A study of fifty unmarried mothers known to the family service division of the Chicago Welfare Department 1946-1947

Effie Mae Whitaker

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A STUDY OF FIFTY UNMARRIED MOTHERS
KNOWN TO THE FAMILY SERVICE DIVISION OF
THE CHICAGO WELFARE DEPARTMENT
1946-1947

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE ATLANTA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF
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FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades while case work became increasingly concerned with the individual as a person, it likewise extended its services to include large numbers of individuals through the Social Security Program. The Social Security benefits extended services to persons who never before were the recipients of public assistance. One group of individuals served by social agencies is unmarried mothers.

The task before the social agency offering assistance to unmarried mothers is indeed difficult. In one respect, the problems of the unmarried mother are similar to the problems of other persons who seek some sort of welfare assistance, but in a more significant view, the problems are very different. Ruth Brenner wrote:

The unmarried mother has been labeled with a "Scarlet letter" band and is categorized as a delinquent by our present day society. Many of our states, by their laws, give little protection to her child; his birth is registered as "illegitimate" or his father's name is omitted on the birth certificate. When such a situation occurs, the unmarried mother is often exploited by the family, friends or employers.1

Some of the unwed mothers experienced the severe censure of the community. The woman who has given birth to a child out of wedlock usually comes to the social agency feeling alone and

abandoned. Many of these women come to the agency as a last resort and in desperation. In a lecture, Miss Simon, of the University of Chicago, summarized the woman’s plight as follows:

How alone she is, it is sometimes easy to overlook. It is obvious that she has no husband. Even if the father of her baby continues a relationship with her, generally it is inherent in their situation that he cannot offer her the same kind of care and protection that is the gift to the married mother. The unmarried mother’s aloneness is underscored in another way. And this is the factor that we may tend to overlook. Why does the unmarried mother come to an agency? Because there is no one in her total life situation who has the wish and/or the ability to accept her or to help her. This is a desperate reality to the girl even if she only imagines this is so. The psychological reality is that she feels alone and abandoned.¹

The challenge to the social worker in these situations, constitutes a continuing drive and desire to know more, understand more and to discharge responsibilities with more skill. Coupled with this drive to learn and to improve is the strong hope that the persons served will eventually be able to adjust to the realities of their lives, as well as to the expectations of the community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to describe some of the problems of a group of unmarried mothers known to the Chicago Welfare Department in 1946 and 1947; (2) to show

¹Lecture by Bernice Simon, Assistant Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, October 15, 1949.
how the agency has tried to meet their needs; and (3) to evaluate the program of the agency in terms of what has been done for these women as well as to them.

Scope and Limitations

This study was based on case material obtained from the records of fifty unmarried mothers, selected from the writer's case load of one hundred with the Family Division of the Chicago Welfare Department. These women lived in several areas in Chicago. However, most of them came from the near North side of the city. These cases were chosen by virtue of their apparent representativeness. In addition to case record data, each woman was interviewed for additional information which was not a part of the case record. An appointment was made for this purpose and the interview in each instance was held at the woman's home.

Method of Procedure

Pertinent case data taken from case records or obtained in interviews were recorded on the basis of a schedule comprising nine items. The first five items referred to identifying information. Item six dealt with housing. Items seven and eight covered case work services made available and special problems peculiar to unmarried mothers. In some instances, case record data were incomplete, and several visits to the home were necessary in order to obtain the needed information.
Factual information as means of support, earnings, living and health conditions have been treated statistically. Other information to which statistical methods were not applicable has been presented in narrative form.
CHAPTER II

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHICAGO WELFARE DEPARTMENT

Background

Prior to the depression of the thirty's, the responsibility for the care of dependent families rested upon five private social agencies (the Jewish Social Service Bureau, Catholic Charities, United Charities, the American Red Cross, and the Salvation Army), and two public agencies (the Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare and the Mothers' Aid Department of the Juvenile Court). All but two, accordingly, were depending chiefly upon private funds, which were insufficient.

In 1932, the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission (IERC) was established, with authority over the distribution of funds appropriated by the state legislature. The designated administrative agent for Cook County (including the city of Chicago) was the Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare. In 1936, the state legislature limited the functions of the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission to the allocation of funds and other services. After June 30, 1936, the responsibility for administration of relief was placed upon the city of Chicago and upon township supervisors outside of Chicago. The City Council created the position of Commissioner of Relief for Chicago, and the Chicago Relief Administration was brought into existence. This organization is now known as the Chicago Welfare Department.
Purpose and Philosophy

The policies and procedures of the Chicago Welfare Department have stemmed from state laws directing it as follows:

It shall be the duty of this department to relieve and support all poor and indigent persons as are not supported by their relatives or by Cook County and to see that they are suitably relieved, supported and employed.¹

The agency took cognizance of the public's responsibility for meeting the needs of dependent persons according to accepted standards of health and decency and in such a manner as to safeguard the dignity of the individual. It operated under the concept that assistance must be directed toward creating opportunity for rehabilitation, self-support, and self-development.

