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**Nazi Medical
Experimentation:
Should the Data Obtained be Used?**

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Supervised by: Dr. Thom Thibeault

Curriculum Vitae

The author, Elizabeth Dyal, was born in Rockford, IL on December 8, 1979. She is a senior majoring in Dental Hygiene at Southern Illinois University. This is the only university she has attended thus far. She is working on this thesis in order to graduate in the University Honors Program. Her interest in this topic stemmed from an honors class entitled "The Clockwork Nightmare." In this course, her class studied the major points and controversies that were related to Nazi Germany. Nazi medical experimentation was only one subject that they covered, but she has an intense interest in it. Upon completion of this thesis and graduation, Elizabeth hopes to continue on to graduate school to pursue a Master's degree in Health Education.

Abstract

Many researchers question whether or not the data obtained from Nazi medical experiments should be used. This paper examines which experiments were conducted, the data that was found, and the ethical questions related to using this data. Beyond the ethical questions, this paper also determines if the data can be used due to the way the experiments were conducted.

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Introduction

During World War II, unspeakable crimes were committed against innocent people by the Nazis. Some of these crimes were merely execution, while others were slow, torturous, agonies brought on by daily living or Nazi medical experimentation. The Nazi medical experimentation has been a major controversy in today's advancing medical field. After so many suffered without giving their consent to enable physicians and other scientists to conduct experiments, many questions are raised on whether or not that data should be used to better the medical field's knowledge in certain areas, such as hypothermia. There are countless arguments both for and against the data's use. The Human Body and the Law by Charlotte Levy states, "Using human beings as research guinea pigs is an ethical dilemma of considerable magnitude" (1983, pg 1). That is clearly an understatement. Not only is the Nazi medical data questioned ethically, but the data's validity is also under examination. Even though the "right" answer may never exist, exploration of the various arguments is quite intriguing. So, should the data be used? One must first uncover the details.

Chapter I

Although all of the reasons for human experimentation are unknown, we do know that there were at least 26 different experiments that were conducted in concentration camps for the purposes of research, eugenics, or genocide. Two experiments involved freezing prisoners to test how long it took to kill a person by drastically lowering their body temperature and how long it took to revive a frozen person. These tests on freezing and hypothermia were conducted to simulate German troops that were fighting and dying in the bitter cold. They froze the prisoners one of two ways. They would either place them in a freezing cold tub of water or lay them naked outside in the biting cold (Caplan, 1992, pg 65-6). The revival of the frozen victim was often as painful or fatal as the freezing itself. The doctors used sun lamps, internal irrigation, a very hot bath, and copulation with female prisoners (Medical, 2001, pg 1). This information is the most sought after data because these experiments cannot be replicated and hypothermia is still a very large issue today.

Experiments on genetics were done quite frequently. Experiments on genetics were conducted to create a larger Aryan race and to discover what caused deformities to

prevent them from occurring. Genetic testing was done mostly on twins or people with disabilities by the infamous Josef Mengele. He studied twins in order to enable the Aryans to give birth to more twins thus enabling them to procreate much quicker. Mengele also studied genetics on people with defects, such as, dwarfs or people with a strange physical makeup. He did this to find out what gene caused the disorder in hopes to prevent it from happening in Aryans. Mengele and his researchers would perform several tests on the twins or disabled. They photographed them to see hair patterns and collected samples of their saliva. They also did extensive research on the prisoner's lower GI tracts, kidneys, prostate, testicles, and uterus. The researchers did all of this testing without anesthetic. Many times after all these painful procedures were completed, the doctors would simply kill the prisoners by injection so that dissections could be done (Medical, 2001, pg 2-3).

Although the tests on sterilization were much different than those of genetics, they were done for very similar purposes. The only difference was instead of to help a race flourish, it was done to cause the possible

extinction of those who were "racially impure." They believed that by sterilizing as many female prisoners as possible they could finish inferior races. Male castration occurred as well. Research was done to test which sterilization method was the most time and financially efficient. Tying tubes, carbon dioxide injections, the use of x-rays, and other methods were used to sterilize. "In 1943, the gynecologist Chauberg announced to Himmler that using such a technique and with a staff of ten men, he could sterilize as many as 1000 women per day" (Caplan, 1992, pg 30). This research was also done with no painkillers or sedation.

The Nazi's also did several experiments with infectious disease. They injected people with typhus, tuberculosis, or other diseases to observe how the disease took over the body. They also studied how much of an inoculated disease was needed to sicken a person. They were the most concerned with the course of the disease, what difference it made with where the virus was injected, and how long the disease survived outside of the body. They also observed the disease process and to documented it (Fertig, 1986, pg 125-7). These experiments are as equally important as the hypothermia testing in today's society

because one can observe the disease process, but one cannot give the person the disease and watch it from the beginning. The infectious disease experimental data is often coveted by physicians.

