Body Worn Cameras (BWC) Behind Bars: 
Correctional officer views on the introduction of BWCs
in QLD prisons

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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT BWCS

In policing – BWCs found to:
• Reduce officer use of force ✓
• Reduce complaints ✓
• Enhance legitimacy and transparency ✓

To be most effective, BWCs require buy-in from officers.
BWCs presumed to offer prisons similar benefits but to date there has been little research
Unclear what unique challenges the corrections environment might face

BWCS IN QUEENSLAND CORRECTIONS

• 162 BWCs in use state-wide in late 2019
• Deployed based on General Manager’s discretion
• Governed by DCI “Body Worn Camera, Deployment and Use”: An officer must record interactions that occur during an operational incident, use of force incident, or other circumstance where prisoner behaviour suggests interaction should be recorded

STUDY AIMS

1. Understand correctional officers’ attitudes towards BWCs
2. Explore BWCs’ influence on officers’ feelings of safety and security
3. Identify whether BWCs alters officers’ interactions with prisoners
4. Identify implementation challenges and/or areas of improvement

METHODS – PHASE 1

• State-wide survey – online and paper based
• Conducted over 4 month period 2018-19
• 548 responses received – response rate approx. 22%
• Measured general perceptions of BWCs, use of BWCs, perceived benefits/concerns about BWCs, implementation and training and safety items
• Most Qs, 7-point response scale – here simplified to Agree/Neither/Disagree
**SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N = 548)**

- **Gender**
  - Male: 75%
  - Female: 21%
  - Other: 0%
  - Prefer not to say: 4%

- **Age group**
  - 18-24 years: 1%
  - 25-34 years: 24%
  - 35-44 years: 29%
  - 45-54 years: 29%
  - 55-64 years: 15%
  - 65 years +: 2%

- **Education**
  - Did not complete Yr 12: 10%
  - Completed Yr 12: 16%
  - Adv. Diploma/Certificate: 59%
  - Bachelor’s Degree or higher: 15%

**METHODS – PHASE 2**

- Interviews (N = 34)
- Sampled from 9 correctional centres and head office
- Mix of participants — correctional officers, intel, violence prevention, General Managers, ethical standards
- Conducted in person (n=27) or by telephone (n=7)
- Drew out further detail on key themes from survey results; average length = 35 mins

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (N = 34)**

- **Corrections Experience**
  - 1-2 years: 26%
  - 3-5 years: 18%
  - 6-10 years: 20%
  - 11-20 years: 21%
  - 21-30 years: 15%

- **Experience wearing BWC**
  - Yes: 68%
  - Not required in position: 32%

**FINDINGS: OFFICER ATTITUDES**

- I support the use of BWCs in corrections (N=499): Agree 81%, Neither agree/disagree 18%, Disagree 1%
- The advantages of wearing BWCs outweigh the disadvantages (N=499): Agree 89%, Neither agree/disagree 10%, Disagree 1%
- Most senior management staff in this centre support the use of BWCs in corrections generally (N=499): Agree 89%, Neither agree/disagree 10%, Disagree 1%
- Most officers in this centre support the use of BWCs in corrections generally (N=499): Agree 89%, Neither agree/disagree 10%, Disagree 1%
- Wearing a BWC causes me to experience additional stress: Agree 72%, Neither agree/disagree 25%, Disagree 3%

**WHO IS MORE SUPPORTIVE?**

- **DV: Officer BWC Support Scale** (5 items; alpha .86)  
- **IVs:** Gender, Age, Education, Prison type, Frequency of wearing BWC, Implementation and Training Scale (7 items; alpha .93), Functionality Scale (3 items, alpha .73)

**Key Findings:**

- Female officers were more supportive of the use of BWCs in corrections.
- Officers who held more positive perceptions of the implementation and training processes were more likely to support the use of BWCs in a correctional environment.
- Officers who held more positive perceptions of BWC functionality were more likely to support the use of BWCs in corrections.
Findings: Identified Benefits & Drawbacks

