

Study highlights concerns and preferences of residents regarding police involvement in mental health crisis response

October 12 2023



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Police officers often respond to incidents that do not involve crime or immediate threats to public safety but instead deal with community

members facing unmet mental health needs. In response to this, many cities are experimenting with co-deploying police officers alongside health professionals or deploying teams entirely composed of civilian health professionals.

Recently, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) explored the perspectives and preferences about these programs among residents in structurally disadvantaged areas where [mental health](#) distress is more common, [mental health services](#) are less accessible, and involvement with police is more frequent and fraught. [The findings](#), published in the *Journal of Community Safety & Well-Being*, provide valuable insights to guide efforts toward a healthier response to mental health crises.

The study revealed that while many respondents suggested that police presence is necessary during the response to mental health crises because of the risk of violence, they were simultaneously uncomfortable with police officer involvement. The discomfort with police involvement was especially pronounced among younger and Black residents. However, support for co-deployment was high across all subgroups.

First author Helena A. Addison, MSN, RN, a Presidential Ph.D. Fellow and 2021-2023 Jonas Scholar at Penn Nursing, emphasized the importance of considering help-seeking norms and the concerns and experiences of historically underserved community members, who often possess significant apprehension regarding police involvement in crisis response.

"We can all agree that we want police involved as little as possible as mental health first responders," Addison noted, "and the perspectives of [community members](#) is essential to effectively identifying and scaling better systems for supporting people in moments of crisis."

Co-authors of the article include Evan Anderson, JD, Ph.D., of the Thomas Jefferson College of Population Health; Ruth Shefner, MPH, MSW, Ph.D.(c), of Columbia University; and Jennifer Wood, Ph.D., MA, of Temple University.

More information: Resident Perspectives on Police Involvement In the Response to Mental Health Crises, *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* (2023). [www.journalcswb.ca/index.php/c ...
article/view/322/960](http://www.journalcswb.ca/index.php/c...article/view/322/960)

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

Citation: Study highlights concerns and preferences of residents regarding police involvement in mental health crisis response (2023, October 12) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-highlights-residents-police-involvement-mental.html>

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