

Insights and Highlights from the 2023 CREATE Workshop and EHPS Conference

Khaleda Ahmadyar

University of London, UK

Phoebe X. H. Lim

Nanyang Technological

University, Singapore

Carolina C. Silva

Trinity College Dublin,

Ireland

Lea O. Wilhelm

Medical School Berlin &

Freie Universität, Germany

Introduction

The 37th annual conference of the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS) took place in the vibrant city of Bremen, Germany, featuring an exceptional scientific programme complemented by a multitude of engaging social activities. As four early career researchers, we are grateful to the Collaborative Research and Training in the EHPS (CREATE) network for awarding us the CREATE grant, which not only facilitated our attendance at the EHPS Conference but also enabled our participation in the CREATE early career researcher Workshop.

Particularly noteworthy is the choice of topic for this year's CREATE Workshop by Prof. Dr. Laura König (University of Bayreuth, Germany) and Dr. Heide Busse (BIPS Bremen, Germany): science communication, a crucial skill in today's rapidly evolving world of research and public engagement. We found the workshop to be engaging and insightful, and were very impressed with the workshop structure and knowledge transfer which included a visit to the science museum to explore science communication in action! The workshop also offered a unique funding and mentoring opportunity by the EHPS UN committee exclusive to CREATE attendees to support us with initiating our own science communication project. This was a great way to put everything we learned about

science communication into practice following the end of the workshop.

The conference itself was an enriching experience allowing us to deepen our understanding of health psychology, enhance our research skills and connect with the global health psychology community. We reflect on key aspects of the conference below.

Scientific program

The scientific program provided lots of different opportunities to learn about current research through various engaging formats, namely: Oral sessions, symposia, roundtables, posters, state-of-the-art presentations, flashlight talks and keynotes. Below, we delve deeper into two of our favourite formats: flashlight talks and keynote presentations.

Flashlight talks

The introduction of 'flashlight talks' to this year's conference programme was a welcomed and innovative addition. This format provided an excellent opportunity for early career researchers to share their research findings in a concise and impactful manner. The topics picked up on the conference's theme of health psychology's aim for equity, inclusiveness, and transformation. The strict time limit of 5 minutes forced presenters to distil their research into its most essential components, promoting clarity and brevity. Here, we provide examples of the flashlight sessions we attended.

In the session 'Ensuring Inclusiveness in Managing Diseases' (Chair: Maria Blöchl), five presenters spoke about different ways to ensure that our research captures the experiences of those involved and the target group we want to describe. The presenters gave insights into their research on what measures were best when we want to understand treatment burden, what participants saw as the greatest challenges they face with either an illness or caregiving to their children, and what their viewpoints were on screening uptake. Lastly, lessons learned from a dyadic online panel study were presented, with a representative, diverse sample of participants being much harder to achieve than anticipated.

In just 5 minutes, six presenters in the session 'Transforming Healthcare Systems' (Chair: Daniella Watson) were able to convey rich information about their on-going studies. The aim of this parallel session was to look into ways of integrating health psychology techniques into regular medical practice, and presenters elaborated on attempts they had made to understand how clinicians and practitioners felt, or were able to do so through their interventions. It was fascinating getting to catch a glimpse into different countries' medical systems and the unique challenges each of us face as health psychologists working with fellow healthcare professionals.

In the session titled 'Digital Interventions to Promote Health' (Chair: Maya Braun), six insightful talks provided a comprehensive view of how digital interventions and systems are being leveraged across various aspects of healthcare, from setting health goals and tracking physical activity to supporting patients with complex health conditions and enhancing medication adherence. These talks showcased the potential of digital technologies in advancing healthcare and improving health outcomes through various innovative approaches and angles.

As early career researchers, we found the 'flashlight talks' particularly compelling as the

sessions highlighted the excellent work done by early career researchers in Health Psychology and provided a great opportunity to network all in one place. We hope to see 'flashlight talks' incorporated into future conferences!

Keynotes

In the afternoons, the main lecture hall was tightly packed for the keynote lectures. In addition to their special expertise in individual health behaviours, all three speakers extended their focus from the individual to the (global, societal, or social) environment that it is formed in.

