

# The Jewish Women's League of Breslau

## Its Efforts to Protect Reproductive Health and the Health of Women and their Children in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> century

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**Abstract** *The Breslau (now Wrocław) branch of the Jewish Women's Association (Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau) was founded on October 6, 1908. The association grew out of the tradition of Jewish charitable organizations and was based on programs that the pioneers of the movement proposed as a women's conception of how to approach their place in the Jewish community. The issue of the contribution of Jewish women in Silesia to the field of reproductive health at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has not yet received a thorough academic synthesis or analytical study. The current state of research on the subject contains many areas of unrecognised or silence and is far from being considered satisfactory. This article is therefore an attempt to fill this gap and to contribute to the discourse undertaken in the presented post-conference volume. The paper focuses primarily on an attempt to reconstruct the activities of the Jewish Women's League in Silesia – the leading organisation for Jewish social and medical care in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, operating in the region for three decades. In addition to reconstructing the League's contribution to reproductive, perinatal and women's and their children's health in the Silesian Jewish community, the aim of the article was to contribute to the multidisciplinary discourse in areas related to, among others, the history and sociology of medicine, politics or law, centred on the issue of reproductive health. The following questions were therefore posed as part of the research: What were the specific problems and challenges in the health care of Jewish women in Silesia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? What was the process of organising social assistance and medical care for Jewish women in the region? How did the activities of the Women's League affect the situation of Jewish women in Silesia at that time?*

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## Introduction

The activity of Jewish women in Silesia (Śląsk in Polish) in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the field of medical care in the and context of reproductive health was an important area of their pro-social activity. The changes occurring in nineteenth-century Prussian society and the rich and multifaceted Jewish tradition were important for this activity. Judaism integrated moral-religious and hygienic precepts into one coherent system, which indicated, among other things, the importance of taking care of one's own health, as well as caring for the sick, handicapped and crippled.<sup>2</sup> The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought the greatest activity of the Jewish community in the public space, also in Silesia. This process was particularly evident in Breslau (schlesisch *Brassel*, yid. *Bresle*).<sup>3</sup> Organizations established in the city were of varying character: from religious associations, to political, economic, and cultural ones. With the emancipation act of 1812, which brought equal rights for the Jews, the abolition of the last inequalities in the documents of 1847–1848, and the granting of full civil rights in the Reich Constitution of 1871, a true golden age began for the Jews in Germany. Through their activities in associations and foundations, which grew out of the Judaic *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, or commandment to charity (the word *mitzvah* comes from the Hebrew *cawo*, meaning “command,” and the word *tzedakah* comes from the Hebrew word for justice, but is most often translated as “charity”), women made a significant contribution to the development of social and medical care, including reproductive and perinatal health in the region. Additionally, and this is important to remember, the command to provide relief to the sick and needy in Judaism is not a voluntary matter, but an obligation flowing from the Pentateuch: “you shall care for the poor, the sick, the widow, the orphan”.<sup>4</sup>

2 Spielvogel, Spatek, Procków, Jewish doctors 2018, p. 680–685.

3 Dylewski, Śladami Żydów Polskich, 2019, p. 404. Beider, Toponyms, 2012, p. 449.

4 See: Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 19. Malzerowa, Istota i zagadnienia opieki społecznej, “Przegląd Społeczny Miesięcznik poświęcony zagadnieniom pracy społecznej i opieki nad dzieckiem. Organ Związku Towarzystwa Opieki nad Żydowskimi Sierotami we Lwowie” 1927, J. 1, no.1, p. 5.

