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Tanner Castro

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, castrt3@unlv.nevada.edu

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The Benefits of a Grant for Police Worn Body Cameras

Tanner Castro

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Brookings Mountain West Capstone Project- Dr. William Sousa

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Introduction

Police monitoring and accountability are important moral and economic issues within our nation. The problems that surround police accountability serve as the cause of issues regarding high rates of court cases having to deal with police misconduct, the issue of a nature of hostility surrounding police officers, and the social issue of police brutality. In order to help mitigate several of these problems, policy must be constructed in order to increase the rates at which we monitor police officers and hold them accountable.

Monetarily, the courts have a problem of having to deal with cases involving police misconduct. Due to there being a lack of accountability and monitoring of officers, there is a large influx of court cases having to deal with these issues of alleged police misconduct and costing the nation millions of dollars. There is also the social cost of a nature of hostility being fostered towards police officers due to this problem of accountability. Lastly, there is an additional social cost of an increase in police use of force and instances of police brutality because of a lack of police monitoring and accountability. In order to properly ascertain what should be done in order to mitigate these problems, a review of the underpinnings of this policy problem as a whole will first be conducted, followed by a discussion of a policy prescription for this problem of a lack of accountability and monitoring, leading into an analysis of how to implement a policy for this problem along with the possible costs. These analyses will ultimately culminate into the conclusion of what policy should be followed that will produce the most benefits to society.
The Underpinnings of a Lack of Police Accountability and Monitoring

There are three main reasons as to why police accountability and monitoring prevails as a policy problem, it exists as a problem financially, as a problem in regards to evidence for victims and the accused, as a problem in regards to portrayals of officers in entertainment and the media, and as a problem of being able to properly hold officers accountable.

Currently there are millions of dollars that are being lost in our nation due to the large amount of court cases that have to be heard because of instances of alleged police misconduct. In cases of police misconduct, there exists the problem of a lack of monitoring which leads to there being insufficient amounts of evidence that can be used to either help hold an officer accountable, or to help refute false claims. Due to their being not enough evidence to handle these court cases in a timely manner, they often can be drawn out for months or even years at a time. This has led to the creation of a negative externality of clogging the court system. According to the Wall Street Journal, in 2014 the top ten most populated U.S. cities had to spend $248,700,000 on court cases involving police misconduct (Elinson, Z., & Frosch, D. 2014). This is a large amount of finances and resources that creates an opportunity cost for funds that could be utilized to better our communities rather than having to deal with issues relating to police officers. If officers were better monitored and held more accountable for their actions, evidence could be gathered so as to not have to deal with these lengthy court proceedings and saving communities millions of dollars.

A social cost of a nature of hostility towards police officers is also being fostered due to a lack of police accountability and monitoring. Instances with a lack of evidence towards the actions of a police officer, has led to a negative portrayal of officers in the media and from within the world of entertainment; with entertainment being a medium, according to the Journal
on Criminal Justice Behavior, being believed by at least forty percent of citizens within the United States (Donovan 2015). In order to help lower the negative costs that our society receives as a result of a negative view of the police and our government in general, a solution must be carried out in order to hold officers more accountable and make them more deserving of the communities’ trust.

Lastly, a lack of accountability and monitoring of officers has also led to the facilitation of the moral and social costs of police brutality and increased instances of police use of force. One such instance that could have possibly been avoided if proper monitoring was used on police officers, was the death of Tamir Rice in 2015 who died at the hands of two police officers in Cleveland, Ohio (Day 2015). This was an incidence that was captured with the help of surveillance footage, however, if the two officers were properly monitored, they may have not escalated to the level of force that they did. Ultimately, a policy solution must be created in order to hold officers more accountable for their actions and to better monitor them.

**Policy Prescription: Police Worn Body Cameras**

A solution to help mitigate these problems of court funding, the negative culture of hostility towards officers, and police brutality is the further implementation of police worn body cameras through a federal grant system.

