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## ORGANIZATION OF POOR MINORS LABOR BY CHARITY SOCIETIES IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: A POZNAŃ CASE

**Abstract:** One of the means of help offered by the 19th century charity societies was finding employment for the poorest. Among their beneficiaries were also children, whose work was a substantial contribution to the finances of their families. The age limit in this case was 14 – above that age children from the poor families were sent to work (girls most often to service, and boys – to apprenticeship). Attempts were made to send them to recommended houses or craftsmen. One of the organizations which helped children to find employment was the Polish Ladies Charity Society in Poznań founded in 1845, whose activists conducted detailed interviews of families requesting help. The goal of the text is to analyze the situation of the poor minors who worked in Poznań. The source base for the following research were two Card Indexes: the alphabetic Card Index of proteges of the Polish Ladies Charity Society with Celestyna Działyńska's hand notes regarding grants, and the Card Index of proteges of the TDDP, which was organized by districts and led by women reporting to Działyńska, auxiliary reports and private notes of the founder of the Society, Celestyna Działyńska, were included. In the following qualitative and quantitative methods were used, combined with the case study approach. The members of the Poznań Charitable Societies, which functioned in the Middle of 19th century, not only organized workplaces for the minor, but also took care of their education and wellbeing. They paid special attention to the role of a child in their family and checked the circumstances when a child, if of an appropriate age for employment, didn't go to work. In the large families, when the oldest children established their own households, the younger children could still work and contribute to the family's finances.

**Keywords:** charity, child labor, Polish Ladies Charity Society, Poznań, 19th century

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## INTRODUCTION

The organization of labor for the impoverished was one of the most important requirements of the 19th century charity societies – at least those which focused not on the short-term assistance but on real help in getting out of poverty. It was normal to try and involve all family members in the domestic budget – children included. Still at the turn of the 18th and 19th century Benjamin Thompson, Count of Rumford, engaged even the youngest children to work in his Institute for poor people:

Most [of them] were put to sit at spinning-wheel to spin yarn, children between four and seven were taught to sew and make stockings, the elderly and invalids combed wool, old women with poor eyesight or poor fingers were winding the threads on spool for weavers to use, while children who were not fit for any job yet were put to sit against the walls in the chambers, in which their parents and friends were working ('Umiejętności...', 1821: 617).

Even though the child labor cannot be treated as a symbol of the brutality of the system, children took up a job for the sake of their families and themselves, learned profession and self-reliance (Kaczyńska, 2024: 44), yet in the first half of the 19th century we observe the decline of the common approval of the child labor as a factor of bringing them up. For this change of the attitude many social activists advocated, amongst them Fryderyk Skarbek czy Karol Libelt (Piotrowska-Marchewa, 2004: 227–228). Nonetheless, the well-being and the security of the future of the minors and the control of their workplace was a vital objective.

The willingness of undertaking of a job was the most important factor for providing the aid by the charity organizations. For example Society for Supporting The Impoverished in Poznań considered the labor as a basis upon which the mortal life was grown, and the Charity accused the poor that they would prefer to rely on social benefits, while not understanding that labor is their chance to improve their living conditions ('Dyrekcyja towarzystwa...', 1845: 2). The main goal of the charities was to make the poorest social class aware of this idea.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

The purpose of this article is to analyze the situation of the poor minors who worked in Poznan. At the time, Poznan served a special role: on one hand, it was the biggest city of the Grand Duchy of Posen and the center of the regional government; at the same time, for Prussian authorities it was a peripheral city, located nearby the Prussian-Russian border.

The aim of the research was to find answers to such questions as: how did children get under the care of charity societies? How old were they when they started to work? What kind of work did they undertake? Were they under the care of any Society and, if so, in what way? What effect did the child labor have on the overall standard of living for their families? Such a manner of the research questions will allow to determine the attitude of the 19th century charity activists towards the minors' labor, as well as to evaluate the hypothesis whether their position on this matter shifted over time in line with the general changes and trends in Europe at the spoken time. The vital issue is the question of what was the main purpose for the 19th century social activists of the sending the minors to work: whether they perceived such process in terms of the extra contribution to the family budget or the resocialization of the minors played greater role.

