

History of Paediatric Treatment in the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* (1941 - 1944)

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This research is a demographic overview of the children who were treated at the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* in the paediatric clinic, the psychiatric clinic, and the pathology department. It also examines those who worked in the clinic, and the students who conducted research on children as part of their medical studies. This project then asks to what extent did ideology impact the patient experience, and in turn, their treatment. The primary research in this thesis is based on case studies and data from the paediatric clinic, psychiatric clinic, student research, and the pathology department. The impact of evacuation on the medical treatment of children as the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* was dissolved is also analysed. A basis in historiography situates the medical practices of the era in relation to paediatric care, and also offers a comparative overview between the hospital during French and German occupation.

The central question of this research is how this paediatric clinic, and the treatment of children in the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* reflected paediatric standards at the time. How Nazi ideology impacted paediatric care will be explored through case studies. This is a selective, though not distortive, history, focusing on the treatment of children as patients rather than a focus on the heads of departments. Previous histories of the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* have been conducted in a more top-down approach by focusing on the directors of research institutes, but this study seeks a more grassroots approach to illuminate the patient experience (Hans-Joachim Lang, *Die Namen der Nummern. Wie Es Gelang, Die 86 Opfer Eines NS-Verbrechens Zu Identifizieren*. 2004). Therefore, selective case studies are chosen throughout this thesis as

examples to highlight and elucidate the general treatment trends experienced by the children who were treated here.

Strasbourg was evacuated in 1939 and occupied by the Germans in 1940, but approximately 500,000 Alsatians and Mosellans returned to their homes under Nazi occupation (Jean-Noël Grandhomme, 'La « mise au Pas » (Gleichschaltung) de l'Alsace-Moselle en 1940-1942', *Revue d'Allemagne et Des Pays de Langue Allemande* 46, no. 2 (July 2014): 443–65). This complex demographic breakdown of the population is evident in examining paediatric patient records. The issue of nationality politics is a pertinent one in the case of Strasbourg, as the residents had changed their nationality from German to French many times over the years, and were, in general, a bilingual population as a result (Anne-Ségolène Verneret, 'Nommer le conflit. Le cas de l'Alsace pendant son annexion de fait au Troisième Reich, 1940-1945', *Trajectoires. Travaux des jeunes chercheurs du CIERA*, no. 5 (16 December 2011). This difficulty in categorisation, especially as German nationality was based on race and ethnicity, is evident in the patient records of local children who attended the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* for medical treatment. Many Alsatians retained their jobs from the French clinic to the German clinic, highlighting a degree of continuity of staff, albeit under a new ethos (Bernhard Piotrowski, 'Die Rolle der "Reichsuniversitäten" in der Politik und Wissenschaft des hitlerfaschistischen Deutschlands', ed. Jozef Buszko and Irena Paczyńska (Krakow: Nakładem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, *Universities during World War II. Materials of international symposium held at the Jagiellonian University on the 40 anniversary of 'Sonderaktion Krakau', October 22-24, 1979*, 1984), 467–86). *Reichsuniversitäten* were established in the occupied lands of the Third Reich; one in Poznan (1941), one in Prague (1939) and one in Strasbourg (1941) (Christian Baechler, François Igersheim and Pierre Racine eds. *Les Reichsuniversitäten*

de Strasbourg et de Poznan et les résistances universitaires 1941 - 1944, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg 2005). The *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* founded in November 1941 to ‘dethrone the Sorbonne’ (Tania Elias, ‘La cérémonie inaugurale de la Reichsuniversität de Strasbourg (1941)’, *Revue d’Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 43, no. 3 (July 2011): 341–61).

Tania Elias notes that the date 23 November 1941 was particularly symbolic for the inauguration ceremony, as this was the anniversary of the date that the university became French again under Raymond Poincaré in 1918 (Ibid). Therefore, this was a symbolic retrieval of a former German university, known as the Kaiser Wilhelm Universität during the Kaiserreich from 1877 to 1918 (Jacques Héran, ed., *Histoire de la médecine à Strasbourg* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 1997). Just as the university itself was founded on National Socialist principles, the teaching of students in the medical faculty also followed this trend. In the *Vorlesungsverzeichnis* for the winter term 1940-1941 we can see the lectures that were offered to students. They included the study of racial biology wherein students were taught biological determinism and that certain races were inferior. Much of the teaching of medical students occurred in the individual clinics of the hospital as they were equipped with classrooms and libraries for research. The university took control of the hospital at this time, but kept the structure of the French hospital prior to occupation.



Illustration 1; Map of the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg*; the six buildings on the bottom left illustrate the *Kinderklinik*.

