Introducing the Winners
of the Health Section's Presentation Awards from CPA 2022

By Ryan Hoggan (Calgary)

As we rush to get in our abstracts for the upcoming CPA convention in Toronto, let's take a moment to read about some of the amazing work our Section members presented at the 2022 CPA convention in Calgary. These award winners are up to great things!

Best Oral Presentation: Gilla Shapiro, PhD

Presentation Title: The impact of introducing publicly funded school-based immunization programs for boys on human papillomavirus vaccination

About myself:
I am a Psychologist and Clinician-Scientist at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre at the University Health Network. I completed a PhD in clinical and health psychology at McGill University and a dual-degree MPA/MPP at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Hertie School of Governance. My interests include improving mental health, understanding health behaviour including vaccine decision making, examining the social determinants of health, and promoting health equity, access, and inclusion in diverse populations.

Gilla Shapiro, PhD

About my research:
The research presented at CPA was based on data collected at McGill University during my PhD. My collaborators on this work (and co-authors on the resulting manuscript) are Ovidiu Tatar, Bärbel Knäuper, Gabrielle Griffin-Mathieu, and Zeev Rosberger. This study reports on a longitudinal natural experiment in Canada where the implementation of publicly funded HPV vaccination programs unfolded differently across the ten Canadian provinces. We surveyed parents at two times points (in 2016 and 2017) separated by nine months to examine the impact of introducing publicly funded school-based HPV vaccination programs for boys while concurrently examining important sociodemographic and psychosocial factors. Access the full publication.

What's next:
My research on vaccines and health behaviour has two focuses. I plan to continue to develop and refine measurement tools with a specific focus on their use in Canada and its diverse populations. I also plan to continue to investigate the behavioural and social drivers of vaccination by exploring a wider range of modifiable determinants, enabling interventions, and systematic barriers.

Presentation Award Winners from CPA 2022

Best Poster: Brandon Benchimol-Elkaim, MA

Presentation Title: Parent-reported barriers to children wearing masks in school

About myself:
I'm currently a first-year PhD student in Counselling Psychology at McGill University in Montreal. When the pandemic first started, I took an interest in the motivations people had for and against following public health directives. I collaborated with researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Calgary to investigate motivations for social distancing, wearing masks, and most recently reasons for and against receiving treatment for COVID-19.

Brandon Benchimol-Elkaim, MA

About my research:
My poster at the conference focused on parent-reported barriers to children wearing masks in school. When we conducted the study, only children over 12 were eligible to be vaccinated, thus masking remained the most accepted and accessible tool to mitigate transmission of the virus in schools. However, we saw heated debates take place regarding the implementation of mask mandates in schools. We surveyed parents from Canada and the United States about their children wearing masks in school. Parents reported five main barriers to children wearing masks in school. Parents were concerned about the negative impact of masks on children's health, and the logistical challenges to implementing mask mandates in schools. They also believed that mask-wearing is not age or developmentally appropriate for kids and that it would interfere with the learning process. They also had misconceptions about masks.

What's next:
Conducting pandemic-related research was more of a passion project but my main graduate research focuses on conducting clinically focused research that can eventually be applied at the point of care. For my PhD, I am investigating whether mindfulness nature-based training using virtual reality is acceptable and performs better than the standard of care in improving pediatric patients' preoperative anxiety. I am co-supervised by Dr. Bassam El-Khoury (McGill Mindfulness Research Lab) and Dr. Argerie Tsimicalis (McGill Ingram School of Nursing and Shriners Hospital for Children). In addition to my research work, I am looking forward to my first doctoral internship next year as I work to complete my training to become a licensed psychologist in Quebec.

Best Poster: Catherine Lowe, MSc

Presentation Title: Canadian's social connections during the COVID-19 pandemic: A thematic analysis

About myself:
I am currently a second-year MSc student at the University of Calgary in the School and Applied Child Psychology program. I am in the unique position of receiving mentorship under the guidance of two expert supervisors, taking an interdisciplinary approach to research on developmental pathways of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as a part of my thesis work alongside my training as a clinician.

Catherine Lowe, MSc

When I am not working on my research, training, or coursework, I am also a mom to three busy children – so you can typically find me working from various sporting center bleachers and school parking lots waiting to drive one of my kids to their next activity! I finished my BA in psychology at Athabasca University in 2021, where I was given the opportunity to participate in a research lab looking at mental health during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic under the mentorship of Dr. Kharah Ross. In this research lab, I was able to explore the trajectories of mental health outcomes over time during the first nine months of the pandemic, the role of communication technology as a moderator, as well as the impact on social connections for Canadians during the pandemic.

About my research:
The work I presented at CPA was based on an article that was later published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (https://doi.org/10.1177/0254075221113365), stemming from my work under Dr. Kharah Ross. In this study, we analyzed unrestricted responses to how participating in social distancing or self-isolation during the pandemic impacted their social connections as well as what changes occurred to how they connected socially with friends and family. Uniquely, this work applied a thematic analysis for three distinct time points, giving insight into the effects on social connections, but also how these impacts changed over time, spanning nine months. What we found was that those that were participating in social distancing, or self-isolation during the pandemic, largely reported a negative impact on their social connections (37-45% of responses in each epoch), that loss of social connections was a predominant outcome reported (32-36% of responses in each epoch), but also that Canadians frequently opted into an alternative means of connection, such as using communication technology (26-32%). An interesting trend was that reports of decreased contact and communication nearly doubled into the fall and winter of 2020 compared to earlier points in the pandemic from April to August 2020, paralleling

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the re-implementation of public health restrictions across the country. This work indicated that pandemic-related public health responses had a negative impact on social connections broadly and point to areas to target to mitigate social connection disruption for future pandemics and public health responses.

I am particularly proud of this work, as it allowed us to have insight into how the pandemic disrupted social connections, but also what that disruption meant to the individuals affected, bringing meaning and impact to the population studied. Although we had our subjective experience to draw from as researchers who were also living through the pandemic, it was truly amazing to see the breadth of topics discussed as well as the general themes and trends in those themes as the pandemic progressed, something that qualitative research does an excellent job at capturing.

What's next:
Currently, I am continuing to work on the COVID-19 and mental health project to better understand how the pandemic impacted Canadians over the initial nine months, which we hope will provide valuable knowledge to direct future pandemic-related public health responses and buffer adverse effects captured. Additionally, I am in the process of finishing my MSc this coming summer and am currently applying for admittance to a PhD program in School and Applied Child Psychology at the University of Calgary. I hope to carry forward what I have learned through my work on social connections during the pandemic and take a holistic and ecological approach to my future research endeavors. It was a wonderful experience to participate in the 2022 CPA conference, and I'm looking forward to 2023!