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Evidence-Based Psychology: From Reliable Evidence to Responsible Practice.

Standards of International Psychological Organizations

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Why is it Worth Discussing Evidence-Based Psychology in Poland Today?

The discussion of evidence-based psychology is particularly important in Poland because of ongoing legal changes regulating the profession of psychologist, debates over psychotherapy standards, and the long-standing popularity of psychology as a field of study. In addition, there is a growing societal awareness of the availability of services provided by psychologists as part of broadly understood psychological interventions. These processes increase the social importance of psychology, drawing attention to the need to raise educational standards in this field, strengthen the quality of services provided by psychologists, and recognize the enormous professional responsibility of psychologists as representatives of a profession of public trust. Act of 23.01.2026 on the profession of psychologist and professional self-government of psychologists (2026, Journal of Laws of 2026, item 187) establishes a new legal framework for the profession,

linking it to current scientific knowledge and evidence-based psychological practice. Regarding diagnosis, it emphasizes evidence-based psychological methods and, for psychological tests, the importance of standardization, objectivity, accuracy, and reliability. Thus, the scientific basis of a psychologist's activities also gains a legal dimension. At the same time, debate over regulating the psychotherapist profession (Sejm of the Republic of Poland, 2025, https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm10.nsf/PrzebiegProc.xsp?nr=1345, accessed on 15.09.2026) has raised questions about qualifications, educational standards, professional responsibility, and the empirical basis of the interventions used. These issues in the public debate indicate that the quality and scientific foundations of psychological practice are no longer an exclusively internal discussion within academic and professional circles (Ombudsman, 2025).

The great interest in psychology further underscores this issue as a field of study, the most frequently chosen in the recruitment process for the academic year 2025/2026 (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2025). The growing number of graduates also means more people apply psychological knowledge across various areas of social life, underscoring the importance of quality standards in education and practice.

These issues have already been addressed in the pages of the *Review of Psychology*, issue 66(1) of 2023, entitled "The crisis of credibility in psychology: causes, manifestations, solutions", which focused on methodological problems and ways to increase the credibility of research (https://czasopisma.uwm.edu.pl/index.php/pp/issue/view/521, accessed on 15.09.2026). On the other hand, issue 68(4) of 2025, entitled: "Psychotherapy. Treatment with psychological methods", pointed to the importance of empirical foundations of psychological interventions and evidence-based practice (https://czasopisma.uwm.edu.pl/index.php/pp/issue/view/611, accessed on 15.09.2026).

This study builds on these lines of discussion by examining how major international psychological organizations address the quality of evidence, the reliability of psychological knowledge, and the use of research results in professional practice. The activities of the *Association for Psychological Science* (APS), *the Society of Clinical Psychology* (SCP), *the Australian Psychological Society* (APS Australia), *the American Psychological Association* (APA), *the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations* (EFPA), the *International Association of Applied Psychology* (IAAP), and *the International Union of Psychological Science* (IUPsyS) were taken into account.

These organizations' activities span different areas of psychology: from promoting transparency and replicability of research, through systematic assessment of the empirical basis of interventions, to accounting for the use of scientific knowledge as part of a professional psychologist's competence.

The following sections present APS initiatives on research reliability and methods for assessing the empirical basis of interventions adopted by SCP, APS Australia, APA, EFPA, IAAP, and IUPsyS, and their solutions concerning the relationship between scientific knowledge and professional psychologists. The study concludes by reflecting on the importance of these experiences for developing standards in Polish psychology.

Credibility of Psychological Knowledge in Regulations

The Association for Psychological Science (APS) exemplifies an institutional response to challenges related to the credibility of psychological research. The organization develops solutions to increase transparency in the research process, enable independent verification of results, and improve replicability (Association for Psychological Science, n.d.- a). These include APS journals' publishing policy, the development of new publication formats, and promoting open science practices. APS supports a research culture based on transparency, openness, and replicability.

These activities incorporate open science principles directly into publishing practice. APS is the publisher of highly-rated journals such as *Psychological Science* (JIF 2025 = 5.1), *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (JIF 2025 = 8.4), and *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* (JIF 2025 = 13.4) (Clarivate, 2026). To the extent tailored to their profile, practices are promoted or required, including, among others, preregistration, sharing data, materials, and analytical code, and declaring information regarding the transparency of the research process (Association for Psychological Science, n.d.-a; n.d-b; n.d.-c).

