

**CHILD ABANDONMENT AND ILLEGITIMACY IN THE ISLAND
OF SÃO JORGE (AZORES-PORTUGAL)**

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INTRODUCTION

1- Data gathered

During the 1992 Scientific Expedition to São Jorge, parish registers were consulted referring to some villages of the district of Velas, according to the following described:

Baptisms (1875-1900)- Variables include date of birth, place of birth, legitimacy/illegitimacy.

- Velas
- Santo Amaro

Marriages (1876-1900)- Variables include place of birth of the couple, residency, age, marital status, occupation and consanguinity.

- Urzelina- 146
- Velas- 279
- Santo Amaro- 148
- Norte Grande- 290
- Manadas- 136

Deaths (1876-1900)- Variables include date of burial, sex, age, marital status and legitimacy.

- Santo Amaro
- Velas

For purposes of this report, only data referring to the baptisms were dealt with, giving particular emphasize to the variable of illegitimacy.

2- Evidence of "Expostos" in Azores

Evidence of "Expostos" or "Engeitados" (abandoned children) in Portugal are very rare; this fact is also true for the Azores. The available azorian sources on this subject are not the same on every island : in Faial, for example, "Livros de Entradas de Expostos" have been found, containing only the births of "expostos", and in many cases the date of death (Lima & Smith, 1991). In fact, legislation dating from 1820 (Gouveia-Pinto, 1820) advised all municipalities to keep separate books for "expostos", but that didn't happen. For example, such records do not exist for the island of S. Jorge, where the baptism of an abandoned child is kept together with all the other baptisms.

In Portugal the legislation on "expostos" exists since the beginning of the 19th century (Gouveia-Pinto, 1820). There were 65 laws containing all the principles by which "expostos" should be looked after. These rules included the existence of one or several women capable of receiving and taking care of the babies, during their first days (called "rodeira"). Another person (usually a man) should be sent to look for proper nurses. All the belongings of the baby should be carefully kept to allow his identification in case the parents wanted him back. This in fact happened frequently, and can be confirmed for the island of São Jorge.

In theory, all medical care should be provided to "expostos", and the nurse could be severely punished if such didn't happen. On the other hand, a good caring nurse should be rewarded.

Several obligations were due to the nurse, including good care, in terms of clothing, food, and health. They should have the babies vaccinated, and when collecting their fee, they should show the baby, in order to demonstrate he was receiving good care. These rules were probably followed to some extent, but there is no possibility of knowing so. In Faial, Lima & Smith (1991) were able to find a list of nurses to whom no "exposto" should be given to, thus demonstrating that some sort of control was done.

In S. Jorge, the municipality expenses with "expostos" began even before 1800 (the first record dates from 1726): nevertheless, this was not seen as an obligation of the municipality but rather as a proof of humanity, once there were no laws on the subject. The cradle ("roda") in Velas, was created in 1806, and the obligations of the municipality towards "expostos" were divided into 9 simple rules (Avellar, 1902).

Once the cradle was replaced by the Hospicio (a house specially created to receive abandoned babies, also known as "casa da roda"), it was determined that it could receive abandoned babies of any place in the island. The Hospicio could take care, besides the "expostos," of any child under the age of 7 whose mother fulfilled one of the following conditions:

- a- Single women belonging to traditional families, that would become "dishonored".
- b- Single women with no financial conditions to raise their babies.
- c- Single women that would become unable to work because of their babies.

An allowance was given to the nurses during the first 7 years of the baby's life.

The abandoned babies were at the responsibility of the municipality, which provided an allowance to the nurses, during the first 7 years of the child's life. After that, they could stay with their nurses, but no further payment would be done. Once this was not the will of the nurse, the "exposto" would be given to the person in charge of the orphans in the municipality. The municipality, then, was free to give the child to whomever paid more.

The economic costs related with "expostos" where, without a doubt, a burden to the municipalities (Figueira, 1869): eventually, and if these expenses were too high, all the population could be called to contribute.

The illegitimacy rate in a population is an important phenomenon, because among other aspects it can conceal the population's true genealogical structure, hiding possible biological links, that become impossible to trace. Consanguinity, for example, can be seriously underestimated in a population with a high level of illegitimacy, and where the illegitimate child has similar chances to survive as the legitimate one. (Areia, 1985).

Therefore, to analyze the importance of illegitimacy in the structure of this population it would be essential to determine if there is differential mortality rates for abandoned and illegitimate, that is, to determine if they had equal opportunity to survive.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The non-legitimate births were annotated with the indications of year of birth, status (illegitimate or abandoned), sex, place of birth, and year of death. This information was kept in a file program, consisting of 436 records.

The percentage of non-legitimacy was calculated for each district separately. The sex ratio (number of boys/number of girls x 100) at birth, for non-legitimate and legitimate children was calculated and analyzed.

It was impossible to study the mortality of the abandoned due to the insufficient information. Only in very few cases the date of death was annotated in the birth record.

RESULTS

The number of non-legitimate children and the number of legitimate by district and by periods of 5 years are shown in Table 1.

Table 1- Number of non-legitimate and legitimate children.

Years	Non-Leg.		Legit.	
	Velas	St. Am.	Velas	St. Am.
1876-80	70	21	217	97
1881-85	77	20	204	120
1886-90	78	15	228	129
1891-95	81	18	195	115
1896-00	30	27	222	112

In absolute terms Velas presents the highest number of non-legitimate births, but also the highest number of legitimate. Non-legitimacy percentages by year, for each district are shown in Figure 1.

