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*Short communication*

**GIVING AN IMPULSE TO MENTAL HEALTH  
CARE IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE – FINDINGS  
FROM THE EC-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECT  
*IMPULSE***

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IMPULSE (Implementation of an effective and cost-effective intervention for patients with psychotic disorders in low and middle-income countries in South Eastern Europe) is a 3.5-year project funded by the European Commission as part of the *Horizon 2020 initiative*. The project started in April 2018. Recently the project has been extended for 6 months and the end-date is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Data collection for all studies within the project has been completed and currently the focus is on analysis, write up, and dissemination.

The objective of the study is to facilitate the development of psychosocial care and treatment for people with psychotic disorders in Southeast Europe. The project brings together service users, family members, clinicians, researchers,

commissioners, and policy makers to ensure project activities are focused and meaningful and that project outputs are sustainable.

The IMPULSE study is co-ordinated by Queen Mary University of London. Research activities are conducted by partners in six European countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo (UN Resolution), Montenegro, Serbia, and the United Kingdom. More information about the team and research activities can be found on the project website (<http://impulse.qmul.ac.uk/home/>).

The main accomplishments within the project are related to improving psychosocial treatment and outcomes for individuals with psychosis, pioneering work related to improving service user involvement and stakeholders' engagement, and building research capacity in the region. More details are provided below:

- The main clinical study within the project is one of the largest ever conducted randomised-controlled trials of a psychosocial intervention with individuals with psychosis. The clinical study was designed as a multi-country, hybrid type II effectiveness – implementation RCT. The study was successfully completed during 2019-2020 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo (UN Resolution), Montenegro, Serbia. The trial findings indicate that the studied digital, psychosocial intervention (DIALOG+) improves outcomes of individuals with psychosis and utilisation of resources for healthcare systems. Research into non-pharmacological treatment of individuals with psychosis has been neglected for years and this work is contributing to the body of evidence regarding holistic mental health treatment and care of this vulnerable clinical population.
- The project brings together all relevant stakeholders to ensure sustainability of project outputs. Pioneering work related to service user involvement in the region involved developing a model for meaningful and sustainable involvement in settings with limited resources. For example, involving service users and carers as advisors in research was achieved by setting up Lived Experience Advisory Panels (LEAPs) in each

participating country. The LEAPs have been meeting every three months to provide advice and guidance to researchers on all aspects of the project, including study materials, interpretation of research findings, and dissemination strategies. The team also meets regularly with clinicians, commissioners, and policy makers to seek advice on implementation and sustainability of project findings. The interdisciplinary, collaborative and partnership research process implemented in the IMPULSE study has contributed to higher quality of results, exchanging ideas across disciplines, and bridging the gap between research, policy, and practice.

- Building capacity in mental health research in the Western Balkans has been one of the core aspects of the IMPULSE project. Investments into mental health research in this region remain scarce and therefore this project used the opportunity to contribute to collective expertise in mental health services research. With more than 100 hours of training over 3.5 years and hands-on experience, researchers had the opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge related to trial methodology, implementation science, interviewing individuals with psychosis, qualitative research, publishing, and dissemination. The project staff are current and future leaders in mental health care and research.

The IMPULSE Consortium has pledged to go beyond scientific publications and conferences to disseminate key project findings. A series of dissemination meetings and workshops with policy makers, clinicians, patients, and carers have been organised either in person or online. A list of published, open access papers as well as other outputs and news from the project can be found on the project website and social media platforms (<http://impulse.qmul.ac.uk/home/>). If you are interested in learning more about this work or in collaborating with the team, please get in touch.

*This research will have an important impact on policy and practice at international scales.* The IMPULSE Consortium has pledged to go beyond scientific publications and conferences to disseminate key project findings. A series of dissemination meetings and workshops with policy makers, clinicians, patients, and carers have been organised either in person or online. A list of published, open access papers as well as other outputs and news from

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*Note.* This short communication has been prepared by the Chief Investigator of the IMPULSE project