Eligibility requirements were determined in accordance with law and administrative policy. Assistance was available upon proof of:

(1) Inadequate resources; (2) residence in Illinois and Chicago; (3) inability of legally responsible relatives to support; (4) physical inability to accept employment to which referred; (5) ineligibility for other assistance programs.²

Chicago Welfare Operating Units

The operating units of the Chicago Welfare Department were

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²Ibid., p. 6.
as follows:

(1) Accounting-Auditing Division.—Audits budgets, bills and time-sheets and prepares the checks to meet the obligations of the Department of Welfare.

(2) Active Files Section.—Contains case records of persons receiving assistance, so that they may be pulled as needed.

(3) Application Division.—Services persons applying for assistance. The recipient is first given a brief, preliminary intake interview.

(4) Case Registration Unit.—Clears with the Central Files Section or with the Social Service Exchange, when application is first made.

(5) Children's Division.—Handles children who, by order of the Juvenile Court or voluntary agreement of the parents, require care outside their own home and the selection of an available foster home. When institutional care is required, the Children's Division attempts to make the necessary placement.

(6) Commodities Division.—Is responsible for seeing that many items of clothing and such household items as mattresses, blankets, bed linens, and layettes are available to recipients. This division also distributes certain foodstuffs to meet a temporary need.

(7) The Home Economics Division.—Has the responsibility of deciding the items for which assistance is granted; it establishes quality and quantity standards, and it conducts periodic price surveys in order to initiate changes in the amounts allowed as prices fluctuate.

(8) The Inter-Agency Unit.—Handles all cases involving non-residence, including inquiries regarding the legal residence in Chicago of persons stranded in another city.

(9) Master Files Unit.—Maintains three card files serving to identify every case ever known to the Department of Welfare. These separate files are organized according to name, address, and case number.

(10) Medical Division.—Is for consultation by case workers in matters involving the health of recipients. As needed, the Medical Division makes arrangements for medical attention, hospitalization, clinic attendance, and surgical and orthopedic appliances.
(11) The Medical Examining Unit.--Examines all applicants and recipients for the purpose of determining employability.

(12) Placement Section.--Refers all employable applicants and recipients to suitable available employment. Contact is maintained with employers throughout the city for this purpose.

(13) Resource Division.--Investigates such resources as property, insurance, stocks, bonds, dividends from closed banks, and personal injury claims. It also reviews cases referred by case workers to determine whether assistance was obtained by misrepresentation and arranges with such recipients for a repayment plan.

Persons seeking assistance from the Chicago Welfare Department had to make an application in the Application Division. At this time the recipient was given a preliminary intake interview by workers assigned to this division. A case file was prepared on each individual who was then assigned to a worker as a part of his case load. An appointment was given the recipient at the intake interview, and he was usually requested to bring with him certain identifying papers or other documents as related to his particular problem. Arrangements were also made for an examination by the Medical Examining Unit to determine the recipient's employability. During the second interview, the worker obtained detailed data relative to the person and his circumstances. If the person desired food, clothing and money for living expenses, a budget was prepared with the assistance of the sections involved, including the Commodities Division and the Home Economics Division. Every social worker depended upon the Resource Division which investigated the assets which the recipient possessed.

If it appeared that the recipient was in need of medical
attention, he was referred to the Medical Division for consultation with the medical workers and the medical staff. Arrangements for treatments, hospitalization or some other service may be recommended, depending on the recipient's condition. All employable persons were referred to the Placement Section where attempts were made to obtain employment for them.

Each worker was assigned a district and was given a case load. The rapid turnover in personnel and the increasing number of new recipients meant that some workers were burdened with a large case load. This situation presented many difficult problems.
CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC STATUS OF CASES STUDIED

Employment

Employment did not constitute a real problem during the war years for most of the unwed mothers. Many of the mothers indicated that they had come to Chicago seeking better paying jobs in war industries. Several had relatives living in the city who had sent for them.

TABLE 1

AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 to 27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 to 31</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 to 35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, thirty-two of these women were from twenty to twenty-seven years of age. In several instances, information was given that the trip to Chicago was the first away from home for any appreciable length of time.
### TABLE 2

PLACE OF BIRTH AND RACE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The unwed mothers came from nine different states and from Puerto Rico. Twenty-one of the women were born in Illinois. This represented the modal group. Of the twenty-nine who were not born in Illinois, thirteen came from Mississippi. The large number of Negro women shown in Table 2, as contrasted with only five white women, was due to the location of the district in a predominately Negro community.

