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Nobody's children?
Wards of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Vilnius between 1814 and 1825

Dzieci niczyje
Podopieczni szpitala Dzieciątka Jezus w Wilnie w latach 1814–1825

Abstract: The article focuses attention on the residents of a Vilnius shelter – the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Vilnius. Founded in 1791, the hospital served as a children's asylum throughout the 19th century. Orphaned and abandoned children, children of prisoners and exiles were sent to the institution and remained there until the age of fifteen. It was the only institution of its kind in Vilnius that admitted infants. The article presents an attempt to identify the origins of the orphans and determine the reasons for their abandonment. It also sheds light on the parents (mainly mothers) of the children sent to the shelter. The basis for the analysis is the "Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt" ("Infant admissions journal") from 1814 to 1825.

Keywords: charity, child in the 19th century, Vilnius, hospitals, nursing homes

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Streszczenie: Artykuł skupia uwagę na pensjonariuszach wileńskiego przytułku – Szpitala Dzieciątka Jezus w Wilnie. Szpital został założony w 1791 r. Pełnił funkcję przytułku dla dzieci przez cały XIX w. Do zakładu trafiały dzieci osierocone i porzucone, dzieci więźniów i zesłańców, które pozostawały w nim do 15. roku życia. Był to jedyny tego typu zakład w Wilnie, który przyjmował niemowlęta. Artykuł prezentuje próbę określenia pochodzenia podrzutków i ustalenia przyczyn ich porzucania. Rzuca również światło na rodziców (głównie matki) dzieci trafiających do przytułku. Podstawą analiz jest rękopiśmienny „Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt" z lat 1814–1825.

Słowa kluczowe: dobroczynność, dziecko w XIX w., Wilno, szpitale, zakłady opiekuńcze

Historical research on children and childhood has become increasingly popular in recent years. Researchers examine the history of children and childhood from various perspectives – from models of upbringing, education and legislation regarding a child's position in family and society, to the material environment, customs and private life. Historical writing focusing on children is characterised by diversity of methodology and subject matter. In Polish historiography, the most popular context of inquiry is the child's place within the family in various historical periods and social environments.[1]

The 19th century heralded a fresh perspective on children, particularly among the families of the emancipating social classes. Their developmental needs began to be noticed and they increasingly became an object of investment in terms of upbringing and education of children that would pay off in the future. Teachers, doctors, social activists and psychologists all developed a growing interest in children.[2] Protection of the lives and financial security of minors was ensured by provisions in 19th-century legal codes.

[1] A summary of the most important works by Polish historians regarding childhood and children in the past can be found in: K. Jakubiak, M. Nawrot-Borkowska, *Przegląd nowszych badań nad dziejami dziecka i dzieciństwa na ziemiach polskich (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem lat 1795–1939)*, in: *Rodzina i dziecko w zmieniającym się świecie: perspektywa historyczna i pedagogiczna*, eds. K. Jakubiak, R. Grzybowski, Toruń 2021, pp. 11–54.

[2] H. Kurowska, *Niemowlę jako obiekt zainteresowania rodziców, lekarzy i państwa w XIX wieku*, in: *Życie prywatne Polaków w XIX wieku*, "Świat Dziecka", vol. 5, eds. J. Kita, M. Korybut-Marciniak, Łódź–Olsztyn 2016, pp. 123–147.

A pragmatic approach to the issue of caring for children, who, according to contemporaries, constituted valuable human capital requiring appropriate moral formation to fulfil useful social roles in the future, stimulated the initiation of educational and child care activity. The development of state welfare policy was associated with the establishment of institutions where "street children" would be given the opportunity to acquire basic education and practical skills to save them from joining the margins of society and proceeding down a criminal path.

The fate of illegitimate, orphaned and abandoned children is addressed periodically by local researchers. Cezary Kuklo, in an article entitled *Abandoned children in eighteenth-century Warsaw*, reviewed various contexts of research on the issue, paying particular attention to abandonment in the modern era.[3] The issue of abandoned children appeared in accounts of 19th-century hospitals, shelters and nursing homes. The characteristics of child care offered by charitable societies and religious congregations were examined.[4] More attention was paid to "unwanted children" by Aneta

[3] C. Kuklo, *O porzucaniu dzieci w osiemnastowiecznej Warszawie*, in: *Ars historiae – historia artis. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Andrzejowi Wyrobiszowi*, eds. E. Dubas-Urwanowicz, J. Maroszek, Białystok 2012, pp. 235–253.

[4] Z. Podgórska-Klawe, *Warszawski dom podrzutków*, "Rocznik Warszawski" 1974, vol. 12, pp. 111–145; eadem, *Szpitale warszawskie 1388–1945*, Warszawa 1975; eadem, *Od hospicjum do współczesnego szpitala. Rozwój historyczny problematyki szpitalnej w Polsce do końca XIX wieku*, Wrocław 1981; Cz. Kępski, *Towarzystwa dobroczynności w Królestwie Polskim (1815–1914)*, Lublin 1993; M. Surdacki, *Losy dzieci porzuconych w społeczeństwie europejskim do XX wieku*, in: *Dziecko w rodzinie i społeczeństwie. Dzieje nowożytne*, eds. K. Jakubiak, W. Jamrożek, Bydgoszcz 2002, pp. 155–156; H. Markiewiczowa, *Działalność opiekuńczo-wychowawcza Warszawskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynności 1814–1914*, Warszawa 2002; eadem, *Działalność opiekuńczo-wychowawcza Wileńskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynności 1807–1830*, Warszawa 2010; J. Domańska, *Dobroczynność względem sierot na ziemiach polskich do 1918 roku*, "Biuletyn Historii Wychowania" 2011, no. 27, pp. 19–31; M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Dobroczynne Wilno. Pomoc ubogim i potrzebującym w Wilnie w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, Olsztyn 2012; *Galicja i jej dziedzictwo*, vol. 16: *Opieka nad dzieckiem w Galicji*, ed. A. Meissner, Rzeszów 2002, pp. 9–21; J. Meissner-Łozińska, *Placówki opieki nad dzieckiem w Krakowie w okresie autonomii galicyjskiej*, in: ibidem, pp. 94–113; A. Haratyk, *Rozwój opieki nad dziećmi i młodzieżą w Galicji doby autonomicznej*, Wrocław 2002; eadem, *Udział społeczeństwa galicyjskiego w opiece nad dziećmi ubogimi i osieroconymi (1867–1914)*, Kraków 2007.

