

Gender, life cycle, and family ‘strategies’ among the poor: the Barcelona workhouse, 1762–1805*

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Poor relief has received less attention from historians of southern Europe compared with northern Europe. This article seeks to challenge the frequent assumption that the strength of family ties in southern Europe mitigated the need for welfare provision. It provides new data for men and boys entering the Barcelona workhouse in the period 1780–1803, and compares these with data from an earlier study of women and girls who entered the same institution over the period 1762–1805. We establish the characteristics of those who sought relief in terms of age, place of origin, marital status, and occupation. We use the information on reasons for entry and exit to ascertain family circumstances. We show that there were significant differences between males and females in terms of why they entered and left, and length of stay, particularly among the elderly. The bulk of the population of the workhouse, however, was comprised of children and adolescents. For this group, entry into the workhouse represented not just a temporary solution to life cycle poverty and periodic unemployment, but also a longer-term strategy aimed at smoothing entry into the labour market.

I

In a seminal article some years ago, David Reher suggested that a deep divide existed and continues to exist between north and south Europe in terms of family forms and particularly the strength of family ties.¹ Put simply, the nuclear family form was more predominant in north Europe, the extended family in southern Europe and, more importantly, ties of family loyalty and obligation were stronger in southern Europe. Within this schema, children left home upon marriage in northern Europe or often earlier in order to go into service, while children in southern Europe remained in the parental home for longer and, in areas where the stem family dominated, often brought spouses into the parental home after marriage. The elderly were thus more likely to reside with children in southern than in northern Europe, a feature that holds true today. Moreover, as Reher and others point out, ‘spatial proximity’ or close contact with kin remains an important feature of southern European societies beyond the co-residence implied by such terms as ‘extended’ or ‘stem family’.²

For many historians, these differences in family forms and family ties have important implications. The ‘north-west European marriage pattern’ of late marriage for both sexes, neo-local household formation and high proportions never marrying has been credited with being the backbone of the industrious revolution, labour mobility and high female labour force participation.³ More important for the purposes of this article, however, is a further question raised by Reher and others concerning the effect of family ties on the demand for welfare.⁴ In Peter Laslett’s conception of ‘nuclear hardship’, nuclear families in northern Europe and particularly the elderly, lacked the protection from poverty offered

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¹ Reher, ‘Persistent ties’.

² Viazzo and Zanotelli, ‘Welfare as a moral obligation’.

³ De Vries, *Industrious revolution*, pp. 9-19; de Moor and van Zanden, ‘Girl power’.

⁴ Reher, ‘Persistent ties’; Heerma van Voss, ‘Poor relief institutions’.

elsewhere by extended kin, and thus were reliant on the support offered by ‘the collectivity’.⁵ In turn, the existence of kin networks in southern Europe obviated the requirement for the ‘collectivity’, whether the parish or later the state, to provide for the poor. If the extended family were vulnerable to poverty, it was earlier in the life-cycle, when numbers of dependent children were highest.⁶ This feature has been adduced as an explanation for the higher numbers of foundlings abandoned in southern Europe. Where individuals did make use of poor relief, it was only because kin were absent: thus, urban charitable institutions catered mostly for migrants detached from their families of origin, especially in crisis years of high prices or epidemics.

Although there have been important challenges to the notion that kinship automatically entails welfare provision, the idea that family ties have and have had deeper meaning for southern Europeans has proved hard to shake.⁷ Indeed, for Catalonia, the area under study in this article, there is a long tradition of stressing the importance of the stem family in terms of social cohesion, the welfare of family members and, *pace de Vries*, the economic dynamism of the region relative to the rest of Spain. However, this view of the stem family derives from a rural elite of substantial peasant families. It is less clear that it held the same significance among urban families and, indeed, the poor.⁸ It is not that kinship networks were not important to the poor (we will provide examples later to show that they were), but that there were limits to how far family support could go. There must always have been some role for the ‘collectivity’. More importantly, the current literature paints a stark divide between family on the one hand, and welfare on the other, which tends to suggest that they were either/or options.⁹ The choice of welfare, particularly institutional care, therefore becomes a negation of family ties, expressed most starkly in the notion of ‘abandonment’.

In this article we use the records of one welfare institution, the Barcelona workhouse (*Misericòrdia* or *Hospicio*) over the period 1762-1805, first, to establish the characteristics of those who sought poor relief in terms of origin, age, marital status and gender, and second, to show that family support and poor relief were not necessarily alternatives, but rather that families often made strategic use of poor relief at different times in the life-cycle and to suit different circumstances. Abandoning or, in more neutral language, placing family members in institutional care did not have to signify an absence of family ties. On the contrary, it could in some cases be the best means by which families could meet a duty of care to dependents and provide for the long-term future. Moreover, we also seek to show that family ties and the strategies employed by the families of the poor varied by gender and age, a question that has been insufficiently addressed. Our work thus contributes to a growing literature that seeks to provide a more nuanced view of the southern European family and to investigate the relatively neglected area of poor relief provision in southern Europe, particularly Spain.

II

The period under study was one of rapid economic change in Barcelona and Catalonia as a whole as industrialisation took off with the advent of cotton, in tandem with the expansion of commercial viticulture prompted by overseas demand for wine and spirits.¹⁰ Rapid population growth and brief periods of economic prosperity were increasingly interrupted in the final decades of the eighteenth century by harvest failures, war and economic blockade, all of which caused rising prices and considerable social unrest.¹¹ 1789 saw food riots in Barcelona and other towns.¹² The authorities responded with a combination of repression and charity: rounding up vagrants on a periodic basis and

⁵ Laslett, ‘Family, kinship and collectivity’.

⁶ Viazzo, ‘Family structures’.

⁷ Horden, ‘Household care and informal networks’.

⁸ Lynch, *Individuals, families and communities*, pp. 58-67.

⁹ Horden and Smith, ‘Introduction’; Cavallo, ‘Family obligations’; Zucca Micheletto, ‘Family solidarity’, Groppi, ‘Assistenza’.

¹⁰ Vilar, *Catalogne*; Thomson, *Distinctive industrialization*; Valls Junyent, *Catalunya atlàntica*.

¹¹ Delgado, ‘El impacto’; Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 104-9, 384-418.

¹² Castells, ‘Els rebomboris’; Renom, *Conflictos sociales*, pp. 108-22.

imprisoning and executing rioters, but also setting up a charity committee, the *Junta de Caritat*, which ran soup kitchens and disbursed outdoor relief in response to the crisis of 1763-4, in 1789 and again in 1799-1802.¹³ Like *Juntas* founded elsewhere in Spain, notably Madrid, the committee was supposed to co-ordinate existing forms of charitable provision at parish level and also raise additional income through door-to-door collections, lotteries and other means.

Outdoor relief existed alongside various forms of indoor relief. Perhaps the most important poor relief institution in the city was the *Misericòrdia*.¹⁴ The *Misericòrdia* was founded in 1584 with the aim of taking in all those in need or who were caught begging, without distinction of age or sex, and setting them to work. Those who were too sick and infirm to work were to be cared for in the Hospital de Santa Creu, founded in the fourteenth century. In 1771 a commission was set up under the auspices of the bishop of Barcelona, Josep Climent and five civic authorities to oversee the establishment of a new workhouse or *Hospicio*. The *hospicios* were part of a reforming drive by the Bourbon government aimed at the centralisation under state control of various aspects of governance, but also at the repression of social unrest, particularly after the French Revolution. They were intended as large-scale workhouses, to be built in major cities, with the aim above all of cracking down on vagrancy, but also of taking in the poor of the surrounding area, whether diocese or province. In places where such institutions already existed in one form or another, the main impact was a change in funding, in that the *hospicios* received a significant subsidy from the Crown. In the case of Barcelona, the end result of three years or so of deliberations was not to replace the *Misericòrdia*, but to increase its capacity and to change the name of the institution in 1775 to that of *Real Casa y Hospicio de Barcelona* (Royal House and Workhouse of Barcelona), to reflect, as elsewhere, the change in finances following the granting of a royal subsidy. The main significance of the change for the purposes of the present study is that the extension in the capacity of the workhouse was achieved by the acquisition of a separate site in 1772, a former religious college in the Carrer Montalegre. The new site was used to house male inmates, while the women remained on the old site in Carrer Elisabets, which continued to be referred to as the *Misericòrdia*.¹⁵ This division had implications for the survival of sources, as will be explained shortly. A further change took place in 1803, with the establishment of another new workhouse, the *Casa de Caritat*, designed to take in still greater numbers than previously, but with a new focus on adults and the able-bodied poor. The *Misericòrdia* at this point took on a new role as an institution for poor girls under the age of 12.