The children's clinic was the largest clinic of the hospital, with 6 buildings in a modern pavilion style (Jean-Marie Mantz, 'Editorial', *Histoire & patrimoine hospitalier: Mémoire de la médecine à Strasbourg* 23 (2010): 2–4). It was originally built in 1910, and retained the same structure into the Nazi era, bar the construction of a library, lecture theatre and small laboratory on site following occupation in 1941 (Jean-Marc Levy, 'Les "patrons" successifs de la clinique infantile', *Histoire & patrimoine hospitalier: Mémoire de la médecine à Strasbourg* 23 (2010): 14–29). This style of building was particularly modern and focused on accelerating the recovery of sick children, through the segregation of particular illnesses to reduce epidemics, as well as providing access to a central garden for exercise and fresh air. Within this building were lecture halls, a library, hospital wards and laboratories dedicated to paediatric treatment.

The director of the clinic, Dr Kurt Hofmeier, who formerly worked at the *Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria Haus* and at the *Charité* in Berlin, brought his expertise in paediatrics to the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* in 1941. He had been a rather early member of the Nazi party, joining in 1932, and this appears to have aided in his appointment to the head of the children's clinic as the NSDAP routinely conducted checks on the political reliability of staff at the hospital. All staff were subject to a local NSDAP check as to their political reliability, especially those who retained their job following Nazi occupation. In the case of Renatus M., he had worked at the clinic previously, was Alsatian, but was listed as having no political affiliations. His name had already been changed as part of the Germanisation process, from René to Renatus. While another staff member, Karl Willer, refused to join the NSDAP for quite some time, it is evident that internal pressure led him to join as a volunteer with the Hitler Youth movement in order to satisfy the local authorities.

The German Red Cross provided nursing services to the children's clinic, and while most of the nursing staff were German, they also had been present at the hospital prior to occupation. In order to retain their positions, a political reliability check was conducted, even though the German Red Cross had indicated their staff would follow Hitler's orders and be formally incorporated with the Nazi state from 1937 (Law on the German Red Cross). The scale of the paediatric clinic is particularly evident when the nursing staff is examined, as one fully qualified nurse was permitted per four patients. The staffing ratio in principle was eight trainee nurses for every ten full sisters and six nurses, indicating the considerable amount of staff. The German Red Cross nurses also managed the *Poliklinik* of the children's clinic, a sort of outpatient facility where children could return for check ups, or receive treatment for minor illnesses without admission to the hospital. Records from the *Poliklinik* have not been found, but given that five full time nurses worked there, and up to 3,000 patients could be seen on a daily basis, gives an indication of the size of the clinic, and the amount of staff accommodated at the institution.

While there was a private ward in the children's clinic, the majority of patients were all treated in the same wards based on illness rather than class. Many patients came from outside the city to receive treatment, such as those from Luxembourg, Belgium, Saar in Germany, as well as the south of France.

Nationality	Number of Patients
Alsatian	555
Reichsdeutscher	127
German	90
Lothringen	27
Italian	7
French	6
Volksdeutscher	2
Polish	2
Ukranian	2
Luxembourger	2
Belgian	1
Yugoslavian	1
Swiss	1
Lithuanian	1
Unknown	34
Illegible Nationality	11
Total	869

Table of Nationality Breakdown for Patients in the Kinderklinik

It is indicative of the political policies of the Nazi regime that a number of children from Eastern Europe were also treated at the clinic, such as two patients from Poland, one from Yugoslavia, and two from Ukraine. These children were accommodated at the *Umsiedlungslager*, which aimed to resettle those considered to be ethnically German and begin ‘Germanising’ them to be integrated into German society in the West (Isabel Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”: *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003). While children from different insurance classes were treated side by side, a possibly divergent model of care emerged throughout this study, as those from Western Europe with more wealthy parents have more

detailed patient files. This is evident through a number of case studies, where informed consent forms were signed by their parents for certain procedures such as pneumoencephalography. Letters were also written to parents informing them as to their children's diet, and their progression in treatment, especially in the case of those with long term illnesses. This is in contrast with the files of patients from Eastern Europe, where their parents do not come to visit, nor is there any correspondence between the doctor and their parents informing them as to their child's condition. It also appears that more modern therapies were utilized in children who had wealthier parents.

It appears that Strasbourg did not adhere to ideas set out in the *Ehegesundheitsgesetz* and the *Gesetz für Erbkrankte Nachwuchs* which controlled the treatment of people with hereditary illnesses, mental health conditions, and other illnesses such as epilepsy and Downs syndrome (referred to as 'Mongolism' at the time) (Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *Grenzüberschreitungen: das Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik 1927-1945*, (Göttingen : Wallstein-Verl., 2005). In other institutions, these patients were sent to T4 institutions to be killed, or were given an overdose of medications. Many children who were admitted with such diseases were transferred to further *Kinderfachabteilungen*, which were institutions built to cater for children with these conditions and were often complicit in their maltreatment or even death (Maïke Rotzoll, Gerrit Hohendorf and Sigrid Oehler-Klein, 'Der Pädiater Johann Duken im Dienst nationalsozialistischer Gesundheitspolitik' in: Oehler-Klein, *Die medizinische Fakultät der Universität Gießen im Nationalsozialismus und in der Nachkriegszeit: Personen und Institutionen, Umbrüche und Kontinuitäten* (Die medizinische Fakultät der Universität Gießen 1607 bis 2007), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (2007): 323-357). This was not the case in Strasbourg, nor was their treatment compromised. One such example was the

