

Zdrowie kobiety, jego
profilaktyka i ochrona
w dziewiętnastowiecznych
popularnonaukowych
czasopismach medycznych

**Women's health issues,
preventive care and
prophylaxis in 19th-century
Polish popular medical
magazines***

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SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

czasopisma popularnonaukowe, popularyzacja
nauki, XIX wiek, ziemie polskie, medycyna,
higiena

KEY WORDS:

Polish press in the 19th century, popular medical
periodicals, medical information and health advice
for women

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł prezentuje tematykę zdrowia kobiety, jego
ochrony i profilaktyki w polskich czasopismach
popularnonaukowych wydawanych w XIX wieku.

Bazę źródłową stanowią teksty publikowane
w „Dzienniku Zdrowia dla Wszystkich
Stanów” (1801–1802), „Przyjacielu Zdrowia”
(1861–1863), „Zdrowiu” (1877/78–1880), „Lekarzu”
(1903/04–1904/05). Zasadniczym zatem założeniem
badawczym było udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie,
czy w analizowanych periodykach problematyka
zdrowia kobiety zajmowała należne temu
zagadnieniu miejsce.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the coverage of women's
health issues, preventive care and prophylaxis
in 19th-century Polish popular medical periodicals,
in particular *Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich
Stanów* [*Journal of Health for all Social Classes*]
(1801–1802), *Przyjaciel Zdrowia* [*Health's Friend*]
(1861–1863), *Zdrowie* [*Health*] (1877/78–1880),
and *Lekarz* [*The Physician*] (1903/04–1904/05).
The authors of this study try to find an answer to
the question whether those periodicals did succeed
in giving women's health issues the rank and status
warranted by their significance.

* Temat realizowany w ramach projektu *Polskie czasopiśmiennictwo popularnonaukowe do 1939 roku*, finansowanego przez Narodowe Centrum Nauki — UMO-2014/15/B/HS2/01071.

Summary

Undertaking research on the issues of women's health, as explored in the 19th c. popular-science journals, published across Polish lands, focused predominantly on spreading medical knowledge, promoting general hygiene, and advocating a scope of preventive practices, is well justified, on the one hand, by broad implications of the issue itself, while on the other, through being genuinely intrigued by an on-going character of certain phenomena. The starting point consists in the fact that all editors of those periodicals had freely acknowledged women's health to be a significant factor for the social fabric of an entire community, even though in the view of the very proponents of this assertion "the gentle sex has not acquired sufficient self-awareness as yet".

Convincing women not only about the need to take care of their own health, but also about the need to have these principles implemented in everyday life therefore became the mission of popular-science journals: „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” [*Journal of Health for all Social Strata*] (1801–1802), „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” [*Health's Friend*] (1861–1863), „Zdrowie” [*Health*] (1877/78–1880), and „Lekarz” [*The Physician*] (1903/04–1904/05). The principal research objective consisted in establishing whether women's health issues, as addressed in the periodicals under study, actually enjoyed the status warranted by their significance.

Critical assessment of the journals under study unequivocally proved that the most numerous group was constituted by the write-ups focused on pregnancy and maternity, as well as on personal hygiene, further on also exploring the issues of illnesses, mainly mental ones, marriage, as well as addressing attendant preconceptions, myths and superstitions. Physicians, believing that overall quality of life of Polish women was actually much worse than in the other developed countries, especially the women living in the countryside, pursued a scope of specifically targeted activities, on the one hand, the awareness-raising ones on the sheer scale of adversity in this regard, while on the other, they endeavoured to turn them into general prevention schemes, while being aware their actions would be met with negligible social resonance. Despite their short presence on the publishing market, popular-science journals played a significantly instrumental role in the quest for the nation's health status; this objective also well embraced within the patriotic endeavours of the activists representing the enslaved nation, in which the role of women, even though largely limited to the basic functions, i.e. procreation and overall responsibility for the condition of future generations, was highlighted in all publications at the time.

Undertaking research on the issues of women's health, as explored in the 19th c. popular-science periodicals, published across Polish lands, focused predominantly on spreading medical knowledge, promoting general hygiene, and advocating a scope of preventive practices, is well justified on the one hand, by broad implications of the issue itself, while on the other, through being genuinely intrigued by an on-going character of certain phenomena. The starting point consists in the fact that all editors of those periodicals had freely acknowledged women's health to be a significant factor for the social fabric of an entire community, even though in the view of the very proponents of this assertion "the gentle sex has not acquired sufficient self-awareness as yet"¹.

Perception of women's health issues and attendant preventive practices in terms of a historical perspective, has been narrowed down to a single source, i.e. the 19th c. popular-science journals representing medical science. Even though the Authors are well aware that such an approach may result in some limitations in their research, it should also be highlighted at this juncture that at the time the periodicals under study also took on a certain scope of educational duties, also through their organisational restructuring, but first and foremost, by way of promoting a diversity of socially desirable attitudes to the issues of general sanitation and personal hygiene.

