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## EHPS Conference Grant Report

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### Abstract

In September 2024, the EHPS conference took place in Cascais, Portugal. This report captures the experiences of early career researchers who were awarded grants to attend. We reflect on how the conference expanded our understanding of health psychology, enhanced our confidence in networking, provided opportunities to present our research, and inspired ideas for future projects and collaborations. The conference also allowed us to engage with the latest developments in health psychology from around the world, highlighting the value of international perspectives and building connections across borders. Our experiences demonstrate not only how attending the conference supported our professional growth, but also how the EHPS fosters an inclusive and accessible environment for early career researchers.

**Key words:** health psychology, early career researchers, conference, networking, collaborations, inclusivity.

Amidst permanent sunshine, beautiful coastlines, and the smell of salt in the air, the EHPS 2024 conference was held in Cascais, Portugal. Focussing on ‘Health Psychology for a Sustainable Future’, the EHPS 38th Annual Conference saw an increasing number of sessions on such important topics as ‘women’s health’, ‘health inequalities’ and ‘sustainability’. The conference challenged all attending researchers to think of the role they can play in contributing to a sustainable future, whether in our professional roles, in the way we chose to travel or the food we consume. Prior to the conference, the EHPS awarded Conference Grants to several early career researchers, granting us the privilege to travel to Portugal and attend the conference. Therefore, we want to take the opportunity to introduce ourselves, express our gratitude as well as share our individual experiences below.

### Carmen Colclough – Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Sussex, UK

I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to present findings from my PhD work at the EHPS conference. In an oral presentation, I presented evidence that people with dementia may benefit from providing emotional support to others. However, receiving emotional support from their carer may not always be associated with positive outcomes, particularly if the person with dementia does not feel competent. These results highlight the need to empower people with dementia to feel they can have a positive influence on others. The other presentations in the session were relevant to the findings in my presentation, which led to some very useful discussions at the end. Piecing together the findings from other research on peer support and caregiving relationships helped me to develop my ideas for future research. The Lab Series session ‘*Stress and health behaviour: Avenues for future research and collaboration*’ provided an excellent opportunity to sit with others and discuss challenges in conducting research with dyads. The atmosphere at the conference was wonderful. Attendees were well looked after and some great discussions were happening with a coffee and Portuguese custard tart in hand between sessions. I was also excited to see the range of topics presented at the conference. I am currently coming to the end of my current postdoctoral contract and the conference was a fantastic opportunity to attend a wide range of talks to help figure out - what’s next! I left feeling energised and confident that health psychology is for me.

### Dr Rhiannon Hawkes – Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Manchester, UK

I was immensely grateful to receive the conference grant with the opportunity to present a ‘State-of-the-Art’ presentation on a programme of work evaluating fidelity of the behaviour change content in the National Health Service Diabetes Prevention Programme in England, which formed my PhD. My presentation reflected on the value that health psychology and behavioural science can have in these nationally implemented programmes to achieve behaviour change at scale. It was an exciting opportunity to share the learnings from this programme of work with a large international audience, and I was encouraged by the engaging questions and feedback after my talk.

I enjoyed the variety of sessions on offer in the EHPS programme; the only limitation was that so many interesting sessions were happening in parallel. The symposium entitled ‘*Applications of the Behaviour Change Intervention Ontology in health psychology research: case studies and reflections*’ was particularly useful for me, as my recent work evaluating type 2 diabetes policy programmes has involved describing the behaviour change components in these programmes. I appreciated learning from the concrete examples on how the Behaviour Change Intervention Ontology can be retrospectively applied to published intervention descriptions, and look forward to using these ontologies in my future work. Another memorable session was the roundtable on ‘*Applying health psychology in non-academic settings: opportunities, benefits and challenges*’. Presenters (who had worked in both academia and non-academia) discussed conducting research in these two settings, including the differences in timelines, ethical

approvals, and funding. These are challenges I've encountered in my own work with policy makers and service providers of health programmes; it was useful to reflect on ways to manage expectations of all parties when collaborating on projects. I'm looking forward to continuing my involvement with the EHPS community over the coming years.