It was found that some of these women had fairly good jobs during the war years, but seldom were they able to accumulate sufficient assets for extended periods of illness or unemployment.
TABLE 3

PRIOR USUAL MEANS OF SUPPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual Source of Support</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common law</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putative Father</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty per cent of the women were self supporting, according to the data in Table 3. Four of the women were receiving some support from husbands who had married them subsequent to the birth of the baby after assistance had been sought with the Chicago Welfare Department. Although Illinois does not give legal status to common-law marriages, eight of these women lived with men whom they called their common-law husbands and who were so regarded in the community. In two instances, the women stated that a formal marriage never took place, because they thought that common-law arrangements were recognized in this state. Of this group, sixteen per cent received some support from their "common-law" husbands. In some instances, these relationships appeared to have been reasonably stable and of long standing. In other instances there appeared to have been a succession of men. Three women classed as having "other"
usual means of support had been dependent for so long on social agencies that relatives were out of the picture.

**TABLE 4**

**DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT PRECEEDING APPLICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of Employment</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five years and over</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The forty per cent figure of prior usual employment in Table 3 does not mean by implication that the other sixty per cent of the women never worked prior to seeking assistance. Actually, there was not a single instance in which it was found that the woman had never worked prior to seeking aid. Some of the sixty per cent had worked intermittently, usually not more than a month at a time. Consequently, their principal means of support had to come from some other source as relatives and friends. Table 4 shows that the length of employment varied considerably among the women. The modal, as well as the medial group, had been employed less than one year.
Table 5 shows that nineteen of these women had earned between twenty and thirty dollars weekly. Twenty-three had earned between thirty and forty dollars weekly. This latter category represented the modal as well as the medial group. Over half of the women employed in laundries were in the thirty to forty dollar income group. Only two of the total number had earned between fifty and sixty dollars weekly. The waitress in this category explained that her earnings came largely from tips, and the laundry worker reported that she was paid extra for overtime work. It was noteworthy that clerical employment accounted for only two persons.
on savings, sold what assets they could (property, securities
and furniture), sought aid from relatives and friends, threw
themselves on the mercy of their landlords, begged from door
to door, became promiscuous, or were aided by "boy friends",
who were very often married men with families. Some found
part-time employment in domestic service and at odd jobs. The
low wages earned in the jobs they had held did not allow for
much saving against times of emergency. On the whole, their
resources were quickly exhausted, and application for relief
was made relatively soon after the loss of the usual means of
support. This adjustment period had meant, for the unmarried
mother, a general reduction in expenditures, insufficient food,
a cheaper room, every kind of inconvenience and hazard, and no
little emotional strain.

An Aid to Dependent Children referral was made after the
woman attained status as an active case. However, after the
application interview, the woman, if the situation warranted,
was instructed to apply for the grant before further
investigation by the Resource Division. The worker was
responsible for the follow-up, to assure that the Aid to
Dependent Children Application was completed.

Intermittency of Relief

Periods of dependency were not always continuous. Relief
was stopped when private employment was obtained or when
insurance adjustments or the sale of securities made possible a
few months of independent living. Hospitalization for serious
illness meant the stopping of relief, although the case was not usually closed. Relief was stopped as a matter of agency policy when a client failed: (1) to keep an office appointment, (2) to return a new affidavit of need at the prescribed time, (3) to notify the district office of a change in address, or (4) to co-operate in the investigation of her resources.

Case 1

In one instance, the client was a young woman, twenty-five years old, who was mailed an affidavit and was given specific instructions to fill the forms and have them ready when the worker visited on a designated date. On the specified date, the worker went to the client's address and was told that she was not at home. A message was left, emphasizing the necessity of having the affidavit in by a given date. One week passed, and no response was received. Relief was stopped. Two days later, the client was in the office demanding her check. The client reported that she had borrowed money from neighbors, had an unpaid grocery bill, the neighbors had fed her children, and the landlord had threatened eviction. The reason for the stoppage was explained to the client and she quickly produced the affidavit.

The stopping of relief due to the failure of the mother to comply with agency rules and regulations was a common occurrence. However, in most of these instances reinstatement took place in a few days or, at the least within two weeks.

Living Arrangements

In a study relating to a group of persons dependent in one way or another, it is often difficult to formulate a minimum standard for decent housing without considering the facilities available in the community for low income groups. Considerable confusion usually exists with regard to what is a minimum standard for decent housing. However, it would seem
that adequate housing should certainly have such essentials as a building constructed in accordance with the building code, adequate exits, well lighted halls and stairways, and sufficient windows for air and sunlight and warmth in winter. Sanitary conveniences should be clean, dry, and well lighted. There should also be adequate space for the occupants. If the housing accommodations do not meet the minimum standard for health and decency, the welfare of not one locality is in jeopardy, but the entire community may be affected. Gunnar Myrdal has made the following observation relative to poor housing:

Housing is much more than just shelter. It provides the setting for the whole life of the family. Indeed, whether or not any organized family life will be at all possible depends very much on the character of the house or dwelling unit. Children cannot be reared in a satisfactory manner if there is no place for them at home where they can play without constantly irritating the adults or being irritated by them. Over-crowding may keep them out of their homes more than is good for them - in fact so much that family controls become weak. The result is that some of the children become juvenile delinquents. This danger may become even more pronounced if there are insufficient recreational facilities in the neighborhood, something which is often characteristic of Negro areas. Children in crowded homes usually have great difficulties in doing their home work; their achievements in school may suffer in consequence. The presence of boarders in the homes, or the 'doubling up' of families in a single residence unit, which is much more frequent in Negro than in white families, usually means that there cannot be much privacy; often it means a constant threat to family morals. Crowding, in general has similar effects. In addition to the moral and mental health risks, there are all the obvious physical health hazards.1

In Chicago, the housing situation has been especially

---

critical during and since the war. The overcrowded conditions in many areas of the city, due in part to restrictions by property owners as to race and religion, have produced a very critical and tense situation.

**TABLE 6**

**LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND MONTHLY RENTAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Arrangements and Type of Dwelling</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Monthly Rental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$10.00 to 19.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with own family in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private dwellings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with family (not related) in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friend in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooming house</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooming house</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these women were found living under the most wretched circumstances. Table 6 shows that the largest group paid twenty to thirty dollars monthly rental. Regarding living arrangements, the largest group lived alone. It was of interest to observe that four of the five women paying rent from fifty to sixty dollars lived alone in apartments. In many of the homes
of the total group, the living rooms and dining rooms were transformed into kitchens at night. A number of women occupied rooms in basements, which were cold, damp, and lacking in sunlight. Sanitary facilities were often in very poor condition. In some instances, toilets were located in the basement and baths were on upper floors and not readily accessible to occupants of the basement. In one building visited, twelve families used one toilet, and shared one bath tub. Frequently, the plumbing was in poor condition, and in a few places there was no hot running water. Many women were fearful of using sanitary conveniences used by so many persons about whom they knew so little. They solved their problem by taking "sponge" baths in their rooms and occasionally visiting a friend to take a real bath.

The living quarters of many of the women were one and two room kitchenette apartments, "cut" out of larger units. Most of them were firetraps with every type of hazard imaginable. One woman made a complaint about insufficient heat and her landlord attempted to evict her on a nuisance complaint. Several of the buildings were headquarters for prostitution and the narcotics traffic.

Methods of heating and lighting the living quarters in which this group of women lived varied. Most of the building and rooming houses had central heating plants, although several of the dwellings were heated by stoves. Women living in stove heated houses often had considerable difficulty in securing
kindling wood. In some instances, neighbors were helpful in supplying paper and kindling, but some of the women reported that they had to seek paper and wood from the refuse heaps and alleys. Another problem was inadequate storage space for fuel and many had to carry coal up several flights of stairs to their rooms. One common means of saving fuel was to close off part of the house in cold weather and to confine all activity in one part of the house. Even in dwellings with central heating equipment, complaints were made constantly of inadequate heating. Some women were forced to visit friends in order to keep warm. In one instance the furnace had not been used for several days due to shortage of coal. In another dwelling, the heat was turned off at noon, so that one woman was forced to use her gas range for heating purposes.

The cooking and eating arrangements varied also, depending on the circumstances. Those few women living alone in apartments or who had use of an apartment reported that they cooked in their own kitchens. Those who lived in hotels cooked in their rooms or ate in restaurants. Women living in boarding houses or in light-housekeeping rooms cooked in their sleeping rooms, in community kitchens, or (in small boarding houses where the relationship with the landlord's family was close) used the family kitchen.

The most common way of cooking and eating was using cooking equipment in the single room originally intended for living and sleeping purposes. Cooking equipment usually
included a two-burner gas plate, several pots and pans and a few dishes. A wooden box for food on a window sill made a satisfactory ice box in winter. Dishes were usually kept in drawers or shelves; sometimes both food and dishes were stored in the clothes closet.

The general economic situation of this group of women was dismal. The neighborhoods and the women were both poor, which confined these women to their particular social environment. In one respect the problem was not entirely one of employability, but one of opportunity to work. However, one recognized that limited training for certain types of employment and inadequate educational qualifications presented a problem of employability with respect to certain types of better paying jobs.

The problem of living arrangements remained acute, especially in the area where these women lived. The rentals shown on Table 6 were relatively low as compared with the rapid increase resulting from the enforcement of Federal Rent Controls. The problem was accentuated by the decline in employment. Since this study was begun, the city has begun an extensive slum clearance and low cost housing program which may alleviate the housing problem somewhat.
Establishing the Case Work Relationship

Probably the most important aspect of a worker's giving services to unmarried mothers is that of establishing a relationship with them. This is not always easy. Among the fifty women included in this study, varying patterns of behavior were found. However, the absence of a sense of reality seemed to be the core of many of their problems. Naturally, the further away from reality the women were, the more difficult was the task of establishing a sound working relationship.