It is well-worth highlighting at this point that back in the 19th c. hygiene acquired its scientific grounding and began to be distinguished as an independent discipline. At that time, the principal focus rested on the etiology of a disease and the issues of general prevention, as its proponents and promoters merely intended it to be complementary to medical sciences. Broadly scoped public education in the field of individual health status was postulated, whereas the attendant activities, inspired by rather low, health-oriented public awareness was generally associated with scarcity of an adequate body of knowledge, disadvantageous upbringing, and generally poor living standards². In the flyer advertising the upcoming "Health" magazine, its edi-

¹ L. Lafontaine, *O brzemienności*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 2, s. 193.

² A. Napierała, *Higiena prywatna w polskich publikacjach popularnych i popularnonaukowych w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku. Koncepcje i porady*, Poznań 2018, s. 91–100; D. Fleming, *Warszawianka w kąpielni. Problemy higieny w warszawskiej prasie kobiecej lat 1860–1918*, Warszawa 2008, s. 8–18; M. Demel, *Z dziejów promocji zdrowia w Polsce*, t. 1/2, Kraków 2000,

tors argued that “throughout the recent decades, hygiene has flourished in the most civilized countries, thus opening a brand new era in the history of mankind”, whilst admitting with certain self-acknowledged bitterness that “regretfully enough, on the home turf general health awareness is far too slow to take root, and the hygiene issues have so far been raised in the general press only”³.

In yet another article, his author argued that “Scholars devoted years of strenuous effort to investigating the impact of individual factors such as air, water, housing, quality and quantity of food on individual health, and consequently gave rise to a new branch of knowledge, i.e. public hygiene,” and further on, “In the neighbouring countries the work in this particular area is being pursued with unrelenting persistence by numerous representatives of the most diverse branches of science. We have not accomplished much as yet, and to be more specific, there is just about everything to be done in this area. Almost everything we have learned to date on the harmful effects of various factors on individual health status originates in foreign research”⁴. It had also transpired that a diversity of activities specifically aimed at raising public awareness were greeted by downright ignorance, backwardness, and rife illiteracy. In view of general unavailability of structured, institutional forms, dissemination of the key principles of hygiene, as well as the basics of a healthy lifestyle was taken up by popular-science journals.

Right at the turn of the 19th c. “Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” [Journal of Health for all Social Strata] was established in Warsaw (1801–1802), whose originator cum publisher cum editor cum co-author of a majority of published materials was, in line with the information comprised on the title page, one “Leopold Lafontaine, doctor of medicine and surgery, medical consultant and surgeon of the late Stanisław August [Poniatowski], the Polish King”. Twelve issues of the journal were published in all, released on a monthly basis⁵.

s. 12–13; tenże, *Pedagogiczne aspekty warszawskiego ruchu higienicznego 1864–1914*, Warszawa 1964, s. 16.

³ Prospekt, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 1, s. I. [dod.].

⁴ A.M. Weinberg, *O materiałach spożywczych i ich zafalszowaniu*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 6, s. 69.

⁵ Na temat czasopisma pisali: T. Ostrowska, *Polskie czasopiśmiennictwo lekarskie w XIX wieku (1800–1900). Zarys historyczno-bibliograficzny*, Wrocław 1973, s. 34–36; I. Wiktorowna Panituk, *Z historii pierwszych periodycznych publikacji medycznych*, [w:] *Spoleczno-ideowe aspekty medycyny i nauk przyrodniczych XVIII–XX wieku*, pod red. B. Płonki-Syroki, Wrocław 2002, s. 513–521; A. Syroka, *Popularyzacja wiedzy medycznej i farmaceutycznej na łamach „Dziennika Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” z lat 1801–1802*, [w:] *Życie codzienne w XVIII–XX wieku i jego wpływ na stan zdrowia ludności*, pod red. B. Płonki-Syroki i A. Syroki, Wrocław 2003, s. 457–462; I. Arabas, *Potoczna wiedza o lekach w czasopismach dziewiętnastowiecznych*, „Medycyna Współczesna” 2004, nr 1, s. 142–143; E. Tówpik, *Lekarze warszawscy w łóżach wolnomularskich. Cz. 5: Lata 1767–1821*, „Nowotwory. Journal of Oncology” 2004, nr 4, s. 411–412; A. Bołdyrew, *Poradniki i czasopisma jako źródło postulatywne do badań nad żywieniem dla dzieci i młodzieży na ziemiach Królestwa*

Another periodical promoting medical science and hygiene had been 60 years in wait. In 1861, "Przyjaciel Zdrowia" [Health's Friend] (1861–1863) appeared in Warsaw, founded and edited by Karol Gregorowicz, also an author of numerous articles⁶. The motto of this biweekly publication was: "The source of happiness and prosperity, as well as the power of every nation consists in its population and its healthy status". This slogan derived from a fundamental positivist thought promoting a collective pursuit of actions aimed at ensuring a healthy status for the entire nation.