One implication of these changes of name and location has been the different survival of the source material. All the records for women prior to 1803 or so (there is some overlap for 1803-5) are held in the archives of the *Misericòrdia*. The records of the Casa de Caritat from 1803 are held in a different archive, that of the Diputació (municipal government) of Barcelona. Until recently, no records pertaining to men prior to 1803 appeared to have survived. A single entry register has, however, since come to light in the archives of the Casa de Caritat, covering those men and boys who entered the *Hospicio* between 1780 and 1803.¹⁶ This register forms the object of the present study. The records pertaining to men are set against those of a previous study of the women by Montserrat Carbonell, covering a longer time span of 1762-1805.¹⁷ It must be stressed from the outset that the volume of material that survives for the female section is huge compared to the single register for the male section. Aside from the female entry registers, which comprise the main source of Carbonell's work, the archives of the *Misericòrdia* include information relating to the financing and the everyday life of the institution, as well as, crucially, the petitions for entry into and exit from the workhouse. This last source allows us to say far more about the precise family circumstances of the women and girls who entered

¹³ Vilar *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 104-5; Simon Tarrés, 'Crisi de subsistències de 1763-4'; Garcia Domènech, 'Junta d' Auxilis'; Delgado, 'El impacto', pp. 134-9.

¹⁴ González Sugranyes, *Mendicidad y beneficencia*, pp. 99-122; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 65-79.

¹⁵ In this article, the name *Misericòrdia* will be used to refer to the women's workhouse, *Hospicio* to refer to the men's, though the first term was also used more specifically to refer to the department within the women's workhouse for girls and young women, who were kept apart from older women, and from those sent for discipline. Within the same building, there was also a small wing for 'decayed' but respectable women, along the lines of an almshouse. These women do not form part of this study.

¹⁶ Arxiu General de la Diputació de Barcelona (henceforth AGDB), CC, 29.

¹⁷ Carbonell, 'Pobresa'; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 55-168.

the institution than can be said for the men. For the men, the only entry petitions to have survived are for boys who entered the institution along with mothers or sisters and whose details were kept by the *Misericòrdia*.

The registers do contain roughly the same information for men and women, though the consistency with which all variables are recorded varies between the two datasets and over time. We have the date of entry, name and surname of the man or woman, age, marital status, names of parents and, where applicable, spouses, place of origin, occupation either of the man himself or, for the women, more usually the occupation of father or husband. We have some indication in the registers of why the individual in question entered the workhouse and further information in that regard can be derived from who brought them, whether family or the authorities. We also have some information about why they left, in terms of whether they were placed in domestic service or apprenticeships, were reclaimed by family, or were discharged with no further details. The registers record all information regarding names, age, sex, origin and reasons for first entry on the left-hand or verso page, and then across the right-hand or recto page there are brief notes on when and why the individual in question exited the workhouse but also notes for re-entries and exits. 17% of the men and 14% of the women entered the workhouse more than once, and thus have information of this kind, though it should be noted that the workhouse authorities sometimes struggled to keep track of individuals, at least as far as the upkeep of this register was concerned, since several individuals were found to have been recorded twice as new entries, rather than having their first entry updated. It seems likely there were separate registers for exits, and that entry petitions also existed for the men, since there are occasional references along the lines of ‘entry petition number 88’ or ‘exit number 4 in the apprentices’ register’.

In theory, the workhouse was supposed to take in all able-bodied paupers regardless of age or sex, while, as mentioned, those who were ill or mad, were taken in by the Hospital de Santa Creu. This last institution also took in foundlings. In practice, the dividing lines were not always clear: the workhouse in 1796 and 1797 at least had a group of inmates described as ‘excused from work because of their chronic ills’.¹⁸ There were also other institutions in Barcelona that shared some of the same functions of the *hospicio*, though these were much smaller and specialised in function. The *Casa de Reclusió* or *Galera* was a female prison, with 111 inmates in 1787. The *Casa del Retir* was for prostitutes who wished to reform, with just 24 inmates in 1787. Finally, the *Casa dels Infants Orfes*, which took in orphaned children, had just 24 orphans. That same year, the Hospital de Santa Creu had 1,755 patients, including foundlings out to nurse, and the *Misericòrdia* and *Hospicio* had 1,341 inmates between them, making these the principal welfare institutions of the city. It is clear that there were links between them and transfers back and forth. Very few individuals died in either the *Misericòrdia* or the *Hospicio*, being transferred to the *Hospital de Santa Creu* instead, but their deaths are still recorded in the registers, suggesting that the workhouses attempted to keep tabs on those who left. There were also transfers, in both directions, between the workhouse and the various prisons of Barcelona. The workhouse thus combined relief for the poor with repression of the poor, in a similar fashion to that described by Sandra Cavallo for the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin.¹⁹ As in Turin, the last decades of the eighteenth century seem to have marked a high point in the repressive nature of the institution. In earlier and later periods, the regime seems to have been more relaxed. This role of disciplining as well as relieving the poor needs to be borne in mind later when the question of family strategies is discussed. Not all who entered the workhouse did so voluntarily.

III

[Figure 1 here]

The two datasets thus contain information on 6176 women who entered the workhouse between 1762 and 1805 and 4063 men who entered between 1780 and 1803. Figure 1 shows the numbers entering each year. The annual totals combine those entering for the first time with subsequent re-entries. There

¹⁸ AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, ‘Estats de les persones i cabdals, 1773-1798’, reports for 1796 and 1797.

¹⁹ Cavallo, ‘Conceptions of poverty’.

is a certain degree of truncation bias for the early years in both series, since re-entries by men and women who entered for the first time before the initial date of the series are not captured. Beyond that, however, the trends show peaks in the crisis year of 1789 and around 1793-4, when prices were also high again.²⁰ Interestingly, however, the crisis of 1799-1802 saw a dip in numbers entering. These are also the years when the *Junta de Caritat* was co-ordinating outdoor relief in the form of a soup kitchen. Over 4 million rations were distributed between 17th March 1799 and 4th April 1802.²¹ It may be that additional relief allowed the poor to remain outside the workhouse to a greater extent than otherwise. More likely, however, is that the workhouse was unable to admit as many poor as usual, forcing the authorities to step in with provision of outdoor relief. The institution's finances were in a parlous state by the end of the eighteenth century, the result of the economic crisis, so much so that it made an urgent appeal for donations in August 1800, claiming to have funds left for only three days.²² There is no indication that turnover was more rapid in crisis years. There was no tendency for stays to be shorter over time or in particularly bad years.