The main focus was put on the activity of the Polish Ladies Charity Society [Towarzystwo Dobroczyńności Dam Polskich; further: TDDP], which operated in Poznan between 1845 and 1853. The Society was a Polish charity organization founded by Celestyna Działyńska, and in its time was one of the most important philanthropic organizations in the city. It operated alongside a few months younger Society for Supporting The Impoverished [Towarzystwo Ku Wspieraniu Ubogich i Biednych] in Poznan, and a male Society of St. Vincent de Paul [Towarzystwo św. Windentego a Paulo]. As it was proved in the archival sources, both institutions cooperated with the Society. The first one mostly needed doctors for the poor and therefore would send them for medical help to TDDP. Some of the people receiving assistance from the Society declared that they were also benefiting from other means of help.

In the case of the Society, two Card Indexes were preserved, which are stored in the Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences: the alphabetic Card Index of proteges of the Polish Ladies Charity Society with Celestyna Działyńska's hand notes regarding grants, and the Card

Index of proteges of the TDDP, which was organized by districts and led by women reporting to Działyńska. Both indexes include mostly the same information. The indexes written by Charity Societies and various organizations which helped the poor are important sources for studying indigent people. Such sources were used e.g. by S. Shave, who – by using among others microhistoric research – was able to reconstruct biographies of the poor people from the parish of Dorset and pointed out a complex connection between people receiving grants and the family growth (Shave, 2009).

These sources are complemented by the reports of the TDDP and private notes of its founder – Celestyna Działyńska. The sources used were regarding the activity of the men's Society of St. Vincent de Paul and archival sources of the Society of the Ladies of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul [Towarzystwo Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo], which was founded as the successor of the Polish Ladies Charity Society and which operated since 1853.

According to the Criminal Code of the Prussian Lands from 1851 a minor is a person below the age of 16 (Szewczyk, 2005). It is difficult to determine how many working children there might have been – the specific age of the beneficiaries was not always mentioned by Działyńska. Instead, she often used terms like “the oldest daughter” or “the youngest son”. When dealing with the especially laconic descriptions the researcher is unable to determine the exact age of the person mentioned – especially since the indexes include cases where it was the adult children (with their own families) who paid money to support their parents. For the purposes of this paper, Only those index cards were analyzed which included the exact age of the child, or those which allowed to determine the age by further analysis (e.g. by comparing data in the Poznan Project online database or the Database of Archival Indexing System). To determine the age of the employed children, index cards of those families in which there were minors were analyzed. From the analysis of 1621 cases, it was revealed that half of the families requesting assistance mentioned children, out of which 81% were families with minors. The rest 19% were parents who provided information about their adult children, who lived outside their parents' households and often already had their own families. In the cards, they were usually mentioned in regard to what degree they helped their parents. The most common occupation, amongst both men and women, was a an unskilled laborer (PAN BK, 7507; PAN BK, 7508, 1-22).

In some instances, it was not possible to determine who the receiver of the gifts for the specific family was. On some pages there are annotations regarding children's school or staff supplies, but in many cases, there are only amounts of certain items which were passed on to the families without information to whom specifically boots or clothes were given. It is worth mentioning that, despite its showy declarations, the Society commissioned work to only 6,2% of its adult beneficiaries. More frequently, they were financially supported e.g. by obtaining a chance to buy supplies necessary for work. Therefore, in my analysis, focus was put on the ways the Society helped minors in finding jobs.

## POZNAŃ IN THE MIDDLE OF 19TH CENTURY. THE POOR IN THE CITY

In the first half of the 19th century Poznań population grew from 18 211 in 1816 to 38 209 in 1852 (Łuczak, 1965: 47). However, it was not the effect of the natural growth but the increase of the migration to the city, which was the capital of the Great Duchy of Poznań. On one hand it was a consequence of the policy implemented by the occupational authorities of the Prussian state (migration of the German clerks, tradesman and artisans), on the other it was the direct result of the ongoing pauperization of the society and their attempt of finding a job in the city. One of the significant factors of the spoken growth was the process of building the fortifications around the city of Poznań which took place from 1828 and was finished forty years later. The first stage was finished in 1834 while the city was rewarded with the title of the stronghold II class (Matusik, 2021: 80–82). During the winter season the works were severely limited and at such times workers become unemployed, thus being a burden for the city social welfare dedicated towards the poor (Jaffe, 2012: 146–147). Simultaneously, the first stage of the construction was the only moment till the outbreak of the Great War when the number of the unqualified workers was lesser than the amount of the working opportunities (Łuczak, 1965: 227). At that time the construction businesses offered the highest pay – skilled foreman earned between 20 sgr and 1 tal., journeyman 15–30 sgr., apprentice 9–15 sgr. per week (Makowski, 1992: 36–37).

