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Counselling on healthy lifestyles in Estonian family magazines (1930–1940): a thematic analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the 1930s, Estonia's population was approximately 1 126 000. The healthcare system faced numerous challenges, including infectious diseases, alcoholism, prostitution, and child mortality. Access to services was uneven. At the same time, urban lifestyle was gaining popularity. People had more leisure time, which needed to be filled with activities. Therefore, the number of popular family magazines increased, with over 200 magazines published in 1934 alone. The advice published in these magazines contributed to solving, understanding, and preventing health issues, as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle. This legacy of health advice warrants exploration and interpretation.

The aim of the study is to reflect on and interpret the health counselling legacy published in family magazines over the years 1930–1940, using the thematic analysis method.

Data collection was conducted through collecting historical pictures and texts in collaboration with the Estonian Health Museum during the years 2023–2024. A total of 460 magazine issues were analysed. Thematic analysis was carried out, along with the interpretation of the photographs and illustrations from the perspective of health counselling.

The advice contributed to changes in the lifestyle of Estonian citizens. Guidance was provided in various areas: the prevention and treatment of infectious and non-infectious diseases, first aid, the combating of sexually transmitted diseases, women's and children's health, mental health, folk medicine practices, alcohol abstinence, healthy nutrition, hygiene, and physical exercise. The advice was offered in both written and visual form. Folk heritage and health knowledge of the time were relied upon, while popularising scientific perspectives. Analysing this historical legacy can provide new opportunities for introducing and deepening healthy lifestyles today.

1. Introduction

The research is based on the principles of health humanities. The humanities are a valuable tool in contemporary medical education and practice (Klugman and Lamb 2019, 3). Health humanities establish an interdisciplinary conceptual connection between health sciences and other fields, such as history, literature, art, philosophy, and cultural studies.

The social world of health care can be meaningfully interpreted (Crawford et al. 2015, 7). Through health humanities, it is possible to grasp the meaning of events and experiences in health care. We can come to an understanding of the effects that technologies, tools, techniques, and health-related ways of thinking have upon us (Crawford et al. 2015, 8). Such an understanding sheds light on the lifeworld of individuals (Kvale 1996) – the world as immediately or directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life (Britannica 2024) – and, as Stelter (2010) notes, on their personal and social realities, patterns of action, and behaviour.

In the context of health humanities, the study of lifestyle (Journath et al. 2020), along with societal, environmental, and individual factors in maintaining health (Teesalu and Zilmer 2012), is important, while the analysis of these factors can benefit from applying cultural and social theories.

The focus of the study is on the interwar period in the Republic of Estonia (1930–1940) and the analysis of media publications issued at that time. The peak of journalistic publications in Estonia occurred in 1933, when the total number of Estonian-language magazines and newspapers reached two hundred (Lauk 2000). At that time, the population of Estonia was approximately 1 126 000. The foundations of a healthy lifestyle became increasingly established, supported by a civil society influenced by Western ways of life. However, there is a lack of research on the

representation of health issues related to cultural heritage. The main research problem of this study is how advice promoting a healthy lifestyle, shaped by the new European way of thinking, is reflected in the perceptions of Estonian doctors through family magazines within the context of health humanities.

The aim of the study is to reflect on and interpret the health counselling legacy published in family magazines over the years 1930–1940, using the thematic analysis method. Based on this objective, the following research questions were formulated:

- What textual and visual material on health counselling was published in magazines?
- What themes were represented in the health advice in family magazines?
- How were these themes framed within the context of the state-supported ideology of a healthy lifestyle?

2. Background

2.1. Theoretical background

Health advice published in magazines can be seen as a type of cultural legacy which is not an intrinsic substance, it does not exist independently of its social context. Cultural heritage carries moral prescriptions and ideological orientation. This definition is never neutral, it is framed by relationships of meaning and supported by relations of power (Kuutma 2019, 221).

The background of the study extends to an understanding of the changes taking place in society, where socio-psychological phenomena and processes can only be understood within specific historical, cultural, and macrosocial conditions. The social field provides a space of possibilities for everyone involved (Bourdieu 2003).

In the present study, the researchers relied on three cultural theories: Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (2003), Gustav Frank and Barbara Lange's picture theory (2015), and Teun van Dijk's theory of ideology (2005).

Bourdieu not only analyses these fields but also examines the people within them, exploring the reasons behind their actions. People do not live in a vacuum, but within a complex institutional network that empowers, enables, and legitimizes their actions. However, agents are free in their decisions and choices only insofar as the field allows. Due to this space of possibilities, the agents of a certain era are fixed in space and time and are relatively dependent on the economic and social conditions of their environment. The possibilities offered by history determine what is possible or impossible within a given field at a particular moment (Bourdieu 2003, 76–79).