Bołdyrew, who analysed the attitude of the society of the Kingdom of Poland towards social pathologies – in her research, the topic of abandoned children (the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century) was thoroughly analysed, both in terms of the causes of the phenomenon and institutionalised forms of care.[5]

The issue of caring for orphaned, abandoned and homeless children in the Lithuanian-Belarusian lands in the 19th century has not aroused wider interest from social historians. The aim of this article is to present the forms of help available for youngsters in Vilnius in the first half of the 19th century, in an attempt to grasp the underlying reasons behind the abandonment of children, and to describe the forms of help offered to foundlings and orphans. The article presents the living conditions of abandoned children, focusing on the residents of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Vilnius – the only facility in the city (and in the entire province) providing care for infants. The text will omit considerations on child care and educational practices followed by institutions offering assistance – it does not aspire to be included in the history of child care pedagogy. The source basis of the article are manuscript sources preserved in the Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius, especially the handwritten "Infant admissions journal" from 1814–1825.

Religious associations initiated the provision of institutional care for orphans and abandoned children.[6] The Catholic Church, guided by principals of Christian mercy, created the first hospitals and shelters for orphaned,

[5] A. Bołdyrew, *Społeczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego wobec patologii społecznych w latach 1864–1914*, Łódź 2016; eadem, *Dzieciobójstwo i porzucenia dzieci w Królestwie Polskim jako przejaw patologii życia społecznego. Zarys problemu w świetle publicystyki przełomu XIX i XX w.*, "Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej XIX i XX wieku" 2008, pp. 278–299; eadem, *Żłobki i stacje „Kropla Mleka" jako placówki wspierające ubogie rodziny w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, "Wychowanie w Rodzinie" 2016, no. 2, pp. 103–119; eadem, *Społeczno-obyczajowe uwarunkowania porzucania dzieci i dzieciobójstwa w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, "Biuletyn Historii Wychowania" 2019, pp. 35–51.

[6] E. Bartkowiak, *Z historii opieki. Szpitale i zakłady zakonne dla dzieci w tradycji polskiej*, "Relacje. Studia z nauk społecznych" 2016, no. 2, pp. 41–42.

abandoned and homeless children from the 8th century.[7] The status of foundling resulted in social exclusion – a child born out of wedlock was treated as "the fruit of sin". Initially, institutions where unwanted children were left were intended to protect unmarried mothers from shame and prevent them from committing infanticide (children were left anonymously). Over time, child protection became the main idea.[8] In Europe, the greatest contribution to providing organised assistance for abandoned children was made by Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) – the founder of congregations of missionary priests and sisters of mercy. In 1645, he organised the Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés in Paris.[9] This hospital became an inspiration to create a similar facility in Warsaw. Priest Gabriel Piotr Baudouin (1689–1768) from Paris, a member of the missionary congregation, organised the Foundling Hospital of the Infant Jesus in 1732.[10] The facility enabled anonymous child abandonment – an unwanted baby could be placed in the so-called circle. The child, having gained "foundling" status, received care until adulthood.[11] Over the course of the 19th century, approximately 200 hospitals and shelters for children were established in Europe (more than half in German states).[12]

Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Vilnius

The first facility in Vilnius providing care for orphaned and abandoned children was the Hospital of the Infant Jesus. In the 1780s, attempts had already been made to expand the care given to orphans, but additional

[7] M. Kolankiewicz, *Zapiski o instytucjonalnej opiece nad dziećmi*, "Dziecko Krzywdzone. Historia, badania, praktyka" 2006, no. 17, pp. 6–35.

[8] K. Koralewski, *Opieka społeczna (dobroczynność publiczna)*, Warszawa 1918, p. 142.

[9] L. Natanson, *O podrzutkach we Francji*, "Tygodnik Lekarski" 1850, no. 52, pp. 409–411.

[10] L. Paprocki, *Opieka nad dziećmi opuszczonemi i dom podrzutków w Warszawie*, Warszawa 1871.

[11] Z. Podgórska-Klawe, *Warszawski Dom Podrzutków (1731–1901)*, "Rocznik Warszawski" 1975, no. 12, pp. 111–145.

[12] A. Marek, *Dziecięce szpitale w Europie 1802–1908*, "Medycyna Nowożytna" 2006, vol. 13/1–2, pp. 79–92.

funding for children living in general institutions (hospitals) did not yield satisfactory results.[13] The initiative to establish a hospital specialising in child care came from the superior of Vilnius missionary priests – Andrzej Pohl and Jadwiga Teresa Ogińska née Załuska p.v. Skuminowa-Tyszkiewiczowa. Jadwiga Ogińska – double widow of Krzysztof Tyszkiewicz and Prince Tadeusz Franciszek Ogiński (1712–1783), heir to a large fortune, had no offspring of her own. In 1786, after consultations with Andrzej Pohl, who participated in a project to set up an institution for orphaned children, Ogińska donated a property located near the monastery of missionary priests for a hospital. It is worth noting that the foundations of these facilities were initiated in consultation between the church hierarchs (who had experience in running hospitals/poorhouses) and representatives of the social elite who had material resources at their disposal. The generous founder decided that the best place to establish the facility would be a tenement house and square located in the suburbs – behind Subocz Gate. A year later, the cornerstone for the hospital buildings was laid here, and Ogińska allocated 50,000 Polish zlotys to secure the investment. Other donors co-financed the institution by bequeathing tenement houses, farms, squares and various sums of money.[14] A permanent contribution to the hospital fund was an annual fee of four red zlotys from the Knights of the Order of St. Stanisław and a fee established in 1797, collected from public entertainments and theatre performances organised in the city. The model of the Vilnius facility was the Foundling Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Warsaw, founded by Gabriel Piotr Baudouin from the Congregation of St. Vincent de Paul. Jadwiga Ogińska, in the institution's design plan, justified the need for its establishment as follows:

> Having spent almost a century in this world, I can never bear it with a dry eye or a calm heart that in Vilnius, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, among the abundance of various funds and grants, orphan

[13] S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus w Wilnie*, Wilno 1934, pp. 2–3.

[14] The treasurer of the Vilnius Voivodeship, Kazimierz Wołodko, donated his tenement house to the facility; Father Herbnicki donated a garden where vegetables were grown; priest Jan Piłsudski left PLN 53,000.