As stated previously, the top ten cities in the United States spent $248,700,000 in 2014 in order to deal with claims of police misconduct (Elinson, Z., & Frosch, D. 2014). However, according to a study that was conducted in Rialto, California where police worn body cameras were used over the period of one year, claims of police misconduct decreased by eighty percent, and use of force incidents decreased by sixty percent (Figure 1) (Lopez 2014). If the amount that was spent on court cases is able to reflect this study, and claims of police misconduct are
decreased by eighty percent nationwide, then the top ten cities in the United States could yield financial savings of up to $198,160,000.

Along with the financial savings that could be yielded through the implementation of police worn body cameras, body cameras also have the potential to pay for themselves. In a 2014 report that was conducted on the city of New York, the city had to pay a total of $152,000,000 as a result of having to deal with claims of police misconduct (James 2014). This same report that was conducted on the city of New York also found that outfitting the entire police department with body cameras would cost approximately $33,000,000 dollars. If police worn body cameras could help reduce even a fifth of these claims, then the body cameras would essentially pay for themselves.

Police worn body cameras can also help change people’s perspective on police officers. As stated prior, one common social cost to not being able to properly monitor police officers and hold them accountable, has been the increase in the culture of hostility growing towards them. This nature of hostility is evident through research conducted through the Pew Research Center where African Americans and young people have more negative views of police officers as opposed to white individuals and older correspondents (Fingerhut, pg. 1). However, according to a 2015 study that was conducted by Dr. William Sousa, an expert through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) on police worn body cameras, eighty-six percent of respondents in a national survey believed that officers would behave more respectfully towards citizens if they wore body cameras (Figure 2) (Sousa 2015). Being able to change the public perception that people have of officers is something that would be highly beneficial towards creating a more healthy relationship between law enforcement and civilians.
Police worn body cameras can also protect the community by providing evidence for victims and officers who are falsely accused. Due to officers not being properly monitored, it is often difficult to ascertain whether or not to believe an officer or the alleged victim in claims of police misconduct. Body cameras have been shown to provide enough evidence to defend victims against brutality. One such instance includes the horrific tragedy of the death of six year-old Jeremy Mardis, a boy who was shot in the front seat of his father’s car while the police were chasing him (CBS 2015). The instance that was recorded on body cam footage showed that the “father had his hands up in his vehicle before the officers even open fired” (CBS 2015). Due to body cameras taking footage of this event the death of young Mardis was met with justice when the police chief in this incidence fired both of the officers, Norris Greenhouse and Derrick Stafford, and both had to face criminal charges for their actions in this incidence. Body cameras cannot totally prevent instances of police brutality from occurring, but they can help to reveal when an officer is truly out of line, and they can help the community become more at ease when departments take appropriate actions towards these instances.

Body cameras not only help protect the public from injustices of police brutality, but they can also help police officers in guarding against false accusations that are thrown at them. One such instance was documented by KOB news in 2014 when a woman accused an officer of sexual assault by groping her (KOB 2014). Since the officer had his body camera on and recorded the entire incidence, the officer was saved from having to try and fight the accusation. In a more extreme instance of body cameras helping to protect an officer, Devon Guilford was a seventeen year old boy who was pulled over for a traffic stop when an officer by the name of Jonathan Frost asked Guilford to exit from his vehicle (Shortell 2015). Guilford was resisting arrest and was consequently shot at by a taser from Frost that failed to connect. After he was
shot, Guilford attacked the officer and started striking at him from the ground. In fear of his life and afraid that Guilford may potentially attempt to take Frost’s firearm, Frost withdrew his weapon and fired several shots at Guilford killing him. Although this was an unfortunate situation that resulted in the death of a young man, the body camera footage that was taken off of Frost was enough to prove that he had acted within reason. These instances help to show that body cameras are just as important to officers as they are to the rest of the community.

