

Preventing suicides on release from police custody: risk factors, contextual characteristics, policy, practice and future research

Researching issues of suicide prevention and policing, health and mental health care in police custody and inter-agency working therein.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Sheffield
Police region	Yorkshire
Collaboration and partnership	• Prof Layla Skinns, University of Sheffield (corresponding researcher). Contact the researcher • Katie Weir, University of Sheffield • Dr Emma Tuschick, University of Sheffield • Prof Catherine Robinson, University of Manchester • Dr Iain McKinnon, Newcastle University • South Yorkshire Police • Northumbria Police • Cleveland Police • Lancashire Constabulary • Northamptonshire Police
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	August 2026
Date due for completion	July 2027

Research context

Police custody plays a central role in the lives of the 900,000 people in England and Wales who are detained each year. This project focuses on an urgent issue: suicides on release from police custody, which have remained at 55–65 per year for the last decade. This is in spite of Angiolini Review recommendations in 2017 for improvements to pre-release risk assessments and planning, referral and handover, information and follow up support, suggesting they have been partially and inconsistently implemented.

This timely project therefore aims to systematically understand custodial risk factors associated with post-custody suicides, asking:

- What patterns of custody-related experiences are identifiable among those who die by suicide post-release?
- To what extent do these patterns vary by socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity and offence type, as well as by force and suicide method?
- What insights can be drawn regarding the mechanisms and contextual factors underpinning these deaths when considered in conjunction with existing research and evidence?
- What are the implications of these findings for the design of future research, in particular the development of comparative and causal analytical approaches?
- What are the implications of these findings for strategies aimed at reducing suicides following release from police custody?

These questions will be addressed through analysis of an existing set of NPCC-held data on post-custody suicides in 2019–2024, which combines data collected by the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) with data from all 43 police forces in England and Wales. The NPCC has agreed in principle to share this data set with the research team and it will be supplemented by publicly available Coroner's inquest information for all 426 individuals who are named in it. Working collaboratively with police stakeholders, this project identifies evidence-informed recommendations for policy and practice and establishes a proof of concept for further research.

Research methodology

The Data

Project research questions will be addressed through analysis of an existing NPCC-held dataset of 426 post-custody suicides in 2019–2024, which combines IOPC annual deaths statistics with

additional data gathered from the 43 forces in England and Wales.

To enhance this dataset, additional information will be collected for all 426 cases from Coroner's inquests and related public records, for example, verdicts, Prevention of Future Death (PFD) reports and media coverage, made possible by individuals being named in the NPCC data set. Led by Tuschick, for all 426 individuals, basic information will be recorded, such as whether an inquest took place, its outcome, and other key categorical details. For a purposively selected subset of 20 cases, more in-depth data will be gathered. These cases will be chosen because they illuminate key mechanisms relevant to the research, such as the role of ethnicity, access to healthcare, engagement with Liaison and Diversion services or inter-agency coordination, and building also on Tuschick (2026).

Data Analysis

Led by Weir, the quantitative analysis will follow a two-stage approach. Given the categorical nature of the variables, this approach is designed to identify and interpret patterns of co-occurring characteristics and custody-related factors.

In the first stage, Latent Class Analysis (LCA) will be used to identify distinct groupings or 'pathways' across cases. In the second stage, multinomial logistic regression will be employed to examine how membership in these identified pathways varies according to individual and contextual characteristics. These include demographic factors (for example, age, gender, ethnicity), situational variables (for example, offence type), geographic context (for example, police force area) and outcome-related variables (for example, method of suicide).

Interim reports or publications

Tuschick E. (2026). [Suicide prevention measures for people arrested or under investigation for sexual offences agile evidence review 2026](#). N8 Policing Research Partnership.