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WOMEN'S IMPACT ON NZ SOCIETY HEALTH: PART
ONE

WOMEN'S IMPACT ON NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY: HEALTH 1915-1985 PART ONE: CHANGING PATTERNS

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“To bring to the service of those who suffer the heart of a mother, sister and guardian angel” – Mother Mary Joseph Aubert

Expectations of women in health throughout the period 1915–1985 revolved around the notion of self–sacrifice and responsibility for the health care of their community/family.

The pattern for this period was illustrated during the black death influenza epidemic of 1918. In a handful of months at the end of 1918, 8500 people died from the deadly flu brought back by soldiers from World War One. Those who contracted the disease died within hours of becoming infected and turned black after death, the result of severe pneumonia.

More men than women died in the epidemic, and women were called to come forward and care for the sick and the elderly in the name of 'patriotism and humanity' (Minister of Health George Russell). The chairman of the Auckland Hospital Board claimed that any woman not contributing was 'neglecting an obvious duty'.

STATISTICAL PATTERNS

LIFE EXPECTANCY

SHAPE OF A KIWI

Shape of a Kiwi (extract)

Gibson Group 2004. Duration 9:40

Documentary which investigates the changing physical characteristics of New Zealanders. Statistics have shown a steady increase in body weight, height and strength over recent generations. This extract looks at dietary reasons and tracks from pre-European to present times.

MAORI LIFE EXPECTANCY

One News 09/07/2003 (extract)

TVNZ 2003. Duration 1:59

Disturbing truths from a new study on Maori health and life expectancy show the the gap is widening between non-Maori and Maori. After significant improvements in Maori health in the 1950s and 1960s the life expectancy rate for Maori has barely moved through the 1980s and 1990s.

INCIDENCE OF DISEASE

INFLUENZA 1918

MARTINBOROUGH

The World, Population 1300 [Martinborough] (extract)

City Associates 1982. Duration 2:05

The local impact of the Influenza epidemic.

THE BLACK DEATH

Good Morning. 15/08/2002 (extract)

TVNZ 2002. Duration 4:32

The writer of a book on the 1918 flu epidemic shares detail.

POLIO 1947–1948

WILSON HOME 1948

Weekly Review 348

National Film Unit 1948. Duration 3:01

AUCKLAND... HOME FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN ... At the Wilson Home in Takapuna, children receive therapy and have fun in the swimming pool. Most of the activities are based outside, and weather permitting, the children enjoy their meals and lessons in bed on the front lawn. In the evening the children learn handicrafts and hobbies. The home is run by the Auckland Hospital Board and cares for 73 patients, many of whom are victims of the recent polio outbreak. Short wave therapy is one of the more modern treatments used.

TUBERCULOSIS

HEALTH - SUCCESS STORY

Pictorial Parade 61

National Film Unit 1957. Duration 2:04

HEALTH-SUCCESS STORY....In the 1940s the Department of Health instituted measures designed to combat the spread of Tuberculosis. With early detection being of the utmost importance, X-rays, skin tests, and sanatoriums for recovering patients were provided free to the public. This film celebrates an intensive 15-year campaign against TB. Tuberculosis is an infectious wasting disease transmitted through the air. The disease was particularly rife amongst the poor and Maori, who lived in crowded housing conditions. Poor nutrition also lowered resistance to disease and illness generally, increase the chance of infection.

MODERN & FATAL

MENINGOCOCCAL B

TV3 News 19/07/2004 (extract)

TV3 Network 2004. Duration 2:48

The first child vaccinated in the Ministry of Health's meningococcal vaccination campaign.

AVIAN BIRD FLU

TV3 News 16/11/2005 (extract)

TV3 Network 2005. Duration 2:50

The Government has made public its strategy for dealing with a possible bird flu pandemic. Pete Hodgson (Health Minister); Mark Jacobs (Public Health Director).

FAMILY SIZE

SUPERSIZE FAMILY

Weekly Review 204

National Film unit 1945. Duration 1:22

AUCKLAND... FAMILY OF TWELVE: The largest state house in the Dominion is the new home of Mr and Mrs Paul and family. The oldest boys, Trevor and Owen, prepare the ground for a crop of potatoes while the girls enjoy the sunshine and a session of mending and sewing. Mrs Paul makes use of her first real stove to make a batch of scones.

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THE MAORI EXPERIENCE

THE BACKBLOCKS

Weekly Review 332: Hokianga... Backblock Medical Service (extract)

National Film Unit 1948. Duration 6:50

Hokianga...Backblock Medical Service: The heart of the Hokianga Medical Service is Rawene Hospital in the centre of Hokianga Country. From this base Dr GM Smith and his staff of two doctors and six district nurses

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attend to the health needs of a largely Maori population in isolated rural communities.

