

Fargo Police Department's Perception of Body Worn Cameras

Carol Archbold, Ph.D.

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Methodology

In October 2020, newly appointed Chief David Zibolski of the Fargo Police Department (FPD) announced that he was planning to implement body worn cameras (BWCs) (Thompson, 2020). To capture FPD personnel perceptions of BWCs prior to them using the technology, surveys were administered during roll calls throughout January 2021. Surveys were completed by 96 percent of patrol level officers.

Fargo police officers completed BWC training in September 2021 and began wearing the technology in October 2021. After officers had utilized BWCs for approximately one year, surveys were administered during roll calls throughout November 2022. In order to examine changes in officer perceptions, the survey contained the same questions as the survey that was administered in January 2021. Surveys were completed by 95 percent of patrol level officers.

Research Findings

The Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to compare the mean rank of patrol officers' responses on the pre and post surveys to determine if officers' perceptions of BWCs changed after using the technology for

one year.

The following pages contain the findings of the comparison of pre and post test responses.

Interpretation of the Following Findings:

“**mean score**” is the aggregate mean score. Officers had four choices for responding to the following questions: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) agree; (4) strongly agree. Therefore, the closer the mean score is to 4, the more agreeable officers are with the statement. In contrast, the closer the mean score is 1, officers were less agreeable with the statement.

“**mean rank**” is the average of the ranks for all responses to each survey question.

“**p (sig)**” tells us if the difference in mean scores is statistically significant. If the p value is .05 or less, the difference between the pre and post survey responses is statistically significant. If there is a difference in mean scores and the p value is greater than .05, the difference in the mean scores could be the result of random chance. ***This means we want to pay attention to the scores highlighted in yellow.

How BWCs Impact Police Work

When Officers Wear Body Cameras...

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
They will have a more accurate account of what has transpired.	PRE 3.28 POST 3.38	99.05 107.70	.224
It will improve the quality of evidence collected and submitted.	PRE 3.37 POST 3.52	94.25 111.17	.019*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs would improve the quality of evidence collected and submitted by officers. After using BWCs for a year, officers see the various ways that BWCs help them regarding the collection of evidence.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
BWCs make police officers jobs easier.	PRE 2.92 POST 3.28	88.31 115.62	.001*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs would make officers' jobs easier. After using BWCs for a year, officers see the various ways that BWCs make their job easier.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
BWCs make it easier to prosecute DUI offenders.	PRE 2.98 POST 3.28	89.22 114.17	.001*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs make it easier to prosecute DUI offenders. BWCs capture video footage of the interaction with DUI offenders (i.e., field sobriety tests, etc.).

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
BWCs make it easier to prosecute domestic violence cases when victims are unwilling to testify.	PRE 3.08 POST 3.16	99.88 105.91	.416
BWCs help secure convictions (in general).	PRE 3.06 POST 3.15	98.18 106.58	.218
BWCs reduce the time spent filling out paperwork/reports.	PRE 2.02 POST 2.10	100.92 104.94	.564
BWCs will improve officer training.	PRE 2.97 POST 3.24	91.33 113.03	.002*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs improve officer training.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
BWCs are an invasion of the officer's privacy.	PRE 2.06 POST 1.71	116.47 88.76	.001*

**There was a decrease in agreement with the statement that BWCs are an invasion of officers' privacy. This means that after wearing BWCs for one year, more officers do not agree that BWCs are an invasion of their privacy. Perhaps the various benefits of BWCs outweigh their concerns of privacy. It is also possible that officers have become accustomed to wearing the technology so they are less concerned of its presence as they carry out their work each day.

How BWCs Will Impact Citizen Behavior

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Citizens will be more respectful when they interact with officers.	PRE 2.07 POST 2.17	99.19 106.56	.306
Citizens will be more cooperative when interacting with officers.	PRE 1.95 POST 2.10	97.13 108.48	.078
Citizens will be less likely to resist arrest.	PRE 1.83 POST 1.95	97.56 108.08	.083
Citizens will become less aggressive toward officers (in general).	PRE 1.89 POST 2.03	97.06 108.55	.081
BWCs will deter witnesses from speaking with officers.	PRE 2.17 POST 2.07	107.52 98.78	.123
Citizens will be less likely to file complaints against officers.	PRE 2.25 POST 2.30	101.15 104.73	.612
Citizens will feel that BWCs are an invasion of privacy.	PRE 2.41 POST 2.24	110.52 95.09	.027*

**Overall, officers did not report that the presence of BWCs would have much of an effect on citizens behavior (specifically regarding cooperation, showing respect or being aggressive). However, there was a decrease in agreement with the statement that citizens will feel like BWCs are an invasion of their privacy. This is likely because BWCs have been used by FPD for a year and citizens realize that interacting with FPD officers in public spaces will involve them being recorded by BWCs. Or to put it another way, being recorded by BWCs is just part of interacting with FPD officers.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Citizens will benefit (in general) from the use of BWCs.	PRE 3.04 POST 3.26	92.56 112.75	.003*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that citizens will benefit (in general) from the use of BWCs.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Police-community trust will increase with the use of BWCs.	PRE 2.85 POST 2.96	97.94 106.80	.172
Police-community relationships will improve (in general) with the use of BWCs.	PRE 2.72 POST 2.92	93.39 110.03	.014*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs will improve police-community relationships.

How BWCs Impact Officer Behavior and Decision Making

When Wearing Body Cameras...

