Body Worn Camera and Student Perceptions

CRIM 4004

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The discussion on police body-worn cameras and whether they enhance trust and confidence in citizens has been a major debate. The main purpose of introducing the cameras among the police was to enhance confidence and trust that citizens have towards police officers with the hope that it could improve police behavior. However, in the wake of many incidents of police officers using excessive force, killing innocent citizens across the US, and also increase in police brutality has led to the cameras not serving the initially intended purposes. In the US, many police departments have suffered the negative impacts of trust and confidence crisis from the public. More often many people have recorded incidents of police brutality and the use of excessive force against innocent citizens like in the recent cases of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor who were killed by law enforcement officers in full glare of the public.

This study seeks to examine whether; the use of the body-worn camera enhances the public’s trust in the police. This study will, therefore, focus on the impact of cameras on student's perception in trusting and having confidence in the use of police force, understanding of the police legitimacy, and perceptions of police when they are wearing the cameras. Other major areas of research in this study include; whether the factor of the body-worn camera creates a positive impact on student perception when interacting with law enforcers and whether students feel more comfortable interacting with officers wearing a camera or not. this research is important to examine as it is crucial that police officers do not exceed their power, and if so there needs to be policies and technology in place that can allow the enforcement to take accountability and act fair during every encounter. It is also crucial that citizens do not have negative perceptions and attitudes in trusting police officers and their performance in the field. Research has shown that, citizens perceptions on how they trust police officers are based on the fairness of process during an encounter which can be decided by body worn cameras (Crow et al, 2017). It has come to technology of body worn cameras to determine the relationship between police officers and citizens whether it can be a factor that can improve police accountability and citizen-police interactions.

The main purpose of this study is to examine whether the use of the body-worn cameras by law enforcers improves initial interactions when citizens when a body worn cameras are on. To achieve this, research will be done to;

1. Investigate whether citizens feel more comfortable and trust that the police officers will act accordingly and follow conduct on their behalf when the cameras are on
2. Examine whether the factor of the body-worn camera has any positive impacts on student’s perception when interacting with the police
3. Investigate the issue of police legitimacy and in regard to wearing the body-worn camera

This study is significant in providing insight into if the ability of body worn cameras will enhance police transparency which can help in the reduction of the cases of excessive use of force and reduce the killing of innocent people. The study will also help to determine whether the use of the body-worn cameras will help in the enhancement of trust levels between police officers and the citizens. This study will also help in opening the future discussion on whether; all police officers should be equipped with cameras as they go to work, and whether it would be mandatory for the cameras to be on for every officer and every interaction.

The major focus of this study is the analysis of the role of police wearing body-worn cameras in enhancing the levels of confidence among the citizens. The main research question include;

1. Does the use of body worn cameras enhance police legitimacy and help in the creation of positive perceptions of police officers?

There are a number of research studies that have been conducted to address the issue of police body-worn cameras, and how they relate to the enhancement of trust and confidence among students towards the police. According to the study, “*Inconsistencies in public opinion of body-worn cameras on police: Transparency, trust, and improved police-citizen relationships*” by Sousa et al., (2018), the use of the body-worn cameras has brought mixed reactions from the public regarding the support of the new technology, and the ability of the cameras to enhance the police transparency, enhance a better system of police-citizen relationship and improve the trust that the public has towards law enforcers. Sousa et al., (2018), arguments have also been supported by Goetschel & Peha (2017) in their work, “*Police perceptions of body-worn cameras*”, where, the two authors argued that the introduction of the body-worn camera (BWC) technology had not been received well by the officers, and therefore, its implementation had faced great resistance from the law enforcers. The use of the BWC technology has helped in the reduction of citizen complaints, in cities like Pittsburgh. However, while the technology was termed to have increased the police working efficiency, its use did not reflect well with other officers, who stated that it lowered levels of trust among each other and citizens.

Use of the body-worn cameras has been one of the major innovations, which were introduced to enhance the relationship between the police and the citizen. Some of the major goals of introducing the cameras were to enhance the levels of transparency and accountability of police officers while they are at work (Smykla et al., 2016). The cameras were also meant to enhance police legitimacy, where people had lost their trust and confidence in the police force. With the increased levels of doubt, many citizens were concerned about the excessive use of force by the police officers captured in the majority of the video footage across communities. The use of the camera footage would help in understanding the underlying problem within the community, and the nature of the events between the police and the community members (Sousa et al., 2018). They were also meant to enhance the levels of civility, where, cameras would help in increasing citizen's level of compliance with the police officer's commands. Footages would be used to assess the levels of compliance and also review the complaints lodged against certain officers during the law enforcement process (Ariel et al., 2016). The intention was to ensure that, the citizens were informed that the encounter process was being recorded which might, therefore; change their behavior towards the officers. The recording process would ensure that some of the issues do not escalate to levels where the police officers would be required to use excessive force to deal with the citizens, and therefore, lead to a positive interaction between law enforcers and the public (Lee et al., 2019).