> children, without the means to live, wander the streets, and abandoned babies […] are without care or shelter.[15]

Until the hospital was opened, orphaned and abandoned children would be placed in existing shelters and institutions for adults, alongside the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the poor and criminals. In Vilnius, children were also cared for by the Rochites, who took in children abandoned on the streets of Vilnius, and the Mariavite Sisters, who ran a school for orphans – neither of these orders accepted responsibility of accepting infants.[16]

Work on the construction of the new hospital, under the supervision of Augustyn Kossakowski, an architect from Vilnius, lasted four years (1787–1791). The foresight of the hospital's founders is clear from the request for a protectorate from King Stanisław August Poniatowski. The monarch's patronage of the emerging facility was obtained at the Warsaw Sejm on 3 December 1790.[17] The ceremonial opening of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus took place on 17 October 1791 and was attended by clerical and secular authorities – Archbishop Stanisław Bohusz Siestrzeńcewicz, Catholic clergy and members of the city hall. The initiator of the facility tried to provide an appropriate setting for the ceremony. Over a hundred orphans, dressed in identical uniforms, were led through the city, accompanied by the Sisters of Mercy, from Gosiewski Hospital to the new building. A detailed description of this event was included in the "History of Domestic and Foreign Charity".[18]

Jadwiga Ogińska played an active role in the ceremony – she blessed the minors who were moving to the new facility, and she sponsored a sumptuous banquet in the missionaries' monastery for the sponsors of the initiative and the clergy who took care of the religious grandeur of the opening.[19] The

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[15] Citation: S. Rosiak, *Prowincja Litewska Sióstr Miłosierdzia*, Wilno 1933, p. 228.

[16] W. Zahorski, *Z dziejów dobroczynności wileńskiej*, in: *Z nad Wilii i Niemna. Pamięci Adama Mickiewicza i Tomasz Zana w 50 rocznicę ich zgonu*, Wilno 1906, pp. 72, 74–75.

[17] *Potwierdzenie szpitala pod tytułem Dzieciątka Jezus w mieście Wilnie dane na sejmie warszawskim dn. 3 grudnia 1790 roku*, "Dzieje Dobroczynności Krajowej i Zagranicznej" [further: DDKIZ] 1821, pp. 399–400.

[18] *Otwarcie Szpitala Dzieciątka Jezus w Wilnie*, DDKIZ 1821, R. II, p. 398.

[19] Ibidem.

theatricalisation of this event and its setting must have made an impression on the city's residents. The setting of the event emphasised the generosity and sensitivity of the founder – Jadwiga Ogińska was considered the first charitable lady of Vilnius.

The facility was aimed at poor children from the lower classes, whose families were unable to provide them with basic life needs, as well as orphaned or abandoned children, children of exiles and prisoners who wandered the streets and constituted a depressing and unfortunately common sight across the landscape of Vilnius. Babies found on the streets of Vilnius and dismissed by the police, children brought by destitute parents and single mothers, and children of prisoners were also sent to the hospital. The new hospital building behind Subocz Gate, called the "foundling home" or "Subocz hospital" by the locals, served as an orphanage throughout the 19th century until World War I.[20]

From 1795, the hospital was supervised by the Lithuanian Hospital Commission, then in 1808, as part of the unification of care institutions with Russia, it was taken over by the Chamber (Magistratura) of Universal Welfare, which was a provincial component of the state social welfare system in the Russian Empire.[21] The Chamber of Universal Care acted as an intermediary in the event of difficulties in collecting funds bequeathed to the hospital but did not subsidise it. It was a supervisory body and introduced the obligation for care facilities to file reports on the type and number of sick and poor people, with particular emphasis on financial reports.[22] It also defined limits for admitting sick/poor people commensurate with

[20] S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, p. 21.

[21] *O urządzeniach i administracyi szpitalów i wszelkich zakładów dobroczynnych w Polszcze i Litwie od miesiąca lipca 1791 do połowy listopada 1792*, DDKIZ 1820, pp. 160–168 and DDKIZ 1821, pp. 384–400; *O przeszłych Kommissyach Szpitalnych Litewskich i o teraźnieyszey Magistraturze Powszechney Opieki w guberni litewsko-wileńskiey*, DDKIZ 1820, pp. 2–3. On the functioning of Vilnius hospitals in the 16th–18th centuries, see: M. Jakulis, *Špitolės Vilniuje: labdara, gydymas ir skurdas XVI–XVIII a*, Vilnius 2019.

[22] Reports from individual facilities sent to the Chamber of Universal Care with varying degrees of completeness can be found in: Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvo [further: LVIA], f. 390, op. 3–4, Zarząd Wileńskiej Opieki Społecznej.

accommodation and financial capacity. Reports, limits on the number of admissions and annual visits by the Chamber's officials aroused resistance from the superiors of the orders – it was a form of secular interference in the internal affairs of the monasteries. In 1842, all hospital properties were nationalised.[23] These facilities fell under the management of the Chamber of State Property, subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A fixed annual amount was allocated for their maintenance – proportional to their previous funds, limits were introduced on the number of residents admitted. strict control of hospital administration was introduced, and doctors were appointed to work in individual facilities.[24]

From the beginning of its existence, care over the young residents of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus was entrusted to the St. Vincent de Paul Sisters of Mercy Congregation,[25] commonly called the Sisters of Charity. The Sisters of Mercy appeared in Vilnius as early as 1745. They were sent to care for patients of the largest hospital in Vilnius on Sawicz Street, founded by Bishop Bogusław Gosiewski.[26] After the opening of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus, four Sisters of Charity from the Warsaw Congregation were sent to care for the children, under the leadership of Elżbieta Filauzerowna (she served as superior until 1822). In 1795, 7 sisters worked at the facility, in 1810 this number rose to 10, and in 1818 to 12, a situation which continued until the 1830s. In 1832, 11 Sisters of Charity served there.[27]

The number of children grew rapidly in the years following the opening of the hospital.[28] In the first two decades of the 19th century, there were 150 to 250 residents at the institution. In 1809, the Chamber of General

[23] J. Moszczyński, *Zakłady dobroczynne w Wilnie w czasach przeszłych i dzisiejszych*, in: A. F. Adamowicz, *Praktyczne postrzeżenia niektórych lekarzy*, Wilno 1862, p. 176.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] The congregation was established in France in 1633. Its mission was to care for the sick, beggars, elderly and orphans. The Sisters of Mercy came to Poland in 1659 thanks to Maria Ludwika Gonzaga.

[26] W. Zahorski, op. cit., p. 73.

[27] S. Rosiak, *Prowincja…*, pp. 230–239.

[28] Idem, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, pp. 2–9.

Welfare tried to limit the number of admissions – boys from the age of 6 were to be sent to government military establishments, and girls were to be raised as landed citizens. A ban was introduced on admitting children if one of their parents was still alive.[29] In reality, this regulation was not respected – the Sisters of Charity accepted everyone in need. The number of children at the institution increased every year: in 1804, there were 161, in 1810 – 164, and in 1816 – 336.[30] A similar increase could be noted at the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Warsaw.[31] This was related to the intensive demographic growth of the city's population in the first three decades of the century, which was influenced by, inter alia, the Imperial University of Vilnius established in 1803 as well as the education system reform by Alexander I. A lively intellectual and organisational movement attracted intellectual and aristocratic elites, students, and local landowners to Vilnius – the city was termed the "Athens of the North" until the November Uprising. The increase in the number of orphaned and abandoned children was also influenced by the passage of troops during the Napoleonic Wars, epidemics that hit the city (typhus, dysentery, typhoid fever, scurvy)[32] and the economic crisis in the Lithuanian-Belarusian lands – the main burden of war, as it had become the base of the Grand Army in 1812. The effects of the War of 1812 were tragic – the poor of the Vilnius Governorate, as a result of destruction, pillage and hardship, experienced hunger for several years after the end of hostilities.[33]

[29] Idem, *Prowincja…*, p. 236.

