

Archival Materials as A Source for Studying Detention Conditions and Child Mortality in the Kazakhstani Gulag Camps: A Case Study of Karlag

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Abstract

This article examines key aspects of the history of children in the Gulag. It provides insights into the archival funds and documents used for this study and offer a brief historiographical overview of the topic. Six categories of children who were in forced labour camps are identified, focusing on those who entered the camps in infancy alongside mothers convicted under “political” articles (including as members of the families of traitors to the motherland) or born to prisoner mothers. Drawing from documentary materials from the State Archives of the Russian Federation and the archives of the Karaganda corrective labour camps, the study clarifies the timeline, population, and conditions of children in Karlag. It outlines the reasons for the increase in the child population within Gulag camps, leading to the establishment of specialized infrastructure for children of imprisoned mothers in the early 1940s. The authors compared the conditions of detention for children of imprisoned mothers in infant homes and children of civilian workers in children’s homes. Extremely difficult conditions of detention for children of imprisoned mothers, extremely low levels of food and clothing allowances, and unsatisfactory arrangements for the baby’s home were noted. The study tracks the dynamics of infant homes, their resources, and healthcare levels in Karlag during the 1940s–1950s. Child mortality rates are analyzed by year, identifying causes, peak years, and conducting a comparative analysis of child mortality rates within the Gulag and Karlag. In conclusion, the study draws correlations between the dynamics of imprisoned children and the overall camp population.

Keywords: *Children of the Gulag, Children of Kazakhstani Labour Camps, Child Prisoners, Children of Karlag, Living Conditions for Children, Infant Mortality, Camp Childhood, Infant Homes.*

Introduction

In the Kazakhstani Gulag camps, children were also detained alongside adult prisoners. This phenomenon was not unprecedented; children were present in concentration camps across the Soviet Union, sometimes comprising a significant portion of the population. For instance, in August 1921, ten concentration camps in Tambov province housed 1,155 children under the age of five, with those under three accounting for a third of the prisoners (34%). These children were hostages from peasant families, taken during the suppression of the 1921 peasant uprising in Tambov province (Yakovleva, 2002, pp. 19–23). Unlike some regions, such as Tambov province, there was no recorded children’s contingent in the concentration camps of Kazakhstan during the 1920s. Instead, the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) of the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) ASSR operated four concentration camps in Akmola, Ural, Petropavlovsk, and Semipalatinsk provinces (Bastemiyev, 2002, p. 20). In October 1921, the total number of prisoners in these concentration camps was approximately 8,305, predominantly peasants, with some individuals convicted for “political offenses” (Panasenko, 1987, p. 14). One such camp was the Petropavlovsk Forced Labour Camp (referred to as a concentration camp in archival documents), established in May 1920. The majority of prisoners were peasants (72%), comprising 256 farmers (State Archive of the North Kazakhstan region [GASCO], F. 55, D. 1, C. 15, S. 3). However, children were not among the detainees in Kazakhstani concentration camps during the 1920s. The admission of children to the Gulag camps in Kazakhstan began in the mid-1930s.

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In this article, our objective is to determine the number of children, analyse the conditions of their detention, and assess mortality rates in Kazakhstani corrective labour camps.

Children detained in various facilities (corrective labour camps, labour colonies for minors, distribution centres, prisons, special settlements, etc.) can be categorized as follows: those who were sent to camps as infants alongside their mothers convicted under “political” charges (including family members of traitors to the Motherland); children born to incarcerated mothers within the camps; children convicted under Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR in 1926; “street children” left parentless, subjected to political repression, or affected by famine in the 1920s and 1930s; children convicted under “domestic” or criminal charges of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR; children of repressed peasant families exiled to Kazakhstan; and children of special settlers (from deported families). In this article, our research will focus on the first two categories of repressed children.

Materials and Methods

This article draws upon materials sourced from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), as well as three archives from the Republic of Kazakhstan: the Archive of the Department of the Committee for Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan (UKPS and SU GP RK) for the Karaganda region, the State Archive of the Karaganda region (GAKO), and the State Archive of the North Kazakhstan region (GASCO).

In GARF, materials on Gulag camps, including those on Kazakhstani corrective labour camps, are primarily found in fund R-9414 – the Main Directorate of Places of Detention (GUMZ) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, covering the period from 1930 to 1960 (often referenced as foundation 9414). Inventory 1 within this fund encompasses cases from 1930 to 1960, corresponding to the duration of the Gulag’s existence. The materials used in this study consist of correspondence between the Gulag and the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), the USSR Central Committee, allied and republican People’s Commissars, reports, official letters addressed to the People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs and his deputies, as well as summary statistical tables on prisoner morbidity and mortality in corrective labour camps, circulars, directives of the Gulag Sanitary Department, and more. Typically, archival files of this nature contain general statistical data, which we employed for comparative analyses of the number and mortality rates among child detainees within Gulag camps over various years, as well as statistical data specific to the Karaganda corrective labour camp. Additionally, materials directly related to children, such as records on children’s institutions and infant homes within the Gulag system, were accessed from this fund. These include monthly reports on child morbidity in corrective labour camps for specific years, as well as summary statistics on medical and childcare facilities in camps (such as nurseries and infant homes). More detailed information regarding camps in the Kazakh SSR, such as acts of acceptance and transfer for camps in Karaganda, Sandy, and Steppe, along with inspection reports, certificates, reviews, and correspondence concerning the operations of Karlag, are also contained within specific case files.

From the Kazakhstani archives, substantial material concerning camp children, their detention conditions, and monthly mortality rates for various years were used from the Archive of the UCPS and the SU GP of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Karaganda region. Fund 16 houses a collection of archival documents from the Karaganda corrective labour camp. The Karlag Foundation stands out for its comprehensive information on the camp’s history, prisoners, detention conditions, correspondence with higher authorities, and more. Fragments of previously unpublished documents were sourced from reports of the SANO (sanitary department) of the Gulag of the NKVD-Ministry of Internal Affairs, informational reports and records from the Karlag sanitary service, reports from the head of the sanitary department, and correspondence between the Karlag administration and the Gulag. During comparative analysis of statistics, certain discrepancies were noted between the archival data of the Gulag and those of Karlag, particularly concerning child mortality in the late 1930s and 1940s. Generally, figures in the Karlag archive tend to be somewhat or significantly higher than those in the summary data of Gulag materials. We posit that the primary sources, as discussed later in this article, offer more reliable information, and we trust that the Karlag health department accurately reported on child mortality in the camp. A significant challenge

encountered while working with archival materials from the 16 – Karlag foundation was the poor condition of many camp documents. Numerous sheets were affected by fungus, lacked organization or descriptions (inventories), were stored in piles, still not digitized, many sheets are missing/cut out from the files.

