

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Jadwiga Ślęzak (1917–2022) – nestor and pioneer of Polish clinical paediatric psychologists

Stefan M. Brudzynski

Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Jadwiga Ślęzak was born in Działoszyce on 11th November 1917 and graduated from high school in Mysłowice in 1938. During the war, Dr. Ślęzak was involved in the underground teaching of girls in a countryside estate, where she survived the war. After the war, Dr. Ślęzak studied psychology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She was greatly influenced by Professor Zygmunt Mysłakowski (1890–1971), who was specializing in pedagogy and theory of education, and who employed Jadwiga Ślęzak as his assistant while she was still a student, and she worked in psychological counselling.

Dr. Ślęzak graduated from the Jagiellonian University in psychology in 1948 and was employed at the Educational and Treatment Clinic (*Poradnia Wychowawczo-Lecznicza*) of the University, where she continued her psychological counselling. In 1949, Dr. Ślęzak moved to Rabka, which had sanatorium treatment centre for children suffering from tuberculosis. She started her work in the Counselling Office of the Institute of Mental Hygiene in Rabka (*Poradnia Instytutu Higieny Psychiczej*) and began her master's thesis. Then, she accepted the permanent position of psychologist and pedagogical instructor in the Children Sanatorium Centre in Rabka and defended her master's thesis in 1949. Dr. Ślęzak worked in this centre for 15 years (1949–1964). During her residence in Rabka, Dr. Ślęzak collaborated with Stanisława Rączko (1911–1997), who specialized in therapeutic pedagogy and special education and operated a mobile puppet theatre for children with tuberculosis as an innovative psychotherapeutic means.



Jadwiga Ślęzak
in the early 1970s

[Photograph published
by written permission
of the family]

Dr. Ślęzak's research interest was focused on helping and rehabilitating children who survived tuberculosis-induced meningitis and encephalitis, and she achieved a significant level of expertise in her work. She ran teaching and training courses for nurses, educators, and teachers employed in the rehabilitation sanatorium. Under the direction of Dr. Ślęzak, there were also organized courses for psychologists who wished to undertake work in the institutions with a curative and educational profile. Based on data from her clinical research, Dr. Ślęzak started her doctoral dissertation in 1962 and defended her Ph.D. thesis at the

Jagiellonian University in 1965. The thesis was entitled "Disturbances of psychological development in children after tuberculosis-induced inflammation of meninges and the brain and perspectives of their rehabilitation". One of the reviewers of the thesis was Professor Antoni Kępiński (1918–1972), a well-known psychiatrist. Professor Kępiński evaluated Dr. Ślęzak's thesis highly and stated in his review that the results were the first publication in Polish language with an exhaustive description of the consequences of tuberculosis-induced meningitis and encephalitis in a child, and that it was the first Polish publication providing methods of child rehabilitation.

In 1964, Dr. Ślęzak moved to Warsaw to the Methodological Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance at the Ministry of National Education (*Centralny Ośrodek Metodyczno-Edukacyjny przy Ministerstwie Oświaty*) in the division of Special Schools and Institutional Education. Dr. Ślęzak received the position of Director of the Section of Psychology in this division.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Prof. Stefan M. Brudzynski, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, e-mail: sbrudzynski@brocku.ca

Three years later, Dr. Ślęzak accepted the position of Clinical Psychologist at the rank of an Adjunct Lecturer in the Neurology Clinic of the Institute of Mother and Child in Warsaw, and in 1970, she became the director of the Psychology Laboratory in the Department of Child Development of that Institute. In addition to clinical and research work, Dr. Ślęzak continued her didactic work as a Lecturer in training courses for medical doctors and clinical psychologists. She also visited other similar centres abroad and attended scientific stays in East Germany (1969) and later in the U.S.A. (1974).

Continuing her research, Dr. Ślęzak participated in a collaborative project undertaken by the Institute of Mother and Child with the American Ministry of Health in Washington, DC in 1974. She visited many American paediatric centres (in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York) and elaborated an effective rehabilitation model for children suffering from spina bifida, which included collaboration among medical doctors, psychologists, and members of patients' families. Many results from this project and other projects related to studies of meningitis and epilepsy were published in the Polish Journal of Paediatrics between 1969 and 1978. Dr. Ślęzak introduced the Denver Developmental Test for the first time in Poland and adapted the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Test (WAIS) for testing sick children.

In 1974, Dr. Ślęzak moved to the Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw and worked there as an adjunct lecturer. Her main direction of research concerned a model of improving psychomotor development of children with congenital spina bifida and hydrocephalus. Dr. Ślęzak lectured and led seminars in developmental psychology and defectology, i.e., therapeutic pedagogy dealing with the development of children with physical and mental defects and the problems of their upbringing. The graduate seminars concerned the emotional and social functioning of children with clinically manifested brain defects and with developmental problems and the corrective pedagogical influence of the school and patients' families. Dr. Ślęzak supervised 28 master's dissertations in the Institute. In 1980, Dr. Ślęzak received the title of Doctor of Science in Psychology (D.Sc., *habilitacja*) in Humanities from the Scientific Council of the Institute of Psychology, University of Warsaw.