Not without the influence was the general situation in Europe. The Great Famine, which started in Ireland in 1845, caused a crisis on the whole continent – the hunger, which was the effect of the destruction of crops, speculation on grains and not efficient intervention of the states (Osterhammel, 2013: 271). On 21st of April 1847 the Potato Revolution erupted in Berlin, a week later in Poznań – hunger riots, during which the bakeries were attacked (*‘Wiadomości rozmaite’*, 1847, p. 3).

In the half on 19th century the biggest population of the poor was living on the right bank of Poznań – Śródka, Chwaliszewo and Ostrówek, which were the areas mostly inhabited by Poles. Bad living conditions (e.g. hunger and lack of hygiene), epidemics of cholera (1831, 1837, 1848), famine (1817, 1824, 1827–28, 1847) had their repercussion especially around these places. Hence, the highest amount of beneficiaries of the Towarzystwo lived there.

Municipal authorities tried to resolve the issue of the growing numbers of the poor. Since 1796 a City Directorate for the Poor had been functioning in Poznań, which was under the governance of the local police. The Directorate provided aid after confirming the extreme poverty of the person and after they performed any kind of work. In 1847 the Directorate was transformed into the Deputy for the Poor and existed after the regaining independence by Poland; it ceased to exist just in 1928 (Fidler, 1937: 9). The Prussian legislation defined the specific duties regarding the care to be provided to the poor – e.g. 1842 Bill stated that local authorities were responsible for helping and aiding the poor and forbade begging (Chlebowska, 2002: 215–220) – though in the 40s the city councilors were not eager to the funding of such activities for the city’s budget (Jaffe, 2012: 270). Additionally, Prussia in 1839 implemented a Bill that regulated the child labor – it was introduced as a countermeasure to the growing number of the juvenile working at the factories, what had negative consequences for their physical growth and health as a future military recruits (Łukasiewicz, 2023). Prussia was not the only country in Europe that undertook such acts – the role model was Great Britain which implemented such laws already in 1833 (Anderson, 2018: 175). In the Prussian law the minimal required age for the employment was 9, children under 16 were forbidden to work more than 10 hours a day, as well as before taking a job children were to attend school for at least three years (Anderson, 2018: 175; 2021: 40–77).

Parallely, the first half of the 19th century was the time when the child care was organized. Creation of the schools and orphanages was the domain of the charitable organizations in Poznań (mainly Society of nursery which cooperated with Celestyna Działyńska). Such institutions were a place of the daily care, as well as served educational purposes, where children received elementary background. It is worth mentioning that spoken activities were not perceived as a charity in accordance with the Prussian State Law – charitable institutions and foundations were considered those what “free of charge eased the poverty caused by the lack of material resources”. Chlebowska (2002: 208–209) states that “by the definition all activities that covered the care of the ‘morally neglected children’ or ex-convicts were excluded, due to the fact that they belonged to the ‘material causes’ but ‘spiritual and moral ones’. Their aim was to help to cross social class barriers, engaging with the mentality and psychological level, thus not ‘helping’ the poor *sensu stricto*, but undertaking the so called social therapy or socio-pedagogical work, what started the development of the modern social care and outlined the progress of the public care for the poor”.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK FOR THE POOR BY CHARITY SOCIETIES

The 19th century charity societies dealt not only with the organization of work for young people, but with the organization of work for the poor in general. “A frequently discussed issue is: how to help indigent people in finding employment? And how to encourage them to help themselves?” asked the 1853 report of male Society of St. Vincent de Paul (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1853*). The societies tried to adjust the job to their beneficiaries depending on their age, gender and skills. Society for Supporting The Impoverished had even its own employment agency, where not only job seekers could apply, but so could employers looking for employees (*‘Obwieszczenie’*, 1846). However, no detailed documents have been preserved that would determine the scale of this undertaking. The Society granted loans or made financial donations for buying equipment necessary for work (e.g. tools for the workshop, leather, materials etc.). Działyńska also allowed her benefi-

