

Mental health and custody: a follow on study

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of the paper is to report the findings of a small scale indicative research project. The project explores the assessment of detained persons in police custody by Forensic Physicians (FP).*

Design/methodology/approach – *A range of information was collected in every case where custody staff had identified a mental health concern and requested an FP assessment. As well as information about demographic factors, this would include questions regarding any links that the individuals had with community-based mental health services. As well as this information, anonymous custody records and force adverse incident records for the month were examined.*

Findings – *In the month of the project, 59 FP assessments were requested. Only six members of this group had any contact with community-based mental health services: two with a social worker, two with a CPN and two with a psychiatrist. Of this group, three had not been in contact with mental health services for over a month.*

Research limitations/implications – *The size of the cohort and variety of arrangements for providing nursing and social care support in custody settings may limit the generalisation of the findings.*

Practical implications – *This study highlights that there is a group of individuals whose mental health causes concern to the police in a custody environment. In this study, the overwhelming majority of the group have no contact with mental health services. The research supports the recommendations of the Bradley Review for wider health care provision in custody settings.*

Originality/value – *The paper highlights that fully effective community mental health services need to consider police custody settings as a key point for intervention.*

Keywords *Vulnerable adults, Police custody, Forensic physicians, Safeguarding, Adult protection, Mental health services*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

This paper reports the findings from a study carried out into assessments carried out by Forensic Physicians (FP). The assessments were all undertaken in police custody settings where custody officers had concerns relating to the mental health of the detained person. A range of information was collected in every case where custody staff had identified a mental health concern and requested a FP assessment. As well as information about demographic factors, any links with community-based mental health services were explored. As well as this information, anonymous custody records and force adverse incident records for the month were examined. This study highlights that there is a group of individuals whose mental health causes concern to the police in a custody environment. In this study, the overwhelming majority of the group had no contact with mental health services. The research supports the recommendations of the Bradley Review for wider health care provision in custody.

The Bradley Review

In 2008, the government commissioned a report to look at the experiences of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in contact with the criminal justice