

# Causes and solutions to workplace psychological ill-health for nurses, midwives and paramedics: the Care Under Pressure 2 realist review

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## Plain language summary

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## Plain language summary

The National Health Service needs healthy, motivated staff to provide high-quality patient care. Nurses, midwives and paramedics experience poor psychological health (e.g. stress/anxiety) because of pressured environments and the difficulties of healthcare work.

This study planned to better understand the causes of poor psychological ill-health in nurses, midwives and paramedics and find which interventions might help and why.

We analysed the literature using a method called 'realist review' to understand how interventions work (or not), why, and for who. We tested our findings with patients, the public, nurses, midwives and paramedics in our stakeholder group.

We reviewed over 200 papers/reports and identified five main findings: (1) existing solutions (interventions) are disjointed, focus mainly on the individual (not the system) and do not recognise enduring stressors enough; (2) when there is a blame culture it is difficult to encourage staff psychological well-being; (3) the needs of the system often override staff psychological well-being at work; (4) upholding and implementing personal and professional values at work can have negative personal costs; and (5) it is difficult to design, identify and implement solutions that work well for staff groups in different circumstances with varied causes of poor psychological health.

Healthcare organisations should consider: (1) changing (rebalancing) the working environment to help healthcare professionals rest, recover and thrive; (2) investing in multiple-level system (not just individual) approaches to staff psychological well-being; (3) continuing to reduce stigma; (4) ensuring the essential needs of staff are prioritised (rest-breaks/hydration/hot food) as building blocks for other solutions; (5) addressing the blame culture, assuming staff are doing their best in difficult conditions; (6) prioritising staff needs, as well as patient needs. We will provide guidance and recommendations to policy-makers and organisational leaders to improve work cultures that tackle psychological ill-health and suggest new areas for research.

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