Gustav Frank and Barbara Lange's picture theory (2015) is based on the principle that images are related to social practice, in the course of which images are created but also change. In the context of this study, the focus is on the health-related visual legacy (e.g. historical photographs, illustrations, advertisements, and magazine covers) that provides a distinctive overview of the era and its culture (Frank and Lange 2015). Visual literacy is crucial when 'reading' these images, as it is a fundamental outcome of applying art history methods in health science (Conaty 2019, 101).

At the heart of van Dijk's (2005) theory of ideology lies the idea that ideology is shaped by discourse and communicated through media tools, including magazines. Journalism is inextricably linked to the values, aesthetic aspirations, lifestyles, and ideologies that dominate society. Ideologies are often assumed to dictate what groups and their members perceive as good or bad, right or wrong. People may hold beliefs without realizing that these beliefs are part of an ideology. Thus, ideologies are not 'on' or 'between' people, groups or societies, but reside within the minds of group members (van Dijk 2005, 58–64).

Van Dijk does not view ideology as entirely negative. In his opinion, no group can exist or function socially without a shared group identity and set of ideological beliefs (van Dijk 2005, 183). The media plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of ideologies. Access to the media directly affects the dissemination of ideologies. It is well known that elites, organizations, and the state have privileged access to the media, allowing their opinions and ideologies to dominate public discourse. This makes van Dijk's theory particularly relevant for analysing the health advice heritage of the 1930s, where ideas endorsed by the political elite were prominent in magazines.

Taking into account the sociocultural dimensions of the health phenomenon, it becomes clear that different stages of social development produced distinct health discourses (Pakholok 2013), or historically variable types of health culture and ideologies.

2.2. Historical background

During the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940), significant attention was directed towards public health and the implementation of anti-epidemic measures, alongside the training of doctors and nurses. After the First World War and the Estonian War of Independence, i.e. in the 1920s, there was a severe shortage of medical care, but the training of doctors continued, and during the interwar period, 800 doctors received their diplomas in Estonia. One of the most prominent and well-educated nurses of that time was Anna Erma, who emphasized the importance of highly educated nursing staff. In 1939, the Estonian state operated 22 hospitals, alongside 23 private hospitals and 85 outpatient medical centres (Rinaldo 2022, 68–83).

In the 1930s, Estonian health care faced challenges such as infectious diseases, alcoholism, prostitution, and high child mortality rates. Rural society, which was dominant, adhered to customs and beliefs that had developed over centuries, and many villages relied on healers without formal medical education (Rinaldo 2022, 77).

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the American and European middle classes began to develop a desire for a cleaner, healthier lifestyle. A rapidly professionalizing middle class turned to health and fitness in significant numbers. The achievement of well-being increasingly became a personal responsibility (Crawford 2006, 405–407). In the 1930s, however, Estonia followed suit, with the promotion of health and hygiene becoming a requirement for ensuring a strong and healthy citizenry. Attention was focused on improving hy-

Table 1. Information about magazines and issues included in the sample

Title in Estonian	Title in English	Years of publication	Frequency of publication	Issues included in the sample
<i>Ajakiri Kõigile</i>	<i>Magazine for All</i>	1936–1940	4–12 times a year	All
<i>Eesti Naine</i>	<i>Estonian Woman</i>	1924–1940	6–12 times a year	1930–1940
<i>Eesti Spordileht</i>	<i>Estonian Sports Magazine</i>	1920–1940	Weekly to monthly	1934–1940
<i>Huvitav Žurnaal</i>	<i>Interesting Journal</i>	1933–1940	3–6 times a year	1934–1935
<i>Maret</i>	<i>Maret</i>	1935–1940	Monthly	All
<i>Muusikaleht</i>	<i>Music Magazine</i>	1924–1940	Monthly	1938–1939
<i>Taluperenaine</i>	<i>Farm Housewife</i>	1927–1941	6–13 times a year	1930–1937
<i>Tänapäev</i>	<i>Today</i>	1935–1940	7–12 times a year	All
<i>Tervis</i>	<i>Health</i>	1921–1940	Monthly	1932–1935
<i>Vallatu Magasin</i>	<i>Mischievous Magazine</i>	1936–1940	6 times a year	All

giene, home cleanliness, children's health, healthy eating, combating alcoholism, and physical training. The state played a key role by organizing various campaigns and courses, such as home improvement campaigns and cooking courses (Talvik 2010, 94–96), and by disseminating national culture across the country through sporting events that highlighted the importance of citizens' athletic strength (Kruusmaa 2021, 5).