The article also uses materials from the State Archive of the Karaganda region (GACO), specifically from the 1171p foundation, which includes records from the Political Department of Karlag. Additionally, materials are sourced from the State Archive of the North Kazakhstan Region (GASCO), specifically from fund 55, which contains documents from the Akmola Provincial Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Deputies.

The research employed various methods including historicism, analogy, generalization, a systematic approach, as well as quantitative, problem-chronological, and interpretative methods. These methodologies collectively facilitated the organization of available materials on the research topic and enabled a historical reconstruction of the functioning of children's institutions (such as nurseries and infant homes) in Karlag, including the conditions of children's detention within them. The problem-chronological method served as the structural backbone of the article, while the comparative analysis method identified peak years of child mortality in Gulag and Karlag camps during the 1930s to 1950s. Generalization and analogy methods helped identify commonalities and distinctions in the conditions of children's detention, such as comparing children of imprisoned mothers in infant homes to children of civilians in nurseries. The comparative historical method distinguished between quantitative and qualitative changes over time and across different departments of the Karaganda corrective labour camp within the Gulag and Karlag contexts. Additionally, the historical and typological method aided in the systematic classification of mortality causes across various years. These methods, among others, contributed to the comprehensive exploration of the research problem in the article.

Discussion

One of the earliest historical and journalistic works addressing the issue of children as victims of repression within the Gulag system was A. I. Solzhenitsyn's book "The Gulag Archipelago", specifically in its chapters "Youngsters" and "Women in the Camp" (Solzhenitsyn, 2006). Concurrently, as part of a collaborative scientific effort between the International Foundation for Democracy and the Hoover Institution, the first collection of documents concerning repressed children in the Russian Federation was published under the title "Children of the Gulag" (2002). During this period, there was a growing interest in the study of childhood experiences in the labour camps within Russian historiography. Dissertations were defended on the topic (Shutkova, 2003), regional aspects of the issue were explored (Mikhailov, 2010), and various sources including memories and visual materials regarding children in corrective labour camps were examined (Favorskaya, 2012; Soegov, 2017).

In American and European historiography, the works of renowned researchers such as A. Applebaum (Applebaum, 2003; Applebaum, 2015; Applebaum, 2023) and C. Frierson (Frierson, 2010; Frierson, 2015) are notable. Additionally, articles by E. MacKinnon (MacKinnon, 2012; MacKinnon, 2019), K. Rooney (Rooney, 2012), and others contribute significantly to the understanding of this topic. European authors have continued to explore various aspects of childhood in the Gulag system, as evidenced by works such as those by Craveri (Craveri, 2014; Craveri & Losonczy, 2017). Furthermore, fiction and journalistic publications on this subject have emerged, including works by Better (Better, 2022), among others.

Western historiography diverges from Russian approaches in several aspects. European researchers predominantly rely on memoirs and interviews of former Gulag prisoners in their studies. They often use these first-hand accounts to delve into theoretical inquiries such as the development of coping mechanisms and survival strategies among children, the dynamics of motherhood and childhood within the camp environment, marital relationships among inmates, and the day-to-day existence of children in corrective labour camps. Conversely, Russian historiography places greater emphasis on archival materials, incorporating more statistical analysis. The works tend to employ historical, comparative, and descriptive methods as their primary analytical approaches (Saktaganova, Allaniyazov et al., 2022, p. 233).

The history of children's experiences in Kazakhstani corrective labour camps, particularly in Karlag, has not traditionally been a well-developed topic in Kazakhstani historiography. It began to receive attention only in the 1990s, primarily within the broader context of the camp system. Indirect references to this aspect can be found in the works of scholars such as D. A. Shaimukhanov and S. D. Shaimukhanova (Shaimukhanov & Shaimukhanova, 1997), S. D. Dilmanov (Dilmanov, 2002), A. R. Kukushkina (Kukushkina, 2008), among others. In 1999, the publication of lists containing 1,507 children born in Karlag marked a significant step in shedding light on this topic (Goretsky, 1999). It's worth noting that until the 2020s, there were few works by Kazakhstani researchers that specifically focused on the childhood experiences within the camps. However, in recent years, Karaganda scientists have undertaken research projects dedicated to this issue, resulting in a number of articles authored by Z. G. Saktaganova, T. K. Allaniyazova, K. K. Abdrakhmanova, and others (Saktaganova, Allaniyazov et al., 2022; Allaniyazov & Saktaganova, 2023).

Thus, a concise historiographical overview indicates that the examination of this issue is still in its nascent stages. It is noteworthy that the exploration of the "children of the Gulag" has not received adequate attention in both foreign and Kazakhstani historiography. The category of repressed children in Kazakhstani Gulag camps, overall, and specifically within Karlag, is emerging as a distinct area of study. Comprehensive and analytical scholarly works addressing this matter are still in progress.

Results

Statistics regarding the presence of children in Gulag camps during the initial decade of operation are notably sparse and largely unsystematic, primarily documented in archival records starting from the late 1930s. General statistical data on the number of children in Gulag camps prior to 1939 is not readily found in the GARF archives. This scarcity of materials can be attributed to the absence of separate accounting for children within the camps, leading to a lack of corresponding records. Children began to appear in the camps as early as the 1930s, following the issuance of a decree by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR on April 7, 1930, mandating the imprisonment of convicted mothers in corrective labour camps along with their children under 2 years old (Kokurin & Petrov, 2000, p. 67). Subsequently, with the decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars on August 1, 1933, the age limit for children accompanying incarcerated women was raised to 4 years, and the necessity of housing minors separately from adults was emphasized (Kokurin & Petrov, 2000, p. 7–9). However, it wasn't until the end of 1937 that the Gulag's sanitary department began enforcing rigorous reporting on the 'birth rate, morbidity, and mortality of the child population,' as well as the operations of children's institutions. On December 25, 1937, the Gulag sanitary department issued an instruction emphasizing the importance of accounting for the presence and mortality of children in corrective labour camps (State Archive of the Russian Federation [GARF], F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 2753, S. 19).

