

Society for the Society of Addiction (SSA) Travelling Scholarship Report

January – April 2018

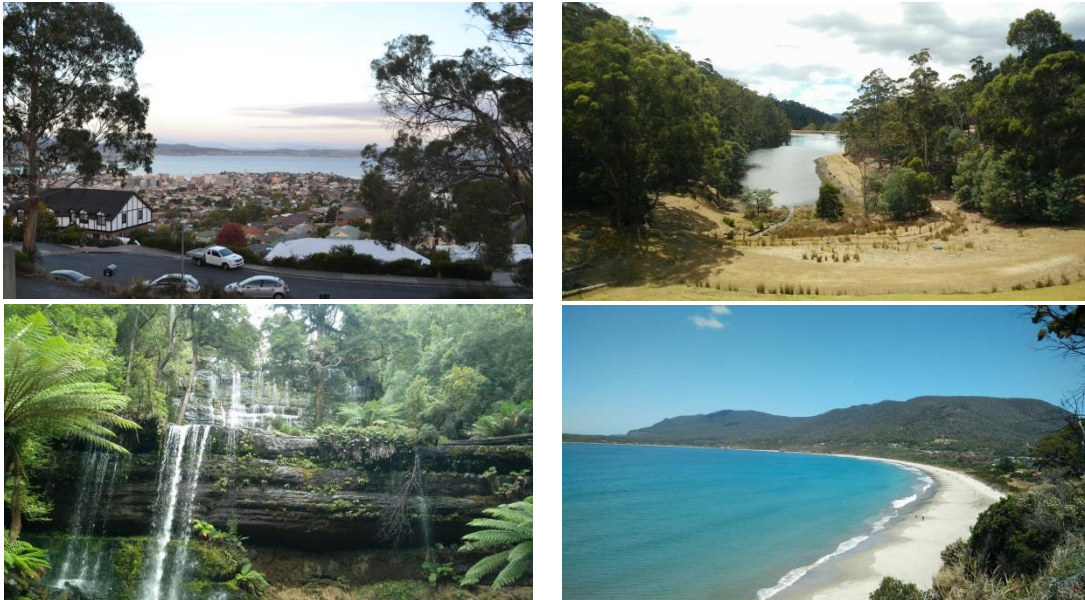
Katherine East (Addictions Department, Kings College London)

I was awarded the SSA's Travelling Scholarship in November 2017 to visit three research institutions between January and April 2018: The University of Tasmania (UTAS, Hobart), Cancer Council Victoria (Melbourne), and The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC, Sydney). Mid-way through my time at UTAS, I also attended the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco's (SRNT) Annual Meeting in Baltimore to present in a symposium. I also visited The University of Queensland (Brisbane) for one day at the end of my trip.

I am currently in the second year of my PhD, which aims to develop and test measures of social norms towards smoking and e-cigarettes. As part of this, I am working with data from national and international surveys, including data from Australia. The overarching aims of my trip were therefore to meet and work with different research groups; to learn and implement new data analysis techniques; to gain insight into nicotine/tobacco and addictions policies and regulations in Australia; to discover opportunities for future work and collaborations; and to present my own work and gain feedback from researchers with knowledge of smoking and e-cigarettes under different regulatory environments.



The University of Tasmania (UTAS), Hobart (4th January – 1st April 2018)



The first portion of my research trip was spent with the Behavioural and Situational Research Group (BSRG) at UTAS, hosted by Associate Professor Stuart Ferguson and two of his PhD students: Tina Jahnel and Katherine Elliston. Associate Professor Ferguson and his team specialise in health-related behaviour change including exploring the process and drivers of addictive behaviours using sophisticated, real-time, real-world data across multiple occasions (Ecological Momentary Assessment, EMA).

EMA is a relatively novel research method which has gained popularity in the field of nicotine/tobacco research in recent years. Specifically, there have been some discussions around whether social norms may change on a moment-by-moment basis and whether it would be appropriate to measure them using EMA methods. Therefore spending time with a research group with a heavy focus on this methodology and research interests which closely aligned with my PhD has had important benefits.