In the case of one young woman, who said she was seventeen years old, it became evident that she not only had little comprehension of what had happened but had no attachment toward her child's father and no sense of responsibility for the baby. On the other hand, many of the mothers were deeply involved emotionally with respect to the father and indicated that they wanted to accept the responsibility involved.

Marguerite M. Hayman writes:

We begin where she (the mother) is and with the problems which she describes as most disturbing and needing attention. We evaluate her as an individual as we observe her reactions and listen to her experiences. If at the onset we can relieve some of her anxiety by easing the discomforts of her external environment, such as to help with plans for living arrangements, to provide opportunity for medical care and financial assistance, if needed, and to create tangible things for her to do during the waiting period, a first and necessary step is taken in the helping process. In such manner, too, we are at once sharing the burden of both her real and unreal
Another girl explained that she wanted to keep her baby and accept full responsibility for it but that she was afraid and insecure because of what her friends and neighbors might say.

These complex emotional reactions present a formidable challenge to the worker. A sound relationship necessitates frequent contacts between the worker and the client. In some cases it has developed that the worker is the only person in the unmarried mother's life who, as far as the mother is concerned, accepts and understands her situation.

Prenatal and confinement care were important phases of the unmarried mother's experience. The need for adequate psychological care of the pregnant woman cannot be overemphasized, because the emotional aspects of her situation vitally affect the physical well being of the mother and child. In one instance removal of the girl from her home during this period relieved some of the emotional pressure and tension.

Frequently social workers have undertaken tasks with deep convictions about what was needed and how it was to be done. Many case workers have certain prejudices and biases.

Charlotte Towle described these as "lay attitudes." She wrote:

The public assistance worker brings an ever varying array of so-called lay attitudes — the deep convictions, prejudices, and biases to which every human is heir in his thinking about social problems, human behavior, and racial groupings.¹

One type of "lay attitude" which is unfortunate is the notion that everything must be done for recipients, that they are not capable of making sound judgments relative to certain problems which they face. Mary Smith wrote:

Perhaps the test of case workers with unmarried mothers is whether they can accept a plan which does not accord with their own thinking, if they feel that they themselves have played a role which has been constructive because it has helped the mother to an understanding of herself and an ability to stand on her own feet.²

To enlist the cooperation of the mother was easiest when initial contact was made at the peak of her anxiety, that is, before the birth of the child. One case illustrates this situation.

Case 2

One young woman, aged twenty-two, came to the agency two months after she learned of her pregnancy. She was living alone and had no known relatives in the city. She was not employed, but had been supported by a friend whom she said was the father of the expected baby. This was her first experience of this sort and she was obviously ashamed and frightened. She reported that her friend was not very sympathetic after she informed him of her condition. She was in need of economic help as well as medical attention.

The important aspect of this situation was that when this


woman came to the agency, it was because there was no one else on whom she could rely satisfactorily for help. There is little doubt that she felt alone and abandoned. In this case, a conscious effort was made to show a sympathetic understanding of the woman's problem. Arrangements were made for temporary financial assistance pending further investigation and the preparation of a budget. At a subsequent visit the woman was referred to the medical unit for consultation and examination. She was then sent to a prenatal clinic in her district. This woman not only appeared pleased with the assistance which she received, but she proved to be a very helpful and cooperative recipient.

Financial Assistance

Due to the very poor housing conditions under which these women lived, the matter of direct relief was paramount, especially in winter. In many instances, bedding was inadequate, and although most of the buildings had a central heating system, many of the rooms remained cold throughout the day and night. In these situations a fuel allowance was a necessity; utility allowances were also made in many instances.

The statutory stipulation of maximum amounts for almost every item resulted in the practice of making what amounted to flat grants for one-person family cases, and often even the prescribed maximum failed to meet the needs of the individual. It was frequently necessary to revise budget allowances upwards in order to meet unanticipated needs. Various types of special
diets increased some of the budgets. In other cases, the individuals made fraudulent claims in order to obtain additional relief. Many of the problems which arose in connection with financial assistance were referred for "legal aid" to agencies equipped to offer such help. This was especially true in forcible evictions.

Case 3

A five day's notice for payment of rent due was served on one woman aged thirty-five. Her landlord had obtained an increase in rent and the rental allowance by the agency was fixed at the old rental. Before the adjustment could be made with the agency, the woman was given a summons to appear in court. The woman was referred to the legal department of the United Charities for representation. The case was dismissed after the court was informed that the defendant would be allowed additional funds to meet the increase.

Many complaints were made of insufficient clothing for a presentable appearance, let alone keeping warm. Case records revealed the necessity for these mothers to use part of their food allowance for rent and, in many cases, resort to fraud. Rent levels varied considerably among districts, and many families in deteriorated areas paid higher rentals than people living in better neighborhoods.