Another publication "Zdrowie" [Health] (1877/78–1880), "a popular-science biweekly dedicated to natural sciences and hygiene", enjoyed merely three years of circulation on the market. It was published in Warsaw by Jan Brzezinski, edited by Konrad Dobrski (1877), subsequently in association with Bronisława Znatowicz (1878), then by Dobrski, Znatowicz and Teodor Dunin (1879), and in its final year — by K. Dobrski⁷.

This hygiene-oriented trend in Polish popular-science journalism was also followed by "Lekarz" [The Physician] (1903/04–1904/05), "a popular medical journal devoted to hygiene, general disease prevention, dietetics, and emergency services", based in Warsaw. The originator, publisher and editor of this biweekly publication was Jerzy Brunner, who managed to invite in a large group of physicians to become its regular contributors.

Following this brief outline, let us move back to the main subject. The need to persuade women about crucial importance of caring for their own health, and following up the key principles of such care in their everyday life became the principal slogan promoted by the above-referenced periodicals. A question then arises, whether the issues of women's health were adequately addressed in the 19th c. popular-science periodicals focused on health promoting and general prevention?

Critical assessment of the journals under study unequivocally proved that the most numerous group, which comes as no surprise, was constituted by the write-ups focused on pregnancy and maternity issues, as well as on personal hygiene. It should be highlighted at this point that all published articles were fully consistent with the current state of medical science and hygiene, the point much emphasized both by the authors and editors, frequently citing scientific expertise of renown medical specialists, mainly the foreign ones, though.

Polskiego w latach 1795–1914. (Perspektywa społeczno-kulturowa i zdrowotno-wychowawcza), „Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej” 2013, t. 11, s. 5–18.

⁶ Zob. T. Ostrowska, *Polskie czasopiśmiennictwo lekarskie...*, s. 53–54.

⁷ Tamże, s. 75–78.

Pregnancy and motherhood

In the 19th c., the issues related to protecting health of an expectant mother and her child became the subject of growing interest of both physicians and hygienists. Already at the beginning of the period under review, Leopold Lafontaine, editor and publisher of the “Journal of Health for All Social Strata” not only demanded respect for pregnant women, but also that legal protection be granted to them, saying that “a pregnant woman by the very fact of her pregnancy deserves respect, as she gives birth to a brand-new citizen, thereby contributing to the growth of the country’s population, and her own family”⁸. The same author then went on to convince prospective mothers that as they exerted a certain impact on the health of their own children, they were by the same token obligated to pursue adequate preventive measures, as by holding them close “under their hearts, they get them ready for life and then death, ensure their health, weakness and sickness or strength, endurance and a happy life for them”⁹.

By far the most comprehensive material on the subject, i.e. *On pregnancy*, by the above-referenced editor, was published in the “Journal of Health for All Social Strata”¹⁰. Inaugurating the publication of the cycle, Lafontaine argued, “There can be nothing of more importance within the entire medical practice than propagating the ways in which pregnant women should behave in order for them to survive in the best of health before they go into labour. For it is this particular period, upon which happiness or misfortune in the entire life of their new-borns is going to depend”¹¹.

In the view of the journal’s contributors, first of all, it was the incorrect diet of pregnant women that could bring about complications in pregnancy, or result in premature birth, pregnancy poisoning, anaemia, and many others. Availability of medical consultations were therefore clamoured for, as the physicians asserted that every diet in pregnancy had to be closely tailored not only to “suit the needs of a pregnant woman’s body”, but also be consistent with her previous eating habits. The latter, as it was emphasized, should not be subject to any rapid changes. In line with the doctor’s recommendations, “a fragile lady” should not, for instance, “out of a sudden start tampering with spicy foods, when previously she had survived merely on vegetables and delicate broths”, and stay well away from any “irritating foods” or “wine, spices, and any fatty broths”, as consuming them was believed to

⁸ L. Lafontaine, *O brzemienności*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 2, s. 195.

⁹ Tenże, *O wartości zdrowia*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1802, nr 7, s. 14–15.

¹⁰ Tenże, *O brzemienności*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 2, s. 193–228; nr 3, s. 317–339; nr 4, s. 47–70; nr 5, s. 203–217; nr 6, s. 335–367; 1802, nr 7, s. 56–73; nr 8, s. 171–182; nr 9, s. 330–340.

¹¹ Tenże, *O brzemienności*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 2, s. 193.

“increase irritability and weakness within the body, promote undue blood coagulation, and generally impair digestion”¹².

These remarks also pertained to women “who, through a body-weakening diet, were irritable, susceptible to falling ill, prone to anxiety, likely to suffer stomach cramps, and many of them also suffered from indigestion”¹³. In conclusion, however, the physician admitted there was no single, universal diet to be recommended to expectant mothers, and its structure very much depended on the above-referenced factors. He also recommended avoiding or cutting down on coffee and tea, staying away altogether from eating salty, smoked meats, cheese, and drinking alcohol, as well as being extra careful when eating fish. Harmful effects of alcohol on overall quality of a mother's lactation, and consequently on her new-born baby was highlighted by the editors of “Health”¹⁴, while similar advice also appeared in “The Physician”¹⁵.