Jewish social organizations operating in the field of basic health care in Germany – including Silesia – had a particularly long tradition: there were many of them that dated back to the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup> This experience made it possible to develop a model for the functioning of medical institutions such as hospitals, nursery schools, dispensaries, treatment and prevention centers in health resorts, and to gather a significant part of the society around the issue of pro-health education. Among the Jewish philanthropic associations in Germany before 1945, there were more than two thousand societies involved in health care as part of social welfare with a total of more than two hundred thousand members.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the German Jewish population at that time numbered about half a million people.<sup>7</sup> Jewish organizations took care not only of their co-religionists, but also of the other inhabitants of the localities in which they were active. Paradoxically, the scope of Jewish social protection in Germany far exceeded its needs. Thus, before World War I, charitable activities were directed toward Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, migrating through Germany to other countries – mainly England and the United States, but also toward non-Jews in need.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of these organizations, the *Jewish Women's League – Jüdischer Frauenbund* (J.F.B.) – presented itself as one of the most serious and largest associations with four hundred and thirty branches and eighty thousand members in pre-war Germany.<sup>9</sup> During the first ten years, thirty-five thousand women joined the organization. By 1929, there were 430 branches and 34 chapters with a total of fifty thousand members, accounting for more than 25 percent of Jewish women in Germany over the age of thirty. The *Jüdischer Frauenbund* (J.F.B.) was founded in Berlin<sup>10</sup> in 1904 at the initiative of courageous Jewish suffragettes: Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936)<sup>11</sup>, Sidone

5 Herzig, *Jüdisches Leben*, 2018. Tatarkower, U podstaw żydowskiej opieki społecznej, 1931, p. 385–397.

6 Tartakower, *Żydowska ochrona społeczna w Niemczech hitlerowskich*, "Przegląd Społeczny. Miesięcznik poświęcony zagadnieniom pracy społecznej i opieki nad dzieckiem. Organ Związku Towarzystwa Opieki nad Żydowskimi Sierotami we Lwowie" 1936, J. 10, no 4–5, p. 76.

7 Herzig, *Jüdisches Leben*, 2018.

8 Ibid. p. 78.

9 Ibid. p. 79.

10 Cf. Dämmig, Klapheck, *Debora's Disciples*, 2006.

11 Born in Vienna, an emancipationist, social activist, and poet. In 1881 she moved to Frankfurt am Main, where she became involved in the German emancipation move-

Werner (1860–1932),<sup>12</sup> who came from Poznań (Poland), and Henriette May (1862–1928).<sup>13</sup> Its foundations rested with Judaism and Jewish moral precepts, but the organization's goal was primarily to represent the interests of Jewish women in Germany, to improve their position in society, to activate women, and to strive for equality understood as a social alliance, rather than revolutionizing society. The organization's goals also included: education in various fields, professional preparation (especially in the areas of medical care and education), health care, combating prostitution, and the trafficking of Jewish girls. The statutory goals of the organization focused, among other things, on promoting and supporting the idea of women's equality in public life, access to suffrage, but also assistance in confinement, and basic assistance in reproductive and perinatal health. These demands were particularly reflected in social welfare and medical projects, which emphasized the important role of women in society and the idea that simple and practical reforms would improve the position and living conditions of women. As a result, care and treatment places were created for unmarried mothers condemned by society, as were centers for Jewish girls at risk of prostitution, kindergartens for children of single women who wanted to work, as well as help from midwives and community nurses in caring for newborns. The Association published a cookbook taking into account the dietary principles of Judaism and containing recipes and dishes to be served to children and sick adults.<sup>14</sup> The organization senior to the Jewish Women's Association was the All-German Association of German Women's Associations (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*) founded in 1894

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ment. Between 1904 and 1924 she was the president of the Jewish Women's League. She died in 1936 in Neu-Isenburg. Cf. Koziriska-Witt, *Ostjüdinnen*, 2011, p. 69–87.

- 12 A native of Poznań, she was an emancipist, educator and social activist. In 1893, together with Gustav Tuch (1834–1909), she founded the Israeli Humanitarian Women's Association (*Israelitisch-Humanitärer Frauenverein*), which she chaired from 1908 to 1932. She died in Bad Segeberg in 1932. Cf. Weissberg, *Frauenbund*, 2016, p. 138.
- 13 A native of Berlin, educator and social activist, graduate of a teachers' seminary. In the Jewish Women's Association, she served as secretary and member of the board. The first woman to serve on the board of the Central Verein Deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith), which she co-founded (1918). She died in Berlin on May 14, 1928. Cf. Weissberg, See Footnote 166, p. 143.
- 14 Kochbuch, 1926, p. 230–239, 242–243.

on the initiative of Auguste Schmidt (1833–1902)<sup>15</sup> from Breslau, who headed the organization until 1899.