An important phase of the agency's service was medical care. After having come to the agency pregnant or having given birth to a child, the unwed mother was usually referred to a medical worker who in turn initiated a referral to a prenatal clinic or to the Cook County Hospital, depending on the situation. The Chicago Welfare Department utilized facilities
of public medical clinics and a minimum fee was paid for service. Payments for private medical care were made only when specifically authorized. In emergency situations, referrals were made directly to the County Hospital. The agency also provided for nursing services, therapeutic surgery, and other types of medical care depending on the situation.

Problems Peculiar to Unmarried Mothers

Many of the problems faced by unmarried mothers were essentially no different from the problems faced by other women in the community in need of welfare assistance. The problems of bad housing, poor health, and general poverty affected the mother who had given birth to a child out of wedlock as well as the average woman who was in need of relief simply because she was unemployed. However, there were some problems which were peculiar to the unmarried mother.

First consideration might be given the matter of social attitude and community pressure. On one occasion the writer was told by a young mother that she had tried to "get rid" of her baby by abortion, indicating that she could not bear the thought of facing her family and friends with an "illegitimate child." Another woman had left her small home town and had come to Chicago, to have her baby where no one would learn of her situation. Ruth Brenner wrote:

Such community attitudes leave the unmarried mother in an unstable social situation. Unless the help she needs is made available to the mother at this time, the result may be two unhappy beings. Moreover, the social agencies interested in offering this help to unmarried
mothers and their children have not felt satisfied with the results of their efforts.¹

A number of these women who gave birth to babies out of wedlock, were faced with not one problem, but several. There was the factor of deep-seated feelings of guilt, affecting both mother and putative father. And of course, there was the baby, who needed all the intelligent help available. Then there were the families of the natural parents concerned. Finally, there was the community, in which social stability had to be maintained at the same time as help was extended to the aberrant individual.

The community quite naturally accepts the responsibility to help a family whose troubles are too great for them to handle alone, but if a woman has a child without marriage, if service is given, it may be punitive or expected to serve as a general deterrent....Both boys and girls must have it demonstrated to them that extra-marital relationships lead to unpleasant results. A girl must enter married life as a virgin, or at least there must be no child to indicate lost virginity. This feeling of deterrence extends through all groups of the community in the more subtle social ways as well as the practical aspects of financial support and service for a mother and child. The community attitude tends toward the belief that if an unmarried mother wishes to keep her child she should support him herself, but if relief is needed, the child's father should shoulder the burden. Public relief agencies often take the stand that "bastardy proceedings" are obligatory. The Juvenile Court is often reluctant to accept the child of the unmarried mother for public support unless bastardy action has been attempted.²

Hasty court litigation often creates a situation unfavorable to the working out of a truly equitable solution. In this


respect, the notion of deterrence which existed in the community created a situation in which it was difficult for established agencies to give adequate acceptable service to unmarried parents and their children.

Community attitudes and social pressures place the unmarried mother and her child in a precarious social situation.

One of the most difficult decisions confronting the unmarried mother was what to do about her baby. Such a decision was never made in a vacuum; rather, it reflected the total psychological pattern of the individual unmarried mother reacting to external realities. How the mother viewed her problem, the alternatives presented, and the ultimate impact of the experience on her life and the life of the child, posed a problem for which there was rarely an ideal solution.

Sometimes, the unmarried mother stated that she wanted to keep her baby and would do so if circumstances were favorable. However, experience demonstrated that many of these women had strong feelings of rejection for their children, of which they were totally unaware. Miss Leontine R. Young writes:

Actually there is little conflict between the interests of the mother and of the baby; the conflict lies within the girl herself. The unhappy mother who feels for the moment that the baby may be an answer to her personal problems is doomed. The reality is that the baby is not and cannot be an answer to conflicting and neurotic needs. The baby can only be an answer to a healthy desire for a child, which in itself presupposes a willingness to assume responsibilities for the care and protection of that child and negates a morbid possessiveness of him....If we can escape the pressures and emotional confusion of the immediate situation and acquire perspective on the total problem, we shall have little difficulty in seeing that
the ultimate interests of mother and child are parallel and that we have no need to make a choice. We cannot afford to get caught up in the unmarried mother's own conflicts and confusion.¹

A number of situations were met during the interviews with the unmarried mothers. For example:

Case 4

A young woman, twenty-four years of age, insisted that she wanted to keep her baby and indicated that she expected to begin work as soon as her health permitted. This young woman lived with an aunt who had promised to take care of the baby while the mother was at work. Further inquiry showed that this woman not only had real awareness of the responsibility involved in taking care of her child, but she apparently was psychologically prepared to assume that responsibility. There were also indications that the girl and the baby's father would soon marry.

In this situation described, the real problem seemed to be whether or not the mother's desire to keep her baby represented a futile attempt to meet a neurotic and largely unconscious need. There was also a question of whether the mother would be able to plan for the baby on a realistic basis. After consultations with the young mother and her aunt, it was recommended that the mother be permitted to keep her baby. Subsequent visits with the mother have proved the decision to be wise.