Based on the records from the R-9414 foundation (Main Directorate of Places of Detention of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR) at the State Archive of the Russian Federation, it is documented that on January 1, 1939, there were 15,010 children and adolescents in NKVD camps. Among them, 759 (5.1%) were children under 16 years old, while 14,251 (94.9%) were minors aged 16 to 18 years old. By October 1, 1939, these numbers had decreased to 357 (4%) and 8,568 (96%) respectively, totalling 8,925 children (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1140, S. 190, 213). Moving forward to March 1, 1940, the count of Gulag prisoners under the age of 18 had risen to 16,133, representing 1.2% of the total camp population. This indicates a notable decrease in the number of children and minors in Gulag camps by 1.7 times in 1939, followed by an increase of 1.8 times in 1940. It is hypothesized that the sharp decrease in the children's camp population in 1939 could be attributed to the high mortality rates experienced in the NKVD camps during 1938, which marked the peak year of mortality in the Gulag between 1934 and 1939, with a mortality rate reaching 10%. Children, along with the elderly and the disabled, were among the most vulnerable groups in the camp system. Additionally, the year 1939 saw a phenomenon known as the "reverse flow", marked by a significant increase in the release of prisoners from camps, with over 327.4 thousand prisoners discharged. It is plausible that among this cohort, there existed a small percentage of children; however, quantitative data regarding released children are unavailable.

Children of imprisoned mothers began to be present in Kazakhstani camps from the mid-1930s onward. Records indicate that women with young children started entering the Karaganda corrective labour camp towards the end of 1935 (Allaniyazov & Saktaganova, 2022, p. 129). Information detailing this occurrence is documented within the Karlag archive. In a letter dated January 9, 1936, the head of the Linnik camp noted the unsatisfactory conditions for infants, though the exact number of children admitted to Karlag at that time remains undisclosed. The letter describes the children's condition as "skinny and pale", attributed to the irregular delivery of quality milk and cereals, and the lack of household and sanitary supervision in the children's kitchen. Medical attention for the children was reported to be infrequent (Archive of the Department of the Committee for Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan [Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region], F. 16, D. 7, C. 157, S. 69). Subsequently, the children's presence in the corrective labour camp increased following the adoption of a resolution by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (b) on July 5, 1937. This resolution mandated the imprisonment in camps for 5–8 years of all family members of individuals deemed traitors to the motherland.

As of January 1, 1938, there were 570 children in Karlag, consisting of 7 (1.2%) children under 17 years old and 563 (98.8%) teenagers aged 16 to 18 years old (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1139, S. 176). By April, the number of minors aged 16 to 18 years old had increased to 584, but by October 1938, it had decreased to 435, representing 2.3% of the total population of this age group among Gulag prisoners (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1139, S. 176). Moving forward to April 1, 1939, there were 441 juvenile prisoners in Karlag, among whom 57 (13%) were under 16 years old and 384 (87%) were aged 16 to 18 years old. This group included 59 (13.4%) girls and 382 (86.6%) boys. Regarding the types of crimes for which they were convicted, the breakdown is as follows: 22 (5%) for counterrevolutionary crimes, 71 (16%) against the government, including 3 (0.7%) for banditry, 1 (0.2%) for official crimes, 30 for crimes against persons, 148 for property crimes, 151 as socially harmful and socially dangerous elements, and 18 for other offenses. Notably, almost 40% of minors were categorized as 'political' prisoners, being convicted for counterrevolutionary crimes, offenses against the government, or identified as socially harmful or dangerous elements. By July 1, 1939, the number of minors in the Karaganda corrective labour camp had decreased to 231, comprising 15 (6.5%) under 16 years old and 216 (93.5%) aged 16 to 18 years old (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1140, S. 159).

On December 16, 1938, a significant increase in the mortality rate among the children of imprisoned mothers was recorded in Karlag, marking the first peak year of deaths in Gulag camps, particularly among children. Among the 514 children in the camp, 98 children (19% of the total child population) died within a span of two months (September-October) in 1938. The number of children who died during this period was 1.5 times higher than the number of deaths recorded in the same two months in 1941, where 63 children passed away. Notably, 50% of the children died from pneumonia. Reports attribute the high mortality rate from pneumonia to extremely unsatisfactory medical treatment, delayed hospitalization, and inadequate preventive measures in nurseries, leading to a high incidence of colds and subsequent lung complications (State archive of the Karaganda region [GAKO], F. 1171, D. 1, C. 13, S. 61). Various archival documents present conflicting figures regarding the total number of children who died in the camp in 1939. Some records indicate 114 deaths (GAKO, F. 1171, D. 1, C. 13, S. 61), while others report 156 deaths in the first two quarters of 1939, with 40 in January, 33 in February, 35 in March, 35 in April, and 13 in May (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 6). While determining the precise figure is challenging, it is unlikely that the Karlag sanitary department would overstate the number of children's deaths in the camp. Hence, we believe that the latest data, indicating 156 deaths in the first five months of 1939, is likely closer to reality.

The documents of the Karlag office contain materials on the examination of children's institutions. The inspection of nurseries revealed alarming conditions in the detention facilities for children. On January 1, 1939, there were 356 children, with 70% of them under the age of one year. By July 1, 1939, the number had risen to 505, with 480 of them accommodated in nurseries, while the remainder were quarantined in Karabas. The documents reveal appalling conditions in the nurseries, describing them as having "extremely inadequate laundry facilities and dryers, insufficiently spacious and poorly designed for the laundry workload. The small kitchens were ill-equipped, with cold corridors and feeding areas within the buildings.

Moreover, there was a complete absence of bathrobes for nursing mothers, and children rarely had outdoor activities, except for a small percentage permitted in the Central Industrial Garden and Samara camp department. Additionally, fruits and vitamin juices were notably absent from the children's diet.

The laundry facility is small, and there are only six laundresses who work in two shifts. Unfortunately, the nursery fails to provide clean linen as the linen is unwashed, with remnants of children's faeces found on the washed linen. Furthermore, the dryer is undersized, leading to delayed drying of linen, especially blankets. The dairy kitchen, although housed in a 4-metre room, lacks essential facilities. Prepared mixtures are stored in pots and transferred to litter bottles before being poured into variously shaped small bottles upon delivery to the buildings. The amount consumed by the child is determined by visual estimation. While the bottles are washed with hot water, they are not sterilized" (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5). "The complementary feeding of children was carried out in the ward by a nanny, and for one nanny there were from 13 to 18 children requiring complementary feeding. Not only crawling babies received complementary foods, but also children from 1 to 6 months old. Complementary feeding lasted in the ward for the entire break between feedings, as a result, up to 50% of children did not receive a normal break between feedings, on the one hand, infants had excessive starvation and on the other, overfeed". The reports wrote that "the children's nutrition was good, but the menu was monotonous" and at the same time noted "a completely insufficient supply of dried fruits, eggs and a complete lack of fruits and vitamin fruit juices, which carrot juice cannot completely replace. In 1938, 1970 rubles were underspent on food at the expense of eggs and fruits, which were not replaced by other types of food" (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5). Therefore, the statement about "good baby food" in corrective labour camps raises deep doubts, considering the fact that with insufficient supply (as written in the same survey), the management also underspent funds by 1970 rubles, and the menu lacked meat necessary for the full growth of the child's body (this is also stated in the document), eggs, fruits, fermented dairy products, etc.

