

## The role of Nurses in the Korean War

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### Abstract

*It is meaningful in that it can be used as valuable data in modern nursing by exploring the meaning and essence of the experiences experienced as women and nurses in the special situation of war to understand their experiences. To find the role of nurses in the war, the research was classified into primary data and secondary data. Among the many data, only those with high external and internal evaluations were selected and analyzed. However subjective opinions were not included. At a time when women's social advancement was difficult, the nurse faithfully fulfilled the role of a nurse on the battlefield, and as a result, it became a new channel for women's social advancement. Nurses performed various roles, such as nursing for soldiers wounded in the Korean War, as well as midwifery and health education for the general public. In this way, during the Korean War, both inside and outside the battlefield, nurses performed all the roles they could in their respective positions. Nursing activities on the battlefield have taken their true value in line with the characteristics of nursing education based on holistic nursing, integrated thinking, love for humanity, and dedication. Recently, disasters and war zones are increasing worldwide, and the number of nurses required in these fields is also increasing. Based on the research results of past nurses' activities, there is a need for interest and research on the new roles of nurses needed in the present and future society. In addition, while not forgetting the sacrifices of nurses in the past, this spirit must be continued and developed.*

**Keywords:** Korean War, Nurse, History, Role

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession has achieved its greatest development and achievement during warfare [1]. Florence Nightingale participated in the Crimean War from 1854 and, despite opposition from military commanders and surgeons, improved the sanitation and environment of military hospitals, contributing to reduction of the mortality rate of wounded soldiers from 42% to 2% by 1858 [2]. After returning to England, based on the experience and philosophy of wartime nursing, he established a nursing education institution and converted it into a discipline requiring systematic education [3], it is evaluated that it has influenced various fields of modern nursing, such as infection control, hospital infectious diseases, and hospice nursing [4]. In the 16th century England, the general public's appreciation and esteem for nurses was very low. At that time nurses were portrayed as drunken, immoral women and was a low-paying, hard-working profession [5]. In the 18th century, in the United States, the salary of a clerk was \$20 per month and that of a nurse was only \$2 per month, so no one wanted to work in nursing [6]. Therefore, women from military families who accompanied

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their families to the battlefield were mainly in charge of military nursing work [7]. Negative perceptions of nurses and the low socioeconomic status changed rapidly based on the Nightingale's activities and the successful missions of the nurses who were active in the war [5], [6]. As an example, in the early 20th century, the daughter of an officer was often a nurse in Britain, and during World War II, the American public called nurses "the most special of all professions." So it is come to recognize it as a heroic profession [8]. It was a courageous challenge for women to bravely engage in warfare at a time when women's social activity was limited. As a result, the nurses who participated in the war at that time were very proud that the state did their best in their role [9].

In other countries, many studies have paid attention to the activities of participating nurses. Systematic studies on these vivid experiences of participation, the process of adjusting to society after returning home, and mental and physical ailments have been carried out for decades providing a large amount of accumulated data. On the other hand, research on participating nurses in Korea is very insufficient. The search for nurses who participated in war lead to the collection and construction of meaningful historical materials which describe the nursing work that is performed in crisis situations such as conflicts and disaster areas. In addition, the meaning of war and nursing from the perspective of a war veteran can evaluate war from a different point of view from the existing war-related studies.

Therefore, this study intends to describe the historical records of nurses who participated in the Korean War.

## **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to clarify the role of nurses by describing and understanding the roles of nurses in the Korean War as a whole. Also, by examining the historical events the experiences and efforts of the nurses the true meaning of nursing as an independent field of medicine can be found. This confirms how the independence of nurses was established, but also presents suggestions for the direction of nursing in the future society.

The specific research objectives are as follows.

1. To collect and evaluate historical events related to the role of nurses during the Korean War.
2. To identify the role of nurses in historical event data.
3. To understand the social meaning of nursing according to the role of nurses during the Korean War.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.1 Data Collection Method**

In this study, a literature review was first conducted to collect data. The literature review was conducted using 'Korean War' and 'Nurse' as search terms among materials published in databases of Medline, CINAHL, KoreaMed, RISS and KISS.

### **3.2 Data Analysis Method**

In this study, a historical method was used to examine various historical events about the role of nurses during the Korean War. The research process of the historical approach is similar to the survey research. It is research method that interprets according to modern point of view based on the results of many previous studies [10].

In general, things to consider in the course of research in the historical approach are as follows. First, in the data collection process, data used in historical research are divided into primary data and secondary data.