Case 5

One girl, nineteen years old, grew up in a home deserted by the father. This girl had actually never had real fun during her youth. Her mother was a rather bitter and disappointed woman who kept her daughter close to

home. Occasionally, the girl wandered away from her confined and drab home setting. She met several men who, although not much older than she, afforded her what she described as "lots of fun." In each instance, she knew the men for a relatively short period of time, and she admitted that she had known the father of her child less than a month.

It was fairly evident here that this girl's desires did not include her baby. She appeared to be primarily interested in clothes, freedom and fun. She had not considered her responsibility to the baby and continued to inquire if adoption could be arranged. The baby in this instance was temporarily placed in a foster home until further consultation could be arranged with the mother. It was felt that a delay in the final decisions would be helpful to the mother as well as the agency.

Case 6

This young woman was twenty years old and a spirited, fun-loving sort of person. She had never done well in school and finally quit altogether. She never kept a job for any length of time, and, from her own admission, it appeared that she received money and gifts from several different men. Although the father of the child was a married man, she expressed love for him. She said that she kept the company of several men only after she saw the futility of her love for the father of her child. She asked the worker if she might place the baby in a foster home until she decided what to do.

In this case, the mother was also undecided about her situation and requested that the baby be temporarily placed in a home until she could reach a final decision. The agency considered this to be a proper adjustment pending a further investigation of the case by the agency.

These cases illustrate the gravity of the decision to be
made relative to what to do about the baby. Hasty decisions are frequently tragic decisions. Much of the responsibility rests with the caseworker who helps clarify the issues in order that the unmarried mother might make a satisfactory decision.

The problem of getting support for "illegitimate" children in Cook County and the subsequent enforcement of Court orders often involved lengthy litigation. The Illinois Statutes provided:

When a woman who shall be pregnant, or delivered of a child, which by law, would be deemed a bastard, shall make a complaint to the Justice of the Peace or Judge of a court having jurisdiction herein, in the county where she may be pregnant or delivered, or the person accused may be found, and shall accuse, under oath, or affirmation, a person with being the father of such child, it shall be the duty of such justice or judge to issue a warrant against the person being so accused and cause him to be brought forthwith before him, or in his absence, any other justice of the peace or judge in such county.

It further provided by the statutes:

In case the issue is found against the defendant or reputed father, or whenever he shall in open court have confessed the truth of the charge against him, he shall be condemned by the order and judgment of court after the birth of such child, to pay a sum of money not exceeding $200 the first year, and a sum not exceeding $100 yearly, for nine years succeeding said first year, for the support, maintenance, and education of such child and shall, moreover, be adjudged to pay all the costs of the prosecution, for which costs execution shall issue as in other cases.

According to Illinois statutes the maximum amount of

1 Illinois Revised Statutes, Chapter 17, Section 1, 1946.
2 Ibid., Section 8.
money which the putative father had to pay for the support of his child was $1,100. However, the putative father might make a lump sum payment of a sum not less than $800.00 and obtain a release from the mother. A portion of the law read:

The mother of a bastard child, before or after its birth, may release the reputed father of such child from all legal liability on account of such bastardy, upon such terms as may be consented to in writing by the judge of the court having jurisdiction herein of the county in which such mother resides: Provided, a release obtained from such mother in consideration of a payment to her of a sum of money not less than $800.00 in the absence of the written consent of the judge of the court having jurisdiction herein, shall not be a bar to a suit for bastardy against such father, but if, after such release is obtained, suit be instituted against such father and the issue be found against him, he shall be entitled to a set-off for the amount so paid, and it shall be accredited to him as of the first payment or payments: And, provided, further, that such father may compromise all his legal liability on account of such bastard child, with the mother thereof, without the written consent of such judge, by paying to her any sum not less than $800.00.2

It is fairly clear that the Illinois statutes on Bastardy action were inadequate in several respects. In instances where the mother had obtained an order from the Court of Domestic Relations in Cook County, requiring the putative father to pay the money, her struggle had just begun if the man refused to pay the money. A number of the women interviewed complained about the long drawn-out and technical legal procedure. In one case the man involved had paid only fifty dollars to the woman under the order and refused to pay further.

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1Ibid., Section 18.
In a number of cases the men were in arrears, and in two instances the man had left the city. The problem of enforcing such orders afforded a real dilemma. If the man did not pay, he was in contempt of court. If he was sentenced to jail for failure to obey the court order, he was thereby prevented from working, and the woman got no support money. Many women finally accepted a compromise adjustment with the putative father in order to avoid continuous litigation. Of the women interviewed, seven had made out-of-court adjustments with the father.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

It has been suggested that with the exception of the added factor of unmarried parenthood, the problems of the unmarried mother are similar to those of any other dependent group of individuals needing public assistance. However, in a broader sense, the fact of unmarried parenthood, coupled with economic need, present problems which are extremely complex. Each unmarried mother comes to us with many experiences and the impact of these on the individual differs with each new case brought to our attention.

