

Children and Health



Children's hospital, Yugoslavia, after the Second World War

The poverty and hardness of life in most countries of Southeast Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries meant that virtually the entire population lived in unhealthy conditions. That had a particular impact on the health of children, who are most susceptible to diseases, not yet being strong enough to fight them. Babies and infants were at the greatest risk as their families lived in unhygienic, poorly heated rooms, and they were often without sufficient parental care as their mothers had to start working again soon after the baby's birth, leaving children with inadequate care. That was why it was often the case that only a small number of children reached adolescence, despite the high birth rate.

Besides poor living conditions, another significant reason for the high child mortality rate in the past was the lack of knowledge

about many diseases. There were neither sufficient medicaments nor sufficient knowledge about how to treat many diseases and disorders. Before the discovery of penicillin (1929), many diseases were incurable, and one of the most common causes of death amongst children was pneumonia, as well as other respiratory diseases. Unhygienic conditions and malnourishment often led to stomach infections and many at that time incurable parasitic diseases. Many children died from diseases that are cured today in a few days, thanks to modern medicine. Communicable diseases such as scarlet fever, measles, chickenpox, diphtheria, typhoid, tetanus, infantile paralysis... were also common causes of death among children. Even influenza took the lives of huge numbers of people; in the large-scale epidemic that spread through war-afflicted Europe in

1918, 44,000 children died in one month in Hungary alone. Besides those diseases, which are today treated and cured relatively easily with antibiotics, there were also a number of today virtually unknown diseases that struck in the form of epidemics and caused the death of enormous numbers of children. In the 19th century children were dying of cholera, pellagra, smallpox, and even the plague.

The most dangerous incurable disease was tuberculosis, for which a cure was not found until 1944. Up until then, tuberculosis had been incurable and, to make matters even worse, it was believed that people suffering from tuberculosis needed sea air, the sun and heat. Medicine later proved that the treatment of tuberculosis requires just the opposite, that is rest in fresh mountain surroundings. And that is how the disease is treated today. Before 1914, one death in five was due to tuberculosis. For Hungary, we have the figure that between 40,000 and 50,000 people were dying every year of tuberculosis at the end of the 19th century.

In addition to medicine not knowing the real causes of disease until the 20th century, one of the significant factors leading to the high child mortality rate was the lack of state welfare support. Although vaccination started among children, the first laws on healthcare passed and the first dispensaries were opened in the middle of the 19th century (in Bulgaria, the first case of vaccination was recorded in 1845, and systematic vaccination against communicable diseases was introduced in the 1890's; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, systematic healthcare started after 1878 within the Austro-Hungarian health system; in Hungary, the first national council for healthcare was formed in 1868, and larger-scale vaccination started at the beginning of the 1860's; in Greece, the first children's hospitals and orphanages were opened and laws passed providing for a larger-scale struggle against communicable diseases, mainly typhoid and smallpox, in the 1850's), those measures could not encompass the entire child population. That is why the death rate amongst children in virtually all countries was very high. Statistics from all countries show that new-

born babies and infants up to the age of three were at the greatest risk. Figures for Athens tell us that almost half the children were dying before the age of ten in the 1890's, which is slightly higher than in Hungary where, at the beginning of the 20th century, slightly more than 600 per 1,000 children reached the age of ten. The situation improved somewhat between the two world wars. In Romania, 20.5 children per 1,000 died in that period before the age of one, while in Bulgaria, on the eve of the Second World War, child mortality had fallen to 136 per 1,000.

It was not until after the Second World War that measures for the systematic monitoring of children's health, free vaccination and all-encompassing social and medical insurance were introduced. And those measures, and their regular implementation, were what led to a fall in the child mortality rate, the prevention of large-scale epidemics and quicker and more effective treatment and cure. In the 1970's, for example, the infant mortality rate had halved in Bosnia and Herzegovina (32.4 per 1,000), while in Bulgaria that rate had fallen to 27 per 1,000, and, in Romania it had reached 20 per 1,000. Infant mortality rate had reached 41.8 per 1,000 at the beginning of the 1990's in Albania.

