

The Care Responders Study

Exploring single and joint-crisis response models, including police and mental health professionals attending emergency calls together to improve out-of-hours mental health support for young people.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Manchester
Principal researcher(s)	Dr Sarah Parry sarah.parry@manchester.ac.uk
Police region	North West
Collaboration and partnership	• Pennine Care NHS Trust • Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Trust • Greater Manchester Police
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	March 2023
Date due for completion	December 2027

Research context

The Care Responders Study is exploring how emergency and crisis services can better support children and young people experiencing a mental health crisis. Funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the study examines different ways of responding to mental health emergencies, including models where a children's mental health practitioner and a police officer work together to provide support.

The research aims to understand how different crisis response approaches are experienced by young people, families and practitioners, what outcomes they achieve, how much they cost and

what constitutes the most effective response to a mental health crisis. Throughout the project, young people are offered opportunities to contribute their ideas, experiences and creativity to help guide the research and ensure that the findings reflect what matters most to those who use services.

The study begins with a realist review of existing evidence on crisis response models for young people. Findings from this review are discussed with people who have lived experience of mental health crisis, helping the team develop theories about how and why different approaches may work in different circumstances. These theories are then tested through a pilot of the Care Responders model in Greater Manchester and through interviews, surveys, routine service data and discussions with young people, families and professionals.

The Care Responders Study seeks to provide evidence about whether more joined-up approaches to crisis care can improve experiences and outcomes for young people and their families. The findings will inform practical guidance, training and future service development, helping decision-makers design crisis care systems that are compassionate, effective and responsive.

Research methodology

The Care Responders Study uses a mixed-methods realist evaluation to understand how and why different crisis response models work for children and young people experiencing a mental health crisis. The study combines a realist synthesis, a Care Responders pilot, a realist evaluation and a health economic evaluation.

The realist synthesis reviews published and grey literature alongside discussions with stakeholders and people with lived experience to develop an initial programme theory explaining how joint responses may influence outcomes for young people.

The study is developing and testing an agile Care Responders model in Greater Manchester, where police officers and mental health practitioners work together through joint response vehicles, ride-along models and control-room triage approaches. Findings are compared with data from treatment-as-usual crisis responses.

Participants include young people aged 5 to 20, parents and carers, and practitioners. Data are collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, creative submissions, routine service data and online questionnaires. Quantitative measures assess wellbeing, resilience, coping, mood, service

satisfaction, parental stress, therapeutic relationships and health-related quality of life, while qualitative interviews explore experiences of crisis care and its perceived impact.

A nested case study in Merseyside examines a separate 24/7 CAMHS crisis service through interviews, focus groups, routine data and document reviews to identify transferable learning. Data are analysed using realist methods to develop and test context-mechanism-outcome configurations, alongside statistical and health economic analyses comparing the costs and outcomes of joint and single-agency responses.

The study also includes a co-production and knowledge mobilisation workstream. In partnership with Made by Mortals, young people with lived experience, family members, mental health practitioners and police officers co-produce theatre performances, workshops and creative outputs. These activities help refine emerging findings, share learning in accessible ways and support the translation of evidence into future policy and practice for children and young people in mental health crisis.

Interim reports or publications

Parry S and others. (2025). 'Realist review protocol for understanding young people's experiences of engaging with police-mental health practitioner collaboration in emergency responses to mental health crises'. Systematic Reviews, volume 14, issue 1, article number 173. [Read open access article](#)

Research participation

We are keen to hear from a wide range of policing professionals, including:

- frontline response officers
- neighbourhood officers
- custody staff
- control room staff
- safeguarding teams
- child protection specialists
- mental health leads
- senior leaders involved in vulnerability, safeguarding or partnership working

- officers and staff with experience of responding to young people in mental health crisis

Officers at all stages of training and their careers are invited to take part in a research conversation or survey exploring their experiences of responding to young people in crisis, perspectives on collaborative working, training needs, operational challenges and ideas for improving future services. Whether your experiences have been positive, challenging, or somewhere in between, your insights are valuable.

The Care Responders Study aims to generate evidence that can inform future policing policy, workforce development, partnership working and crisis care for young people. By contributing your knowledge and experience, you can help shape future guidance and support the development of more effective responses for some of the most vulnerable young people who come into contact with emergency services.

Please contact [Dr Sarah Parry](#) for further information.

Additional resources

[Project website](#)