

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance
Miami Beach Police Department BWC Study Podcast (Part 2)

Todd Maxwell: OK. Hello again listeners, this is Todd Maxwell part of the Bureau of Justice Assistance body worn camera team and as promised, we were able to catch up with Doctor Barak Ariel. We will continue the discussion from our previous podcast with this new accompaniment.

As a reminder, Doctor Ariel is a Jerry Lee fellow in experimental criminology and lecturer in experimental criminology at the University of Cambridge. Doctor Ariel, thank you for welcoming – for attending this con or being able to catch up with us. Can you give us an overview and explain the study you're coordinating with Miami Beach Police Department.

Barak Ariel: Sure, it's a great pleasure to be part of this wonderful project. It's going to be a very exciting opportunity to conduct a randomized control trial and beyond on body worn videos in large departments (in the South) to see what's the sense of wearing these cameras can be for policing, law enforcement and the criminal justice system all together.

We're trying to answer as many questions simultaneously. The design that we have which again is a randomized control trial is looking at causal impact of wearing these cameras on a wide range of questions.

We're going to look at the classic questions that are associated with body worn videos such as the use of force and complaints and assaults against officers and injuries to suspects. And these are questions that has been floating around in the literature for some – for a few years now but we want to look further.

We want to dip a little bit into it and see whether body worn videos would also have an impact on the criminal justice system for instance thinking perhaps the – well, body worn videos are worn then that may have an effect on the decision making process of the officers which could increase or decrease the decision to arrest.

It may also have an impact on the other side of the criminal justice system when offenders go to court, we may see early guilty pleas rising as a result of the worn videos because if something's caught on – caught on tape then it's less likely the offenders will go to trial. That obviously had cost opportunities for the entire system.

And other questions that come up with body worn videos that we really want to look into is the data sharing. It's one of the overlooked questions and how the different parts – the moving parts of the criminal justice system can work together and become a little bit more efficient and more effective with delivering justice because some of the systems don't talk as much as we want them to at least not in an efficient way.

So the different kinds of systems – technological systems that are associated with body worn videos for instance is it using the cloud based system or even using an Internet. The way that we can share data and build cases can be a much more efficient when everything is stored in one place.

You also have a better way of deciding where cases are going and how they're moving in the system and knowing how long it takes. So efficiencies are likely to increase when using a storage – data stored electronically and digitally across the system.

But overall the body worn videos research that we see blossoming and flourishing over the world is quite intriguing – quite interesting it may – it may in fact become a game changer for policeman, for law enforcement and of course it doesn't come from an assumption that it is necessarily attributed to a change that is going to be caused to policing.

But it also has an impact on the community, it has an impact on legitimacy. It may have an impact on the way that suspects and witnesses correspond and communicate in encounters with the police.

So we're really interested in looking at all these questions simultaneously and the fact that we have a long (help) – that we have a study that will be taking us

to conceive in the next couple of years allows us to look in a comprehensive way at all these questions at the same time.

Todd Maxwell: That's a – I'm really glad to hear about the data. Wanted to update, we went to – recently we went to a symposium at Stanford University. We're talking about digital media evidence and a vast majority of it and how law enforcement agencies are going to be able to handle and share that data.

And with that vast amount of data, how could we improve auto-redacting, auto-tagging of audio and video. So it's good to see everyone moving in this area of research.

I know you were involved with the...

Barak Ariel: (Inaudible).

Todd Maxwell: Go ahead, sorry.

Barak Ariel: No, please go ahead. I was just about to comment that yes these questions are pertinent and they come – and I see it in every department that is interested in employing body worn videos with as far as research and evaluation are just going ahead and buying these devices.

These questions come up very quickly into the process and the technology is faster – is moving faster than we can imagine. I don't – I don't think that body worn video enterprise or the application of body worn videos in policing is primarily about the cameras, it's actually primarily about the data. It's an IP add on, not a – not something that necessarily is just about the camera itself because the camera is stupid, it's just a piece of device, it's what you do with it, it's how you deploy it and how you use it.

Todd Maxwell: Right.

Barak Ariel: And what you do with this vast amount of data and information that you eventually capture by using body worn videos.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you. For our listeners out there, Doctor Ariel is also involved with the Rialto study so if you – have a check in if you could sort of talk about this part of the Rialto study that people talk about is the law enforcement, not only was the body – were the body cameras were introduced but there's a management style change, there's a lot of different changes happening there.

So how do you envision this study being different? Is it just like you said more comprehensive or are you guys looking at multiple different layers because they don't have that whole systematic management change happening in Miami.

Barak Ariel: Well I think – I think since all the systems are looking at how body worn videos are potentially changing policing, it is a comprehensive change for a police department.