D.S.

Save the Children

The Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria strives for the unification of all social powers, organizations, associations, and people. The care for children finds expression in the Geneva declaration and in the resolutions and wishes at the first inter-

Questions

- 10.1. Learn about the various types of diseases in history.
- 10.2. How did those diseases affect people's lives? How were cures found for some of the most lethal diseases of the past?

national congress for child protection held in August 1925 in Geneva.

In order to reach its goal, the Union tries to establish regional branches in villages and towns, which will take care of children. The first and primary concern of children remains mainly to parents. Children, however, cannot always enjoy their parents' care because very often they are deprived of it and are left to the care of their closest relatives. Because of the migration and moving of the population and the hard economic conditions, parents turn out alone, so, deprived of parents' care children are also deprived of the care of close relatives, and these children are many. These children and babies are left at the help of merciful people who can replace the mother, the parents, or the relatives. Here is a case, in which mercy for children may be expressed.

The mother dies, the baby and the other children remain at their father's care; but the father does not know and cannot feed and take care of the children; besides, if he stays at work or is absent the children are left without his cares, as well. There are children with such fate in every town and village.

In a certain village, the mother gives birth to twins and dies of fever. The babies are given to neighbors, but they do not know how to feed them neither have a possibility to raise them. A teacher-counselor asks the Union to put them in a kindergarten or an orphanage.

The mother gives birth to a baby, she has bigger children, as well; she gets ill; the



Sheer luxury, a slice of bread and jam, a photograph taken during the war.

father goes to work; the helpless ill mother becomes twice ill because there is nobody to look after her children.

Mother or father in prison or in an asylum, or unable, or uncaring, and children remain without supervision, upbringing and even without nourishment.

Poor parents with many children in unfertile years, earthquake, fires, unemployment are not able to either feed or raise their children and they remain deprived of care and attention.

The municipal councils and the police



Village soup kitchen, Bulgaria

often find abandoned or neglected children, they don't know what to do with them and turn to the union for finding a place for them.

The children themselves, being babies, bigger children, or pupils may get ill, as well. With ill or unable parents, who cannot look after their ill children, the last should be given to the cares of doctors and nurses and this could be done only in a hospital. Ill children having tuberculosis, whooping-cough or often-dangerous infectious disease, diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles should be separated from the healthy ones and treated in hospitals.

Many children are born with brain damage, or after birth become ill, have temperature and syncope. These should be treated quickly in hospitals because otherwise a big part of them remain crippled, mentally defective, develop slowly, often have syncope, become violent, make troubles. Such children must be put in orphanages, so they will not be a burden to the parents, who go to work, and not make harm to society and together with that - be trained for any kind

of work which could help them nourish themselves.

In the whole territory of Bulgaria we have only one kindergarten in Sofia and one hospital for children - the university child clinic - and this is the only choice for accepting, giving shelter or treating the unfortunate children, who are often refused because there is no place available.

From 1925 till 1928, 91 small children were accepted in the kindergartens and 485 babies were refused to be accepted. 43 mentally ill children were treated at the child clinic in 1928, 17 of whom from South-western Bulgaria, 18 from Southern Bulgaria and 8 from Northern Bulgaria, who also need an orphanage where they will be raised, educated and trained to do some work.

Recommendation

- Devote one class to the history of health. By doing so, show to what extent medical progress has changed everyday life and, as a result, the history of mankind.

There is a certain number of boarding houses and orphanages for the blind, the deaf and the dumb, for the orphans in schools but there is no orphanage, no social care for the unfortunate babies and small children-orphans, crippled, mentally ill, and for the ill children - no child hospital. The charity organizations on the other hand, having no funds, can do nothing beneficial for the miserable children, which is the duty of the municipalities, the district councils and the state.