Primary data refers to data portrayed through records or photographs of persons who directly witnessed the situation or participated in the event. Secondary data refers to prior research or books that summarize and interpret events or historical situations based on primary data. Second, data should be selected after performing external and internal evaluation of various historical materials. For the external evaluation of selected historical materials, not only the accuracy and clarity of the records must be ensured, but also the materials evaluated as valuable books must be selected. For internal evaluation, it is important to check the degree of consistency between two or more records for the same event, and to select the data closest to the time of the event, especially while analyzing it based on data published at the time. The last thing to consider is to interpret while being careful not to include subjective intervention in the analysis of historical data. In addition, it is important to identify the nursing history characterized by the times from an integrative point of view [10]. To not include subjective intervention, after being aware of the caveats of this historical approach, collecting the primary data from Korean Red Cross, Daily Newspaper Library, Illshin Hospital or Severance Hospital about major events related to the Korean War. The secondary data were studied by citing various previous studies and books published based on the primary data.

## **4. MAIN SUBJECT**

### **4.1 Activities and Roles of Korean Nurses in the Korean War**

The history of nurses is also the history of women. Among various historical events, war in particular has had the greatest influence on the history of nursing [11]. During World War II, equal status and rank with men was recognized, and it contributed to raising the status of women by securing the position as a female officer in a battlefield dominated by men [6]. In addition, due to the shortage of nurses during World War I, the government allowed married women or widows to work as nurses, which was previously prohibited, providing an opportunity for married women to have jobs [11]. Through wartime nursing, a new system was introduced in the field of nursing and the scope of practice was expanded [12]. During World War II, a US military operating room nursing officer first installed and operated Post Anesthesia Recovery Units [13]. At that time, there was a perception that nurses were suitable for anesthesia tasks that could only be performed by anesthesiologists and medics [14].

The duties and roles of nurses changed during the Korean War. The Korean War was that brought the greatest tragedy of our nation, and it was a war in history that caused indelible wounds and a lot of damage to our nation. During the Korean War, a total of 397,519 patients were hospitalized at the medical facilities. As a result, the allies suffered massive losses of troops and wounded one after another [15]. From the beginning of the war to the armistice, it was possible to take care of the wounded soldiers on the battlefield because of the sacrifice and loyalty of the nurse, who performed brilliantly. Due to the efforts of these nurses, Korean War Nursing is the first example of the new more important role, nurses in the care of wounded soldiers as seen by the personnel administered during that period. In this way, the participation of nurses in the war contributed to the improvement of social awareness of the nursing profession, and it became an opportunity to expand and develop the nursing field due to the various nursing skills pioneered during the war. In addition, military nurses were given the status of an officer after participating in the war and contributed to the improvement of the status of women [16]. Due to the fact that they played an important role in caring for many soldiers and civilians during the war. At the beginning of the war, five army hospitals and one sanatorium had a capacity of 8,560 beds, but the operating capacity started with less than 2,250 beds, which was a very poor environment. It was subsequently expanded continuously and at the time of the agreement, there were 125 army hospitals, 3 hospitals in Jeongyang, and 8 hospitals for mobile surgery, totaling 43,600 beds. During this

period, the average daily hospitalization was 22,800, with records of up to 52,500 hospitalizations [15]. As can be seen from these data, the nurses who performed brilliantly from the beginning of the war to the armistice were able to fulfill their role as a medical unit thanks to the sacrifice and loyalty of the nurses. In other words, it can be said that nursing activities during the Korean War became the basic basis for nursing in the war in terms of duration and number of people administered.

A new historical light on the role of nurses during the war period should highlight the role of nurses caring for civilians as well as on the battlefield caring for soldiers. Among them, the role of midwives was emphasized. Because about one third of nurses and midwives were missing due to the war, their training was needed first [17]. In order to solve these problems, many nurses made efforts to train midwives. Geum-Jeon Lee, a representative nursing figure, continued her activities in Busan, where she had taken refuge during the Korean War, and worked hard to train midwives [18]. In addition, the nurses worked hard for neighbors who were marginalized in everyday life, as all attention was battlefield. When the Korean War broke out, Han Shin-kwang, another representative figure, gathered about 100 helpless women and children to the Busan refugee camp and built a mother-and-child center to comfort refugees. Not only that, but she was in charge of overall business while serving as the business manager of the Korean Nursing Association [19]. In this way, during the Korean War, both inside and outside the battlefield, nurses performed all the roles they could in their respective positions.

#### **4.2 Activities and Significance of Foreign Nurses Participating in the Korean**

When the Korean War began, civilian-centered medical support was provided centering on UN member states, including Sweden, Denmark, Italy, India, Norway, and Germany [20]. In addition, the United States and Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom dispatched nursing officers [21].