The 1930s marked a period of rapid cultural and economic development in Estonia. The futuristic belief in a better tomorrow fuelled fantasies of abundant life and luxury, leading to increased consumption. The urban lifestyle, with its glamorous appeal, gained popularity, although European (and especially Estonian) society had traditionally been agrarian. People found themselves with more leisure time, which needed to be filled both at home and outside. As a result, the number of family and entertainment magazines increased (Talvik 2010, 88). The notion that physical appearance and bodily beauty were desirable became more widespread, with the development of a harmonious body and participation in sports considered the foundation of beauty (Kruusmaa 2021, 75).

More active citizens and doctors facilitated the introduction of progressive European trends in Estonia. Public health promotion and the provision of relevant health advice were seen as important national responsibilities, and popular family magazines played a crucial role in this effort.

3. Materials and methodology

The study employs qualitative research methodology. Data collection was conducted through the purposeful gathering of historical pictures and texts in collaboration with the Estonian Health Museum, between September 2023 and May 2024. The sample comprised ten family magazine titles, sourced from electronic databases (digar.ee and muis.ee). Texts, photos, and illustrations from 460 magazine issues were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun et al. 2019).

The sample includes family magazines published between 1930 and 1940, which had a broad readership and covered popular health-related topics. The ten qualifying magazines were: *Ajakiri Kõigile* (*Magazine for All*), *Eesti Naine* (*Estonian Woman*), *Eesti Spordileht* (*Estonian Sports Magazine*), *Huvitav Žurnaal* (*Interesting Journal*), *Maret*, *Muusikaleht* (*Music Magazine*), *Taluperenaine* (*Farm Housewife*), *Tänapäev* (*Today*),

Tervis (*Health*), *Vallatu Magasin* (*Mischievous Magazine*) (Table 1).

Articles were selected based on health-related keywords, the overarching theme of which was health and health maintenance. The selection of images included magazine covers, illustrations, photographs, and advertising graphics, which were observed to depict topics related to maintaining health. Over the study period, 63 articles and 115 images meeting the criteria were collected, forming the sample.

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted according to the methodology outlined by Braun et al. (2019). Thematic analysis involves generating knowledge through the process of analysis in a creative and interpretive way, moving between parts of the text and the whole to gain deeper understanding (Braun et al. 2019). The analysis for coding and thematization followed six steps: 1) familiarizing with the data, 2) generating initial codes (substantive codes), 3) searching for themes, i.e. main and subthemes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) final defining and naming of themes, and 6) drafting the results.

Adhering to the ethics and reliability of the study, good research practice was followed in the planning of the study, also during collection and analysis (Tartu Ülikooli eetikakeskus 2023). When describing and formatting the research results, the most open use of the data was ensured, maintaining the specifics of the era (1930–1940) and transparency of the data (Tartu Ülikooli eetikakeskus 2023, 15). In using historical material in this study, no individuals were interviewed, nor was any personal information referred to (Riigi Teataja 2024).

4. Results

Well-known doctors of the time, such as Voldemar Üprus, Mari Ambros, Olga Madisson, and Maria Jürisson-Kleitsman, gave advice on solving, understanding, and preventing health problems in the popular family magazines included in the sample.

The advice, which took into account both the traditions of folk medicine and scientific perspectives, was provided on various diseases, e.g. infectious and venereal diseases, colds, tuberculosis, appendicitis, typhus, migraine and headaches, rheumatism, varicose veins, intestinal diseases and worms,

Table 2. Categorization of health-related topics

Main themes	Subthemes
Health protection: diseases, their prevention, and first aid	Prevention of infectious diseases (including tuberculosis)
	First aid
	Combating of sexually transmitted diseases and promotion of women’s health
	Mental health
Promoting a healthy lifestyle	Hygiene (teeth, body, home, children)
	Skin care and beauty treatments (including healthy sunbathing)
	Nutrition, physical exercise, and weight management
	Combating alcoholism and smoking
	Promotion of pharmacy goods

liver and gall bladder diseases, stomach disorders, dropsy or convulsions, rickets, heart and blood pressure problems, mental health issues, women’s health, etc. Additionally, guidance was provided on first aid techniques, the importance of abstinence from alcohol, skin care, nutrition, healthy tanning, etc.

Advice was presented in both textual and visual forms. Magazine covers, illustrations, and advertisements for various health products were created for the magazines by specially trained artists and applied artists such as Nikolai Triik and Guido Mamborg, alongside popular self-taught artists such as Heino Lehepuu, Arnold Edesi, Karl Vanaveski, Kaarel Joon, Voldemar Tomasov, and others.

Thematic analysis allowed us to identify two main themes. The first deals with the prevention of infectious and other diseases, as well as first aid. The second main category includes writings and images that focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle in a broader sense, including sports, beauty treatments, and hygiene. Nine subthemes were ultimately formed. The results of the categorization are presented in Table 2.

