

STUDY

DO POLICE BODY-WORN CAMERAS REDUCE CITIZEN FATALITIES



Results of a County-Wide Natural Experiment

A RESEARCH SUMMARY OF:

Miller, J., & Chillar, V. F. (2022). Do police body-worn cameras reduce citizen fatalities? Results of a country-wide natural experiment. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 38, 723-754.

TOPIC AREA:

- Body-worn cameras
- Use of force
- Police-citizen encounters

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:

- Can body-worn cameras impact the frequency of officer use of deadly force?
- Can body-worn cameras reduce the rate of citizen fatalities during police-citizen encounters?

KEY FINDINGS

- In the three-year period following a law enforcement agency's acquisition of body-worn cameras (BWC), a downward trend was seen in the rate of citizen fatalities.
- Two of three analyses provided in this study produced statistically significant reductions, with BWCs being associated with a 22% to 29% reduction in fatal encounters.
- A third analysis also displayed a negative effect of BWCs on fatalities (21.5% reduction). However, this reduction was not statistically significant.

METHODS USED:

- The study relies on two datasets. Data about BWC implementation by police agencies comes from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Body-Worn Camera Supplement (LEMAS-BWCS) and data about citizen fatalities in encounters with law enforcement comes from fatalencounters.org (FE), a media-sourced dataset.
- From the LEMAS-BWCS dataset, 2,376 agencies were identified for inclusion in the study sample – 1,346 agencies that acquired BWCs between the years 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 and 1,030 agencies that did not acquire BWCs.
- To examine the impact of BWCs, the study utilizes several analyses. The first examines the trends of all 2,376 agencies in the sample. The second compares agencies that acquired BWCs in 2013 or 2014 to agencies that did not acquire them until 2015 or 2016. The third analysis estimated the effect of BWCs on agencies that did not acquire BWCs as compared to statistically similar agencies that did acquire BWCs.
- The analyses examine trends in the rate of citizen fatalities in the time period 8 years prior to BWC acquisition to 3 years post-acquisition.

LIMITATIONS:

- BWC implementation may be only one aspect of a broader set of changes to policies and practices made by an agency at one time, meaning that BWCs may not have been the only driving force behind the reductions in fatal encounters seen in this study.
- Variation in organizational characteristics, including use of force policies, officer adherence to policies, and level of officer discretion, may result in variation among BWC implementations, limiting the applicability of this research to other agencies.
- The reductions seen are largely driven by large-sized agencies, which may be more likely to both acquire BWCs and have a higher number of citizen fatalities or reduction in fatalities.
- The study relies on self-report administrative data and media-sourced data, both of which may be subject to measurement error.

HOW DO THESE FINDINGS APPLY TO MY AGENCY?



There is promising evidence to show that body-worn cameras can lead to reductions in the rate of citizen fatalities during encounters with law enforcement.



However, it should be noted that body-worn cameras are not a panacea. Rather, body-worn cameras should be implemented alongside other policies and practices that promote procedural justice and help build trust between law enforcement and the community.

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