Using the cameras also had the intention of ensuring that there was a better and a quick resolution of issues, especially on complainants lodged by citizens towards individual police officers. The footages would help in determining whether any police officer used excessive force, and the reason why the officer might have acted in the manner that they did (White et al., 2018). The use of the camera footage would, therefore, generate a higher level of confidence and trust in the police officers, as the public will be assured that their issues would be addressed without any problem. The aspect of generating more corroborative evidence from the captured footage is a major focus for many citizens since the footage would provide more evidence on the types of crime the citizens are accused of committing, and therefore, lead to higher numbers of guilty pleas in court proceedings for the crimes committed (Henstock & Ariel, 2017). The body-worn cameras would improve the levels of policing through the necessary training.

Other studies have been conducted to analyze and understand the advantages and the disadvantages of the police body-worn cameras and their relation to the privacy of the citizens and the confidence and the trust they create. Lin (2016), in the text, “*Police body has worn cameras and privacy: Retaining benefits while reducing public concerns*" argued that the use of the cameras enhanced public confidence in the local and the international policing systems. The author argued that the use of technology helps in reducing the complaints from the citizens and the number of allegations made against officers by the citizens. The arguments by Lin (2016) were supported by Braga et al., (2017) in their text, “*The benefits of body-worn cameras: New findings from a randomized controlled trial at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department”,* where the authors argued that the use of the body-worn cameras helped in the process of reducing the number of criminal cases since criminals would have early pleas. The authors also argued that the use of the cameras would lead to a reduction in the cases of assault by the police officers against the citizens.

The conducted literature, however, has many gaps in regard to the use of the cameras, which might increase the cases of mistrust and lack of confidence in the police enforcement. One of the major issues is that the cameras might lead to the breach of the privacy protection of the members of the public who have been recorded by the cameras (Gaub et al., 2020). There are no stipulated laws and guidelines on when the police can use the camera by providing clear guidelines regarding the opening and the closing of the cameras. There are no clear ways that have been stipulated, indicating whether the public would be provided with the camera footage. The captured clips might be released to third parties since the devices used might have an encryption mistake, which might compromise the privacy of the citizens. The privacy of the citizens is usually compromised by the use of body cameras, where citizens might be captured when they are not aware.

In this study, the major focus shall be on two variables; the dependent and the independent variables. The independent variable is the body-worn cameras, while the dependent variable is positive perceptions of police officers. The independent variable, the body worn cameras, which shall either be turned on or off, will influence the response, the behavior, the actions, trust, and confidence of the dependent variable, the students, and the citizens perceptions of police officers. The study will measure the variability of students' response toward police behavior when they understand that variable of body worn cameras in specific scenarios and police legitimacy. Police legitimacy can be defined as the citizens general trust in police officers, in the sense of transparency and performance. Essentially how we decide to measure our variables will be based off of these operational definitions;

1. police legitimacy = a positive response to one or more of the three questions on police legitimacy
2. body worn cameras = the number of positive responses that students support body worn cameras
3. positive perceptions = the number of positive responses to three or more of the scenario questions on police legitimacy and necessity for body worn cameras
4. enhance = Among students, the mean of Humber College Students on the survey will be significantly greater of < 4 positive responses on their opinion of police officers who wear body worn cameras

