

**POLICING AND MENTAL HEALTH : CONSIDERING THE QUESTION OF DEMAND: A UK
PERSPECTIVE.**

Dr Ian Cummins

Senior Lecturer

University of Salford

Policing and Mental Health

- Bittner (1967,1970) had indicated that police beat officers were becoming increasingly involved in mental health work
- Teplin's (1984) seminal study of policing and mental illness, she used the term "mercy booking" to describe the situation where the police arrest an individual because they felt that this would ensure that a vulnerable person would ensure that the person was given food and shelter - even if it was in custody.



Deinstitutionalisation and Community care

- There has been a series of concerns that police and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) more widely have become de facto providers of mental health care.
- Police officers often feel that they are not properly trained to deal adequately these situations.
- There is also a well-documented frustration, amongst police officers, at the perceived failures of agencies working in the mental health field
- Wood et al's (2011) review of trends in the UK, Canada and the USA concludes that the same issues arise across the countries: a combination of reduced psychiatric provision and poorly funded community services has led to increased pressure on police officers who often receive little or no specific mental health training.
- Lord Adebawale (2013) concluded mental health is core police business

“Picking up the Pieces”

- The Bradley Review (2008) and the Home Affairs Select Committee Report in 2015 both highlighted concerns about the increasing demands being placed on the police
- There is a strong feeling amongst police officers that they are “picking up the pieces” - this was the subtitle of a HMICFRS (2018) report- for the failing of community mental health services.
- Mental health crises often build to a point where individuals, families and carers seek emergency support.
- HMICFRS (2018) report notes the peak period for mental health related calls to the police is Monday to Friday 15:00-18:00.
- HMICFRS (2018) report also suggests that this increase indicates that as other agencies are finishing work or switching to limited out of hours office cover then the police are contacted.
- There is a further spike in demand 17:00- 22:00 on Saturdays and Sundays

“
**We are filling in the gaps for
community care and crisis care in
the community because there is just
no one else to send.**

BBC
RADIO

5 *live*

**MARK COLLINS
NATIONAL POLICE
CHIEFS COUNCIL**



What is mental health police work?

- One of the problems is agreeing what is “mental health work”
- In April 2019, the National Police Chiefs Council introduced a new definition of a mental health related incident:
 - *Any police incident thought to relate someone’s mental health where their vulnerability is at the centre of the incident or where the police have had to do something additionally or differently because of it.*



Focus on mental health crisis work clearly important

Does it obscure other areas of police work where mental health issues are important? For example vulnerable people in custody

Will police officers always have some involvement in mental health work?

What is the impact of new models of working such as street triage?

Contact details

- Dr Ian Cummins
- Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Society
- University of Salford
- C509 Allerton Building
- Frederick Road Campus
- i.d.cummins@salford.ac.uk

