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REVIEWS

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Adam A. Zych. Scientific editing
Encyclopaedia of old age, aging and disability
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Encyklopedia starości, starzenia się i niepełnosprawności,
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The twenty-first century is a time of changes in the social structure of Poland and throughout Europe, due to factors like a growing over-representation of elderly people caused by a decreasing fertility rate and an increasing life expectancy of both women and men. This has economic, medical and social consequences affecting the condition of the state. The above-mentioned social situation is subject to intensive interdisciplinary studies on aging, old age and disability. Academic researchers and practitioners address the changes and their consequences, and suggest directions for social politics in view of minimizing the effect of the aging society.

In this social context, there is a need to systematize the knowledge, concepts and definitions; to collect them into one work, which will be an important stage in scientific research and a reference point for further exploration. This demand

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is met by a five-volume encyclopaedia – the first one in Poland – addressing the issues of aging, old age and disability. The *Encyclopaedia of old age, aging and disability* has been prepared by a wide range of specialists, with prof. Adam A. Zych as the scientific editor.

I feel genuine satisfaction reviewing the first volume of the encyclopaedia, being aware that Polish studies are becoming a part of the global research on old age and disability represented by such worldwide and well-known studies as: *The Graying of America: An Encyclopedia of Aging, Health, Mind, and Behavior*, (University of Illinois Press, 2001), or *Encyclopedia of Disability* (SAGE Publications, 2005).

Due to the considerable length of the first volume of the encyclopaedia, in this review, I will focus on selected and, in my opinion, the most important elements of the work. First, the structure, scope and authors of the encyclopaedia will be discussed. Then, two selected subject headings and two biographic entries will be analysed. Finally, a brief summary of the work will be presented.

The encyclopaedia is an impressive work. In its entirety, it will contain over 1200 entries and nearly 300 biographical entries, written by over than 250 authors representing various scientific disciplines. The entire work is supervised by scientific editor, prof. Adam A. Zych. The first volume of the encyclopaedia contains 253 entries, both of a definitional and a reviewing character, as well as 67 biographical entries. The volume was prepared by 125 specialists in the fields of medicine, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and other scientific disciplines.

The subject headings from A to G contained in the first volume point to the fact that old age, aging and disability cannot be perceived only from a medical perspective, as they also have a biological (“biogerontology,” “aging biology,” and “chronobiology”), psychological (“gerotranscendence” and “psychological wellbeing”), pedagogical (“geragogics” and “glottogeragogics”), sociological (“digital immigrants” and “sandwich generation”), religious (“old man in the Church” and “biblical gerontology”) and global (“globalization of aging”) dimensions. Thus, it can be concluded that the main profile of this volume of the encyclopaedia is based on social and humanistic sciences, but formed to a large extent by medical knowledge. This is also reflected in the selection of the authors of the entries, who are physicians, psychologists, sociologists, educators, political scientists, etc.

The second aim of this review is to discuss selected subject headings. Since I focus primarily on the issue of disability in my scientific work, I chose two subject headings related to this problem for the analysis: “adapted physical activity” and “adulthood and old age of people with intellectual disability.”

“Adapted physical activity (APA),” a subject heading developed by prof. dr. hab. Stanisław Zbigniew Kowalik from the Eugeniusz Piasecki University of Physical Education in Poznan, is one of the longest entries in this volume of the encyclopaedia, filling eight columns of print. The author explains that “APA refers to movement, physical activity and sports, in which a special emphasis is

placed on the benefits and possibilities of people with limiting conditions, such as disabilities, health impairment, or old age.” The author describes the origin and development of APA, mentioning the fact that, in Poland, an alternative term – adaptive motional activity (AMA) – is used. He also mentions the necessity to integrate the activities of Polish and international organizations and to transform the physical culture of disabled individuals into APA, as well as to popularize this concept in Poland. The author explains that the idea of APA is to increase the physical and sports activity of disabled persons, resulting in the strengthening of both the physical and mental spheres. Three possible forms are indicated within APA: sports, recreational sports, as well as therapeutic and corrective physical activities. AMA should be a part of rehabilitation, i.e. a set of professional pro-health activities related to preventing the deterioration of health and to restoring or improving functioning in all conditions. In the further part of the study, the author points to the high effectiveness of using motion as a form of stimulation for disabled individuals. He describes the mechanisms of influencing them through physical activity, including: functional compensation, learning new forms of physical activity, homeostatic challenge, and mental unblocking. The presented mechanisms of using motion to influence a disabled person result in better physical performance, mental resilience, and thus, generally speaking, a better state of health. In the summary, the author once again points to the advantages of using APA and the necessity to promote this form of physical activity.

