

Nursing Education in Estonia During the Years of Occupation: Paternalism and Ideology

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Abstract : Background data. In 1940-1941 and 1945-1991 Estonia was occupied by Soviet Union. Paternalism was a common principle in Soviet social policy, including health care. The Soviet government, not the individuals themselves, decided on achieving a person's quality of life. With the help of Soviet ideology, the work culture of nurses was constructed and the education system was also reshaped according to the ideology. The "new period of awakening" was initiated under Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost (1985-1991), leading to democratization. Aim. The qualitative study aimed to analyze nursing education in Soviet Estonia in the conditions of paternalistic orientation and ideological pressure. Method. The research was conducted in 2021 and 2023. Senior nurses (aged 69-87) who had worked for at least 20 years during the Soviet era were surveyed. Thematic interviews were conducted in written form and orally (13 interviewees), followed by a focus group interview (8 interviewees). A thematic content analysis was performed. Results. Nursing is part of society's culture and in this sense, in -terviews with nurses provide us with critical information about the functioning of society and cultural identity at a given time. During the Soviet era the training of nurses occurred within vocational training institutions. The curricula underwent a shift towards a Soviet-oriented approach. A significant portion of lessons were dedicated to imparting knowledge on the principles and tenets of Communist-Marxist ideology. Therefore, practical subjects and nursing theory were frequently allocated limited space. A paternalistic orientation prevailed in health care: just as the state regulated how to cure, spread hygiene, and healthy lifestyles propaganda, training was also determined by the management of the institution, thereby limiting the person's autonomy to decide what kind of training was needed. The research is of significant value in the context of the history of nursing, as it helps to understand the difficulties and complexity of the development of nursing on the timeline. The Soviet era still affects Estonian society today and will continue to do so in the future. The same type of developments occurred in other post-Soviet countries.

Keywords : Estonian SSR, nursing education, paternalism, senior nurse, Soviet ideology

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