Lafontaine also noticed differences in the menus of, as he put it, “urban ladies” and “country girls”, which in his view originated from certain dietary habits. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that it was a somewhat simplified take of the issue. The publisher of the “Journal of Health” asserted that “If a pregnant woman was previously used to eating meat, it would be harmful to her to suddenly drop this eating habit altogether, and put herself on a vegetable and soup diet instead. Country girls stayed perfectly healthy sustaining themselves on potatoes and vegetable, as they were simply used to such a diet. Besides, their overall physical disposition was very much different from the one of the urban ladies, as they were getting more physical exercises, stayed much longer out in the open air, and consequently their bodies became stronger, while their stomachs could therefore easily digest foods that were at the same time healthy and nutritious to them”¹⁶. He made this reservation, however, that it was not his objective to give women any “dietary penance”, but merely to bring to their attention certain “health issues” that were applicable both to a mother and her new-born baby¹⁷.

The issues of nutrition in pregnant women were combined with those of breast feeding, in line with the assumption, as one of the authors put it rather explicitly, that “every healthy mother had the duty to breastfeed her child, just as nature wanted”¹⁸. It was perfectly admissible, though, to hire a wet-nurse in the event of

¹² Tenże, *O brzemiennosci. Nagle zmiany są szkodliwe*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 3, s. 319.

¹³ Tamże, s. 321.

¹⁴ *Wpływ wysokoku na mleko matki*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 23, s. 295–296.

¹⁵ *Żywnienie kobiet karmiących*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 3, s. 68.

¹⁶ L. Lafontaine, *O brzemiennosci. Szczególna dietetyka dla osób ciężarnych, a naprzód o jedzeniu i picciu*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 6, s. 361.

¹⁷ Tenże, *O brzemiennosci. Nagle odmiany są szkodliwe...*, s. 324.

¹⁸ Tenże, *O brzemiennosci. Nikt przeciwko naturze nie wykracza bezkarnie*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 3, s. 331.

a mother falling ill, and so the criteria for selecting a wet-nurse were also offered and discussed in some detail. Nevertheless, doctors were principally opposed to a fashion of hiring wet-nurses by perfectly healthy but “merciless mothers”¹⁹. Prospective health status of a child, and subsequently, of an adult human being, to a large extent depended on a new-born baby being breastfed by his own mother. In yet another article, Władysław Chodecki, its author, added with some regret, yet also as a kind of a warning, that steadily fewer and fewer women were capable of breastfeeding, the reasons for that being primarily seen in a reluctance of expectant mothers to have their breasts conditioned for natural feeding, but he also highlighted the harmful effects of women wearing the laced-up corsets²⁰, and tight clothing, at large. The former, in his view, effectively inhibited normal development of the mammary glands.

The editors of “The Physician” also referred to those issues publishing in their magazine, by way of an example, two daily menus specially designed for breastfeeding women²¹. This topic was explored in some detail in the article *Nutrition in the new-born babies*, its starting point being an assertion that “every breastfeeding woman should take good care of her own health and proper nutrition”²². It may therefore be inferred that a scientific approach to diet was already taking shape at the time, extending to the benefits of consuming particular foodstuffs, as well as onto the effects of committing possible nutritional errors, be that by the currently breastfeeding mothers, or the expectant ones. On the other hand, the physicians were only too well aware themselves that general awareness of a huge impact of nutrition on an individual health status was quite negligible within a population. Given widespread poverty, and pretty much destitute status of a significant part of society, these recommendations filtered down to the poorest social strata in a rather limited extent.

Other topics highlighted in the periodicals under study, here merely mentioned *in passim*, were, for instance, painful gums in pregnant women due to excessive accumulation of dental plaque²³, or harmfulness of taking baths in the Vistula river, which, when overindulged in by pregnant women, might well prove “disastrous for them in the end”²⁴.

¹⁹ Tenże, *O brzemności. Czyli lepiej przyjąć dla dziecięcia mamkę*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 4, s. 56.

²⁰ W. Chodecki, *Higiena i dietetyka kobiety karmiącej*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 7, s. 145–148; nr 8, s. 172–176.

²¹ *Żywienie kobiet karmiących*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 3, s. 68.

²² M. Biehler, *Odżywianie dzieci. II. Zasady karmienia mlekiem kobiecym*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 7, s. 148–151; W. Chodecki, *Odżywianie dzieci. III. Mleko kobiece i mleko krowie*, tamże 1904, nr 10, s. 217–220.

²³ *Cierpienia dziąseł u ciężarnych*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 7, s. 166.

²⁴ L. Lafontaine, *O używaniu i nadużywaniu rzecznych a mianowicie wiślanych kąpeli i nieco o kąpeli powietrznej*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 1, s. 48–62.