4.1. Health protection: diseases, their prevention, and first aid

Articles in the magazines frequently focused on infectious diseases and their prevention due to their widespread nature. For instance, Dr J. Roostalu wrote about influenza and the possibility of home care. It was emphasized that the treatment must be prescribed by a doctor, but the patient should stay in bed and take aspirin or other antipyretics. The patient must also drink plenty of fluids, such as raspberry, linden flower, or Chinese tea, and make sure to sweat properly. After the illness, the patient should give his/her body another 3–5 days to heal (Roostalu 1937b, 51–52).

Doctors also addressed methods for building resilience and strengthening the body to resist seasonal infectious diseases.

‘Every body has a defence mechanism that activates when the body has sufficient resilience. /.../ General infection protection means raising hygiene standards, isolating the sick, eliminating sources of infection, sterilization, improving nutrition, and using disinfectants, such as boiling the dinner-ware in a 2% soda solution.’ (P. J. K. 1940, 283)

To further enhance resistance to diseases, recommendations included gymnastics and air baths, along with a focus on vitamins in food.

‘Air baths, taken early in the morning near a half-open window, performing simple gymnastic exercises, and breathing with the abdominal muscles (starting with 2–3 minutes!) have a beneficial effect.’ (Maret 1938, 43)

It was written that sun exposure should also be undertaken cautiously. Nutrition was considered a key issue in winter. Vitamin deficiencies caused by a lack of fresh vegetables should be addressed. The consumption of raw juices was recommended as well (Maret 1938, 43).

Tuberculosis, a prominent infectious disease at the time, also received considerable attention. A special issue of the magazine *Tervis* (*Health*) was dedicated to this disease (see Fig. 1).

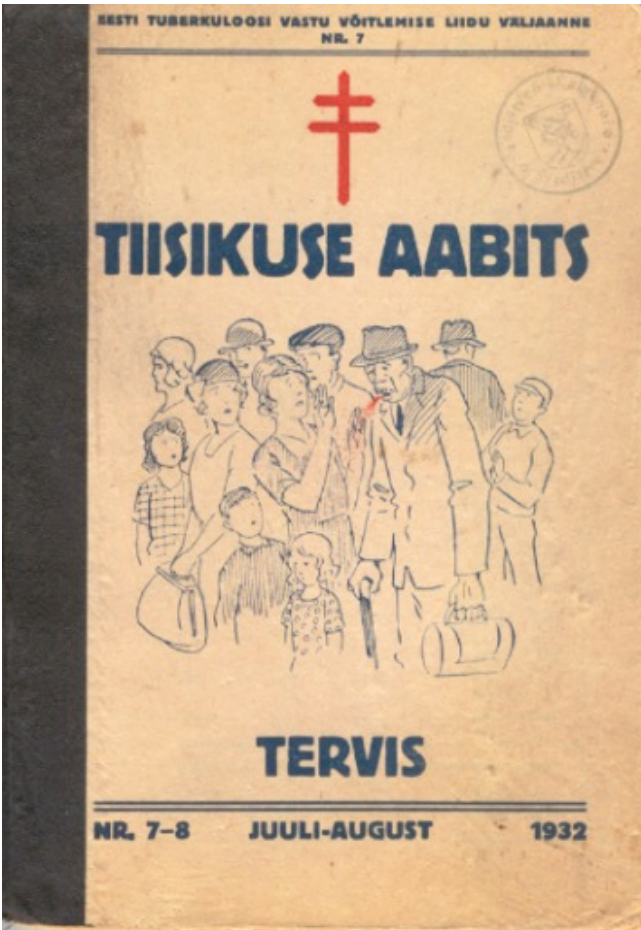


Fig. 1. Magazine cover. Special issue of *Tervis*: *tiisikuse aabits* (*Health: ABC of Tuberculosis*), 7–8/1932. VK _ 4528:5 R 627:5, Museum of Võrumaa. <https://www.muis.ee/et/museaalview/1105700>

In the magazine *Taluperenaine* (*Farm Housewife*), Dr Olga Madisson provided statistics on tuberculosis, stating that at the beginning of the 1930s, tuberculosis caused nearly 3000 deaths annually in Estonia. She concluded that tuberculosis killed 7–8 people every day, and one in seven people was destined to fall victim to the disease (Madisson 1930, 38).