[30] Idem, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, pp. 9–13.

[31] There were 472 children in the Warsaw facility in 1802, 729 in 1809, and 981 in 1816, see: J. Bartoszewicz, *Historya Szpitala Dzieciątka Jezus w Warszawie*, Warszawa 1870, pp. 246, 249, 355.

[32] M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Stan zdrowotny mieszkańców Wilna w początkach XIX wieku*, "Biuletyn Historii Pogranicza" 2012, no. 12, pp. 15–26.

[33] For more, see: D. Nawrot, *Litwa i Napoleon w 1812 roku*, Katowice 2008; J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Litwa w 1812 roku*, Warszawa 1912.

Babies in the Hospital of the Infant Jesus

More detailed information about babies admitted to the institution is provided by the "Admission journal for infants" kept by the Sisters of Mercy from 1814–1825.[34] A handwritten document with 120 pages, carefully kept by the nuns, gives the date of admission of the infant to the hospital and the persons or institutions that sent the child to the facility. It provides information about the child's age, name and surname (if known), and the sacrament of baptism. Brief information is also provided about the baby's state of health. For some children, the date of death or the date the infant was taken, as well as information about the person taking the child, was recorded. If the infant survived and was not removed from the institution, the document contains entries about the date when the child started school. However, there are few such episodes in the preserved source.

The journal did not always maintain the anonymity of the parent leaving the child – the sisters recorded some of the mothers', fathers' or relatives' names. Most often, the name of the person who sent the child to the institution was given – they were officials, doctors, university professors, generally respected people in the Vilnius community. Children were also sent "from the police", "from the court", or sometimes a postillion would bring them. Babies found in various parts of the city were sent there: "in Anatkol, under the Holy Cross of St. Veronica", in gates, alleys, under the walls of monasteries, in uninhabited houses, churches, cemeteries, on university walls, in taverns, markets, at the governor's palace, in front of the town hall, at the Gate of Dawn. There are few reported cases of abandonment in towns near Vilnius. Some of the babies were brought by the midwives who delivered them. There was no typical "circle" at the Vilnius facility – infants were abandoned "at the grate" – at the main gate of the hospital. Much more often, infants would be adopted from poor or sick mothers. There were cases where a child had both parents but they left the child at the institution for some time. Some of the children were sent to Subocz Street from the university clinic, from St. Jacob's Hospital, from Gosiewski Hospital or from

[34] Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Vrublevskių Biblioteka [further: LMAVB], f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 1–120.

the Vilnius Charitable Society. Infants referred from other hospital facilities were usually several-day-old children of women who were sick or had died during childbirth or as a result of postpartum complications, which were common at that time.[35]

Table 1. Babies[36] admitted to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in the years 1814–1824

Year	No. infants admitted	No. boys	No. girls	No. deceased	No. taken	Mortality (%)
1814	86	39	47	56	30	65%
1815	82	38	44	46	36	56%
1816	79	39	40	47	32	59.4%
1817	75	48	27	38	37	50%
1818	120	55	65	67	53	55%
1819	165	88	77	71	94	43%
1820	163	81	82	104	59	63.8%
1821	195	95	100	102	93	52.3%
1822	193	90	103	108	85	55.9%
1823	159	76	83	103	56	64.7%
1824	165	96	69	79	86	47.8%
1825	149	79	70	79	70	53%

Source: Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Vrublevskių Biblioteka, f. 318-17180, Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt, *fols. 1–120.*

The Sisters of Mercy's journal recorded the children admitted to the facility from the day of birth (there were infants abandoned immediately after birth) to the age of three. Children aged one to three years, who were not actually infants, were rare cases, and entering their names in the "infant" journal could have been dictated by physical or mental disability that made

[35] Ibidem.

[36] Children up to three years of age were called infants – the term had a different meaning than today. During the period under study, children over three years of age who were not included in the table were also admitted to hospital. In order to maintain reliability, the source term 'infants' was retained for children up to three years of age.

them dependent. In the case of older children, there are often notes about the type of disability.[37]

Infant mortality in hospitals was very high – in the years 1814–1825 it averaged almost 56% (see table 1). The mortality rate in this type of institution was as high as 80%.[38] There are several reasons for such a high number of deaths. First of all, infants who were brought to the facility were on the verge of physical exhaustion – cold and starving. Children who were several days old or several weeks old, sent by the police, found on the streets and thrown over hospital walls, had a very slim chance of survival. Some children were admitted with the following notes: "very weak", "completely frozen" or "swollen". Infants who had spent half a day or more in difficult weather conditions (especially in the winter months) had a minimal chance of survival and their stay in the facility usually did not last longer than one day. The second cause of death was malnutrition. The babies had to be fed by wet nurses, but the hospital usually had none. All alternative methods of feeding the babies were ineffective. Another reason for the high percentage of deaths was disease, among which smallpox was the most dangerous during this period. In some years, most of the children admittedly died of smallpox.[39] It was very easy to become infected in the hospital – the babies stayed in one room and were fed by the same women. The sisters also made entries about other diseases and ailments that plagued those under their care: measles, whooping cough, ulcers, consumption, colds, jaundice, and fever. Tooth eruption was relatively often cited as the cause of death. Convulsions and haemorrhages were less frequently reported.[40] The Sisters of Mercy also received mutilated children with fractures: "Peter, a few days old, broken on the cross";[41] "Adam, 1 year old, brought in beaten";[42] "Zofia, 2 years old, legs

[37] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 1–120.

[38] Between the years 1784–1866, infant mortality was 78% in the Vienna Foundling Home, see *Wiadomości bieżące*, "Gazeta Lekarska" 1865, R. 3, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 32.

[39] In 1815 and first quarter of 1816 most infants died of the pox.

[40] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 1–120.

[41] Ibidem, k. 64.