THE MAORI DISEASE

Tuberculosis and the Maori people of the Wairoa district (extracts)

National Film Unit 1952. Duration 3:49

The district nurses were the rural health care providers. Although paid very little, these women worked extremely hard to care for the sick in outlying areas of the New Zealand countryside. The chance of contracting tuberculosis was an occupational hazard, with most nurses being overworked resistance to the disease was lowered. This film advises of the importance of good food, housing, appropriate exercise, rest and medicine.

INFANT MORTALITY

The Nineties (extracts)

Top Shelf 1993. Duration 2:13

In this film, women in their nineties talk about their experiences of infant mortality in the early 20th century. There were two main causes of infant sickness around this time; (1) cures for ailments (many of which are now easily treated) were undiscovered or unavailable, (2) poor infant feeding. At the close of the 19th century mothers often gave totally unsuitable mixtures to their infants, leading to epidemic levels of infant diarrhoea. Infant mortality led to the Karitane and Plunket child care schemes, which emphasized proper infant feeding and hygiene. As a result, by the mid-1950's New Zealand had one of the world's lowest rates for infant mortality in the world.

CHANGING IDEAS ABOUT HEALTH CARE

MENTAL HEALTH

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Out of Sight, Out of Mind (extract)

Frank Film 2004. Duration 5:16

Norm Madden's harrowing story. "A documentary about the incarceration in psychopedic hospitals of people who shouldn't ever have been there ... It takes us back to the 1920s and 30s, when many orphaned or illegitimate children, or even some who were just a little slow, were classified under the Mental Defectives Act as unfit for normal society and sent to institutions like Templeton in Christchurch. Such people, we are told, were known variously as idiots, imbeciles or the feeble-minded, and lumped in together with the genuinely intellectually handicapped. Some of them wound up spending their whole lives in these places, where conditions were tough and at times brutal."

"New Zealanders still have it in their power by excluding colour, limiting entry to the best whites, and preventing the unfit from breeding, to become and remain about the finest of white strains in the world." – Dr Theodore Grey in his Report on Mental Health (1927)

After being 'released' in early adulthood, Norm worked capably all his adult life in the health system here and overseas. After years of seeking justice he finally received compensation and an apology from the Minister of Health. He never got to use the compensation, being invalided with a stroke and moving to a retirement home.

SUNNYSIDE DOWN

Inside Out: Sunnyside Down (extracts)

Long White Cloud 2002. Duration 13:54

As the Christchurch institution is demolished, we take a look at the evolution of mental health services in New Zealand.

MODERN MALADIES

Valium Daze Halcyon Nights (extracts)

University of Auckland 1989. Duration 3:13

This film, made to highlight tranquiliser addiction among women, also illustrates the different attitudes to women and men from their doctors.

Women are more likely to visit the doctor than a man for two reasons; they are often in charge of their families health, and it is more acceptable in our society for a woman to be sick than a man. A comparative study noted in this film concludes that in cases of general tiredness, women are more likely to be prescribed a tranquiliser or sedative, whereas men are sent for a blood test.

Suburban neurosis, a term originating in the 60's, describes the condition of bored, depressed housewives, dealing with feelings of uselessness or lack of hope. One hospital superintendent in 1960 said he had treated 'whole streets' of women for this same illness.

A 1971 study reported 8.3% of married women were taking tranquilisers, 3.3 % of men and 3.5% never married women. Also, the proportion of sleeping pills used by married women doubled from 1958 - 1971.

MATERNITY CARE

NEW PLUNKET ROOMS 1944

Weekly Review 143 (extract)

National Film Unit 1944. Duration 1:59

SUBURBAN EVENT....MIRAMAR, WELLINGTON OPENS NEW PLUNKET

ROOMS: The Dominion's finest Plunket Rooms in Miramar are about to be opened to the music of the Boys Institute Band. District MP the Hon. Robert Semple was the official speaker for the afternoon. Mr Semple was sponsoring a comprehensive building plan for children of the district. The first achievement of the Miramar Children's Centre Scheme was officially opened by Plunket's president. The district Plunket nurse visits the centre several times a week to check children and babies from the area.

KARITANE - CRADLE LAND 1933

New Zealand Pictorial Reviews No 2.

Filmcraft 1933. Duration 1:35

CRADLE-LAND Karitane Home Wellington

A Karitane Home founded by Truby King, is where babies and toddlers are cared for under the special guidance of many Karitane nurses.

