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Source Potential of the Fonds of Maternity Hospitals and Wards in Pre-Revolutionary Russia:
Second Half of the 18th – Early 20th Century

Abstract

The study is devoted to the analysis of archival materials of maternity hospitals and departments in Russia in the second half of the 18th – early 20th century stored in the Department for the storage of documents until 1917 of the Central State Archive of Moscow, in the Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg, in the State Archive of the Yaroslavl Region, and in the State Archive of the Smolensk Region. The voluminous files of maternity wards have meager viewing lists and are rarely engaged in historical research. However, introduction into scientific use of documents from maternity wards and medical reports is important for research on social and demographic history and that of childbirth, as well as for the history of everyday life, women's and gender history. Hence springs the purpose of this study, which is to identify the source potential of the fonds of maternity hospitals and departments in pre-revolutionary Russia and information capabilities of medical reports, journals, and maternity cards. The authors have established that materials found in these fonds can be divided into several categories: acceptance cards of women in labor, clinical cards of obstetrics, patient histories. The documents recreate the picture of the development of clinical obstetrics, the daily life of women in labor in the clinic, the interaction of doctors and patients. These materials can be a valuable source for studying the representation of body culture, reproductive behavior, hygiene, sexual socialization. The analysis of archival documents concludes that while in the first decades of their existence, maternity wards ministered to the poor strata of the population in birth of illegitimate children, in the 1910s they catered women from wealthy families. An important result of the comprehensive study of archival material is the discovery of information capabilities of the fonds of pre-revolutionary maternity wards in the central and regional archives of Russia. Pregnancy cards contain extensive history, including data on the first sexual intercourse, beginning of menses, number of pregnancies, age at the time of first pregnancy, thus providing important information on the history of sexual

socialization, female physicality, and reproductive culture. A meaningful analysis of these materials allows the conclusion that maternity ward journals, patient histories, midwives' reports contribute to the study of social, everyday, and gender history; and provide new information for studying the history of corporeality, childbirth, sexuality.

Keywords

Historical sources, documents of maternity wards, medical reports, social history of childbirth, women's history, informational capabilities of cards of women in labor, women in labor, midwives.

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