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A study of twenty five mothers who were committed for neglect of their minor children to the Reformatory for Women, Framingham, Massachusetts 1941-1946

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A STUDY OF TWENTY FIVE MOTHERS WHO WERE COMMITTED FOR
NEGLECT OF THEIR MINOR CHILDREN TO THE REFORMATORY FOR WOMEN,
FRAMINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS
1941-1946

36

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

In spite of the great amount of literature that exists on crime and punishment, very few writers have undertaken a study of the background and characteristics of mothers adjudged criminally neglectful of their children and committed to institutions. Mothers who are negligent of parental responsibilities, although oftentimes not apprehended by legal authorities, constitute problems in every locality. The portion of children who suffer abuse of wilful neglect from their parents is small, but the aggregate number of such children mounts into thousands.¹

The cause for some parents' failure to assume the responsibilities of parenthood appears to be economic, social and personal. Economic insecurity may contribute to neglect. The prevalence of divorce and separation which have resulted in many broken homes and in many instances are attributable to World War II have had bearing upon parental neglect. Furthermore, parents differ in competence, character, capacity, energy, industriousness and resourcefulness. But, some parents do achieve adequate homes under adverse circumstances while others fail under favorable conditions.

Massachusetts, highly praised for its care of neglected children, has played an important role in dealing with neglectful parents. It was one

¹White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, Dependent and Neglected Children, "Report of the Committee on the Socially Handicapped" (New York, 1933), p. 23.

of the first States to emphasize a case work approach in handling these parents instead of prosecuting and punishing them.¹ Through the leadership of the Boston Children's Aid Society in 1866² and other progressive organizations, this State attempted to understand neglectful parents and to bring about some acknowledgment of their parental obligations. In many instances, however, irresponsible parents were only looked upon with scorn or indifference.

Incarceration as a method of dealing with persons charged with non-fulfillment of parental obligations was not initiated in Massachusetts but in New York³ in 1874. This measure was instituted when a child who had received brutal, fiendish treatment from her foster mother was declared "a cur" because there were no laws for the protection of human beings. This substitute parent person was sentenced to a year in the penitentiary.

A similar provision to prosecute a parent for mistreatment of a child was made in Massachusetts in June, 1878 when a mother received a three months' sentence in the House of Correction for pinching, biting and beating her daughter.⁴ In 1885 a law was enacted in Massachusetts making it possible to punish husbands for the neglect and non-support of their families.⁵ It was not until 1906, however, that both parents were held legally responsible for the neglect of their children.⁶

Prosecution continues to be a powerful instrument but is used only

¹Ray S. Hubbard, "Child Protection," Social Work Year Book, ed. Russell Kurtz (New York, 1929), p. 66.

²Henry W. Thurston, The Dependent Child (New York, 1930), p. 201.

³Ray S. Hubbard, Crusading for Children (Boston, 1943), p. 11.

⁴Ibid., p. 16.

⁵Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts, ch. 176, sec. 1 (Boston, 1885), 621.

⁶Ibid., ch. 180, sec. 1 (Boston, 1909), 136.

when persuasion and education fail. Frequently, legal compulsion and discipline become necessary in handling culpable parents. This practice is enforced in Massachusetts as well as in other states.

The writer, while engaged in training at the Reformatory for Women, Framingham, Massachusetts, became interested in the problem of the neglectful mother and the reasons for her behavior. It was felt that a study of this type of mother would prove helpful in understanding parents who fail in their social and parental responsibilities.

Purpose of Study

An effort is made to show the provisions of the Massachusetts law in regard to neglectful parents; to give the personal characteristics and family backgrounds of the twenty-five mothers who have been adjudged neglectful; to point out the types of parental neglect; and to indicate pertinent factors influencing such negligence.

Scope of Study

This study covers twenty-five mothers who were committed to the Reformatory for Women, Framingham, Massachusetts from 1941 to 1946.

Method of Procedure

The material for this study was secured from case records selected on the basis of completeness. Personal interviews were conducted with four of the mothers and their relatives and conferences with staff members and social workers in social agencies were held. In addition, records of social agencies were reviewed and references and official legal documents pertinent to the subject were used.

