



OBITUARY

AARON ANTONOVSKY 1923–1994

It is with great sadness we have to report that Aaron Antonovsky died on July 7.

Aaron was born in the United States in 1923. After serving in the U.S. army in World War II, he obtained his PhD in sociology from Yale University. Aaron emigrated to Israel in 1960, settled in Jerusalem and worked at the Israel Institute for Applied Social Science and in the Department of Social Medicine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem-Hadassah.

By the end of the 1960s, Aaron's role as a leading figure in medical sociology was established when he published several articles on social class differences in morbidity and mortality. His first major paper, published in 1967 and reprinted countless times throughout the world, was one of the first efforts to call attention to this risk factor. This paper is still widely cited in the literature as research on social class remains a primary focus of public health.

In 1972 Aaron became one of the pioneers in the establishment of the medical school of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. As incumbent of the Kunen-Lunefeld Chair in Medical Sociology, he had two central roles in the medical school. Being the first chairman of the admissions committee, he designed the medical school's much copied admissions process. In addition, he established and headed the Unit of the Sociology of Health, which has had a leading role in shaping the school's bio-psycho-social and community orientation. During his twenty years in Beer Sheva, Aaron taught countless physicians and students how to look in a new way at the medical profession, at disease and health, and at society as a whole.

During the years that Aaron's work in the medical school was bringing him international recognition in the medical education community, he continued to develop as a theoretician and researcher. Already in the 1960s his contribution to research on the stress process was acknowledged. In the 1970s he began to develop the salutogenic model of health and illness which attained worldwide professional attention in his 1979 book, *Health, Stress and Coping*, and its sequel, *Unravelling Mystery of Health*, which was published in 1987. A breakthrough in research on the relationship between stress and illness, the salutogenic model influenced the thinking of medical and behavioural scientists about the factors that form the basis of human health. His fundamental contribution was to point out the consequences of a pathological orientation toward sickness and disease, arguing persuasively that a far more useful view is obtained when researchers and clinicians instead focus on health and the forces that help people maintain effective functioning even in the presence of hazardous influences.

Aaron became one of our advisory editors in February 1976 and shortly afterwards was made a regional editor. In addition to his esteemed help over many aspects of journal policy and review, he was an enthusiastic participant in most of the *International Conferences on the Social Sciences and Medicine*. In 1992 he presented the Opening Address on the occasion of the XIIth meeting.

Aaron published over 100 papers and wrote or edited 12 books. In his work he combined creative conceptual thinking with sophisticated quantitative methodologies, which were expressed in an informal, charming and crystal clear manner. Recognition of his talents and achievements was expressed in 1993 when he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Nordic School of Public Health.

Aaron retired from the medical school in 1992 but remained an active researcher and lecturer at meetings throughout the world. He became ill during a conference in Lisbon in May and died just two months later.