### David Healy – Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Galway, Ireland

I am a Postdoctoral researcher currently working on a project that aims to integrate considerations for health inequalities into the Irish National Inpatient Experience Survey. During EHPS 2024, I co-facilitated the lab series entitled: “promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in health psychology research: development of a practical guide”. Attendees discussed in groups their experiences with EDI throughout the research process, sharing challenges they have faced in incorporating such principles into Health Psychology research, as well as suggestions for what could make Health Psychology research more inclusive. The planned output of this lab series will be a White Paper that collates all of the insights shared by attendees, to provide recommendations for how to increase equality, diversity, and inclusion in Health Psychology research. Preparing this lab series and discussing EDI in Health Psychology with other EHPS delegates offered me the opportunity to engage with other like-minded researchers in the field of health inequalities, through which I gathered insights that will help direct my current research in health inequalities. I also presented a poster as part of a previous project I worked on in the area of diabetes audit and feedback. This poster reported preliminary findings from a rapid review which aimed to identify design considerations for diabetes audit and feedback in general practice. Having the opportunity to attend the EHPS 2024 conference enabled me to learn more about the research being conducted on my research topic, as well as learning more about potential future directions of Health Psychology, such as greater focus on participatory approaches in health research and important questions regarding the future of qualitative and quantitative measurement and analysis in the field. I look forward to continuing to engage with the EHPS in the years to come.

### Dr Tomasz Moschko – Postdoctoral researcher, University of Tübingen, Germany

During the EHPS 2024 conference, I was able to present results from a study on self-regulation in close relationships. I conducted this study during my PhD at the University of Tübingen, which I successfully finished only a few weeks before arriving in Cascais. The study implemented an intensive longitudinal design tracking couples' self-regulation, well-being, and relationship quality across 21 study days. Results revealed that typically, high levels in both partners' self-regulation predicts higher well-being and relationship quality. However, partners reported to feel closest on days they reported similar (high OR low) levels of self-regulation. I particularly benefited from discussing these findings during my talk, as I am currently in preparation to submit these results for publication. Moreover, I enjoyed the vast amount of sessions on social relationships and health during the EHPS 2024 conference and was thrilled to meet and talk to all the leading experts in this field. After joining the “EHPS family” during the EHPS 2023 conference in Bremen, I was very excited to travel to Cascais and my participation in the EHPS 2024 conference met all my expectations again. Beyond the high quality and great diversity of research talks, I was impressed by the amicable atmosphere at the conference - which was hugely supported by the possibility to spend the breaks in between sessions at the beach. For me, one of the social highlights was definitely the Conference Dinner in the stunning casino venue, which also was a perfect opportunity to celebrate finishing my PhD alongside the people that supported me throughout this journey. Still singing along to the conference band's hit song “EHPS”, I am already looking forward to this year's conference in Groningen.

### Dr Lauren Rockliffe – Health Psychologist, Everyone Health

I am a Practitioner Health Psychologist, working in a Tier 3 weight management service in the private sector. I was delighted to be awarded a conference grant to attend EHPS 2024 and to be afforded the opportunity to present a work-in-progress poster about evaluating the acceptability of an online behaviour change intervention for Tier 3 adult weight management patients. This was a valuable opportunity for me to share how health psychology can be embedded within private healthcare services, and the approaches utilised to deliver and refine psychological support in this context.

Working in the private sector, I have limited opportunities to connect with those working in academia, so attending EHPS allowed me to network with academics working in the areas of eating behaviour, physical activity, and weight management. I also learnt about new research and alternative approaches that may help to enhance the delivery of health psychology support within our weight management service. I found the symposium on multisensory body perceptions and eating behaviour particularly interesting, as well as the various presentations focusing on the relationship between stress and eating behaviour. This is something that affects many of the patients I work with, so it was helpful to gain an enhanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

Overall, I felt that the conference was a great success and am very grateful to have been able to attend. Attending EHPS 2024 reinforced the importance of continuous learning and collaboration in enhancing healthcare delivery and improving patient outcomes in the area of weight management.

### Caitlin Sorrell – PhD student, University of Nottingham, UK

The generous funding from the EHPS bursary enabled me to attend EHPS for the first time. I welcomed the opportunity to present findings from my PhD as part of the oral session on new frontiers in digital health. My presentation outlined my feasibility study for a randomised control trial (RCT) on the effects of engagement with a dental anxiety Online Support Group (OSG). Both qualitative and quantitative data presented during the session indicated that both the measures and the intervention were acceptable to participants. The presentation concluded that a fully powered RCT was both feasible and required to add further weight to promising early findings. Questions from the audience indicated that the attrition rate for the intervention, which was significantly lower than anticipated (7.5% vs 33%) was of particular interest.

The conference provided thought-provoking presentations on a broad range of topics, and perhaps none more so than the keynote speech by Paschal Sheeran which urged us not to accept without challenge some of our academic conventions. It made me reconsider

the “medium to large effect size” I had presented just a few hours earlier! In addition to the official content, the value of events such as these is in the connections made and the lively discussions over coffee. The conference dinner in particular enabled me to connect with colleagues from Wales and Australia and compare the different contexts in which we practice health psychology.

