

Short Communication

Impactful messaging with photography for public health collective efforts to ensure our communities are kept healthy and safe

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article*

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INTRODUCTION

Photography is an effective way to succinctly and accurately portray a public health concern or issue. Photography is often utilised in manuscripts with examples being on topics such as climate change, laughter therapy, water and rock jumping safety combined with drowning prevention, cycling safety and motorcyclist helmet safety ^{1,2,3,4,5,6}. In addition YouTubes also are an effective way to create multimedia utilising photography ⁷. Within Australia, the ‘our world in photos’ [photographic stories] is a strengths-based photovoice model to explore and share children’s perspectives on well-being, operational since 2023, being organised by the Curtin University’s

School of Population Health and the Ardyaloon community who have co-developed the project⁸. Research and participatory processes underpin the project and it has resulted in over 200 photographic stories that highlight children's insights thus leading to the development of informed new educational resources. Strategic exhibits include Government House Perth (2024), Rural Health West, Aboriginal Health Conference (2025), and an international debut at St Francis Xavier gallery, Nova Scotia Canada (2026).

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES HEALTHY & SAFE.

The American National Public Health [PH] Week [April 7-13] in 2025 focused on recognizing collective efforts to keep our communities healthy & safe⁹. The theme was 'it starts here', which acknowledged the beginnings, laying a foundation importance and action necessity. Hilton uploaded four photographs from India on poverty and road traffic safety as examples with narrative which were temporarily uploaded to the miscellaneous page on the work website; Deborah Hilton Statistics Online. In due course this page will be deleted. The statement was; I am wanting to collate some ideas around National PH week. Send email me your photograph stating why you selected this, where it was, why is it relevant to PH & how it relates to the theme. It doesn't have to be overseas, but even from your back yard. If you are happy that others view this plus your short description, I will add these to this site including your name & this will create a community forum of ideas. If you are happy with this, I will add the first 10 photos emailed to me to this page. You can also send me comments re; other people's photographs. I will at completion summarize these ideas & without specifying names [in the summary you will be anonymous]. I will create an abstract for submission to a PH Association of Australia conference or conference held elsewhere. I've put four photographs below as examples to view [see below for one example]. Let's get snapping our photos! Thank you for your participation. Twenty-five people were invited to send photographs and the results included 13 photographs from 6 people.



Photograph 1; Road traffic chaos in India as a sample photograph.

The results were that I was emailed 13 photographs from 6 people.

The descriptions of 3 pics were health & safety in relation to electrical hazards where the comments included using the correct mask to save your precious lungs, the important of replacing the damaged cord or that perished rubber plug [one example below].



Photograph 2; Perished rubber plug.

Four photographs related to public safety with respect to walking & sitting in areas where people whom are affected by alcohol may also be. These photographs were of Kentucky Fried Chicken [KFC] 201-203 Bourke St Melbourne. The person whom sent these in stated; 'I know the security man there. The tables and chairs were removed because after 12.00 midnight too many drunken people were hanging around so by removing the tables and chairs the drunken people from night clubs are forced to take their KFC food outside to eat. But it's a hard for people who like me I use a walking stick now not to be able to sit down and eat in store'.



Photograph 3; No tables or chairs.

Two related to safety around large animals and the person I spoke to who said I can use this photograph was working with horses. The event was the Benalla heavy horse driving day where Clydesdales horses were being paraded and judged. The gentleman said that the horses exercise by dragging the tyres in order to physically train. This is to build endurance and strength for when they drag carts, pull carriages along and haul loads. You have to be careful when you hold the long ropes.



Photograph 4; A Clydesdale horse dragging a tyre with someone holding the reins.

One photo related to ponies being good for physical and mental health. Hacking my pony around our local country park is fun for us both. It improves my mental wellbeing, and hers as it keeps her stimulated and it's good for our physical health too! It's also a great way for me to be able to teach her to be sensible and patient when out with the public whilst best of all enjoying ourselves and bonding more at the same time. 'You learn more when you're having fun' - this goes for us both.



Photograph 5; Ponies are good for your health.

Three photographs related to public safety and the Whakaari/White Island [New Zealand's most active explosive volcano] where there was an explosion in 2019 where 22 people were killed. Whakaari/White Island volcano (Photo 6) is located 50km north of Whakatane on the North Island of New Zealand. On the 9th December 2019, 22 people were killed whilst on a tourist guided tour into the crater of the volcano. Another 25 suffered severe to lifelong injuries. It erupts intermittently and often unexpectedly and yet for decades tourists have been allowed to enter the active crater from tourist boats arriving at its shoreline, even though being inside the crater of a highly explosive volcano is the most dangerous place to be. It was inevitable at some time when tourists were on the island that it would erupt explosively & lethally.