"The places for feeding babies in the nursery are cold, the doors from the room went directly outdoors, two doors opened one against the other, and when the door was opened, a puff of cold air rushed into the feeder. The feeding places are small, they could normally accommodate 10–15 mothers, and 20–25 women fed at the same time. The feeding places are equipped with low benches, which were not enough, so there were daily quarrels and fights between mothers over space" (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5). It was noted that "the general condition of children in the nursery is unsatisfactory. There are no healthy guys. There is whooping cough, chicken pox, and influenza, which cause complications in the lungs. All children suffer from all kinds of skin diseases to one degree or another, a large percentage of the disease. We consider the main causes of skin diseases to be: the presence of skin diseases in mothers; a nursing mother unwraps the child during feeding and, in the absence of dressing gowns, puts him on dirty linen, dirty pea jacket; dirty unwashed linen. The presence of a large percentage of lung diseases was attributed to sharp temperature fluctuations between the ward (18–23°), the corridor (8–10°) and the feeder, given that every mother in the feeder necessarily unwrapped her child" (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5). With such temperature contrasts (from 8 to 23°) in one room, the health and life of infants were in great danger, which led to mass deaths of babies.

The main causes of a large percentage of deaths were mentioned in the reports: 1) the birth rate of weakened children, it reached 75% (weight from 2000 to 3000 grams); 2) a large concentration of children in a small area, lack of isolation between buildings (shared kitchen, staff and mothers walking), respectively, rapid transfer of infection from one building to another; 3) "nurseries were essentially not a nursery, but a poorly equipped children's hospital, of the equipment there was only one quartz lamp and one blue, and with only one plug, the need for electricity was not provided. There were no separate rooms for manipulation, medical examination, weighing in the buildings, there was a lack of baby scales (there were only three scales for 4 buildings and a hospital)". 4) 15% of the new-borns were children with congenital syphilis. 5) Early transfer of children to complementary foods due to the lack of milk from the nursing mother (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5).

“The concentration of a large number of children in one territory (356) in the presence of a common laundry, kitchen, staff, led to the constant presence of any infection (since April, for example, whooping cough). Currently, there are whooping cough and chickenpox. Lack of linen, lack of laundry facilities, dryers, contributed to the development of skin diseases (pemphigus). Cold corridors, feeding areas gave colds for weakened children. Infections in the nursery were brought by mothers (flu, stomatitis, cutaneous) living in common crowded barracks; medical supervision of mothers was insufficient, mothers were not provided with underwear, dresses, shoes. Child care is insufficient, there are not enough qualified nurses, babysitters feed the children, they clean up after the children; nurses are not present in the feeders when feeding children with mothers” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 7, C. 62, S. 3–5). The situation with child mortality in the Karaganda corrective labour camp in 1938 – early 1939 was so terrifying that the sanitary department of the Gulag of the NKVD conducted an examination and found that the detention of children of prisoners in children’s institutions of the Karlag was “in completely unacceptable conditions”. On May 8, 1939, the order on the Main Directorate of corrective labour camps of the NKVD of the USSR No. 163 “On the shortcomings of the work of children’s institutions of the Karaganda camp of the NKVD of the USSR” was adopted. It noted that “the buildings of children’s institutions were insufficiently insulated, fuel was delivered intermittently, which led to colds of children. There were not enough vitamin-containing foods in the children’s diet. The imprisoned mothers and pregnant women were kept extremely crowded in damp, unsettled barracks and were insufficiently provided with linen and bedding. Extremely low discipline was observed among the junior staff of the nursery and among the imprisoned mothers. Preventive work and child care were completely unsatisfactory, as a result of which there was an increased incidence among children, and there were a significant number of children with poor physical development” (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 22, S. 151). The situation was even worse in infant homes, since there were children of civilians in the nursery, while the children of mothers of prisoners were in infant homes. Moreover, this situation was in almost all camps of the NKVD.

An increase in the number of children of prisoners was observed in Karlag from mid-1939 to early 1940. Firstly, there was a surge in the birth rate among incarcerated mothers, resulting in the birth of 282 children within the corrective labour camps over the span of 10 months in 1939 (January-October). Secondly, 369 women with children arrived in Karlag from other camps and colonies (Hedeler & Stark, 2007, p. 123). Additionally, in the subsequent years of 1940–1941, a further 1,048 children were born. The influx of children posed certain challenges for the camp management, which were not adequately addressed at the local level.

The sharp growth of the children’s contingent in the corrective labour camps led to the problem of creating a special infrastructure for the children of incarcerated mothers, it became acute in the early 1940s (Better, 2002, p. 366–367). In his report dated April 19, 1941, the head of the Gulag V. Nasedkin informed the leadership of the NKVD of L. Beria: “In camps, colonies and prisons of the NKVD of the USSR, there are 12,000 children under the age of 4 and 8,500 pregnant women, of whom 3,000 are in the last month of pregnancy. Of this number, only 8,000 children are housed in specially organized children’s institutions at the NKVD corrective labour camps, the rest are held in prison cells and barracks together with their imprisoned parents.” The issue of the need to finance and create children’s institutions of the Gulag was raised (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1p, C. 42, S. 26–27).

In March 1940, there were 90 infant homes in the Gulag system, in which there were 4,595 children whose mothers were prisoners (Zemskov, 1991). From January 1, 1948 to March 1, 1949, the number of convicted women with children increased again by almost a third (by 38%) and pregnant women by almost 2 times. Women with children and pregnant women accounted for 6.3% of the total number of female prisoners held in camps and colonies (Omelchenko, 2014, p. 44–45).

