

Career Paths of a Psychologist in Poland – Opportunities and Limitations

Ścieżki rozwoju w zawodzie psychologa w Polsce – możliwości i ograniczenia

Key words: profession, occupational activity, psychologist, lifelong learning.

Słowa kluczowe: zawód, aktywność zawodowa, psycholog, kształcenie ustawiczne.

Streszczenie. Praca zawodowa jest jednym z podstawowych obszarów aktywności dorosłego człowieka i wynika z przypisanych jednostce ról społecznych. Wybór profesji, zgodny z predyspozycjami, umiejętnościami, przygotowaniem i wykształceniem, daje gwarancję wykonywania zadań zawodowych na wysokim poziomie, a także obopólną satysfakcję – świadczeniodawcy i świadczeniobiorcy. Polski współczesny rynek pracy jest bardzo prężny i elastyczny, między innymi dzięki zmianom, które zaszły w procesie transformacji ustrojowej. Obecnie statystyczny Polak planując karierę zawodową, zakłada, że kilka razy w ciągu jej trwania zmieni miejsce pracy, a także branżę. Studia na kierunku psychologia od wielu lat cieszą się niesłabnącą popularnością. Praca w zawodzie psychologa, choć obostrzona jest pewnymi wymaganiami formalnoprawnymi, daje nieograniczone możliwości rozwoju na każdym etapie aktywności zawodowej i uzależniona jest głównie od motywacji, indywidualnych predyspozycji jednostki, do ustawicznego podnoszenia swoich kwalifikacji i rozwoju zawodowego. Posiadanie wykształcenia psychologicznego pozwala na pracę nie tylko sensu stricto jako psycholog, ale także w wielu dziedzinach pokrewnych, nie ograniczając przy tym możliwości zupełnego odejścia od zawodu. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie drogi kształcenia w zawodzie psychologa, możliwości rozwoju, a także omówienie ograniczeń w rozwoju zawodowym wynikających z braku stosownych legislacji prawnych.

Introduction. The choice of educational path and college major is one of the crucial life decisions, which influences the individual's possibilities of occupational activity in a selected sphere. Hence, it is extremely important to make a decision which in the future will lead to self-fulfilment, satisfaction, advancement and

¹ <http://akademia.4grow.pl/kategorie-zlote-mysli-cytaty/praca-880>.

recognition when performing one's job. On the other hand, the labour market has undergone a substantial transformation during the recent years.

In the past, when taking up a job, people usually spend their entire professional career in one company, and if they did change it, it was no more than two or three times, and then they retired. Working the whole life in one company used to be a norm, even a desired phenomenon. During that time, people worked in line with their education, learned occupation, without changing the fundamental sphere of their professional activity. Today, the contemporary labour market operates by a different set of rules. It is assumed that a working person will not only change the company, but also the industry. The statistics as well as the analysis of the social and demographic data reveal that during the last several years approximately 30% of adult Polish citizens have changed their workplace two times. Changing workplace is the most frequent in the group of young people in the 18–24-age bracket, residents of big cities. Neither the gender nor the level of education is the significantly differentiating factors in the referred scope. The society also declares higher readiness for mobility at the labour market and they declare willingness of changing workplace².

The classification of 2014, published in the Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on Classification of Professions and Specialisations for the Requirements of the Labour Market and the Scope of Its Use, of 7 August 2014, binding as of the 1 January 2015, distinguishes 2443 professions/specialities³. Compared with the previous one, published two years before, the classification has increased by 148 professions/specialisations and 10 multifaceted professions, that is such that incorporate even several specialisations.

Psychologist as a Profession. According to the Classification of Professions and Specialisations of 2014, the profession of a psychologist involves examining and studying mental processes and behaviours of human beings as individuals, as well as applying this knowledge for a better adjustment of an individual or a group for a social life and also for personal, educational and professional advancement. The document lists the following tasks and obligations of a psychologist, which, among other things, include:

- selection of methods, test tools and performing examinations to determine the level of intelligence, abilities and skills; quantitative and qualitative analysis of performed measurements,
- analysing the impact of various factors upon the thought patterns and behaviour of an individual,
- providing counselling and psychological support,
- conducting individual or group therapeutic activities,
- conducting educational and assisting activities in order to provide optimal solutions,

² <http://kariera.forbes.pl/jak-czesto-zmieniamy-prace-,artykuly,138260,1,1.html>; access date: 03.06.2017.

³ <http://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10240/54723/Opisy%20gr.eleme.KZiS%202014r.%20%289.02.2015%29.pdf/9b0ce94e-fa88-4510-82bd-67f2aa83e575?t=1430916465000>; access date: 05.06.2017.