[Table 1 here]

Although the ordinances stressed that no distinctions were to be drawn in terms of age or sex, women nonetheless outnumbered men in the workhouse at various times for which we have information on total numbers, shown in Table 1. This undoubtedly reflects the greater vulnerability of women to poverty, but also a marked preference among the ecclesiastical and secular reformers of the period for helping young women, who were seen as particularly in need of protection. Advocates of the *hospicios* stressed the role these institutions could play in this regard. Alongside young women, however, the other group that the founders of the *hospicios* sought to target were vagrants, which may explain the increasing presence of men over the period. There were large-scale round-ups of the poor in 1772, with the opening of the new *hospicio* on Carrer Montalegre, in 1775 and in 1789. In 1775, four *mossos* or police officers were created with the specific job of rounding up beggars across the diocese of Barcelona.²³ The figures for 1772 in Table 1 reflect the situation before the round-up of that year and the opening of the new *Hospicio*. The effect of the round-up is clear, with far more men entering than women: 527 and 282 respectively.²⁴ While more men left, thus keeping women in the majority among inmates, the female share from 1773 onwards remained lower than it had been prior to the round-up.

[Figure 2 here]

In terms of the numbers entering each year, at least from 1780 men actually entered in greater numbers than women, as Figure 1 shows. However, stays by men were far shorter than stays by women, as Figure 2 shows. Again, all stays have been combined, not just first stays. There was no correlation for either sex between number of stays and length of stay, undoubtedly because the numbers entering more than once were small for both sexes. To avoid the distortion of having a longer time span for female stays, which would allow longer stays to be over-represented compared for men, only those stays occurring after 1780 are included. Using the full sample for women increases the percentage of very long stays slightly, from 3% to 7%, but the differences are not marked. While 79% of stays by men lasted under a year and, in fact, 38% were less than a month, only 45% of stays by women saw the woman in question leaving within a year. Reasons for these differences are described below.

[Figures 3 and 4 here]

²⁰ Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 387-90, 410-18

²¹ Accounts are in *Diario de Barcelona*, 6th November 1802. See also Delgado, 'El impacto', p. 138.

²² *Diario de Barcelona*, 25th August 1800.

²³ Biblioteca de Catalunya (henceforth BC), Follets Bonsoms, 4988 and 7245; AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C1, 'Murrís, vagos i pobres, 1775-6'.

²⁴ AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, *Estats de persones i cabdals, 1773-1798*, 'Estado de la gente existente en la casa hospicio de Misericòrdia de Barcelona en 1 de julio de 1773'; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, Table 1 on p. 195. The round-up lasted from 3rd November 1772 until 1st July 1773. The figures in Table 1 for those years are the totals of men and women present on those two dates.

Figures 3 and 4 show trends over time for men and women respectively depending on place of origin, whether from Barcelona or not. For both sexes, those from Barcelona made up 29% of the sample, but with considerable fluctuations from year to year. Nonetheless, it is clear from both figures that the overall downwards trend in entries was driven mainly by a decline in those coming from outside Barcelona. Why this should be is unclear. The 1790s saw many years in which economic blockade and rising prices led to factory closures in Barcelona, but the crisis was by no means confined to the city, and so the demand for poor relief was not necessarily higher among Barcelona inhabitants than elsewhere. More likely is that financial pressure led the workhouse to be chary of admitting outsiders. There is no evidence of an explicit policy change, but it may be that round-ups of vagrants across the region were carried out with less enthusiasm than in earlier periods, or perhaps that men rounded up in this fashion were recruited straight into the army or navy. There was a royal decree in April 1794 ordering that 2500 men be recruited across Catalonia from amongst those considered to be 'idle'.²⁵ A decree of 15th April 1799 ordered all immigrants who were not gainfully employed to leave Barcelona under pain of a prison sentence, though those in need of relief were supposedly exempt.²⁶ In earlier years, the workhouse admissions do suggest to some extent that economic crises saw a surge of immigrants into the city from the countryside, given clear peaks in 1763 for women, and 1789 for both sexes, but by the 1790s this effect was muted. Despite contemporary comments that the city was full of outsiders, including refugees driven south by the French invasion of 1793-4, a greater presence of outsiders in the city did not translate into a greater presence in the workhouse.²⁷

[Figures 5 and 6]

Short-term crises were not the only driving force behind migration. As will be discussed below, place of origin in itself tells us nothing about the timing of migration: some immigrants had been in the city for years before entering the workhouse while others came straight from the countryside to the institution. Closer examination of the locations from which the workhouse population was drawn, however, suggests a role for the Barcelona labour market in determining the movements of many inmates. The bulk of migrants came from within Catalonia. Just 6.9% came from elsewhere in Spain, mostly from the neighbouring regions of Aragon and Valencia, and 4.7% came from abroad, mostly from France. Figures 5 and 6 are maps showing the districts or *comarques* within Catalonia from which men and women respectively came, excluding those from Barcelona. Men were more likely to have migrated over longer distances and to have come from outside Catalonia, with 8.5% coming from elsewhere in Spain and 7.8% from abroad, compared with 4.1 and 2% respectively for women. A noticeable cluster of men came from the Alt Urgell district, in the north-west. This area of the Pyrenees, among the poorest in Catalonia, saw high levels of temporary and seasonal migration down to the plains but also as far as Barcelona during this period. For both men and women, however, the highest proportions were drawn from the central districts, particularly the Bages and Osona districts and along the coast from the Maresme. The central districts that contributed high numbers to the workhouse were part of a proto-industrial zone, originally focused on the woollen industry but rapidly going over to cotton during this period.²⁸ The putting-out networks of the woollen industry were quickly taken over by cotton spinning for the Barcelona mills and local enterprises.²⁹ The migration patterns shown here match in terms of geography and occupations those found by Natalia Mora-Sitja in an analysis of dispensations from marriage bans for the years 1770, 1800 and 1830.³⁰ The information on occupations for men in the workhouse sample is too limited to confirm this labour market effect, but the occupations recorded for women, that is, those of fathers or husbands, show a high proportion of textile workers, 20% of recorded occupations overall, above that of other sectors, and rising in importance over the period to account for 26% of known occupations during the years 1792-1805.³¹ Other important sectors

²⁵ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. II, p. 168.

²⁶ *Diario de Barcelona*, 15th April 1799; Delgado, 'El impacto', pp. 136-7.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 270.

²⁸ Torras, 'Especialización'.

²⁹ Okuno, 'Entre la llana i el cotó'; Garcia Balaña, *Fabricació*, pp. 71-89; Marfany, *Land*, pp. 77-8, 82-4.

³⁰ Mora-Sitja, 'Labour supply', pp. 90-99.

³¹ Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 136-46, 197-200. Occupations were given for 1,446 women but only 79 men.

were agriculture and construction, the latter reflecting the physical expansion of the city during these years. Arranz and Grau found similar patterns in terms of place of origin for apprentices in the building trades for the years 1761-70.³² It is thus likely that the workhouse reflects a pattern of high migration into Barcelona by a particularly skilled work force, but that the workhouse also represented support to this same workforce during periods of crisis and factory closures. It is no accident that the committees in charge of organising poor relief during the crises of 1763-4 and 1799-1802 included several cotton manufacturers, some of whom were later involved in the administration of the *Casa de Caritat*.³³ However, as will be discussed below, the workhouse did not simply take in factory workers who were temporarily unemployed, but also played an active role in training young men and women, particularly the latter, for the labour market.

