

The research project titled “A Good Death? The Anthropology of Non-Medical Palliative Care in Poland” examines people who accompany the dying and their families outside the hospital setting: death doulas, grief companions, geriatric coordinators, educators, and specialised funeral-home workers. Although such occupations have been discussed in Western countries for years, they remain virtually unstudied in Poland—a rapidly ageing nation that is still Catholic yet increasingly secular. The project fills this gap and tackles a practical question: how can dignified, person-centred end-of-life support be provided when families are dispersed and the health-care system is focused mainly on medical procedures?

The research will last one year and will encompass:

- participant observation during workshops and events organised by representatives of these new non-medical palliative-care professions;
- autoethnography based on a year-long placement in one such role (grief-support helpline consultant);
- about twenty narrative interviews with practitioners from different regions of the country;
- critical discourse analysis of training materials and media coverage.

This combination of methods will capture both everyday practice and society’s imaginaries of a “good death.”

Why does it matter?

- Polish literature has so far focused on physicians and hospices; the role of secular specialists in dying remains a blank spot.
- Population ageing and an expanding care-services market mean that growing numbers of families seek emotional and organisational support outside the public system.
- Understanding these new professions will help policy-makers plan palliative-care strategy more effectively and enable practitioners to develop shared standards.

Expected outcomes include the first Polish map of these occupations and of the processes through which they emerge, plus a contribution to contemporary understandings of the notion of a “good death,” ultimately leading to a better grasp of palliative patients’ needs.