

Trained midwives - Political Issue in the 18th Century Finland

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Early modern maternity health in Europe

- In early modern Europe, one woman out of a hundred died in childbirth or in childbed fever. In big cities, maternal mortality rate was particularly elevated.
- Even one in five children born alive died before their first birthday. Child mortality was higher in towns than in the rural areas.
- In continental Europe, these problems tried to be tackled through improved professionalism and better training for midwives during the 17th and 18th centuries.



Midwifery - Regulated profession in medieval and early modern Europe

- The oldest regulations related to European midwifery originated in the medieval German cities.
- In France, the midwifery profession was regulated from the year 1578 and in Sweden (Finland) from the year 1663.
- Giovanni de Grevembroch (1731-1807) *Gli Abiti dei Veneziani* (The Venetian occupations): A Venetian midwife and a porter carrying her wooden birthing chair.



The need of professional education

- The professional education of midwives begins at hospitals and under the control of medical collegiums.
- Germany 1589
- France (Paris) 1630
- Sweden and Finland (Stockholm) 1711
- Danmark 1714
- Norway 1748 and 1764
- Spain, Italy, Holland about 1750
- The obstetrical mannequin (1758), for practicing mock births, invented by Angélique Marguerite Le Boursier Du Coudray, the court midwife of the Queen of France.



The studies in midwifery

- The students had to be literate and know how to write.
- The studies included the reading of textbooks, anatomy lessons, following autopsies, and practical training.
- German court midwife Justine Siegemund's textbook of the art of the midwifery (1690). Here she shows how a midwife can turn a foetus around in a woman's womb with the help of two hands and a rope.

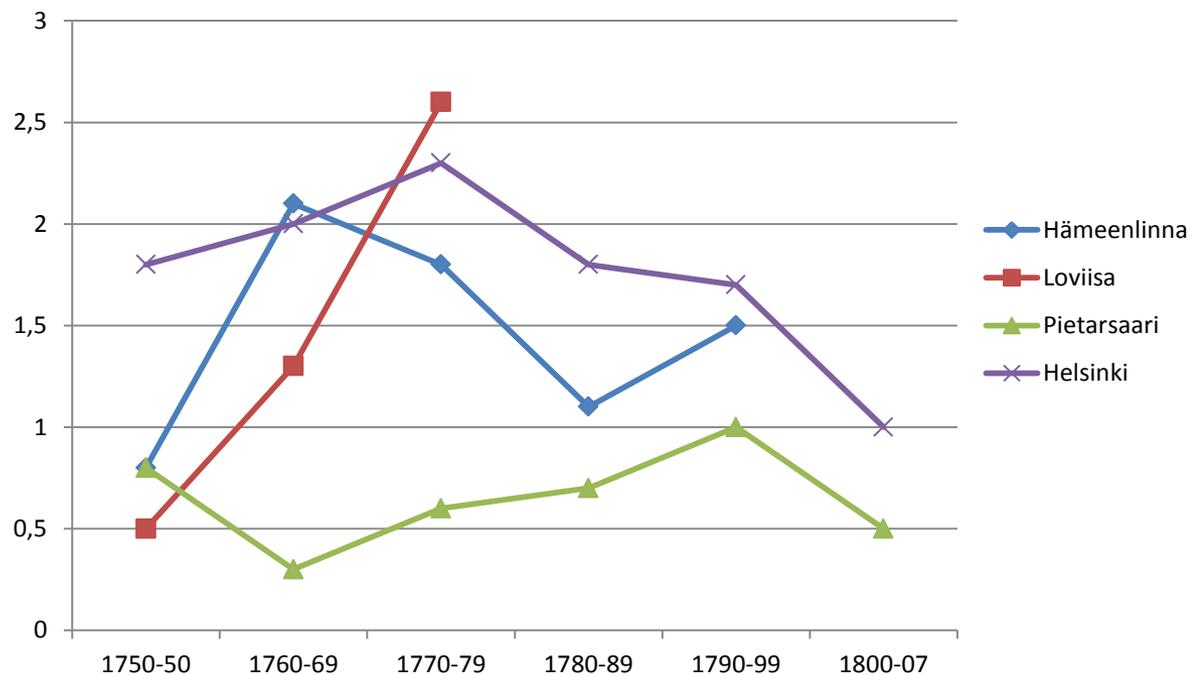


The impact of the governmental training investment in 19th century Finland

- The risks groups among the mothers giving birth were the same as today: first time and aged mothers.
- The trained midwives were able to:
 - Perform bimanual pelvic examinations
 - Turn the foetus presenting itself in an awkward position.
 - Untrained birth attendants or barber-surgeons did not master these techniques or would not perform such procedures. Only the trained midwife would introduce her hand into the mother's vagina.

Women's childbirth-related mortality as percentage of all births in four Finnish towns in 1750-1807

Naisten synnytyskuolleisuus prosentteina suhteessa syntyneiden määrään 1750-1807



Infant mortality as percentage of all births in four Finnish towns in 1730-1807

Kuvio 1: Imeväiskuolleisuus prosentteina suhteessa syntyneiden määrään 1730-1807