At that time, many believed that tuberculosis could be hereditary, as even newborns contracted the disease. Dr Madisson refuted this misconception by explaining:

'Tuberculosis is an infectious disease, not hereditary in any way. The cause of tuberculosis was discovered in 1882 by Robert Koch in Berlin, and it is caused by stick-like Koch's cells.' (Madisson 1930, 39)

Dr Madisson also provided recommendations characteristic of the era on how to avoid contracting tuberculosis. She advised:

'To combat tuberculosis, fresh air, proper nutrition, and a sunny apartment strengthen the body. The sick person must have their own bed, washing and eating utensils, towels, and handkerchiefs. /.../ Those suffering from tuberculosis should be prohibited from childcare. A person suffering from tuberculosis should not marry until complete recovery and with the permission of a doctor.' (Madisson 1930, 40)

Some first aid measures recommended in these magazines seem alarming by today's standards. For example, in *Eesti Naine* (*Estonian Woman*) the following advice was given for snake bites:

'In order to reduce the amount of poison that enters the body, the blood must be squeezed or sucked out of the wound immediately after the snake bite. You can suck with your mouth only if your mouth and teeth are healthy.' (Eesti Naine 1930a, 169)

Next, the recommendation was to

'put a dome glass on the wound, then burn the wound with acids (nitre, carbol, sulphur) or with fire (with a hot nail, iron, coal, lighter); pour snuff, alcohol or kerosene on the wound, tightly tie the limb above the bite to prevent the poison from spreading further into the body; give alcohol to drink.' (Eesti Naine 1930a, 169)

Gynaecologists also contributed articles on women's health and hygiene, including menstruation care. Homemade and washable sanitary bandages were proposed, and they were advised to be made of soft, thin fabric. The most recommended design was square, about the size of a larger handkerchief, with a loop attached to each end for fastening to a button. The bandage was suggested to be fastened to a special belt with two buttons – one in the front and one in the back (Eesti Naine 1932, 144).

The well-known gynaecologist Maria Jürisson-Kleitsman (1935, 1) highlighted the increased risk of premature birth and miscarriage for working women compared to housewives. During pregnancy, it was advisable to avoid workplaces with dust, toxic gases, and other harmful substances, or jobs that required heavy lifting. Other informative articles discussed the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (Koll-Kiršfeld 1931, 178), cervical cancer (Kleitsman 1934, 67–68), and breast cancer (Linkberg 1934, 2–4).

Mental health issues were also highlighted in these magazines, with discussions of conditions such as neuroses:

'Nervousness is defined as disturbances in the harmonious cooperation of individual parts of the total personality, which are not caused by physical or tissue changes.' (Hion 1932, 6–9)

Jealousy was also classified as a neurosis:

'Unhealthy jealousy occurs chronically and without cause. This unhealthy form of jealousy does not heal on its own but requires the intervention of neurologists. Usually, such individuals suffer from a feeling of inferiority. /.../ If such symptoms are present, one should seek help from a specialist without feeling ashamed.' (Maret 1936a, 295)

In the articles written on mental hygiene, it was recommended that anger be avoided (G.-H. 1940, 182). It was argued that nervous diseases were more common in women than in men because women experienced a more vivid emotional life. Additionally, female neuroses were attributed to overwork, as women had greater workloads, juggling employment, household duties, childcare, and assisting their husbands (Räsas 1933, 34).

Teen suicides was another topic addressed:

'Almost every day you read: a ten-year-old schoolboy, fearful of punishment, has ended his life; a fourteen-year-old apprentice jumped into water over a quarrel with a friend. /.../ And the poisoned atmosphere paralyzes them. /.../ Youth suicides are nothing less than a sharp critique of our times.' (Eesti Naine 1930d, 102–104)

The article emphasized that adults could only prevent youth suicides by fostering a healthier, simpler, fairer, more open, and happier environment (Eesti Naine 1930d, 102–104).

4.2. Promoting a healthy lifestyle

Magazines often conveyed the message that maintaining one's health is a person's foremost duty. Readers were advised to eat healthy food (Eesti Naine 1930c, 226–227; E. A. 1933, 267; Klinge 1934, 94–95; Ajakiri Kõigile 1940c, 93–94), exercise, get sufficient sleep, avoid anger, live in harmony with nature (Eesti Naine 1935, 4–5; G.-H. 1940), and take care of their heart (Roostalu 1937a, 125–126). It was emphasized that every household should maintain a home pharmacy (Ajakiri Kõigile 1938, 370).

Housewives were taught the importance of keeping their homes clean, with a particular emphasis on children's hygiene. For example, it was written that being in school with many others, children could contract and pass on infectious diseases, scabies, or lice. Therefore, every mother was urged to ensure that her child was not a carrier of such diseases. Dr Madisson (1934, 250) wrote that at least once a week, the child's entire body should be washed with soap and warm water in a sauna or bath.