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers will act more professional.	PRE 2.71 POST 2.87	95.20 108.34	.055*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that officers would act more professional while wearing BWCs.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers are more likely to follow department procedures when interacting with the public.	PRE 2.75 POST 2.81	100.73 105.12	.506
Officers will be distracted when they perform their work.	PRE 2.11 POST 1.94	111.38 95.17	.005*

**There was a decrease in agreement with the statement that BWCs would be a distraction to officers while they conduct their work. Again, after wearing BWCs for a year, officers become used to the technology being present while they conduct their work.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers are less likely to give warnings to citizens.	PRE 2.06 POST 1.90	109.89 96.57	.021*
Officers will feel like they have less discretion.	PRE 2.39 POST 2.01	118.89 88.16	.001*
Officers will hesitate when they make decisions.	PRE 2.28 POST 1.89	119.92 87.19	.001*
Officers' decisions to use higher levels of force will be influenced.	PRE 2.43 POST 2.07	117.87 88.00	.001*

**After wearing the BWCs for one year, there was a decrease in agreement with the statements that BWCs would restrict officers' use of discretion, that officers would hesitate to make decisions, that officers would feel like they had less discretion while on duty, and that BWCs would influence their decisions to use higher levels of force. Some critics of BWC technology argue that the technology increases danger to officers as they may second guess decisions they make in high stress, volatile situations. The consistency in the responses provided by FPD officers suggests that they do not agree with the critics.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers are less likely to make stops and arrests.	PRE 1.89 POST 1.91	103.07 102.93	.981
Officers will have fewer contacts with citizens.	PRE 1.97 POST 1.91	106.82 99.43	.209

Impact of BWCs on Work Environment of Police Officers

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
The use of BWCs will increase morale in the FPD.	PRE 2.22	90.11	.003*
	POST 2.54	112.02	

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs will increase morale within the FPD.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Wearing a BWC causes me stress and anxiety.	PRE 2.18	118.23	.001*
	POST 1.76	87.67	

**There was a decrease in agreement with the statement that BWCs would cause FPD officers stress and anxiety while on duty. To put it another way, fewer FPD officers believed that wearing BWCs would cause them an increase in stress and anxiety.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Wearing a BWC will decrease officer safety (in general).	PRE 1.86	109.15	.086
	POST 1.72	97.26	
BWCs will result in officers communicating less with other officers while on patrol.	PRE 2.30	112.49	.006*
	POST 2.04	93.26	

**There was a decrease in agreement with the statement that BWCs would result in officers communicating less while on duty. To put it another way, BWCs are not hindering communication among Fargo police officers.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers will benefit (in general) from wearing BWCs.	PRE 3.12	93.71	.008*
	POST 3.32	111.68	

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that officers will benefit (in general) from wearing BWCs. After wearing the technology for one year, FPD officers are seeing all of the ways that BWCs benefit them.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers will experience an increase in job satisfaction while wearing BWCs.	PRE 2.40	91.60	.008*
	POST 2.64	111.51	

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that officers will experience an increase in job satisfaction while wearing BWCs. Again, this is likely that they are seeing how the technology benefits them.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
Officers overall job performance will improve from wearing BWCs.	PRE 2.57	92.74	.006*
	POST 2.81	112.58	

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that officers will experience an improvement in overall job performance while wearing BWCs.

Impact of BWCs on Perceptions of Police Accountability and Transparency

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
I think BWCs will ensure greater accountability in policing.	PRE 3.09 POST 3.23	95.97 109.56	.042*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs will ensure greater accountability in policing.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
I think body cameras will improve transparency in police work.	PRE 3.08 POST 3.27	93.97 111.43	.011*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs will improve transparency in policing.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
BWCs will protect officers from false allegations of misconduct.	PRE 3.38 POST 3.52	95.81 109.72	.056*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that BWCs will protect officers from false allegations of misconduct. This is likely viewed as one of the ways that officers benefit from BWC technology.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
The use of body cameras shows how little management trusts officers.	PRE 1.90 POST 1.80	107.50 96.87	.122
BWCs will increase the likelihood that the officer will receive an internal complaint from a colleague or supervisor.	PRE 2.24 POST 2.14	107.70 98.61	.186
The general public should be able to view footage from BWCs.	PRE 2.28 POST 2.53	93.37 111.99	.015*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that the general public should be able to view footage from BWCs. This finding suggests that FPD officers value transparency associated with their work.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
I think that using body cameras will increase lawsuits filed against police officers and my police organization.	PRE 2.04 POST 1.83	111.69 94.00	.006*

**There was a decrease in agreement with the statement that BWCs will increase lawsuits filed against FPD officers and the FPD. This finding suggests that officers are less worried that BWCs will increase litigation filed against them and their organization.

Officer Acceptance of the Use of BWCs

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
I support the use of body - worn cameras on all patrol officers.	PRE 3.10 POST 3.55	83.67 122.21	.001*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that the individual officer supports the use of BWCs by all patrol officers.

	Mean Score	Mean Rank	p (sig)
The use of BWCs is well received by my co-workers.	PRE 2.89 POST 3.27	85.96 118.92	.001*

**There was an increase in agreement with the statement that the use of BWCs is well received by officers' co-workers within the FPD.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that patrol officers recognize various ways that BWCs benefit them and the community after using the technology for one year. Acceptance of this technology will increase the likelihood that patrol officers will utilize the technology according to department policies and based on the training provided to them by their organization.

Reference:

Thompson, Dave. 2020. "New Fargo police chief will look at more training and body cameras for officers." Prairie Public Newsroom, October 7. <https://news.prairiepublic.org/local-news/2020-10-07/new-fargo-police-chief-will-look-at-more-training-and-body-cameras-for-officers>

About the Author



Carol Archbold, Ph. D., is a Walter & Verna Gehrts Endowed Professor and Challey Institute for Global Innovation & Growth Faculty Fellow at North Dakota State University in the Department of Criminal Justice. She also serves as Chair of the American Society of Criminology - Division of Policing.

carol.archbold@ndsu.edu