**Benefits**
- Captures audio, unlike CCTV
- Improves evidence gathering
- Allows more efficient review of incidents
- Protects officers and prisoners

“It gives the person viewing a real sense of what was actually occurring. So, you actually hear and see from a first-person perspective what’s happening, instead of a corner angle with no sound [like CCTV].” (I15)

**Drawbacks**
- Can be uncomfortable to wear
- If attached to shirt, may unclip when officer involved in altercation
- Extra scrutiny may lead some to hesitate in using force:

“People are hesitant to use force when it might be necessary, but they’re hesitant to use it because they’re concerned that they’ll be on camera and it will be, you know, looked at the wrong way.” (I02)

Findings: Research Aim 2
To explore BWCs’ influence on officers’ feelings of safety and security

**FINDINGS: PHYSICAL SAFETY**

- Wearing a BWC makes me feel safer while on duty (n=514)
- 28% Agree
- 31% Neither disagree/agree
- 45% Disagree

- When officers wear BWCs prisoners are less aggressive (n=515)
- 38% Agree
- 29% Neither disagree/agree
- 33% Disagree

- When officers wear BWCs there are fewer prisoner assaults on staff (n=511)
- 13% Agree
- 10% Neither disagree/agree
- 77% Disagree

**WHO FEELS ‘PHYSICALLY’ SAFER?**

- IVs: Individual physical safety items
- IVs: Gender, Age, Education, Prison type, Frequency of wearing BWC, Frequency of activating BWC

Key Findings:
- Female officers and those who activate their BWC more frequently more likely to agree that “wearing a BWC makes me feel safer while on duty”
- Officers who worked in both men’s and women’s prisons less likely to agree that “when officers wear BWCs, there are fewer prisoner assaults on staff” compared to those who work only in a men’s prison
- No significant predictors when asked “when officers wear BWCs, prisoners are less aggressive”

“Nine times out of ten that’s not a deterrent for them; they’ll just keep going with the behaviour. They’ll just keep carrying on, swearing, being abusive towards you. Very rarely… Because I think they’ve already escalated… They won’t go, ‘oh…’ I think if you get them before they start to rise then it might work, but generally they’re already elevated, they’re going to keep going.” (I04)
Officers felt that the presence of BWCs provided them with peace of mind when it comes to their job security. 

\textit{As long as you're doing the right thing, your body worn camera is going to be your first port of call as evidence to essentially save your job. (I10)}

So what’s happened with me is I was in an incident whereby a prisoner made a claim that [he] was assaulted so I was suspended and stood down for a period of eight months. I’ve only just returned to work and the only reason that I returned to work is that some footage came to light that showed I didn’t actually do what I was accused of. So real big fan of body cameras sitting right here. Because without that, I would have lost my job. (I11)
Findings: Research Aim 4
Identify implementation challenges and/or areas of improvement

Findings: Implementation Challenges

- A sufficient number of BWCs have been provided to my centre (n=45)
- I have received adequate training on using a BWC (n=522)
- I received training on how to best capture an incident using my BWC (n=513)
- Officers should have access to the footage taken by their BWC (n=487)

Findings: Areas for Improvement

- Clear guidelines on access to footage policies
- Information sharing between centres for BWC strategies
- Using BWC footage for training purposes

“In a time of panic, when you’ve got your mind going at 1000 miles an hour and trying to cover all the aspects of an incident, you don’t recall properly all the relevant details. I think it’s good to have that clarification [from the BWC footage] because these things can end up in court and you’ve got to be absolutely spot on.” (I01)

FINDINGS: AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Study focused on officer perspectives, but prisoner perspectives also need to be considered
- Need to understand whether prisoners feel BWCs affect their behaviour or perceptions of officers and safety
- Research is needed to examine impact of BWC introduction on actual (not just perceived) safety & complaints
- Are there fewer incidents where BWCs are in use?
- Are there fewer complaints? Are complaints resolved more efficiently?

Future Research Directions

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