ciaries to work for the Society: she commissioned poor seamstresses to sew shirts or stockings, and shoemakers to make shoes. The Society of the Ladies of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul established a sewing workshop next to the St. Joseph Nursery in which young girls learnt how to sew thin underwear and altar linens. For their work they earned a small salary (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1855*). Importantly, this was not just a workplace, but also a place of learning – young girls learnt there how to read, write, calculate, and sew. The workshop was founded because some of the girls that received help from the Society were already teenagers – and therefore too old to be sent to the nursery. This is why the Society founded the sewing workshop, in which the girls could both work and undertake education (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1853*). What's interesting that some cases of younger girls who also went to the sewing workshop – in the indexes there is the case of an eight-year-old girl named Bothe, who in 1854 worked in the sewing workshop and stood out among the others by her “good behavior” (PAN BK, 7508, 13: Bothe). It should be stressed here that the women's activity in this area inspired the male version of the society which in 1856 wrote a letter to the Archbishop proposing to buy a house on the Ślusarska Street where a nursery and a workplace for homeless boys could be established. In the letter it was emphasized that the Society and Countess Działyńska also extended their protection over the matter (AAP, OA VI 62).

The male Society of the St. Vincent de Paul also ran its own sewing workshop – its purpose was on one hand to provide work for poor women, and also give the opportunity for the poorest to buy clothes. In 1855, the male Society was giving a permanent work to a few people and a few more people were employed seasonally (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1856*). Since 1853, the Society had commercial contacts with Miss Nowicka who also hired a few seamstresses to sew shirts. These shirts were then sold at favorable prices – between 2.5 and 3.5 złoty. They were marked with a stamp “Work of the Poor” and their competitive prices were intended for the indigent. Additionally, the male Society permanently hired three more people to copy letters and bind books, and helped 17 more people to find employment outside the Society (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1853*).

Places such as the founded by charity societies sewing workshops allowed the poorest social classes to acquire some specific skills and a sort of professionalization. On one hand, they allowed the poorest to



earn some money; on the other they kept control over the beneficiaries. The means of assistance as well as institutions established by the Polish Ladies Charity Society, the Society of the Ladies of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul, and the male Society of St. Vincent de Paul also involved children who were able to work.

## HOW DID CHILDREN ENTER THE CARE OF SOCIETIES?

Children were reported to the charity societies by their parents, priests, district doctors, and local social activists involved in the work of philanthropic societies. In the case of the Society some reports came from Działyńska herself – in the indexes she recorded children who attended the schools and the nurseries she ran. From the records it is known that Działyńska paid special attention to the youngest, believing that childhood and attending school were important formative stages in a person's life. Skills acquired during the first few years of schooling were supposed to give them abilities that would allow them to get out of poverty in the later years. Therefore, apart from learning the alphabet, children in Działyńska's schools learnt sewing, gardening and small handicrafts.

Działyńska also paid close attention to children in families that the Society was taking care of – she tried to record information about how many children and what age there were in the specific family, sometimes adding their short descriptions. In the cases of working children, she required that their parents must know where exactly they worked. She was surprised when she realized that Justyna Majewska from Grobla Street wasn't able to tell her whose house her daughter was in service at that moment. She paid attention to children's appearance, their situation and behavior. If a specific family was a permanent beneficiary of the Society, Działyńska also recorded changes in their situation. In the case of Zuzanna Wichrowska from Zawady, she recorded that she had:

two children. the older one is 10, the younger is 7. they earn no money, have no clothes and live in a pigpen. Children lie in the bed because they're naked. [Wichrowska] was sent to Franciscans [for treatment], while her children were taken in by the organist,

they attended school. Soon she died there and the children were taken away by their father (PAN BK, 7508, 20: Zuzanna Wichrowska).

However, this was not the end of the care for the family by the Society. The illness of the father was also recorded, and two years after the first report the older daughter was described:

The daughter of the carpenter is 12 years old now and she is indeed depraved – she drinks vodka, begs for alms and is worth nothing. It would be necessary to put her in someone's good hands. The girl is very wicked. The father taught her how to beg for alms and lie, and she already begged some ladies for clothes. Immediately she would sell the clothes, and for the money thus obtained she bought vodka, which she drank with her father (PAN BK, 7508, 20: Zuzanna Wichrowska).

It is not possible to establish how the story of Wichrowski family ended since the index card was not updated since then. To prevent the degeneration of young people and to provide financial support for their families, teenagers were sent to work.