This study relies on the use of the theories of procedural justice and the deterrence theory to explain the relationship between the use of the police body-worn cameras and the people's reactions, trust, and confidence in the police operations. The procedural justice theory focuses on the idea of practicing fairness in the process of resource allocation and the process of solving problems (Gangl, 2003). According to the theory, there should be the administration of justice and the proper use of legal proceedings to solve problems within society. Different countries have used the sense of procedural justice in different formats, where the US has applied due process, while Canada has relied on the use of fundamental justice, the use of procedural fairness in Australia, and the use of natural justice in other counties, which use the common law jurisdictions. The procedural justice focuses on the use of transparency and fairness when making critical decisions (Cropanzano et al., 2002). The theory advocates for fairness when distributing rights and resources through distributive justice and also advocates for fairness in the punishment of wrongs, through retributive justice. According to the theory, all parties should be listened to, before any decision is made, through the use of the necessary steps, as a way of ensuring that the procedures are fair. The theory is based on four major models, which explain how it works, which include; the outcome model, the balancing model, the participation model, and the group engagement model (Watson & Angell, 2007).  The procedural justice theory, therefore, relates to the aspect of police body-worn cameras, where the theory argues that, the camera footage should be used to evaluate, whether the law enforcers acted within their guidelines or they operated against the set principles. The footage should also provide a clear report on the behavior of citizens, and whether they needed to have acted otherwise, before passing any judgment. The two sides should be listened to, with the camera footage being used to provide the necessary evidence needed, before passing any fair judgment regarding the use of excessive force (Demir et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the deterrence theory states that the threat of punishment will deter people from the act of committing a crime (Achen & Snidal, 1989). The theory also states that the punishment threat helps in the reduction of crime probability and also reduces the rates of offending in societies. The theory states that punishment helps in the denunciation, incapacitation process, and retribution as well as the rehabilitation process. The criminal deterrence theory is widely applied in two major cases, which include; the imposition of punishment on offending individuals and also on the prevention of any further crime happening by the offenders (Jervis, 1989). It argues that the aspects of punishment have a wide impact on the idea of deterrence, with one of the major impacts being the certainty of punishment and the severity of the punishment based on the actions of the crime rate. The theory highly applies in the case of the police cameras, where, the officers are likely to act following the law, and avoid the application of excessive force to the citizens (D'arcy & Herath, 2011). The fear of punishment will deter them from the use of excessive force towards the citizens. The theory also has it that citizens will behave better and control their actions when they understand that the cameras are recording, due to the fear of punishment upon the reviewing of the camera footage (Ariel et al., 2015).

It is important to dive into the complexity of the issue and what outcomes that can appear from our data. The study will take an in-depth examination on how the use of body worn cameras enhance the relationship between police officers and citizens, through trust in police specifically in an encounter or police legitimacy in regard to transparency and performance when interacting.

This study tests 3 hypotheses, which include;

H1: The use of the body-worn cameras has positive impacts on student's perception when interacting with police

H2: Students who encounter police officers with body worn camera will have a higher level of trust compared to police officers that don’t

H3: Students who encounter police officers that wear body worn cameras will increase the trust of police legitimacy

Data for this study shall be obtained through the quantitative method of research which will focus on the collection of data regarding the use of the body worn cameras and the trust in the police force using a survey and other secondary resources. The survey will collect data from a sample of students in Humber College. The sample size will consist of fifty participants that will be selected through the stratified random sampling to get a fair representative of the population at Humber College. The participants will be students from community and justice service program and criminal justice program in Humber College. In this way, the sample size will be well spread and an appropriate representative of the student population that has little to more knowledge on the issue, and opinions will be of educational/scholarly thought.

There are many advantages to using quantitative methods of research. Firstly, it provides a wide range of sample sizes that would be studied; the process provides an easy process of data collection and also allowed for the use of randomized samples. A survey is considered the most appropriate tool for data collection in quantitative research as it allows for collection of large amounts of data from a group of people at the same time in a relatively cost-effective manner. Besides, the collected data can easily be quantified by either manual analysis or through use of data analysis software. With the survey, the subjects can give feedback freely without fear or any influence from the researcher. Moreover, quantitative data collected in that manner can easily be analyzed more scientifically and objectively and can easily compare its validity with other existing research studies. The survey method is especially great for testing multiple hypotheses and allows for students to answer straightforward questions based on their experience, knowledge and own characteristics.

However, there are limitations of using the questionnaire, which include the possibility of the subject failing to understand the questions being asked. Since the researcher frames the questions, the subjects have no freedom of answering it how best they think it should be answered. Also, it’s not easy to tell how truthful the collected information is. To counter this, there will be a detailed explanation to the subjects prior to providing the information for them to fully understand the use of the given data. Though, our recruitment strategy is to reach a large sample size to collect data from which we intend to request access or request program coordinators to obtain student emails to send out a mass email of our survey. The accessibility of the questionnaire will be via Survey Monkey, an online, easy access survey tool. Upon completing the survey, students will sign a consent form that provides a detailed description of the purpose of the survey, how their results will be used and general clarifications about participating in the study. All data will be confidential and will be analyzed through the data analysis software SPSS.

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Questionnaire

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Responses | |
| Yes | No |
| 1. Do you feel more comfortable when interacting with a police officer who has worn a body-worn camera? |  |  |
| 1. Does the use of a body camera enhance the Police legitimacy and does it help in the creation of positive perceptions of police? |  |  |
| 1. Do the body-worn cameras have any positive impacts on student’s perception when interacting with police? |  |  |