Now, let's be clear. The Rialto study was the first study but ever since the Rialto study, there've been a lot of other studies either in the cooker or have already been published. I mean there's a very interesting study by Professor (Redding) and Professor (Shawn) from (Mesla) and we also have a very interesting experiment conducted in Orlando with Professor (Jennings) and colleagues.

Yes, Todd), the body of knowledge is increasing and there's been a recent review of the literature by Professor Cynthia Lum from George Mason and their colleagues.

And they all show pretty much the same kind of direction that yes it is about use of force and complaints and legitimacy but we're also seeing a new kind of management, we're also seeing a new kind of way of delivering justice and I think that we'll see more of it in Miami because we're learning more and we understand more based on the previous studies that were conducted (we altered) as well.

But it is indeed a comprehensive change and I think the – I think the evidence of – that's been published so far has been what's supportive of this change.

Todd Maxwell: I agree and just a quick plug for our body worn camera tool kit at (www.bja.gov/bwc). All those studies that Doctor Ariel has mentioned are available on our toolkit under our research tab and as an attachments and downloadable. So if you want to review any of those ones I've mentioned.

Doctor Ariel, besides the abstract, do you provide any other assistance to Miami Beach PD like policy review or assistance with some of these change management. This is – the reason for this question is been brought up by several agencies, the importance of having a research partner not only to do some studies but to be involved in some of their program development.

So I was just curious, if you are involved or provided any assistance or advice on that front.

Barak Ariel: I try to – I try to be of help as much as I can. I know that (Donald Tappy) and others and his department in Miami Beach has actually drafted a very – a very sound policy document for body worn videos. But as we learn from (Colin) and Rialto and (Ventura), this – the policy is changes – the policy changes because it develops, the technology develops as well.

I think what we really can bring to the table as researchers or academics working with these police departments is some sense of integrity – not of course to say that the police do not have integrity but I think that the results that we would potentially then publish at the end of all these trials and all these studies is viewed differently by the communities than if the police would come out and say, "Yes, we're actually reducing force," "Yes, we do things better."

Because you know at the end of the day these is the treatment providers doing their own task and we already know from the medical profession that is – pharmaceutical companies will publish a study that says that their products work, I don't know if we can necessarily see that is actually is the case because we're going to (build were) – the results would be suspect.

From an academic perspective, if body worn videos will work or not, it's not the important question, it's just to show the causal estimates and to show that

they're valid and do a proper design that will actually show these kinds of results. I guess it's more publishable that body worn videos will increase in the force so would actually make things not work but so far we haven't seen this kind of – this kind of evidence.

So to a long – a long answer to your question, we're trying to get as much involved as possible just at least to have some sort of a comparative – a comparison between this police department and other departments that we have the privilege of working with.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. That's the perfect answer.

Without revealing any outcomes of your study and I know it's early on, can you tell us if you come across anything that sort of surprise you about this evaluation process or the partnership in a – in a positive or negative way?

Barak Ariel: It's an interesting question. I mean again I've been very lucky to be part of body worn video research for the past few years and I can tell you from a (anecdotal) experiences that the (perspectives) and approach of the police officers out there has changed. There's been a lot of suspicions and a lot of cynicism about body worn videos in the early years.

And I think – I think that officers themselves, never mind the boss, never mind the chiefs out there, it's the officers out there in the ground that have a different kind of view than what they had just a few years ago you know from a little brother, big brother sort of like device that will catch them in the act doing bad things they're not supposed to do to some sort of like an appreciation that this is an insurance policy for what they're doing.

Todd Maxwell: Right.

Barak Ariel: So, yes it's important because at the end of the day, a lot of times it's his word against his or her word and it's kind of difficult for officers to show that they'd actually done a good job and now that you have a device that actually

corroborates the story from the very initial blow or from the very initial argument.

And that's something that I know a lot of officers have been looking for a long time because the police has changed. The police is a much more professional body than it was 50 years ago. The kind of problems that we had 50 years ago – 40 years ago perhaps even more recently are not as prevalent as they were back then and because officers are so busy they don't have – they got so much on their hands that they just want to keep on doing their job and do the best where they can.

So here are the tools that's supposed to help them rather than to catch them in the act necessarily. And I think there's some sort of a change – a shift in the officer's perspective in this kind of tool. And of course it's not just my understanding. There's recent – there's evidence around the – the research evidence around that again Professor (Jennings) and others have shown that quite clearly.

Todd Maxwell: So just a quick follow up on that. Do you think the law enforcement from the officer's perspective, their ability to trust this is influenced by how strong a policy there is on supervisors and bosses not being able to use this as a punishable tool and just looking over video and finding fault versus using it as a potential training tool or basically not being able to hold what they do on the video against them or having a policy saying if this happens.

