

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance Los Angeles Police Department BWC Study Podcast

Todd Maxwell: Hello listeners, this is Todd Maxwell a member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team. And today I'm speaking with Sgt. Dan Gomez with the Los Angeles Police Department, Dr. Craig Uchida researcher and president of Justice and Security Strategy.

Sgt. Gomez was appointed to LAPD in 1993 and has served in a number of different capacities. He is currently assigned with the tactical technology section, where he researches and develops technologies including body-worn cameras and related policy development.

Dr. Uchida is the president of the Justice and Security Strategy. In addition to his experience working with the U.S. Department of Justice, he received his PhD in criminal justice from University of Albany. Dr. Uchida started with LAPD's research partner and conducting their NIJ funded evaluation of body-worn video technology implemented at the department.

Sgt. Gomez and Dr. Uchida, thank you for speaking to me today. And to start off could you -- Sgt. Gomez could you tell me why LAPD is getting involved with a research partner?

Sgt. Dan Gomez: Great, thanks Todd. Well I think from LAPD's standpoint especially around body cameras there's just so much information that is out there and so much that still needs to be kind of worked through. And working with the research partner really allows the department to do a couple things.

One is we can -- since we're very much a data-driven organization it allows us to really put a scientific methodology behind what we're doing and when we go back to the community, public trust is hot topic amongst law enforcement today and you have in academia and partners like Dr. Uchida to able to come at it from -- not just the police department talking about data. But really a collaborative effort especially around academia, it really helps with that public trust that I think we're trying to accomplish. So these kinds of partnerships are just crucial to move forward.

Todd Maxwell: I agree. Dr Uchida, I've read the abstract of the study on the NIJ Web site. Can you give us an overview of what the study is about and what you have to learn from the research perspective?

Dr. Craig Uchida: Sure, absolutely. Thank you for allowing us to talk with you today too. When we were first asked to do this study, none of the issues that had emerged in the last year and a half had really emerged, Ferguson hadn't happened and a lot of the current issues that are such a -- such a problem for law enforcement had not arisen.

And so I think LAPD had the foresight to say to us, hey, we need to learn from this ourselves and try to get as much information out of what we could do for them as possible. So part of what we're doing is multi -- I guess research in the sense that we're doing both a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation and we're also looking at how video analytics might work.

So briefly with the process evaluation, we really want to know how this is being implemented, how our officers using the cameras? How have they been installed? What kind of training has taken place? And how officers taken to those cameras?

The second part is to look at the impact of the cameras themselves on individual officers as well as the department overall. And when I say that as outcomes, we want to know whether police behavior has changed or not and that's one of the big questions out in the field today. There's a suggestion that police officers will change and do things differently.

And so we want to know if that impact is going to happen and it's happening, and that includes things like measuring uses of force. Do uses of force decline as a result of wearing the cameras, do civilian complaints against police officers decline because they're wearing cameras and they're acting differently.

So those are -- those are two of the, you know, major outcomes that we're looking for with this. And so we're hoping that we can actually learn a lot

from this and be able to provide law enforcement with answers to those kinds of questions.

Todd Maxwell: OK, great. Can you just tell our listeners when you guys started the study? You mentioned you started before some of these other things.

Dr. Craig Uchida: Yes sure. Part of what -- and Sgt. Gomez really did a lot of legwork beforehand and in both picking the cameras that were being used and testing them out and using officers in a way as guinea pigs, and as pilots users I suppose, almost -- what? Three and a half years ago now Dan, how long ago did you start doing this?

Sgt. Dan Gomez: Yes. We've been researching body cameras, probably closer to about four to five years and then from once we made the decision to move forward, that was kind of in the last quarter of 2013. So again pre-dating a lot of kind of what has pre-empted a lot of agencies to look at body cameras.

Dr. Craig Uchida: And so -- as he was doing all of that, we were working with him in a way to figure out how do we want to measure things, which cameras are going to be used and so forth. And as they developed their training curriculum and put in -- installed all of the equipment and so forth, we were able to observe a lot of that.

About a year ago now we started our researching planning for this and a lot of our research too is based on our officer surveys and our observations of police work. And so about eight months ago now, we started working with the department on the officer survey and trying to determine what is that they want to learn from the police officers themselves.

And we also I might add -- had to have our survey instrument approved by the police union as part of the negotiation process for getting the cameras in place. So at least a year ago for us in terms of the development of the survey, four years ago for the LAPD with respect to the way in which they would collect and determine which camera to use, and then as a result of all of that we started doing the actual research in August and September of last year, when LAPD began rolling out the cameras. And the cameras itself are currently being used in five divisions, I think, is that right Dan, five?