CHAPTER II

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN COMMITMENT

Legal Provisions

The Massachusetts Law of 1906 amended in 1909¹ and 1931 to provide more stringent treatment of offenders gives the State the authority to discipline parents who are considered irresponsible in fulfilling their parental responsibilities. As last amended the law states that:

Any parent whose minor child by reason of the neglect, cruelty, drunkenness, habits of crime or other such vice is growing up without education or without proper physical care, or in the circumstances exposing such child to lead an idle and dissolute life, shall be punished by a fine of not more than two hundred dollars or by imprisonment for not more than one year, or both.²

Legally, it is possible to start proceedings alleging that children are neglected while action is being taken against the parents for neglect of them. Usually, the identical evidence is sufficient to prosecute the parents on a charge of neglect as well as to have the children adjudicated neglected. The growing tendency to file both complaints simultaneously has resulted in the provision for a double hearing which takes place in the juvenile court. This saves time and needless embarrassment and humiliation for the persons involved.

Thus far, private agencies have assumed the greatest responsibility for safeguarding children from wilful and deliberate neglect. However, the activities of policewomen, truant and probation officers and juvenile courts have been helpful in detecting culpable parents. Prevention of parental

¹ Ibid.

² General Laws of Massachusetts II, ch. 273, sec. 1 (Boston, 1932), 3200.

neglect, essentially a public responsibility, is being in a larger measure assumed and financed by the state and local governments.¹

Nature of Charges

The offenses for which parents were held legally responsible are many and varied. Many parents were charged with drunkenness, failure to support their children, desertion and abandonment and were found contributing to the moral degradation of young girls and boys. Significantly, there were parents who actually exploited their children, and in some situations, evidence of neglect could be attributed to broken home situations. Children who were mentally and physically defective were found to be neglected by parents because of their condition. Interestingly, some children born out of wedlock were neglected and had been subjected to brutal, bodily cruelty.

It is worthy of note that more than three-fifths of the mothers considered in this study were found guilty of neglect because of their immoral conduct. In many cases, the mothers were alcoholics, indulged in promiscuous sexual activities or lived in adultery. In two situations, the mothers compelled their children to engage in immoral practises. Two of them were encouraged to participate in sexual activities, and another child solicited male customers for the mother for illicit sexual purposes.

Approximately one-third of the mothers failed to provide essential physical necessities such as adequate shelter, food or clothing for their children. In one case a newly born infant had been abandoned by its mother, and another died from lack of medical care which the mother had failed to provide.

¹C. C. Carstens, "Neglected Children," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. Edwin Seligman, III (December, 1930), 405.

Disposition of Offenders

A parent summoned to court for negligence is usually dealt with in one of three ways. The offender may be placed on probation if the officiating judge feels that with the help of community resources and under careful supervision, the mother will be able to perform her parental duties more adequately. She may be fined and warned against the reoccurrence of such offense or the judge may commit her to a reformatory or jail for a specified length of time.¹

Wherein not any of the twenty-five mothers studied had been fined, the majority of them had been given probationary periods prior to their commitment on the charge for which they were finally incarcerated, namely, neglect of their minor children. Only three mothers were not on probation at the time of their commitment. In one instance, a mother had completed a probationary period of one year for a previous offense. Another mother had been supervised very closely for a number of years by social workers of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. In both cases, these mothers were unwilling to assume any responsibility for their own rehabilitation and finally were committed to the reformatory. The third mother, Mrs. D., had jeopardized the lives of her seven minor children by frequently leaving them inadequately fed and meagerly clothed in a heatless apartment in winter. She, in turn, would engage in alcoholic sprees financed from regular, allotment governmental checks. Because of the seriousness of her behavior she was committed to the reformatory without probation.

¹A parent committed to the Reformatory for neglect of minor children automatically receives a two year indeterminate sentence. A parole hearing may be granted in eleven months except in unusual cases.

Community efforts had been made to assist the mothers with their problems. The social services offered by the case work agencies, for the most part, were family counselling and financial assistance. Public agencies, especially child care, family welfare and medical organizations, had rendered services to these mothers repeatedly.

Of the twenty-five records reviewed, twenty-two make mention of the kind of help received by the mothers from social agencies. One mother had been known to as many as thirteen social agencies, and another to ten agencies. Nineteen mothers had been clients from one to ten social organizations.