The first historical significance of the participation of foreign military nursing officers during the Korean War was to play a central role in applying the medical technology and deferral system developed during World War II to the June 25 War. This contributed to increasing the survival rate of the domestic soldiers and Allied forces who participated in the Korean War [20]. For example, by pioneering the use of the first-generation artificial kidney machine to treat the hemorrhagic fever that was prevalent during the Korean War, it not only protected the lives of patients, but also contributed to the improvement of kidney dialysis technology. Second, war provides a dynamic practical environment for nursing and treating various subjects, and veteran nursing officers contributed to the development of military medical technology by performing a wide range of roles in this medical environment [21]. Foreign military nursing officers who participated in the Korean War improved their nursing capacity by nursing not only battle injuries, but also various diseases such as frostbite, burns, hemorrhagic fever, sexually transmitted diseases, malaria, and trench foot caused by poor battlefield conditions [22]. Third, due to a shortage of surgeon personnel in the 24-hour endless procession of war wounded, nursing officers play a wide range of roles in patient treatment and medical evacuation at the U.S. Army Mobile Surgery Hospital. We have a new perspective on the scope of work and utilization plans of officers [20]. Nursing officers performed medical tasks that were not previously considered as nurses' duties, such as patient classification, blood transfusion, penicillin treatment, and wound closure [9]. In addition, during air evacuation or hospital train evacuation, the nursing officer, as the only medical agent, independently judged the patients' conditions and treatments and performed duties, thereby demonstrating the potential competency and performance of the nursing officers [15].

All of the nursing officers appearing in the records were women, and they participated in the Korean War and took care of an unbearably large number of patients in a harsh environment where even basic necessities

were scarce. And even in the midst of it, it seems that they did not lose their leisure. Nursing officers were called by the state and devoted themselves to defending democracy in an unknown foreign land, defending the lives of their own soldiers. It is judged that the foreign military nursing officers' participation in the war not only contributed to the success of the Allied Forces, but also showed Nightingale's nursing spirit and professional vocation based on love for humanity.

## **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

Unlike other countries, Korea does not have many previous studies on nurses who participated in the War. However, as a result of analyzing published domestic and foreign literature, it was found that nurses not only took care of soldiers on the field of war, but also played the role of nurse, educator and health leader for many people. The results study on the role of nurses participating in the Korean War are considered to be useful in the following area.

### **5.1 Practice of Nursing**

This study provided vivid information on nursing performed for a large number of seriously ill patients in an environment where available resources are limited and the lives of medical personnel were threatened.

By understanding the experiences of nursing officers in the special situation of war, it provided practical information on the aspects and difficulties of nurses who will be dispatched to work in areas of war, conflict or disaster in the future. And through this, it can be used as basic data to expand the nurse's competency and mental attitude and the scope of nursing work to work in a hazardous area.

### **5.2 Education of Nursing**

This study is the first study on the participation of domestic and foreign nurses during the Korean War, and it can be used as basic data for indirect experiences on the role of nurses in war situations. The achievements of proud nurses who overcame adversity and devoted themselves to the spirit of nursing can be included in the education of nursing students and used as a reminder of the spirit of nursing. In addition, the necessity of education necessary for nurses was presented for crisis situations such as war and disasters, not general hospital environment. In the special environment of war, providing sufficient information about the patients' diseases, predicted patterns, and working environment will help nurses to prepare for and adapt to work on the battlefield.

### **5.3 Research of Nursing**

Basic data on the activities of nurses who participated in the war, which had not been actively studied in the history of nursing in Korea, were constructed. In the future, this study can be used as basic data that can be expanded to include nursing services performed in crisis situations such as disasters and conflict areas.

### **5.4 Policy of Nursing**

This study presented basic data on the need for government policy support for the physical and psychological health of nurses who worked in crisis situations such as war, conflict, or disaster. Globally, disasters and conflict zones are increasing, and the number of nurses to work in these hazardous areas is also increasing. They are exposed to existing dangers and potentially harmful substances in accordance with the state's request

and professional view of work, and perform their duties. It will be possible to analyze and prevent the risk factors of nurses who worked for the country by promoting a long-term follow-up study on them as a national policy like in developed countries.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Due to the characteristics of nursing education based on holistic nursing, integrative thinking, love for humanity, and dedication, nursing activities on the battlefield can have a significant impact on the recovery and health of wounded soldiers. Not only that, the historical roots of nursing, which grew as a result of mothers taking care of their families, are mandatory not only in the facilities of the battlefield, but also in the psychological stability and emotional comfort of the general public suffering from war. The Korean War is a tragic history of the Republic of Korea, but in the event many nurses tried to protect freedom and justice and solve many problems. Therefore, various data related to nurses who participated in the Korean War were compiled and there is a need to consider historical values and meanings. It was a difficult decision to bravely participate in the war and take care of many people at a time when women's social activities were weak. However, the present exists because the nurse herself has endured her role in a dangerous situation under the judgment that it is necessary. It is necessary to continue and develop this spirit while not forgetting the sacrifices of many nurses.

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