This study revealed that the economic situation of these women was generally poor. Some of these women had fairly good jobs prior to receiving assistance, but the great majority were never able to accumulate sufficient assets to meet emergency situations. The data indicate that forty per cent of these women had been gainfully employed and it was suggested that the employability of the other sixty per cent was probably high. However, certain limitations were recognized, namely, lack of experience for better paying jobs and inadequate educational qualifications.

The earnings of these women ranged from ten dollars to more than fifty dollars weekly. The modal group earned between twenty and thirty dollars weekly. The medial group earned between thirty and forty dollars weekly. Only two women had earned over
fifty dollars weekly.

Substandard housing has been a major problem in Chicago and it was revealed that most of these women lived in very poor neighborhoods and under the most wretched circumstances. Many of them lived in accommodations which should have long been condemned.

Relative to case work services, emphasis was placed on the importance of establishing a sound working relationship with the unmarried mother. It was the writer's experience that it was least difficult to enlist the cooperation of the mother when the contact with her was made at the peak of her anxiety. The unmarried mother came to the agency in many instances, having experienced the severe censure of the community and humiliation. This was the experience of even women who lived in a particular situation where unmarried parenthood was acceptable. Once out of her own group, she too, received the condemnation of the community. The worker's recognition of these factors in aiding the distressed mother was of primary importance. An understanding offer of assistance may have specific significance for the unmarried mother.

One special problem from the point of view of budgeting and planning was the rent item. The records revealed that because of the stipulations setting a limitation on rent, many of these women found it necessary to use part of their food allowance to supplement the rent payments. Frequently, it was necessary to revise their budgets to meet these situations.
The point was made that there were many situations peculiar to the unmarried mother, as contrasted with other recipients. One of those problems was the impact of social attitudes and community pressure on the behavior of the unmarried mother. Another aspect of the same problem was how community mores affect the policies and effectiveness of public agencies which gave assistance to unmarried mothers.

Another special problem of the unmarried mother was what to do about the baby. Three types of situations were discussed in the study. It was recognized that there are many opinions among social workers relative to this problem, and there appears to be a great need for further analytical thinking. However, it was suggested that the worker's responsibility is that of helping to clarify the issues in order that the mother might make a wise decision.

Still another type of problem discussed was that of obtaining child support and enforcing court orders. The statutes of Illinois provide for Bastardy proceedings where a baby has been born out of wedlock. However, the putative father may release himself from further obligation by making a lump sum payment of not less than $800.00. It was found that enforcing these orders for support money often involved lengthy litigation. In a large number of cases the unmarried mothers accepted a compromise settlement out of court. This was often done to avoid publicity relative to the woman's condition.

It is recognized that some of the problems of unmarried
parenthood cannot be solved by the social agency. The case worker is limited by the type of job to which the agency is committed. The problems of adequate income, housing, medical care and the like cannot be corrected by the welfare agency. Knowing of resources available in the community, frequently the agency makes referral where need may best be met.

There are some encouraging signs in Chicago. The city has already embarked on a large scale slum clearance and public housing program which will help improve the situation to some degree. However, there remains the problem of job opportunities not only for these women, but for many other dependent individuals who seek public and private assistance. They may have certain impediments which make it difficult to obtain certain types of employment. The social welfare agency is not equipped to correct this situation. It can only be of temporary help.

The study indicated that the Chicago Welfare Department is administering a program which alleviates the adverse conditions faced by these women in a manner calculated to benefit the individual's social development. It is hoped that in the near future our society will be better developed to meet human needs so that there may be a decrease in the extent of unwed motherhood.
SCHEDULE FOR STUDY OF FIFTY UNMARRIED MOTHERS KNOWN TO THE FAMILY SERVICE DIVISION OF THE CHICAGO WELFARE DEPARTMENT, 1946-1947

1. Case Number

2. Age

3. Address

4. Residence (Original)

5. Race

6. Housing:
   a. Unit: (check one) family alone friend other
   b. Type of dwelling: hotel apartment rooming house
   c. Rent board other
   d. Number of rooms
   e. Number of occupants
   f. Sleeping arrangements: bed shared, bed alone room shared, room alone
   g. Facilities (check): cooking bath hot and cold water

Remarks:

7. Employment History:

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<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Dates Began</th>
<th>Dates Ended</th>
<th>Wages incl. add.</th>
<th>Reason for Leaving</th>
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</table>
8. Economic Status:
   a. Usual means of support:
   b. Reason for need of assistance:
   c. Amounts and kind of assistance given:
   d. Length of assistance:
   e. Reason for discontinuance:

9. Case Work services (related to problems)
   a. Emotional or personality problems noted: Yes No
   b. Problems related to pregnancy directly: Yes No
   c. Intensive case work services given: Yes No
      If yes, specify:
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Unpublished Material


*Illinois Revised Statutes*, Chapter 17, Section 1, 1948.

Lecture by Bernice Simon, Assistant Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, October 15, 1949 (unpublished).