



Conference report

The 12th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, Tampere, Finland

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The biennial World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion hosts a range of oral and poster presentations on numerous disciplines, including: epidemiology, preventive medicine, public health, social and behavioural sciences, as well as social and economic medicine. In 2016, the 12th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion was held in Tampere, Finland between 18 and 21 September. The conference was hosted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare, co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), and supported by the Government of Finland and Bloomberg Philanthropies. The conference theme “from research to implementation” emphasised the importance of connecting knowledge around violence with injury prevention, while stressing the need to address the multitude of transnational public health challenges. In speaking to this theme, the Tampere Declaration - that is, the key conference outcome - expresses a commitment to global injury prevention and safety promotion.

Over four days the conference hosted 1000 presentations with delegates representing over 100 countries. This internationalism was made possible largely through conference scholarships that were awarded to apparent deserving candidates, who otherwise may not have had access to the financial resources necessary to attend such an event. Despite an overrepresentation of European delegates, the scholarships ensured attendance from delegates who live and work in the Global South.

The first day facilitated what were called “pre-conference sessions” which included various workshops and lectures. I attended a stellar methodology workshop, convened by Shrikant Bangdiwala and Shankar Viswanathan, entitled “From Evaluated Research to Sustainable Implementation”. The workshop saw a spirited and participatory form of co-learning, whereby each attendee discussed various challenges and successes that had been encountered during his or her work. Difficulties around sustainable implementation were addressed in an honest and nuanced manner, leaving me with a sense of trouble regarding the feasibility of sustaining participatory research within community settings.

From the second day, the conference proceedings included plenary sessions, parallel oral sessions - each of which was organised thematically - and poster presentations. An especially engaging plenary session was delivered by Alexander Butchart from WHO. His experience of working with interpersonal violence within an African context made for a fascinating presentation. Regarding the oral presentations, the two that - for me - were especially captivating were Rabbya Ashrafi’s “Community Crèche as a Measure to Prevent Child Injuries” and Ashley Martin’s “The Safer Homes Programme”.

The oral sessions were interspersed with what were called “state of the art sessions”, which showcased work that was somewhat less conventional than that which characterised the oral presentations. For me, an outstanding state of the art session was entitled “Innovative Approaches to Capacity Development

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for Injury Prevention in Low- and Middle-income Countries”. The session’s foci on pedagogy and technology-based interventions as ways by which to address injury prevention presented me with an interesting set of considerations for my own community-based work on child safety.

Despite the exciting and wonderfully insightful discussions that took place at the conference, there was - for me - a striking dearth of criticality on the part of delegates with respect to their work. Indeed it seemed that reflexivity, issues around transformation, and epistemological shortcomings were largely ignored across the various presentations. This lack of critical engagement was perhaps best illustrated by the plenary video address delivered by Michael Bloomberg, CEO of Bloomberg L.P. and one of the wealthiest people alive. Bloomberg is WHO Global Ambassador for Non-communicable Diseases as well as the founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies, one of the conference’s key financial supporters. It is an unsettling and strange experience to (at an international conference on safety) listen to a former Republican mayor responsible for New York’s racially-prejudice ‘stop and frisk’ tactics, who presents a well-documented history of misogynistic comments, has received various lawsuits concerning sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination within his company and is, more generally, indicative of ruthless neoliberal capitalist violence, speaking on safety as a global imperative.

It should be said that I am well aware of the central role that corporate funding plays in hosting conferences, especially those that are relatively large-scale. I am also aware of the veil of human rights concerns under which Big Business frequently operates as a means of distracting, justifying and/or mistranslating the myriad injustices that are committed when advancing the capitalist doctrine. However for Bloomberg, a man who represents violence for so many, to be given a platform of this nature that went entirely unchallenged was, for me, disappointing.

The 12th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion hosted numerous engaging and lively discussions. The impressively diverse programme was, organisationally, a triumph with almost no cancellations and every session kept to time. Personally, the conference ignited my own enthusiasm around transnational work on safety. Further, and perhaps most crucially, the conference served as a reminder of the tremendously important (and immensely difficult) task of enacting a critical agenda within a system of global capitalism.