- assessing the importance of psychological factors to prevent, diagnose and treat mental illnesses, emotional disorders and personality disorders,
- cooperation with other specialists of similar or related fields,
- conducting scientific and promoting activities through lectures, publications, reports, analyses,
- researching and developing testing tools,
- developing theories and utility models for better understanding and interpreting human behaviour⁴.

Who is a psychologist, then, who can become one and which ethical and formal requirements does one have to meet? In Poland, these formal issues are governed by the Act on the Profession and Occupational Association of Psychologists, adopted in 2001 (Journal of Laws 73.763/2001, subsequently amended), which became effective on 1 January 2006. According to the item 4.1 and 4.2 of the hereinabove act, the profession of a psychologist involves providing psychological services. However, even though there has been 11 years since the act was published, there have been no implementing acts thereto adopted and no occupational association of psychologists has been appointed. The psychological organisations, including the Polish Psychological Association, undertake systematic attempts and initiatives aimed at implementing these “dead note” regulations so as to ensure the highest quality of psychological services provided to clients. In autumn 2016, 12 associations, grouping professional circles of psychologists, put forward a postulate calling for the quickest possible initiation of developing a new legal act that would govern the right to practice the profession of a psychologist in Poland⁵. The latest information suggests that instead of a new act on profession of a psychologist is to be prepared, instead of continuing the works on the previous one. The consequence is that the profession of a psychologist is still not protected by the law and that translates into difficulties in legal protection of clients of psychological services.

Currently in Poland, the profession of a psychologist may be performed by any person with Master of Arts diploma in psychology, obtained in the course of education at a Polish university or an equivalent diploma, granted by a foreign university (confirmed and recognised by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education)⁶.

Above all else, a psychologist is the profession of public trust. It must be stressed here that the term of *profession of public trust* is characteristic to the Polish reality and it is not a broadly recognised and used term in the European terminology⁷. For that reason, certain difficulties emerge with defining and specifying term, and there are no precise legislative regulations in the Polish legal system referring to the notional scope of this term⁸. As held by the Constitutional Court on 7 May 2002 (case K 41/05), the

⁴ <http://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10240/54723/Opisy%20gr.eleme.KZiS%202014r.%20%289.02.2015%29.pdf/9b0ce94e-fa88-4510-82bd-67f2aa83e575?t=1430916465000>; access date: 05.06.2017.

⁵ http://www.ptp.org.pl/ustawa/ustawa/PTP_7_ZG_17.pdf access date: 05.06.2017.

⁶ <http://www.ptp.org.pl/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=287>; access date: 06.06.2017.

⁷ P. Antkowiak, *Polskie i europejskie standardy wykonywania wolnych zawodów*, Przegląd Politologiczny, 2013, Nr 1, p. 129–141.

⁸ <http://www.senat.gov.pl/gfx/senat/pl/senatopracowania/56/plik/ot-625.pdf>; access date: 07.06.2017.

profession of public trust, including the profession of a psychologist, should be understood as a profession which performs the tasks of a special character from the viewpoint of public tasks as well as caring for public interest. Therefore, to perform such profession duly, a special preparation is required in scope of theoretical basis and practical experience, personal competences, professionalism, responsibility as well as employing and following the principles of a professional ethics^{9,10,11}.

These days, the possibilities of work and occupational fulfilment in the profession of a psychologist are very varied. Before, the profession was associated with being part of the health care – working in psychiatric hospital or mental health clinics, and in education – working in upbringing centres (currently the psychological and pedagogical centres), working at schools, and in broadly understood legal institutions – penal institutions, reformatories, social rehabilitation facilities as well as providing expert opinions to legal institutions. Currently, the categories of occupational activities of a psychologist may be grouped as follows:

- health care;
- social support;
- education;
- marketing, management, psychology of advertisement;
- social rehabilitation psychology for youth and adults;
- organisation of work;
- psychology of sport;
- psychology of transportation.

Psychologists are employed in various institutions, often in line with their other qualifications. These institutions include, among other things:

- Psychological-pedagogical centres
- Sexology clinics
- Mental health clinics
- Addiction treatment facilities
- Adoption centres
- Child homes
- Care and upbringing centres
- Hospitals
- Hospices
- Psychotherapy centres
- Diagnostic centres
- Rehabilitation centres
- Labour medicine centres
- Schools
- Special schools

⁹ http://www.ptp.org.pl/ustawa/ustawa/PTP_7_ZG_17.pdf; access date: 05.06.2017.