Hygiene (of body and clothing)

One of the difficult, yet also burning issues addressed in the periodicals under study, was overall cleanliness of the body and attire, since it was the dirt that was a direct cause of contracting various illnesses, and conducive to spreading infectious diseases, as physicians and hygienists often pointed out. Especially in the late 19th c. and at the turn of the 20th c., in view of the development of bacteriology as a separate field of knowledge, the journal contributors highlighted the importance of personal hygiene, mainly in terms of individual body care, ensuring its overall cleanliness, which was believed to be effectively capable of preventing women from assorted health hazards. Preventive character of these recommendations was also aimed at eradicating bad habits, and making away with all sorts of superstitions.

Particular attention was therefore paid to the damaging effects on women's health that certain parts of her attire were believed to induce. Any type of clothing that caused a woman's body to be tightly bound for a long time was met with strong disapproval. The importance of this issue is evidenced not only throughout the published articles, but also by the actual selection of topics, as addressed by the editors and publishers in their editorials. This was the case, for example, with "The Physician", whose editor in his appeal to the readers highlighted the need to have the issue of "rational clothing and corsets explored at some depth in the light of the latest findings" in the journal's "woman's hygiene" section²⁵.

In response to the question "What influence may present-day attire of the gentle sex have, as compared to the one worn in the past, with regard to women's health issues?", an article was published in 1801 in "The Journal of Health for All Social Strata" *On the effect of women's attire on their health*²⁶. It comprised comments and specific recommendations regarding both outdoor garments, and underwear and footwear, as well as cosmetics used by women. The Editor of "The Journal of Health" advised wearing underwear, including bras and "bloomers", promoted dresses made from lightweight material, e.g. muslin, while seeing potential health hazards to women in their bared shoulders, "naked necks and backs", which proposed "the exact opposite to the purpose of being dressed up"²⁷. The journal's editor was additionally worried by the shoes "on the high raised soles" and the ones "with long, pointed caps" as potentially deforming for women's feet. He rounded up his comments with some satisfaction, though, as he acknowledged

²⁵ *Do czytelników naszych!* „Lekarz” 1904, nr 24, s. 553–554.

²⁶ L. Lafontaine, *O wpływie strojów damskich na ich zdrowie*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 1, s. 71–87.

²⁷ Tamże, s. 82.

that “at this age, at least as far as the dress code is concerned, we have grown far more prudent”²⁸.

This train of thought was further pursued by “The Physician” in the article *A woman’s attire in terms of hygiene*²⁹, which not only was a historical flashback on the subject of women’s fashion, but above all, a presentation of the views espoused by a physician cum hygienist, for whom women’s clothing might well be regarded as “a means of causing certain illnesses, or protecting against them”. The object of particular criticism was the laced-up corset, the wearing of which, in the author’s view, was a rape committed not only on the “principles of aesthetics”, but above all on the “principles of personal hygiene”.

Utter delight of the editors of “Health’s Friend” was triggered by a crinoline, which in their opinion “bestowed great honour upon human reason and deserved in every respect the praise of a physician cum hygienist”³⁰. In the author’s view, it ensured “comfort and health”, while the “stiffly starched skirts squeezed up the waist, constricted a woman’s silhouette, and impaired normal breathing”³¹. The physicians were also openly dismissive and disapproving of veils, which they regarded as potentially harmful to women’s eyesight³².

Repeatedly cited Lafontaine fully approved of the declining use of cosmetic powder and hair pomade, although remained openly critical of “hair curling”, much like of wearing wigs, usually made of material of unknown origin. Lafontaine even ventured a stern warning that the wig-makers purportedly made use of the hair of some “evil-doers sent down for a spell in the penitentiary institutions, or — worse still — of the beggars’ hair who had fallen victims of contagious diseases in the hospitals”³³.

The topic of skin and hair care as a sure way of keeping oneself in good health was also taken up in “Health’s Friend”³⁴ and in “Health”³⁵.

In terms of cosmetics, the comments were aimed rather at affluent women, as it would be pretty hard to assume that peasant girls or labourers would be making use of the cosmetics commercially available and recommended at the time, e.g. creams, blushes, and powders. Nevertheless, the periodicals under study were full of

²⁸ Tamże, s. 87.

²⁹ W. K., *Strój kobiety w świetle higieny*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 2, s. 29–33; nr 3, s. 57–61; nr 4, s. 82–86.

³⁰ *Pożyteczne wynalazki dla strojów damskich*, „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” 1861, nr 1, s. 14.

³¹ Tamże, s. 15–16.

³² *O szkodliwości woalek*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 4, s. 96.

³³ Tamże, s. 78.

³⁴ *O włosach*, „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” 1861, nr 5, s. 2–5.

