Reviewer's report

Title: Contacts with mental health services of individuals seen by the police for mental health crises

Version: 1 Date: 26 June 2012

Reviewer: Jennifer Teller

Reviewer's report:

The paper addresses an understudied aspect of police interaction with people in a mental health crisis and the influence of the interaction on re-establishing contact with mental health services in the month following the initial interaction.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

There are two questions posed by the authors: extent that individuals seen by police in a mental health crisis are disengaged from services and whether the type of police response re-engages these folks with services.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Generally, the methods are well-described; however, it should be clarified on page 6 (and described again as done in the current Analysis section) that there are two ways of studying mental health contacts: month before to month after and year before to month after. Page 6 was confusing as in the same paragraph discusses the two different comparison frames without indicating that there were two different analyses.

Do you know which police officers had contact with which subjects and if there were differences in referral by officer? A more sophisticated analysis would be possible and contribute to the argument.

3. Are the data sound?

Yes. The limitations in the Discussion are clear as well. I would suggest that the limitations be a paragraph by itself.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

In general, though I suggest that there be a more complete discussion of Crisis Intervention Teams and referrals to mental health services, especially in light of the rather disturbing finding that more than half of the folks in mental health crisis who were not engaged in services were not brought by the police into contact with services at the time of crisis. I think including some of the findings would strengthen the argument that the police are important to the referral process and
perhaps to averting additional crises by the same person.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   See 3 above.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   Yes. However, I suggest that work building on Lamb et al. 2002 paper be discussed in the background, discussion, and conclusions.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   I suggest editing the title to something like “Individuals in mental health crisis and police referral to mental health services: Does type of referral increase system re-engagement?”

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   In general, however it needs to be more tightly edited and consistent (e.g., decide if using “percent” or “%” and stick with the choice throughout the text). I also have a note about use of SD or +.

   In the abstract and conclusions, it is stated that police see a “substantial” number of individuals. It appears that there is 1.35 mental health crises per day, which doesn’t appear substantial. However, it might strengthen the argument that it is substantial if, for instance, the number of total calls over that same period is reported.

   I would also like to see the range of number of contacts between the 336 individuals and the 492 crises. How many of the individuals had more than one call?

   Also, please watch pronoun gender (e.g., somebody endangering his life) to make sure it is inclusive “people are endangering their lives” or “somebody is endangering his/her life.”

   The first time “frontline professional” appears, should it be in quotes?

   Person self is awkward. How about something like, In one-fifth of the calls it was the people in the mental health crisis themselves who contact police.

   You do not need a comma before “that.”

   What was the process of coding “the characteristics of mental health calls?” Were there any checks? These should be reported in order to reproducible.

   Please arrange Tables in descending order. That is,
   Caller
   Neighbour
   Agency
Person self (or whatever it will be called)
Family or friend
Unknown or missing
Victim or police surveillance
It will make the tables more clear.

Table 3 column headings need to be clarified. I'm not sure the difference between “increase in number of contacts per month for response” and “proportion with contacts after crisis for response,” what these terms mean, and why % are reported for “proportions.”

I would be interested in knowing more about the individuals who had more than one crisis: How frequently and time between crises.

With the exception of Table headings and order, the use of substantial, pronoun gender, and inclusion of clarification of individuals and crises, all other suggestions are minor and discretionary.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests. Jennifer L.S. Teller, PhD