“Adulthood and old age of persons with intellectual disability” is a subject heading developed by Kamila Skowrońska, MA, who is a teacher and educator at the Youth Educational Centre in Bielice and a PhD student at the Lower Silesia University in Wrocław. In her study, she points to the characteristics of adulthood, based on D.J. Levinson, who identifies its following stages: entering a role, redefining performed roles, and establishing a place for oneself in the adult world. Next, the author explains the concept of old age, presenting different definitions of the notion and ages at which it has its beginning. Scientists distinguish the following concepts of age: biological, chronological, economic, mental and social. The author points to demographic changes in Poland; the growing percentage of older people and its effects. After a comprehensive introduction into the subject of adulthood and old age, she goes on to the main topic, i.e. adulthood and old age of individuals with intellectual disabilities. In the past, such people passed away at a young age, which was associated with improper care or lack thereof, lack of rehabilitation, inappropriate course of rehabilitation or bad living conditions. Currently, the average life expectancy of people with intellectual disabilities is 66 years, but it will become longer. The author states, after I. Fornalik, the environmental determinants of the perceived quality of life, exemplified by three models of old age of those with intellectual disabilities: aging side by side with a brother or sister, old age in an institution, and old age of persons with coupled disabilities, who require particularly high

environmental stimulation. The study finally indicates that, unlike the non-disabled, those with intellectual disabilities, despite being adults by age, cannot count on being provided with education or autonomy, or on starting a family, which results from the limited support they receive and the stereotypical manner in which they are perceived.

The two subject headings having been discussed, two selected biographical entries out of the total 67 included in the first volume of the encyclopaedia will now be addressed. The first of the selected biographical entries is devoted to Louis Braille, and was written by dr. Dariusz Rutkowski, PhD, a professor at the Institute of Special Education Studies at the Lower Silesian University in Wrocław. The entry fills two columns of print and it can be divided into several points: the family and the environment in which Louis Braille grew up, his main discovery, i.e. the alphabet for the blind, and his professional activity in adulthood. In a concise manner, the author depicts the family situation, the circumstances of loss of sight and the opportunities for education and development that Louis was provided by his parents. It is equally interesting to read about the development of the alphabet, the foundations of which were laid by N. Barbier, inspiring Louis with his idea. The biographical entry ends with a sentence summarizing the achievements of Louis Braille: "The braille alphabet is not a sole one, but it is definitely the most popular, used in almost every country in the world (...), enabling blind people both to read and write practically any information."

The second selected biographical entry is the one devoted to Ludwig Guttmann, written by prof. Adam A. Zych. It fills one column of print. The author concisely illustrates his background, scientific path, achievements in the field of medicine and the formation of the Spine Injury Centre. Guttmann pointed to the necessity of full integration of the disabled with society. It was already at that time that he put a strong emphasis on the fact that they cannot be condemned to isolation; that they should return to society, work and enjoy life, play sports and compete with others. It is the sport of disabled individuals that became a valuable contribution of Guttmann, providing the foundation for the organization of Paralympic Games, which now enjoy such great importance and prestige.

The analysis of the subject headings and biographical notes gives an insight into the very nature of the encyclopaedia, which appears to be a deeply substantive work prepared with extraordinary care.

In summary, there are mediocre studies that sparked virtually no interest, there are acceptable studies that appeal to a narrow group of readers, and there are extremely valuable publications that are popular and used systematically. *The Encyclopaedia of old age, aging and disability*—with prof. Adam A. Zych as the scientific editor — belongs to the category of extremely valuable studies, which will be used by a wide group of readers. This is an impressive work, whose number and selection of included subject headings and high level of

content makes it eligible to be regarded the most valuable study of recent decades in its category.

The encyclopaedia contains entries that are well-known and deeply rooted in science alongside new and recent subject headings, which scientists are using to explain current social reality. It does not require special recommendation, as anyone who studies old age and disability scientifically or simply holds interest in the issue will want to have this book in their library.