### **The Jewish Women's League of Breslau and its Activities in the Field of Reproductive Health and the Health of Women and their Children**

The Breslau branch of the *Jewish Women's League* (*Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau*) was founded on October 6, 1908. This date is significant because on October 1 of that year women in Prussia were permitted to study at universities for the first time. The structure of the organization was based on branches that concentrated on work in different areas. The activities of the Silesian Jewish women breathed freshness and practicality under the new challenges of industrial society for women.<sup>16</sup> The organization's goals, which focused broadly on issues related to protecting the health of mothers and their children, including reproductive and perinatal health issues, were pursued primarily through the Health Care Branch (*Erholungsfürsorge*) and the Girls' Branch (*Mädchenklub*). During World War I, many displaced, poor Jewish girls from the East, mainly from Galicia (formerly part of the *Austro-Hungarian Empire*, now part of Ukraine), were taken care of. It became an important task for the branch to take care of them in order to prevent them from falling into the clutches of prostitution. The direction of the Association's activities in the context of taking care of girls concerned a courageous and open discussion about Jewish prostitution.<sup>17</sup> Apart from poverty, the founders of the association pointed to the legal status of women in Judaism as one of the causes of Jewish prostitution, claiming that Jewish divorce laws significantly contributed to the increase in the number of women engaging in prostitution. During World War I, many men left their homes and never returned. Women remained *agunot*, or "wives chained to their marriage," unable to remarry without an official

15 A native of Breslau, she was a pioneer of the women's emancipation movement in Germany. In 1865 together with Louise Otto-Peters (1819–1859) she founded the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein (ADF) in Leipzig. In 1890, together with Helene Lange (1848–1930), an educator and suffragist, she founded the Allgemeinen Deutschen Lehrerinnen-Vereins (ADLV). In 1894 she became the first president of the League of German Women's Associations (Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine – BDF), which she founded. She died in 1902 in Leipzig. Cf. Plothow, *Begründerinnen*, 1907.

16 Ibid. p. 449.

17 Pappenheim, Rabinowicz, *Verhältnisse*, 1904, p. 76.

Jewish divorce, which requires the man to divorce his wife, not the other way around, or demands Jewish witnesses to the husband's death.<sup>18</sup> The prevention of venereal disease was also an important part of the Association's activities. Therefore, as part of the work of the branch focused on health, comprehensive care, education, and assistance were undertaken for girls as well as single women and pregnant minors. The branch also developed activities around adoption mediation, which yielded extremely good results. The phenomenon of mass orphanhood, which emerged in the years 1914–1918, forced the Jews to intensify their activities within the modern system of care. In the post war years, it became the basis for further development of orphan action. After 1916, the Breslauer Home for Infants and Children of the *Jewish Women's League* (*Breslauer Säuglings -und Kleinkinderheim* des J.F.B.), which comprehensively supported women extended its services to take care of their young children.

## Preventive and Perinatal Actions

One of the important goals of the work in the area of perinatal health was preventive measures that focused on education and the promotion of healthy lifestyles among members (which took place under the guidance of a doctor). The work specifically focused on strengthening the role of young women in the Jewish community. This goal was pursued by providing girls with access to health-promoting education and vocational training that would give them independence. For professional work was seen as a condition for economic, psychological, and emotional independence. Therefore, the *Jewish Women's League* supported and organized professional training for poor girls threatened with prostitution, established employment offices and vocational counselling centers. The first meeting of the Breslau girls' section of the *Jewish Women's League* took place on October 26, 1913 in modest rooms at the then Neue Schweidnitzer Strasse 10 (now Świdnicka Street).<sup>19</sup> Lisbeth Cassirer née Lasker (1886–1974),<sup>20</sup> known for her love of art, became the chairperson of