Sgt. Dan Gomez: That is correct.

Dr. Craig Uchida: OK. And we're looking at two divisions in particular and looking at officers in those divisions -- what we did in August and September was conduct the surveys of the officers. So my research staff went to every roll call in each of the divisions and had officers fill out the survey, actually on tablets.

We used technology for the surveys to expedite things and also because I think the department and the officers are used to using tablets. So we were able to do that. And then second we observed officers, just prior to their use of the cameras. So the both the survey and the observations allow us to measure what the officers think and actually do prior to implementation of the cameras.

And next month and in April we'll do another survey because the officers will have been wearing the cameras for at least six months. So we'll get their views in about how they've been wearing those cameras. And then we'll also observe them to see how they use the cameras and in what situations they get involved in. And be able to have a pre-post look at their perceptions and their behaviors. So that will tell us quite a bit about what they were thinking and what they were actually doing. And those are two major components of the process evaluation. It helps us know very precisely the thinking and the doing parts of officers and whether in fact their behavior changes. So I think those findings in particular will be very, very useful.

The other thing I want to mention too is we'll do a third survey in six months - - and another six months, so we'll get probably about a full year of officer surveys and we'll be able to say over that time, how officer perceptions on the cam -- about the cameras may or may not have changed. You know, I think that also very useful to a law enforcement because they really need to know what to anticipate as these cameras come in to play and as they're being used by officers.

Todd Maxwell: Right that would be great, thank you. Thanks for elaborating. Sgt. Gomez, I know you sort of went over why you got involved with the research partner in

the first place, but in relation to this study, what is LAPD hoping to learn or get out of this partnership?

Sgt. Dan Gomez: Well, there's a quite a few things and think Dr. Uchida hit a couple of those and the research that he's doing, one of things that we already got the benefit out of this kind of research is without these surveys, without DR Uchida and team going out getting this information, they brought back some real world examples of what the officers were concerned with, with some of the information that they gave pre-deployment and we were able to make a strategic decision about, OK, how do we address these? How -- as an organization, how do we make sure that in our training process we cover some of these concerns to help alleviate some of the -- the I don't know associated with body cameras and really kind of focus in on adoption. So I think that was kind of key and we are already seeing the benefit out of that. And I think in the end when you look at kind of this research project and what we're trying to get it's really about asking two questions.

What did we get right out of this process? And what can we do better? And I think having kind of this research component to it helps us approach it from a non-traditional law enforcement way and allows us to self examine these type of outcomes and decide again how we can improve and ultimately how we can share our experience with other organizations so that we kind of develop this best practice and have a way of getting the information in a way that can be replicated by other organizations.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Well, my next question was about some of the benefits of the partnership side, the ones spelled out. You mentioned some of the officer training information, have you used the partnership for policy review or some of your training document feedback?

Sgt. Dan Gomez: Yes, most definitely as result of the surveys like I mentioned, we did look inward and say, OK, are we -- when we develop our policy, are we asking the right questions, and without the kind of the research component that, I think we would have taken a traditional approach to our policy.

But this way we were able to break out, we did some -- beside the community outreach that we did -- we did some nontraditional outreach with doing surveys with doing more than just focused community group meetings and I think the research is kind of coming back full circle in the sense that when we look what the officers were saying, when we're looking was the community was saying, and then when we look at kind of a temperament relative to law enforcement and building public trust, all those things together really helped us focus in on our policy and things like victims' rights and considerations beyond the normal kind of police procedural type items, really made us examine top to bottom, how we were going to look at policy.

And quite frankly we're not done, our Chief of Police Charlie Beck has been very outspoken at saying, hey, in six months we're going to go back, we're going to take a look at our policy and ask those very questions, what did we get right? What do we need to change?

But I think coming back toward an academia response, it will really help us look at it and say, are we making the best decisions both for the community and for our organization.

Todd Maxwell: Great. And that's one of the things that body-worn camera team and BJA really sort of emphasize is the periodic review of those body worn camera and all policy to see gaps and update those over time.

Narrator: This concludes part 1 of BJA's Body Worn Camera Podcast with Sergeant Dan Gomez of the Los Angeles Police Department and Dr. Craig Uchida (CH) from Justice & Security Strategies. Part 2 will be broadcast in the next episode so be sure to tune in next time for the conclusion of this podcast. And as always, please remember to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc and submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. Thank you for listening today.

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