

The accuracy, consistency and effectiveness of police officers’ assessment of threat, harm and risk in ‘risk to life’ incidents

How police officers apply the [National Decision Model](#) to accurately, consistently and effectively manage threat to life incidents.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Hertfordshire
Principal researcher(s)	research.map@college.police.uk
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Royal Cayman Islands• Malta Police Department• Canada Police Department• New York Police Department
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2023
Date due for completion	August 2027

Research context

De-institutionalisation and an influx into the community of persons with severe mental illness mean police are frontline professionals who often manage risk to life incidents when people are in crisis without health care assistance. Police officers are encouraged to make risk-based decisions, and increasingly do so for mental health matters.

When preservation of life is unsuccessful, a coroner’s inquest is opened. Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is engaged where a person dies while ‘in the care of the

state', since 'everyone's right to life shall be protected by law'. The ECHR places two distinct duties on member states:

1. a negative duty to refrain from taking life
2. a positive duty to take appropriate measures to safeguard life

When Article 2 of the ECHR is engaged, the coroner extends the scope to establish 'in what circumstances' death occurred. This extended scope allows the examination of critical decisions. This study argues that multi-agency approaches and cooperation in risk to life incidents can only be considered effective where there is a standardised approach to the assessment of threat, harm and risk and appropriate information sharing protocols. The College of Policing encourages a positive approach to risk openly supporting decision makers, providing police responders use the [National Decision Model](#) (NDM) .

Research methodology

This project will advance an ethnographic methodology capitalising on the author's policing experience and career as a barrister. The author has practical, operational experience as a police officer in this field of study, and now as a barrister representing officers in the police tribunal and families in the Coroner's Court. Several in-depth qualitative approaches will be applied. In the first stage:

1. reviewing policy documents
2. reviewing results of case studies and collaborated working arrangements
3. applying relevant legislation
4. examining political and public opinion on police responses to mental health

Once completed, the study will conduct:

1. focus groups with bereaved families following police contact
2. open interviews with senior and frontline police officers
3. open interviews with Senior Coroners presiding over Article 2 compliant inquests
4. assess NDM application by frontline staff in a realistic policing environment.

The final phase of the study will consist of substantial periods of observational research of police work, through investigation of police training programmes and assessment of work product.

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Tags

- [Operational policing](#)