³⁵ K. Kochler, *Pielęgnowanie płci*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 10, s. 121–123; nr 11, s. 139–141; tenże, *Pielęgnowanie włosów*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 20, s. 252–253; H. Uliński, *O piegach, opalaniu i t.z. plamach wątrobianych*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 16, s. 373–375; nr 17, s. 398–401.

recipes for home-made powders³⁶ “harmless to skin”, cosmetic powders for face and hand washes³⁷, or complexion-softening liquids³⁸. As a matter of interest, cosmetic massage was also taken up and addressed as a viable option³⁹.

Marriage

The issues of sexual nature, marital sex, and married life at large, very seldom appeared in the periodicals under study. A most inspiring topic of the spouses' individual temperaments, with a particular emphasis on the woman's, was addressed in the article *On the vocation of marriage*, in which the author quite explicitly highlighted the issue of the “spouses' physical and temperamental compatibility” as a prerequisite of marital bliss⁴⁰. He then went on to say, rather ruefully, that these issues were largely ignored by society, or treated with undue leniency. By the same token, however, the author did acknowledge that both men and women were perfectly eligible to experience “sexual attraction” to each other. In a way, then, this assertion might therefore be regarded as a ground-breaking one, as it made yet another area open to public debate, previously considered a social taboo, while effectively debunking a few popular myths about marriage. The more did it merit extra attention, that it was first articulated in the early 19th c. The topics regarding women's diseases and their impact on marital sex life⁴¹, infertility, or sexual frigidity, appeared in “Health's Friend”⁴².

A woman's body

A matter of interest, and yet warranting particular attention, nowhere in the journals under study was there to be encountered a presentation of a woman's body in terms of its anatomical and physiological characteristics as a whole, merely in

³⁶ *Przepisy na pudry toaletowe nieszkodliwe dla cery*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 4, s. 92.

³⁷ *Przepis na proszek kosmetyczny do mycia twarzy i rąk*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 5, s. 118.

³⁸ M. B., *Phyn udelikatniający cerę*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 6, s. 141.

³⁹ L. Wernic, *O masażu kosmetycznym*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 23, s. 532–535; nr 24, s. 563–566.

⁴⁰ *O powołaniu małżeńskim. Dla osłabionych mężczyzn i nieplodnych kobiet oraz o najlepszym leczeniu sposobie*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 4, s. 30–31.

⁴¹ M. Thernerson, *Choroby a małżeństwo*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 21, s. 481–484; nr 22, s. 511–513; 1905, nr 10, s. 433–437; nr 20, s. 470–472; nr 21/22, s. 492–496.

⁴² *Niektóre uwagi dotyczące wyłącznie stanu małżeńskiego*, „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” 1862, nr 3, s. 5–10.

terms of its respective organs. The article *What mothers and their daughters should be aware of*, focused on the issues of sexual awareness, is therefore well-worth noting. The author, while critically approaching overall effectiveness of having this postulate implemented in practice, observed that “In this particular respect, we seem to have pretty odd practices indeed, i.e. mothers simply avoid addressing any matters related to their daughters’ adolescence, while their daughters feel embarrassed to ask any such questions, often enough put off by their mother’s evasive responses on the previous occasions”⁴³.

Appreciation of the significance of this issue was also corroborated in mission statement in “The Physician”, as it drew attention to the need for effectively addressing the topics related to “Girl’s hygiene from the early years in life”. At this juncture, due attention is drawn to a pretty timeless character of this issue, one of the most fundamental problems in the children’s upbringing faced by their parents — sexual awareness and the need for an attendant education in this regard.

Illnesses

This thematic category comprises the write-ups dealing primarily with mental illnesses, to which, in the authors’ view, women were particularly susceptible as “weak and mentally unstable creatures”⁴⁴. The underlying reasons for sudden bouts of hysterics, attributable to the gentle sex only, in the late 19th c. were deemed to be correlated with women’s extra sensitive and vulnerable nervous system⁴⁵, and more specifically, for being affected by the “glands and reproductive organs”⁴⁶. Women with mental disorders were perceived by the authors as “nervous”, the symptoms of their illnesses were discussed at some length, and, more importantly, their social acceptance was postulated.

One of the authors, while discussing a scope of preventive measures, began his write-up with an assertion pretty much characteristic of that time: “Education and any endeavours aimed at improving the women’s lot should be pursued in such a way that their nervous system is not overly stimulated. By means of making use of pertinent

⁴³ M. Fijałkowska, *O czym matki i ich córki wiedzieć powinny*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 20, s. 461–464; nr 21/22, s. 496–500; nr 23, s. 527–530; nr 24, s. 544–548.

⁴⁴ *Higiena kobiet nerwowych*, „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” 1862, nr 18, s. 1–7; *O kobiecie nerwowej*, tamże, s. 15–16.

⁴⁵ A. Napierała, *Higiena prywatna...*, s. 364–368; A. Stypuła, *Kultura a choroba psychiczna. Rola czynników kulturowych w postrzeganiu, przebiegu i leczeniu zaburzeń psychicznych*, Kraków 2012, s. 27.