[Table 2 here]

The population of the workhouse was extremely young. Table 2 shows the age profiles for the men and the women of the workhouse, compared with the age distribution for the population of Catalonia as a whole, according to the census of 1787. Again, to keep the samples comparable, only those women who entered after 1780 are included, though in fact the age profile does not appear to have shifted over time for either men or women.³⁴ The age categories are chosen to match those of the census. What jumps out is the dominance of the 7-15 age group for both sexes, accounting for slightly under a half of all the men and only a little less than that for the women. Relative to the age profile of the Catalan population as a whole, this group is overrepresented within the workhouse. The under-representation of adults aged 15-50 is not surprising. The under-representation of younger children can be explained in part by the presence of the *Hospital de Santa Creu*, which took in foundlings and, in the case of boys, the likelihood that these were left with their mothers in the women's quarters until old enough to be transferred to the men's department, but with such transfers not always being recorded.³⁵ The predominance of younger ages matches to an extent what Cavallo has described for the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin in the 1750s, though there those over 60 also stand out.³⁶ The predominance of the 7-15 age group in the *Misericòrdia* and *Hospicio* is still striking. It speaks to the role played by the workhouse in facilitating entry into the labour market through provision of training, and placements in domestic service or apprenticeship, all of which is discussed below.

Another group that is overrepresented compared with the general population, however, is men over 50. Here, the contrast between the sexes comes as something of a shock. Older women were not overrepresented in the workhouse compared with the general population, but the 21% of men in this age group were. We might expect the reverse to be true, given the wealth of historical evidence for the vulnerability of elderly women in the past. In the absence of surviving entry petitions for men, explaining the greater presence of men over fifty is difficult. Of the 658 men in question, however, 86% were from outside Barcelona originally, suggesting that migration may have been a factor. Men were perhaps more likely than women to end up some distance from kin and place of birth. It may also be that a sense of family obligation was stronger where women were concerned, a question taken up below.

³² Arranz and Grau, 'Inmigración y asimilación', pp. 73-7.

³³ BC, Fons Erasme de Gònima, 67/6, 'Casa de Caritat'; AGDB, CC VII 767; Simon Tarrés, 'Crisi de 1763-1764', pp. 200-1; Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, p. 104; Delgado, 'El impacto', p. 135.

³⁴ First impressions were that the age profile for both sexes became markedly younger over time. However, this proved to be the result of fewer ages being reported overall but with age reporting being more likely at younger ages. Adjusting for this suggests the age profile did not change significantly over time.

³⁵ For example, Josep Mir, aged 5, entered the *Misericòrdia* with his mother Rosa and sisters Rosa and Josepa on 22nd July 1790, but there is no record in either the women's or the men's registers of his subsequent transfer or departure. His mother and sisters left separately in May and October 1791 and May 1792. By contrast, 80 boys are recorded in the register of the *Hospicio* as having been transferred from the *Misericòrdia*, such as Pere Arques, who was sent to the *Hospicio* in May 1800 aged six, having entered the *Misericòrdia* in January 1798 with two siblings.

³⁶ Cavallo, 'Conceptions of poverty', Table 6.4 on p. 162.

Combining age with marital status adds a further dimension, as shown in Table 3. Among both men and women, single people dominated and were overrepresented compared with the Catalan population overall in 1787. This is unsurprising given the youthful age profile of the workhouse. Both widows and widowers were also overrepresented in the workhouse relative to the general population. For women, this is hardly surprising, given the vulnerability to poverty which characterised widows across European societies. It is interesting to note, however, that widowers were overrepresented to a slightly greater degree than widows.

[Table 3 here]

Among the elderly, however, the vulnerability of widows is clear. Table 4 shows marital status for those aged 60 or over on entry to the workhouse. Over two-thirds of women in this age group were widowed, compared with just over a third of men, suggesting that for women, it was not age *per se* that determined entry into the workhouse so much as being elderly and without a partner. For men, the loss of a spouse seems to have mattered far less than old age. Half of the men over 60 were married on entry to the workhouse, though, as will be seen below, few actually entered with their wives, suggesting a significant loosening of family ties.

[Table 4 here]

IV

Having established the characteristics of the workhouse population, the larger question of the relationship between family and welfare in terms of the strength of family ties still remains. This question can be assessed in more depth from the information on reasons for entry and exit as given in the registers and for some women, from the petitions that accompanied their entry or exit. The reasons for entry are shown in Table 5, including first and subsequent entries, so that individuals who entered more than once are counted more than once. The information in the registers is limited for both men and women, in that it is either often missing or lacking in detail. For 2947 instances where men entered, the entry reads simply along the lines of *vino* (he came) or *admitido* (he was admitted) and the same for 4127 instances for women. ‘Orphans and abandoned’ include those with one or both parents dead, or where spouses or parents had abandoned them, were in prison or in hospital and a tiny number of cases involving lost children. ‘Discipline’ includes those caught begging, also those sent from prison, caught smuggling, sent ‘for correction’ and one case of syphilis. ‘Without means’ includes all those described simply in vague terms indicating poverty, the most common by far being *desamparado/a* (without means). Being ill, pregnant or disabled included a large number of children sent specifically to be treated for ringworm, a specialism of the institution. Transfers from other institutions, such as the hospital or prison, are likely to be overrepresented, since these do seem to have been carefully recorded. The categories overlap, in that many entries state why someone was begging, for example, or many transfers from the hospital include those who were ill. These cases have also been counted twice. Table 5 should thus be read as all reasons given for entry. The percentages have been calculated on this basis: 1663 reasons for men, 2212 for women.

[Table 5 here]

There are differences for men and women, which are more likely to reflect differences in recording practices than in reality. Only four boys are described as ‘orphans’, for example, compared to 435 girls who had lost both parents and 375 who had lost one. As will be seen shortly, women were more likely to be returned to families and thus there may have been a greater concern from the start to establish their family circumstances. A corollary to this may be that a duty of care was expected towards women from male kin, but not vice versa, therefore there was no need to establish for men that kin were unavailable.

One divide in Table 5 is between those who were sent to the workhouse as a disciplinary measure and those who were admitted for relief. The two categories of inmates were segregated in the *Misericòrdia*

and presumably also in the *Hospicio*, though we lack precise information on this point, with those who had been admitted for disciplinary reasons treated more harshly in terms of diet and regime, but usually staying for much shorter spells. This last point explains the divergence in length of stays by men and women. The institution's role in repressing, rather than relieving the poor reveals the fragility of many family ties. On the face of it, repression would seem to be roughly equal for men and women but in fact, there were striking gender differences. For women, begging made up the bulk of deviant behaviour, with only 38 cases in which criminal or deviant behaviour was the reason. For men, two-thirds of 'discipline' cases were for criminal or otherwise deviant behaviour. Mothers often claimed to be struggling with adolescent boys in the absence of fathers. Francisca Gener, a widow from Barcelona, complained of her only son's disobedience, mistreatment of her and that he had run away several times, behaving worse on each return.³⁷

However, on closer examination, it becomes evident from entry petitions that for many women, disciplinary reasons also lay behind their entry into the *Misericòrdia*, particularly for married women. Rosa Ramon Surroca was sent to the *Misericòrdia* on 5th July 1799. The entry in the register gives no information as to why, but the surviving entry petition reveals that her husband requested her admission because of her 'disorderly behaviour'.³⁸ Narcisa Bonaplata i Sala was sent to the *Misericòrdia* in June 1799, following a request by her two brothers-in-law, who alleged she was often drunk and violent towards her husband, who was blind.³⁹ Anna Autanell was admitted with her two daughters in June 1781 at the request of her parents and her parish priest. She had been abandoned by her husband with their daughters, and had become pregnant by someone else. She had been admitted to hospital at the instigation of her parents and other relatives to have her baby. Since her return to her village, however, she had 'continued in her immoral behaviour', causing 'scandal' and setting a 'bad example' to her daughters.⁴⁰ The *Misericòrdia* thus substituted for divorce among the poor, or allowed poor families to shed troublesome members, at least temporarily.

