

Exploring police roles in mental health crises

Research examining police responses to mental health crises, including psychosis training for officers and interviews on police and public perceptions of mental health-related policing.

Key details

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Police region	North West
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	January 2024
Date due for completion	December 2026

Research context

Police officers are increasingly on the frontline of mental health crises, responding to individuals experiencing psychosis and other severe mental health conditions. While managing mental health crises is not an official part of their job role, in reality, these encounters are incredibly frequent and have significant consequences for both officers and the public. Without the appropriate training and resources, these interactions can lead to misunderstandings, crisis escalation and negative outcomes. Given the growing number of mental health-related emergency calls, improving police training and response strategies is essential.

To address this, we developed a psychosis training programme for police officers, designed with feedback from officers, clinicians and individuals with lived experience. The project also explored police officers' views on their role, training and challenges in responding to individuals in crisis, as well as perceptions among mental health professionals and the public regarding police involvement

in mental health interventions, including concerns, expectations and areas for improvement.

Although mental health crisis response is not a core policing responsibility, it is an unavoidable reality of frontline police work. By combining qualitative research and training implementation, this study seeks to enhance officer preparedness, inter-agency collaboration and public trust in policing responses to mental health crises. Findings will contribute to evidence-based, trauma-informed policing practices that better support both officers and the communities they serve.

Research methodology

A mixed-methods study combining the development and evaluation of a psychosis training programme for police officers with qualitative research exploring the perspectives of police officers, mental health professionals and members of the public regarding police responses to mental health crises.

Interim reports or publications

Campodonico C and Barnes H. (2026). 'The responder gap: Police officers' experiences of mental health crisis response in England under Right Care, Right Person'. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* (submitted).

Summary of findings

The training was piloted with Lancashire Constabulary and has since been delivered to over 200 officers across the North West. Longitudinal data showed increased confidence in recognising symptoms and understanding causes of psychosis, alongside a more empathetic approach to engagement and strong knowledge retention, particularly around effective responses and best practice in crisis situations. Officers also scored highly on practical response scenarios, such as how to respond to someone with psychosis who is frightened. The 60 interviews have now been completed (20 for each group). The police data has been analysed and submitted for publication, while the public and healthcare professional data are in the final stages of analysis.

Research participation

For the 2025/26 academic year, the research lead secured additional funding to build on the findings from the previous year. While it is evident that the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP)

framework was implemented rapidly, leading to a number of operational challenges, some police forces have reported more successful implementation through effective collaboration between police and NHS services. We are currently recruiting for a Delphi study (a structured consensus study) with senior police officers and NHS professionals involved in the implementation of RCRP in their area, to explore the factors that support successful implementation. The aim is to develop a hierarchy of priorities for police and NHS services to focus on when adapting to the framework.

This research is voluntary, and all data will be handled ethically and confidentially. This study has received approval from the University of Lancashire Ethics Committee.

For more information or to participate, please contact the research lead at ccampodonico@uclan.ac.uk.