In addition to hygiene-related articles, magazines published pictorial materials advertising various hygiene products. Nivea products, such as face and body creams, tanning creams, and toothpaste, were particularly popular. Unlike modern advertisements, these often included practical instructions on how to properly use each product (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Nivea toothpaste advertisement with instructions on proper tooth brushing for children. *Maret*, 3/1938, 89.
<https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/nlib-digar:232440>

In magazines of the time, significant attention was given to facial skin care. In the autumn and winter months, dry skin was often a problem, and to prevent this, it was necessary to avoid factors that reduced the skin's fat content, such as water. The skin was advised to be moisturized with cream, ointment, or fat (Maret 1936b, 74–75). Excessive use of cosmetics was thought to cause dry, rough, and wrinkled skin. It was recommended that the simplest and most natural treatments be chosen, e.g. plant juice – especially cucumber juice (Hermann 1935, 293). Magazines also explained what acne was and offered home treatment advice (Paldrock 1932, 48; Richter-Berlin 1938, 181–182). Fatty creams were discouraged, while talc, alcohol, and rice powder were recommended for drying the skin (Ein 1932, 74–76).

Beauty treatment and skin care recommendations were often intertwined with nutrition. To maintain fresh facial skin, it was recommended that plenty of vegetables and fruits be consumed. Sugar consumption was advised against *'because it creates acids and sucks lime from the bones, which is also evidenced by the loss of teeth. Honey, which contains iron, would be ideal instead of sugar.'* (Eesti Naine 1930, 199)

Special soaps for facial care were also recommended, often accompanied by advertisements for such products (Richter-Berlin 1938, 182).

The magazines discussed the health benefits of sun exposure and proper tanning. It was written that the sun had a good effect on people suffering from tuberculosis and other diseases, as sunlight could destroy disease germs within hours (Roostalu 1937c, 183).

'The old saying goes as follows: "Where light does not enter, the doctor enters." And so it is – the sun is the greatest guardian of health, and the more light there is, the stronger the health.' (Madisson 1936, 189–191)

Magazines also provided modern-sounding recommendations for proper tanning to gain the benefits of the sun while avoiding sunspots and other skin disorders (Ajakiri Kõigile 1936, 46–47; Madisson 1936, 189–191; P. J. K. 1938, 518–519). Suntan creams that protected the skin were advertised (Taluperenaine 1936, 229; Taluperenaine 1937, 223), alongside articles and images promoting beach resorts in Estonia (Ajakiri Kõigile 1940a, 277; Ajakiri Kõigile 1940b, 278).

In farm families, the consumption of fruits and vegetables increased, with housewives applying new skills learned from cooking courses to diversify their diets. Magazines helped spread these new trends. It was believed that, to prevent disease, a certain number of vitamins needed to be included in the daily diet. A lack of vitamins was expected to result in nervousness, malaise, digestive problems, incapacity for work, and other ailments (Ajakiri Kõigile 1940c, 93–94). Honey was recommended both as food and medicine (Klinge 1934, 94–95), while excessive salt intake was discouraged (Eesti Naine 1930c, 226–227; E. A. 1933, 267). Excessive fatness (as it was called) became increasingly disfavoured, and sports were regarded as a source of beauty. Advertisements for slimming medicines appeared, e.g. in the magazine *Maret* (1940, 166).

The ideal body image shifted from the previously favoured strong, peasant physique to a slimmer, more athletic figure. National gymnastics and sporting events, such as the Estonian Games, were organized twice in the 1930s. In 1939, a special issue of *Eesti Spordileht* (*Estonian Sports Magazine*) was published for these games, with a cover designed by the renowned artist Jaan Jensen (see Fig. 3). The opening article quoted a message from the President of the Republic, Konstantin Päts, stating:

'Folk games invigorate health and sharpen the spirit. But we know that healthy members of the nation result in a healthy,



Fig. 3. Magazine cover. Special issue of *Eesti Spordileht* (Estonian Sports Magazine): *Eesti mängud* (Estonian Games), 6/1939. Artist Jaan Jensen. <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/periododika/33041>

vibrant and able-bodied nation that is also self-aware.’ (*Eesti Spordileht* 1939, 156).

At the beginning of the 20th century, skating was a beloved winter sport in Estonia. However, the condition of skating rinks was often poor, and as a result, skiing began to gain popularity. Prior to the 1930s, skiing had always been more of a necessity for Estonians – it enabled people to cover long distances, commute to work, and access the forest. During the decade covered in this study, skiing was transformed into a popular sport recommended for men, women, and children alike. Skiers, illustrated by well-known artists, appeared on magazine covers (see Fig. 4).

The topic of excessive alcohol consumption was discussed in magazines, focusing on both its health effects and its broader societal consequences, such as crimes committed under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol was considered one of the major causes of mortality, significantly impacting the population and its growth. According to 1936 statistics, the death rate for men was higher than that of women, primarily due to alcohol-related causes. Various proposals were suggested, such as banning the sale of alcohol in stationery and food stores, closing nightclubs, and granting municipalities the right to prohibit alcohol sales (*Eesti Naine* 1938, 10–11).