18 H. Kozińska-Witt, *Ostjüdinnen*, 2011, p. 69–87.

19 Specifically, its section from the Moat and the intersection with Podwale to the railroad viaduct (author's note).

20 She was a co-editor of the Calendar of the Jewish Women's League published every year. In the 1930s she moved with her husband from Breslau to Berlin, where in 1934 she founded the local branch of the Jüdischen Kulturbund (Jewish Art Association). During the Nazi era, her Berlin apartment functioned as an art salon, due to the ban-

the section. The supervisors of the Breslau group in particular years were: Ina Heimansohn 1913–1922, Dora Hirschberg 1923–1926, Erna Stein-Blumenthal 1925–1926, Margarete Danziger 1926–1927, Qara Müller 1927–1928.<sup>21</sup> The founding group consisted of thirty people. That same year, the section began organizing continuing education classes on topics such as health care. In 1916 the seat of the section was moved to the bigger and more comfortable rooms in Agnesstrasse (now Michała Bałuckiego Street). In May 1918 the section, which at that time numbered 114 members, was moved to new, still bigger rooms at Freiburger Strasse 15 (now Świebodzicka Street 15). From 1918 the meetings of the Breslau youth section were held once a month at first, and then more often (even up to 4–5 times a week).

During the war many displaced, poor Jewish girls from the East joined the youth unit. It became an important task of the unit to take care of them so that they would not go down the road of prostitution. Decisions concerning this issue were made in October 1928 in Breslau, during the general convention of the *Jewish Women's League*. The issue provoked lively discussion and concern, along with a declaration of international cooperation. The leading activists of the Polish branch of the *Jewish Women's League* – Róża Malzerowa and Ada Reichenstein<sup>22</sup> of Lviv – wrote about the problem in 1928 e.g., in the pages of the *Social Review*: “the percentage of Jewish prostitution from Poland is relatively

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ning of Entartete Kunst – degenerate art – for many Jewish artists. In 1938 she left Nazi Germany and went to London with her husband and daughter Susan Cf. Bauschinger, Cassirers, 2015. Stein-Blumenthal, Geburtstag, 1966, p. 11.

- 21 E. Rabin (ed.), Gedenkbuch Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau, Breslau 1928, p. 62.
- 22 Ada Kalmus Reichenstein (1880–?) was born in Stanisławów. She defended her doctoral dissertation in philosophy (on the basis of *Das moderne Märchendrama*) in 1903, as one of the first women students at Lviv University. Her husband was a doctor Marek Reichenstein, (1867–1932) an assistant in the Clinic of Internal Medicine at the Medical Faculty of Lviv University, known for his love of art history, co-founder of the Jewish Museum in Lviv and owner of the largest collection of Judaica in that city before the war. Ada Kalmus Reichenstein was also the head of the committee for building a sanatorium “Jewish Academy” in Vorokhta. Cf.: Ł.T. Sroka, Stowarzyszenie Humanitarne “Leopoliś” we Lwowie (1899–1938), “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 2016, no. 123, p. 63. Ada’s sister was Maria Kalmus Schneiderowa – the first woman in the history of Lviv University to study medicine – she became a gynecologist. Both sisters were famous for their pro-social and charitable activities. They belonged, among others, to the board of the Jewish Women’s League in Lviv. See: From the Editorial Board, Z Towarzystwa Ochrony Kobiet, “Kurjer Lwowski” 1911, J. 29, no. 151, p. 6.

enormous”.<sup>23</sup> We face a whole range of issues such as: “[...] the care of the illegitimate child, the abandoned and homeless woman, the fight against fornication, the fight against human traffickers [...]”.<sup>24</sup> Meeting the basic needs of immigrant women, such as help with organizing life in the city – but also psychological care, medical care, and education in the context of reproductive health – became a priority. To this end, an apartment was rented in Breslau in Brüderstrasse (now Bracka Street), where the girls were accommodated. As part of the section's activities, further education and vocational courses were introduced, e.g., in the field of medical care. Initially, the education programs took place mainly in the evening mode and concerned such issues as: basic health care, venereal diseases, as well as pediatric nursing and social work with sick children, e.g., blind or deaf-mute.<sup>25</sup> After completing courses, the girls were sent to hospitals or children's centers where they helped with nursing or organized various forms of therapeutic activities (e.g., books were read to the blind and sick). In addition, the Association helped to place girls with illegitimate children in the Home for Single Mothers of the Jewish Women's Association in Isenburg by transferring monthly funds.<sup>26</sup> At that time, public opinion – both Jewish and Christian – was particularly strong in its condemnation of unmarried mothers and their illegitimate children. The center protected women who cared for their offspring.