Gender disparities also seem to the fore in the disciplining of beggars. That women were caught begging in 29% of cases compared with 11% for men, seems at odds with the higher presence of men in the workhouse in years when beggars were being targeted by the authorities. It may be that many of the men described simply as 'sent for discipline' had in fact been caught begging or, as suggested above, that in some years beggars were forcibly conscripted. If we assume, however, that those over 60 were unlikely to be conscripted, the gender disparity remains. 46% of women over 60 were caught begging, compared with 16% of men in this age group. This finding seems to contradict the suggestion above that families might feel a stronger sense of obligation towards elderly women than towards elderly men, reflected in the greater presence of older men in the workhouse. Both could be true, however: families may have made a greater effort to keep elderly female relatives at home than elderly men, but when family support was inadequate, women may have had fewer resources with which to keep themselves off the streets. The marital status of female beggars bears this out to a certain extent: 42% were widowed, compared with 18% of the overall population of the *Misericòrdia*. Moreover, the proportion of women caught begging who were reclaimed by family members (18%) was much lower than that for all women (see Table 6 below). However, on closer examination, the question becomes more complex. First, 28% of the women caught begging were married, slightly above the proportion single (26%). In some cases, they were begging because their husbands were absent, in prison or in the hospital, but in other cases they were begging alongside their husbands or other family members, usually children. In other cases, where women were reclaimed by kin, there is the suspicion that women were begging to supplement family income. The petitions that accompanied requests for release often claim that the woman's arrest for begging was a mistake, but the circumstances are suspicious. According to her husband, Francisca Vidal was wrongly arrested for begging on the steps climbing up to the city wall, and he could swear that he had sufficient means with which to keep her.⁴¹ However, contemporary

³⁷ AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, expedient 8, undated.

³⁸ AHCMB, ARM5, P3, C4, expedient 65.

³⁹ AHCMB, ARM5, P3, C4, expedient 56.

⁴⁰ AHCMB, ARM2, P5, C2, expedient 17.

⁴¹ AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, expedient 9, letter dated 4th May 1795.

sources suggest the city wall was a popular place for beggars, since it was a favourite stroll for Barcelona residents.⁴² Similarly, Teresa Quadras was arrested simply for being ‘poorly dressed’, according to her son, and Maria Rosa Izquierdo because ‘a charitable person customarily gave her alms, but without [Maria Rosa] begging’.⁴³ These examples hint at the possibility that begging for some women was a means to contribute to a family economy of makeshifts, rather than a sign of abandonment.

Among those whose entry into the workhouse was not characterised in terms of punishment, the situation in terms of family ties was equally complex. In many cases, entry was also testament to how fragile ties of kinship could be among the poor. Particularly telling in this regard is the high proportion of individuals described as married, compared with the low proportion of married couples. We know from the *Misericòrdia* registers when women entered with other family members, but for the men, relationships are rarely stated and thus have to be deduced from shared surnames, places of origin and other information. In other words, of the 729 married men and 703 married women, only for 24 of the men and 78 of the women could spouses be identified as present in the workhouse at the same time. While these figures are likely to be underestimates, since couples who entered apart are harder to detect in the sources than those who entered the same day, it is still clear that entry into the workhouse either entailed the break-up of a marriage or was a sign that the marriage had already broken down. In some cases, as we have seen, entry to the *Misericòrdia* was a means of disciplining ‘wayward wives’, or a form of divorce for the poor. Many of the married women came in having been abandoned by their husbands, as in the sad case of Anna Autanell described above. War was a frequent reason for abandonment. Maria Termens, whose husband Joan was absent from home having deserted from the army, came voluntarily to the *Misericòrdia* in October 1783, since she was pregnant and without the means to support herself.⁴⁴ She gave birth to a baby girl, who was sent to the foundling hospital. Maria left in 1785, only to return again two years later, also voluntarily. Occasionally, the registers reveal that husbands were in the *Hospital Santa Creu* or in prison. For the men, unfortunately, there is no way of knowing where a wife was unless she can be identified in the *Misericòrdia* records. 85% of married men and 83% of widowed men were from outside Barcelona, however, compared with 67% of single men. Combined with the finding above that older men were a significant group amongst those in the *Hospicio* from outside Barcelona, these figures suggest a pattern of migration by men, whether in search of work, alms or both, with wives and children left at home. In some cases, this will have constituted abandonment, in others temporary migration.

Indeed, one interpretation of the high presence in the workhouse of those born outside of Barcelona would be that the institution was catering to a migrant population that had lost ties to family and origins. Even if we assume, *a priori*, that urban households might have fewer kin ties on which to call, place of origin is a blunt tool in this instance for assessing family strategies. We have no means of distinguishing those who had moved to Barcelona at some point before entering the workhouse, and had subsequently fallen on hard times, from those who were sent from elsewhere straight to the workhouse. Similarly, children born in Barcelona who entered the *Misericòrdia* or *Hospicio* could have parents born elsewhere and also lack kin networks. We can deduce from the information available in some cases that all these scenarios were to be found amongst the workhouse population. Josep Fontrodona entered in November 1790, aged 4, and from Barcelona, but with his father Antoni who was originally from Caldes de Montbui. Theirs was perhaps a case of a migrant family forced to have recourse to the workhouse once employment failed or another disaster struck. As described above, the Barcelona labour market was a powerful force in determining subsequent entry into the workhouse. By contrast, Antoni Llobet Planas was sent to the *Hospicio* in May 1781, aged 12, by the parish priest and civil authorities of his home village of Baga, presumably because he was an orphan. There are numerous instances like this in the registers and among the entry petitions for women. Rural families were no less fragile than urban ones when poverty struck.

⁴² Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. V, pp. 127, 143, 226, 267-9.

⁴³ Cited in Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 160.

⁴⁴ Llibre d’entrades de dones, fol. 270.

The discussion so far could be taken as simply reinforcing the image presented by much of the literature, in that poor relief in this instance was being used only when family ties were weak or non-existent. The opposition between family and welfare still remains. However, it is clear from many examples that the poor relief offered by the workhouse also enabled families to provide better for kin and to fulfil the duty of care that many recognised themselves as being under. Frequently, entry into the workhouse of dependents allowed households to survive difficult periods in the life-cycle or short-term economic crises. Joan Banius, a labourer from Badalona, asked that his mother Maria Foxart be admitted to the *Misericòrdia*.⁴⁵ He was unable to maintain her properly, but with the help of various relatives could contribute a *sou* per day to her upkeep. In particular, placing dependents in the workhouse freed up men and women to work. Joan Pujol, a widowed smallholder or agricultural labourer from Piera, was unable to look after his daughter and work in the fields all day, so placed her in the workhouse in 1788. Marcos Codina, a widowed day labourer, placed his daughters aged 8 and 4 in the workhouse. He was described in the entry petition as ‘a poor labourer who one day has work, another day does not, because of which they are very poor and he is unable to keep his daughters. But what most troubles the petitioner is that if he is offered work outside the city he has to leave them alone’. Miquel Nieto, a shoemaker, requested admission for his elderly father since he was unable to take care of him and work at the same time, leaving them both without an income, whereas if his father was in the *Hospicio*, Miquel could work and contribute to his father’s keep.⁴⁶

Beatrice Zucca Micheletto has recently highlighted the important role played by the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin in facilitating continued labour force participation for women with children.⁴⁷ The *Ospedale* did this in three ways: by contributing to the ‘economy of makeshifts’ with bread rations and other temporary aid; by placing infants with wet-nurses and by taking in older children for brief periods. The *Hospicio* and *Misericòrdia* fulfilled only the last of these three functions, the other two being taken up in the case of Barcelona by the *olla pública* (soup kitchen) and by the *Hospital de Santa Creu*, institutions which have yet to be studied in any depth. It is clear, though, that taking in children frequently allowed women to continue working. Mariangela Huguet, a widow, left a daughter in the *Misericòrdia* ‘because she works and cannot take care of her’, reclaiming her daughter three years later. Magdalena Sintés requested entry for her son, aged 6, in order to work as a wet-nurse, having placed two younger children of her own in households in the country.⁴⁸ Maria Calvet requested admission for her daughter since she herself was working as a servant.⁴⁹