In the case of the journal *Psychological Science,* the openness of data and source materials has ceased to be only an additional practice. It has become part of the publication standard, with the possibility of justified deviations arising from ethical, legal, or confidentiality restrictions. The possibility of publishing original papers in the journal also depends on the authors and the so-called *Research Transparency Statement* (Association for Psychological Science, n.d.-b). This document provides information about the conditions of the pre-registration process, the availability of the research data used, the transparency of the materials used, and the method of coding the results. Thus, transparency is treated not only as a declarative value but also as an element in organizing the publication process.

The essence of the described solutions is not data sharing itself. They aim to evaluate how the subsequent stages of the research project are implemented, from planning and implementation to the analysis of the results. An answer to the question is also sought as to whether the final published report corresponds to previous research decisions. From this point of view, the following are of particular importance for psychological practice based on scientific evidence: the pre-registration of the project, the formulation of hypotheses, the development of analysis plans, and the detailed documentation of the procedures carried out. It should be remembered that preregistration does not preclude exploratory analyses; rather, it allows researchers to distinguish between hypotheses and analyses formulated before examining the study results and those developed at later stages of preparing the publication. Presenting hypotheses formulated after examining the results as if they had been specified in advance is considered an unethical research practice.

The guidelines in the document titled Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP), currently in its 2025 version (Grant et al., 2026), provide a broader framework for these practices and focus on increasing the possibility of verifying

empirical claims. The formulated guidelines distinguish three groups of solutions: *Research Practices*, *Verification Practices*, and *Verification Studies*. The first group includes study registration, the protocol, the analysis plan, and the transparency of reporting materials, data, and code. The common goal of these activities is to create conditions that allow independent evaluation of the study's course and the results obtained.

TOP 2025 clearly distinguishes transparency from actual verification. The mere availability of data and code does not establish that the analyses are correct. Therefore, the principles of computational reproducibility, which allow checking whether the reported results can be reproduced using the same data and procedures, and results transparency, which assess whether the reported data have not been selectively reported, are distinguished. At the same time, the authors of the guidelines emphasize that transparency is not synonymous with methodological quality. The study can be completely transparent yet have methodological shortcomings. The presented principle of openness, therefore, increases the possibility of independent evaluation of research, but does not replace strict methodological rigor.

The second important area of APS activity is institutional support for research replication. An example of this activity is the so-called *Registered Replication Reports* (Association for Psychological Science, n.d.-a) – multicenter replication studies conducted in accordance with the original research protocol. Their importance lies not only in checking whether the previous effect can be obtained again, but also in more accurately estimating its size and scope of generalization. An important principle is that a well-conducted replication can be published, regardless of whether its results confirm the original.

Registered Reports serve a similar function (Chambers & Tzavella, 2022). In this format, research questions, hypotheses, and the methodological plan are peer-reviewed before data are collected, and a positive evaluation of the project can lead to conditional approval for publication regardless of the final result. This solution reduces the dependence of the publication decision on the statistical significance or attractiveness of the results. It shifts the focus from the result to the quality of the formulated question and the research project.

Another characteristic feature of the modern approach to research credibility in psychology is the shift of responsibility from a single researcher to the entire scientific system. Transparency standards can be considered not only by journals, but also by research funding institutions, universities, scientific organizations, and achievement evaluation systems. The answer to the problems with the credibility of contemporary research is therefore not only an appeal for greater reliability of individual researchers, but also a change in the applicable rules and institutional incentives.

At the same time, both APS policies and TOP 2025 standards emphasize the need for flexibility. Not all proposed practices can be applied in the same way across all research paradigms. Ethical and legal limitations, confidentiality protection, and the specificity of the methods used may justify deviations from the formulated principles. Therefore, the guidelines are contextual and modular, and not absolutely mandatory.

However, the solutions discussed in this part of the article do not determine the strength of the evidence for a particular psychological intervention. Transparency, reproducibility, and replication primarily concern the reliability of the knowledge-creation process. Assessing the strength of the entire body of evidence is a separate task, undertaken by the *Society of Clinical Psychology* and *the Australian Psychological Society*, among others.

