

**RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2020**

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**Citizens Relationships with Police Hampered by  
Trust, Transparency and underdeveloped Policies  
for Body Worn Cameras**

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## Abstract

This study used a critical communication conceptual framework merging the diffusion of innovation and policy feedback theory to demonstrate how policies can be formed and implemented through engaging the community. At present, there is no uniformed policies for Body Worn Cameras footage release. This study revealed a gap in the research on how families and communities are impacted when BWC video is delayed. Results showed that both the community and victim's family members are requesting changes to community policing initiatives. Findings revealed having the community involved when polices are developed or reviewed is vital to establishing relationships with law enforcement.

*Doctoral Capstone*

# Problem

Video captured by police **BWC is delayed and impacts families of victims** and individuals in the community.

The time BWC video release varies with law enforcement agencies across the country that have their own polices in which sends a message of no uniform acceptable reasonable method where society can compare to others to ensure transparency is followed within some guided approach (Thomas, 2017).



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# Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study **explored the perception of the family members and community members** that have been impacted by BWCs delayed video release and how the phenomenon impacts their trust in police.

In addition, this study explored policies around police BWCs that provide a broad overview that include:

- Old and current policies
- Lack of Policies
- State and Federal Policies

## Significance

This study focused on filling the gap in the literature regarding the community perceptions of body-worn cameras delayed video releases.

Furthermore, police officers engaged with the public regarding incidents has been studied, analyzed, and reported on extensively and that reporting indicates that there remain problems.

This study was relevant due to the number of increasing cases involving police and BWC transparency.

Understanding policies around the use of body-worn camera video release served as an appropriate starting point for improving community relationships with law enforcement.

## Theory or Framework

Two theories were merged to create a conceptual framework

### Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT)

- DIT developed by Rodgers (Geary, 2016) demonstrates how *innovations and ideas can be spread across the populations*. Tenets of this theory are, the benefit of having a collaborative, integrated process engaging several sectors of the community can infuse positive change over time

### Policy Feedback Theory (PFT)

- PFT (Mettler & Sorelle, 2014) was used as the second theory applied in this study utilize to show that community *citizens can interact with policy makers providing feedback to existing polices and new polices*

## Relevant Scholarship

There is major concern from the community and victims' families when the video from an officer's BWC is delayed (Mateescu et al., 2016).

Recent cases have garnered national attention, where police departments have been slow to comment on the video from BWCs.

Farmer (2016) stated that **police departments keep information guarded and secured** from being leaked by operating in a secretive manner.

There is already tension from the community from past incidents, but when police departments do not engage with the community in a timely manner this further increases public concerns about police conduct involving BWCs as Paulsen (2016) addressed.

**Varying policies have been viewed as inconsistent** by the community (Paulsen, 2016).

It is vital that police departments begin to examine their overall interactions with the community as they continue to establish policies around community policing (Hemmer, 2017).

For police to narrow the gap between them and the community regarding these perceptions, **trust must be established, starting with communication and transparency** with the community (Hemmer & Whitten, 2017).

## Research Question

How does the lack of a requirement to immediately release the video to the family member contribute to your distrust of the police?

1. What do community members believe justifies the delay of video from body worn camera's?
2. What can policymakers do to improve communication and transparency in your community?

## Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to select the 13 participants

- Local Kansas Citizens
- Kansas Church Congregation Members
- Local churches-selected based on region (South, West, East & North)

## Procedures

The researcher-developed interview protocol consisted of 10 items consistent with the research questions.

Data were collected through interviews, face to face what?, phone calls, and through emails

Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

13 interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes to 1 hour over a 3-month period.

## Analysis

Data analysis included manual and NVivo coding to identify themes from the interview data.

# Findings

A total of 11 themes emerged from the interview responses.

## **The predominant emerging themes were:**

- Video that is held back immediately alerts to something being hidden.
- There is no justification to delay video.
- Only the family member should make the decision to delay video.
- Officers remained employed after their unethical acts.
- Policies seem to fit the department and do not include the community.

## **Summary of the Main Results From the Research Questions**

- The families and the general community, along with the secondary data, all expressed the same feeling and perceptions around the delay of police BWC footage and lack of polices.
- Video should not be delayed.
- Video should at least be shared with the family immediately.
- Policies not being appropriately implemented impedes police and community relationships.
- current polices in place that do not address issues that emerge and the lack of policies that do not exist until an incident occurs.

## Interpretation

The feedback from the participants confirmed the need of better policies around communication around the release of BWC to stop video from being delayed.

Implementing a model such as two combined theories is necessary to engage the community at the table to help review old policies and assist with developing new policies.

## Limitations

Family members directly impacted at the time were engaged in (lawsuits) huh?

Sample size of the family members was very low (2 family members) compared to the community sample size.

Members from church population pastors made the decision to approve /disapprove

Researcher had no social media platform to disseminate to the general public



# Recommendations

## Recommendations for Practice

- Police body worn camera video of youth under 18 that is stored parents should be informed
- Officers that have established a relationship with neighborhoods interventions should implement trainings for other officers to demonstrate how community policing can be successful

## Recommendations for Future Research

- Quantitative research looking at how long it takes for the community trust to be broken with law enforcement lack of transparency, communication and trust
- Improve policies that can be diffused across the state counties with law enforcement offices.
- Data-driven instructional strategies for working collaborative applying principles from two merged theoretical frameworks to engage in communication (DIT & PFT).

# Social Change Implications

Improve police and community relationships

Create a greater community structure and engagement between law enforcement and the citizens.

Allow for unfamiliar faces to be at the table to be engaged in policy discussions

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