Households, whether male or female headed, thus frequently used the workhouse as part of a strategy of makeshifts, placing dependents, especially children in the institution in times of crisis, and reclaiming them once circumstances were better.⁵⁰ Maria Vidal, herself a widow, took her mother Isabel Marqués out of the workhouse in 1777 after three years: ‘since the petitioner now has the means to provide for her mother, she wishes to take her home’.⁵¹ Children, girls in particular, were often reclaimed once better able to contribute to the family economy. Rosa and Maria Cantilló were sent to the *Misericòrdia* in 1770 as orphans. In 1777, their brother, Joan Baptista, working in the house of a spice merchant, requested that they be allowed to leave in order to live with their cousin Narcis March, a spice merchant of Reus, to work as servants, but with the promise of a dowry in due course.⁵² Francisca Miró was reclaimed by an uncle in 1785, after 15 years in the workhouse, in part to help her aunt at home following the marriage of her aunt and uncle’s only daughter.⁵³ Francisco and Agustina Ferrer also reclaimed in 1782 an orphan niece, Ignès Balensuela, whom they had been forced to place in the

⁴⁵ Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 159

⁴⁶ AHCMB, AF18, P2, C1, ‘Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres’, undated, but some time between 1798 and 1800.

⁴⁷ Zucca Micheletto, *Travail et propriété des femmes*, pp. 194-218.

⁴⁸ AF18, P2, C1, ‘Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres’, undated, but some time between 1798 and 1800.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ For similar strategies in Turin, see Zucca Micheletto, ‘Family solidarity’, pp. 522-7.

⁵¹ Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 159.

⁵² AHCMB, ARM2, P3, C5. Expedient 20.

⁵³ AHCMB, ARM2, P3, C5, Expedient 14.

Misericòrdia in 1770, but ‘now that the petitioners have the means to support and educate their niece Ignés they humbly request that she be entrusted to them’.⁵⁴

Reclamation, however, was far more common for women. Table 6 shows, where recorded, the number of times men and women were reclaimed, left to go into service and so on, excluding the 19% of men and 21% of women who died. Those who entered and left more than once are counted more than once, though it makes almost no difference in percentage terms to use either first exits only or final exits only instead. Unfortunately, large numbers of exits are recorded simply along the lines of ‘left with permission of the workhouse authorities’, shown in Table 6 as ‘discharged, no details’. Entry into the labour market refers to domestic service, apprenticeships, the army and navy. ‘Transferred elsewhere’ includes those sent to the hospital, but excluding those who died there, to prison or another institution.

[Table 6 here]

The gender differences here are stark. Men and boys were overwhelmingly more likely to leave without any mention of where or to whom they were going. The workhouse authorities may have been more reluctant to allow women to leave without a family to whom they could be entrusted. Men were also over twice as likely to escape as women, presumably because it was easier for them to do so. The most important finding, however, is that only in 6% of cases were men reclaimed by a family member, usually a parent, compared with 52% of cases for women. The examples above show that women were often reclaimed in order to contribute to the household economy, to substitute in effect for domestic servants. However, we would expect the earning capacity of boys in the urban economy of Barcelona to be equal to that of girls, or certainly not so much lower as to explain a discrepancy of 45%. In the absence of petitions soliciting the removal of boys from the workhouse, we can only speculate that ties of family loyalty seem to have carried more weight where girls were concerned. This fits with a culture in which women traditionally remained at home until marriage, whereas younger sons at least might at some point be expected to make their own way in the world.

For the largest group of inmates, namely children and adolescents, entry into the workhouse was not just a short-term response to crisis, but a long-term strategy aimed at improving life chances. The workhouse offered a powerful incentive to families to place children and adolescents there, namely, preparation for entering the labour market. As such, the institution constituted what Clare Haru Crowston has termed with reference to the *Trinité* hospital in Paris, an ‘alternative apprenticeship’, that is, a route into the labour market that allowed the poor to bypass traditional guild structures or at least some of their requirements.⁵⁵ As Table 6 shows, 14% of boys left for apprenticeships, domestic service or the army or navy, primarily the first of these, and 14% of girls left to go into domestic service. From 1772, the *Misericòrdia* embraced a new role of training domestic servants, teaching a hierarchy of skills including cooking and hairdressing.⁵⁶ Prior to that date, the workhouse had been reluctant to place women in domestic service, doing so only on condition that their masters or mistresses maintained them for life or paid 50 *lliures* to return them to the workhouse. Under new proposals by the reforming bishop, Josep Climent, women would be placed with suitably vetted households, in exchange for wages, bed and board, and clothing, but under regular supervision by the workhouse, which took them back in if need be. As Climent pointed out, simply by virtue of being adequately dressed, women from the *Misericòrdia* were well-placed to find work as domestic servants. The bishop also stressed that girls from the *Misericòrdia* were used to a life of discipline and thus likely to be more submissive and willing to remain indoors. Climent was scandalised by what he regarded as a dangerous tendency for maidservants to be allowed to wander the streets running errands and buying provisions in the marketplace, a job in his eyes for male servants. Respectable households wanting maidservants who were accustomed to being indoors, ‘who were well trained and of an honest disposition’ should thus

⁵⁴ AHCMB, ARM2, P3, C5, Expedient 7.

⁵⁵ Haru Crowston, ‘L’*apprentissage hors des corporations*’, pp. 409-41.

⁵⁶ Climent, *Noticia*, pp. 5-14.

apply to the *Misericòrdia*.⁵⁷ Households had to prove their respectability: in the margins of the letters written to request servants are notes from parish priests or others of good standing testifying to the honest reputation of the would-be employers. Marianna Llobera was thus described as ‘a woman to whom the servant she requests could be entrusted’ by her parish priest.⁵⁸ Unlike English workhouses, the *Misericòrdia* acted as a guarantee of respectability and of training for households seeking domestic servants.

The workhouse was also involved in various forms of textile manufacturing, first wool and then cotton.⁵⁹ Inmates were also employed in stocking-knitting and the manufacture of handkerchiefs, ribbons and embroidery. In 1776, there were two workshops dedicated to woollen manufactures, one with 48 spinning wheels, the other with 50, and one dedicated to cotton. In 1768, the *Misericòrdia* had contracted a master clothier, Domingo Artés, to teach carding and spinning to the women and boys, and in 1784, at the instigation of the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce (*Junta de Comerç*), sent girls to a newly established school for spinning in order to learn the so-called Piedmontese method of spinning. Undoubtedly the workhouse made use of skills that many inmates already had, given that 20% of women were the wives, widows or daughters of men in the textile sector and that, as has been shown, many were coming from proto-industrial areas. It was, though, also equipping women to participate in a market where female labour was in demand for much of the period, so much so that women occasionally cited training as a motive for entry into the workhouse. Maria Torell, herself working as a domestic servant, requested that her 14 year-old daughter be taken in by the workhouse in order ‘to learn sewing and stocking-knitting’.⁶⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, the workhouse was sending women not just into domestic service but also into the textile factories. In June 1795, Rita Serradell and Antònia Soler were sent out to learn spinning; Gertrudis Penedés, Magdalena Maiol, Joaquina Vila, Maria Rovira, Josepa Valls, Magdalena Parés, Magdalena Fernández, Antònia Fernández and Maria Antònia Sera were all sent to work in a factory, though the fact that a chaperone accompanied them suggests they returned to the workhouse at night.⁶¹ As well as the demand from the burgeoning textile factories, the ‘wanted’ sections of contemporary newspapers frequently advertised for women who could sew, spin or knit stockings, often combined with domestic service. One notice requested a servant who knew how to spin, while in another, a widow advertised herself as a cook, but stated she could also knit stockings.⁶² In particular, the workhouse took a leading role in trialling new technology. In 1778, there were proposals to build a new spinning wheel and to set up looms for weaving cotton in the workhouse. In 1790, the workhouse was the testing-site for a new machine for spinning wool, and in 1793 for one for spinning linen, hemp, silk, wool and cotton. In 1795, a document refers to Teresa Botés, who ‘having learned to spin with a machine, initiated work on the first machine that was set up in the *Misericòrdia* on the 11th of this month [July]’.⁶³