## THE BEGINNING OF WORK BY CHILDREN

In the primary poverty line proposed by S. Rowntree, which he based on research conducted in 1899 in York, he stated that the chances of getting out of poverty increased for people around 15 years old. According to Rowntree's analysis, the next point after childhood up to 14 years old when families start to live below the basic poverty line, was when children are born, while the family is living only from the parents' income. Only when children are able to start earning money, does a family has a chance to escape poverty (Rowntree, 1901: 137).

When analyzing the index cards collected by Działyńska and the documentation of the charity societies it can be presumed that a similar age for starting work was assumed in the case of the children who were sent to work by the societies in Poznan. In most cases, the age of 14 was the limit after which children were supposed to undertake a job. In the case of children under the age of 14, societies allowed the possibility of education, and such children were mostly sent to schools. This phenomenon can be seen in the statutes of the Society for the Education of Poor Girls which were preserved among other

Działyńska's documents. It is written that "a recommended girl should be at least 10 years of age and no more than 14, have elementary education, and know how to read, write and calculate." Girls should present a birth certificate, a poverty certificate, an attestation of moral character, and an elementary school certificate. It meant that girls over 14 years of age should start to earn money.

Działyńska didn't condemn child labor as she was aware that children were contributors to a family budget. She paid special attention to girls. "The moral, industrial, and if necessary, science education is an aim of an establishing society" is stated in the document, which Działyńska received, possibly, to consult, since her corrections and comments can be found in it. Next to the statement that "the society will aim to ensure that the girls educated with its help become, to the best of their abilities, governesses, housekeepers, practical housewives, and decent and capable servants," there is a note by Działyńska saying that: "governesses and cooks cannot be educated in equal manners - but good nannies are very rare here." It is worth mentioning that despite these notes, no information on vocational practices was found (Łysakowska-Trzoss, 2023).

In what cases was work undertaken by children under the age of 14? In the indexes there can be found cases of children who either helped their parents in work (e.g. by carrying sand or water) or, because of the bad health condition of others family members, were the only ones who could undertake a job and provide financial support for the family. Such was the case of Wiktoria Marchwicka's family from Chwaliszewo - a worker whose husband was an alcoholic and with whom she no longer lived. Because of an illness (she had "crippled hands") she was not able to work. Her 21-year-old daughter was also ill, and thus the only family member who was able to work was her 11-year-old son, who earned money by carrying textiles. Furthermore, in the case of Kunegunda Górniaczek an annotation can be found that her underage daughter helped her in the work (carrying sand). In their case, Działyńska decided to help them by buying sand from them.

Sometimes cases are found that when a child was more eager to go to work than attend school. Such was the case of a 13-year-old Sobyestan Łabęcki's son, who preferred to learn how to be a bricklayer instead of going to school.

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## DIFFERENT FORMS OF MINORS LABOR

Girls over 14 years of age were employed mostly as servants, which was the most popular form of work among women from lower social strata. The decline in the employment of men in wealthy families and the increase in the employment of women in less wealthy families in the 19th century led to a situation where women first began to equal men in terms of numbers, and then almost completely dominated the ranks of domestic servants (Urbanik-Kopeć, 2019: 10). In 1840 in Poznan this stratum consisted of 3236 people, including 2730 women (Makowski, 1992: 39).

Most of the time, Działyńska was asked for clothes for girls who were starting their employment – it was the most common request for help by parents of children ready for work. The Society tried to buy them clothes (shirts, dresses, stockings), as well as bedding, or a pallet mattress. Requests for help in finding a job were much less frequent, and if a girl was ever sent into service, it was most likely in the house of one of the ladies from the Society or a close friend of theirs. It was supposed to protect young people from ending up in a house of someone wicked or immoral.

Parents who intended to send their sons for vocational training faced similar issues. Agata Kwiatkowska lamented that she would like to send her son for apprenticeship with a craftsman, however the craftsman “doesn’t want to accept him with empty hands” (PAN BK, 7508, 10: Agata Kwiatkowska). Preparing supplies for a boy’s apprenticeship was a common problem among the poor. Even though in the long run it was supposed to bring additional funds for the family, the initial cost for many families was a heavy burden. Families had to pay for apprenticeship (though there were few cases when a master exempted the family from paying fees), and they had to buy supplies for their sons. In 1846, Mrs. Radecka gave her bedding to her son who was about to start his apprenticeship, because the master didn’t want to accept him without one.

