

Police-related triage interventions for mental health-related incidents: a rapid evidence synthesis

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Police services increasingly receive emergency calls involving individuals who are perceived to be suffering from mental ill health or a mental health crisis, but where no crime has been committed. Police officers have to then make decisions about how best to resolve such incidents.

A rapid synthesis of evidence was conducted on police-related mental health triage interventions aimed at these situations. This analysis looked at the different types of interventions that have been described in the literature, what evidence there is about the effects of these interventions, views around their acceptability and feasibility and any barriers to, or facilitators of, them being used in practice.

Both systematic reviews and primary studies were included. However, many evaluations were limited in what they looked at and how they were conducted.

Most police-related mental health triage interventions involved police officers working in partnership with mental health professionals. These interventions were generally valued by staff and showed some positive effects on procedures (such as rates of detention) and resources, although these results were not entirely consistent and not all important outcomes were measured. Most of the evidence was at risk of multiple biases because of design flaws and/or a lack of reporting of methods, which might affect the results. All the included primary research evidence was conducted in England and health equity data were largely absent.

Much of the published evidence has called for a prospective, comprehensive and streamlined collection of a wider variety of data on the impact of police-related mental health triage interventions. This rapid evidence synthesis expands on these recommendations to outline detailed implications for research and practice in this area.

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