⁴⁶ *Higiena kobiet nerwowych...*, s. 3.

economic instruments it should be ensured that a woman does not assume the man's role, does not emancipate herself⁴⁷. While endeavouring to prove that women were emotionally more sensitive than men, Reich put forward a justifiable assumption that women were indeed more sensitive than men, and anxiety reactions occurred in them much faster, and were stronger. He also gave various reasons for women's health problems, as well as statistical data for the incidence of mental illnesses in women of different nationalities, obviously enough, well subordinated to the guiding assertion of overall detrimental impact exerted by women's emancipatory movements.

In explaining the origins of mental disorders, especially neurotic disorders in women, the author reached out for the argument whereby "Where a woman plays a greater role than accorded to her by the laws of nature, where she dominates, and dominates over men, the statistics reveal a high proportion of mental suffering in women. Wherever women generally rule, we encounter corrupt morals, and the entire woman's status to be improper"⁴⁸. This article fits in perfectly well with the 19th c. struggle with women's emancipation movements, as explicated by the above-referenced example, while also making use of advances in scientific research. One more assertion by Reich seems well-worth recalling, though. He rounded up his statement with the inference whereby "emancipation for women was extremely dangerous, and as disastrous as humiliation originating from personal enslavement"⁴⁹.

By way of a comment, only this conclusion springs to mind, i.e. apart from very biased perception of the impact of emancipation movements on a woman's mental disposition, the significance of the issue of their humiliation and exploitation was also acknowledged. An additional observation is also very much called for at this point. The above cited statements were not the only positions in this regard presented by the 19th c. physicians. The issue of neurological disorders was presented in a much broader context in a number of other publications. A question then arises, why such an extensive and rather boldly formulated text should appear in a popular-science periodical? The answer does not seem to be a simple one, either. It may nevertheless be reasonably assumed that the publishers had a rather limited editorial material at their disposal, a typical enough phenomenon at the time, so they reached out to the translations of materials of foreign origin, the ones available in a summarised form, or published as mere excerpts. And this was most likely the case with the article authored by Eduard Reich's, a German physician, psychologist, and psychiatrist.

In turn, the issue of other illnesses was usually highlighted in the context of broader topics related to health issues and prevention at large, and pertained both

⁴⁷ E. Reich, *O przyczynach i zapobieganiu cierpieniom nerwowym kobiet*, „Zdrowie” 1890, nr 1, s. 1–3; nr 2, s. 16–19; nr 7/8, s. 89–93.

⁴⁸ *Tenże*, nr 2, s. 17.

⁴⁹ *Tenże*, nr 7/8, s. 90.

to typically female disorders (e.g. infertility), and the ones affecting pretty much everyone (e.g. tuberculosis, skin conditions).

It is well-worth drawing attention to the texts aimed at specific professional groups. There were specific recommendations for washers and midwives, especially those working in strenuous conditions. The former were primarily exposed to harmful detergents, bleaches and contact with germs⁵⁰. Consequently, they were exposed to the hazard of contracting skin diseases and those affecting the respiratory system. The midwives were required to pay special attention to overall cleanliness of their hands, both prior to coming into contact with a pregnant woman, or the one already in labour, and right after finishing their duties. The principle of ever clean hands was meant to protect both women at the same time⁵¹.

Preconceptions, myths, and superstitions

As already mentioned, the health and hygiene prevention programme also embraced the fight against all sorts of preconceptions, myths, and superstitions. Many of them related to women directly, yet as a bona fide topic this appeared in the periodicals at issue sporadically only. The frequently cited editor of the “The Journal of Health” wrote in one of his pieces, e.g.

One hundred women have a craving to eat a hare dish in their pregnancy. When a perfectly shapely and healthy new-born baby then comes into the world, no one would ever recall the greatest misfortune that a hare might have done. But should a child be born with a cleft palate (popularly dubbed a harelip), its mother would inevitably go on musing whether during her pregnancy she might by chance have seen a hare somewhere, or had a hare dish served to her, or perhaps seen a man with a harelip⁵².

And then he rounded it all up with a touch of humour: “Be free from any anxiety, my caring ladies, for you have nothing to fear about your delicate foetus in terms of any undue bodily disfigurements at birth [...] even if you happen to have accidentally seen a mouse, rat, or a conjurer, or even a fierce bear”⁵³. In turn, one of the lady readers of “The Physician” cited an example whereby a local quack advised a woman patient that she should treat a “forming breast ulcer with the guts

⁵⁰ *Praczniki i choroby zakaźne*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 4, s. 95.

⁵¹ *Akuszarki*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 6, s. 130.

⁵² L. Lafontaine, *O brzemienności. O imaginacji kobiet w czasie brzemienności i o znakach urodzenia*, „Dziennik Zdrowia dla Wszystkich Stanów” 1801, nr 5, s. 211–212.

⁵³ Tamże, s. 214.

removed from a living male rabbit⁵⁴. The physicians also debunked yet another myth whereby water and frequent washing was supposed to be detrimental to the condition of a woman's hair⁵⁵.