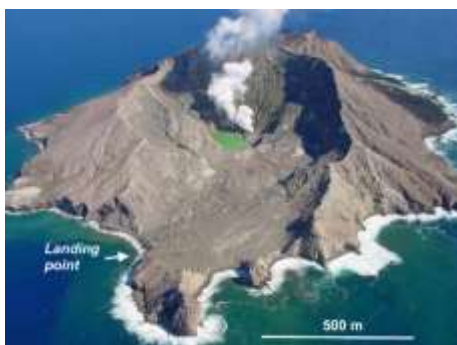


Photo 6; Whakaari White Island. Source New Zealand Institute for Geological and Nuclear Sciences [GNS] website, and the website is now known and renamed as the Earth Sciences New Zealand [Formerly GNS Science] ¹⁰.

Even when not erupting explosively there are active gas vents scattered across the crater floor that release noxious gases such as sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide and carbon dioxide. These pose serious respiratory health risks, especially for people with respiratory health problems such as asthma and others, but tourists were not warned before embarking on the boat for the island.

It was inevitable at some time when tourists were on the island that it would erupt explosively and lethally, but again tourists were warned that this was a possible risk. As stated above on 9th December, 2019, the volcano erupted violently (Photo 7) when 43 tourists and 4 guides were in the crater. 22 people were killed and the other 25 suffered severe injuries that for some would change the rest of their lives. Deaths and injuries were caused by impacts from ballistic rock boulders hurtling through the air, asphyxiation from gas and ash, and extreme thermal and chemical burns to both the exterior of bodies and the internal respiratory airways. Why was tourism allowed onto the volcanic island? Not surprisingly, no one is now permitted to go onto the island. Too little, too late."



Photo 7; White Island 9 Dec 2019 eruption - YouTube video screenshot.

CONCLUSION

Continuing work on utilising photography for awareness will occur. Hilton has registered a photographic exhibition with the Global PH Week [GPHW] ¹¹. This is organised by the 'World Federation of PH Associations' (WFPHA) and is an annual global advocacy initiative, mobilizing PH actors worldwide to advance equity, strengthen systems, and champion PH as a global public good. Peace for Health, Health for Peace. Each year, the Global PH Week brings together PH associations, institutions, professionals, and communities to raise PH's visibility, share solutions, and inspire collective action across countries, cultures, and contexts. The websites for these various events may or may not be archived in due course.

The 2025 edition of GPHW focused on "Redefining Equity: Decolonizing PH for a Healthier World," acknowledging the ongoing need to confront systemic inequities rooted in historical and cultural legacies. Focusing on health equity, empowering marginalized populations, and addressing the persisting impacts of colonial frameworks in global health systems was a priority

¹². During the week, 100s of events are hosted from across the globe. By promoting the awareness week initiative visibility of PH is enhanced, hence aiding and driving meaningful progress, that advocates for continued funds to strengthen health systems and ensure ongoing preparedness for calamities that are continuing to occur on a global scale.

Historically global health photography has been dominated as viewed through the eye of Western photographers ¹³. Internationally, in order to decolonise global health and empower local photographers there needs to be a paradigm move. This becomes a rewording and extension of the scope of the global health photography culture.

Hilton uploaded 5 photographs as examples on an alternative temporary photography google site created which was linked in addition to registering this event to the awareness week in 2026. This allowed people to view the sample photographs plus she invited people to send photographs in related to the theme. The sample 5 photographs related to genocide, people living in poverty-stricken conditions, peace in differing ethnic cultures, fire safety and lastly habitat protection. The photograph on fire safety was from a hostel in Agra which had a lovely devotional candle lighting display for a number of nights [photo 8].



Photo 8. A devotional candle and incense display.

Not knowing what it was about, I blew the candles out thinking it was a fire hazard as they were still burning late into the night. I was quickly informed by a manager as to the purpose of the candle burning for a number of days & I was reassured that there was no fire hazard. These types of devotional candle lighting ceremonies maybe related to harmony and peace. Many different faiths or ethnic cultures in various countries have differing customs, religiosity practices, religious importance and/or belief in a higher power control. Tan and colleagues have reported on considerable research on various customs and quality of life outcomes ¹⁴.

Hilton's photography projects are a work in progress. 'A picture is worth 1000 words', and photographs allow messages to be succinctly, intensely & clearly portrayed thus playing a valuable role in PH communication. Visual pictures can certainly speak louder than words.

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