The values observed are extremely high, reaching 62% in the year of 1887 in Velas, being the average for the two districts and for the total period of time 30%. Only since 1893 has there been an indication that these figures were decreasing. The expected values for illegitimacy in Portugal are below these numbers. Areia (1985) obtained, for a population of the center of Portugal, 10% of illegitimate births, considering such to be a normal expectancy. High values of illegitimacy were obtained by Abade (1992) in several populations in the north of Portugal. According to this author the values observed reveal a social acceptance towards single mothers, and consequently towards illegitimate children.

We have to keep in mind, that, because there was a special place for abandonment in Velas, "expostos" represent a fairly high percentage of the non-legitimate children. From the 436 complete records of non-legitimate children that we have annotated, 303 refer to illegitimate and 133 to abandoned. The "expostos" thus represent 30.5% of the non-legitimate births.

From the two districts in study, Velas shows clearly the highest percentage of non-legitimate births. This fact is, as stated before, related with the existence of a special home for the abandoned in the area (referred as "Hospicio" in the records), where the babies could be cared for. The "Hospicio de Expostos" name given to the institution where the babies were abandoned, was created by the district in 1874, in order to replace the cradle of Velas. This was thus a recognized institution accepted and seen as beneficial, once it would "save the honor of honest families without jeopardizing the life of the innocents" (Gouveia-Pinto, 1820).

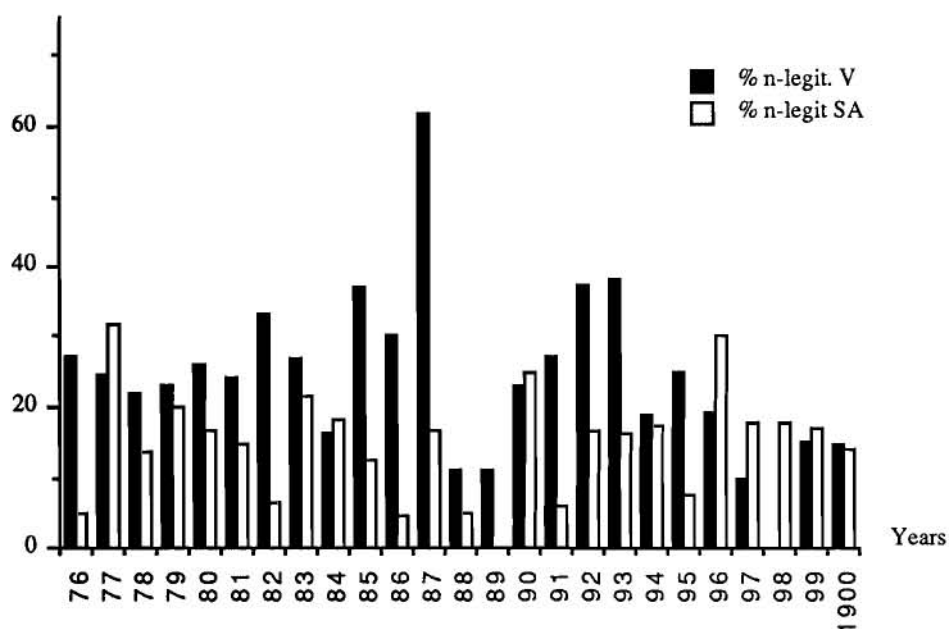


Figure 1- Percentage of non-legitimacy for Velas and St. Amaro, by year.

The sex-ratio was calculated for non-legitimate and legitimate (Table 2). On what concerns Velas, this ratio is higher for legitimate births; for Santo Amaro values are higher for non-legitimate in three of the five periods in study.

Table 2- Sex-Ratio of non-legitimate and legitimate, by district.

Years	Sex-ratio(Non-Leg.)		Sex-ratio(Leg.)	
	Velas	St. Amaro	Velas	St. Amaro
1876-80	64	216.7	217	125
1881-85	66.4	95	204	142.8
1886-90	121.8	144.4	228	92.7
1891-95	121.5	166.7	195	71.5
1860-00	105.1	97.2	222	105.7

Considering 106 as the reference value for the sex-ratio (Visaria, 1967) we realize that these numbers are very high, with an enormous excess of boys; the small number of births analyzed, can however, be responsible for some error.

An analysis of the place of abandonment reveals that 65.8% of the babies were left at the "Hospicio de Expostos", the others being abandoned at the doorstep of private homes.

There seems to be no specific criteria on choosing the nurses to whom the abandoned were given to: no preference is given to married women (Table 3). Unfortunately, for 288 records we have no references about the person who took care of the child.

Table 3- Number of nurses, by marital status.

Marital status	Number of nurses
Married	30
Single	58
Widow	3

However in Ponta Delgada (the main city of S. Miguel), the legislation of 1857 stated that abandoned babies should not be given to single women. This rule was implemented to prevent children from being given to prostitutes, that raised them as a way of getting the allowance (J.G.D.A.P.D., 1857, 1879).

From the total non-legitimate children, 27 are subsequently recognized by their parents ("Legitimado posteriormente") and 4 are legally adopted ("perfilhados"). This means that if we try to evaluate the impact of illegitimacy on the population structure, we have to count out all these individuals.

It is likely that the "expostos" in Velas represent a fair percentage of the total "expostos" in São Jorge; nevertheless, even in Santo Amaro, illegitimacy is very high. Maybe this phenomenon is related to the population structure, namely with a late age at marriage and a high rate of celibacy. These aspects will be studied further more.

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