


The impact of the 1918 influenza epidemic in southern La Mancha: Case study *El impacto de la epidemia de gripe de 1918 en La Mancha meridional: estudio de caso*

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ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Aim of this article: this article analyses the effects that the 1918-influenza epidemic had on the morbidity, the mortality and on the economy in southern La Mancha. This study focuses on the municipality of Hellín, located in the province of Albacete.

Methodology: the *libros de defunciones* of the Civil Registry, the *matrículas de la contribución industrial y de comercio* and the *actas de Pleno* of the Hellín City Council, constitute the main sources of study. The authors, by using the mentioned data bases, have calculated the total rates of birth and mortality, infant mortality, average age of livelihood, Dupâquier index (which determines the intensity of the mortality related to a pandemic crisis), seasonality coefficient due to the flu mortality, mortality due to gender and age at death and the number of the industrial licenses and trade in the first decade of the 20th century.

Findings: the results obtained reveal that during the first decades of the 20th century, Hellín started a demographic upgrade, based on a gradual decrease of the mortality. However, this decrease was deeply altered due to the negative impact caused by the pandemic flu of the 1918. It was translated into an important regression of the health conditions of the population. According to the Dupâquier Index, which determines the intensity of the mortality related to a pandemic crisis, Hellín suffered a “severe crisis” of mortality associated with the influenza pandemic, which was translated into a decrease in the average age of survival of the population of Hellin. In the period of 1916-1917 and 1918, average age of survival of men and women in Hellín varied from 44.5 to 43.8 years and from 29.8 to 31.8 years, respectively. The age regression for the whole population was similar decreasing in the same period of time from 44.2 to 30.8 years old. The present results show that the incidence of influenza, unlike other urban contexts, was concentrated in the fall of 1918. A slight excess male mortality has been found; being the most affected the 10-39 year old group. The effects of the pandemic on the local economy, measured from several indicators (for instance number of industrial licenses and trade, index of cereal production, wine and oil of the Albacete region and average salaries of the temporary agriculture workers of the south part of Spain) by contrast, were rather mild.

Limitation: It has not been possible to analyse the social gradient of the mortality caused by the flu in Hellín, due to the scarce information of the professional careers of the death people of the official source of the Spanish Registro Civil.

Originality of the work: the article has been able to merge the “micro” and the “macro”, that is, to fuse the best of the local archive work with the bibliographic and critical study of the works that have dealt with the 1918 influenza pandemic in Spain.