All civilized countries have laws for child protection, which assure for their material support. Hungary has a law for 30 years already, according to which all children in a pre-school age, orphans, abandoned, crippled, mentally ill belong to the state which takes care of their health, nourishment and education; there are doctors, nurses, kindergartens, and orphanages.

The human duty, as well as the Geneva declaration, necessitates that we take care of orphan babies and small children in a pre-school age, of the ill, crippled, mentally ill, neglected and abandoned children.

We stretch out our hand, we beg mercy and ask for help in order to build and maintain kindergartens, orphanages and hospitals, in which all unhappy children, future citizens may find merciful care, nourishment and education.

Babies cry - let's give them mother's care. Children get ill, moan, and want to live - let's shelter them in hospitals. Children are hungry - let's feed them. Save the children!

by Prof. Stoyan Vatev, MD

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Summer Student Colonies

Twenty three years ago the school physicians drew the public attention to the unsatisfactory condition of students' health; according to the reports from 1904-1905 we conclude that there were 28 death cases, 174 - tuberculosis, and also other various health problems due to school environment among

14000 examined students. That fact caused concern about student's health and in 1904 the Ministry of National Education sent 40 physically weak students from Sofia to spend their holidays in the open mountain air



An illustration taken from a Bulgarian publication between the two world wars. Part of a campaign against charlatans.



Organised nourishment in the war.

of Chepino; and this initiative laid the beginning of the summer student colonies.

The promising results of the students' health in this first colony, drew society's attention, which did not hesitate to support this good initiative and "Zdravets" association for summer student colony was founded. The association used the money collected to buy a plot in the village of Pancharevo and in 1907 constructed a building. Since then in 20 years, the association has accepted 120 physically weak poor students per year, because of the good nourishment and cares they added weight and were able to continue their education without problems. "Zdravets" association trustees still saw the necessity for children to spend in the colony not only the summer time but to be there throughout the whole year. For this purpose we collected much more money and a building for a permanent student colony will be constructed soon, such as the ones in Lovech and Nova Zagora, where the physically weak, exhausted or weakened by sickness students will have the opportunity to take shelter for several months throughout the whole year and continue their education without missing the whole school year.

Society started to realize the necessity for students' health protection and this consciousness started to develop also in other towns and summer student colonies near the towns, in mountains, or on seaside were established. Thereby step by step, especially during the recent years after the world war, summer student colonies were founded almost in every town. There have been 60 colonies with 5000 settlers in 1926. But just a little number of students could enjoy these summer student colonies, and all physically weak students need to improve their health in such colonies. Therefore, it is necessary summer colonies for all students to be organized, and such ones could be founded near every town or village, by taking the children out every day during the summer holiday to play and party in the open air and sun, under the supervision of teachers or well-wishers of the children. This will lead not only to improving the health of the students, but will contribute to their moral strengthening also.

by Tsevatana Vateva

(President of "Zdravets" Associations)

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Having a bath, 1912

pears, cherries, walnuts, etc.

At home children have the opportunity to eat whatever they want and whenever they want. But in boarding-houses or in soup-kitchens, where many children, many tastes and wishes are gathered, we have to keep in mind that the food must be varied every day and every Sunday and completely in accordance with the seasons. Furthermore the food should be selected not only by its quality and quantity, but also by its nutritive value.

University Children's Clinic has always been helpful and will be in the future giving information to all soup-kitchens, boarding-houses, orphanages, which would like to know the nutritive value of the food they offer to their inmates.

As the nutritive value of the food

stuffs and their cost are well-known, one can easily prepare nutritious meals and at low cost.

A lunch with nutritive value of 1250-1540 calories costs 5.05-10.35 leva in Sofia soup-kitchen. A lunch with nutritive value of 1070-1700 calories costs 3.80-10.20 leva in Lovech soup-kitchen. The food per day, 3200 calories costs 28 leva in University Children's Clinic. The food per day costs 8.40-12.40 leva in Kjustendil orphanage.