Far less is known about training for boys. According to one contemporary, the *Reial Audiència*, the supreme authority in Catalonia, decreed in 1787 that all boys be taught reading, writing and arithmetic, though it is not clear from the reference whether this was an entirely new venture or simply the adoption of new methods.⁶⁴ Apprentices were placed across a range of occupations. The advantage offered by the workhouse in this regard was that boys from both the *Hospicio* and the Hospital de Santa Creu were exempt from paying premiums, a longstanding privilege the institutions fought hard to preserve in the

⁵⁷ AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, ‘Criadas que han salido en 1777’, letter of Juan Janer, dated 24th January 1777, requesting a maidservant from the *Misericòrdia*.

⁵⁸ Ibid, letter of Marianna Llobera, dated 15th February 1777.

⁵⁹ For this section, see Alonso and Rodríguez, ‘Beneficència il.lustrada’.

⁶⁰ AHCMB, AF18, P2, C1, ‘Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres’.

⁶¹ ARM4, P2, C1, ‘Muchachas que se han vestido por orden del Señor Obispo Junio 1795’.

⁶² *Diario de Barcelona*, 24th December 1792 and 26th December 1792. For other examples, see 1st November 1792 and 27th July 1793.

⁶³ ARM4, P2,C1, ‘Muchachas que se han vestido por orden del Señor Obispo Junio 1795’

⁶⁴ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. I, pp. 169-70; AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C2, ‘Estatutos para el Gobierno de la Escuela del Hospicio’.

face of guild opposition.⁶⁵ Moreover, the *Hospicio* had its own employment to offer. The institution had its own market garden, cultivated in part by the inmates, but also involving outside labour, as a series of letters from around 1770 from individuals requesting the job of gardener testify. In more than one instance, the petitioners strengthened their claim by pointing out that they had previously worked in the garden during their stay in the *Hospicio* or were married to a woman who had been in the *Misericòrdia*.⁶⁶ To give just one example, Joan Fons, alias Malgrat, had been twenty years in the *Hospicio*, six of which he had spent working in the garden, before serving an apprenticeship with a market gardener. If given the job, he offered to marry a girl from the *Misericòrdia*.

In addition to smoothing entry into the labour market, the workhouse also attempted to smooth entry into the marriage market. Girls were eligible to enter three lotteries which paid out dowries every year from charitable funds endowed for that purpose, and also benefitted from one-off lotteries, such as in 1799, when the new bishop, Pedro Díaz Valdés, sought to mark his investiture by paying dowries of 100 *lliures* each for 12 girls from the *Misericòrdia*.⁶⁷ Moreover, in 1772, the *Reial Audiència* passed a decree ordering the guilds to admit to master status free of charge any journeyman artisan who married a girl from the *Misericòrdia*. For families, therefore, placing children and adolescents in the workhouse represented not so much abandonment as the prospect of improved life chances.

V

Poor relief in Spain has received little attention to date, and little is known about the characteristics and lives of the poor. This study has presented new data on the ages, origins, marital status and circumstances surrounding the entries and exits of over 4,000 male inmates of the Barcelona workhouse over the period 1780-1803. These data complement the earlier work by Carbonell on over 6,000 female inmates for the period 1762-1803. Together, they show that the population of the workhouse was overwhelmingly young and single, and from outside Barcelona, though the timing and purpose of migration varied. There were differences between men and women: men entered in greater numbers, but stayed for less time, making the population at any one time majoritarily female, though less so over time. Surprisingly, elderly men had a greater presence in the workhouse than elderly women, especially relative to the age structure of the Catalan population. Men were more likely to escape than women and far less likely to be reclaimed by family, at least as far as the records show.

More importantly, this paper has sought to qualify the traditional, somewhat simplistic image of the southern or Mediterranean European family and its role as provider of support to kin in need. Kin did matter to the poor of Catalonia, and ties of family loyalty and responsibility did exist, but often they were fragile. For some, entry into the workhouse testified to this fragility: abandonment, *de facto* divorce and punishment were all reasons for entry. Many married men and women were in the workhouse without their spouses, most children were there without their parents. It is also clear that many inmates were immigrants, drawn in by the demand for skilled labour in the new textile mills and the construction industry, only to resort to institutional care during the many downturns in the economy. The role of the workhouse in substituting for kin in an urban setting, however, should not be overplayed. Many who entered from outside Barcelona came straight to the workhouse from rural areas, where kin were available but unable to help. For many families, institutional care was not a negation of family ties but rather the easiest means to fulfil responsibilities towards dependents. By placing the elderly and, above all, the young, in the workhouse, families could weather short-term crises and balance production with consumption. For the young, who made up the bulk of the workhouse population, families also

⁶⁵ For disputes surrounding this exemption, see AHCMB, ARM2, P1, CP2, Expedient 8 and the discussion in Alonso and Rodríguez, 'Beneficència il.lustrada', pp. 821-2. Similar privileges applied to boys from the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin and *La Trinité* in Paris, with similar opposition from the guilds in the latter case: see Zucca Micheletto, p. 209 and Haru Crowston, pp. 418-20.

⁶⁶ AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, numero 1. See also letters of Agustí Català and Salvador Pomareta.

⁶⁷ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. IV, p. 159. 100 *lliures* was a considerable sum; most dowry funds for poor girls paid 25 *lliures*. Dowries were also paid by the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin: see Zucca Micheletto, p. 211.

practised a long-term strategy, that of securing entry into the labour and, for women, the marriage market. This paper has emphasised the importance of the training offered to children and adolescents within the workhouse and the numerous ways in which entry into both markets was smoothed through easier access to guilds, recruitment into domestic service, the army and navy, and the provision of dowries.

Jane Humphries has recently shown that the boundaries between ‘nuclear’ and ‘extended’ were blurred among the families of the poor in industrial revolution Britain.⁶⁸ In terms of family ties, poor families were less ‘weak’ than the traditional historiography has suggested, with the poor drawing on kin and institutional welfare in a complex and shifting ‘mixed economy of welfare’. We argue similarly that the family ties of the poor in industrialising Barcelona were less ‘strong’ than has been suggested, and no less complex and changing. The idea of ‘strong’ versus ‘weak’ family ties in southern versus northern Europe is not without foundation, but we question its applicability to the households of the poor.

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Tables

Table 1: Population of the Barcelona workhouse according to sex

	Number men	% men	Number women	% women
1768	225	24	710	76
1772	122	14	766	86
1773	454	34	896	66
1787	430	32	911	68
1796	326	36	580	64
1797	303	34	597	66

Source: all except 1787 taken from AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, 'Estat del Numero de totes les personas...per principis de l'any 1768' and 'Estats de persones i cabdals, 1773-1798'; 1787 taken from Iglésies, *Cens del comte de Floridablanca*, vol. II, p. 500.