[42] Ibidem, k. 110.

crippled from birth";[43] "Onufry, 2 years old, sent from the police. Crooked legs".[44] Sometimes the cause of death was not determined – there are entries that read: "died of loss of breath",[45] "died dropsy",[46] "swollen".[47]

Social origin of the abandoned children

An attempt to determine the social origin of abandoned and orphaned children in Vilnius in the first decades of the 19th century is difficult due to limited sources. The city, developing rapidly in terms of demographics, had a population of approximately 50,000 in the years of interest.[48] There are no official sources illustrating the social structure of Vilnius residents. More precise data regarding the social divisions of Vilnius residents are only available from the early 1930s, but they can be used to estimate the groups living in the city during the previous two decades. About 50% of the population was Jewish. The second largest group, constituting approximately 15%, was the nobility. About 10% were townspeople – mainly craftsmen and their families. The rest of the city's society – fewer than 3,000 people – include officials, clergy, peasants, servants, and foreigners. About one third of this stratum were the poorest – servants, peasants who came from the countryside, and day labourers.[49] It can be assumed that the majority of abandoned children came from the latter social group and, due to the nature of their work or difficult economic circumstances, were unable to take care of their offspring. Servants in particular – mainly young unmarried women – were the main "source" of illegitimate pregnancies, abortions and infanticide in 19th-century society. The highest number of child abandonment cases were

[43] Ibidem, k. 117.

[44] Ibidem, k. 109.

[45] Ibidem, k. 113.

[46] Ibidem, k. 115.

[47] Ibidem, k. 65.

[48] Michał Baliński states that in 1825, Vilnius had 46,655 inhabitants; see: M. Baliński, *Opisanie statystyczne miasta Wilna*, Wilno 1835, p. 59.

[49] Ibidem, pp. 62–63.

recorded among them.[50] Despite the lack of entries about the social origins of the parents of the abandoned children, the notes made by the Sisters of Mercy in the "Admission journal for infants" provide some valuable clues. The large number of infants admitted with their mothers is striking:

> Anna Tekla Rogalska, baptised at St. Kazimierz, admitted with her mother;[51] Aleksander, four weeks old, admitted with his mother Antonina Janicka;[52] Petronella, a few months old, baptised by the Missionary Fathers, with her mother Chrzczonowicz as a wet nurse;[53] Franciszek Sadowski with his mother Anna Sadowska as a wet nurse.[54]

According to records, in the years 1814–1819, about ¼ of the children were admitted with their mothers, who found temporary shelter in the hospital and were employed as wet nurses. In 1815 alone, of 82 infants, 21 were admitted with their mothers. Typically, the mothers and children would stay from several weeks to several months – after that time, the women would take their children and leave the facility. There were cases where a wet nurse found employment in the institution for even several years. Infants admitted with their mothers had the best chance of survival.[55] Among the residents admitted with their mothers, the largest percentage were children of poor hired labourers and of servants who had been dismissed due to pregnancy or deprived of a roof over their heads and income. Some young women had definitely been thrown out by their parents, who considered an illegitimate child to be a disgrace to the family. The process of admitting children with their mothers continued until the end of the period under study, but with a gradual yet noticeable decline in the number of women staying with their children and employed to feed infants. In 1820, 163 infants were admitted

[50] For more, see: R. Poniat, *Służba domowa w miastach na ziemiach polskich od połowy XVIII do końca XIX wieku*, Warszawa 2014; *Kultura pracy. Z dziejów służby domowej XIX i XX wieku*, eds. A. Napierała, M. Michalski, Poznań 2021.

[51] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 6.

[52] Ibidem, k. 7.

[53] Ibidem, k. 8.

[54] Ibidem, k. 9.

[55] S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, p. 8.

to the hospital and only 26 mothers stayed with them at the institution. In 1825, out of 149 children, only 16 mothers were admitted with them. Typical of the 1920s were entries about taking children "to town to see a wet nurse".[56] The reduction in the number of women admitted – probably intended to reduce the facility's running costs – resulted in an increase in infant mortality.

Another group among those admitted were children of poor widows and abandoned women whose dire living conditions made it impossible to provide their offspring with basic care – in these cases, the Sisters of Mercy did not give the mother's surname. Some of the children abandoned by the poorest women were picked up by them after some time. Sometimes, the mother's economic situation was so dreadful that she sent all her children to the shelter – in February 1819, Katarzyna Jurczyńska was admitted to the institution with two small children: two-year-old Jan and three-month-old Wiktor. She herself took a job at the facility as a nurse.[57]

The children of bedridden women – wives whose husbands were unable to provide for the mother and her offspring – were also sent to the hospital. The sisters gave them food and clothing. The largest group were babies found on the streets of Vilnius or abandoned to well-known and respected residents of the city. Mortality was the highest among these children, but there were cases where the mother or someone from the family came to the hospital after some time and picked up the abandoned child.

The fate of children born out of wedlock was most often in the hands of their mothers – men were usually not interested in the problematic offspring and often did not know about its existence. It can only be assumed that some women who left their children on the streets or brought them directly to the hospital experienced social exclusion due to illegitimate motherhood. In all likelihood, some of the abandoned babies were the result of rape (especially during periods when armies passed through or troops were stationed in the city). The Sisters of Mercy did not record the profession or social position of the mothers. Certainly, some mothers were involved in prostitution – in April 1819, the journal noted: "Jerzy, immediately after birth, was baptised

[56] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 66–70.

[57] Ibidem, k. 47.

at St. Kazimierz, given away from a whore".[58] There were certainly more children from women engaged in prostitution, but it is difficult to make any estimates based on the information included in the census.

In some exceptional cases, men brought children to the facility. There are few recorded examples of babies being brought by "destitute fathers" whose wives had died during childbirth or postpartum – "Paulina Piotrowiczówna after her deceased mother – brought by the father";[59] "Julianna Kostukiewiczówna, a few weeks old, after her deceased mother, brought in by her father".[60] Widowed fathers did not only bring newborns to the hospital, but also older children – one or two years old: "Marianna Jawrycka. The mother died at St. Jacob's. The father brought her in. He is the guardian. The child is crippled and cannot stand on her own";[61] "Marianna, 2 years old, after her deceased mother. The father brought her in".[62] Entries in the journal show that the widowers' children were taken away from the institution after their father's financial situation had stabilised.

Children from outside the city were occasionally admitted to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus – mainly from places near Vilnius. Although not large in number, they are nevertheless worthy of attention. Generally, they were children of women running away from their family homes due to harassment and social exclusion after giving birth to an illegitimate child. It must be remembered that in the rural environment, sanctions against women having children out of wedlock were very severe – in small communities where everyone knew each other, social pressure was greater than in the city. Public condemnation in rural environments often took the form of severe physical and moral punishments: social exclusion consisting in a ban on participating in all kinds of social events, folk festivals, public condemnation by priests, being tied to church doors, etc.[63] Therefore, some rural women wished to

[58] Ibidem, k. 50.

[59] Ibidem, k. 71, 105.

[60] Ibidem, k. 116.

[61] Ibidem, k. 108.

[62] Ibidem, k. 114.