To put attendees in the right mindset to absorb the wealth of information presented, the conference organisers were kind enough to ensure a fantastic venue, beautiful setting, broad sunshine and stunning Portuguese cuisine. Many delegates, myself included, no doubt travelled home with a Fado tune in their hearts, looking forward to Groningen 2025.

### Alexandra Šurinová – PhD student, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia

As part of my studies, I research the discourses which have emerged within the Slovak population regarding COVID-19 vaccination and how, or whether at all, they are related to the perception of vaccination against MMR and HPV.

The EHPS 2024 conference in Cascais was the first I got to experience as a direct participant. I had high expectations, as I had previously attended an EHPS conference as a volunteer, but the EHPS 2024 conference surpassed even those. I was pleasantly surprised by the conversations and interest during the presentation of my poster, which provided me with many ideas, insights, and recommended sources. I am truly grateful for the valuable discourses with all the discussants. Naturally, as a participant, I was most interested in the presentations related to the topic of my research and the invited keynotes, which featured high-quality lectures. I particularly appreciated the symposium dedicated to the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic research, which offered insights on how to better prepare for potential pandemic outbreaks in future. In addition, the conference featured many other interesting topics that are not within my academical merit. Here, I would highlight the presentations on surf therapy or sustainable transport – the latter being the main theme of the conference. It was nice to see the recognition of participants who chose eco-friendly transportation for the EHPS 2024 conference, emphasising the importance of this topic. For this, I would like to commend the organisers. Finally, I cannot fail to mention all the informal evening gatherings full of pleasant and insightful conversations, demonstrating the strength and beauty of the EHPS community. The icing on the cake was the fact that all of this took place in beautiful Estoril, which offered stunning beaches just a short walk from the conference venue – making for a spectacular sightseeing during our breaks.

### Dr Victoria Woof – Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Manchester, UK

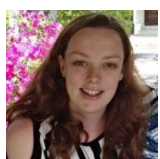
As my PhD thesis was due for submission prior to the conference, it was unclear whether I would have funding to attend EHPS in Cascais, despite having an abstract accepted for oral presentation. I was therefore incredibly grateful to receive the EHPS Conference Grant, which enabled me to present research from my PhD. The study I presented explored how women attending a Family History Risk and Prevention Clinic in the UK experience changes in their clinically-derived breast cancer risk estimates. Despite presenting on the Friday morning (after the conference dinner), my talk was well attended, and the questions I received provided valuable feedback and discussions, which I reflected on in my PhD Viva, two weeks after the conference.

The EHPS programme of the EHPS 2024 conference was packed with exciting sessions aligned with my research interests. In particular, the symposium “Participatory and co-creation approaches: Their role in sustaining women’s health” was highly relevant to my current work. Additionally, the Thursday session, “Risk perception and communication,” contributed valuable insights, as my PhD research focused on breast cancer risk appraisals and communication. I also benefited from networking with colleagues in the ‘EHPS family,’ particularly engaging in discussions about co-design and conducting research with underserved communities—discussions were helpful for my new role as Research Associate.

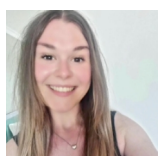
Having attended EHPS in Bratislava in 2022, I was excited for the 2024 conference in Cascais, and it certainly did not disappoint. I was impressed by the organisation and the friendly atmosphere. Socialising at the welcome drinks reception, during breaks, and at the conference dinner provided much-needed downtime from the day’s academic activities. EHPS is, in my opinion, one of the best conferences for Early Career Researchers, offering opportunities to learn from others at various stages in their careers in an inclusive and welcoming environment. I look forward to attending future EHPS conferences.

### In conclusion. . . .

Attending the EHPS 2024 conference has allowed us to learn about all the novel research being conducted in the field, meet new colleagues and catch up with friends. Of note was how friendly the EHPS community is; there was always someone to talk to during the coffee and lunch breaks which helped form connections in a more informal way. Also, with the conference being held in Cascais, exploring the beautiful coastline in the evenings was a great way to wind down after a busy day at the conference. We would like to express a huge thank you to the EHPS Grants Committee for this great opportunity. Thanks are also owed to the organizing committee for ensuring the smooth running of the conference, allowing us, as well as all other delegates, to relax and focus on absorbing as much information as possible. Finally, we also want to thank all workshop organizers, presenters and attendees of the conference for making it such an informative and unforgettable experience. We are all looking forward to attending EHPS 2025 in Groningen!



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