Dr V. Üprus, writing in the magazine *Taluperenaine* (*Farm Housewife*), addressed the harmful effects of alcohol on women, especially pregnant women:

‘Alcohol can affect foetal malformation, and hydrocephalus and other changes in brain tissue structure may occur. .../



Fig. 4. Magazine cover. *Tänapäev* (*Today*), 1/1936. Artist Nikolai Triik. <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/periododika/29304>

Disorders or insufficiencies commonly observed in families with alcohol abuse include epilepsy and mental illness.’ (*Üprus* 1932, 33–34).

Smoking was also considered more harmful for women than for men. Women’s different breathing patterns were believed to increase the likelihood of nicotine seeping into the lungs when inhaling smoke. Additionally, a woman’s more delicate body was thought to be more easily harmed (P. J. K. 1936). At the time, there were no effective tools to quit smoking, and overcoming the habit relied solely on individual willpower and self-control.

Despite the clear explanations in the magazines about the harms of smoking, commercial interests still had an influence, and smoking women were featured in advertisements (see Fig. 5). Such advertisements appeared in magazines such as *Muusikaleht* (*Music Magazine*), 2/1939; *Eesti Spordileht* (*Estonian Sports Magazine*), 10/1935; *Tänapäev* (*Today*), 3/1939; *Huvitav Žurnaal* (*Interesting Journal*), 3/1937.

Numerous advertisements for pharmacy products appeared in magazines such as *Taluperenaine* (*Farm Housewife*), 2/1934, 9/1937 and 5/1939; *Maret*, 2/1939; *Eesti Naine* (*Estonian Woman*), 1/1935, among others. During the decade under study, pharmacies functioned as small cultural hubs in villages and towns (see Fig. 6). They sold nearly everything, from medicine to building materials. While some medicines were prepared locally in pharmacies, others were purchased from external suppliers. In addition to medicines, pharmacies offered chemical and cosmetic products, detergents, paints, adhesives, plaster, and various construction supplies.



Fig. 5. A smoking woman. Advertisement on the back cover of *Vallatu Magasin* (*Mischievous Magazine*), 2/1937. Artist August Vahtel. <https://www.digar.ee/viewer/et/nlib-digar:367460/316992/page/116>

By 1939, 211 over-the-counter pharmacies and 27 closed pharmacies affiliated with hospitals and the railway were operating in Estonia (Rinaldo 2022, 83).

5. Discussion

Family magazines provided an important platform for addressing health topics, serving as both informative and educational tools. Counselling texts were supported by imagery. Frank and Lange (2015) note that cultural encounters, comparisons, and conflicts are processed visually through image memory. A healthy way of life began to be considered as the foundation of a renewed lifestyle – a vision actively promoted through the magazines. As a nation, Estonians grew more confident in participating in pan-European processes, embracing Western thinking, values, and, among other things, health-related attitudes.

When examining the contents of magazines from the 1930s as a product of the developments taking place in society, one must not forget the fact that in Estonia, particularly in the latter half of the 1930s, a so-called pro-totalitarian system emerged, wherein certain targeted information was disseminated to the masses through literature and art. This context imposed certain constraints on the space of possibilities (Bourdieu 2003) and positioned magazines (especially the state-supported ones) as tools of ideology (van Dijk 2005). The magazines promoted a positive attitude toward the state and the government, contributing to the upbringing of a ‘good



Fig. 6. Räpina Pharmacy, late 1930s. ERM Fk 2909:32. <https://www.muis.ee/museaalview/895249;jsessionid=75E98ECE2CA0E027A6B6396053FF94F7>

and healthy citizen' through both text and imagery, among other things. President Konstantin Päts (1936) emphasized in his speech:

'Developing a sense of beauty is also a significant social task. /.../ Beauty is accompanied by cleanliness, health, joy of life, and the will to live. This is a great and educational task.'

The national ideology, which promoted 'positivity', was directly reflected in magazines as part of the cult of the good citizen. The reading material of the magazines was positive, progressive, decent, and morally upright, and the same is evident in the imagery. Depictions of happy lives certainly had to be aesthetically pleasing, therefore the pictures were charming and lovely, with a clear appeal to many readers, designed to resonate with their sense of national identity. Simultaneously, the visual appeal of these images served an advertising function, making the magazines more attractive to potential buyers.

As Kuutma (2019) writes, cultural heritage encompasses both material and spiritual cultural assets transmitted from one generation to the next. The results of this study support the conclusions of Graham et al. (2000) that cultural heritage emerges at the intersection of power and politics. Through cultural heritage, the narratives and identity of the ruling elite are reinforced to support the state and its political ideology. Both continuity and impermanence, inclusion and exclusion are woven into it (Kuutma 2019).

