

## **Psychotherapy as Treatment by Psychological Methods: Science, Practice, and the Patient’s Best Interests – Introduction**

This thematic issue of *Przeгляд Psychologiczny*, entitled *Psychotherapy. Treatment by Psychological Methods*, is published at a time of ongoing public debate concerning the regulation of the professions of psychologist and psychotherapist in Poland. The immediate impetus for this debate is the legislative process aimed at formally regulating both professions. Regardless of differences in the positions presented, this discussion is of considerable importance to the professional community, as it brings into the public sphere questions related to standards of education and professional practice, as well as the quality of services provided to individuals seeking psychological assistance and psychotherapy.

One of the key – though differently interpreted – concepts emerging in this debate is that of the *patient’s best interests*. The term is invoked both in the context of deregulation proposals and in arguments advocating the introduction of formal training standards, understood as a set of requirements concerning professional preparation and the conduct of practice. These standards encompass, among other elements, the organization of training, the qualifications of instructors, expected learning outcomes, and methods of their assessment.

This issue of *Przeгляд Psychologiczny* represents a scientific contribution to this debate. The articles collected here demonstrate that psychology, as a scientific discipline, constitutes the foundation of psychotherapy, and that psychotherapy – understood as treatment by psychological methods – is an integral component of psychological services (Aleksandrowicz, 2004; Czabała, 2016; Grzesiuk, 2005; Popiel & Zawadzki, 2023).

The claim that completion of psychology studies alone qualifies an individual to practice psychotherapy independently must be regarded as unfounded and inconsistent with existing training standards. A degree in psychology does not constitute a sufficient condition for the practice of psychotherapy. Comprehensive postgraduate training of at least four years is required, including systematic theoretical education, supervised clinical practice, ongoing supervision, and the therapist’s own therapeutic experience. Neglecting these requirements risks creating unjustified divisions within the professional community of psychologists and psychotherapists, a development that appears particularly problematic from the perspective of safeguarding the patient’s best interests.

The close relationship between psychology and psychotherapy is further supported by empirical evidence, which indicates that in Poland the profession of psychotherapist is predominantly practiced by individuals with a background in psychology. Nationwide data show that the vast majority of psychotherapists (93.9%) hold higher education degrees in psychology (75.2%), pedagogy (13.3%), or medicine (5.4%) (Suszek et al., 2017). These findings align with public expectations: in a representative sample of Polish adults, 77.6% of respondents indicated a psychology degree as desirable for the profession of psychotherapist, and 68% indicated either a psychology degree or a medical degree with specialization in psychiatry. At the same time, 65% of respondents disagreed with the view that any individual holding a master's or engineering degree should be eligible to become a psychotherapist (Boczkowska et al., 2024).

The issue opens with an article by Agnieszka Popiel and colleagues, who – based on a comparative analysis of European regulatory models – address the question of whether psychotherapy should be regulated as an independent profession or rather as a specialization within established mental health professions, such as psychology or psychiatry. Their analysis illustrates that overly inclusive regulatory frameworks may lead to a lowering of educational standards, weakening of evidence-based practice, and diffusion of professional accountability, potentially posing risks to the patient's best interests.

Appropriate academic education and completion of comprehensive psychotherapeutic training are necessary, yet not sufficient, conditions for responsible clinical practice. For therapeutic interventions to be effective and safe, they must be conducted in accordance with the principles of evidence-based practice (EBP), which integrates the best available empirical research, clinical expertise, and the values and preferences of the patient. It is therefore noteworthy that the effectiveness of psychotherapy has become one of the central topics in contemporary Polish debate. Although discussion has often focused more on the legitimacy and methodology of research than on its systematic implementation in line with international standards, the shift from a declarative belief in effectiveness toward empirical verification of therapeutic interventions represents an important step toward mature, scientifically grounded clinical practice.

The authors of the subsequent contributions go further: rather than debating whether psychotherapy effectiveness should be examined, they demonstrate how research findings should be critically interpreted and responsibly applied. Joachim Kowalski provides an accessible yet methodologically rigorous guide to meta-analyses of psychotherapy outcome studies, fostering critical appraisal skills. Magdalena Nowacka reviews empirical research on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy for perfectionism, conceptualized as a transdiagnostic process underlying multiple mental disorders. Barnaba Danieluk discusses cognitive-behavioral models of prolonged grief disorder and therapeutic protocols whose efficacy has been confirmed in randomized controlled trials.

In response to the rapid development of digital technologies and the increasing availability of online psychological support, Monika Kornacka and colleagues review internet-based interventions with empirically supported effectiveness, while

also highlighting challenges related to quality assurance, regulation, and responsible implementation in clinical practice.

The issue concludes with two articles by Maria Baran addressing cultural competence in psychology and psychotherapy. Although Poland was long perceived as a relatively culturally homogeneous country, data from the 2021 National Census indicate that at least 3.69% of residents identify with a nationality other than Polish, with some reporting dual national identification (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2023). Migration processes have intensified significantly since 2021, particularly in connection with the war in Ukraine. The author demonstrates that a lack of cultural sensitivity not only diminishes diagnostic accuracy and therapeutic effectiveness but may also result in systemic clinical and ethical errors, thereby undermining the fundamental principle of acting in the patient's best interests.

The articles included in this issue share a common message: psychotherapy is a psychological intervention that – if it is to serve patients responsibly – must be grounded in psychology as a science, delivered by appropriately qualified professionals, and subject to continuous empirical evaluation as well as ethical and cultural reflection. In this sense, *Psychotherapy. Treatment by Psychological Methods* is not merely a commentary on the current legislative debate, but an invitation to a more responsible discussion about the future of psychotherapy in Poland – one in which reliable scientific knowledge and the patient's best interests serve as the primary points of reference.

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