



Body cameras

An evaluation of the pilot scheme in
Police Region Stockholm

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English summary of Brå report nr 2020:1

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) – centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures

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This report is a summary of the Swedish report Kroppsburna kameror report no 2020:1.
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Authors: Fredrik Marklund and Katharina Tollin
urn:nbn:se:bra-892

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Box 1386, 111 93 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46(0)8 527 58 400, E-mail: info@bra.se, www.bra.se

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Summary

In the spring of 2018, Police Region Stockholm, together with the Swedish Police Authority's Department of National Operations, initiated a pilot scheme in which three hundred body cameras were distributed to police officers in Botkyrka, Rinkeby and Södertälje. The purpose of this initiative was to reduce the police officers' exposure to threats, violence and harassment in these areas and to improve the work environment of patrolling police officers. Brå has evaluated the pilot scheme and studied how the cameras are used, whether they contribute to fewer incidents involving threats, violence and harassment aimed at police officers, whether the officers change their use of police powers and the extent to which the footage is used as evidence in preliminary investigations and ^{court} cases.

Brå's overall conclusion is that the outcome is to some extent in line with the expressed intentions of the pilot scheme. The changes are, however, rather modest, especially if the high expectations for the cameras and the extensive investment involved is taken into account.

The report shows that certain forms of violence and harassment aimed at police officers were less common following the introduction of body cameras. This mainly concerns a tangible drop in harassment and attacks involving stones, lasers and bangers. Sexual harassment against female police officers also fell during the period in which the body cameras were used.

In interviews with police officers, it becomes evident that the body cameras increase their sense of security. The lower levels of harassment are assumed to be a consequence of the fact that individuals who regularly harass police officers in Botkyrka, Rinkeby and Södertälje more often "watch their tongues" following the introduction of the cameras.

Other forms of violence against police officers, such as kicking and pushing, did not fall to the same extent. According to the police officers, such physical attacks are often made by intoxicated or mentally ill individuals, that is, individuals without the same opportunities to control and adapt their behaviour based on the realisation that they are being recorded. The study also shows that the police officers' use of various police powers (e.g. handcuffing and pepper spraying) have not been particularly affected by the body cameras.

Another result is that the footage from the body cameras is seldom used as evidence in court cases. The report found that material from the three hundred body cameras was retrieved in 178 preliminary investigations completed during the first year in which the body cameras were used. This corresponds to less than one preliminary investigation per camera. The reviewed preliminary investigations have resulted in 81 published court verdicts. In 22 of the 81 prosecutions, the footage from the body cameras was presented as evidence in court and 20 of these prosecutions led to a conviction. The percentage of convictions where a decision was made not to call the camera footage into evidence was the same as in the cases in which the footage was used as evidence.

Most of the footage considered viable as evidence comprised video recordings of a suspected criminal act in which the police officer was the victim such as threatening a police officer or resisting arrest). Other types of videos, such as recorded conversations with plaintiffs or footage of crime scenes, were used as evidence to a lesser extent than expected. In interviews with police officers and prosecutors, differences were noted in expectations for and opinions of the value of such evidence, which may explain why most footage requested in preliminary investigations was not used as supporting evidence in subsequent prosecutions. While the police expected certain types of footage to be usable in court, prosecutors regularly chose to dismiss these footages in favour of other types of evidence (e.g. still photos of injuries and testimony from police officers), which were considered stronger.

Another conclusion is that the use of the cameras varies. Brå's study shows that the police officers wear cameras on three out of four shifts, although there are differences in both the ways in which they use the cameras and their propensity to record events. One reason for this variation is that there is a lack of clear instructions as to which situations ought to be recorded, leaving it to the individual officer to

decide whether the incident ought to be recorded. We can therefore conclude that there is considerable potential when it comes to developing a more strategic work method for the cameras. Brå recommend that measures to further strengthen the Police Authority's development work with body cameras should be implemented in four areas:

1. *Training and clear guidelines.* One basic prerequisite for all forms of work employing cameras is that the police officers are confident in their use of the technology and well acquainted with the existing guidelines and the manner in which the camera footage is handled. Work is under way at the Police Authority to further clarify the legal circumstances for the use of cameras and to further refine the national guidelines for the use of body cameras. Brå states that this work ought to be followed by new training initiatives.
2. *Systematic documentation.* One prerequisite for the footage being used as supporting evidence in prosecutions is that the video content is clearly documented. There is currently a lack of instructions on how the video content is to be documented in preliminary investigations. Guidelines outlining the details to be included would aid all roles involved in handling the videos within the criminal justice system.
3. *Strategic work towards defined goals.* Today, it falls to each individual police officer to decide how and when to record. However, if body cameras are to provide a tool in efforts to achieve specific overarching goals, guidance must be provided on the best way to record video based on the intended goals. Such strategies ought to be developed at the local level and adapted to the prevailing conditions in each local police district.
4. *Feedback and favourable examples.* The report show that police officers lack information about whether the footage they record can be used as evidence. Initiatives to provide patrolling officers with feedback could encourage increased and improved use of the cameras.

Method and material

The study is based primarily on survey distributed to police officers in Botkyrka, Rinkeby and Södertälje, interviews with police officers and a review of court cases and preliminary investigations. The study also involved the analysis of register data, policy documents and observations. The evaluation was partly financed in part by Police Region Stockholm.