



BACKGROUND

HISTORY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

To properly contextualize the situation of psychiatric nurses in BC it is necessary to understand the larger social, political, and economic historical context of the province. In the next section an overview of the BC geography and economy, the history of BC women in labour, the labour movement, and mental healthcare will be provided to optimally situate the unique aspects of psychiatric nursing in the province.

Today, RNs and RPNs work side by side in acute and community mental healthcare areas, but animosity and role confusion persists. To understand the current relationship between RNs and RPNs, and the place of RPNs in the BC healthcare system, it is essential to understand the history of RPN nursing education.

RPNs in BC emerged within a specific historical, socio-political, legal, intellectual,

and gender context that was shaped by nursing education, and beliefs about mental illness within that time.

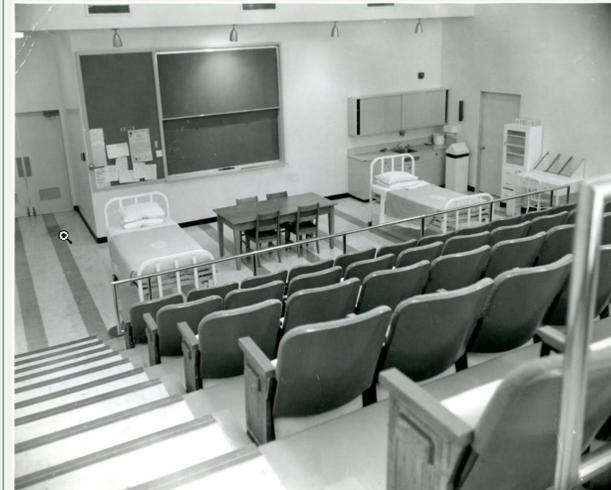
The rationale for conducting this historically-based study is to engage in a multifaceted analysis of the intersections of the events and beliefs of time and how it shaped the formation, evolution, and ongoing persistence of RPNs.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Historical exploration of registered psychiatric nursing education through an interpretive and critical lens can illuminate questions that are more difficult to ask including: why was separate education considered to be the best choice within certain historical contexts, what were the key pieces of RPN education that substantiated the separation of training and education, how was RPN curriculum influenced by changes in the mental health system? The research questions guiding this study are:

- What social, political, and economic events contributed to the development of registered psychiatric nursing in BC?
- How did the development of RPN education relate to trends in psychiatric nursing within the broader historical context of nurse education, and various social, political, and economic influences in the development of the profession over the past century?



- What socio-political factors of the early 20th century led to the formation of Essondale (later Riverview) Hospital and the BC Psychiatric Nursing School?
- What role did the BC Psychiatric Nursing School at Essondale Hospital play in the development of Registered Psychiatric Nursing?
- How did provincial legislation influence the formation, education, and professionalization of RPNs in British Columbia?
- What were the social, political, and economic influences on the development of mental health nursing curriculum at the BC School for Psychiatric Nursing?
- What was the role of the Psychiatric Nurse and psychiatric nursing students in British Columbia in the final years of Riverview Hospital until its closing in 2012?
- When and how did the de-institutionalization movement in BC occur and what was the effect on the role of RPNs at Riverview Hospital and subsequent impacts on curriculum?

METHOD AND DESIGN

A historical method of research allows for a critical examination and analysis of records of the past to discover the unknown and explore questions of “why” (Glass, 1998). The importance of using historical sources to contextualize the unique circumstances of psychiatric nursing must not be overlooked (Brennan, 2011; Molloy et al., 2016). Historical sources can be used to help researchers reflect on the past to highlight the problems of the current conditions, to question assumptions, and to potentially propose alternative histories and analyses (Molloy et al., 2016).

Primary sources of data are those accessed through British Columbia archives, including government reports, government correspondence, curricula, newsletters, committee meeting minutes, maps, pictures, and publications of the BC School of Nursing. The major reports in the public include BC Government Annual Reports of Mental Health Services. Archives BC Government reports were accessed primarily through the UBC Open Archive. Reports reviewed include those from the 1920s to the 1990s.

In addition to archival research I will conduct oral history interviews of some nurses who were familiar with the BC School of Psychiatric Nursing. Locating participants for interview will involve contacting the Nurses and Nurse Practitioner Association of BC and the BC History of Nursing Society to find names of prominent RPN nursing figures in BC who are known to still be alive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Few historical research studies have focused on psychiatric nurse education in Western Canada. There is a dearth of peer reviewed academic literature focused on the history of registered psychiatric nursing education in BC. Similarly, there is a dearth of literature on psychiatric nursing education in Western Canada. The three major pieces of research examined are a government funded report published in 2004 that included some historical data on psychiatric nursing generally but provided some insight on the BC context, a 2002 nursing dissertation focused on psychiatric nurse education in the provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and lastly, a 2020 book published on the history of psychiatric nursing education in Manitoba.



SIGNIFICANCE

In 2019, approximately 47% of the RPN workforce in Canada was licensed to practice in BC (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2020), which is an upward trend from 42% in 2002 (Canadian Institute for Health Information., 2004). The history of psychiatric nursing in BC is worth documenting because it will provide a means of understanding and reflection. There is a gap in the story of the history of psychiatric nursing in the province, fueling assumptions, stereotypes and antagonism between RNs and RPNs to nurses, healthcare professionals and the public who are not aware of the history of the profession, it's connections to provincial mental health institutions of the 20th century. Similarly, there is a gap in understanding of the connection psychiatric nurses in BC have to the education of RPNs in other provinces.



RESEARCH APPROACH

An interpretive approach is grounded in the work of historical sociology, following in the tradition of seminal theories like those of Weber, mainly rejecting positivist methodology and embracing of an open-ended comparative process and analysis foregrounding multiple causative factors that result in social change. The underlying assumption is that researchers are not value-free, meaning the perspectives of the researcher is integrated into the interpretive process.

The critical perspective allows interruption and interrogation of existing narratives, both revisionist and progressive. The approach can be utilized as a means to allow the researcher to move beyond notion of progressive historical perspectives, to critically analyze issues of the past, for example, asking questions like why psychiatrists maintained control of registered psychiatric nursing education for such a long time and the changes in the relationship between nurses and psychiatrists when this shift happened.