

## HEALTH MATTERS, PATIENTS AND DOCTORS THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY. INTRODUCTION

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The articles included in this thematic section of “Ethnologia Polona” are written mainly by Polish anthropologists whose work has made medical anthropology an important and well visible sub-discipline of socio-cultural anthropology in Poland. In addition, we have invited two medical anthropologists from abroad (working in Saint Petersburg and Oslo) to submit their papers which complement the topics raised in this issue.

The emergence of medical anthropology in Poland was a slow process, because, for a long time it was largely folk medicine or its “remnants” that attracted researchers. Pioneering studies which paved the way for medical anthropology were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s at the University of Wrocław, where ethnologists’ interest concentrated on ethnobotany and new approaches to studying folk medicine, and at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, with the focus on complementary medicine and medical pluralism<sup>1</sup>. However, until the beginning of this century only a few Polish scholars had developed an interest in medical anthropology. The situation has significantly changed in recent decades, which was perhaps precipitated by earlier publications aimed at popularisation of this anthropological sub-discipline in Poland (e.g. Penkala-Gawęcka 1983, 1994), and then by well attended conferences and seminars. Among these events, a workshop organised in Poznań in 2009 gathered a group of young Polish anthropologists who had started their studies on health, illness and medicine, and a conference in Będlewo, in 2011, was attended by anthropologists and

1 For a comprehensive overview of the sources and paths to medical anthropology in Poland see Penkala-Gawęcka 1995; for an outline of its further development see Bartoszkowski and Penkala-Gawęcka 2011.

scholars representing related disciplines<sup>2</sup>. Other important, international conferences took place in Warsaw: MAYS (Young Scholars Medical Anthropology) meeting in 2011 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> HIT (Health in Transition) Conference in 2013<sup>3</sup>.

Scholars working in medical anthropology conduct research both at home and abroad; outside Poland, most researched areas are Central Asia (e.g. Penkala-Gawęcka 2006, 2016) and Latin America (e.g. Wądołowska 2010; Kujawska 2016; Kujawska and Pardo de Santayana 2015), as well as Ukraine (e.g. Kołodziejska-Degórska 2016). In addition to more traditional topics of research, such as medical pluralism or complementary and alternative medicine, Polish anthropologists study, among other issues, people's health-seeking strategies in diverse socio-cultural settings (Penkala-Gawęcka 2016; Main 2018), new reproductive technologies and women's experience of in vitro fertilisation (Radkowska-Walkowicz 2013), the medical choices of Jehovah's Witness patients in Germany (Rajtar 2013), experiences of people suffering from cancer (Wierciński 2015), or rare diseases in Poland and Finland (Rajtar 2017). In recent years, there has also been increased interest in Poland in studying various aspects of biomedicine (Radkowska-Walkowicz and Wierciński eds. 2014) and psychiatric anthropology, popularised and developed by Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk (ed. 2018, 2019) and Andrzej Perzanowski (2018).

The development of Polish medical anthropology is also connected with the activities of the Interdisciplinary Research Team for Childhood Studies at the University of Warsaw. As a result of studies conducted by the members of this team, a number of valuable works have been published, including volumes on children and health (Radkowska-Walkowicz and Reimann eds. 2018), the perceptions of "in vitro children" and their own experiences (Krawczak, Maciejewska-Mroczek, Radkowska-Walkowicz eds. 2018), child and adolescent psychiatry (Witeska-Młynarczyk ed. 2018; 2019) and, recently, on Turner Syndrome (Maciejewska-Mroczek, Radkowska-Walkowicz, Reimann eds. 2019). The activities of this group provide evidence of the advantages of collaboration between medical anthropologists and representatives of other social sciences, humanities and natural sciences.

The observed proliferation of research output – including articles and special issues in leading journals (Speier, Šmídová, Wierciński eds. 2014; Penkala-Gawęcka and Rajtar eds. 2016), participation in international conferences and seminars, invited lectures at home and abroad, and cooperation of medical anthropologists with foreign institutions and international organisations, interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as courses in

2 As a result of these meetings, two edited volumes were published: Penkala-Gawęcka (ed.) 2010; Penkala-Gawęcka, Main, Witeska-Młynarczyk (eds.) 2011.

3 Articles based on the presentations from the latter conference were published in *Czech Sociological Review* (Speier, Šmídová, Wierciński eds. 2014).

medical anthropology at some Polish universities – may be regarded as visible signs of the current strength of this subdiscipline of anthropology in Poland<sup>4</sup>.

This special issue provides an insight into the ways medical anthropology is currently developing in the country, though, of course, it cannot present the whole panorama of these studies. In the articles contained in this issue, we can trace the intersections of various research areas, topics and concepts, such as childhood, reproduction, biomedicine, biotechnologies, medicalisation, institutionalisation, commercialisation, standardisation, normalisation, guidelines, agency, ethics, disability, addiction, patients, biomedical practitioners, healers, complementary medicine, indigenous medicine, etc. While referring to anthropological theories and concepts, the authors all ground their studies in thorough ethnographic research.

Several articles offer anthropological analyses of diverse biomedical technologies used in the diagnosis or treatment of children's health problems, and/or examine the children's own views on such interventions, as well as opinions and attitudes of parents and other actors. These texts show the complex "social work" of such technologies, whose impact goes far beyond biological action.

Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz discusses Turner Syndrome, treated not only as a biological phenomenon, but a "multidimensional cultural fact". She focuses on the growth hormone used in the treatment of girls with TS, and examines it, on the one hand, as a kind of flexible biotechnology, and on the other hand, as "the hormone of hope", a substance which gives a person the prospect of achieving "normality" and avoiding stigmatisation. The specificity of this hormone also raises questions regarding biomedicalisation, bioethics and body enhancement.

The article of Ewa Maciejewska-Mroczek deals with another kind of technology – assisted reproduction, and more specifically in vitro fertilisation (IVF) – and presents a wide ideological, political and legal context of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in Poland. Of particular value is how she reveals how a silent subject, an "IVF child" is being created in the anti-IVF discourse, and gives special attention to the voices of these children. The author highlights children's active role in building their own meanings of in vitro, but also the ways in which negative discourses of ARTs permeate into the worlds of children, and she argues strongly for considering their attitudes.

Anna Klepikova's research is based on interviews with parents of children with developmental – mainly intellectual – disabilities and autism. She shows that a medicalised, professional approach to disabilities, which dominates in Russia, is also shared by the majority of parents. In her article, Klepikova examines popular biomedical and

4 Today, the main university centres of medical anthropology in Poland are the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, with the Research Group "Medical Anthropology", and the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw, with the Unit of Medical Anthropology and Corporeality.

alternative methods of treatment and rehabilitation adopted for children with disabilities, and argues that parents' assessments of their outcomes can be analysed with the use of the placebo effect theory. From this perspective, such factors as the price, prestige, foreign origin, exclusiveness and popularity of treatment enhance the placebo effect, which, in turn, fosters the commercialisation of disability rehabilitation sphere and proliferation of its institutions.

Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk focuses on practices of diagnosing ADHD among school children in Poland and analyses a new tool used for identifying this disorder. The author emphasises the biomedicalisation of ADHD and the development of "diagnostic cultures", clearly seen in the example of the ADHD scanner, as a new instrument of neurotechnology. She comments on the process of commercialisation of such tools and reveals how screening programmes of this kind create a special category of "patients-in-waiting" – those with the liminal status, waiting for the final diagnosis.

Małgorzata Rajtar, in turn, shows the process of normalisation of eating and constructing dietary guidelines for "healthy" people, and compare them with dietary regimens regarded as suitable for persons with a rare metabolic disease – LCHAD deficiency. According to her argument – grounded in fieldwork conducted in Poland and Finland – while healthy individuals are required to know the guidelines and make informed choices about their eating habits, this model is also extended to people with rare diseases, including LCHAD deficiency. However, as the author stresses, in this case there are no universal standards of proper nutrition and dieticians' recommendations may significantly vary; in addition, they are further appropriated by parents and patients themselves.

Some of the articles presented above tackle ethical issues connected with the use of biotechnologies, especially in the case of children. In another text, Aleksandra Rzepkowska deals with the dilemmas and problems of fieldwork among people with autism, including the ethics of this type of research. On the basis of her in-depth study, the author highlights the unique nature of work with autistic people, applied methods, and questions of responsibility and empathy, and concludes with a claim of the importance of traditionally understood fieldwork, in spite of difficulties and ambivalence of this particular field project.

Two further articles focus on drug addiction and the agency of drug users/addicted patients. Aleksandra Bartoszeko describes patients' participation in a Norwegian heroin-addiction treatment programme and thoroughly examines the complex issue of their agency. She shows how patient agencies are made, and how patients and clinicians negotiate and expand them in practice inside and outside the clinic, which demands navigation between policies, treatment protocols and legal regulations. In her paper, Zuzanna Sadowska discusses the problem of drug users' agency. Based on fieldwork conducted in Warsaw, she problematises current dominant approaches to drug addiction, arguing that regular users are not deprived of agency. The author describes diversified

and changing trajectories of people's drug use and analyses the processes of negotiating agency between the user and the substance.

Biomedical professionals, working during a period of intense healthcare system reforms, are at the centre of the next two articles. Hubert Wierciński examines the roles of Polish primary care doctors and focuses on their activities as social entrepreneurs. However, his aim is to show how this role influences encounters between doctors and patients, creating the space for deeper interactions and cooperation with patients, although – as the author argues – these opportunities have been undermined by an increasing bureaucratisation of healthcare system. In the next paper, Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka presents specific features of Soviet and post-Soviet mental healthcare in Kyrgyzstan, including the current efforts by representatives of “new psychiatry”, who strive to implement globally approved standards of community-based and culturally sensitive treatment of mentally ill people. The author shows how these directives have been adapted to the local environment, where psychiatrists have recognised the value of traditional Kyrgyz healers' interventions and have started cooperating with them, despite radical differences in their ontologies and cognitive principles.

The issue of differences between ontologies of biomedicine and traditional medicine, and their possible reconciling is also tackled in the last article of this special section. Monika Kujawska underlines the complexity of the medical landscape of the Ashaninka people from the Peruvian Amazon and examines the coexistence of biomedicine and indigenous medicine within the area of women's reproductive health. Her analysis presents the Ashaninka as a resilient society that preserve their traditional practices connected with childbirth and birth control and at the same time adopt elements of biomedical knowledge.

This collection is intended to give the readers an insight into the main subjects and areas of research for Polish medical anthropologists, which are compatible with the contemporary studies of world medical anthropology. At the same time, it attests to the development of this anthropological sub-discipline in our country.

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