

EHPS Grant Report

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Last year I was fortunate enough to be awarded the 2021 EHPS Conference Grant which allowed me not only to attend as both a presenter, and as an audience member, but also to network, learn and participate at an excellent international conference. This year presented the challenge of online attendance, which allowed me to attend a range of talks without even leaving the office! As a Masters student, moving into a PhD, this was an eye-opening opportunity to engage with presentations related to my current and upcoming research areas, and to enjoy the workshops and lab series to develop my skills as a researcher.

My approach to this conference was two-fold: a) to disseminate and discuss aspects of my own research, and the field of women's reproductive health more generally, and b) to learn how to incorporate Health Psychology into my current PhD research which has a more clinical focus. The week started by attending a presentation, exploring the physical and psychological impact of pain relating to endometriosis (Guillemot, 2021). My own research is centered around using qualitative methods to explore the diagnostic experiences of young women with endometriosis, and thus this research offered an insight into their experiences of pain in this condition. Guillemot highlighted that, through psychological questionnaires, women reported that their psychological quality of life was improved by knowing about their diagnosis for a longer period. This prompted me to consider the role of coping skills and practices for the individuals in my own research, and which I went on to discuss in my recently published article

(Wren & Mercer, 2021). These coping strategies were also considered with reference to the psychological impact of infertility for women with endometriosis, in an engaging 'Give Me 5 Minutes' presentation (Klinkenberg, 2021). Using similar methods, Klinkenberg addressed key factors in the impact of infertility on women's mental health, including sexual satisfaction and length of relationship. As a research team, although we had considered the specific role of infertility for the young women in our study, we had not yet considered the role of their partners in supporting family planning and fertility discussions. When I presented my own work on the first day of the conference, one of the questions probed my analysis of these discussions and my understanding of the network of support often employed by women experiencing reproductive difficulties. This prompted me to reflect upon my own understanding of this research, and lead to some changes in our approach to discussing the participants' poignant experiences. Furthermore, the interest from other researchers both during and following this presentation, gave me the confidence to eventually pursue the publication of my Masters thesis (Wren & Mercer, 2021).

At the time of the conference, I had just begun my PhD which prompted a more clinical focus to Health Psychology research, working in the Behavioural Genetics Group at Cardiff University, UK. During this time, my research plan remained unclear but for our first study, we were focusing on exploring mood and neurodevelopmental disorder-associated traits in participants with a congenital skin disorder, X-linked ichthyosis (XLI), ichthyosis vulgaris (IV) or psoriasis. During the third day of the conference, I attended a poster talk by another

PhD student who was interested in the prevalence of mental health disorders in young people with chronic skin conditions (Flinn, 2021). Flinn was conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis in this area, and although at this point, she was conducting title/abstract screening, this prompted me to get in contact about her work. This opportunity to network with Flinn and others involved in related research, encouraged me to view my own research through a new lens, with an increased focus on Health Psychology. This has since influenced my own reflective practices and encouraged me to get involved in more collaborative projects in this area.

During the third day of the conference, I also attempted the Lab Series session 'Learning and doing translational health psychology together'. This was an eye-opening occasion that encouraged audience members to discuss their experiences of translational health psychology on an interactive Padlet, which we discussed as a collective group. As a new PhD student, this was an aspect of Health Psychology that I was not yet aware of and thus I started to view the discipline in a new, proactive sense. This session prompted me to think about research priorities in my own field and wider disciplines, specifically how to engage stakeholders, patients, and clinicians in the more complex processes within research. Since this session, I have also been involved in establishing a university-wide Translation of Research and Impact Network, specifically for Early-Career Researchers.

As I have mentioned, this conference was an eye-opening opportunity for networking, discussions, and learning, within two niche areas of my own research. I am hugely grateful to the EHPS EC Grants Committee for allowing me to attend, to present my own work and learn from other researchers. As I reflect on my recent first publication, it is clear that attending the conference provided me with a boost in confidence and commitment to my research, and I look forward to attending again in 2022.

References

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