The medical researchers also did extensive studies on pharmaceuticals and the body. They tested drugs such as ruthenol (for Typhus), periston, and other drugs to see what effects the drugs had on the prisoners (Fertig, 1986, pg 13-45). Many times, they would inoculate a person with a certain infectious disease and then test a new drug on them to see if the drug cured the person. Other times, the researchers would give the drugs to people within the camps that were sick due to improper hygiene and nutrition. The prisoners literally became guinea pigs for pharmaceutical companies and the Nazi researchers. Similar to the pharmaceutical injections, the researchers would inject certain chemicals or gases into a prisoner to watch those effects as well. The drugs, chemicals, and gases all had detrimental effects on the people that were tested. The products either caused death, severe discomfort, or debilitation.

Experiments with high altitude, pressurization, surgery, traumatic injury, and others were also

conducted for a variety of reasons. Mostly, the researchers had an opportunity to do tests on human beings that they did not consider to be human. They would put people in rooms with high altitude or high/low pressure and see how long they could withstand certain degrees. They would perform state of the art surgeries on people or injure a person severely to see how their body reacted. Anything that could be tested, that the researchers thought of, was tested (Medical, 2001, pg 1).

Chapter 2

There are several reasons why individuals argue that the data obtained from Nazi medical experimentation should be used. Many doctors and researchers have good intentions for the data's use. First, much of the data found cannot be obtained today due to ethical laws and patient rights. Dr. John Hayward, hypothermia expert stated, "I don't want to have to use this data, but there is no other and will be no other in an ethical world" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 2). In Hayward's case, he has done hypothermia testing for several years on volunteers, but he never allowed their body temperature to go below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Nazi researchers, on the other hand, allowed their patient's body temperature to slip below about 80 degrees Fahrenheit

(Holocaust, 2001, pg 1-2). This is a very valid reason why the research should be used. The results could not be reproduced, yet, they had been documented previously.

Others argue that by not using the data we are allowing Holocaust deniers to strengthen their claims, and at the same time we are forgetting the innocent victims who endured the experiments. A Jewish teacher of medicine, Velve Greene, said, "They tried to burn the bodies and to suppress the data. We must not finish the job for them" (Caplan, 1992, pg 170). People believe that by publishing the data, we not only can prove that these atrocities did in fact happen, but also by remembering them we are helping to prevent them from ever occurring again. A doctor from Yale, Howard Spiro, claims, "The best argument I've heard for preserving the Nazi data is to keep evidence that those experiments were carried out. As long as the data are available, evidence that at least some people did some bad things in Nazi Germany cannot be denied" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 2). By using the data, some feel that we are paying a justice to the victims. We are creating a positive reason for why they suffered. Many experiment survivors believe that the data should be used, and since the destruction happened to them first hand they can speak for those who

were not as lucky as they were. The best statement for this argument comes from Lucien Ballin, a woman who helped discover all of the Nazi experiment data. She states, "The suffering is done. Let someone benefit from all the pain" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 1).

Many researchers believe that data is neutral. It can be neither good nor evil. So there is no reason to not use the data. The data itself did not do the experimentation, it was merely the product. Along these same lines, scientists believe that it may be more unethical to not use the data that could save someone's life. Dr. Benjamin Freedman, a bioethicist, stated, "We are talking of the use of the data, not participation in these heinous studies, not replication of atrocities. The wrongs perpetrated were monstrous; those wrongs are over and done. How could the provenance of the data serve to prohibit their use" (Caplan, 1992, pg 145). We cannot take back the terrible treatment that so many endured, but we certainly can make use of their suffering. By using this data, many see something positive in light of so much evil. Many others, though, disagree.

Chapter 3

Questions regarding the Nazi medical experimental data's validity, and the ethics in regard to using the data, present a very large problem. Many researchers consider the data to be ruined due to the way it was obtained. Many claim that not only was it not properly recorded, but it also should not be used because it promotes unethical medicine.

Nazi medical data's validity is an interesting concern of several researchers. Many of today's researchers claim that the data was not recorded properly, they did not perform the tests in a necessary way to use the data, and that the data is not a true representation of the actual population. Others question the background of the doctors themselves, stating that many did not have specialized training in their area of experimentation. Lastly, in order for an experiment to be done correctly, it has to be able to be repeated. The terrible experiments by the Nazi's would be near impossible to replicate, especially considering the state the patients were in.

Dr. Robert Berger, one researcher that has looked at Nazi medical data, states that the hypothermia studies are not accurately recorded. He stated that very little data

exists, and Nazi researchers failed to record important variables such as age, nutrition levels, and what state the victim was in upon immersion (naked, clothed, unconscious, or with anesthetic). Berger argues, "Dachau hypothermia studies contain all the ingredients of a scientific fraud" (Frohnmayr, 2001, pg 3-4). The hypothermia tests are not the only experiments that are scrutinized though. Phosgene and other chemical tests are also under fire. Researchers claim that the Nazi's changed the data to make it look more appealing, they did not use the correct standards in checking the victims weight and height, and they did not have clear ways to measure their results (Frohnmayr, 2001, pg 4).

However, the researchers best argument is that the victims did not accurately portray the true population. The victims all came from certain race or social groups, they were malnourished, they were usually sick, and they did many tests on small children who may have had underdeveloped immune systems. All of this makes the Nazi data very difficult to take seriously. Obviously, not all race and social groups are the same, so a researcher cannot conduct tests just on those groups and expect to get results for all people. Also, sick, malnourished people do

not have the same strength as a healthy person to endure disease or drastic changes in temperature. Therefore, the data might be totally worthless to the normal population or other race/social groups. Dr. Katz, a teacher at Yale University, has looked at all of the experiments, and he does not think that the data should be used. He stated, "They're of no scientific value" (Cohen, 2001, pg 9).

As previously stated, the competence of the doctors was questioned quite a bit, as was the fact that the data cannot be replicated, when researchers studied the data obtained from the experiments. For example, Dr. Heissmeyer, who conducted the Nazi tuberculosis studies is often ridiculed for his lack of knowledge in the area of bacteriology. One doctor stated in regard to Dr. Heissmeyer, "He did not then, nor does he now, possess the necessary expertise demanded in a specialist of tuberculosis diseases. He does not own any modern bacteriology textbook. He is also not familiar with the various work methods of bacteriology" (Cohen, 2001, pg 10). As one can easily see, the scientific validity of the data is as big of a concern to researchers as are the ethics of using the data.

The ethics of using the data is perhaps the most difficult question that researchers have to answer. Whereas, some believe that not using the data is unethical, others have views that are quite different. There are three main arguments stating that the data is unethical in nature and thereby should not be used.

First, the methods used in obtaining the data were unethical because they involved torture and death or innocent humans. Whether it was hypothermia testing, tests with infectious disease, or any of the other horrible experiments, the victims died a slow, agonizing death. The data should not be used just for the sake of those people. Not only did the victims not give their consent to be tested, but also the outcome of the tests was supposed to be death. Any experiment that has guidelines such as these should not be used. For example, the following details are of a dreadful experiment. The graphic pictures that the data gives a person should be reason enough to know that the methods and data are unethical and tainted. "The subjects were given unaltered sea water and sea water whose taste was camouflaged as their sole source of fluid. The Gypsies became so profoundly dehydrated that they were seen

licking the floors after they were mopped just to get a drop of water" (Cohen, 2001, pg 3).

Secondly, by using the data people are supporting and encouraging this type of behavior. They are also setting a pattern for other unethical studies. A survivor of these experiments, Eva Mozes, said, "To declare the use of the Nazi data ethical, as some of the American scientists and doctors advocate, would open a Pandora's box and could become an excuse for any of the Ayatollahs, Kadafis, Stroessners, and Mengeles of the world to create similar circumstances whereby anyone could be used as their guinea pig" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 2). Many fear by using this data we are making science more important than human life. By doing this, others would be more inclined to do unethical experiments as well.

Lastly, the scientists who did the research were unethical, and the information should be ignored. The Hippocratic Oath is possibly one of the most important parts of the medical profession. At the time of graduation, doctors recite this oath as a promise of what they will give back to the practice of medicine. One part of the oath includes the following statement: "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability

and judgment, but never with a view to injury or wrongdoing" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 1). Since many of the Nazi researchers were doctors, they violated their promise to the medical profession. This made their data unethical and void. According to the book, Human Guinea Pigs, "No experiment should be contemplated, proposed, or undertaken to which, if he were in circumstances identical to those of his intended subjects, the experimenter would even hesitate to submit himself, or members of his own family, or anybody" (Pappworth, 1967, 189). This was not the case in Nazi Germany. The main focus on the ethics of using the Nazi data is summed up best by Robert Pozos. He said, "The use of the information states that the collection of information is of greater value than the individuals from whom the data was gathered" (Caplan, 1992, pg 104).

Chapter 4

There are many consequences for using the Nazi data, and as citizens in an ethical world we must remember what our moral responsibility is to the people who made this controversial data available. We must consider how the use of this data will effect all people instead of selfishly using it for the sake of science. Perhaps by the data's use, unethical experimentation on human beings would become

more commonplace, or maybe we would one day realize how we really did disrespect those who died for the benefit of others. Not only is this data's validity questioned but also so are the doctors who performed the experiments. Is it even worth the argument. We all have a moral obligation to remember the victims, and since some survivors believe that the data should not be used we should respect their wishes. The data is not worth all of the controversy. Using the data just places our society at more risk for something terrible like this to happen again. By disregarding the data, we are losing nothing.

Conclusion

Although the arguments by both sides are well taken, the data should not be used. The data like the experiments should be left in the past. They are not worthwhile enough to drudge up the pain and suffering of the victim's families and the survivors. The data was not found in an ethical manner, it is not necessarily valid, and the tests are for the most part outdated. The doctors who performed the tasks did not adhere to the Hippocratic Oath. Other than the ethics of the matter, the data found is not true of the overall population. It would not be useful in discovering cures for disease or anything else in normal,

healthy, nourished people. This data should be buried like its victims. Eva Mozes, one of Josef Mengele's twin experiments, leaves us with a statement that should be the only argument heard at all. "Today some doctors want to use the only things left by these victims. They are like vultures waiting for the corpses to cool so they could devour every consumable part. To use the Nazi data is obscene and sick. One can always rationalize that it would save human lives; the question should be asked, at what cost?" (Holocaust, 2001, pg 2)

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