

Lea Pulkkinen

Professor Lea Pulkkinen has had an impressive international career as a professor of psychology, working mainly at the University of Jyväskylä. In recognition of her scientific career, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters awarded her the Academy Award. The award sum is 30 000 euros.

As a young student, she originally studied psychology as a minor subject, but Introduction to Psychology by Professor Martti Takala opened a window into scientific thinking, and she switched her major to psychology.

“Aiming to understand how we acquire information has been the most significant aspect of my career. Psychology is an empirical science that collects information from the people by listening to them and observing them. This information allows us to understand how people act and how they think. The utilization of information based on research has been a strong priority in my life.”

Pulkkinen is one of the most distinguished researchers in the field of developmental psychology in Europe and has made Finnish psychology research more interna-

tional. Pulkkinen’s doctoral dissertation in 1968 launched a unique and still ongoing longitudinal study of the growth and development of children into adulthood. In the late 1960s, and long after, emotions and reason were considered as separate from each other, but Pulkkinen realized that the differences in people’s behavior could be explained by emotional regulation. The continued monitoring of the same group of people from primary school until middle age demonstrates the importance of emotional and behavioral regulation in terms of personal development in various areas, such as personality, education and working career, personal relationships, wellbeing and health, health behavior, and social adaptation. The study is known internationally as the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development (JYLS). Pulkkinen is grateful to her students and colleagues for their cooperation and to those who have participated in the study for donating their time to research.

Pulkkinen has worked as a visiting researcher and professor at the University

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of California, Berkeley, Arizona State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Cambridge in England. In 1991–1996, she served as the president of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development.

Alongside her international career as a scientist, Pulkkinen has wielded significant social influence and actively advocated for children, and she has been able to utilize the information obtained through research for the development of the society in an exemplary manner. Through multiple decades, she has been asked to weigh in on plans, decisions, and proposed legislation concerning children, and her objective has been to raise the cause of children and homes above party politics and day-to-day policy. In the 1970s, Pulkkinen participated in the planning of the educational goals for municipal daycare and raised con-

cerns about childhood loneliness during the service cutbacks in the 1990s. In the 2000s, she headed a trial intended to develop the structure of school days toward a more integrative direction by introducing enjoyable recreational and supervised leisure activities. This resulted in the inclusion of before- and after-school activities in the Finnish Basic Education Act. In 2015, Pulkkinen was invited by the Ministry of Education and Culture to examine effective practices for flexible school days, and her work produced a list of suggestions for establishing the concept. She is delighted by the fact that an addendum on the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities was introduced to the Youth Act at the beginning of 2023.

Her challenge for the future is also related to children.

“I would like to see society become more child oriented. The fact that a good

childhood can carry far in life is also demonstrated by my own research. Child-orientation means that the psychological needs of children are taken into account. They need a lot of love, experiences of success, and the sense that they know what is expected of them. Love, structures, and encouragement. And the greatest of these is love.”

The internationally respected and experienced scientist sees worrying signs

in our time concerning the future of Finnish science.

“We have harnessed science for practical needs and strategic guidance, which means that scientists are forced to chase grants, trying to jump from one field to another. This offers little chance of substantial Eureka moments. We need robust fundamental research. International mentoring and connections are also important, as they encourage and inspire us to innovate.”



The 2023 Academy Award was awarded to Professor Lea Pulkkinen.