

Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission¹

Action number: CA18124

Grantee name: Alma Brand

Details of the STSM

Title: The pelvic floor, Sexual health, and Distress

Start and end date: 03/09/2022 to 14/09/2022

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

The purpose of this mission was to learn more about Sophie Bergeron's laboratory and the other researchers' views on the involvement of the pelvic floor in sexual health and dysfunction in women. I was interested if they included pelvic floor muscle function and problems in their research. I learned that this involvement is found important, but that they lack knowledge about the topic. Pelvic floor function and related problems remain undiscussed in their training to become psychologists/sexologists. During their education, they are trained to do clinical psychological work and couples therapy besides their education and research. The University has an actual treatment department in which the students can be monitored through one-way see-through windows. Due to their lack of knowledge about the pelvic floor, this aspect of sexual functioning is not (often) included in studies, which therefore have a predominantly psychological/sexual/relational character. Sophie has some knowledge about the pelvic floor because she has collaborated with a pelvic physical therapist in the past to study vulvodynia and acknowledges its importance and the lack of knowledge. She is open to collaborating with others to increase the impact of the research they do. Sophie's interests have shifted more to low sexual desire and dyadic aspects in relationships that affect sexual health in couples.

I was given the opportunity to present my research topic, which was received with great interest. The questions afterward included several ones on pelvic floor function, especially related to sexual functioning. I loved how the team members were interested and prepared to think about the questions I had about some aspects of my study. This gave me, and the others new ideas on how to address sexual health and function in the light of our topics of interest.

In addition, I wanted to gain more insight into their research methodology. I learned about the challenges and advantages of working in a team. I learned that much can be accomplished with scholarships, a research budget, an actual research coordinator, research assistants, and a team member focussing on recruitment and publicity on social media. It was an experience in itself to see how splitting tasks and sharing responsibilities offer great opportunities, and chances to discuss research issues, ask questions,

¹ This report is submitted by the grantee to the Action MC for approval and for claiming payment of the awarded grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation of this report on behalf of the Action MC and instructs the GH for payment of the Grant.

learn from each other, and help and support each other. It was nice to be an 'additional' team member for a short time, and exchange ideas about data analysis and topics included and related to our studies.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to visit a short symposium "La santé sexuelle et amoureuse aujourd'hui" given by Sophie Bergeron, Marie-Ève Daspe, and Katherine Péloquin. The sexual health of adolescents, young adults, and couples was discussed and presented in this symposium.

Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities

My main achievements are:

- Extending my research network and getting to know wonderful, skilled, enthusiastic researchers in Canada. I hope that we meet again.
- Noticing a lack of knowledge on pelvic floor muscle function and problems in psychology/sexology all over the world, just as there appears to be a lack of psychology/sexology knowledge in pelvic physical therapy practice. It would be beneficial to integrate the topics more in the light of sexual and pelvic health. I shared my patient information booklet with them.
- Gaining insight into the benefits of working in a team. The biggest challenge is smoothly coordinating the team and studies. This is a time-consuming task. It makes me feel proud of all the work I do alone with the guidance of my supervisors.
- Learning more about different ways of recruitment and data collection methods, including the use of social media. The team has assistants who recruit participants in schools and have them fill out online surveys on an iPad on the spot, besides advertising/promoting studies on the internet to motivate people to participate. The fact that they can "pay" participants for participation motivates and positively stimulates long-term participation. Having one team member who solely focuses on social media, another time-consuming task is a valuable addition to their laboratory.
- Learning how to set up (paid) adverts on Facebook for recruitment. I love the creativity involved in this and recently published a paid advert for my research/recruitment on Facebook.
- Learning that the laboratory is an office.
- There are clinical rooms on other premises of the university (which I did not visit) where they are going to start a study on couples and how one partner can reduce stress/cortisol in the other based on relationship aspects. They will perform physical measurements in the lab. So, although the main scope of the research there is mainly psychological, there are also some somatic aspects.
- Gaining insight into their data collection methods and analysis programs. They mainly use Qualtrics and SPSS and mentioned the Meaning Extraction Method for qualitative data analysis after my presentation. I may want to try this myself.
- The possibility for future collaboration with the laboratory. Several students have expressed being open to discussing further questions, and a wish/option for future collaboration. So far, no explicit plans are made, because of their and my current activities. I am going to keep in touch with them, hoping and looking forward to learning more and working with them in the future. We will exchange some recent and future publications (AO. psychometric studies). I am pleased to know I can always reach out with questions if there are any. I hope they will not hesitate to ask me any questions they have.