Another important area of support for young women in need was to help them stabilize their personal lives by providing them with the necessary means to get married. The obligation (*mitzvah*) to support poor Jewish women

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- 23 R. Malzerowa, W odpowiedzi p. Dr Reichensteinowej, “Przegląd Społeczny. Miesięcznik poświęcony zagadnieniom pracy społecznej i opieki nad dzieckiem. Organ Związku Towarzystwa Opieki nad Żydowskimi Sierotami we Lwowie” 1928, J. 2, no. 6, p. 24.
  - 24 A. Reichenstein, O międzynarodowej, międzypartyjnej i międzywyznaniowej pracy społecznej, “Przegląd Społeczny. Miesięcznik poświęcony zagadnieniom pracy społecznej i opieki nad dzieckiem. Organ Związku Towarzystwa Opieki nad Żydowskimi Sierotami we Lwowie” 1928, J. 2, no. 11, p. 3.
  - 25 Editor's note, Und welche Lehre für das Mädchen, “Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt” 1938, Jg 15, Nr. 4, p. 2.
  - 26 The center was founded in 1907 in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. It was the first home for single mothers in Germany. Cf.: B. Pappenheim, Aus der Arbeit des Heimes des J.F.B. in Neu-Isenburg 1924–1929, “Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbund. Das Sonderdruck” 1930, Jg 6, no. 1, p. 3; L. Daemmig, M. Kaplan, Jüdischer Frauenbund (The League of Jewish Women), Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 27 February 2009, Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/juedischer-frauenbund-league-of-jewish-women> (05.06.2025).

wishing to marry – *Hachnossas Kalloḥ*<sup>27</sup> – has always ranked among the most sacred duties which no one could evade. During the period of the organization's existence, which spanned two world wars, this injunction gained special importance in the community. The problem for Jewish women was the “spreading threat”<sup>28</sup> in the form of disgraced child brides and mixed marriages that called into question the continued fate of Judaism. Faced with this fact, in February 1927 the *Jewish Women's League* set up a relief fund for future married women. Help was manifested both in the form of regularly paid membership fees and donations of household equipment and furnishings. Support was also provided in the form of assistance in organizing wedding ceremonies or dowries for indigent girls, which were requested from well-to-do members of the Association. By 1928, the fund had made it possible for eighteen young ladies to get married and build a house.<sup>29</sup>

## House for Young Children and Infants in Breslau

The House for Young Children and Infants (*Breslauer Kleinkinder und Säuglingsheim des J.F.B. in Krietern*) was founded in 1916 in the Krietern (now Krzyki) district as a home for Jewish orphans and children of single mothers who lacked sustenance. Judaism has always regarded the care of orphans as a task of great importance. The question of orphans in Breslau became extremely urgent to solve from the beginning of World War I. Under the conditions of the war, an important issue arose to create a place for the poorest, neglected, abandoned, and most often illegitimate children.<sup>30</sup> Because of their “illegal” statute, these children were excluded from orphanages and educational homes intended for school children. For this purpose, the Jewish community in Breslau granted a subsidy. With a contribution of 4,276 marks, a house with a garden in Moritzstrasse (now Lubuska Street) was rented. The center was also maintained thanks to the support of the American Joint Distribution

27 Cf.: A. Simonsohn, Ausstattung für Bräute, [in:] E. Rabin (ed.), Gedenkbuch Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau, Breslau 1928, p. 42; P. S. De Vries, Obrzędy i symbole Żydów (Jewish rites and symbols), A. Borkowski (transl.), Kraków 2001, p. 292.

28 A. Simonsohn, op. cit., p. 42.

29 Ibidem, p. 43.

30 J. Cohn, Breslauer Kleinkinder und Saeuglingheim des J. F. B. in Krietern, [in:] E. Rabin (ed.), Gedenkbuch Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau, Breslau 1928, p. 20.