6. Conclusions

The thematic analysis of the research data enables drawing the following conclusions:

- The analysed health-related articles (63) and images (115) provided extensive material for health counselling. Health counselling in family magazines was rooted in heritage culture, incorporating techniques from folk medicine, introducing the achievements of modern medicine, while simultaneously encouraging the adoption of Western lifestyles.
- Firstly, the topics of health protection and disease prevention and treatment emerged. Emphasis was placed on the prevention of infectious diseases (including tuberculosis), first aid, the combating of sexually transmitted diseases, women's health, and mental health issues. Secondly, topics related to the promotion of healthy lifestyles became evident. The range of topics covered was broad: hygiene (teeth, body, home, children), skin care and beauty treatments (including healthy sunbathing), nutrition, physical exercise and weight management, the combating of alcoholism and smoking, as well as the promotion of pharmacy goods.
- The texts and images in the magazines highlighted key developments in Estonian society during the 1930s. Health and the adoption of a renewed Western lifestyle were highly valued and reflected in the magazines. The state-directed ideology of a healthy lifestyle, as demonstrated by government statements, including presidential initiatives, was implemented through both written texts and visual representations.

The wealth of data studied enabled making interdisciplinary connections between health practice and science, history, cultural studies, and art. This interdisciplinary approach helps to conceptualize the sociocultural and lifestyle-related ways of functioning, as well as patterns of action and behaviour among the Estonian population.

This study helps to shed light on health science and its sociocultural dimensions, opening historical perspectives in contemporary context. The extensive use of imagery adds value, as the interpretation of these images reveals the diversity of culture and ideology. This material offers a novel approach to integrating cultural heritage into the modern learning and research process.

This was the first extensive study in Estonia of health advice found in the cultural heritage of magazines from the 1930s and 1940s. The study was limited in scope, and therefore it was decided to include in the sample ten family magazines that were the most widely distributed. In the future, it is planned to expand the sample and deepen the analysis.

Further research could also focus on an in-depth analysis within different fields (history, art, anthropology, etc), and expanding the study to an international level – particularly by comparing the Baltic countries – would provide valuable insights.

Data availability statement

All research data are contained within the article and can be shared upon request from the authors.

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Tervisliku eluviisi nõustamine Eesti pereajakirjades (1930–1940): temaatiline analüüs

Merle Talvik, Taimi Tulva, Kristi Puusepp ja Ülle Ernits

1930. aastatel oli Eesti rahvaarv ligikaudu 1 126 000. Eesti tervishoiu ees seisis mitmeid väljakutseid: tegeleda tuli nakkushaiguste, alkoholismi, prostitutsiooni ja laste suremusega. Tervishoiuteenuste kättesaadavus oli ebaühtlane. Samal ajal kogus populaarsust linlik eluviis ning inimeste vaba aeg suurenes, vajades tegevustega sisustamist. Kasvas ka pereajakirjade arv, näiteks 1934. aastal ilmus neid üle 200. Ajakirjades avaldatud nõuanded aitasid kaasa terviseprobleemide mõistmisele, lahendamisele ja ennetamisele ning tervisliku eluviisi edendamisele. Seda tervisenõuannete pärandit on oluline uurida ja tõlgendada. Artikli keskne uurimisprobleem oli, kuidas tervisehumanitaaria kontekstis kajastuvad pereajakirjades avaldatud, uuest euroopali-kust mõtteviisist kujundatud ja tervislikku eluviisi propageerivad peamiselt arstide kirjutatud nõuanded.

Uuringu eesmärk oli temaatilise analüüsi meetodil reflekteerida ja tõlgendada aastatel 1930–1940 pere-ajakirjades avaldatud tervisenõustamise pärandit. Andmeid koguti aastatel 2023–2024 koostöös Eesti Tervishoiu Muuseumiga, hõlmates ajalooliste piltide ja tekstide kogumist. Analüüsiti 460 ajakirjanumbrit, viidi läbi temaatiline analüüs ning tõlgendati fotosid ja illustratsioone tervisenõustamise aspektist. Ajakirjades avaldatud nõuanded toetasid elustiilimuutusi Eesti elanike seas. Nõu anti mitmes valdkonnas: nakkus- ja mit-tenakkushaiguste ennetamine ja ravi, esmaabi, sugulisel teel levivate haigustega võitlemine, naiste ja laste tervis, vaimne tervis, rahvameditsiini võtted, karskus, tervislik toitumine, hügieen ja kehakultuur. Soovitused esitati nii kirjalikus kui ka visuaalses vormis. Tugineti toleaegsele rahvapärandile ja terviseteadmistele ning samal ajal populariseeriti teaduslikke seisukohti. Minevikupärandi analüüsimine aitab luua uusi võimalusi tervislike eluviiside tutvustamiseks ja süvendamiseks.