Bathing and feeding babies is all in a day's work for these very efficient young ladies.

KARITANE - JUBILEE BABIES 1957

Pictorial Parade 61

National Film Unit 1957. Duration 1:55

KARITANE – JUBILEE BABIES.... Founded by Sir Truby King in the 1900's, Karitane nursing methods and hospitals pioneered infant welfare in New Zealand. Initially Dr King cared for sick infants at his home in Karitane near Dunedin, but the need for trained infant-welfare nurses soon became apparent and a twelve-month course leading to qualification as a Karitane nurse was instituted.

Karitane nurses were trained to recognise infant sickness and to understand and carry out the feeding and general care of babies. The Plunket society supported Dr King's methods but unlike the Karitane nurse, Plunket nurses were already fully qualified as a nurse or midwife, and the society's acceptance and instruction of Karitane methods was additional to their nursing training.

The demand for Karitane's services resulted in a progressive lowering of the age for admission to the course from 20 to 16, and extension of the course to 16 months.

It should be noted that Maori infant mortality rates remained higher than Pakeha rates until the 60s. A study in 1954 explained the discrepancy as the result of lack of antenatal and postnatal care, inferior diet, less breastfeeding, and poor living circumstances'. A reason suggested for this is Dr King's personal interest in healthy British babies for advancement of the British race.

MOTHERHOOD

ETERNAL MOTHERHOOD

Weekly Review 248 (extract)

National Film Unit 1946. Duration 0:37

LEARNING MOTHERCRAFT ...When this film was made in 1940 (and for a considerable time afterwards) Intermediate schools had model flats for the acquisition of domestic skills. The line "Some give up the idea of a career in favour of marriage and home" is an indicator of attitudes towards women and the work of motherhood. Up until the mid-60's it was generally expected that a woman should submerge or ignore her own needs in favour of the duties of bearing and raising children. Early 'working mothers' were often reviled and blamed for marital breakdown. The work of motherhood has seldom been recognised in society or law, and the issue of paid parental leave is a current political topic.

A WOMAN'S ROLE 1945-70

Sheilas: 28 Years On (extract)

Occasional Productions 2004. Duration 3:02

From a follow up to the 1976 six part series entitled 'Women'. Aloma Parker remembers the role expectations of the postwar to 60s period: domestic role, motherhood, marriage, babies, work & education.

BIRTH, CONTRACEPTION, SOCIAL TABOOS

SOCIAL TABOOS

The Nineties (extracts)

Top Shelf 1993. Duration 2:20

Women in their 90s recollect their ignorance of subjects such as sex, periods, contraception. Much of the information available to New Zealanders growing up in the 90s were social taboos until the 1960s and 1970s.

FAMILY PLANNING

Standing in the Sunshine - Family Freedom (extracts)

Isambard Productions 1993. Duration 4:40

Contraception was basically unknown, unpracticed and socially taboo in early 20th century New Zealand. Birth control was seen as the man's responsibility and Doctors were not taught about contraception in medical school. A woman was liable to be seen as a 'slut' for asking. Birth control was also considered unpatriotic and selfish – popular racist paranoia of the time feared the white race would be overrun by the rising population of Asia. At its peak in NZ in the late 30's at least 4000 illegal abortions were being performed each year. Between 1927 and 1935, 223 women died from septic abortions in NZ. The Family Planning Association was founded in 1936 in response to these unsafe practices. Lack of contraception also led to illegitimate children and the crushing social stigma of solo motherhood.

CONDOMS IN SUPERMARKETS

Eye Witness News 12/09/1985 (extract)

TVNZ 1985. Duration 2:47

The decision to sell condoms in supermarkets criticised by Society to Protect the Unborn Child which said it would lead to more casual sex and more abortions as young people would not have the maturity to use contraception properly. The Health Dept. and the Family Planning Association welcomed the move.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

NEW X-RAY MACHINE 1958

Pictorial Parade 71 (extract)

National Film Unit 1958. Duration 2:23

NEW X-RAY MACHINE: Over £100,000 has been raised by the people of Auckland province for the new cancer x-ray plant at Auckland hospital. The huge machine is eased into position in the newly built radiotherapy block. The chairman of the Auckland Hospital Board, Mr Grierson gives a speech at the opening ceremony. The Mayor is also present. The workings of the machine are demonstrated. This also says much about the private / public funding provision during this period.

BIRTH & NEW TECHNOLOGY

6:30 News 04/07/1984 (extract)

TVNZ 1984. Duration 2:58

New Zealand's first test-tube baby, the medical ethics versus the technological advance.