Professor Cornelia Betsch's (University of Erfurt, Germany) keynote lecture highlighted the role health psychology research can play in the important challenge to transform planetary health. She gave insights into real-life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as a researcher and health communication advisor for governments and international institutions. Professor Betsch conveyed to the listeners the important findings of her research on vaccination and mask wearing, and how during the course of the pandemic, these received added meaning as social signals. She also described the importance of timing and delivery when communicating with politicians, and the general public in an emerging global health crisis.

The keynote presented by Professor Jutta Mata (University of Mannheim, Germany) was especially compelling, emphasising the pivotal role of social context in eating behaviours. The keynote underscored the pressing challenges of unbalanced nutrition and related diseases in industrialised societies, highlighting the limitations of individualised dietary interventions. Professor Mata advocated for a social approach to promoting healthier eating and sustainability, suggesting that health psychology should harness the power of social factors to drive lasting change in eating behaviours and address broader societal issues.

In a culmination of a significant proportion of the research presented over the first few days of the conference, Professor Urte Scholz's (University of Zurich, Switzerland) keynote lecture on the role of social relationships in health behaviour change brought together the ideas of health interventions and our being social creatures. Professor Scholz raised the need to differentiate types of dyadic interventions depending on the level of involvement of the dyad partner (individual, parallel, cross-over, joint; Scholz et al., 2020). She proposed how we as researchers could use similar naming styles to better communicate and integrate our ideas on effective dyadic behaviour change interventions.

For us as early career researchers, the keynotes demonstrated how a research idea can be approached through different research projects spanning several years from a variety of different angles, an advanced stage that we, as emerging researchers, have yet to reach. Also, the lectures inspired new and exciting ideas for further research into behaviour change interventions, and what to consider when delivering our findings back into society. From a listener's perspective, it appears that we are not alone as researchers in the endeavour to understand and transform health, with many colleagues striving towards that goal in a collaborative way. For us, the keynotes thus rendered the idea of pursuing relevant and extensive ideas less daunting and more accessible.

Networking

The EHPS Conference not only offered multiple networking opportunities, but also demonstrated its commitment to fostering connections and knowledge exchange.

Starting the conference with the CREATE Workshop gave us the chance to meet other early career researchers in a smaller group, making it less intimidating. During coffee breaks, lunches and

workshop dinner we were able to have informal conversations about our projects, challenges, goals, and even personal experiences. These conversations fostered a sense of comfort that contributed to a supportive atmosphere throughout the entire conference.

In addition to the captivating workshops and informative sessions, the events that took place alongside the conference also left a lasting impression. The 'Meet the Experts' sessions, where early career researchers had the opportunity to engage with keynote speakers in an informal setting, were an appreciated opportunity as these small-group discussions facilitated insightful conversations and opened doors to collaboration. The 'Challenge Night' was another highlight, as seasoned researchers candidly shared their most amusing or challenging mishaps and lessons learned in research, creating an atmosphere of shared experiences and laughter. For anyone who was unable to hear the lessons learned in the crowded pub: a collection of recommendations to circumvent the pitfalls of academia life can be found in the 'Survival Guide for Early Career Researchers' (Kwasnicka & Lai, 2022).

All of these events allowed us to connect with other researchers, exchange insights with peers, and cultivate both professional and personal relationships that we believe will have a lasting impact on our careers and research endeavours.

Conclusions

We left the conference with renewed enthusiasm for our research and a sense of belonging within the health psychology community. This experience has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on our academic and professional journeys, and we look forward to applying the knowledge and insights gained to our future work in the field. By facilitating our attendance at both the CREATE workshop and the EHPS conference, the CREATE

grant has truly opened doors for us, and for this, we are immensely grateful.

References

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Khaleda Ahmadyar

School of Health and Psychological Sciences, Department of Psychology, City, University of London, London, UK

Khaleda.ahmadyar.1@city.ac.uk



Phoebe X.H Lim

Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

phoebe.lim@ntu.edu.sg



Carolina Silva

The Trinity Centre for Practice and Healthcare Innovation (TCPHI), School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

silvac@tcd.ie



Lea Wilhelm

MSB Medical School Berlin, Berlin, Germany;
Division of Health Psychology, Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

lea.wilhelm@medicalschooll-berlin.de