Other

And finally, a few more things well-worth pointing out. The journals advised their readers on the foreign association movement for the protection of women's health, mainly of German origin, whose principal objective consisted in disseminating available knowledge on health, general prevention, and hygiene issues, mainly in the communities of industrial labourers. This was a clear encouragement to have the organizations of a similar kind established in Poland⁵⁶.

An important task of a popular-science periodical consisted in advising general public on the new arrivals on the publishing market, including those devoted to protecting women's health. "The Physician", for instance, published a short review of C.H. Stratz's book *The Beauty of a Female Body* (Warsaw 1904), translated by Edmund Biernacki. A highly popular publication presenting the woman's body both in a medical take and in an artistic one, as well in its sexual dimension. That book claimed credit for 14 editions in Germany, and was translated into a number of European languages⁵⁷.

The readers were also recommended another book, in the form of a brief review of *Marriage in terms of hygiene* (Płock 1904), by Mieczysław Themerson⁵⁸. Much wider commentary was warranted by the books authored by Izabela Moszczeńska's *What every mother should tell her adolescent daughter about* (Warsaw 1904); *Talking to children about the sensitive issues* (Warsaw 1904)⁵⁹. "Health's friend" comprised information on yet another book, i.e. *Hygiene of women and children*, authored by Gregorowicz, a journalist, which somehow failed to gain much recognition among the readers, though⁶⁰.

Women's position within a family and the prerogatives vested in them effectively made them responsible for overall health of all members of the household, which is why the recommendations on how to prepare meals, take care of children's hygiene, and care for the sick, were principally directed to them. The household itself also

⁵⁴ *Przyczynek do sprawy przesądów i zabobonów ludu wiejskiego*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 6, s. 139.

⁵⁵ K. Kochler, *Pielęgnowanie włosów*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 20, s. 252–253.

⁵⁶ *Kobiece towarzystwo ochrony zdrowia*, „Zdrowie” 1878, nr 22, s. 284.

⁵⁷ *Z piśmiennictwa*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 3, s. 69–70.

⁵⁸ *Z piśmiennictwa*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 14, s. 330–331.

⁵⁹ *Z piśmiennictwa*, „Lekarz” 1905, nr 21/22, s. 505–508.

⁶⁰ *Od Redakcji*, „Przyjaciel Zdrowia” 1861, nr 3, s. 1.

merited their attention, e.g. all the household appliances and keeping them clean at all times, as in the authors' view overall sanitary conditions, particularly in the kitchen, was quite alarming, hence plenty of advice and practical tips on how to "raise the level of requirements in terms of health and aesthetics"⁶¹. One of them, making a direct reference to the opinion espoused by English physicians, said: "My experience has led me to believe that all prospective progress in the domain of hygiene to a large extent depends on the assistance offered to us by women"⁶². This was particularly true of the fight against tuberculosis⁶³.

The above-referenced review of publications on women's health and hygiene, even though limited to popular-science journals only, goes to show these topics attracted much wider interest across the Polish lands within the period at issue. Physicians, believing that overall quality of life of Polish women was actually much worse than in the other developed countries, especially the women living in the countryside, pursued a scope of specifically targeted activities, on the one hand, the awareness-raising ones on the sheer scale of adversity in this regard, while on the other, they endeavoured to turn them into general prevention schemes. This does not mean their actions managed to gain an appreciable social resonance. They failed to do so, the fact readily corroborated by the physicians' express complaints, as published in the popular-science journals. If, on the other hand, we should assume that overall standard of living and individual financial standing exerted a certain impact on some behavioural paradigms and hygienic practices, then whatever the physicians postulated and promoted in this domain, actually stood any chance of being implemented among the affluent part of the population only.

Relative selectivity in taking up certain topics, lack of continuity, sometimes a one-off character in addressing certain issues, was principally due to the popular-science journals' rather short-term existence on the publishing market. After all, time that lapsed between the launch of the first one, i.e. "The Journal of Health for All Social Strata" and the establishment of another title spanned 60 years. Regardless of their "short presence", they played a significantly instrumental role in the quest for the nation's health status; this objective also well embraced within the patriotic endeavours of the activists representing the enslaved nation, in which the role of women, even though largely limited to the basic functions, i.e. procreation and overall responsibility for the condition of future generations, was highlighted in all publications at the time. The present paper is therefore intended as complementary to the researchers' findings to date.

⁶¹ W. Serkowska, *Kuchnia i gospodarstwo domowe. (Rady higieniczne)*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 19, s. 452–455.

⁶² *Znaczenie kobiet dla higieny*, „Zdrowie” 1879, nr 2, s. 24.

⁶³ W. K., *Współdział kobiet w walce z gruźlicą (według d-ra E. Vidala)*, „Lekarz” 1904, nr 22, s. 326; nr 23, s. 343; nr 24, s. 375.

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