With the outbreak of the war, nutrition, conditions of detention, medical care, etc. deteriorated sharply again, which led to a second jump in the infant mortality rate in 1942–1943. The conditions of detention for children in infant homes were the most challenging across all camps, and the death rate was appalling. In 1941–1944, 924 children died, including 202 (21.8%) in 1941, and the figures differ in different sources – the archival files of the Karlag and Gulag sanitary departments. In 1942, 314 (34%) children died, in 1943

– 226 (24.5%), in 1944 – 182 (19.7%) (Dilmanov, 2002, p. 169). The maximum number of child deaths occurred in 1942 – one in three children died, and in 1943 – one in four of the children of Karlag. Mortality among children of imprisoned mothers in Karlag in January 1944 it was 3%, in February – 1%, in March – 1.5% (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 2796, S. 186).

In the 1940s, the child population of prisoners continued to grow in Karlag: on January 1, 1941, there were 865 children of imprisoned mothers, in 1942 – 1077, 1943 – 765. During 1942–1943, 17 children's institutions were organized in the Karlag centre and camp units and on January 1, 1944 there were: 1 nursery with 119 children, 19 kindergartens with 632 children, 1 playground with 72 children, 1 children's tuberculosis sanatorium with 25 children. In these children's institutions there were children of civilians and militarized guard. 5 infant homes were created for 759 children of incarcerated mothers (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 447, S. 148).

Analysing the infant mortality rate in Karlag in 1943 (226 children of imprisoned mothers died), the main causes of mortality are named in the documents of the sanitary department, but some variants of the “explanation” raise questions:

“1. Children who arrived with external prisoner transports are mostly atrophic, hypotrophic and tuberculosis patients, so, out of 91 children who arrived from other camps and prisons to the infant home, medical and sanitary department, etc., 57 children died or 62% of the number of arrivals, despite all the measures taken for care, nutrition and treatment them” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 447, S. 148). It is difficult to agree with the statement “*despite all the measures taken for their care, nutrition and treatment*”, since the “measures taken” could not be satisfactory. The second reason, stated next, refutes the claim that these measures could be sufficient for the treatment and recovery of sick, exhausted children.

“2. Insufficient caloric intake of pregnant women and mothers (hospital meals – 1926 cal.), as well as the inability to create good living conditions for them due to the overcrowding of the camp's housing stock and a sharp shortage of material supplies leads to the fact that children are born, overwhelmingly, weighing up to 3 kg. And only a small percentage of mothers are able to feed their babies with breast milk after childbirth, and about 80% of mothers do not have milk after childbirth. As a result, these children switch to artificial feeding and give a large percentage of hypotrophy, atrophy and high mortality. Thus, out of 120 births in the medical and sanitary department in 1943, children with a weight of up to 2.5 kg – 50%, up to 3 kg – 40%, above 3 kg – 10% were born from imprisoned mothers. And of all these mothers, only 20% were able to feed their babies with breast milk. Of the 135 babies who died in the medical and sanitary department of infant's home, 118 (87.4%) children were under the age of 1 year, of which 114 (84.4%) children were on artificial and mixed feeding” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 447, S. 148).

3. In 1943, a severe influenza outbreak resulted in significant complications and a high mortality rate among the aforementioned group of weakened children. Specifically, 67 out of 135 children from the medical and sanitary department in the infant home succumbed to influenza and its complications, accounting for 49.6% of the total.

4. Of the same 135 children, 48 (35.5%) children died of pulmonary tuberculosis, mainly from among the transported children. Mortality is mainly due to two infant homes – Churbai-Nurinsky and medical and sanitary department, receiving transported children and new-born children: 188 (83.2%) of 226 children died in these two infant homes. The Samara infant home, for example, had no deaths in 1943, Bidaik – 18, Akmola – 6 (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 447, S. 148).

The various causes of death mentioned above are interconnected: severe cold in the barracks, inadequate heating, shortages of material supplies, poor nutrition, and lack of basic conditions for infant care collectively deprived new-borns of any chance of survival.

Table 1. Mortality Among the Karlag Children's Contingent In 1943 (Archive of the UCPS And SU GP RK in the Karaganda Region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 13, S. 59).

Children's contingent	in total		up to 1 year		from 1 year old up to 3 years old		from 3 years old to 8 years old	
	of children	%	of children	%	of children	%	of children	%
Children of the civilian staff	50	20.3%	25	11.6%	20	37%	5	83.3%
Children of incarcerated mothers	196	79.7%	191	88.4%	34	63%	1	16.7%
In total	246	100%	216	100%	54	100%	6	100%

The materials in table 1 make it possible to compare the proportion of mortality of children of incarcerated mothers and children of civilians. In 1943, almost 80% of deaths occurred in the children of mothers of prisoners, that is, the children of imprisoned mothers died 4 times more than those of civilians. The main trends in mortality had not changed, as in previous years, almost 85% of deaths fell on children of incarcerated mothers under 1 year old and 63% – from 1 to 3 years old.

Thus, a severe influenza infection in 1943 caused severe complications and a high mortality rate among the weakened contingent of children. Deaths from tuberculosis fell mainly on children arriving with external prisoner transports (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 26, C. 13, S. 150).

In the post-war years, the situation did not improve dramatically. The number of children and pregnant women in Gulag camps and colonies from 1947 to 1953 can be tracked in Table 2.

Table 2. The Number of Children of Imprisoned Women and Pregnant Women in Gulag Camps and Colonies on January 1 of Each Year.

Years	Number of children female prisoners		Number of pregnant women	
	People	%	People	%
1947	14630	100%	6779	100
1948	10217	69.8%	4588	67.7%
1949	22815	155.9%	9310	137.3%
1950	19260	131.6%	11950	176.3%
1951	14713	100.5%	6888	101.6%
1952	28219	192.8%	11096	163.7%
1953	35505	242.7%	6286	92.7%

Note: calculated by the author according to published data (Zemskov, 1991)

The third peak in mortality occurred in 1947. Surprisingly, despite 1947 not being the most challenging year for prisoners (with a death rate in corrective labour camps around 4.4%), it saw nearly every second child perish. The peak years of mortality in the Gulag were 1942 and 1943, with mortality rates of 17.5% and 16.9%, respectively. However, unlike the adult population, the infant mortality rate had become alarming once again. In 1947, for every thousand children in Gulag infant homes, the death rate was 409 children (40.9%). Subsequently, in 1948, it decreased to 309 (30.9%), followed by 200 (20%) in 1949, 159 (15.9%) in 1950, 109 (10.9%) in 1951, 81 (8.1%) in 1952, and 46 (4.6%) in 1953 (Zemskov, 1991). This infant mortality curve illustrates the dire situation in infant homes in 1947 and the subsequent decrease in mortality over seven years (from 1947 to 1953) by almost nine times, from 40.6% to 4.6%. This indicates some improvement in the living conditions of children in camps during the 1950s.

