

Chapter 5. Findings and Conclusion

The overall aim of this research project was to conduct an exploratory study into the impact that RCRP has had on response policing in SWP, and more specifically answer the following questions:

- Do officers in SWP feel that RCRP is being utilised correctly?
- Has the introduction of RCRP alleviated pressure on response officers' capacity and time to investigate crime effectively?

This chapter will endeavour to answer these questions by summarising the key findings of the study and referring back to the literature review to understand the contextual background of the topic.

5.1 Do officers in SWP feel that RCRP is being utilised correctly?

The literature review suggested that prior to the implementation of RCRP, there had been no clear definition of what roles different emergency services had in response to people experiencing mental health crises, and due to a number of factors including austerity, the ability of the NHS to tackle the issue deteriorated leading to an expansion in the police's responsibility (Marsden, et al., 2020). With the introduction of RCRP police should only respond to mental health crises, when it is related to crime or there is a real immediate risk of serious injury or death (Home Office & Department of Health and Social Care, 2024).

When officers from SWP were asked whether they thought RCRP was being utilised correctly, 51.9% of survey respondents stated that they felt it was, 18.5% stated that they felt it was not and 29.6% were unsure. The qualitative data provided some insight into understanding these responses, with officers raising concerns surrounding the assessment of incidents at source. Some officers felt that initial call takers were taking mental health calls without real immediate risk to life and passing it to them to challenge. Furthermore, officers expressed concerns surrounding the ability of other services, such as ambulances in certain incidents, to respond due to shortages in the services which resulted in police being deployed. It was also noted that the issue of other services not responding is potentially exacerbated by risk tolerance levels within the police despite clear guidelines of roles following RCRPs introduction, with an officer expressing concerns that a risk-adverse approach by police would eventually overrule policy.

5.2 Has the introduction of RCRP alleviated pressure on response officers' capacity and time to investigate crime effectively?

The literature review suggested that other services became dependent on the police to deal with the initial response in mental health emergencies due to austerity within the NHS and lack of funding for mental health services in combination with the deinstitutionalisation of mental health and an increase in community-based care (Marsden, et al., 2020; Mclean & Marshall, 2010). The review suggested that this overreliance on police became a barrier to police productivity, with time spent responding to mental

ill health calls, locating people who have absconded from healthcare facilities, and waiting with people detained under S136 of the Mental Health Act 1983, cited as the main issues (Home Office, 2024).

88.9% of survey respondents stated that they thought the introduction of RCRP was beneficial to response policing with no respondents outright disagreeing, with the introduction in principle reducing the amount of safety and welfare calls officers need to respond to, however, as stated earlier, concerns persisted with the perceived effectiveness of assessment and issues surrounding deployment, such as partner agency resources. Furthermore, 63% of respondents stated that they felt that RCRP had alleviated pressure and demand, with a notable 55% of respondents stating that they had noticed a difference in the type of safety and welfare calls that they were attending.

5.3 What impact has RCRP had on response policing in SWP?

The findings of this study suggest that the introduction of RCRP has had a notable impact on response policing in SWP and that overall, officers feel that it is beneficial and that it has alleviated pressure and demand on response policing, however, survey responses were not as clear regarding the correct utilisation of RCRP. From examining the textual data, the main concerns around utilisation involved how calls were assessed and partner agencies' ability to resource incidents. As stated in the methods chapter, this research is based on the subjective experiences of officers, and of note the survey respondents primarily worked in the region of Cardiff and the Vale, and therefore the findings cannot be applied universally. However, while the findings are not universal, they provide valuable insight into the experiences of those affected by the initiative, in particular at the early stages of implementation.

5.4 Future research

Due to the demographic and sample size number, the research topic would benefit from future research incorporating larger sample sizes across different force areas of England and Wales, in order to gain a universal understanding of the impact of RCRP. Furthermore, this dissertation is a cross-sectional study and further insights could be gained from conducting a longitudinal study to understand whether the experiences of officers change over time as RCRP becomes embedded in operational policies. Finally, as stated earlier, this dissertation aimed to understand the impact of RCRP on response officers in SWP and utilised a survey to gain insight into officers' subjective experiences. Therefore, this research could be advanced, by reviewing data held by SWP on safety and welfare calls pre and post-RCRP to understand whether the actual reduction in police deployments to safety and welfare calls differs from the subjective experience of officers, and provide a more objective understanding of the topic.

References

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