Many of the mothers were granted probation to enable them to improve their home conditions, to assume greater parental responsibility and to develop more wholesome parental attitudes. Several were granted extensions of probation for rehabilitation purposes, but they were finally removed from the community.

Commitment was arrived at only after considerable review of the court histories compiled by the probation officers who presented their findings to the judges. More than half of the mothers studied had been arrested prior to their arrest for neglect of parental duties. All of the mothers who had experienced previous arrests had been given probation. A fifth of these mothers continued their delinquent behavior and upon revocation of probation, were committed to other peno-correctional institutions. One mother had experienced three previous commitments in the House of Correction for idleness, drunkenness and adultery. Three had been adjudged juvenile delinquents and were committed to training schools. Still another had served a previous reformatory commitment for being careless in speech and behavior.

Twenty of the mothers accepted no responsibility for the circumstances responsible for their incarceration. There was much projection, and many of the married mothers claimed that their husbands were responsible for the conditions resulting in the neglect of their children. Five of the mothers felt that they were committed without justification as the police had misinterpreted the facts in their individual situations. Two mothers evidenced no responsibility for their predicaments and stated that other women had conducted themselves similarly and not been committed. Another mother felt that her "jealous and emotionally unstable" mother-in-law had reported her without adequate grounds to the authorities. Although one offender acknowledged the charge of drunkenness, she felt her commitment was unwarranted. She asserted that her drinking was concealed from her children and did not influence them.

It is indicative that commitment on charges of neglect of children is used in Massachusetts only after efforts are made to assist the offending mother to mend her delinquent practices. A rehabilitation program is promoted through the use of social agencies and probation under supervision. In the case of the twenty-five mothers studied, however, such approaches to their problems proved futile, and commitment was considered the most practical measure to meet their needs.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE OFFENDERS

The importance of the family in influencing the development of its individual members is an accepted concept in social work practice.¹ Therefore, in considering the offender committed to an institution for neglect of her children, an examination of her social and family characteristics seems essential.

Parentage and Race

Recent social work literature frequently mentions the high incidence of broken homes among delinquents due to the death, desertion, separation or the illegal union of the parents. Interestingly, over two-thirds of the mothers considered in this study were products of disrupted family situations. Five of the homes, although not actually dissolved, were undesirable for the wholesome rearing of children due to the incompatibility of the parents and their extreme laxity in discipline. Only three of the mothers came from homes which were not broken or considered inadequate.

Approximately one-third of the twenty-five mothers were cared for by persons other than their natural parents. Significantly, four of the offenders were adjudged neglected children and placed in the custody of the state. The parents of a third of the offenders were reported as immoral either for being sexually promiscuous or alcoholic. Two of the offenders, when children, were victims of incest with their own fathers. One offender had been subjected to inhumane, brutal treatment by her own mother.

The elements essential in a home to assist a child in making adequate

¹Charlotte Towles, "Common Human Needs in Public Assistance Programs," Social Service Review, vol. XV (December, 1944).

adjustments and in developing a balanced personality are vividly stated by Dr. Van Waters, Superintendent of the Massachusetts Women's Reformatory. She cites that:

It is the primary function of the home to rear children in comfort and security, to furnish them with sound joyous health and with behavior codes of sufficient virility to sustain them in conflict with the demands of modern business, adventure, business and monotony.... Its center of gravity must be sound biologically, that is in the best interest of childhood.... What we need is the parental attitude that respects the personality of children and seeks to deepen and enrich their social relationship.¹

But the majority of the mothers studied had been deprived of normal life and wholesome parental examples. Most of the homes from which they came were characterized not only by disintegration and immorality but also by economic insecurity.

Verified birth records indicated that twenty-two of the offenders were born in the United States with Massachusetts the most common birth place. Eight of the committed mothers studied had been born in seven other eastern states. The birth places of the remaining offenders had been in either Canada or Ireland.

All persons who have not become naturalized are subject to deportation by alien and immigrant officials who keep careful records of all commitments to the reformatory.² Two of the three mothers who were born in foreign countries were still classified as aliens upon their commitment to the reformatory. The case records of the two aliens did not reveal whether any attempts had been made to deport these mothers.

¹ Miriam Van Waters, "What's Wrong With the Home," The New Republic (New York, Feb., 1925), XXXIX, 279.