Committee.<sup>31</sup> The children's health was supervised by a pediatrician, Dr. Franz Steinitz (1876–1931),<sup>32</sup> who monitored their health and aimed at preventive measures. In 1928, Else Toeplitz, the caretaker and manager of the center, took over the supervision of the children. At that time, the ward chairwoman, Paula Ollendorff,<sup>33</sup> and Johanna Cohn, the wife of the sanitary councillor Richard Cohn,<sup>34</sup> were responsible for all the center's affairs. In the first quarter of 1918, the center housed 32 children. By 1928, 165 little wards found accommodation for longer and shorter stays; 16 of them were adopted. In 1919, a part of the invested capital was used to buy a beautiful secluded garden in the Krietern district of Breslau. In the summer of 1925, due to the unsatisfactory condition of the building, the center changed its address to Trentinstraße 35 (now Krzycka Street 35), where it occupied a building that met the latest hygienic standards of the time. In July 1927, thanks to numerous donations, the center established a ward for infants.<sup>35</sup> Thus, professional health care was undertaken for infants and children who were considered particularly vulnerable

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- 31 The organization was founded on November 27, 1914 on the initiative of the American Jewish Committee. It was supposed to help Jews in war-stricken Europe by distributing funds collected by charitable organizations: American Jewish Relief Committee, Central Relief Committee and People's Relief Committee. The organization still exists today, providing assistance to Jewish communities in need. Cf.: J. Tomaszewski, A. Żbikowski (ed.), *Żydzi w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura. Leksykon*, Warszawa 2001.
- 32 Editor's note, *Die Hauptversammlung der Breslauer Ortsgruppe des J. F. B.*, "Breslauer Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt" 1931, Jg 8, nr 12, p. 168.
- 33 She was born on May 18, 1860 in Kostomłoty near Breslau (then Kostenblut). In Breslau she graduated from a teachers' seminary and worked as a teacher in Budapest and London. She was a prominent social democratic politician, and in 1918 she was the first woman to be elected to the Breslau city council. While holding this position, she founded many Jewish charitable organizations, engaging in charitable care herself. She was a co-founder of the Jewish Welfare Office in the Breslau municipality. In 1920 she became the chief chairman of the Jewish Women's League and was also active on the board of the World Union of Liberal Judaism. She always felt part of the German people and considered the Zionist movement the wrong way to go. She spoke several languages, was a well-read person, and took an active part in the cultural life of Breslau. In 1937, at the invitation of her son Friedrich Ollendorff (who was a Zionist), she went to Palestine. She fell ill there and died in 1938. She was buried in the cemetery on the Mount of Olives. Cf.: H. Vogelstein, Paula Ollendorff zum Gedächtnis "Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für die Synagogen-Gemeinde Breslau" 1938, no. 20, p.1.
- 34 E. Rabin, op. cit., p. 61.
- 35 E. Landsmann, *Das Kinderheim des Jüdischen Frauenbundes Breslau*, "Breslauer Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt" 1927, Jg 4, Nr. 8, p. 119.

to disease. The organization thus played a pioneering role in the development of pediatric medical care (modern forms of intervention and innovative measures). Care was taken to provide isolation rooms for sick children with separate toilets for them, washable walls and floors, separate entrances from the hallway and staircase, and access to running hot water. In order to reduce infant mortality, mechanisms of infant health control and prevention were developed in accordance with the state of knowledge at that time.