Dr. Ślęzak published about 30 research articles in Polish and international journals and is the author or co-author of several books, book chapters, university scripts, and scientific monographs (the main publications are listed below) [1–13]. The most important contribution of Dr. Ślęzak to paediatric neurology, which is published in the book "Diseases of the nervous system of children and youth" (Michałowicz & Ślęzak, 1985), is in the field of infectious diseases of the nervous system [7], particularly consequences of bacterial meningitis and encephalitis, as well as in child epilepsy and the treatment

of congenital malformations of the nervous system. Other important contributions made by Dr. Ślęzak are published in the book "Cerebral palsy in children" (Michałowicz, Ed., 1993), and they emphasize the importance of collaboration among physicians, psychologists, educators, and rehabilitators in the treatment and social adaptation of afflicted children [10–13].

Dr. Ślęzak retired from university work in 1979 and died on 9th January 2022 in Warsaw at the age of 104. She never married or had her own family but devoted her very long and active life entirely to sick, disabled, and disadvantaged children.

REFERENCES

1. Ślęzak J. Zagadnienia psychologiczne dziecka przewlekle chorego: Szkolnictwo Specjalne. Wybrane zagadnienia z działu chorych [Psychological issues of chronically ill child]. Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa 1959.
2. Ślęzak J. Metody badania psychologicznego w ocenie rozwoju małego dziecka [Psychological methods in evaluation of development of the small child]. In: Michałowicz R. (ed.). Wybrane zagadnienia z neurologii dziecięcej. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1971.
3. Ślęzak J. Opieka psychologiczno-pedagogiczna dzieci z przepukliną oponowo-rdzeniową [Psychological-pedagogical care of children with spina bifida]. In: Naumik A. (ed.). Wrodzone przepukliny ośrodkowego układu nerwowego o dzieci. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1972.
4. Ślęzak J. Usprawnienia czynności psychoruchowych małego dziecka z uszkodzeniem ośrodkowego układu nerwowego [Improvement of psychomotor functions of a small child with damages of the central nervous system]. In: Michałowicz R. (ed.). Seria wskazówek dla rodziców. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1973.
5. Ślęzak J. (ed.). Ocena rozwoju psychoruchowego dziecka do szóstego roku życia [Evaluation of psychomotor development of a child up to sixth year of life]. Biblioteka Pediatrii. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1975.
6. Ślęzak J. Znaczenie postaw rodziców w procesie usprawniania dzieci z zaburzeniami rozwoju psychoruchowego [Significance of parents' attitude in the process of improvement of conditions of children with disturbances of psychomotor development]. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Polska Akademia Nauk, Komitet Nauk Psychologicznych, tom 21 Monografii Psychologicznych, Wrocław 1978.
7. Michałowicz R, Ślęzak J. Choroby układu nerwowego dzieci i młodzieży [Diseases of the nervous system of children and youth]. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1983 and 1985 (two editions).
8. Ślęzak J. Uczeń z odchyleniami w stanie zdrowia i rozwoju [Student with deviations of the development and health]. Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1984.
9. Ślęzak J. Psychospołeczne problemy dzieci z drgawkami i napadami padaczkowymi [Psychosocial problems of children with interictal spasms and epileptic fits]. In: Michałowicz R. (ed.). Padaczka i inne stany napadowe u dzieci. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1992, 211–222.
10. Ślęzak J. Metody oceny rozwoju psychoruchowego [Evaluation methods of psychomotor development]. In: Michałowicz R. (ed.). Mózgowe porażenie dziecięce [Cerebral palsy in children]. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1986 and 1993 (two editions), 134–145.

11. Ślenzak, J. Kierunki i metody oddziaływania psychologiczno-pedagogicznego wspomagającego rozwój psychiczny [Directions and methods of psychological-pedagogical influence supporting mental development]. In: Michłowicz R. (ed.). *Mózgowe porażenie dziecięce* [Cerebral palsy in children]. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1986 and 1993 (two editions), 376-383.
12. Ślenzak J. Rola rodziny w procesie leczenia dziecka. Wychowanie w rodzinie. [Role of family in the process of child treatment. Upbringing within the family]. In: Michłowicz R. (ed.). *Mózgowe porażenie dziecięce* [Cerebral palsy in children]. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1986 and 1993 (two editions), 430-447.
13. Ślenzak J. Przystosowanie społeczne dzieci [Social adaptation of children]. In: Michłowicz R. (ed.). *Mózgowe porażenie dziecięce* [Cerebral palsy in children]. Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warszawa 1986 and 1993 (two editions), 448-453.