Sending boys to apprenticeship was a delicate matter, because most masters were Germans and practiced Lutheranism. It was eventually accepted that when there were no available Catholic masters a boy could be sent to apprenticeship to a Lutheran one. Concerns about sending the children to non-Catholic masters are clearly visible in the in-

dexes. Działyńska was deeply concerned when Hipolit Kiciński's mother took him from a carpenter named Gustawicz, only to put him with Girsztak who was, according to Działyńska, "a Luther and a drunkard". Działyńska postulated that the boy should be sent to a new master, and she promised the boy to give him a prayer book if he behaved properly.

The problem of boys being apprenticed to Evangelical masters was widely discussed among Catholic charity societies and was treated with the utmost care. The activists wanted vocational training to take place without compromising children's spirituality. Thus, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul promised prizes (between 3 and 5 talers) for those who undertook apprenticeship with a master craftsman or a teacher from the Sunday school. In 1856 such prizes were received by 5 students (PAN BK, 7505: *Report 1856*). It should be considered however that in this period Germans dominated among individual craftsmen and not only in numbers, but also financially, since they worked in the most specialized and profitable crafts. They also took in more apprentices than the Polish masters (Makowski, 1992: 52-55).

The other form of earning money practiced by young people was trade. Children could help their parents in food trade (e.g. by selling buns) or by selling their own products. For example, in 1847 a 15-year-old girl named Krzycka came to Działyńska and offered Działyńska to sell needlework to her. Her mother was in a mental facility in Owińska at the time. After verifying that the needlework was indeed made by the girl herself, Działyńska decided to buy it.

The Society continued to care for children whose parents were registered in the Society but died. After the death of Knastowa from Ostrówek, her son asked for protection, afraid that after the death of his parent, the master with whom he apprenticed would not treat him fairly or fire him. The protection of the Society was supposed to prevent this. However, the card contains no information if it was effective or not (there is only a description that the boy "seems to be good").

It is also worth noting, that in some index cards seasonal work was mentioned, which depended on the season of the year. Though Majewska's 15-year-old son learnt bricklaying in the summer, Działyńska saw the need to organize work for him in the winter too.

## CASE STUDIES: CASES OF THE KOWALSCY, DYNISIEWICZ AND MELEROWICZ FAMILIES

In her work in which she reconstructed the biographies of the poor in Dorset, S. Shave (following Rowntree's research) noted that there was a deep connection between receiving grants and family growing. By analyzing card indexes of the Society, it is seen that the situation of the families changed along with changes in the situation of the child on the labor market. Thus, the cases of three different families were analyzed who were under the care of the Society and in which child labor was an important factor. In the vital issue was what the impact on the family working and non-working children had, as well as what was the situation of children in large families.

### 1. The case of widow Kowalska (PAN BK, 7508, 10: Kowalska)

At the beginning of 1846, the Society was visited by a widow named Kowalska whose husband died during the first cholera epidemic (supposedly in 1831). Since neither her first name, nor the names of her husband or children were recorded, we are not able to determine her age. She undertook odd jobs, e.g. carrying sand needed to build a fortress or sweeping the streets. When she came to the Society, she declared that she had a 16-year-old daughter who did not want to go to work. According to the mother, she was "young, pretty, and wanted to dress up." It must have been a shock for the activist, because the information that the 16-year-old daughter was not working was underlined. Furthermore, it was noted that the daughter "should be watched over and protected from evil." However, after an inspection made in the widow's house it turned out that her daughter was unable to work - she suffered from cramps. Both women lived in one small room ("in untidiness"), without bedding or clothes. After the verification of how the widow and her daughter lived, the Society gave them money for food and clothes. Because of the bad health condition of the daughter (and mother, who later also became ill) it was the only available option for assistance.

Kowalska returned to the Society one year later, due to another illness of her daughter, who suffered from ascites and was about to be moved to the Sisters of Charity hospital. It is worth mentioning that both in 1846 and 1847 Kowalska came to the Society in first few months of the year - sup-

posedly because of the lack of support of family finances by her daughter, but also because during the wintertime means of earning money were severely limited. In February and March, the woman received food from the Society. This was the last information about the woman and her daughter recorded by the Society.

Children who - despite their proper age - didn't undertake any job were burdens on their family's budget. Though most of the time they were unable to work because of their bad health, the case of widow Kowalska shows us how much care the Society put into verifying the actual life situation of the petitioners and how many doubts the information about a child who neither worked nor attended school caused to the activists.

