

# GOALS AND ACTUAL PRACTICE – multi-level analysis of the evolution of Finnish geriatric nursing from the 1930s to the 2000s



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the evolution of the content and characteristics of Finnish geriatric nursing from the 1930s to the 2000s. The research approach was based on three underlying assumptions: historicity, multi-level analysis and the dimensions of goals and actual practice. Historicity implied both a long-term analysis of the phenomenon and the use of historical methodology. Multi-level analysis implied that the phenomenon was analyzed at both a macro-level and a micro-level. The macro-level consisted of the societal geriatric policies (level I). The micro-level was divided into functional environments comprising the municipal context (level II) and nursing organizations (level III), as well as the nursing practice (level IV). The focal aim in the multi-level analysis was to compare the goals (at levels I-III) to the actual practice (level IV). The underlying theoretical premises of the multi-level analysis consisted of system-oriented thinking, and the data were organized in terms of the guidance model. The evolution of geriatric nursing was analyzed on the basis of official documents at level I, the municipal documents of three municipalities in northern Finland at level II, the documents of geriatric nursing organizations in selected municipalities at level III, and retrospective knowledge of nursing aids and assistants and practical nurses at level IV. In addition to this, contemporary material, as well as relevant literature, magazines and research findings, were used to shed light on the historico-socio-cultural context. The manner of reading applied was systematic interpretation, which al-

lowed the macro- and micro-level information of geriatric nursing of different historical periods to be integrated into a comprehensible whole.

The study highlighted the basic dimensions of both goals and actual practice. Using a theoretical societal frame of analysis, they were combined into the general guidelines of geriatric nursing: the retaining nursing of the activation stage (1930-1950), the collective nursing of the preliminary stage (1950-1970), the individual nursing of the revitalizing stage (1970-1990) and the balancing nursing of the renovative stage (1990-). The findings indicated that the evolution of geriatric nursing was shaped by the goal-oriented dimensions of the geriatric policies, the municipal organizations and the functional contexts of the nursing organizations, as well as by the nurses' role in the actual practice. The findings also indicated that the goals defined in geriatric policies were implemented in the actual nursing practice with some delay. The purpose of the study was to produce synthesizing basic nursing research. It thus opened up a new perspective into the research questions motivated by nursing science. The findings can also be utilized in efforts to understand the value and knowledge-base of geriatric nursing and in nurse education. In order to be able to develop nursing further, it is important not to approach nursing as a separate phenomenon, but to integrate it into a wider historico-sociocultural analysis. The methodological solutions made here can also be applied to other nursing research.

**Key words:** geriatric nursing, history of nursing, historical research, retrospective knowledge

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