## Nursing Assistance

Care for the sick in Judaism derives from the commandment to visit the sick (hebr. *Bikur Cholim*, yid. *biker-chojlim*), which carries the broader sense of nursing them. According to the Talmud (Nedarim 39b), visiting an ill person renders him or her sixty percent sick, and failure to visit may lead to the death of one's neighbour. Fulfilling this order in Jewish communities was the responsibility of special confraternities (hebr. *chewot*) such as *Bikur Cholim*. Their members visited the sick and took care of their needs. Nursing in Judaism is thus connected with the command to visit the sick, constituting one of the most important precepts of Judaism and Jewish social ethics, since it serves to preserve and sanctify life. It is the "sacred duty" of both Jewish men and women.<sup>36</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nature of most training institutions (even with explicit Christian ideals) prevented Jewish women from participating in the nursing profession, so Jewish hospitals in Germany began to organize the first nurse training courses themselves. The first professional Jewish nurse in Germany is believed to be Rosalie Jüttner, who most probably came from Poznań (Poland) and was employed in 1881 in a hospital in Hamburg. In Breslau, nursing courses began in 1884 at the Fränckel Jewish Hospital on what is now St. Anthony Street. In 1899, the German Association of Jewish Nurses (*Deutscher Verband jüdischer Krankenpflegerinnen*) was established in Breslau. As for nursing help within the structures of the Jewish Women's Association in Breslau, they worked in all the institutions of the organization, and there were also community nurses who joined the group on behalf of the community in April 1914. Their tasks in the field of reproductive health included assistance in childbirth, coordination of puerperal home care, assistance in pediatric care, assistance in newborn

36 Cf.: H. Steppe Den Kranken zum Troste und dem Judentum zur Ehre. Zum geschichte der jüdischen Krankenpflege in Deutschland, Frankfurt a. Main 1997.

care, care in case of puerperal infection, organization of visits to the doctor or purchase of medicines. In the first year of operation, 159 people received ambulatory care for various cases, including those related to childbirth and puerperium, and this number increased from year to year. In 1923, the number of members of the Breslau Jewish community covered by home nursing care amounted to 1,495 people, and in 1927 there were 2,492 outpatient cases. In 1928 the community nurse of the Association was Rosa Schönfelder.<sup>37</sup>

### Therapeutic and Recreational Support for Women and their Children

The center belonging to the Breslau branch of the *Jewish Women's League* was a sanatorium for Jewish children in Bad Flinsberg (now Świeradów-Zdrój) (*Kinderlandheim des J.F.B. Bad Flinsberg*), which started operating in 1924 in the boarding house Loreley (currently at 6 Bronisława Czecha Street).<sup>38</sup> The center was financed, among others, from a grant by the Joint Distribution Committee and from a long-term loan taken from the *Hilfskasse gemeinnütziger Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen in Deutschland*.<sup>39</sup> Stays in health resorts were a form of assistance for the poorest or single-parent families, where the upbringing of children rested on single mothers. Before the establishment of the center, the conditions in which the children were placed were not always comfortable, e.g., during World War I children were accommodated in unused rooms of inns.<sup>40</sup> Emma Vogelstein née Kosack (1870–1949), wife of the liberal rabbi from Breslau – Hermann Vogelstein (1870–1942) – was the director of the Association of Women and responsible for all organizational matters from the beginning of the sanatorium's existence. She was born in Warglitten – East Prussia (now Warglity) and died in New York.<sup>41</sup> Children staying at the center were consulted by doctors (e.g., from 1924 to 1928 by Dr. Arthur Schäfer from

37 L. Cassirer, *Jüdische Tuberkulosenfürsorge eine arbeitgemeinschaft des Jüdischen Wohlfahrtsamts und des J.F.B.*, [in:] E. Rabin (ed.), *Gedenkbuch Jüdischer Frauenbund Ortsgruppe Breslau*, Breslau 1928. p. 53.

38 Cf.: Editor's note, *Die Arbeit des Jüdischen Frauenbundes in Breslau*, "Breslauer Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt" 1925, Jg 2, nr 11, p. 168.

39 E. Vogelstein, Rabin (ed.), op. cit., p. 30.

40 Editor's note, *Besichtigung des Kinderlandheimes in Flinsberg*, "Breslauer Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt" 1929, Jg 6, nr 9, p. 154.

