The aim of the dissertation is to examine and analyze traumatic experiences of Poles related to the period of World War II, captured in biographical accounts, using oral history methods.

The key research problem concerns the way in which traumatic experiences were experienced, processed and described by witnesses, and how these memories evolved over the years. The research hypothesis assumes that oral history is a valuable tool for recognizing these experiences, and also allows for the study of the ways in which they are expressed in narrative and the ongoing memory processes. The work shows how trauma was and is processed in individual accounts, and what place trauma research occupies, or may occupy, in contemporary historiography.

Although the topic of war trauma is not a new issue in the humanities, it has been studied only to a limited extent in Polish historiography. The work is an attempt to verify the previous views on documenting and interpreting war experiences in classical historiography, and it discusses the possibility of presenting trauma using the tools available to non-classical historiography in a non-modernist version.

For this purpose, an attempt was made to integrate theories from non-classical historiography, trauma theory, and oral history methodology, that allowed for construction of a comprehensive approach to the analysis of trauma. The key source material were biographical recordings of witnesses to history, conducted using the oral history method in the years 2012–2020. The narrative analysis focused on case studies of three people who experienced war trauma. Additionally, the documentation of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes was used, including transcripts of witness interviews, and testimonies of concentration camp prisoners collected in 1945, which broadened the research perspective.

The structure of the work aims to present the issues related to war trauma in a logical and systematic way, starting from its empirical traces and first attempts at theoretical approach, through research difficulties taking into account the Polish historical context, to the analysis of specific source cases. This way of presenting the topic was intended to comprehensively present the issue of war trauma, gradually introducing the reader to its complexity, thus allowing for better understanding of how trauma was recorded and interpreted both empirically and theoretically. The systematic approach, from general traces of trauma to the analysis of specific cases, also allowed for indicating difficulties and limitations in researching this issue, especially in the Polish historical context. Subsequent steps, combining historical and psychological approaches with extended theoretical reflection, enabled a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in post-war Poland.