

In Memoriam:



Avi Madan-Swain, Ph.D. (1956 – 2025)

By Anne E. Kazak, Ph.D., Joe Ackerson, Ph.D. and Daniel Marullo, Ph.D.

Avi Madan-Swain, Ph.D. had a professional career that advanced a broad perspective on children and families, with contributions across many key areas of pediatric psychology. She spent her entire career at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and Children’s of Alabama where she developed clinically innovative programs in pediatric hematology-oncology, conducted clinically relevant research, and provided training that deeply influenced the competence and practice of many pediatric psychologists. In all realms of her professional life – astute clinician, innovative program developer, committed

investigator, and wise mentor – she focused above all else on advocacy and her commitment to bettering the lives of children and families.

Dr. Madan-Swain was born in India. She talked about reconciling her own life with those impacted by poverty in India. During college at Jadavpur University in Kolkata she worked with Mother Teresa at a school for children with disabilities and at a home where people were brought from the streets to die. While accepting the 2015 University of Alabama Dean's Excellence Award for Service, Dr. Madan-Swain said, "What Mother Teresa said made me look at humanity in a different way, to figure out how to reach and meet individuals where they are and walk with them on their journey." She was deeply impacted by this experience and committed herself to a career in which she would advocate for marginalized children, such as those with developmental disabilities and chronic health problems.

Dr. Madan-Swain came to the United States where she first received a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin – Stout and then continued her formal education and received two doctoral degrees; the first in special education from Purdue University and the second in clinical psychology from Georgia State University. Her focus on pediatric cancer emerged from doctoral studies with Dr. Ron Brown and in neuropsychology from her internship and fellowship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Children's of Alabama with Drs. Daniel Marullo and Joe Ackerson.

Dr. Madan-Swain's early publications set the stage for papers over the course of her career that examined many aspects of pediatric cancer for children and families, including cognitive sequelae, academic achievement, psychosocial functioning, and post-traumatic stress. This work evolved into a focus on interventions and treatments that targeted multiple outcomes for children with cancer and their families, including pain, attention problems, emotional adjustment, cardiorespiratory fitness and exercise, and grief, among others.

When Dr. Madan-Swain arrived at UAB in the late 1990's there was little psychology involvement in the pediatric hematology/oncology service. She was instrumental in creating a psychosocial program, [the Hope and Cope Program](#), that coordinated psychosocial services for patients and families, meeting not just the medical issues but also the emotional, spiritual, and social, and financial needs of the entire family. This program was innovative and comprehensive and continues today, 20 years after its founding. Dr. Madan-Swain also collaborated with others to develop neurocognitive testing and attention to patients with brain tumors and those undergoing bone marrow transplantation.

Dr. Madan-Swain had a superb ability to identify and integrate clinically important ideas with research questions. I (Kazak) enjoyed many discussions with her about this and about challenges and accomplishments in integrating family-oriented psychosocial care in pediatric settings. I credit her with formulating our current practices for communicating the results of psychosocial screening with families. Again, consistent with her advocacy for families, she was an early proponent of working with families on their journey and assuring that we were engaging with them to offer the best care possible. Related research projects included using problem solving therapy with pediatric cancer survivors (National Cancer Institute), developing an approach and model of family psychosocial risk screening in bone marrow transplantation (funded by Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation with myself and Ahna Pai, Ph.D.), quality improvement initiatives (Kaul Pediatric Research Institute), school re-entry (Starbright), and foundation funded research introducing complementary and alternative therapies for patients and their families.

Dr. Madan-Swain's impact was broad and deep. Dr. Joe Ackerson, in delivering a eulogy at her funeral said, "Avi always did things Avi's way. She did not always choose the easy path, but rather the path of hard work and integrity....'Just think about it' was a favorite phrase – Avi could be very convincing when she wanted to be and had a simply beautiful and disarming smile. She supported so many of us, not just professionally but personally as well. Her legacy will live on through the many students she trained, the patients and families she served, and all of us who were blessed to know her." Dr. Matt Hocking a former trainee, noted, "My favorite times during my training with Avi were my chats with her late in the afternoon...We always stayed to talk with one another even though we both had to drive over an hour to get home. We talked about family, my future career, and all things pediatric psychology...These conversations had a tremendous impact on my career path, and I am forever grateful for all that she did for me." Dr. Dan Marullo noted, "I have been friends and a colleague of Avi for 30 years. What an incredible individual. Avi made an impact and always strove to provide a voice for those in need...Avi was genuine, warm, and kind. She was a true friend and always popped up when you were in need, which I know from personal experience. Such an incredible spirit."

In recognition of her many contributions to pediatric psychology, Dr. Madan-Swain was awarded the Society of Pediatric Psychology Wright Ross Salk Award for Distinguished Service in Pediatric Psychology this spring (2025), around the time of her retirement from UAB. She is survived by Jim, her husband of 40 years, her daughter Dr. Deana Swain, a psychologist at Colorado Children's Hospital, and her granddaughter, Laurel.

Avi Madan-Swain: List of Select Publications

1. **Madan-Swain, A.** & Zentall, S. (1990). Behavioral comparisons of liked and disliked hyperactive children in play contexts and behavioral accommodation by their classmates. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 58, (2), 197-209.
2. **Madan-Swain, A.** & Brown, R.T. (1991). Cognitive and psychosocial sequelae for children with acute lymphocytic leukemia and their families. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 11, 267-294.
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11. Brown, R.T., Sawyer, M.B., Antoniou, G., Toogood, I., Thompson, N., & **Madan-Swain A.** (1996). A three-year follow-up of the intellectual and academic functioning of

children receiving CNS-prophylactic chemotherapy for leukemia. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 17(6), 392-398.

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14. **Madan-Swain, A.**, Brown, R.T., Foster, M., Vega, R., Byars, K., Rodenberger-Kuppenheimer, W., Bell, B., & Lambert, R. (2000). Identity in adolescent survivors of childhood cancer. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 25, 105-115.
15. Brown, R.T., **Madan-Swain A.**, & Lambert R. (2003). Posttraumatic stress symptoms in adolescent survivors of childhood cancer and their mothers. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 6(4), 309-318.
16. **Madan-Swain A.** & Wallander J.L. (2003). Commentary: Internship training. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 105-107.
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