[63] L. Klimka, *Rodzina w litewskiej etnopedagogice*, "Wychowanie w Rodzinie" 2012, vol. 5, pp. 48–51.

escape judgement and give her extramarital children a chance, since they were at risk of being stigmatised in their immediate environment. So, the mother would head for the city.[64] Young destitute mothers would knock at the hospital gates asking for shelter. Examples of such women may be found in the register. Ewa Zajączkowska, born on 24 December 1814 in Niemenczyn, baptised in the Niemenczyn church a day later[65] – together with her unmarried mother, Teresa, arrived at the "Foundling Home" on 15 January 1815.[66] Barbara Pozupaciówna, whose son Kazimierz was born on 20 February 1814 in the town of Podziuny and baptised in the Roman Catholic church in Niemenczyn on 22 February 1814, had to seek shelter with her child outside her home village.[67] Kazimierz, less than one year old, was admitted to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus together with his mother on 1 February 1815. The mother took up a job as a wet nurse for two months, after which she left the institution with her son.[68] The incompleteness of baptism records makes it much more difficult to check the social background and status of the parents of children admitted to hospital. The above examples indicate that some women could be categorised as "hard-working", looking not only for shelter, but also for a chance to raise their illegitimate children and provide them with a decent future.

Religion

Most of the children placed in the institution, due to the fact that the hospital was run by a Roman Catholic religious order, had undergone a Catholic baptism. The Sisters of Mercy made sure that the sacrament of baptism was not readministered – the registry cards contain information about children

[64] C. Kuklo, *Dzieci nieślubne i podrzutki w warszawskiej parafii Św. Krzyża w XVIII w.*, "Roczniki Humanistyczne" 1987, vol. 35, no. 2, p. 308.

[65] LVIA, f. 1400, op. 1, no. 40, *Metryki narodzonych parafii niemenczyńskiej 1802–1818*, k. 93.

[66] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 9.

[67] LVIA, f. 1400, op. 1, no. 40, *Metryki narodzonych parafii niemenczyńskiej 1802–1818*, k. 90.

[68] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 10.

confirmed to have been christened – the name of the church where the child received the sacrament is given. Baptised infants were usually the offspring of poor parents. Some of the babies dropped off at the walls of the hospital or left at the homes of wealthy residents were accompanied by cards giving information about the sacrament and their name. Information about baptism had to be confirmed in the record books. Many mothers decided not to leave any information about the child, which could have made it easier for the police to determine their identity. It should also be remembered that mothers, especially those from poor backgrounds, were simply illiterate. In most cases, the parents' religion was unknown. Therefore, approximately 80% of the hospital's patients were given a conditional sacrament – "sub conditione". Conditional baptism was granted to a child even if its parents were of a faith other than Roman Catholic, but whether or not they had been baptised was uncertain. According to the records, Jewish children were sent to the facility. For example, in 1818: "Katarzyna, 3 weeks old, baptised here, brought by her own Jewish mother".[69] On 25 November 1825, a girl was admitted to the hospital: "Łucja from a Jewish woman, the day after her birth, baptised here".[70] According to the hospital's report to the Magisterium of Universal Welfare, 119 "Jewish orphans" were admitted between 1795 and 1809.[71] Babies were also accepted from people of the Orthodox faith: Eudoxia, a few days old, sent from the civil governor, from a Russian mother";[72] "Szymon Strauch, 3 years old, adopted from a poor Russian officer".[73] If there was any information that the child had been baptised in an Orthodox ceremony, the sacrament was not readministered: "Audotia, a few days, from a poor father of the mayor, baptised in a Russian church".[74]

In 1842, state management was introduced at the hospital. The Sisters of Mercy were deprived of all assets, real estate and income from investments, and supervision was introduced at the facility (managerial functions were

[69] Ibidem, k. 37.

[70] Ibidem, k. 108.

[71] LVIA, f. 390, op. 3, no. 14, *Zestawienie ze Szpitala Sierot*, k. 27.

[72] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 20.

[73] Ibidem, k. 29.

[74] Ibidem, k. 71.

entrusted to persons delegated by the authorities). From that moment on, the Guardian Council that controlled the facility required that new arrivals be christened in the Orthodox rite. While the Sisters of Mercy were in the hospital – until 1864 – some of the infants were baptised in a Catholic ceremony. After the expulsion of the sisters, an Orthodox chapel was established, the Catholic priest was replaced by an Orthodox one, and the children admitted were baptised in the Orthodox rite.[75]

Children of noble birth

Not all children admitted to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus came from the urban poor or the margins of society. Even though state titling was not usually used when entering children into the register, there were some exceptions. The rapid process of pauperisation of the minor nobility in the post-partition era[76] was also apparent in hospital documents. Back in the 1790s, ex-Jesuit Jan Piłsudski allocated significant sums of money for the

[75] S. Rosiak, *Prowincja…*, pp. 242–245.

[76] The situation of the Polish nobility in the post-partition era varied. The pauperisation of the minor nobility in the lands absorbed by Russia as a result of the partitions resulted primarily from the accelerated process of declassification aimed at pushing the minor nobility into taxed groups, subject to military conscription (nidvortsy and grazhdan). It must be remembered that the nobility from these areas constituted over 60% of the entire privileged state of the Empire, which was dangerous from the point of view of the state's interests. Lineage commissions appointed by the Russian government verified nobility on the basis of property and genealogical documentation. Historians have not yet determined the number of declassed nobles from the Lithuanian-Belarusian lands. It is estimated that in the eastern areas of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as a result of declassification in the first thirty years of the 19th century, approximately 250,000 people lost their nobility privileges. Some declassed families lived in harsh financial conditions. There were people among them who benefited from the support of philanthropic organisations. For more, see: J. Sikorska-Kulesza, *Deklasacja drobnej szlachty na Litwie i Białorusi w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 49–61; cf. D. Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793–1914*, 2nd ed., transl. K. Rutkowski, Lublin 2011; M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Drogi do ubóstwa. Protokół parafialny opiekuna ubogich Teodora Herburtta – źródło do portretu warstw spauperyzowanych w Wilnie w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, in: *Życie prywatne Polaków w XIX wieku. Marginesy*, vol. 4, eds. J. Kita, M. Korybut-Marciniak, Łódź–Olsztyn 2021, pp. 57–74.

education of orphans of noble birth at the Infant Jesus Institution.[77] The Hospital of the Infant Jesus's report to the Vilnius Chamber of General Care included a list of the facility's patients in the years 1795–1809. The report states that in the above-mentioned period, 103 children of noble birth were admitted to the institution.[78] Information is also contained in the "Infant admissions journal" that sheds light on the child's social origin: for instance, on 16 September 1816, "noble-born" three-month-old Anna Wilczewska came to the institution, adopted "from poor parents" – legal spouses.[79]

