

# Supporting children of mental health patients

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A study in Norway has found that health professionals caring for people with mental illness have difficulty providing follow-up services to the children of these patients. The law in the country has changed to mandate follow-up care for children, and health professionals believe it is a good thing, but struggle to overcome organisational and professional barriers.

Health professionals caring for adults with mental illness face significant challenges in providing support for patients' children, a study in Norway has found.

The qualitative study of ward leaders and staff in a Norwegian hospital found that a perceived lack of managerial support and anxiety in talking to children about the difficult topic of mental illness affected the care given.

Writing in the journal *Mental Health Practice*, the researchers say that healthcare staff identified a [domino effect](#) in management's reluctance to provide sufficient resources to follow up children of [mental health service](#) users.

They say the 'established bad culture in adult psychiatry' is the most important challenge: 'The culture seems to be "do not get involved, it is not your business"'.

Staff also felt unprepared: 'Some reported feeling alienated in situations where they were expected to interact with children because they

perceived their own competence to be restricted to adult mental health.'

Changes to Norwegian law in 2010 made it mandatory to follow up children whose parents are receiving adult [mental health care](#), and while researchers found staff have [positive attitudes](#) to the change, this has not been reflected in practice.

Other barriers care staff identified included high staff turnover rates and absences, the geography of the area where parents under care and their children might be separated by [long distances](#) and poor collaboration between community-based services and the hospital.

The researchers conclude that while legislation may have been changed to safeguard the children of parents with a mental illness, there needs to be more strategies for changing actual practice.

**More information:** Lauritzen C, Reedtz C (2013) Support for children of service users in Norway. *Mental Health Practice*. 16, 10, 12-18.

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