

Health Psychology in the Time of Covid-19: an update from the European Health Psychology Society

Vera Araujo- Soares Dear EHPS colleagues and
Newcastle University, UK friends,

Every year I have the pleasure of seeing you all disseminating your scientific work at the annual EHPS conference. This year it will be different.

This is the first time in the history of our society that we had to postpone our conference. The inevitable decision to postpone our conference makes our society part of the solution and protects all our members.

In the past 4 years the Executive Committee has lead discussions on preparedness for a potential conference cancelation/postponement in the context of the Climate Emergency. Anticipating a potential cancellation of our main yearly event we have organised a savings account and standard operational procedures with our partner EasyConferences. The goal of all this work was to assure the robustness of our finances and the sustainability of our society. We never thought this would come so fast.

Considering the Climate Emergency we have last year created a committee to investigate our society's carbon emissions. The Chair of this Committee is Professor Marijn de Bruin. The aim is to assure that, as a society, we do all in our control to support the action for Climate Emergency by engaging with our members in generating solutions. With the current Sars-CoV-2 pandemic (also related to the climate emergency as the 'jump' of the virus from a bat to a human seems likely to be the result of humanity's constant occupation of other species ecosystems) this has currently been put on hold, but the urgency of this agenda means

that we will come back to it as soon as possible.

This Sars-CoV-2 pandemic as brought with it a lot of challenges to our health and public health systems. Democracies everywhere turned to science to assure the best evidence based decisions were made to protect the populations. Health psychologists across the whole of Europe and the world have stepped up and contributed with their expertise to inform governments. Behavioural measures have been a crucial part of the world's response to this pandemic event: the fight to keep the transmission rate low.

Again, the time emerged to share with the world knowledge created within our scientific field. The time emerged to create Impact. New agendas for research are set as psychological and behavioural evidence is sought to inform strategies for managing the outbreak. As a society dedicated to the scientific progress of Health Psychology, we have a big responsibility of bringing the public along with us. It is important that we spend more time sharing how scientific knowledge is created, and ensuring that the scientific method can be critically scrutinised. Understanding this will allow people to comprehend why herd immunity might be a good solution in a flu type pandemic, but not an option when confronting the current corona virus. As scientists, I believe that we need to consider our role in dissemination and the need to bring the public into the scientific process as key stakeholder. This initiative is one of the reasons why we have developed a new EHPS grant allowing to bring a policy, practice or public stakeholder to the EHPS conference. This also aims to start the discussion on Public Involvement in research, not just as a participant, but also across the research

process: from designing the research questions to disseminating research.

Within the society several groups formed to cross pollinate and gather information on what other colleagues were doing. There have been several initiatives using social media to share and record research being conducted live across the world on the disease emerging from this new virus (at least to humanity), the now feared new C, the Covid-19. As a society we are monitoring this. Sabrina Cipolletta has been in touch with EHPS National Delegates and will prepare an overview on "Health Psychologists' responses to Covid-19". We will soon contact our members again on this, this time with a simple survey to understand the level of involvement EHPS members have in research on issues related to the pandemic. Funders, journals, ethics committees see a substantial shift in research. This is an opportunity to put our expertise at the service of the communities we share and serve and to make sure that evidence, meeting the highest scientific standards, will be available to underpin decisions affecting the health and safety of our population.

As president elect, and then as president of the EHPS I have been attending monthly meetings in New York (remotely) with the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (<https://psychologycoalitionun.org/>). This Covid-19 pandemic brought all the members in this meeting online, equalizing participation and decreasing carbon emissions. I became part of the committee organising this year Psychology Day at the UN on the 27th of May. Suddenly we realised that this meeting would need to be offered fully online. At this day of celebration of psychological knowledge at the United Nations Professor Susan Michie has presented her work titled "Limiting Covid-19 transmission: a Psychological Perspective". It was the first time, to my knowledge, that a Health Psychologist addressed this group. The fact that the event was this year online made it more sought after, with 1000 people all over the world

attending. The numbers subscribing to attend have exploded, comparing with other years, and the communications will be made available for future (you will be able to find the entire event recorded here: psychologycoalitionun.org). I will be working on a piece summarising what I have learned while attending this meeting on the topic of multilateralism: a topic embedded deeply in the United Nations systems fabric. During this celebration of the role of Psychological Science on our societies concepts such as Political Plasticity and Omni-culturalism (Professor Moghaddam) as well as those on Tight vs Loose Societies (Professor Gelfand) were introduced. These concepts can contribute to better understanding current issues facing our nations. Psychologists can and are supporting our comprehension of current societal patterns. Psychology can contribute to a better world, as Professor Michie has so well put it during her presentation at this event.

Although our EHPS conference has been postponed for next year we will be hosting an exciting e-event at the time the Bratislava conference was scheduled to take place. I want to thank Rado Masaryk (LoC), Robbert Sanderman and Justin Presseau (SC) as well as Petros Startis (EasyConferences) for all their support with this. Together we are working to make this year online event topical and will come back to you soon with more details. For now it is sufficient to say that CREATE, Synergy and our National Delegates and our SIGs will be organising webinars on some of the days of the conference (25, 26 and 27th of August 2020). We also plan a: keynote speaker; Round Table on Health Psychology work with Governments to support the response to Covid-19; annual general meeting (AGM); Award Ceremony where we will announce the winners of this year Stan Maes and Herman Shaalma awards, and our new fellows. The elections for the executive committee will take place online as they do every year. During the AGM we will divulge the results of this election.

People in most EHPS member countries were told

to stay apart, to physically distance in order to decrease the rate of transmission and protect each other, especially those most vulnerable in our societies. For many of us working from home became the new normal as did appreciating and thanking our first line workers: we can empathise and we certainly all cherish these roles.

The first weeks of this lockdown felt strange. Human plasticity and adaptation is renowned and we soon learned how to harness the power of technology to keep in touch. Humans when faced with the impossibility of a hug and a kiss developed other ways to communicate. Lockdown has not, is not, will not deter us from expanding our personal and professional networks. It is, indeed, not the same to interact face to face (physically present) or via an internet connection, but it allows communication to occur and flourish in different ways. Communication is crucial to create shared narratives, to assimilate and accommodate new experiences. Meta cognition will, hopefully, allow us to integrate all these experiences into who we are. Social connectedness while physical distancing is possible.

I hope to see many of you at our online event this year. So far it has been inspirational to observe how the EHPS committees continue working together for Impact.

Stay safe and productive.

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