Assessing the Empirical Basis of Psychological Interventions

The activities presented in the previous chapter concern the process of conducting and publishing research itself. In professional practice, however, the question arises of how to organize the available research on specific psychological interventions and determine the strength of their empirical support. Two different ways of solving this problem are presented by the aforementioned organizations – *the Society of Clinical Psychology* (SCP) and *the Australian Psychological Society* (APS Australia). Both of these aim to translate the extensive and heterogeneous scientific literature into information useful for psychological practice. However, these organizations do not reduce the assessment to a simple division of methods into effective vs. ineffective. Instead, they consider the type and quality of available scientific studies in a given area and, for SCPs, also the clinical significance of the effects, the durability of the results, the safety of the procedure, and the possibility of using interventions outside experimental conditions.

Society of Clinical Psychology – Classification of the Strength of Empirical Support

SCP maintains a registry called *Psychological Treatments*, which provides information on interventions, including published data on their effectiveness (Society of Clinical Psychology, n.d.). The current evaluation system, based on Tolin et al. (2015), shifts the focus from individual studies to systematic reviews and meta-analyses of randomized controlled trials. Interventions are classified into 4 categories: *very strong*, *strong*, *weak*, and *insufficient evidence*. The highest level of support does not mean achieving a statistically significant effect alone. It also considers improvements in participants' functioning, the maintenance of effects over time, the risk of harm, the level and type of resources used, and the intervention's effectiveness under conditions similar to real practice. In this way, the empirical evaluation is linked to questions relevant to the psychologist's professional practice. At the same time, the SCP points out that its database is being updated gradually. Some interventions have already been evaluated according to the new criteria, while others retain their previous classifications. The absence of a specific method from the database does not necessarily indicate a lack of evidence supporting its effectiveness.

An interesting element of this approach is the attempt to determine what constitutes psychological treatment. SCP assumes that demonstrating a specific effect in a study is not enough. Psychological intervention should involve cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or interpersonal processes, and its underlying

assumptions about the procedure and mechanism of change should be rooted in psychological science and consistent with current scientific knowledge.

Australian Psychological Society – Hierarchy of Evidence and Quality of Research

APS Australia has adopted a different *solution*. The fifth edition of the study, *entitled Evidence-Based Psychological Interventions in the Treatment of Mental Disorders: A Literature Review* of 2024 (Australian Psychological Society, 2024), presents an up-to-date overview of the empirical basis of interventions used for a range of mental disorders in adults, children, and adolescents. This document is not a clinical guideline and is not intended to replace a psychologist's professional judgment. Integrate the study's research findings with practical experience, the preferences of people receiving help, and individual, social, ethical, and cultural factors.

The primary tool for organizing evidence on the effectiveness of psychological interventions for APS Australia is the evaluation hierarchy presented by *the National Health and Medical Research Council* (NHMRC) (Australian Psychological Society, 2024). The highest level includes *meta-analyses* and *systematic reviews* of appropriately designed studies; the next levels include *randomized controlled* trials (RCTs) and non-randomized *comparative studies*; and the lowest level includes *case studies*. This hierarchy is complemented by an assessment of risk of bias using tools based on the *Cochrane Risk of Bias tool* (Australian Psychological Society, 2024). If several eligible publications address an intervention, priority is given to the study with the highest level of evidence, followed by the study with the lowest risk of error, and, if these criteria are equivalent, the most recent publication.

APS Australia emphasizes that the level of proof is not equivalent to a clinical recommendation. For this reason, the review did not use the GRADE (*Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation*) system, which is used, among other things, to formulate recommendations based on the entire body of evidence. The document they formulate is intended to map and organize the available knowledge, not to indicate which method should be used for a particular person. The organization also notes the limitations of the hierarchy of scientific research: randomization is not always possible, well-conducted randomized controlled trials (RCTs) may have limited external validity, and research samples do not always represent the diversity of people encountered in practice. In addition, some interventions are more amenable to experimental investigation than others.

Therefore, the lack of evidence for a technique's effectiveness does not automatically prove its ineffectiveness, and the review's results should not be used in isolation from the professional judgment and context of the person receiving help.

Two Ways to Organize Evidence

A comparison of the approaches of SCP and *APS Australia* shows that psychological organizations can organize knowledge about intervention effectiveness

in different ways. SCP creates a synthetic classification of the strength of empirical support for specific therapies. At the same time, *APS Australia primarily* maps the level and quality of available research, considering its place in the "hierarchy of science", the risk of systematic error, and its timeliness. The question is not which system is better. They answer different questions and perform different functions. The common principle remains that evaluating interventions should refer to explicit criteria and the current state of research, rather than only to the method's popularity, its tradition of use, or the beliefs of its supporters.