¹⁰ P. Antkowiak, *Polskie i europejskie standardy wykonywania wolnych zawodów*, *Przegląd Politologiczny*, 2013, Nr 1, p. 129–141.

¹¹ K.T. Panas, *Psycholog w XXI wieku*, *Horyzonty Psychologii*, 2012, vol. II, p. 191–199.

- Job centres
- Occupational counselling facilities
- Penitentiary facilities
- Social rehabilitation facilities
- Police
- Military
- Advertisement
- Media
- Opinion poll centres
- Research and development facilities
- Driver examination facilities
- PR agencies
- Marketing and human resources
- Training/coaching, business consultation companies¹².

Education process of a psychologist. It, it is possible to notice a growing interest of young people in the profession of a psychologist over the last 20 years. Psychology is one of the most frequently chosen college majors to study.

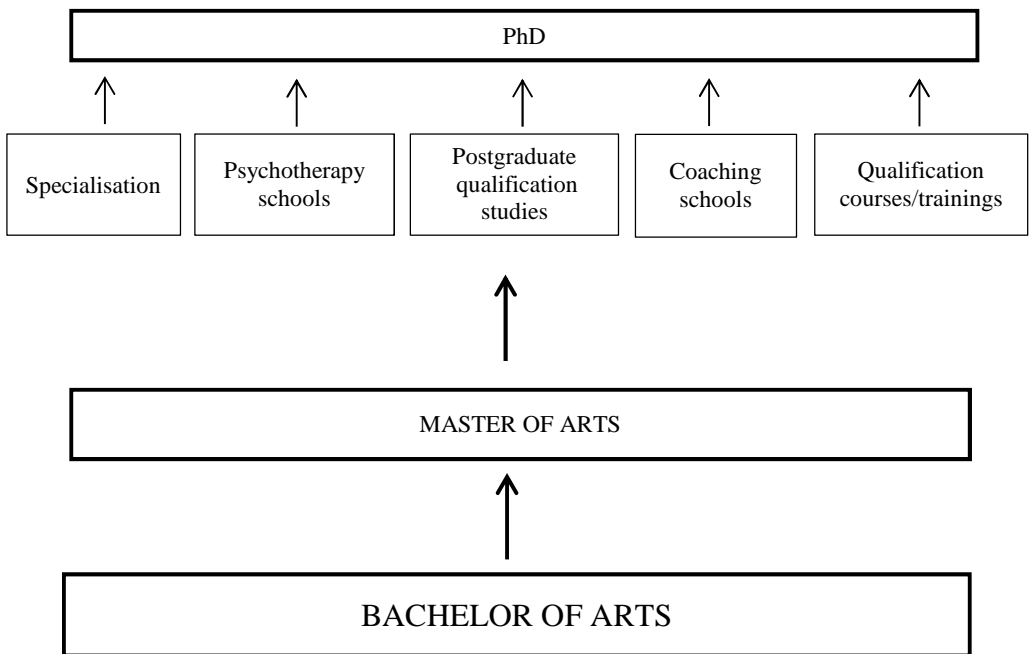


Fig. 1. Education process of a psychologist in Poland

¹² <http://charaktery.eu/artykul/psychologia-i-co-dalej>; access date: 08.06.2017.

These days, it is possible to study both at public as well as private colleges, at full-time and part-time courses, at five-year courses or, at some colleges, at 3.5-year courses, addressed to BA and MA graduates of other majors. It is also possible to employ the Bologna Process study – 3-year first degree course (BA), and 2-year second degree course (MA). There are varied opinions of psychologists with regard to this latter study programme for psychologists. The negative ones express the view that there are no adequate legal regulations specifying the scope of duties and providing psychological services by the BA graduates and the MA graduates. It is claimed that such educational system is adverse to prosperity and quality of broadly-defined psychological services. (cf. opinion of the UAM Council of the Psychology Institute¹³, response of the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences¹⁴, opinion of the Council of the Psychology Institute WNoW University of Lodz¹⁵). The issue of difficulties arising from educating psychologists employing the BA and MA system studies, as well as the standard of services provided by them, has been discussed a number of times by Brzeziński in his publications^{16,17}.

A graduate of the full-time higher education institution course is granted with a title of a MA in psychology. During the studies, students may choose a variety of specialisations that they want to pursue, but the choice provided depends on a specific college. Still, this is not the equivalent of specialisation. Currently, as per the Act on Obtaining a Specialist Title in Fields Related to Health Care of 24 February 2017, a psychologist may choose a specialisation in scope of clinical psychology, which includes the following sub-specialisations: mental disorders of adults, psychosomatics, neuropsychology, clinical psychology of children and youth (the curriculum of specialisation is currently being modified, relating to the hereinabove Act of 24 February 2017). Having received the title of a clinical psychology specialist, the psychologist may apply to be entered into the Register of Clinical Psychologists, held by the Polish Psychological Association. It must be noted that taking education in scope of specialisation is both payable and costly, and psychologists usually receive no funding from their place of employment.

