

Widening worldviews and networks: EHPS Grant Report 2021

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It took three attempts before I finally made it to an EHPS conference. I started my PhD in the Spring of 2019 and was excited to attend the EHPS conference that year. As a clinical psychologist from Malaysia, I was not too familiar with EHPS. Since my PhD research was going to be primarily on health psychology, my supervisor, Dr Karen Morgan (Perdana University - Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, PURCSI, Malaysia), suggested that I attend the conference. I was informed that the conference would be a great opportunity to meet and learn from the authors whose names I have only been able to see on the many articles I have read on health psychology. I was sold. I submitted an abstract on a research I did prior to my PhD, and also applied for a travel grant from EHPS. I was making plans to make my way all the way from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to Dubrovnik, Croatia. However, as the date grew closer, I was offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go for my Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. It was an offer I could not refuse. Reluctantly, I had to cancel my plans for the conference. I consoled myself by thinking there is always next year.

By the end of 2019 I already had some data available from my PhD research and submitted an abstract for EHPS 2020. Again, I was excited to be making plans to go to Bratislava, Slovakia. However, it was not to be. Covid came and made it impossible for the conference to proceed in 2020.

Come 2021, I finally made it to an EHPS conference, and it was all and more that I had

hoped for, despite the restrictions we had with Covid-19. With the conference being online, it gave me the opportunity to pick and choose the presentations and attend as many sessions as possible. I attended the CREATE Early Career Researcher Workshop first which was a real eye-opener for me. It was during Dr Marita Hennessy's (University College Cork, Ireland) session on how to use social media for research and networking that I realized that I have been missing out on Twitter. I was very surprised to see how extensive Twitter is utilized among the research community in Europe. Where I am from, Twitter is mainly used for issues on political or current affairs. Research postings are usually on Facebook and to a certain extent, LinkedIn. I finally made my Twitter account public and started following fellow EHPS participants and EHPS accounts. My worldview expanded. I now had access to an abundance of PhD tips and tricks, notifications of the latest publications especially on digital health, and could access the latest articles too. My PhD journey no longer felt so lonely anymore.

The conference also gave me the opportunity to present the preliminary results of my PhD research on "The impact of the Naluri app on depression, anxiety and quality of life among cardiac patients". The results showed that patients in the treatment group reported improved scores for all three aspects, however the engagement on the app was not included in the analysis yet. This was brought up and discussed in the Q&A session. All the feedback I received as well as the other presentations on digital health during the conference provided me with relevant and useful

ideas on how to further improve my own research.

Another presentation that really caught my attention and interest was the photo elicitation study on “What does it mean to choose health?” (Palacz-Poborczyk, 2021). The use of photos or images instead of interviews to obtain insights from participants is an alternative approach in qualitative study. It allows the participants to express themselves through pictures and further enhances the richness of the data that can be obtained. It made me think of other relevant research questions that can be explored using this research method.

Apart from the knowledge gained, I also got acquainted with fellow national editors of the Practical Health Psychology (PHP). It was lovely to meet everyone with our matching PHP t-shirts. We shared and discussed ideas on how to further expand the PHP Blog’s reach to the community and also how to translate our research from technical to more layman terms in order to make it more relatable for the public.

My deepest appreciation to the EHPS Executive Committee, Grants Committee for awarding me this grant which made it possible for me to learn, share and expand my knowledge and network especially among early career researchers. Here’s hoping that I do not have to wait for another three years to attend another EHPS conference!

References

Palacz-Poborczyk, I (2021, August). *What does it mean to choose health? A photo elicitation study*. Paper presented at the 35th Annual Conference of the EHPS.



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