Both examples also show the limits of such an assessment. Neither the SCP classification nor *the APS Australia review substitutes for a professional's decision about* a particular individual. They primarily answer the question of the state of knowledge about a given intervention. How this knowledge is combined with the psychologist's competence, the client's characteristics and preferences, and the conditions under which the intervention is carried out constitutes the next level of evidence-based practice – and is the subject of the next chapter.

From Scientific Knowledge to the Standard of Professional Operation

The initiatives presented above concern research reliability and the assessment of the empirical basis of interventions. Professional organizations' documents raise the next level of discussion by asking: how a psychologist should use scientific knowledge in professional practice? This is well illustrated by the solutions adopted by several organizations, including international ones – *the American Psychological Association* (APA), *the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations* (EFPA), *the International Association of Applied Psychology* (IAAP), and *the International Union of Psychological Science* (IUPsyS). The documents of the aforementioned associations, focusing on the topics we have analyzed, differ in scope and status. However, they are united by a shift in the relationship between science and practice toward competence and professional behavior.

APA – Evidence-Based Practice as a Process of Professional Action

The starting point for the APA position is the concept of *Evidence-Based Practice in Psychology* (EBPP), according to which evidence-based practice means the integration of the best available research results, clinical competencies, and patient characteristics, culture, and preferences (American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006). This approach is therefore not limited to selecting a proven effective method. However, it encompasses the entire process of professional action: diagnosis, case conceptualization, planning, the relationship with the patient, adapting the procedure to the client's situation, and monitoring results. The APA developed this concept in the 2021 *Professional Practice Guidelines for Evidence-Based Psychological Practice in Health Care* (American Psychological Association, 2021). The APA clearly distinguishes *professional practice guidelines*, which describe how a psychologist conducts professional practice, from clinical guidelines

that address the effectiveness of specific treatment methods. The guidelines include, among others, updating scientific knowledge, making an adequate diagnosis, cooperating with the patient, adapting the approach to the patient's characteristics and context, monitoring the process and results, and changing the approach when it does not yield the expected benefits. It is particularly important to monitor current literature and evaluate research quality as part of professional competence, as well as systematically evaluating the effects of one's own actions. These guidelines primarily indicate professional expectations and support high-quality practice.

EFPA and EuroPsy – Scientific Knowledge as an Element of Professional Competence

In the EuroPsy system, the relationship between learning and practice is more strongly embedded in the model of vocational training and maintenance of psychologists' competences. EuroPsy is a European reference point for the education, professional practice, and competence of psychologists. However, it is not a license to practice the profession and does not replace national regulations.

The EuroPsy (European Federation of Psychologists' Associations, 2025) regulations assume that a psychologist should have research competence not only to conduct research independently but also to critically evaluate scientific knowledge, their own work, and the effects of the interventions used. The latest model clearly demonstrates *scientific and research competencies,* including evidence-based decision-making, critical reasoning, integrating scientific knowledge with contextual information, and using scientifically sound diagnostic and intervention tools. EuroPsy also requires applying these principles not only to clinical psychology but also to other areas of practice, including educational psychology, work and organizational psychology, and sports psychology. The use of scientific evidence is therefore treated as a professional competence of psychologists, regardless of specialty. This model combines knowledge use with ongoing competence maintenance. EuroPsy includes academic preparation, supervised practice, competency assessment, and further professional development; maintaining up-to-date knowledge is part of revalidating competences.

IAAP and IUPsyS – Evidence-Based Practitioner as a Core Competence

The International Declaration on Core Competencies in Professional Psychology (ref), adopted by IAAP and IUPsyS (International Association of Applied Psychology & International Union of Psychological Science, 2016), presents a broader perspective. This document is not an international legal standard, but it provides a framework that can be adapted to different education and professional regulation systems.

From the perspective of this study, it is particularly important to distinguish how the so-called competency *operates in evidence-based practice.* It includes adopting *an evidence-based* orientation in diagnosis, interventions, and service delivery, using current research findings in decision-making, and recognizing the

limitations of available evidence. This competence involves a reflective assessment of one's own practice. A psychologist should assess the effectiveness of their own actions, identify areas for improvement, and use consultation and feedback. The description of interventions also emphasizes the need to assess their usefulness and effectiveness and use evaluation results to modify further action.