In 1949, Lieutenant Colonel Slyusarenko, Deputy head of the Karlag Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, contacted the Main Directorate and gave a description of the state of children's institutions. "There

is a very difficult situation in the Karlag of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the placement of children of imprisoned mothers. The total area in the Infant Homes, including feeders, dryers, corridors, etc. the utility rooms are only 2600 sq. m., while according to the order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR No. 0190 they should be in bedrooms for 1 child of 4 sq. m., therefore, for 960 children staying with us, we should have 3840 sq. m. in the bedrooms. As a result of a sharp lack of living space in the Infant Homes, children are placed in completely unacceptable crowding: in the Akmola and Samara departments, infants are placed 2–3 and even 4 children in one crib. On average, we have no more than 1.6 sq. m. in the bedrooms. This had a harmful effect on the physical condition and development of children, weakened their bodies, made them susceptible to various diseases, especially if we take into account that a significant part of children, especially younger ones, are deprived of the opportunity to be outdoors with the onset of winter due to the lack of sleeping bags and warm clothes, the tailoring of which is not made due to the lack of footage and cotton wool.

An important reason contributing to the spread of diseases and the weakening of children was the extreme lack of underwear, especially diapers, sheets, etc. We feel an extreme need to send at least 3–4 paediatricians to us to staff our Infant Homes, since due to the lack of paediatricians, we are forced to use doctors of other specialties in Infant Homes who cannot provide appropriate care for children. We have already applied to the Gulag Sanitation Department for the secondment of 3–4 paediatricians to us, but our request has not yet been satisfied. I consider it necessary to inform you that the situation with the placement of children is getting worse every day, as the number of children is increasing and will continue to increase if we have over 350 pregnant women from among the prisoners.

Given the extreme overcrowding of our Infant Homes, we were forced to leave newly born children with their mothers in departments without Infant Homes, in separate sections of common residential barracks, which, of course, also does not contribute to favourable conditions for their maintenance and development. Without the help of the Gulag, we will not be able to resolve positively the issue of the normal placement of children, and therefore I urge you to help us in this matter” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 4, C. 31, S. 15).

The head of the sanitary department of the Karlag also addresses directly to the leadership of the Gulag, wanting to improve the conditions of detention of children. “In addition to the materials we sent earlier about the problems in our infant Homes with the placement of children (large crowding), lack of soft, hard equipment, etc., I consider it necessary to inform you once again about the extremely difficult situation in our Infant Homes. For example, the Infant homes of the Bidaik and Samara departments, with 120–180 children, do not have fuel reserves, are provided by daily “delivery”, which is not realistic in conditions of exceptionally high frosts, snowstorms and blizzards, and fuel is delivered with great interruptions. As a result, during the days of blizzards in the children’s rooms in the Infant House of the Bidaik department, the air temperature was only +4°C, due to lack of fuel, children’s underwear and diapers are washed poorly and do not boil, in the presence of a large number of pustular skin diseases and chronic diseases of the gastrointestinal tract among children.

Due to the low temperature in the barracks for mothers, influenza broke out among them, which was transferred to the Infant Home and led to high mortality among children from severe post-flu complications. Recently, infectious conjunctivitis had spread among children, especially in the Toparsk Infant Home; a large number of skin diseases (pustular) occur among children, mainly due to a lack of linen and diapers, poor-quality washing due to lack of fuel... It should also be pointed out that due to lack of fuel during the days of snowstorms, cooking for nursing mothers was delayed and not provided (Bidaik department). All of the above facts lead to a sharp weakening of the physical condition of children, a high morbidity and mortality rate among them. I have repeatedly informed the camp management about this situation, but there are no improvements” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 4, C. 31, S. 16).

A 1950 document from the Karlag archive fund demonstrates the state of the camp’s children’s institutions. “The general sanitary condition of the infant Homes, built of mudbrick in 1936–1938 and never thoroughly

repaired, is unsatisfactory; wooden parts in many wards are affected by fungus; walls, roofs require extensive repairs; floors, window frames, etc. need painting. Infant homes are designed to accommodate a maximum of 500 children, based on the norm of 4 sq.m. per child, according to the order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs No. 0190. In fact, on February 1, 1950, there were 708 children and 618 pregnant imprisoned women. This means that in the next three to four months, the number of children in our infant homes will exceed one thousand people, and there will be no more than 100–110 people who will be transferred to children's institutions of the Ministry of Health. Thus, there is a question of building additional buildings for the children of incarcerated mothers, or of transferring some children under the age of 2 who are not suitable for transfer to relatives and to children's institutions of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education to another camp with facilities for their detention. It is especially necessary to take into account that now in our infant homes there are only children under two years old, i.e. the most vulnerable age, who require special attention to themselves according to the conditions of detention.

In pursuance of the decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of May 29, 1949 on the transfer of children of incarcerated mothers over the age of 2 to be raised by their next of kin or in children's institutions of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, we transferred 88 children to relatives and 185 children to children's institutions of the Ministry of Health and Education, however, the situation with the placement of children continues to be difficult, getting worse every month. As of October 1, 1950, there were only 1,221 children in Infant Homes and outside of Infant Homes in camp units. The big drawbacks of the work of our Infant Homes are understaffed: there are not enough 14 doctors, over 80 volunteer teachers and other medical workers" (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 6, C. 44, S. 16).

In 1951, there were 5 infant homes for 600 children in Karlag, located in the Samara, Dzhartass, Topar, Bidaik and Akmola departments. As of July 1, 1951, there were 538 children in these infant homes, and 416 pregnant women among the prisoners were registered for the same date. In the first days of July, 96 pregnant prisoners arrived from outside (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 451, S. 27). Such a stable situation with a high birth rate testified to the weak effectiveness of measures taken by the Karlag administration to tighten conditions conducive to contacts between male and female prisoners.

Living conditions remained difficult, and in 10 months of 1952, 1,486 cases of primary diseases appeared for the average monthly number of children – 408 people. Considering that 33 children died during the same period (or 8.1% of the total), it turns out that, on average, during this period, each child suffered from various diseases four times. Dysentery and dyspepsia were the leading causes of death (45.5%), as well as pneumonia (30.2%).

