

Ari Haukkala In Memoriam

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EHPS Fellow, University Lecturer in Social Psychology, docent Ari Haukkala, passed away on the 19th February 2021 in Helsinki from a rapidly progressing brain tumour. He was born on

the 13th October 1965.

Ari first attended the EHPS conference in 1995 in Bergen, Norway, and was an enthusiastic and committed EHPS member. A distinguished and well-known academic, he was much liked by colleagues and students. He supported and mentored numerous EHPS members, generated research impact and built research capacity internationally. In 2020, the EHPS awarded Dr Haukkala with an Honorary Fellowship, the Society's highest honour.

Ari conducted research since the 1990s. His multidisciplinary research spanned health promotion, disease prevention, and socioeconomic health inequalities. Ari's principal focus was research which addressed societal problems. A leading principal investigator in social and health psychology in Finland, he worked in numerous areas and trained many students. He published over 100 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters. At the time of his death, he held a two-year research fellowship at the Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies, and was co-director of the Behaviour Change and Wellbeing group at the University of Helsinki.

Many people mention that Ari was exceptionally down-to-earth and that he did not put himself forward. His PhD supervisor remembers that he always helped others, and put common interest and other people's interests first.

A colleague remarked: "Although we met only once a year at EHPS [...] I always felt a fondness for Ari who struck me as a being a wonderful combination of gentle and strong. He was wise and kind."

This article highlights his contributions to research, education and practice, spanning three decades.

A research career widening in breadth across the years

Ari's research covered a wide range of topics and collaborative networks across four main areas: 1) smoking prevention, 2) psychosocial factors in obesity and metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease, 3) psychology of genetic testing, and 4) health behaviour intervention research.

1) Smoking prevention

Ari gained his Master's degree in social psychology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. He used data from the University of Southern California and Finnish National Public Health Institute, to compare how children and youth responded to smoking advertisements. His doctoral dissertation at the National Public Health Institute (current name Finnish Institution for Health and Welfare) examined relationships between cynical hostility, depressive symptoms and socioeconomic differences in health, which influenced societal discussions around inequality. After his postdoc at the Harvard

Medical School smoking cessation unit, his research at the Finnish National Public Health institute focused on youth smoking prevention programs, also as part of European Smoking Prevention Framework Approach with six countries (led by Prof Hein de Vries). He has served in several national committees and worked in prevention programs in Russia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2) Psychosocial factors in obesity, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease

Ari published papers and a handbook chapter on the relationships between psychosocial factors and cardiovascular disease, in particular anger-related concepts (e.g., Haukkala et al 2010). He led a psychosocial workstream of DILGOM (Dietary, Lifestyle, and Genetic determinants of Obesity and Metabolic syndrome), a population-based study investigating associations between nutrition,



Ari receiving his EHPS fellowship (2020)

lifestyle, psychosocial factors, environment and genetics, and obesity and the metabolic syndrome.

3) Psychology of genetic testing

Ari's central contribution was building a bridge between genetics and health psychology research. His research was influenced by medical genetics, social psychology, health psychology, public health, bioethics, and economics. He emphasised health promotion and health equity: e.g., how could genetic risk information be harnessed to promote lifestyle changes and health choices (e.g., screening participation?) His colleagues in genetics mention that he played a major role in Finnish genomic research.

Since the 1990s Ari worked in the area of genetics, proceeding to later establish his own group which worked with people living with the heritable Lynch cancer syndrome, caused by genetic mutations. Ari examined psychosocial consequences of genetic testing, how genetic risk information is communicated within families, and people's reactions to direct contact with untested family members at risk. He led two Academy of Finland funded projects, producing novel insights into communicating genetic risk information.

4) Health behaviour intervention research

Ari was highly influential in promoting behaviour change intervention research in Finland.

Within the EU-funded PRECIOUS program (Nurmi et al. 2019), he led a team in developing digital motivational interviewing components as part of an app to change multiple health behaviours, and its evaluation in a series of n-of-1 RCT studies. Another line of work examined implicit interventions for healthy eating (Aulbach et al. 2019).

"Ari familiarised himself deeply with each area of research where he was involved. He was good in data analysis and drawing accurate conclusions

based on it. He was expert in both social psychological and epidemiological research thinking - a quite unique combination. This is why he was able to influence the advancement of research not only in Finland but also elsewhere."

Research prof Erkki Vartiainen, Ari's former PhD supervisor and boss

Impact on health promotion education internationally

Ari was involved in several international projects that brought know-how to other countries. These included a health promotion project in Kenya, and a World Bank funded school project in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1991, he travelled to Moscow to collect data and also combined the Helsinki-Moscow datasets, which was an enormous task. The PI remembers: "Ari immediately charmed our Moscow colleagues with his exceptional charisma, helpfulness and happiness. Ari went on to other



Ari and Nelli during dinner at the EHPS conference in Prague (2012).

jobs, but our Moscow colleagues kept asking me for years, how Ari is doing."

Active contributor in committees, foundations, and third-sector health promotion organisations

Ari had extensive collaborations where he contributed insights from health and social psychology to health-related research projects and societal endeavours. For instance, he was an invited member of the scientific advisory board of Smokefree Finland 2030, and The Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies, and served on EHPS Scientific Committees (2016) and early career award reviewing committees (2020).

A reliable and approachable mentor and support for young academics

Ari found particular joy and meaningfulness in supporting young scholars and he was a supportive and engaging supervisor. His doctoral and master students progressed to expert positions and pioneering research careers. He brought up a new generation of social and health psychology researchers in Finland. Former students mention how Ari's advice, connections and generous encouragement positively influenced their career paths and opportunities.

A younger colleague who only met him at conferences said: "He was a really encouraging presence and full of warmth. As an early career researcher he made me feel very safe and respected right from my student days when I first met him at EHPS. His authenticity and humility is a much needed and rare quality in academia."

He was widely liked as a teacher on undergraduate courses. His students described him as an inspiring, fun, expert and easily approachable teacher. Ari was devoted to teaching, especially quantitative methods, and continually updated his courses, despite demands placed by research and

other responsibilities. He was passionate about the students learning and understanding substance and methods, and developing critical thinking skills. Indeed, he was selected to receive the Teaching Award by the Faculty of Social Sciences in 2008.

A family man with joie de vivre

Ari had his roots in Southern Ostrobothnia in Finland, where he spent many childhood summers. Scouts group and University Theatre were important to him in his youth. He enjoyed hiking



A portrait of Ari

in nature and cycling, which he also did in his last year, up to 100 km bike trips. He also loved live music, arts, and hanging out with friends and family.

It was unlikely that he would pursue a scientific career: from a working class family, he was not particularly encouraged to pursue a high school diploma. His schoolteacher was instrumental in supporting Ari's opportunities for a high school degree.

Ari possessed a unique skill to be present. He was sincerely present around everyone he met, and created a relaxed and warm atmosphere around him. Numerous people remember Ari's happy laughter. He was loyal, accepting, and fair towards others, and never boasted about himself. Up until his last months, he cycled around Helsinki and

remained full of light and energy.

He was a loving and devoted father of four children. For him, family was always the number one priority. Ari's sudden passing has touched a large network of friends and colleagues. In the Facebook In Memoriam group, memories shared by those who knew Ari are full of deep sadness but also gratitude.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the many people whose memories of working with Ari have been included in this article.



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