

APH Travel Grant: Arne van den End, PhD Candidate, Amsterdam UMC (Location: VUmc)

European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies 2023 (ESTSS23), June 14-17, Belfast, Northern Ireland

I received an APH travel grant to visit ESTSS23, which took place in Belfast. As a dad, PhD candidate, and psychologist in Dutch mental health care, most of my time in the past five years has been dedicated to work and parenting. It dawned on me that my visit to Belfast was the first time in years that I traveled alone to a foreign city for multiple days.

My research focuses on the treatment effects of PTSD treatments, particularly in cases involving comorbidity with personality disorders. ESTSS provides a platform to share new, cutting-edge, and mostly unpublished work on the effects of PTSD treatments. It was a perfect match!

Here are some key take-home messages from the presentations I attended:

- Patient preference is a predictor of better PTSD treatment responses, with psychotherapy being the preferred choice over medication.
- Machine learning models that identify predictors of PTSD treatment outcomes show that pre-treatment PTSD severity indicators can predict rates of symptom change.
- Few trained professionals offer evidence-based PTSD treatment for youth, mainly due to (unsubstantiated!) concerns about patient readiness.
- The prevalence and phenomenology of self-harm behavior indicate an increase in severity and suicidal intent over time.
- Ecological Momentary Sampling methods demonstrate that sleep disturbances are predictive of next-day PTSD symptoms.

Dr. Soraya Seedat's keynote on task-shifting delivery approaches, aimed at providing evidence-based interventions by laypersons to disadvantaged communities, was a humbling example of the tremendous efforts made to treat trauma-related distress in South Africa where interventions are desperately needed.

Another keynote I attended was by John Briere, discussing the posttraumatic effects of repeated exposure to sexism, racism, and anti-LGBTQ+ experiences. This opened up a discussion on the status of a defined A-criterion as a necessary condition for diagnosing PTSD.

I also presented my own research at the conference through a poster presentation. Over the past five years, we conducted a randomized controlled trial comparing stand-alone trauma-focused treatment with and without personality disorder treatment in patients with comorbid PTSD and personality disorders. I enjoyed engaging with the international community and receiving valuable feedback on our results.

I would like to express my gratitude to APH for providing the travel grant that enabled me to have this highly interesting conference experience!