## **2. The case of the Dynisiewicz family**

(PAN BK, 7508, 4: Jan Dynisiewicz)

A shoemaker's apprentice from Zagórze named Jan Dynisiewicz who came to the Society in 1845 stated that he had three children to support: two of his daughters he had with his wife named Maria (Marianna) whom he married in 1838 - 4-year-old Antonina (who attended a nursery) and 2-year-old Cecylia. In the family's care was also 14-year-old Ludwika Chmielewska, whose mother was in an infirmary, and for whose care the Dynisiewiczzes were paid by the local authorities. Because of her age, the family wanted to send Ludwika to go into service with somebody. However, next to her description there was a note that "she would be able to serve, but she doesn't have appropriate clothes." Maria, Jan's wife, also asked for a possibility of sewing. Her request was granted first and in December 1845 she received 1 złoty for sewing shirts. Then, in February 1846, the Society gave Ludwika a shirt, a dress and stockings - based on the previous request it can be assumed that these were the supplies for service. Unfortunately, no note was made on where Ludwika was sent to work. In March 1846, the family received money from the Society (once for sewing shirts, and once as alms), this was however the last time when the family used the Society services. Because there is no information about refusal of further benefits (most of the time such cases were noted in the index cards), it can be assumed that the family no longer needed the Society's help. Even though it is not possible to determine when Jan died, both Maria, and her daughters lived to a ripe old age.

### 3. The case of the Melerowicz family (PAN BK, 7508, 12: Melerowicz)

Antonina Melerowicz, who was born in 1804, came to the Society in January 1846. She was already a widow – when she was 15 years old, in Iwno she married Franciszek Melerowicz who was 11 years her senior. For the next few years, the family lived in Kostrzyn, Siedlce, and finally (around 1825) moved to Poznan, to live in an area known as Nowy Młyn. According to the index card of the Society and data from record books used, the Melerowicz family had nine children in total:

1. Marianna, born 1819;
2. Jadwiga, born 1821;
3. Jan; born 1824;
4. Józef, born 1826;
5. Rozalia, born 1832/34;
6. Konstanty, born 1835;
7. Michalina, born 1839;
8. Antoni, born 1840;
9. Małgorzata, born 1843.

When Antonina came to the Society, she listed only seven children – it was so because Jadwiga and Jan had died before the family came to the Society (Jadwiga died in 1827, Jan in 1825). The family's standard of living was affected by the death of Franciszek, who had worked as a miller. The death occurred sometime between 1843 and 1846. Antonina declared that she was a laborer and washerwoman. In their index card it was noted that Antonina's oldest daughter – Marianna (27 years old) worked in service, her son Józef (20 years old) worked for a shoemaker, while Konstanty (11 years old) was sent to work with a baker. That way, the family didn't have to financially support a child, and at the same time Konstanty was given an opportunity to learn a craft. The financial situation of the family had to be indeed difficult, because there were still 3 children in Antonina's care. All four lived in one room in Zawady and received 4 złoty per months from the Society for Supporting The Impoverished. In winter of 1846, the Society gave the family four shirts – all Antonina's children who worked and lived outside the household were excepted from help, both those of age (Marianna, Józef), as well as the younger ones (Konstanty and Rozalia).

The situation of the family changed in 1847, when Antonina started suffering from an ulcer on her leg. This is when the oldest daughter, Marianna, resigned from service to return home and care for her



mother. The family's situation was reviewed by Celestyna Działyńska's daughter, Elżbieta, who confirmed that the family lived in poverty, due to lack of income. The family then received food, firewood and fabric for the mother's wounds. There is however no information on the other children – and because Działyńska would take notes on any changes (in place of residence or work) in the index cards, it is safe to assume that the youngest three children remained in the household with their mother and Marianna, while Józef, Konstanty and Rosalia were not a part of the Melerowicz budget. The last mention about the family came from February 1848 – one of the activists of the Society alarmed that the mother made the children beg. It is mentioned that Antoni (8), who was supposed to be attending nursery, receive clothes and dinners, was made by his mother to beg. Because of that the Society stopped helping the family.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research showed that children coming from the poor families, after reaching 14 years old (even earlier if being the only able bodied person to provide for the family) was sent to work. In the second half of the 1840s the support was offered by TDDP – it helped to organize a basic package for the child who was sent to work or practice. Less often TDDP supported the creation of the new and specific jobs, yet the Charity paid close attention to the juvenile who just started their jobs in the labor market, thus fining an honest employers or getting to the right households. Over 14 years old children who did not work become burden for the families, thus parents of such might hope for the financial assistance of the TDDP. The priority, if the child was healthy enough, was to get them a job. Since 1850s the poor – including adolescent – had the opportunity to get to the institutions that provided jobs for the poor e.g. sewing rooms that belonged to the charities.