Lastly, police worn body cameras will help to allow officers to realize that they are being held accountable for their actions. There are many instances in the U.S. where there are unreported or unmonitored instances of police misconduct or police brutality. Turning our attention back to Tamir Rice, the boy who was killed by the two officers in Cleveland, it can be seen that these officers were monitored by surveillance footage that was taken in the area (Day 2015). Even more recently has been the instance of Antwon Rose, a seventeen year old unarmed African American teenager who was recorded on a cellphone as he was being gunned down by officers for fleeing from his vehicle during a traffic stop (Shannon, pg.1). However, if these officers were wearing body cameras and knew that they were being monitored and being held accountable for their actions, perhaps they would not have escalated to the amount of force that they did. The use of body cameras on officers yields both financial and social benefits that can help the community at large.

Implementation and Further Study

The most effective way to spread the use of body cameras throughout the nation would be through the implementation of a federal grant system to be awarded to police departments through an application process. Implementing a federal grant would allow for assurance that the money being awarded to police departments would be used towards the purchase and
implementation of body cameras. This grant system would also allow for the possibility of further research in observing how body cameras affected the areas where they were implemented throughout the country. In gathering data on the effectiveness of body cameras, further evidence can be gained in order to determine whether or not to further carry out this system in the future.

A process of this nature in forming a federal grant program has already been created in the past through the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a bureau under the Department of Justice, where over $22,000,000 was formed into seventy-three total awards that were spread across the country (NSCL 2015). This system was beneficial in furthering the outreach of body cameras throughout the rest of the nation, but would need to be implemented further in order to spread the positive effects of body cameras across the country.

A further analysis of the costs and benefits of police worn body cameras was also conducted between March 1, 2011 and September 30, 2015 by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), that conducted a case study of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) (NCJRS 2017). This study on police worn body cameras looked at the benefits that derived from the decrease of twenty-five complaints per one hundred users, the reduced cost to investigate each complaint, and the time saved to resolve a complaint.

This study that was conducted by the NCJRS found that LVMPD incurred the costs of having to deal with the training, installation, operation and maintenance costs that were associated with implementing body worn cameras at a price of $828 to $1,097 per user per year (NCJRS 2017). However, the overall benefit that was measured by time being saved per officer in the investigations of claims of police misconduct was between $2,909 and $3,178 per user. This overall study suggested that applying a total cost-benefit estimate to all 1,400 officers within LVMPD would create an estimated net annual savings of “4.1 million to $4.4 million
department wide” (NCJRS 2017, pg. 10). The implementation of body worn cameras in Las Vegas was concluded to have been successful in providing more benefits as opposed to costs to the city's department.

**Conclusion**

Police accountability and monitoring is a large problem within the United States that has led to further systemic problems as a result of a lack of policy solutions. These problems of funding of court cases and investigations of police misconduct, instances of fostering a culture of negativity towards police officers, and of instances of police brutality can all be better mitigated through the further use of police worn body cameras throughout the nation. In order to better facilitate the use of body cameras across all states, a grant for police worn body cameras must be further implemented.

Police worn body cameras have the potential to lower the cost of court cases and investigations as seen with the studies observed in Rialto, California, in New York City, and of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department where it was observed that LVMPD could save up to $4,400,000 department wide. Body cameras have the potential to change public perception with up to eighty-six respondents in a UNLV study believing that police officers would treat civilians better if they wore body cameras. Body cameras also have the important capability of lowering instances of police brutality and of police misconduct with the study shown in Rialto, California lowering such incidences by eighty percent.

In order to further facilitate the successes that have already been observed through the implementation of police worn body cameras, a federal grant program such as the one that was implemented by the Bureau of Justice Assistance must be further carried out. Through the further implementation of body worn cameras, large amounts of financial, social, and moral benefits will
be yielded that far outweigh the overall costs of having to install these cameras. Hopefully, through the further implementation of a federal grant program for body cameras, the problems of accountability and monitoring for officers can be better mitigated and dealt with in order to create a safer America.
Figures

(Figure 1)

(Figure 2)
The Benefits of a Grant for Police Worn Body Cameras

References


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