² Representative of Immigrant Bureau, Statement (February, 1946), Framingham, Massachusetts.

Six of the offenders had been born out of wedlock. William A. Bonger who has made a study of crime as it exists in several nations points out that children born out of wedlock are more likely to become criminals than children born within the legal sanctions of matrimony.¹ Interestingly, this study does not substantiate his conclusions as almost four-fifths of the offenders were born of parents who were married.

Only six of the twenty-five offenders studied were Negroes. The remaining nineteen were classified as white. There were, however, less Negroes in the institution than whites.

Religion and Education

At least two criminologists² have found that persons without religious affiliations are not predisposed to crime as is commonly believed. All of the mothers studied professed some religious affiliation. Twelve of them designated their religion as Catholic and thirteen as Protestant. Although services were offered for members of both faiths, the records did not indicate how frequently the offenders attended.

With rare exceptions all women committed to the reformatory are given intelligence tests before they are released on parole.³ All of the offenders except one had been tested. The tests showed that only six of the offenders had normal intelligence. Although one offender was classified as having superior intelligence, approximately three-fifths of them were below normal.

¹William Adrian Bonger, Criminality and Economic Conditions, translated by Henry P. Horton (Boston, 1916), p. 499.

²Ibid., p. 209; Edwin H. Sutherland, Principles of Criminology (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 195.

³Tests used were Terman-Merrill, Binet or Weschler-Bellevue for general intelligence, Porteus for manual dexterity and planning ability, Healy P.C. II for correlation ability and Beta for illiterates.

The school grades attained by the offenders reviewed had been verified with the exception of three mothers who had been educated in foreign countries. Five of the mothers had acquired fifth grade education or less. Of this group one who had reached the fourth grade was grouped as normal in intelligence; two as borderline; one as feebleminded.

Ten of the mothers had attained sixth to eighth grade in school. One offender in this group was classified as having normal intelligence; three as dull-normal; three as border zone and two as feebleminded. One mother had not been tested.

Ten of the offenders had achieved education at a secondary level. Most of these mothers had progressed to the second year of high school and were rated as normal in intelligence. There was one mother who classified as a superior adult had only attended the sophomore year in school. Another offender considered normal went as far as the last year of high school. Two dull normal persons had attained the freshman and junior levels in school. None of the offenders, however, had completed or graduated from secondary school.

Occupational Experience

Generally speaking, penal institutions show a large representation from the unskilled laboring group.¹ Many persons of the low income group engage in illegal practices such as gambling, number racketeering and selling stolen goods to supplement their insufficient and irregular incomes.

The majority of the mothers reviewed had been classified in the unskilled or semi-skilled labor bracket. For the most part, waitress or domestic employment had been their chief occupations. During World War

¹Edwin H. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 176.

II, one-sixth of the offenders had secured jobs as factory workers. One mother had worked as a cashier in a chain store, and another was a beautician by trade. Two mothers, however, had had no work experience.

Marital Status

It is worthy of note that a fifth of the offenders were sixteen years of age or under when they married. Twelve were from seventeen to twenty-one years of age at the time of marriage. The remaining mothers ranged from thirty to forty seven in age when they married.

There was some variance in the marital status of the mothers. Although twenty-four of them had been legally married only six were living with their husbands when committed. The marital life of the offenders showed much friction and discord. Two mothers had been deserted and four had been separated as a result of mutual agreement for some time. Five mothers were separated from their husbands because they were in army service and three husbands of offenders had also been committed to penal institutions. Three mothers were widows. Only one offender had obtained a divorce.

In considering the social backgrounds of the mothers, it is evident that the majority of them were products of poor environments and unhappy homes. Although four-fifths of them had sixth grade education or higher they were employed most frequently in unskilled occupations. Most of them had married at an early age but had subsequently become separated from their husbands.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PARENTAL NEGLECT

Many theories have been advanced in an attempt to explain why parents fail in the proper discharge of their duties. It appears that neglect involves in itself psychological, personal, economic, marital and social factors which are inherent in all family situations and cannot be properly ascribed to any one cause.