By the early 1950s, all the infant homes of the Karlag were in dire need of major repairs, which had not yet begun in the Bidaik and Samara departments, and was very slow in the Dzhartass, Topar and Akmola departments. The Infant homes were provided with a soft equipment satisfactorily, there was not enough solid inventory. There were no visual aids, toys, playpens, changing tables, scales for weighing children, tables, bedside tables. The Infant homes were insufficiently provided with personnel, especially medical ones. At least 10 paediatricians and up to 30 average medical workers were required. As a result of the acute shortage of doctors and medical workers, the situation with the provision of medical care to children remained extremely critical, which did not contribute to reducing the number of diseases and deaths among the Karlag children's contingent. Due to the lack of transport from the warehouse of the pharmacy base, medicines were delivered untimely, which slowed down the treatment of sick children and also led to a fatal outcome (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 451, S. 47 reverse side).

Since 1953, there had been a gradual decrease in the number of children in Gulag camps in connection with the 1953 amnesty, and accordingly the number of children's institutions (infant homes) is decreasing. It is possible to trace these changes according to Table 3, and it is possible to trace the correlation between the number of infant homes and the number of children of mothers imprisoned in corrective labour camps. If in 1953, on average, there were 153.7 children of incarcerated mothers per 1 infant home, then in 1956, when the "camp production complex degrades" (Okhotin & Roginsky, 1998, p. 62), both the camp

contingent as a whole in the Gulag and the number of children of incarcerated mothers decreased: for 1 house of a prisoner, there were The average is 27.1 children (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 ad, C. 627, S. 63).

Table 3. Infant Homes in The Gulag In 1953–1956

(GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 Ad, C. 627, S. 63).

As of	Number of Infant homes		Number of children		Number of children per 1 infant home on average
	units	%	People	%	
March 1, 1953	231	100%	35505	100	153.7
January 1, 1954	75	32.5%	3698	10.4%	49.3
April 1, 1955	79	34.2%	7496	21%	94.9
January 1, 1956	49	21.2%	1332	3.7%	27.1

Table 4. Morbidity And Mortality in Infant Homes In 1957

(GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 Ad, C. 627, S. 63)

years	Number of past children	The average headcount of children per year	% of the dead on the average headcount	Deaths by diagnosis				
				Pneumonia	dysentery	Simple dyspepsia	Toxic dyspepsia	tuberculosis
1953	44797	13674	4.58%	44%	10.5%	–	6.5%	9%
1954	12610	6457	4.67%	27.1%	12.5%	19.5%	–	4.3%
1955	7701	5431	3.36%	49.1%	8.7%	10.9%	–	2.7%

According to table 4, we can trace a gradual trend towards a decrease in the average number of children and the percentage of children who died. In 1955, 4,788 children arrived, 10,614 left, and 183 children died. 6079 children were born in corrective labour camps in 1953, 6535 in 1954, 2953 in 1955 (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 ad, C. 627, S. 63).

In 1953, on 23 camps of the Karaganda corrective labour camp with 101 camp sites, there were infant homes: on March 15 – 8, on July 15 – 4; children's isolators, respectively – 6 and 2; maternity wards – 6 and 3 (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 ad, C. 254, S. 272). In total, thus, by the beginning of 1954, there were about 800–850 places in the six infant homes of the Karlag. Within two years (from 1952 to 1954), there was a slight decrease in the number of infant homes: from 7 to 6 and, accordingly, places in them decreased from 1,025 to 850. This decrease indicated that by this time the trend of reducing the number of children in prison had begun, which noticeably increased over the following year. So, in 1955, only two infant homes with a total of 375 places remained for the maintenance of children of imprisoned mothers. As of October 8, 1955, there were only 125 children in two infant homes (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 240, S. 15). The Gulag information on the work on medical and sanitary services for prisoners noted that in 1956 there were 46 infant homes for the children of female prisoners, in which 4,292 children were kept and in addition there were 1,398 pregnant women (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 2889, S. 7).

In 1957, there was one infant home in Karlag, located in the Dzhartass department, with a capacity of 350 people. Additionally, there were 70 pregnant women registered in Karlag (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 ad, C. 630, S. 28–29). At the beginning of the second half of 1957, there were 320 children in Karlag. Of these, 147 children arrived in the first half of the year, with 25 coming from prisons and 122 born in the camp. The total number of children decreased to 202 by the end of the period, including those who had left or deceased. By the end of the second half of the year, there were a total of 265 children, with 172 under the age of one and 93 between one and two years old. Additionally, 62 pregnant women were registered (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1 ad, C. 631, S. 43).

Thus, the dynamics of the number of infant homes in Karlag in the 1940s – 1950s looks as follows: 1941–1951 – 5, 1952 – 7, 1954 – 6, 1955 – 2, in 1957 – 1. Summarizing the above, It is worth noting that Karlag had a wide network of children’s camp institutions, including infant homes, the growth dynamics of which was increasing from the early 1940s until the mid-1950s, which was due to the growth of the camp’s structural units and, accordingly, the camp contingent, represented both by adults and children, including those born in prison. The staff of the infant homes in Karlag, according to the staffing table, consisted of officers (3.9%), civilians (40.6%) and prisoners (55.4%), that is, mainly (more than 96%) from former convicts or prisoners. The number of staff in a particular infant home depended on the number of children they contained (Allaniyazov & Saktaganova, 2022, p. 140).

Between 1952 and 1954, there was a noticeable decrease in the overall number of children’s institutions, although the number of children’s homes saw only a slight decrease during this period. By 1955, the number of infant homes decreased significantly, by threefold, from 6 to 2. This decline was attributed to both a reduction in the number of children born in captivity and the transfer of children of prisoners to orphanages or their placement with relatives (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 631, S. 132–133).

In addition to Karlag, there was a small contingent of children in other camps, but information about children from other Kazakh camps is extremely limited (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1870, S. 30). On October 1, 1938, there were 14 minors from 16 to 18 years old in the Provrinsky corrective labour camp (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1140, S. 11).

In the Steppe camp (Special Camp No. 4) “on September 30, 1949, 78 children of imprisoned mothers were held, 70 of them under one year old, 5 from one to two years old, 3 from two to three years old. The condition of the children was quite satisfactory. There were two patients (chickenpox and occlusive diathesis). In 8 months of this year, 1 child died from pylorospasm (premature). The infant home was located in the area of department No. 3 in an adapted barrack. There were only 1.5 sq. m. of usable living space per 1 child. Solid inventory was provided by 50%, there are no children’s scales and toys. Soft equipment was fully provided, with the exception of medical gowns for nursing mothers. There were no sleeping bags or quilts. There was a dairy kitchen at the infant home, where milk mixtures were prepared under the guidance of a nurse. There were no interruptions in the supply of milk and dietary cereals. Baby clothes were washed in a separate laundry room, there was no dryer.

