Project title: Swindon Street Triage Evaluation

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What we were looking at

We were asked to evaluate the Swindon and Wiltshire Street Triage service where clinical mental health professionals work in partnership with Wiltshire police to provide appropriate support for individuals who come to their attention where mental health is a point of concern. The mental health professionals mainly provide advice, support liaison, information and may have direct telephone contact with a service user in crisis. The evaluation sought data on Swindon and Wiltshire’s Street Triage, as literature demonstrates that the use of police holding power (S136) has a detrimental effect on service user experience and workforce economics (Gregory and Thompson, 2013; Riley et al. 2011). Street triage marries healthcare provision between mental health and police services to reduce distress associated with a mental health crisis (Wilson-Palmer and Poole, 2015). Success of Street Triage is shown over various UK locations (MIND and Victim Support, 2013), whereby there has been reduction in S136 use and diversion of mental health emergencies (Cole, 2014). This service has been in place since 2015.

What is the aim of the project?

The aim of the service is to try and reduce the use of police holding power (section 136) and reduce distress associated with mental health crisis.

What is the aim of the evaluation?

We aimed to evaluate how the service was working and the experiences of staff involved.

Who were we working with?

The key stakeholders were the mental health team working with the Street Triage, and the police officers working in the Swindon and Wiltshire Street Triage. The project was funded by the Avon and Wiltshire Mental health Partnership and the Swindon and Wiltshire Police.

What we did

We accessed audit data already being collected by Wiltshire Police on the number of incidents where individuals were brought to their attention where mental health was a point of concern. The data provided a record of time taken and service user journey. This data set included data captured between 2015 and 2016 related to 879 service users. These were analysed using descriptive statistics. We collected data from 15 police officers through interview, and five members of the mental health team working with the Wiltshire police. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using Designation Analysis (Krippendorff, 1980).
What we found

The majority of service users were already known to mental health services (n=593). The police were involved for a number of reasons, most frequently due to concern about safety of the individual (n=98). A place of safety was considered by police on 126 occasions and 67 were detained. Those considered were significantly more likely to have had previous contact with the Swindon and Wiltshire Street Triage Team. These findings suggest that a minority of detentions (n=67, 37.3 percent) took place when the Street Triage team was operational.

The analysis of interview data identified five themes: expertise facilitating clinical recovery, freeing resources, awareness of street triage, suggested improvements and sharing information. The Street Triage team provided a level of knowledge and expertise about mental health issues that was felt to benefit the police service and members of the public experiencing mental health and distress. There was consensus amongst the participants that police time was saved. However, the service had not been widely publicised. Sharing of information between the mental health service and the police was felt to be of significant benefit to the Street Triage service.

Who was the evaluation shared with and why?

The findings were shared with the funders and the participants to give access to the findings and recommendations for practice. The work has also been presented in this case study to share wider learning across the evaluation community.

What next

A report of the evaluation was provided to the service. This suggested that the service might be more widely advertised to the public. It was also suggested that Street Triage could provide more formal training for police officers and that an extension of the service hours might be considered.

What has or may change as a result of this evaluation?

The funders have made some changes to practice as a result of the evaluation, acting on the recommendations to increase the training provision to the police officers and to more widely publicise the service. The funders are hoping to undertake further evaluation to look at the impact of these changes and undertake ongoing review of the service.

References


