

Explanation of context, mechanisms and outcomes in adult community mental health crisis care: the MH-CREST realist evidence synthesis

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Plain language summary

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The issue

A mental health crisis can be traumatic for individuals and families. There are a lot of different agencies delivering crisis care. This can make getting the right help from services difficult, confusing and slow. It is not clear which services work best or who they work best for.

What we did

This research explored community mental health crisis services for adults. We focused on what is working, who it is working for and in what situations it is working. Service users, carers, mental health professionals and service managers formed an 'expert stakeholder group' to guide the project by helping the researchers make sense of what we learned. We gathered information from research reports, other documents and interviews with experts (i.e. service users, carers, professionals, managers). We focused on three questions:

1. How can services make sure that people in crisis can get the right help, quickly?
2. What makes crisis care compassionate?
3. Does it help if different crisis services work together?

What we learned

Community crisis services are most compassionate and effective when staff from different organisations share information. When leaders of crisis care help staff to work together across services, they find better ways to help people. Close working across teams gives professionals a better understanding of what other services do and makes it easier for them to give people the right help at the right time. When leaders are kind and supportive to staff, they feel better at work and provide better crisis care.

What future work can be done

It would be useful to explore if the most effective crisis services are the same ones that service users like best. We need to know more about mental health triage, inter-agency working and telehealth. Our project did not explore diversity, but this is an important topic to investigate.

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