How important do you think the policy is in alleviating those sorts of concerns?

Barak Ariel: That's a good point. I think – I think it's a very important element of the – of deployment. The officers have their need to understand – need to believe that the policy will protect them from interested sergeants or officers in the middle and upper management that are looking to get them.

I don't think – I don't think that – I don't think but that's my own opinion – I don't think that this camera should be used as a – sort of like a random sort of check or how officers are behaving out there.

First of all because if you want to dip – if you want to dig and want to look for something you know you may find something of course it's something that's not supposed to happen that's one thing but everybody curses, everybody says bad things about their bosses, and you know you can use that against them and I don't see – and that would be a problem from deployment perspective if officers will think that this is what the cameras are for.

If something is caught in the act, something that you have to deal with, absolutely, go ahead and do that but if this is – were under the (inaudible) and perceive this camera or this device as a way to get them and the policy will not got – protect them, you may – you may – you may have resistance and we don't want that.

Todd Maxwell: Right, yes, one of the big debates going on, I'm sure you're aware of is whether an officer has a right to review his video before making a statement or writing his report and there's been a lot of debates on both sides of that so it would be interesting to see where that – where that sort of comes out. Do you have any thoughts on that one?

Barak Ariel: Yes, I've heard this debate across the Atlantic and around the world about you know whether officers should view their own footage before they write reports or not. The real challenge is that how do you – what is the – what is the legal standing of evidence caught on tape and what is the relationship with the evidence you catch on tape and the officer's perspective on what he or she would write on the report.

I mean when would you see something contentious? When the officer is involved in a critical incident or even a very serious incident and he remembers things in a particular way or she remembers things in a particular way and the camera doesn't tell the same story.

The problem is that you have tunnel vision. The problem is that you have a lot of pressure and I'm not really sure that the point is actually see who's right or who's not, the point is the truth. I don't really see a problem with the officers

viewing their own tape or their own footage because that's essentially why that matters.

If you're going to take it to court or you're going to have some sort of an actual disciplinary action or otherwise, why do we need to have two different stories if they are such.

If the officers made a mistake you know the officers made a mistake and some sort of an action needs to be taken. But it's not about you know a way to say we see on tape something one thing and you say something else. Let's just view the footage and see what happened. We can learn from that.

Todd Maxwell: Right. That's a good point. Our final question for Doctor Ariel is basically around research partners. One of the big parts of BJA and the solicitations came out body worn cameras is developing a partnership. So Doctor, would you recommend other agencies, law enforcement agencies partner with a research partner or and if so why?

Barak Ariel: My philosophy is that “first you test then you implement.” It has cost implications, it has moral implications. I don't think that there's any – if you compare this to the medical profession I don't think anybody would want our children to get it a medicine or treatment that hasn't been tested first.

Body-worn cameras so far is being something of a successful policing as far as we could tell from the different kinds of studies that we have so far. I don't know if it's going to work the same way for a prison system or other kind of law enforcement. I'm not saying that it will not work. I'm saying we just don't know.

So instead of implementing a multi-million dollar project in any other law enforcement department, test it out first with a pilot and see that it's – you get in the same benefits. It may – it may back fire or it may not work, it may not have any effect meaning that wearing a camera or not wearing a camera doesn't have any impact in the prison environment or firefighters or border patrol or any kind of law enforcement agency you can think of.

And if that's the case don't waste your money, don't waste my money but if it does work at least you will have the evidence to support policy you're trying to push just as I would suggest that any kind of new policy you want to introduce, test it out first in rigorous and controlled conditions and then you will see whether it's something worthwhile.

Todd Maxwell: Do you think having a research partner to help you with that pilot study then would like you said previously help with the perceived legitimacy of that – of that pilot and the outcomes of it?

Barak Ariel: Yes, we want to invade law enforcement and we want law enforcement officers and agencies to invade the academia. We want to have as much work – collaborative work as much as possible because we bring to the table some sort of a tool or some sort of a way of looking at things in a different way that policy makers would have or treatment providers would have.

So it's a good collaboration for everybody and I think the more we see of it the more professional body we will have in law enforcement.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you for speaking with us today. We're grateful you – that you could speak with us and share your knowledge on this important topic. We apologize to our listeners for the split format but Doctor Ariel is unable to join us last time.

Again, we encourage law enforcement justice, public safety leaders, and those whose agency – agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body worn camera programs to visit the body worn camera toolkit at (www.bja.gov/bwc). This is (Todd Maxwell) signing off. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

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