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Emina Hadziosmanovic, BSc Psychology

Emina Hadziosmanovic talks about getting relevant experience to pursue a career in clinical psychology, how her degree has benefited her, and about her work as an outreach worker with individuals who have physical and mental health disabilities.

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Read the transcript

My name is Emina Hadziosmanovic, and I recently graduated from University of Birmingham in July 2009.

[What is your current job?]

For the last 18 months I have been working with a charity in Birmingham, called Bosnia and Herzegovina UK network as an outreach worker with individuals who have physical and mental health disabilities.

[Can you give a brief description of what you did from graduation up until now?]

I graduated in July 2009 and within 3 or 4 months, in September or October 2009, I started my Masters at the University of Oxford. I was at Saint Hughes College, the Masters was in Psychological Research and in the summer I undertook quite a big research project under the supervision of Professor Miles Hewston looking at the effects of war on reconciliation and forgiveness for individuals living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After my masters, I took a year out, working as an outreach worker. This continued a little bit into my PhD. I started my PhD in October 2011 at the University of Nottingham under the supervision of Professor Kevin Brann and Doctor Nigel Hunt. This is also looking at the effects of war, but it's looking at the social, psychological and environmental long term effects of war on individuals that have been externally displaced to the UK with those that have been displaced within Bosnia. Just recently, in July this year, I was awarded a fellowship from the Rain Foundation and the Princess Diana of Wales Memorial Fund to run a therapy project for refugees living in the UK that are suffering from trauma. For this I hope to undertake a new therapy which hasn't ever been done in the United Kingdom for refugees yet and it's called narrative exposure therapy, which I'm really excited about.

[Can you give a brief description of the course you studied and how it benefitted you?]

I studied for a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, which was accredited with registration by the British Psychological Society. For me it was really useful because, prior to the degree, I had never done psychology before, so it provided the building steps or foundations to my career because we covered all of the core subjects. So cognitive psychology, social, developmental, lots of work on research methods and statistics which was really, really helpful especially with the research that I'm doing now. And in the third year, we also had some option modules which were great because they allowed us to see what the real world of psychology was like, outside of university, so we had modules such as clinical psychology or forensic psychology. So that was really useful in getting a taster of the things that we might li9ke to do after university. So it really benefited me, it provided the starting steps for everything that was to come.

[What would be the range of typical starting salaries and potential for progression within your career?]

The job that I'm doing at the moment is only part-time. The typical starting salary, if it was full-time, would probably be around £22,000. For the PhD and in terms of being a researcher later, the starting salary would probably be somewhere between £24,000 and £26,000. But I also think that I might want to go into clinical psychology at some point in the future, so after doing that Doctorate- I think that it falls within band 6- so the starting salary for that would be £26,000 and it can progress to anything up to £60,000 if you are a very experienced consultant psychologist.

[Would you say that the transferrable skills you have taken from your degree have helped you in the world of work?]

I would say that they have definitely, especially the one which relates to communication, because the types of clients that I work with are individuals that have suffered trauma,. For example, so they find it very difficult to articulate their experiences. So having the ability to talk to a wide range of people that have undergone lots of different experiences is really important. And also in terms of disseminating my research to the wider society by attending conferences and things. So not just oral communication, but written communication, I think, is really important and it's something that my degree really helped me to develop.

[What were your reasons for pursuing a career in your chosen field?]

My reasons for wanting to pursue a career in clinical psychology relate to wanting to help individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences, to rebuild their lives and I think this comes from my own experiences of the war in former Yugoslavia; just kind of living with that and growing up with people who have been affected by trauma and by war experiences. I think that, for all psychologists, there has to be some kind of intrinsic, motivational or a desire for wanting to fulfil a particular research interest and for me that was my personal experience.

[What activities did you undertake at university to enhance your chances to get into your chosen career, and with hindsight would you have done anything differently?]

I did some research posts while I was here, but they were only temporary and lasted just a couple of weeks or a couple of months. I think it would have been better if I had have developed a greater range of experiences- all of the experiences I had at university were research based, which is brilliant as it has led to me doing a PhD now, but as I was applying for a clinical doctorate two years ago, I realised that I didn't have any actual clinical experience in terms of therapy or working with patients and I think this is something that I definitely would have developed whilst I was at Birmingham, to just use the contacts that I had made to see whether I could get some kind of clinical placement, or to go into a mental health unit and observe patients and eventually have some kind of minor role maybe, in helping to deliver some form of therapy. This is something that, during my degree, I didn't really think about, so I would definitely change that if I were to go back now.

[If there is such a thing in your profession, could you describe a typical day?]

In the life of an Outreach worker, I think every day is different, because you never know what phone call you'll get from which client, asking for which type of support. On some days, I might get a phone call from members of the family, saying they're really distressed because a close family member has gone into hospital, so I would go to the house of the family member, talk to them and on some occasions I would go and visit the person in hospital to offer support because many of the people who I work with don't speak English. So in a lot of my work I have to translate on a daily basis, from Bosnian into English and vice-versa. So I think there isn't really a typical day for an outreach worker, because some days I could get called to the other side of town or to Coventry, because I am based within the whole of the West Midlands and then there are other days when I'm in the office doing paperwork and I won't get a call at all, so it's really unpredictable.

[Can you outline your likes and dislikes about your job?]

In terms of the job, I absolutely love working with people and just coming away from a client and feeling like I've done something to change something for them, even if it's a minor problem, ju8st so they feel as though someone is listening to them. In terms of dislikes, I would probably have to say all of the paperwork that comes with working with the clients, so having to fill in forms and all of the stuff that takes ages, whereas I would prefer to spend more time with individual clients.

[What are your aspirations for the future?]

My aspirations for the future are to complete the PhD that I'm currently half-way through and then possibly to apply for a post-doctoral study or to apply for a clinical doctorate. I think my ideal job in the future would be one where there's a combination of research and practical experience. So where I can continue researching within the fields of trauma and social relations, but then apply this to a more practical setting, in for example work with giving therapy to patients that have suffered from trauma with the narrative exposure therapy that I'm trying to develop through my fellowship at the moment, so to use my research to implement therapy.

[Do you have any words of wisdom, or advice for anyone looking to get into this type of career?]

I think experience is probably the key; not experience within one area, but within lots of different areas. I realised that, with myself, all of my experience was research-based which is amazing for going down the PhD route, but not necessarily into a clinical doctorate. So to try and get some practical experience as well as research experience while they're doing their degree but, even more than that, I think that just to have the drive and motivation to succeed in what you intend to succeed in. It takes a long time- you won't necessarily get into a masters straight away, or a PhD, or a clinical doctorate; sometimes it takes years and years. Just to keep building your CV as those years are going by.

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