Table 2: Ages of men and women in the Barcelona workhouse (1780-1805), compared with total population of Catalonia (1787)

Age	Workhouse men	% workhouse men	% men 1787 census	Workhouse women	% workhouse women	% women 1787 census
0-6	133	5	21	679	16	20
7-15	1335	48	17	1741	42	17
16-24	295	11	14	677	16	15
25-40	250	9	20	426	10	20
41-50	190	7	13	165	4	13
50+	590	21	15	456	11	15
Total	2793			4144		

Source: AGDB, CC, 29; AHCMB, *Entrades*; Iglésies, *Cens del comte de Floridablanca*, vol. 1, pp. 44-5.

Table 3: Marital status of men (1780-1803) and women (1762-1805) in the workhouse, all ages, compared with total population of Catalonia in 1787

	Men	% men	% 1787 census	Women	% women	% 1787 census
Single	2242	66	57	4066	70	55
Married	730	21	38	703	12	37
Widowed	431	13	5	1079	18	9
	3403			5848		

Source: AGDB, CC, 29; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 129; Iglésies, *Cens del comte de Floridablanca*, vol. 1, p. 44-5

Table 4: Marital status of men (1780-1803) and women (1762-1805) in the Barcelona workhouse, aged over 60.

	Men	%	Women	%
Single	84	15	44	18
Married	289	50	20	12
Widowed	200	35	214	70
	573		278	

Source: AGDB, CC, 29; AHCMB, *Entrades*, based on sample of those for whom age and marital status were known.

Table 5: Reasons for entry into the *Misericordia* (1762-1805) and *Hospicio* (1780-1803)

	Women		Men		Men	
	1762-1779	1780-1805	1780-1803	1780-1803		
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Orphans or abandoned	291	47	671	46	8	1
Without means	46	7	510	35	275	28
Discipline	12	2	19	1	260	26
Begging	270	43	271	18	176	18
Ill, pregnant, disabled	48	8	12	1	262	26

Source: AGDB, CC, 29; AHCMB, *Entrades*

Note: percentages calculated out of 624 and 1470 first entries for women with reason given and 942 first entries for men.

Table 6: Reasons for leaving the workhouse

	Number men	% men	Number women	% women
Reclaimed by family	166	6	1709	52
Entered labour market	391	14	453	14
Discharged, no details	1223	45	631	19
Escaped	856	31	390	12
Transferred elsewhere	45	2	85	3
Unknown/unclear	38	1	0	0
Total	2719		3268	

Source: AGDB, CC, 29; AHCMB, *Entrades*

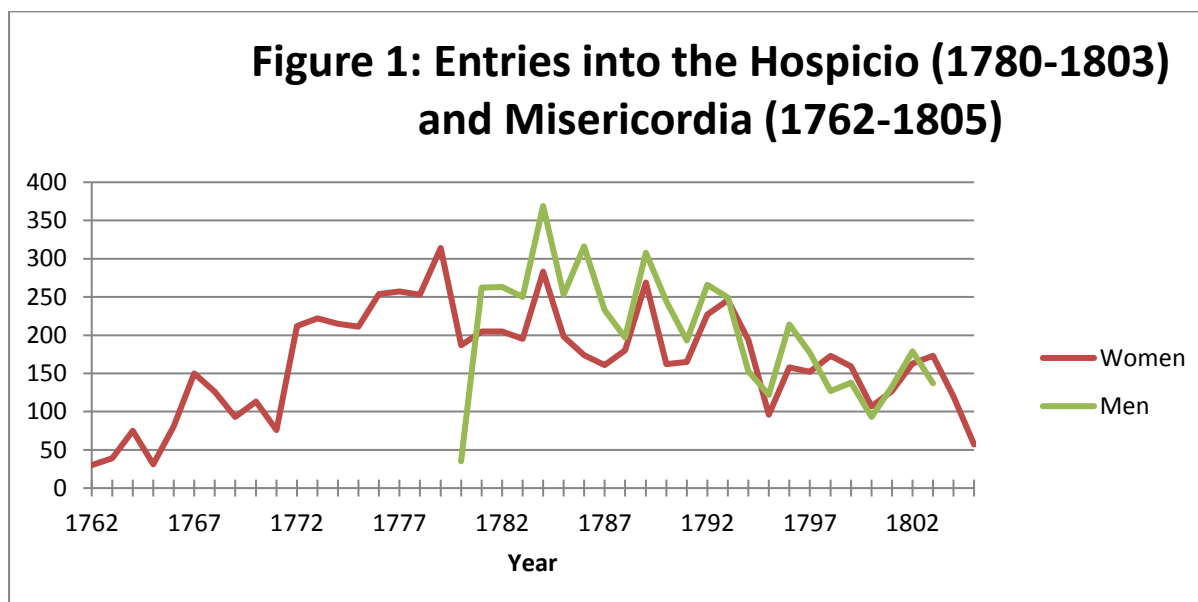


Figure 2: Distribution of lengths of stay in the workhouse by gender, 1780-1803

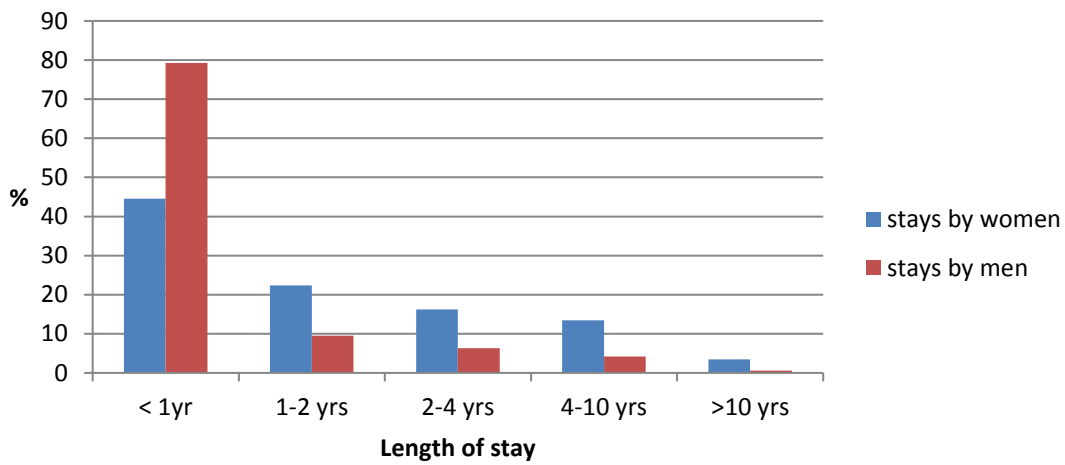


Figure 3: Numbers of men entering the Hospicio each year according to place of origin, 1780-1803

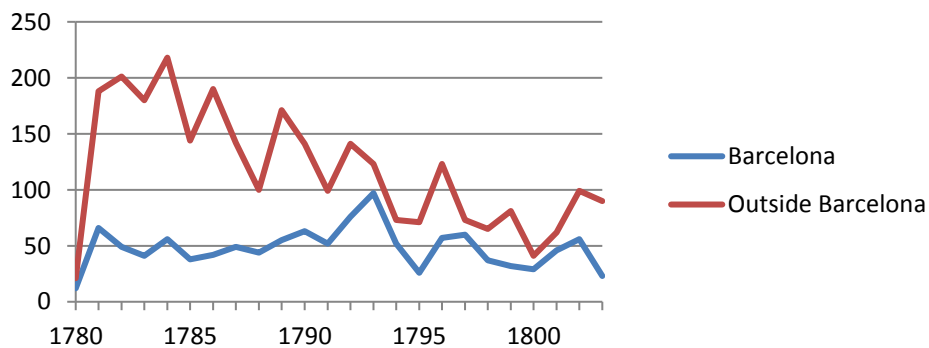


Figure 4: Numbers of women entering the Misericordia each year according to place of origin, 1762-1805