Another form of self-advancement is taking up post-graduate studies in various disciplines of psychology or similar fields (e.g. pedagogy, speech therapy, psychodietetics). The educational offer is very broad in this scope. In some specialisations, e.g. psychology of transportation, psychologists are required to complete specific post-graduate studies to be admitted to perform their job and be

¹³ <http://psychologia.amu.edu.pl/2013/04/26/stanowisko-rady-instytutu-psychologii-uam-w-sprawie-mozliwosci-prowadzenia-studiow-psychologicznych-w-trybie-dwustopniowym-licencjatmagisterium/>; access date: 07.06.2017.

¹⁴ http://www.kompsych.pan.pl/images/Sprawozdania201115/2012/Zal._III._Odpowiedz_Rektorowi_A.Eliaszowi_ze_strony_Prezidium_KP_PAN.pdf; access date: 07.06.2017.

¹⁵ http://psych.uni.lodz.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Stanowisko-Rady-Instytutu_01.11.pdf; access date: 07.06.2017.

¹⁶ J. Brzeziński, *Erozja norm akademickich. Próby diagnozy. Teksty Drugie*, 2006, p. 1–2, 9–39.

¹⁷ J.M. Brzeziński, *Jakiej psychologii (i psychologów) potrzebuje społeczeństwo?* *Roczniki Psychologiczne*, 2011, XIV, 3, p. 7–33.

entered into the register of psychologists authorised to perform examinations of drivers.

The most comprehensive and varied offer of continuous education for psychologists are trainings, courses or workshops, providing different scope of learning, duration, topics included, etc. There are forms which concentrate upon one specific diagnostic method, but there are also courses comprising a broader diagnostic context, such as battery of psychological tests employed in a given diagnostic field. It is also possible to take part in workshops aimed at perfecting various practical skills.

In Poland, the standards and the obligation for continuous education of psychologists have not yet been legally sanctioned, even though the provisions of the European Certificate in Psychology, granted by the European Federation of Psychological Associations clearly regulate the issue and require the certificate to be renewed every seven years, thus obliging psychologists to self-educate¹⁸.

Brzeziński notices that it is necessary to distinguish two layers in the sphere of psychology education – the scientific layer (theoretical foundations), and the practical one. He claims that the quality of academic education is the link between these two layers and it must not be forgotten that without theoretical basis practising psychology is impossible, as the theory precedes the practice¹⁹. He calls for formulating interdisciplinary educational standards in scope of psychology, which will allow for maintaining high quality of education and will subsequently translate into high quality of provided services.²⁰ There is a visible trend in the field which postulates professionalisation of the occupation of a psychologist. Because of active attitude of psychologists and their associations, this trend is also noticeable in Poland.²¹

With regard to the issue of continuous education of psychologists in Poland, it seems appropriate and justified to specify the requirements, forms and methods of educational improvement of psychologists, or, in other words, standardisation of the educational process²². Psychology as a scientific discipline also sees continuous development and new discoveries, not only in theoretical and methodological spheres, but also in terms of legal and moral aspects²³. This is why psychology must keep up with the new things, and the scope of provided services must be extended to include

¹⁸ Y.H. Poortinga, *Organizacja ustawicznego rozwoju zawodowego*, Roczniki Psychologiczne, 2015, XVIII, 2, p. 217–220.

¹⁹ J.M.Brzeziński, *O tym, co ważne, gdy myślimy o psychologii w Polsce*, Roczniki Psychologiczne, 2014, XVII, 3, p. 475–494.

²⁰ J.M. Brzeziński, *Jakiej psychologii (i psychologów) potrzebuje społeczeństwo?* Roczniki Psychologiczne, 2011, XIV, 3, p. 7–33.

²¹ http://www.acpir.swps.pl/images/Raport_%20ustawiczne%20kształcenie%20w%20obszarze%20diagnozy%20psychologicznej.pdf; access date: 04.06.2017.

²² M. Filipiak, M. Tarnowska, B. Zalewski, W.J. Paluchowski, *O systemie kształcenia ustawicznego psychologów diagnostów w Polsce – podsumowanie dyskusji*, Roczniki Psychologiczne, 2015, XVIII, 2, p. 241–250.