There were a large number of children in most of the families of the twenty-five offenders studied. One-fifth of them were composed of from eight to ten children. Six of the mothers had had from four to seven children. The remaining offenders were mothers of either two or three children. Some of the children were not living with their mothers when the neglect charge was filed. Hence, the number of children of whom the mothers were adjudged neglectful was less than the total number of children in the family. One mother was found criminally neglectful of as many as eight children and two of seven. Ten offenders had been found derelict in their responsibility to from four to six children and twelve mothers had neglected from two to three children.

Case Illustrations

A factor bearing upon the neglect of the children was the emotional deprivation in the early lives of the offenders studied. The case of Mrs. B. illustrates her unhappy, insecure, deprived childhood.

The offender was left motherless when she was three years old. Her father, an alcoholic, irregular worker, who deserted his family periodically, remarried. Mrs. B., however, had received very little affection from either her father or step-mother. Her childhood was one of much instability as the family changed residences frequently. At the age of six, Mrs. B. was adjudged neglected when her step-mother was sent to a reformatory on a charge of adultery, and her

father was considered too irresponsible to care for her properly. As a state ward, she subsequently experienced a series of foster home placements. She was most unhappy in these homes. Her symptoms were expressed in constant lying. She became slack, sullen and deceptive. Mrs. B.'s records reflected poor adjustment in school, and she had to repeat many grades. Maladjustments continued until Mrs. B. was nineteen years of age at which time she was committed to an institution as an incorrigible person.

In the case of Mrs. T., age 43, whose childhood was similar to Mrs. B.'s, dual familial neglect was present.

She was committed to the reformatory in 1941 for neglecting her younger children, and her daughter, Mrs. R., was committed at the same time for sexual promiscuity. After a period of parole, Mrs. R. was recommitted, at the age of 22 on a charge of neglect of her own children. During childhood Mrs. B. was subjected to bodily cruelty from her mother, Mrs. T. and was also deprived of physical necessities. Mrs. B.'s adjustments were symptomatic of emotional difficulties, her unhappiness and insecurity. School reports indicated that she had no interest in her work; truanted from school; was retarded educationally; was untidy; and was known to steal.

Twenty-two of the offenders had experienced emotional impoverishment in the formative years of their lives. The responsibility of caring for children and being parents increased their conflict. As they had developed inadequate parental attitudes it was difficult for them to be capable parents.

Marital friction figured prominently as a contributing factor to neglect. The following case exemplifies much dissatisfaction in her married life on the part of Mrs. F..

This mother of superior intelligence had ten children. When only nineteen, she married a man seven years her senior. Her husband who had been arrested on twenty-six occasions was abusive, unfaithful and refused to support the family adequately. Living conditions in Mrs. F.'s home were deplorable. Many social agencies had tried to remedy them, but had received little cooperation from Mrs. F.. Her inability to cope with her home situation was projected upon Mr. F.. Mrs. F. felt that her husband exercised a great deal of influence over the children and had turned them against her. The need of Mrs. F. for attention and affection was so great that she left Mr. F.; went to live with another man and was arrested for adultery. Mrs. F. rationalized her behavior and indicated that her extra-marital relation was a compensation for the unhappy years she had spent with Mr. F..

The marriages of a large number of the mothers were unsatisfactory. Marital disharmony influenced the treatment of children in the case of Mrs. X..

This offender, a mother of three sets of twins, learned that during her last confinement her husband had been unfaithful to her in their own home. Mr. X., who had originally contributed regularly to the family's support, became derelict in caring for the children. Mrs. X.'s anxiety over Mr. X.'s indifference was so great that she vented her hostility upon the children. She would leave them alone for long periods at a time without adequate food or clothing and made no attempt to improve the conditions under which the children were living.

Marital friction seemed attributable to the immaturity and instability of the offenders and their husbands. Many of the husbands were cruel, alcoholic or otherwise immoral. There appeared to be a lack of understanding and respect for the sanctity of marriage and a disregard of the obligations to each other as well as to the children. There was also evidence of marital unfaithfulness. Broken marriages and separations during World War II had bearing upon neglect in nineteen cases. These mothers seemed to be very dependent persons who considered the responsibility of caring for their children alone too difficult. Many of them sought male companionship and drink as a means of escape from discouragement, domesticity and loneliness. This was particularly true in the case of Mrs. D. mentioned previously.