The most popular path of work for girls was to go into service, and for boys – apprenticeship. Since Poznan was not an industrial city, no cases of children who were sent to factories or bigger workshops were found – most of the research on child labor discusses it in the context of industrial cities (Hopkins, 1994; 2002; Papathanassiou, 2007; Iwańska,

2016; Shandra and Birova, 2023; Śmiechowski, 2023). Sending juvenile to work at the fortification construction site was not popular, despite being the main reason for the economic migration for a lot of poor outside of the city. It is possible that Charities perceived such job as too dangerous or too heavy for the children. Additionally, it was a seasonal job, this it could not guarantee the earnings for the whole year. Moreover it was associated with the Prussian regime, while TDDP (or Society of the Ladies) were catholic organizations that did not cooperate with the Prussian authorities in the city (Society for Supporting The Impoverished).

Aforementioned observations fit into the shift in the mentality that happened in the 19th century societies. Since the enlightenment period the social indifference towards the children beggars declined, while the awareness of the proper forms of aid was growing. Instead treating workplace as a natural form of raising and educating children, the pedagogical programs, such as educating via play or teaching in broader manner, was introduced (Piotrowska-Marchewa, 2004: 228). It is clearly seen in case of charitable societies in Poznań (especially those run by Działyńska) where – despite the fact that minors labor is a way to improve family budget – the emphasize was put on sending the minors to schools and care centers, while the preferred age when a minor can took up a job should be no less than 14th birthday. Younger children should had a proper education, what was a goal of the Poznań Towarzystwo Domów Ochrony, in which Działyńska was also involved in. She was in touch with (thanks to her daughter Jadwiga governess, Anne Birt) English social activists and she imported from England many educational help to her schools, such as Lancaster tableau (Zamoyska, 2023: 50). Education facilities were at one hand for the children from poorest families a chance to learn writing and reading, also they created the possibility to raise children in patriotic spirit (Mazur, 1999: 88). Minors' labor, regardless of improving the family budget, had also resocialization aspect. Alongside pauperization of the society the growing number of abandoned, neglected and demoralized children appeared, as well as huge increase of minors criminal records (Leś, 2000: 76). Juveniles going to work were to avoid becoming thieves or living immoral life, thus giving them a chance to come out of poverty permanently.

It is worth noting that 19th century is the moment when “the market for the child was entering the focus of capitalism and consumption, as a customer” (Łukasiewicz, 2023). In the cards it is revealed that youth

sometimes sold material support received from the Towarzystwo and spent it on their own pleasure and entertainment. Ewa Bogdańska, a teenager, sold received support, which was supposed to help her to go into service, and spent the money to buy herself a pink dress. Such situations proved that in spite of good will of benefactors, they did not fully understand the common needs of the poor. A negative aspect of non-working children was teaching them how to steal or beg. Despite his career as a Polish soldier, in the family of Andrzej Budziński description it was noted that he isn't worth anything, because his entire family, including children, were involved in stealing. Furthermore, Antonina Melerowicz, though she received financial support from the Society, still made her children beg. When the Society discovered the fact, the support was terminated.

It is worth mentioning that children could be a financial support for their families even if they did not work. Poor families could take in orphans for whose support they received money. After sending her daughter into service, Agata Koźmińska from Śródka took in an orphan for supporting whom she received 4 zloty from the local authorities. It is worth stressing that children who went to work in their teenage years could become independent from their families but, after starting their own families, they often weren't able to support their elderly parents. Among those who came to the Society, there were cases of families who had problems with helping their elderly parents (Łysakowska-Trzoss, 2023).

It must be noted, however, that in the 19th century, children started being treated in a different way than previously. Since during this period more attention began to be paid to childhood, not ignoring its role in human development, capturing its specificity and ceasing to deprecate it, the period earned the name "the age of the child" (Bołdyrew, 2008: 219; Iwańska, 2016: 67). On one hand schools, orphanages and day care centers were developed, on the other the laws and regulations towards minors labor were introduced. The symbol of those changes was the activity of Poznań social activist (clearly visible on the example of TDDP or St. Vincent societies), who tried to provide care, education and proper jobs to children and teenagers.

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