

Mental health training for front line police officers: a randomised controlled trial

Submission date 13/05/2016	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☒ Protocol
Registration date 03/06/2016	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☒ Results
Last Edited 10/07/2023	Condition category Mental and Behavioural Disorders	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

A significant amount of police time is spent dealing with incidents involving people who are mentally vulnerable. Whilst we are aware that police officers are not experts in mental health, nor should they be, they are often the first responders and yet have minimal training in this area. The Independent Commission on Mental Health and Policing reported there is often poor performance in dealing with mental health issues because of the inadequacy of systems and procedures. Even when a person is identified as having a mental health problem, the information may not be recorded in a coherent manner and there are failures in making use of available resources (e.g. mental health street triage).

When Police officers are called to an incident, one of the considerations they need to take into account is the mental state of those involved. Police officers are not trained mental health professionals so good communication skills and knowledge of how to assess vulnerability, and options for referral are essential. These skills are not necessarily part of current police training but are none the less increasingly important in the day to day work of police officers in the control room, station desks and out in the community. This study is looking at the effectiveness of a new face-to-face mental health training intervention compared with a 'business as usual' control group of police officers. The mental health training intervention for front-line police officers aims to reduce demand on police resources through improving officers' knowledge, awareness and understanding of mental ill health and vulnerability, referral pathways (including knowing who to call and when), and the skills necessary to work both with people in mental health distress and with colleagues in partner agencies.

Who can participate?

Police community support officers, police constables, inspectors and sergeants

What does the study involve?

Police stations are recruited and randomised to two groups: the police officers from the stations in one group are given new mental health training and the other group receive any planned routine training and be a 'business as usual' control group. The mental health training is being delivered by mental health professionals from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust (TEWV). Though this training, the officers develop a greater awareness and knowledge of a range of mental health conditions and be better equipped to identify mental health vulnerabilities; and

communicate with people with mental ill health. They are also expected to understand the importance of and mechanisms for recording incidents involving people with mental ill health, the types of services and organisations that exist in their local area, and ways to refer people experiencing mental health difficulties. They should also be aware of the various roles and organisations who may be involved with a person in mental health crisis (ambulance crew, approved mental health professionals, doctors, social workers, A&E staff, care home staff, etc.), their responsibilities and the restrictions facing each. The training should also help in them gaining some insight into the real-world experiences of people with different mental health conditions. Officers from all the stations are asked to complete an online survey before and six months after delivery of the training. From this data the researchers aim to measure the impact of the training on officers' knowledge, awareness, attitudes and responses to people with mental ill health or vulnerabilities.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

There are no guarantees that participants will benefit directly from taking part in this study as it is not known how effective the training package will be. However, it is expected that the training will increase front line officers' knowledge, understanding and confidence in working with mental health problems, local mental health services, referral pathways, multi-agency working and recording of incidents appearing to involve an element of mental distress. The study is considered low risk as it does not involve any invasive or potentially harmful procedures.

However, the training package focuses on how officers respond to incidents involving individuals in mental health crisis or distress. These are sensitive issues. The training will be delivered by mental health professionals who will not only be experts in discussing the issues sensitively but will also encourage and foster a supportive environment in the training sessions. Additionally, a support information sheet which contains contact details of organisations that individuals could contact for information, advice or emotional support will be made available.

Where is the study run from?

12 police stations within North Yorkshire (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

September 2015 to March 2017

Who is funding the study?

The Police Knowledge Fund, funded by: The Home Office, The College of Policing and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (UK)

Who is the main contact?

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Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

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Additional identifiers**Protocol serial number**

Connectprotocolv.5.1

Study information**Scientific Title**

Effectiveness of a training programme for police officers who come into contact with people with mental health problems: a pragmatic randomised controlled trial

Acronym

Connect

Study objectives

The aim of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a face-to-face mental health training intervention delivered by mental health practitioners to Police Community Support Officers, Police Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors compared with routine training.

The trial also aims to:

1. Investigate whether the specialised training intervention better equips front line officers to deal with individuals with mental ill-health and reduces demand on police resources
2. Assess the impact of the training intervention on officers' knowledge of, and attitudes toward, mental ill health and vulnerability; and their confidence in identifying mental distress, responding to people experiencing mental distress, recording incidents as appearing to involve a person experiencing mental distress, referring individuals to local mental health services and any other relevant agency, and working with partner agencies

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

University of York, Health Sciences Research Governance Committee, 18/03/2016

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Pragmatic cluster randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Mental health training

Interventions

Mental Health Training will be delivered to all officers within the ranks of Police Community Support Officer, Police Constable, Sergeant and Inspector from Response and Safer Neighbourhood Teams from the police stations randomised to the intervention group. The training will be a one-day event, delivered face-to-face in classroom settings by qualified mental health professionals. The training aims to reduce demand on police resources through improving officers' knowledge, awareness and understanding of mental ill health and vulnerability, referral pathways and the skills necessary to work both with people in mental health distress and with colleagues in partner agencies. The content of the training will be informed by the College of Policing Learning Standards, which provide a framework for mental health training for police officers, as well as by findings of the systematic review of evaluations of mental health training for non-mental health professionals being undertaken by the York Trials Unit.

The control group will receive routine training provided by North Yorkshire Police.

All participants will be asked to complete an online survey before and 4-6 months after the delivery of the intervention. Semi-structured interviews with approximately 20 officers who received the intervention will be conducted 6 months after the intervention.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

Number of calls per person, routinely collected via the Police's in-house Niche system. Assessed up to 6 months post-intervention.

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Number of incidents with section 136 applied
2. Number of incidents with 'mental health tags' applied
3. Number of individuals with a 'mental health flag' applied
4. Number of frequent callers

All outcomes will be assessed up to 6 months post-intervention. All study data is routinely collected via the Police's in-house Niche system. The appropriateness of mental health tags applied to a random sample of incidents will be checked by an independent mental health professional

Completion date

31/03/2017

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Response and safer neighbourhood team officers within the ranks Police Community Support Officer, Police Constable, Inspector and Sergeant will be included in the trial, as these officers have regular contact with individuals with mental ill health
2. The two police stations with the highest number of eligible frontline police officers within each of the six Safer Command Areas will be recruited into the trial

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. To reduce the possibility of contamination, frontline officers with specialist roles (Fire-arms, Major Crimes and Dog units) will be excluded from the trial as these individuals often move between police stations
2. Control room and custody staff will also be excluded, as the study is aimed at frontline staff

Date of first enrolment

10/02/2016

Date of final enrolment

31/07/2016

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

University of York

York

United Kingdom

YO10 5DD

Sponsor information

Organisation
University of York

ROR
<https://ror.org/04m01e293>

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
The Police Knowledge Fund, funded by: The Home Office, The College of Policing and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article	results	08/09/2017		Yes	No
Other publications	methodological and practical challenges	22/12/2017		Yes	No
Participant information sheet	version V2	15/02/2016	08/06/2016	No	Yes
Protocol (other)		08/09/2017	10/07/2023	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes