

07 State Control of Reproduction

Forced sterilizations and marriage prohibitions

The Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Sick Progeny was introduced in the Ostmark as of 1 January 1940. The public health offices were responsible for registering the potential victims. Persons concerned had to undergo a trial at the "Hereditary Health Court" that left them little chance to defend themselves. More often than not the verdicts were founded on social value judgments. As soon as sterilization was finally decreed, it was carried out by the public health offices with the help of the police if necessary. Surgeries were performed by specially authorized doctors in public hospitals. Inmates of psychiatric hospitals, youth reformatories, and labor camps for "antisocial" women were particularly at risk. Sterilization was a dangerous operation, especially for women. A considerable number of victims died as a consequence of the operation or sustained lifelong physical and psychological injuries. In Austria, at least 6,000 people were affected by these forced interventions. Only as late as in 1995 did they obtain partial and in 2005 full recognition as Nazi victims. A further important basis for "genetic and racial hygiene" was the Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People of 18 October 1935, which the public health offices were charged with implementing (effective in the Ostmark as of 1 January 1940). It was closely connected to the Blutschutzgesetz (Blood Protection Law), one of the Nuremberg Laws, which criminalized intermarriage and sexual intercourse between "Jews" and "Aryans." The law enabled the public health offices to prohibit undesirable marriages. These marriage prohibitions were based on the data collected in the "genetic file."

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