



Cameras in Corrections: Exploring the Experiences and Attitudes of Custodial officers on the Use of Body Worn Cameras in Prison

Summary of findings

August 2019

Background and Research Aims

In May 2018, Dr Emma Antrobus and her team from the University of Queensland were awarded a QCS Research Grant to undertake a project entitled 'Cameras in Corrections: Exploring the Experience and Attitudes of Custodial officers on the Use of Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) in Prison'.

Body worn cameras (BWC) were introduced into correctional facilities across Queensland in 2017. While BWCs have received much attention in policing in recent years, with some demonstrated success in reducing officer use of force, crime rates and court costs, their use in other settings such as correctional facilities, is less well understood.

Accordingly, the aim of the research was to provide information regarding officers' perspectives on the introduction of BWCs in correctional facilities, implementation challenges and usage practices, as well as the perceived impact of BWCs on officer-prisoner interactions and officer's feelings of safety.

Research Design

The study was undertaken using a mixed-methods approach comprising:

1. A state-wide survey of custodial officers. An email was distributed to all currently employed custodial officers in Queensland and was available for completion for a period of approximately four months; 548 responses were received.
2. Follow-up interviews (conducted in person or by telephone) with a sample of custodial officers (N= 34) from nine centres as well as other corrective services staff involved in the BWC rollout (i.e. violence prevention, ethical standards, intelligence staff).

Key Findings

The key findings from this study include:

- **Officer attitudes-** custodial officers are largely supportive of the introduction of BWCs and perceived others in their centre to share these views. Female officers and officers who had more experience with the cameras were generally more supportive of BWCs. Age and education were not related to BWC support.
- **Implementation challenges-** officers' experiences of the BWC rollout and practices regarding officer access to BWC footage were varied across centres. Officers' feedback suggests the number of cameras provided is inadequate. Furthermore, most officers



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had not personally viewed BWC footage therefore did not know where to best position the cameras to capture usable footage. Varied practices existed across centres regarding office access to the BWC, with the majority of officers wanting access to such footage for reporting purposes.

- **Officer behaviour and interactions with prisoners-** most officers felt confident in knowing when to activate their BWC and believe the use of the camera's followed the Deputy Commissioner's Instruction (DCI). The key reason officers provided for not activating their BWC during an incident was that they had forgotten. Officers generally did not support the practice of recording all interactions with prisoners due to the potential negative impact on their ability to build rapport. Furthermore, while officers felt BWCs improve transparency and accountability, they were less likely to agree that BWCs prevent officer misconduct.
- **Perceptions of job security and physical safety-** most officers felt BWCs improved job security by protecting them against false allegations. Just under half of officers reported feeling safer when wearing a BWC; however female officers were significantly more likely than male staff to report feeling safer wearing a BWC. Relatively few believed that BWCs had an effect on prisoners' aggressive behaviour.

Future research

Key areas for future research include:

- considering the prisoner point of view, specifically the impact (or lack thereof) that BWCs may have on prisoner behaviour, perceptions of procedural justice, and safety;
- evaluating whether the deployment of BWCs is linked to a reduction in prisoner-on-staff assaults;
- evaluating whether the number of complaints by prisoners has significantly reduced following the introduction of BWCs in Queensland centres and whether complaints are resolved faster when BWC footage is available; and
- evaluating strategies to improve BWC activation in order for the benefits of this technology to be fully realised.

