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Archival Documents of the All-Russian Guardianship of the Maternity and Infancy Protection as
a Source for Studying the Social Policies in the 1910s-1918

Abstract

The relevance of the study springs from searching for an optimal model of family policy in modern Russia. Research of history of family policy focuses on social transformations in the Soviet period. Contribution of social experiments of the early 20th century is underestimated. New archival documents are rarely involved. The article is to assess the archival potential of fonds and documents of the All-Russian Guardianship of the Maternity and Infancy Protection for studying social family policy and creation of a new system of social assistance in the field of maternity and childhood protection in the 1910s. The key methodological concepts are approaches of social history of medicine, which permit to consider the impact of development of the institute of medicine on social and everyday spheres of life. The main method is content analysis of archival documents and fond series, containing materials on the activities of the Guardianship. The authors have worked with fonds of the Russian State Historical Archive (fond 767), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (fond 1795), the Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg (fonds 19, 255, 469). The study of the Guardianship documents has shown that main directions of social policy in the field of maternity and childhood protection were laid down in 1914–18. In that short period, under the crisis conditions of wartime, all existing forms and practices of social policy in this area were used. The success of the Guardianship was determined by its clear organization and involvement of prominent representatives of the expert community. Archival documents have shown that the Guardianship had a fundamentally new organizational status. On the one hand, it performed functions of a ministry (coordination of activities of all organizations implementing social family policy, network of representative offices in the regions, substantial state funding, involvement of prominent statesmen). On the other hand, it had the features of a charitable institution (numerous grassroots initiatives, democratic management style, attracting private funding). The results of its work were forgotten, but the best practices proposed and tested in its active work were used by the Soviet authorities. Its legacy formed a basis for construction of the Soviet system of protection of motherhood and childhood; its results and practices were scaled nationwide and became a part of the state concept of Soviet family policy.

Keywords

Historical sources, All-Russian Guardianship of the Maternity and Infancy Protection, the history of motherhood, family policy, the history of social work.

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