The IAAP-IUPsyS declaration thus shows that *evidence-based* orientation is not treated as a feature of one therapeutic stream or clinical specialty, but as a general competence of a professional psychologist.

From Research Knowledge to Professional Competence

A compilation of these documents shows three slightly different ways of institutionalizing the relationship between scientific knowledge and practice. The APA sees it primarily as a process of professional decision-making; EFPA, through EuroPsy, links it to the preparation, assessment, and maintenance of professional competencies; and the IAAP and IUPsyS consider acting as *an evidence-based practitioner* to be one of the basic competencies of a professional psychologist. However, the common direction is clear. A psychologist should be familiar with the current literature, critically assess its quality and limitations, integrate scientific knowledge with information about a specific client and context, and evaluate the results of their actions. If the results are not as expected, the evaluation results should be used to modify subsequent proceedings.

This does not create a single international regulatory system. Rather, these documents share a common meaning: they emphasize the use of scientific knowledge, the critical evaluation of evidence, and the evaluation of results in describing what it means to competently and responsibly practice psychology.

The Importance of the Discussed Solutions for Polish Psychology

The presented initiatives do not establish a single, universal model of psychological practice grounded in scientific evidence. Despite the differences in the scope and status of these solutions, a common direction is visible. It includes concern for the quality and verifiability of knowledge, transparency in the criteria for assessing the basis of empirical methods, updating professional competences, and monitoring the results of actions taken. Evidence-based psychology is not reduced here to the research methodology itself or to a list of "effective" interventions. It includes rather, a whole series of activities – from the way knowledge is created, through the assessment of its quality, to its responsible use in practice.

The first important conclusion is the importance of explicit and verifiable criteria. The examples of APS, SCP, and APS Australia show that psychological organizations can organize evidence in different ways. However, the common principle remains that the scientific basis of a method should be assessable. This does not mean Poland needs to create a central list of "allowed" and "not allowed" methods. It seems more useful to develop procedures for systematic

knowledge assessment, transparent communication of the strength of available evidence, and regular updating of these assessments.

The second area is professional competence. The analysed documents indicate that knowledge of research results alone is insufficient. A psychologist should be able to critically assess the quality and limitations of evidence, relate it to a particular person and context, and evaluate the effects of their own actions. Therefore, monitoring results and being ready to modify the procedure when the intervention does not yield the expected outcomes are particularly important. *Evidence-based practice,* therefore, includes not only the use of existing research but also the systematic evaluation of one's own practice.

From this perspective, international organizations' experience may be important for Polish psychology in several areas. This applies primarily to the education of psychologists, in which methodological competence should be understood not only as preparation for conducting research but also as the ability to search for, critically evaluate, and apply scientific knowledge in practice. Continuous professional development is an important area because updating knowledge and maintaining competencies should span the entire professional career, not end with the attainment of a diploma.

The third area is the responsibility of institutions and the professional community. Promoting evidence-based psychology cannot be the task of a single psychologist. Professional organizations can develop guidelines and standards of competence, universities can strengthen preparation for the critical use of knowledge, and journals can support transparency, replicability, and high methodological quality of research. In this way, the scientific and professional community co-creates the conditions in which using up-to-date knowledge becomes part of everyday practice.

This does not imply the need to create a single Polish model that reflects any of the solutions described. The differences among APA, EFPA, APS, SCP, and IAAP–IUPsyS show that no single way exists to institutionalize evidence-based psychology at the international level. It seems more reasonable to treat these experiences as reference points in discussions of the quality of education, professional standards, and professional responsibility in Poland.

However, the common direction remains clear: psychology increasingly combines professional autonomy with responsibility for the quality of knowledge on which decisions are based, competence with the ability to evaluate evidence critically, and the choice of intervention with the need to check its actual results. From the Polish perspective, it may therefore be particularly important not to copy ready-made models, but using the experience of international organizations in developing their own scientific and professional standards.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Tools

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to support the identification and collection of relevant literature sources, and

EditGPT and Grammarly for language editing, proofreading, and stylistic refinement of the text. The authors independently verified all sources identified with the assistance of AI-based tools for authenticity, accuracy, and relevance before including them in the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the article's final content.

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