

Anu RAE

Patients in University Hospital for the Mentally and Nervously Ill in Dorpat, 1881–1895

Rapidly increasing mental hospital population during the 19th century raised questions and concerns among contemporaries and is a topic of interest for scholars today. Concurrently with anti-psychiatrist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Michel Foucault, Andrew Scull and other scholars started to suggest that not all who were institutionalised were necessarily mentally ill and asylums became instruments of social control. In addition, later studies showed how gender and social class of the patient influenced admission, diagnosis and discharge.

On the basis of a case study of the University of Dorpat psychiatric hospital, which was located in the Livonian Province of the Russian Empire, I will present two hypotheses. Firstly, this institution was not used as a means of social control, at least not to the extent implied by early social historians of psychiatry. Secondly, gender and class were equally important variables when considering patients' admission and prognosis, and cannot be viewed separately from each other. To test these hypotheses, I have created a database based on the first patient admission registry book of the hospital, dating from 1881–1895. During this time there were 2184 hospitalisations, some patients were hospitalised more than once. Both upper and lower-class patients were admitted, making it possible to analyse the relationship between institutionalisation of patients and their socio-economic status and gender.

This paper brings new insight into the debate on institutionalisation of the mentally ill in the 19th century. The source material has not been studied before and my research will add to the current knowledge regarding Europe-wide practices of hospitalisation of the insane, providing an Eastern-European perspective.

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