case of Ernst Z. who had epilepsy, and was admitted for observation of his tonic clonic seizures. He was released, and told to return for a check up; during this time the doctors informed his parents that no more could be done for him as regards treatment, and so the parents were permitted to take him home. In similar cases in this era these children would have been sent to further institutions such as *Kinderfachabteilungen*, to be killed, whereas this did not appear to be the case in Strasbourg. The majority of patients stayed for a short duration, but 25 children stayed between 6 months to one year, indicating the possibility to provide longer term care to certain children.

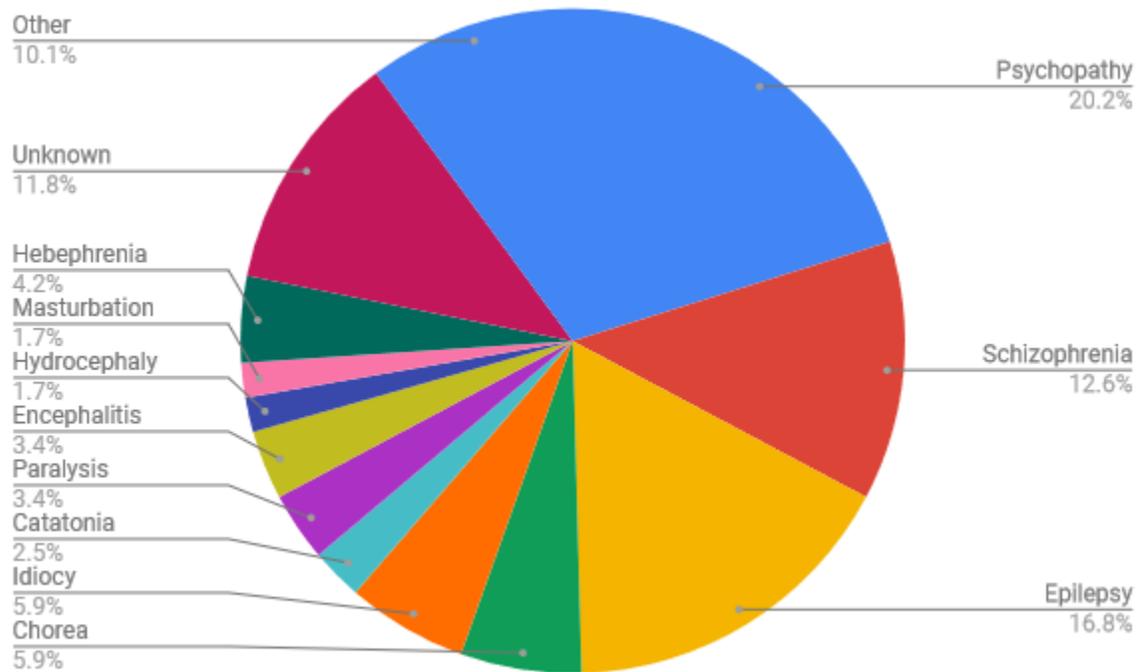


Table of Diagnoses of Children admitted to the Psychiatric Clinic.

While the majority of children were treated in the paediatric clinic, 127 children were treated in the adult psychiatric clinic, in part due to the lack of a dedicated paediatric psychiatry department. In 1944, there was a proposal to build a paediatric psychiatry facility, but due to the

war and the evacuation of Strasbourg in 1944, this did not occur. This letter between Dr Bostroem (the director of the psychiatric clinic) and Dr Stein (the Dean of the medical faculty) explained that the current situation was not fit for purpose, but due to overcrowding, children were accommodated in the adult institution. It appears that these children were subject to modern therapies, such as pneumoencephalography and given medications such as cardiazol as well as insulin shock therapy. This indicates both therapeutic intent, and its role as a teaching hospital showing its use of newer techniques.