²³ A. Bańka, *Psychologia jako dyscyplina naukowa, profesjonalna i etyczna*, Czasopismo Psychologiczne, vol. 2, no 2, 1996, p. 77–80.

the new catalogue consistent with social expectations, which very often enforces exploring very narrow specialisations²⁴.

It is an undeniable fact and unquestionable obligation of psychologists to self-improve and educate after completing studies. Unfortunately, there are no strict criteria concerning the forms and methods of self-education, and therefore lack of requirements for course and training institutions makes the choice of high quality and valuable courses very difficult. It seems justified to sanction the obligation of self-education for psychologists by taking part in different forms of occupational advancement. It is legally regulated in many other professions, such as lawyers, with precisely outlined obligations contained in the Resolution no 57/2011 of the Polish Bar Council of 19 November 2011, "On Self-Improvement of Advocates". It specifies which forms of self-education are granted points or how many points are required from advocates in one year to increase one's qualifications²⁵.

It is important for professionally active psychologists to develop and update their knowledge and skills by taking part in specialised courses and post-graduate studies which are recognised and valued by professional circles, or, better still, which are certified by an institution granting the right to practice psychology²⁶. A practising psychologist – the psychologist with a specialisation in the clinical psychology is expected to demonstrate the highest level of practical skills and qualification in scope of diagnostic and prophylactic activities as well as therapeutic interactions²⁷. Oleś emphasises that besides the essential requirements of self-advancement for psychologists and certifying their competences, it is also important to pay attention to high professionalism and education of the training personnel and their certification as well, including international standards in the process²⁸.

One of the crucial aspects in educating psychologists is the moral and ethical sphere. Doliński stresses that the level of adhering to ethical principles by psychologists depends less upon the number of didactic classes, and more upon ethics of tutors, who themselves should set an example and remain consistent with what they do and teach²⁹. Following the principles of occupational ethics is the fundamental element of work of every psychologist^{30,31}. In Poland, psychologists are required to

²⁴ K.T. Panas, *Psycholog w XXI wieku, Horyzonty psychologii*, 2012, vol. II, p. 191–199.

²⁵ Uchwała nr 57/2011 Naczelnej Rady Adwokackiej z dnia 19 listopada 2011 r. „O doskonaleniu zawodowym adwokatów”.

²⁶ J.M. Brzeziński, *Jakiej psychologii (i psychologów) potrzebuje społeczeństwo?* *Roczniki Psychologiczne*, 2011, XIV, 3, p. 7–33.

²⁷ L. Cierpiątkowska, H. Sęk, *Wyzwania dla psychologii klinicznej w XXI wieku*, *Nauka* 2/2015, p. 69–85.

²⁸ P. Oleś, *Kompetencja w diagnozowaniu, czyli o konieczności ustawicznego kształcenia*, *Roczniki Psychologiczne*, 2015, XVIII, 2, p. 205–210.

²⁹ D. Doliński, *Trzy grosze o tym, co musimy zrobić jako środowisko*, *Roczniki Psychologiczne*, 2011, XIV, 2, p. 49–52.

³⁰ K. Stemplewska-Żakowicz, *Diagnoza psychologiczna. Diagnozowanie jako kompetencja profesjonalna*, GWP, Gdańsk 2011.

³¹ J.M. Brzeziński, *O potrzebie etycznej refleksji w pracy psychologa (Wstęp do wydania polskiego Co wolno, a czego nie wolno terapeutycznie*, Jones C., Shillito-Clarke C., Syme G., Hill D., Casemore R., Murdin L.), GWP, Gdańsk 2005, p. 16–21.

follow the Ethical and Professional Code of a Psychologist, introduced in 1991, which relates to the work of a psychologist as a practitioner, theoretician – tutor, scientist and promoter.

Summary. When discussing a person who works as a psychologist, one has to bear in mind not only their theoretical preparation, obtained in college, but also the scope of competences and skills, including ethical and moral standards.

The contemporary labour market enforces continuous development and increasing qualifications through participating in short (several hours) or long (several days or even years) forms of education, such as workshops, trainings, qualifying occupational courses, post-graduate studies, etc. Every professionally active psychologist is obliged to maintain a high level of professional competences, which translates into continuous education, both theoretical and practical. It also involves being aware of the limitations in own personal and detailed competences³². Continuous self-advancement of psychologists guarantees the highest quality of their services as well as maintaining high level of professional competences.

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³² M. Toeplitz-Winiewska, *Etyczne aspekty uprawiania zawodu psychologa*. In: *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*. T. 3, red. Strelau J., Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 821–836.

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