More often than not, information about the noble origins of infants was given on cards left with them. Sometimes the sisters would enter the contents of the letters the child arrived with in the register of newly admitted children. On 22 June 1825, a baby was dropped off at home with specific instructions: "Alexander, a few days old, with a note announcing that he is of noble birth and unbaptised. He was baptised here in order to name him. His family picked him up on 2 August 1825".[80] "Julian, a few weeks old with a note saying that that he is of noble birth and sent from the University";[81] "Alexander, a few days old with a note saying he is of noble birth along with a request for baptism".[82] Sometimes unmarried mothers brought their babies to the hospital in secret. In some cases, the clues lay in the surnames of the mothers, unmarried members of more distinguished families: Rudominówna, Downarowiczówna, Daszkiewiczówna, Kilmaszewiczówna, Jurewiczówna. The document rarely used surnames – most often only the mother's first name was mentioned, so based on the document it can be assumed that some of the hospital's patients were illegitimate children of well-born maidens who, wanting to rid themselves of the "disgrace" of premarital pregnancy, left their offspring with the Sisters of Mercy. The very sound of the surname cannot be a criterion of social status, but it is worth

77 S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, pp. 6, 8.

78 LVIA, f. 390, op. 3, no. 14, *Zestawienie ze Szpitala Sierot*, k. 27.

79 LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 25.

80 Ibidem, k. 115.

81 Ibidem, k. 116.

82 Ibidem, k. 117.

noting that in the case of these residents we encounter the most notes about the child being picked up by the "family". It can therefore be assumed that pity and compassion for young mothers prevailed over condemnation, and they wanted to provide illegitimate children with education and material security.

Child care for the youngest residents

Infants at Hospital of the Infant Jesus received much more expensive care compared to older children. The annual maintenance of an infant was estimated at 75 silver rubles, and for an older child (a so-called adolescent) – 30 rubles.[83] According to Stefan Rosiak, in the years 1791–1803, 2,107 children passed through the walls of the facility, including 1,412 infants. The ratio of infants to older children varied in particular years. For instance, in July 1827, there were 60 infants and 168 older children; in July 1828, 120 infants and 129 older children.[84] According to the preserved register of infants admitted to the hospital, about a hundred abandoned babies were sent to the facility every year: in 1814, 90 infants; in 1815 – 98; in 1816 – 80; in 1817 – 94, and in 1818 – 92.[85] More mothers with newborn children were admitted in the winter months, when it was more difficult to obtain food and provide warm shelter. Wet nurses were employed to feed the babies. The number of breastfeeding women residing permanently at the facility varied. For example, in 1805, the hospital employed 11 wet nurses, in 1806 – 12, in 1812 – 10, in 1828 – 26.[86] Breastfeeding women

[83] S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, p. 8.

[84] Idem, *Prowincja…*, p. 238.

[85] LMAVB, f. 318-17180, *Dziennik dla wpisywania niemowląt*, k. 1–46. In the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Warsaw, the number of foundlings was several times higher – e.g., in 1829, 929 infants were admitted. At that time, Warsaw had approximately 140,000 inhabitants, see. E. Mazur, *Dobroczynność w Warszawie w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 80–81; J. Bartoszewicz, *Historya Szpitala Dzieciątka Jezus w Warszawie*, in: *Rys historyczno-statystyczny szpitali i innych zakładów dobroczynnych w Królestwie Polskim*, Warszawa 1870, p. 355.

[86] S. Rosiak, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, pp. 13–14.

working in the facility fed two children each, for which they received full board and an annual salary of 7.5 rubles. Tens of breastfeeding women were employed, but usually in insufficient numbers, which the sisters who ran the facility complained about.[87] Malnutrition among the youngest children was a common cause of death. Some of the infants were allocated to be fed outside the hospital – in houses of Vilnius women or by the inhabitants of villages near Vilnius. Nursing mothers then received 2 rubles per month, and, in addition, the facility agreed to provide a patient residing outside the hospital with clothes, underwear, cereals and necessary medicines. The Sisters of Mercy were looking for honest nurses. Women who decided to accept the position of wet nurse were obliged to submit a certificate of "good conduct" issued by the local law enforcement authority. The infants sent to be fed outside the hospital wore a lead medallion hung around the neck as an additional safeguard.[88]

The preserved register from 1838–1839 of children who were sent to be fed shows that infants given to private homes stayed there for a maximum of 15 months. The document recorded the wet nurse's name and surname and her place of residence. There were also regular monthly payments for breastfeeding women. Some of the babies sent away to be breastfed died. The register contains some brief entries regarding the health of a child taken back from paid wet-nurses: "received in good health", "received sick", "injured".[89] After the contract ended, the children were taken to the hospital under the care of the sisters. The Sisters of Mercy also employed some nannies who were responsible for dressing, cleaning and otherwise caring for the babies. One sister was assigned to coordinate the child care duties of the auxiliary staff looking after the infants. Hospital duty was also performed by one doctor.[90] The living conditions in the hospital were difficult. According to the visitation report from 1828, the infants occupied one large room and

[87] LVIA, f. 390, op. 3, no. 7, k. 25–26, 63.

[88] J. Moszczyński, op. cit., p. 181.

[89] LMAVB, f. 318-17177, *Rejestr dzieci oddanych do mamki na wieś 1838–1839*, k. 1–9.

[90] S. Rosiak, *Prowincja…*, p. 258.

one smaller room. The youngest were placed in separate boxes – cots. Four rooms were occupied by older children.[91]

What happened next to the foundlings depended on numerous circumstances. The Sisters of Mercy ran an elementary school at the hospital, attended by boys and girls from the age of 3. The children were educated by the Sisters of Mercy and one employed teacher. The upper age limit for the facility's residents was 15. After finishing school, the children were put to work as domestic servants, to work in craft workshops or on farms.[92] Children often left the hospital before they were 15 years old. The inhabitants of Vilnius became accustomed to the fact that from this establishment they might hire a helper or servant who would work for little or no remuneration – for food and board. Some private correspondence contains a description of the search among the facility's residents for a boy to serve. A young official of the tsarist administration, performing official duties in St. Petersburg, addressed a request to his sister living in Vilnius, who gave him the following advice regarding the choice of a servant:

> As for the servant boy you wrote about, I could arrange it for you, but it seems to me that no one would want to commute that far. I think it would be better to take one from Infant Jesus – there are boys aged 15 and 14 who are sent to work for craftsmen. If you like this idea, I shall ask the nuns under what circumstances the boy may be taken from there. I expect that you will have better luck with a servant from Infant Jesus than from a simple boy who has only tended flocks since childhood. There, while making your selection, you see from their physiognomy which children are good-natured, or the nuns can tell you which one is better and more obedient.[93]

In the light of the above quote, the pupils of the Hospital of the Infant Jesus were taken into service, in craft workshops, to help with various

[91] Idem, *Zakład Dzieciątka Jezus…*, p. 13.