The case studies of these children illustrate how aware they were of the conditions of war and how traumatic this was for them. This is clear in the case of Johann who worried that the Gestapo were following him, and this was interpreted by the doctors as a persecution complex. The case of Renatus F. indicted how the trauma of displacement impacted children, as he showed signs of distress in his medical record. During the evacuation from Strasbourg he suffered extreme headaches, sensitivity to light and sound and a lack of appetite. His condition was serious enough that he was returned to Strasbourg for tests, as his parents believed this to be meningitis, but his symptoms subsided on his return to his home city, prompting his release from the hospital. The use of play and art as a method of communication by children as to their welfare is particularly evident in these case studies. Johann, who was admitted for psychopathy in 1942, used his aspiration to be a painter to draw his surroundings, and also reflected on the dominant imagery of the time, as he depicted a Messerschmidt in flight, and the gates of the hospital. Children's ability to play indicated the degree of their recovery and method of communication with their caregivers in the hospital.

The medical theses conducted by students in the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* primarily focused on the topic of paediatrics, with 31 students completing their theses under the direction

of Dr Hofmeier. These theses vary in methodology and theme, but largely focus on statistical analyses of infant mortality, nutrition research, hereditary concerns, and immunity. All of these areas also follow the research interests of Dr Hofmeier who published extensively on these topics. These theses also illustrate the innovative therapies used at the clinic, as the case of Gaby S. who is reported in Christel von der Decken's thesis '*Über gutartige sympathische Neuroblastome mit histologisch sarkomartigen Bildern*' which was completed in 1945. The patient had a sarcoma which, instead of being treated conservatively, was given innovative therapy in the case of a cancer that generally led to death within a year, through radical excision surgery. This also indicates the collaboration between clinics in order to conduct research, as the pathology department under Dr Klinge is credited in the thesis. Issues such as euthanasia and heredity of dysgenic factors are also discussed in these theses, illustrating the impact of Nazi ideology on student research. In Johanna Wehrung's thesis entitled '*Erläuterungen zum Euthanasie-Problem aufgrund einer Rückfrage bei Frauen,*' she conducted a questionnaire on medical students of the hospital, asking them in what conditions they would agree to euthanasia. This thesis engaged with the ideas of the time from Binding and Hoche, that there were some people with certain conditions that were '*lebensunwerten Leben,*' or 'life unworthy of living.' (Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens, ihr Maß und ihre Form,* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1920). Concerns about the breastfeeding rate in Strasbourg and in the children's clinic was also examined by Werner Hesselring in his thesis '*Sterblichkeit und Todesursachen an der Straßburger Universitätskinderklinik vom 1.1.1941 bis 31.12.1942*' from 1944, which reflects concerns of the time as to optimal infant nutrition. It also reflects the efforts of Dr Hofmeier in creating a breast milk bank in the children's clinic to improve the prognosis of newborn and premature infants.

The majority of the referrals to the pathology department came from the children's clinic, in part because epidemics tended to affect children most severely leading to their death, and also because the children's clinic was one of the largest in the hospital. The pathology records of the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* indicate a considerable interest in epidemiology, as this comprises the majority of these files. It also showed the cooperation of clinics to decipher the cause of death in relation to children. The doctors at the children's clinic would send a note to the pathology lab, requesting certain areas for dissection in order to confirm the diagnosis before the death of the child. The pathology department would then record the weight and condition of the organs, before arriving at their diagnosis, and then sending back a note to the paediatric clinic illustrating their findings. The pathology records also indicate how important the teaching collections were for the hospital, as a number of students conducted their state exams utilising the bodies of those who died in the clinic, as this was common practice in teaching hospitals.

This study concludes with an analysis of the evacuation in 1944 and the post war era. This is in part because the most intact record of the evacuation of the hospital was written by the director of the children's clinic, Dr Kurt Hofmeier. While very little is known about the fate of the patients of the clinic, the impact of ideology on the staff is clear. Hofmeier wrote about how the students gradually stopped attending lectures due to the impending arrival of the allied forces, although the staff had received orders to remain in the university and continue research as normal. General Vaterrodt explained that the university held a strategic and symbolic position for the Third Reich, and thus keeping the university running was regarded as politically important. That being said, Hofmeier noted that many staff members had already evacuated and were absent from a staff meeting on 21 November 1944. Some patients from the children's clinic had been relocated to Stephansfeld, an institution in Alsace, which indicates their knowledge of an

impending battle that would impact the treatment of patients. The denazification of staff, their post war work, and a historiographical analysis of patients in the postwar era also sheds light on the fate of patients and staff following the liberation of Strasbourg.

While this thesis is predominantly qualitative in methodology, a number of quantitative elements are included. This thesis compiles 900 paediatric patient files from the *Reichsuniversität Straßburg* and explains the divergent treatment received by the children there through examining case studies of a number of patients. The full 900 cases are detailed in a database, illustrating their age on admittance, duration of stay in the clinic, nationality, diagnosis, and treatments. 127 paediatric patients who were admitted to the psychiatric institution are also collected in a database, following the same methods of analysis and case studies to provide an in depth analysis of patient care. The complete list of paediatric pathology records is also listed, including the diagnosis that they presented with, and a comparative overview as to how many paediatric patients were represented in the pathology records.