



# Improving outcomes for children exposed to parental mental illness: “it takes a village”

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

A multidisciplinary health and social care policy intervention known as “The Village”, was announced earlier this year in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. This intervention aims to break down barriers to the care of vulnerable children of parents with a mental illness (COPMI) residing in Austria, and improve child development and well-being outcomes.

Using a collaborative “village” approach, Hanna Christiansen and colleagues will engage with key stakeholders and service providers in the Tyrol region of Austria to first scope and design, then implement and evaluate evidence-informed practice approaches that efficiently identify and provide collaborative care for COPMI. Over the 4-year study period, the researchers will also use open innovation science approaches that engage the general public residing in the Tyrol.

The researchers explain that each stage of the project — *underpinned by implementation science, realist evaluation and symbolic interactionism* — will focus on understanding the experiences and challenges of COPMI. In this way, they hope to capture the “child’s voice” in the COPMI health setting, which the researchers explain is still largely neglected in practice. The anticipated outcome of The Village project is that practitioners working with children and adults will know how to sensitively identify families with mental illnesses and COPMI. Practitioners will also be better positioned to ensure that the child’s voice is central to any proposed interventions.

## Referring to:

Christiansen, H., Bauer, A., Fatima, B., Goodyear, M., Lund, I.G., Zechmeister-Koss, I. & Paul, J.L. (2019), *Improving Identification and Child-Focused Collaborative Care for Children of Parents With a Mental Illness in Tyrol, Austria*. *Front. Psychiatry*. 10: 2333. doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00233.

## Glossary:

**Open Innovation Science:** *the strategic use of public engagement to increase innovation and expedite translation.*

**Implementation Science:** *defined by Eccles and Mittman (2006) as the “scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and, hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services and care”.*

**Realist Evaluation:** *a theory-driven evaluation method first developed in 1997 by Pawson and Tilley. Realist evaluation helps explain how and why a complex intervention works or not, rather than simply whether an intervention is effective or not.*

**Symbolic Interactionism:** *a sociological theory based on the belief that meaning and knowledge are constructed and maintained through social interactions and that there can be many truths, depending on the way in which a question is asked, approached and analysed.*