The specific aims of my visit to UTAS were to (i) meet and work with the BSRG to learn about the work they are conducting, specifically EMA methodology and associated analyses, (ii) collaborate with BSRG researchers on new projects, and (iii) present my own work and gain feedback.

Aim (i) meet and work with the BSRG to learn about the work they are conducting, specifically EMA methodology and associated analyses

I met with Associate Professor Ferguson and the BSRG group weekly, which allowed me to gain an overview of current work and future projects and provided me with insight into how EMA studies are conducted, and challenges associated with the methodology. I have also learned about how EMA may be used to study drivers of behaviour change across multiple time points, and how data generated from EMA studies may be analysed (e.g. mediation models and AUC-ROC analyses). I have since been working on my own paper involving secondary analysis of EMA data. As part of my time here, I also observed and assisted Katherine Elliston in testing participants for her EMA study, for which I plan to analyse a subset

of the data once collection is complete. Through discussions with the group, I have also learned about the potential role of in-the-moment social context on smoking behaviour and how this may be assessed.

To immerse myself fully in EMA, I also volunteered as a participant in one of the BSRG's studies. For this, I was required to record all food and drink intake while wearing a SCRAM (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) bracelet to measure transdermal alcohol levels during a four day music festival. This was a novel and interesting experience which provided insights into the benefits and pitfalls of EMA methodology from a participant's perspective; and how to use cutting-edge technology to facilitate data collection from multiple sources to build a better picture of substance use.



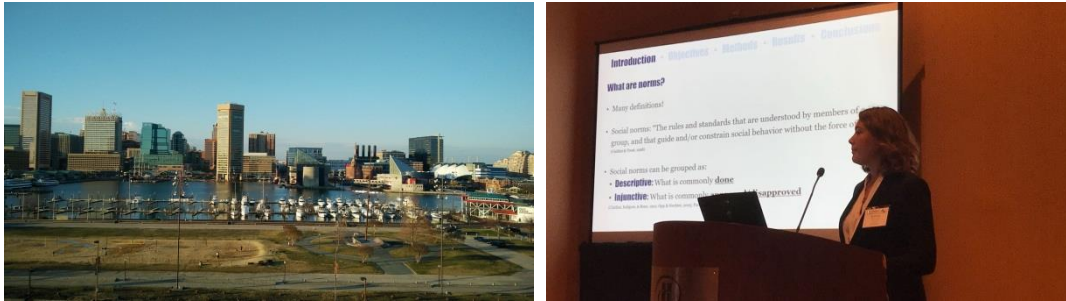
Aim (ii) collaborate with BSRG researchers on new projects

My time with the BSRG has led to collaborations on three projects: (1) Katherine Elliston's EMA study, for which I assisted in testing participants and will analyse a subset of the data once data collection is complete, (2) Leading a project involving secondary analysis of an EMA dataset to assess drivers of lapse to smoking, and (3) Leading a project assessing trends in social norms over time using data from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation (ITC) Project. The latter project also involves collaboration with Professor Ron Borland from Cancer Council Victoria, who I also visited as part of this research trip (see below). Potential future projects exploring whether social norms change on a moment-by-moment basis were also discussed with the team. I also worked directly with Tina Jahnel and Associate Professor Ferguson to organise and prepare for the symposium for the SRNT 2018 Annual Meeting in Baltimore.

Aim (iii) present my own work and gain feedback

I presented work from my PhD at several of the BSRG weekly meetings, specifically a presentation titled "The Association Between Norms and Smoking Uptake Among Youth: A Systematic Review", in preparation for the SRNT Annual Meeting in Baltimore. This provided me with feedback from the team on my presentation and communication skills, as well as different perspectives on the results obtained. I also discussed my findings from the ITC Project, which includes data from Australia; such discussions were invaluable and provided me with insights into why the results may have emerged, based on understanding of different tobacco control policies in Australia and other countries.

Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) Annual Meeting, Baltimore (21st – 24th February 2018)



Mid-way through my time at UTAS, I flew to Baltimore to attend the SRNT 2018 Annual Meeting with the aim of presenting at a symposium I had organised on social norms. The symposium included two papers from my PhD: the first titled “The Association Between Norms and Smoking Uptake Among Youth: A Systematic Review” (presented by me), the second titled: “Social Norms Towards Smoking in 2002 and 2013/15 Among Daily Smokers: Findings from The International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Survey” (presented by Professor Ron Borland). This symposium was conducted with Tina Jahnel and Associate Professor Stuart Ferguson (UTAS), Professor Ron Borland (Cancer Council Victoria), and Professor Jim Thrasher (University of South Carolina). I had been working directly with Tina Jahnel and Associate Professor Ferguson to organise and prepare for this during my time with the BSRG.

The symposium went well, and presenting alongside prominent researchers in the field of nicotine and tobacco research was a fantastic opportunity to raise my research profile. My presentation titled “The Association Between Norms and Smoking Uptake Among Youth: A Systematic Review” allowed me to disseminate findings from the first chapter of my PhD, and also to share new measures of social norms towards smoking and e-cigarettes so that they may be included in future surveys. Professor Borland’s presentation titled “Social Norms Towards Smoking in 2002 and 2013/15 Among Daily Smokers: Findings from The International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Survey” allowed for dissemination of findings from the final chapter of my PhD. The symposium allowed for interesting discussions with the audience surrounding social norms as a concept, how they may be measured, and potential explanations for the results presented. This led to international perspectives on the data, and the ideas which emerged will be invaluable when writing up this paper and my PhD. More broadly, the Annual Meeting allowed me to broaden my knowledge of current research and to meet and network with specialists in the field of nicotine and tobacco.

Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne (2nd – 6th April 2018)



The second portion of my research trip involved a week with Cancer Council Victoria's Tobacco Control Research Team, hosted by Professor Ron Borland, the Nigel Gray Distinguished Fellow in Cancer Prevention. Professor Borland is one of the Principal Investigators of the ITC Project: an international research program for the systematic evaluation of key policies of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) at the population level. The ITC Project is conducting longitudinal cohort surveys in 29 countries and includes over 150 tobacco control collaborators. As stated above, as part of my PhD I have been leading a project looking at trends in social norms over time, using data from the ITC Four Country Project (UK, Australia, Canada, US); therefore this visit was conducive to my PhD.

The specific aims of my visit to Cancer Council Victoria were to (i) meet and work with Professor Borland and his team to learn more about the work they are conducting, and (ii) discuss and write up the paper on trends in social norms between 2002 and 2013/15 in the UK, Australia, Canada and the US.

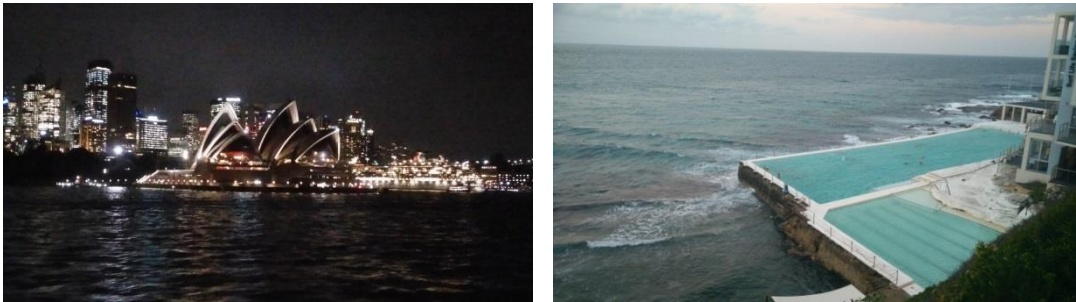
Aim (i) meet and work with Professor Borland and his team to learn more about the work they are conducting

I met with Professor Borland to discuss his work, including the ITC Project, behaviour change and CEOS (Context, Executive, and Operational Systems) theory, QuitCoach, and e-cigarettes. As Professor Borland was involved in developing the ITC Four Country survey, speaking with him was a fantastic opportunity to understand more about its conception and development. I subsequently met with Dr Lin Li to learn about managing trials and his involvement with the ITC Project China, Four Country, and Southeast Asia surveys. Finally, I met with Dr Hua Yong to discuss statistical approaches for analysing data from the ITC Four Country surveys which I had not considered previously.