41 W. Röder, H.A. Strauss (ed.), *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933*, Band I, Politik, Wirtschaft, Öffentliches Leben, Leitung und Bear-

Świeradów-Zdrój), and in the years 1937–1938 by Dr. Lucie Baas, a doctor at the Jewish hospital in Breslau. The house was run by a nurse with appropriate qualifications and who passed a state exam (e.g., in 1928 this was Selma Schloss). Small patients were looked after by educated tutors of both sexes (boys – men, girls – women) and assistants. Each tutor was responsible for a group of 10 to 12 children. The kitchen was run strictly according to ritual regulations, which was taken care of by the head of the kitchen, Josefina Kantorowicz. Apprentices helped with the cooking, thus supplementing their practical training. Consultants and committee members for the sanatorium included: Dr. Erich Breslauer, Lisbet Cassirer, Dr. Alfred Cohn, Richard Ehrlich, Gustav Glaser, Beate Guttmann, Guido Neustadt, Eugen Ollendorff, Eugen Perle, Siegfried Preuss, Ema Rosenberg, Leo Smoschower, Max Selberg, Anna Simonsohn, Clara Schottländer, Emmy Vogelstein, and Jacob Wolfssohn. The economic committee consisted of Helene Eichelbaum, Jenny Kochmann, Frieda Loebell, Friederike Löwenson, and Berta Schlesinger.<sup>42</sup>

The children stayed for an average of 28 days.<sup>43</sup> The average weight gain after the course was about 9 pounds (4.5 kg). An average of three hundred children were on holiday at the center during the year. Boys over the age of twelve were offered therapeutic stays in October.<sup>44</sup> From mid-December 1925, winter cure stays for children were also organized. The cost of these stays was three marks per day, two marks for the poorest children; however, it was stated that if someone paid four marks instead of three marks, he would be co-financing the stay for those who could not afford it. After the treatment in the health resort, the children were directed to the House for Young Children in Krietern, where therapy was continued in order to consolidate the therapeutic effects. An initiative of stationary recreational stays in the villa district of Kleinburg (now Borek)<sup>45</sup> was founded in 1928. During the summer season, 32 people usually stayed in a rented house with a garden. Most of them were women who had no chance to leave their place of residence for a longer period of time. Some of

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beitung, unter Mitwirkung von D. M. Schneider, L. Forsyth, S. C. B. Schmidt, München-London-Paris 1980, p. 784.

42 E. Vogelstein, Rabin (ed.), op. cit., p. 32.

43 Editor's note, *Bezug im Kinderheim Flinsberg, Die Arbeit des jüdischen Frauenbundes in Breslau*, "Breslauer Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt" 1927, Jg 4, nr 10, p. 156.

44 Ibidem, p.157.

45 Currently a district of Wrocław, a village annexed to the city in 1897 thanks to the foundation of Julius Schottländer, who in 1877 bought the area of the Kleinburg villa colony and donated it to the magistrate. Cf.: A. Dylewski, op. cit., p. 413.

them, for example, could not stop working or were not able to raise enough money for a spa treatment. In addition to free rides, these women received afternoon tea and dinner.

## Conclusion

In attempting to outline the final conclusions of own research, it should be emphasised that the pre-war activities of the Jewish Women League in Silesia in the areas of reproductive health and maternal and child health were part of the centuries-old traditions of activity of Jewish aid organisations. The League not only provided social and medical assistance, but above all became an important social movement for its time and for the women living in those times. This was made possible by a specific point of view derived from the precepts of Jewish social ethics, characterised by humanitarianism. The ideas of women's health care focused on the human being as a whole, and medical care was a comprehensive activity, far beyond medical procedures, and encompassing many areas of life. The bold projects of the Jewish Women's League highlighted the neglect and vital needs of women functioning in the society of the time, in which they were in a double minority – as women and as Jews. The simple and practical reforms implemented by the League under adverse conditions provided a biological sense of security and a basis of existence for several hundreds of women and their children. Their work resulted in the establishment of care facilities for unmarried or agunot mothers condemned by society, centres for Jewish girls at risk of prostitution, kindergartens for the children of these women who had to take up professional work to become economically independent. Educational assistance was also organised, e.g. towards becoming a midwife and nurse, in order to improve the care of newborns and mothers-to-be, also from the poorest families.

The activities of the Jewish Women League are also part of the complex landscape of Silesia, forever inscribed in the region's history, and perpetuating this heritage and opening up discussion on it contributes to defining regional and European identity.

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