noted video is released too quickly and readily to the media and there should be limitations. Suggestions included not releasing video while a court case was active.

Focus group participants discussed the impact of the court system on the camera systems. The discussion included how the lack of video can lead to dismissal of cases, how this impacts officers and morale, whether the lack of video should result in the dismissal of cases, and reasons for the lack of video.

Recommendations

We recommend the policy not mandate the camera system be used for every citizen contact. A policy mandating the videoing recording of all citizen contacts is not practical, or auditable. The policy should note when officers are prohibited from using their camera systems.

APD's OBCS policy should be comprehensive and allow for flexibility as the use of OBCS and technology changes. OBCS users as well as police administrators, and other criminal justice system stakeholders, need to have clear and consistent guidelines. The policy should also account for differences in how the system is used by various units. Specifically, FSB and IB officers use their camera systems differently and have somewhat varied needs. These differences need to be better understood and accounted for in policy.

The release of camera system video to the news media should be in policy. The manner in which local and state law provide for the release and decline of public records request needs to be fully explored and considered in the policy. Additionally, APD should have a policy that deals with the provision of camera system video to the local court system. The City of Albuquerque and the APD should work with the District Attorney, the Second Judicial District Court, and Public Defender to more completely study the impact of camera system video on court cases in the court system. Additionally, the City of Albuquerque, the Albuquerque Police Department and stakeholders in the local criminal justice system should develop a policy regarding how video is shared, when video is needed in court cases, how video is used in court cases, and how to deal with missing video.

To reduce the number of occasions users are not able to use their camera system because of broken or missing equipment, some type of malfunction, or any other reason we believe it would be useful to provide officers two complete systems. We believe this will also help with the issue of uploading data to the website.

OBCS users should receive regular and routine training on the use of their camera systems. This training should include new and refresher training on the technology and a component on the benefits of the camera systems for law enforcement and the public.

APD should consider incorporating camera system videos into training that emphasizes the proper use of the camera systems in specific situations that are aligned with the policy.

The policy should take into account privacy issues regarding the video recording of citizens in situations and places where there is a consideration of privacy.

Via the focus groups we believe officers have changed how they interact with the public. The policy should account for casual encounters with members of the public.

APD should fully implement a method to document the video reviewed, the purpose of the review, and the result of the review. This method should be clear, consistent, and flexible.

The policy should include consistent and clear guidelines and language regarding missing video when video is mandated. A progressive method to deal with officers who consistently violate the policy should be developed.

Clear guidelines on how the policy will be monitored should be established. The policy must be flexible and include a system designed to improve compliance without relying on progressive discipline to enforce compliance. Focus group participants noted the policy could include educational aspects that would allow supervisors to instruct officers on minor acts of misconduct that are not part of the original purpose of reviewing the video. Rather, videos could be used as an opportunity to improve officer performance.

APD should consider using camera system data as part of an early warning system. Some participants suggested a few officers will not follow the policy for various reasons and often this is a symptom of a larger problem. APD should consider engaging an outside group to monitor the policy. The monitoring of the policy should be on-going, routine, and systematic.

The use of on-body camera systems is a complicated matter and this complexity should not be minimized. A clear and concise policy that can be routinely monitored is necessary.