Aim (ii) discuss and write up the paper on trends in social norms between 2002 and 2013/15 in the UK, Australia, Canada and the US

Following discussions with Professor Borland and Associate Professor Ferguson (who was also visiting Cancer Council Victoria), the analyses for this paper were finalised, results interpreted, and write up initiated. Due to unexpected findings posing additional research questions, ideas for another paper using the same dataset were deliberated to explore why these findings emerged. Further, through meeting with Dr Yong I learned how to assess and interpret quadratic and cubic trends and interactions in this dataset, which was critical given the nature of the results.

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), Sydney (9th – 13th April 2018)



The third portion of my research trip involved a week at NDARC, an internationally recognised Research Centre of Excellence which conducts research on drug and alcohol use, trends, harms, prevention, treatment and drug policy. Here, I was hosted by Dr Ryan Courtney, a Research Fellow and Lecturer in Health Behaviour whose research specialises in smoking behaviour in disadvantaged populations.

The specific aims of my visit to NDARC were to (i) meet with Dr Courtney and researchers at NDARC to learn more about the work they are conducting, (ii) present and discuss my own research in NDARC's 2018 Seminar Series.

Aim (i) meet with Dr Courtney and researchers at NDARC to learn more about the work they are conducting

I met with Dr Courtney to learn about his experiences running a number of clinical trials, and the challenges associated with them. He provided an overview of three randomised controlled trials he is currently working on: one comparing cytisine (Desmoxan) and varenicline (Champix) for smoking cessation, a second assessing the efficacy of e-cigarettes for smoking relapse prevention, and a third testing the efficacy of reducing financial stress to increase smoking cessation. I subsequently met with PhD students and Research Assistants who were working on these trials, to gain insight into how the trials are run on a daily basis. I also met Professor Michael Farrell (the Director of NDARC), and Professor Alison Ritter, and discussed their work, my PhD, and Australian e-cigarette regulations.

Aim (ii) present my own research in NDARC's 2018 Seminar Series

I was invited to present my research to NDARC as part of their 2018 Seminar Series. My presentation was titled "Social norms towards smoking: Their definition, measurement, and the debated influence of e-cigarettes", which involved all chapters of my PhD so far including data from the ITC Four Country Project. As with the SRNT symposium, this was another fantastic opportunity to open the discussion to the audience, which led to ideas I had not considered previously. Further, it enabled me to gain a holistic picture of my work so far, reflect on its strengths and limitations, and identify areas to be refined.

University of Queensland, Brisbane (23rd April 2018)



While in Brisbane I met with Associate Professor Coral Gartner and her team at The University of Queensland for a day. Associate Professor Gartner is a research fellow with a background in environmental health and environmental epidemiology, whose current primary research field is in the area of tobacco control policy and interventions to reduce tobacco-related harms. As this was a short visit, the aim was simply to meet with Associate Professor Gartner and her team to learn more about the work they are conducting.

First, I met with Associate Professor Gartner, who discussed with me her randomised clinical trial of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation method among smokers living with HIV, hepatitis C and people on opiate substitution therapy. We also discussed some creative approaches for assessing social norms towards smoking and e-cigarettes that will be useful for my PhD. Through attending Associate Professor Gartner's team meeting I learned more about the wide range of projects and research techniques they are involved in, and helped developed a proposal for a project using data from the ITC Four Country Project; this is something we are continuing to collaborate on.

Summary

Overall, this research trip enhanced my skills and knowledge in a number of ways. My time with the BSRG in Tasmania and with Cancer Council Victoria in Melbourne provided me with new research and data analysis skills, and enabled me to work towards at least two peer-reviewed papers and generate ideas for future collaborations. My time with NDARC in Sydney further allowed me to present and discuss my own research and gain insightful feedback. In all institutions, meeting and speaking with academics provided me with insight into latest emerging research in both tobacco control and addictions more broadly.

I am incredibly grateful to Associate Professor Stuart Ferguson, Professor Ron Borland, Dr Ryan Courtney, Associate Professor Coral Gartner and their teams for their hospitality and opportunities they provided. I would also like to thank the SSA for their generosity in funding this trip, and supporting my continuing development as a researcher.