By calculating the calories one can fix meals sufficiently nutritious and at low cost, which fact has a great economic significance when feeding so many children in soup-

Proper Food for Students

Children's food for lunch and dinner has to be always varied and should include mainly:

1. Proteins: meat, eggs, milk;
2. Fats: milk butter, vegetable oil;
3. Carbohydrates: bread, rice, potatoes, beans, lentils, sugar, bee-honey, etc;
4. Vegetables: onion, leeks, cabbage, dock;
5. Fruits: apples, oranges, watermelons,

kitchens, boarding-houses, and orphanages. If in such institutions children learn how to keep an account of food, and along with that girls learn how to cook as the children do so in Lovech soup-kitchen, in that way we educate them how to keep house and be thrifty.

In Lovech soup-kitchen for poor students a rule is introduced that every student must pay for the meal even a small sum. The children in charge keep account of received money all by themselves, put them in the bank and later they use the interest and the grant from the bank for common benefits. In that way children learn how to live not on charity and mercy, but by using their own funds. This initiative contributed to the moral of both children and mothers.

Soup-kitchen must be established at every village and town school. Children will learn how to eat properly and sufficiently, and when they cook and keep account of the food cost they will learn to keep house and be thrifty.

by Prof. Vatev, MD

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Five-Years old Desajda Suffers from Leukemia

The young mother: "Please help my daughter. Perhaps, a miracle can happen if we go to Italy!"

A little girl cries in the arms of her mother. As it is not hard to understand, she is afraid to pass the door that she has passed a hundred of times by now. The little girl suffers from leukemia, a terrible disease. Only the "strongest" can resist it. The sick girl walks inside, while Majlinda, her mother, stays out of the door, tears in her eyes. It aches to the 27-year old mother to see her daughter having an injection in the spine. The girl will lay in her bed for a couple of hours.

"We are from very far away, from Skrapar. We are here with our sick child for one and a half month. This is the second time of hospitalization."

Little Desajda stares at us. She doesn't speak. Her mother, Majlinda, tries to hide her tears. "Desajda became sick all of a sudden. At the beginning she lost her appetite, than became pale and her glands grew".

"We took her to the doctor of the district where we live, but we were sent to Berat and from there urgently to Tirana. From the very beginning the doctors informed us for the terrible disease, lymph plastic acute leukemia".

In fact this disease causes a high level of leukocyte.

"The first curing cycle happened last year from June to September. After 45 days we came again, from October till December. When we left hospital at that time, we never thought that our daughter would need to be hospitalized again, the mother says.

She stops for a while to take a breath and mention to us the fact that a six year old boy from Kukës died last week from the same disease. She talks about the possibility to send these children abroad to be cured in order to help them enjoy the life that they have just began.

"I, Majlinda continues, am ready to give my life to save the life of my daughter. I want to send her to Italy to be cured there. I heard that another child that was sent to Italy came back quite in good condition. Doctors told me that the disease is curable and I hope".

"The people in white blouses, continues the mother of Desajda, have told me that even in Italy, the process of injection in the spine is difficult. In many cases children die during the intervention process. It depends a lot on the condition of the sick child in the moment of intervention. My daughter has reacted positively towards the curing process and this gives me hope. I have never been pessimistic, but I can not accept to loose my daughter, who together with my one year old son, are all I have in this world".

The sick children are sent abroad if the symptoms are repeated. They are some 20 children each year.



Organised provision of food for children

”Some similar cases with that my daughter are cured, I am told. We know someone from our hometown who was cured with the attention of Anila Godo, the doctor, and the former patient is studying medicine now“.

The girl that survived is called Aurora, and she studies in the fourth year of the school of Medicine of Tirana University.

We see Desajda trying to move in her bed wanting to draw some flowers. She has a needle in her right arm, but she behaves as if it is part of her body. Desajda knows all medications she is taking. She was injected in the spine more than 30 times now. She has become a doctor of herself.

(The article was written by L. Kondi)

SHEKULLI , Albania, 28/09/2000

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