[92] J. Moszczyński, op. cit., p. 182.

[93] LVIA, f. 1135, op. 20, no. 97, *List Tekli Łazarowicz do Artura Dolińskiego*, 13 November 1852, k. 345.

jobs – their elementary education and upbringing in a religious spirit were appreciated. The Sisters of Mercy endeavoured to raise children through work and instil an ethos of industriousness.[94] Vilnius residents who employed a child from this institution could assume that the children under their care had been instilled with the principles of good behaviour, discipline and diligence.

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The Hospital of the Infant Jesus was the first, but not the only, facility in Vilnius in the 19th century that offered orphans help. The Congregation of Mariavite Sisters ran a similar operation, which in the first half of the 19th century maintained a shelter for 50–60 orphans. The Mariavite Sisters mainly took in older, orphaned noble, and Jewish children.[95] The Vilnius Charitable Society also took care of street children, but orphaned children were only taken in for a short time. Help tended to be offered to children who required medical care.[96] In 1839, on the initiative of Elizavata, the "House of Orphans of the City of Vilnius" was opened and accepted orphaned children aged 3 to 12. The facility was slightly different in character than typical shelters – it not only offered food and board along with basic education, but also fed and educated poor children from the city who came there for day care.[97] Neither the Mariavite nuns, nor the Vilnius Charitable Society, nor the Dolgorukov institution accepted infants; they all went to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus.

The work of the Institute of Motherhood – the first women's organisation in the city – sheds some light on the situation of pregnant women from the poorest social classes in Vilnius. The Institute of Motherhood, established in 1809 at the Vilnius Charitable Society, offered an important

[94] Cf. M. Piotrowska-Marchewa, *Nędzarze i filantropi. Problem ubóstwa w polskiej opinii publicznej w latach 1815–1863*, Toruń 2004, pp. 226–228.

[95] M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Działalność dobroczynna zakonów i zgromadzeń zakonnych w Wilnie w końcu XVIII i pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, "Echa Przeszłości" 2010, vol. 9, p. 130.

[96] Eadem, *Dobroczynne Wilno…*, pp. 137–138.

[97] J. Moszczyński, op. cit., pp. 186–187.

form of assistance for newborn children and poor pregnant women. The organisation was established on the initiative of Maria Bennigsen née Andrzejkowicz (the fourth wife of General Leoncjusz Bennigsen) and a doctor and professor at the University of Vilnius named Józef Frank.[98] The impetus behind the endeavour was the dire economic plight of women from poorer urban environments. The aim of the institute was to offer medical and financial assistance to poor women in the last stage of pregnancy, during childbirth and postpartum. The support given to the poorest women in Vilnius was intended to prevent mother and child deaths or abandonment of the baby. The mortality rate of poor pregnant and postpartum women reached alarming proportions in the winter months, when, deprived of fuel, food and any assistance, they died of cold or malnutrition. Some recipients of aid were women undergoing illegitimate pregnancies, socially stigmatised and deprived of shelter. The institute provided the following forms of support: assistance from a midwife or doctor during childbirth or in the event of postpartum complications, providing the women with fuel and nutritious food during the postpartum period (beef, wheat bread), and supplying layettes for the baby.[99] Although only selective reports on the 10-year operation of this organisation have been preserved, the initiative itself and the data contained in the reports offer a glimpse into the causes of child abandonment from a different perspective. The Vilnius "History of Domestic and Foreign Charity" periodical published an extract from the institute's thirteen-month accounts. During this period, 64 women were helped and 72 infants were cared for. Were it not for the institute's help, some of them would certainly have ended up at the Hospital of the Infant Jesus. The recipients of the assistance offered by the institute were mainly the wives of poor craftsmen, servants or day labourers, widows, women abandoned by their husbands, and unmarried women.[100] This summary helps identify the most typical origins of children left at the shelter.

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[98] H. Markiewicz, *Profesor Józef Frank – społecznik i popularyzator nauki*, "Forum Pedagogiczne" 2021, vol. 11, no. 2, p. 261.

[99] M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Dobroczynne Wilno…*, pp. 155–156.

[100] *Wiadomość o przychodzie, wydatkach i czynnościach Instytutu Macierzyństwa*

The main reason for leaving babies in the Vilnius foundling home was the dire financial situation facing certain families and the poverty of single women. Relatively often, mothers would stay there with their children. Infants admitted with their mothers had a greater chance of survival – women employed as wet-nurses remained in the hospital for up to several years. Employment at the hospital offered an opportunity to interact with their child and a means to earn a little money. Infant mortality in hospitals was high – over 50% – although in this type of institution it tended to be much higher – at the Hospital of the Infant Jesus in Warsaw in the years 1800–1819, the mortality rate was over 88%; in the early 19th century in a foundling home in St. Petersburg it was 75%, in Ghent and Brussels – 62%, in Madrid – 75%, in Dublin and Smolensk – 98%.[101] Leaving a child at the hospital did not mean a lack of motherly love, emotional immaturity, or a desire to be free from the burden of raising a child. In the light of the analysed materials, the decision to abandon the child cannot be subjected to a critical moral judgement. The preserved sources offer an insight into the dramatic nature of the decision to leave babies. A mother who sent her child to this institution decided to take this step for reasons other than indifference or convenience. Leaving an infant at the hospital was often the only chance for survival. The notes found with the baby and the purposefully chosen places where the baby was abandoned prove that the mothers made a conscious decision. The shelter offered some hope of keeping the child alive, providing shelter, food and basic education. The presence of children of noble birth at the shelter is a testimony to the pauperisation of this social group and the result of the declassing of the minor nobility, who did not manage to pass the legitimation process. Small noblemen, relegated to taxed groups and deprived of the opportunity to earn money, often joined the margins of society and became beneficiaries of philanthropic organisations.[102]

Wileńskiego od dnia 7 listopada 1809 roku, epoki ustanowienia jego, do dnia 31 grudnia 1810 roku, DDKIZ 1820, pp. 139–141.

[101] M. Kolankiewicz, *Schronienie. Historia Domu Małych Dzieci ks. G. P. Baudouina*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 32, 46.

[102] M. Korybut-Marciniak, *Drogi do ubóstwa…*, pp. 57–74.

A broader insight into the phenomenon of child abandonment can be provided by analysing baptism records in Vilnius parishes. Registry data would help determine the number of illegitimate children and would help determine the social status of infants admitted to the Hospital of the Infant Jesus.