The paediatrician-doctor was from the prisoners. Children had been vaccinated against smallpox, diphtheria and Calmette vaccinations were not carried out. The maternity ward, located in the 3rd camp department, did not have an antepartum waiting room, an isolation ward and a children’s room. Pregnant and nursing mothers were in a separate section, bedding was provided, they were used mainly for light jobs. Additional meals were received regularly. Milk was given out once every two days (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1859, S. 109). There were 26 children of incarcerated mothers in camp department No. 2, who, due to the lack of room for an infant home, are kept together with mothers and pregnant women in the same section, which created conditions for morbidity among children (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1859, S. 109). There was an urgent need for specialist doctors, the shortage amounted to 39 people. Paramedics were mainly used in the positions of medical units (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 1870, S. 30).

In the Sandy camp (special camp No. 8), an infant house for the children of prisoners was organized in the 9th camp department in the village of Spassk outside the general women’s zone. On April 1, 1953, 47 children aged 6 months to 3 years were kept in the infant home. There were no deaths among children in the 1st quarter. Children are provided with the necessary equipment, linen, outerwear and bedding in sufficient quantities. A minimum assortment of products was needed for their nutrition: rice, semolina, fresh meat, vegetables, potatoes, etc. In addition, the children received whole milk, sour cream and butter at the expense of the camp’s subsidiary farm (GARF, F. R-9414, D. 1, C. 2611, S. 27). In the Infant home of the Sand Camp, the usable area was 355 sq. m, including the bedroom area of 182 sq. m. There were 6.8 sq. m. per 1 child, and 3.8 sq. m. of usable area in the bedrooms. Totally there were 47 children in infant homes in the Sandy camp. Of these, 1 person was from 0 to 6 months old, from 6 months to 1 year – 6, from 1 year to 2 years – 27, from 2 to 3 years – 11, over 3 years – 2 people. During the reporting period,

only 0 children arrived, 5 children left, and they were transferred to the upbringing of relatives” (Archive of the UCPS and SU GP RK in the Karaganda region, F. 16, D. 1, C. 3, S. 18).

Conclusion

The primary trend of the punitive policy of the Soviet government in the 1930s and 1950s was the escalation of repression and the reinforcement of the camp system, including concerning children. As scholars of the camp system note, living conditions in Gulag camps varied significantly from year to year and from one location to another, even within the same camp complex (Applebaum, 2023). However, in general, life in the Gulag camps was intolerable and monstrous, especially for child prisoners, leading to their physical and spiritual destruction. By analysing the key aspects of the problem, “conditions of detention and mortality of children in Kazakh Gulag camps based on Karlag materials”, it is possible to formulate several conclusions.

The topic “Children in Gulag camps in Kazakhstan” is poorly studied, the children’s contingent of Gulag camps had become a special object of research in Russian historiography only in the last two or three years.

Children in corrective labour camps, convicted and not convicted can be divided into three categories, and the first two of them became “political prisoners” without being tried:

children who were sent to camps in infancy together with their mothers convicted under “political” articles (including as a family member of a traitor to the Motherland);

children born in camps from imprisoned mothers; children convicted under Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR of 1926;

children convicted under “domestic” or criminal articles of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR.

Due to the absence/non-disclosure at the moment in the archives of systematic quantitative data on the number of children in Gulag camps, their composition of crime, etc. it is difficult to say which child contingent of these three categories dominated the camps.

Children of imprisoned mothers had appeared in Kazakh camps since the mid-1930s. The very first children’s camp contingent appeared in the Karaganda corrective labour camp at the end of 1935, when women with young children began to enter the camp. Since the reporting on the “child population” was not stipulated in the Gulag camps until 1937, it is quite difficult to more accurately determine the number of children in the Kazakh Gulag camps. It was only at the end of 1937 that the Gulag sanitary department introduced strict reporting on the “birth rate, morbidity and mortality of the child population” and the work of children’s institutions, and these reports contain rather limited information, as a rule, only on morbidity and mortality (and those are not always complete).

The sharp growth of the children’s contingent in the corrective labour camps of Gulag led to the problem of creating a special infrastructure for the children of imprisoned mothers, it became acute in the early 1940s. Children’s institutions of corrective labour camps included 5 types: dairy kitchens, children’s consultations, nurseries, kindergartens and infant homes. Only infant homes were provided for the children of incarcerated mothers, the other types of child care facilities were exclusively for children of civilians and children of the militarized guard.

The number of infant homes in the camps varied in accordance with changes in the camp structure, depending on the number of children and the funding provided by the Gulag.

The main sources of replenishment of the child content in the camps were: convicted mothers with young children who entered the corrective labour camps; children born in the camps (either pregnant women arrived or became pregnant while in custody from male prisoners, civilians, militarized guard). The most

significant sources were children born in the camp, the appearance of which depended on the strictness of the isolation regime of men and women in the structural units of the camp.

We are tracking a direct correlation between the dynamics of the number of imprisoned children in camps with the dynamics of the number of convicted adult prisoners and the dynamics of the camp contingent as a whole, which varied depending on the repressive processes in the Soviet country.

The conditions of detention of children in the camps were appalling: as a rule, unsatisfactory living conditions, insufficient nutrition, lack of medical staff and medicines, hard and soft equipment, clothes for children and staff, etc. All this led to massive infectious and other diseases that cause a high rate of infant mortality.

Based on archival materials, we have identified three peak periods of high infant mortality in Gulag camps: 1938–1939, 1942–1943, and 1952. During these years, the mortality rate was catastrophic, with monthly losses of children of incarcerated mothers ranging from 50% to 90%. Typically, the infant mortality rate correlated with the overall mortality rate in the camps.

The main trends in the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of children's institutions, including infant homes, in the Kazakh Gulag camps, along with changes in the number of children in camp populations and the child mortality curve, largely align with the trends observed nationwide. The conditions experienced by children of incarcerated mothers in Gulag camps significantly impacted their psychological development; the cruelty and harshness of the camp staff predominantly resulted in psychological distortions. Those who survived the camps often refrained from discussing their experiences of their “happy childhood”, and currently, many are reluctant to recall this period of their lives during interviews.

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