Illegitimate parenthood contributed to the negative feelings of the mothers toward their children in two-fifths of the cases studied. In five additional situations where paternity was denied the fathers supported the children begrudgingly and reluctantly which strengthened their ill feelings toward the children.

Miss Z., a young unmarried Negro mother, had extreme difficulty in obtaining support from the putative father of her children. By the time she had reached twenty-one years of age, she had given birth to two children illegitimately by Mr. C.. A few years later, she entered into common-law relationship with another man, Mr. E.. This union lasted twelve years and four children were born. Domestic difficulties resulted from Mr. E.'s objections to supporting the children. When an argument ensued over purchasing clothing for

the children, he deserted the home. Miss Z., who had become an alcoholic, established another common-law relationship with Mr. H.. Because her conduct was considered immoral and a bad influence on her children, she was committed to the reformatory.

Sexual promiscuity was evident as a factor influencing neglect in some situations.

Mrs. P., a Negro, had been born out of wedlock. Seven of her eight siblings had court records. Mr. P., her husband, likewise had a long and serious court history. Mrs. P., an alcoholic, was mother of seven children, six of whom were legitimate. She indulged in prostitution when her husband deserted. It was stated that Mrs. P.'s eleven year old daughter was soliciting for her. She was brought to court on several occasions for her immoral conduct but was placed on probation. When Mrs. P. disregarded a mandate to report to the hospital for treatment of active syphilis probation was revoked. It was felt that she was a menace to the community, and consequently commitment was imperative.

In the case of Mrs. R., neglect was influenced by her mental defectiveness coupled with her complete dependency on an immature, irresponsible, alcoholic husband who failed to support the family adequately.

Mrs. R., whose I.Q. was 58, at the age of fifteen married as a result of illegitimate pregnancy. Although Mr. R., seven years her senior, was abusive to her and inadequate in many respects, Mrs. R. evidenced a need to be very protective of him even at the expense of her children's welfare. Mrs. R.'s attempts to care for her children were spasmodic. She had been given supervision by the court and help by social agencies to improve her home conditions. But she continually failed to cooperate with efforts made towards rehabilitation of her family. Her children were retarded. They slept upon straw scattered on the floor; and were undernourished; showed rachitic symptoms; and were seldom allowed to go outdoors. The death of Mrs. R.'s baby, caused by marasmus neglect, brought Mrs. R.'s parental culpability to the attention of the authorities. She subsequently made all types of excuses to prevent her other children from receiving proper medical care. It was felt that commitment was advisable.

Drunkenness was pertinent and influenced neglect in almost half of the cases studied. Mrs. X.'s physical and personality difficulties were expressed in her need to escape by means of drinking.

Frequently, Mrs. X spent entire days in taverns, and when drinking, had been known to stay away from home as long as two weeks. On a number of occasions she was found lying on the street by police who returned her home. Mrs. X.'s alcoholism was symptomatic of her emotional and personality immaturity, and she was diagnosed as a mixed psycho-neurotic. Mrs. X., however, attributed her difficulties to fatigue and menopause. Failure to assume parental responsibility

represented a defect in Mrs. X.'s personality. Her behavior pattern was pathological and commitment was deemed essential.

Economic insecurity played some part in influencing neglect in twenty-two cases. Mrs. H.'s case shows that poverty is conducive to neglect.

Mrs. H. worked to supplement the inadequate and irregular earnings of Mr. H., an excessive drinker who was abusive and well known to the police. The couple changed residence very often to avoid payment of rent. The homes were always ill-kept, unsanitary and run down. The children were dirty, meagerly fed and inadequately clothed. Because of frequent pregnancies, Mrs. X.'s health was poor. But she continued to work and to leave her six children unsupervised in wretched living conditions. When Mr. H. was sent to the House of Correction for non-support, their children were placed in the custody of the state. Because Mrs. H. had never had very much money and had experienced so much financial insecurity, she was unable to share her earnings with her children. Money had probably assumed a heightened value to her, and she considered it a compensation for previous deprivations. Mrs. H. was committed because she refused to contribute financially towards the children's support.

Many of the mothers had worked to supplement the family income. Frequently, their wages were spent on alcohol and luxuries. The majority of them depended on public relief as a means of sustenance, and some resorted to immoral ways of living.

It would appear that there were a multiplicity of factors having a decided bearing upon parental neglect. Economic insecurity and marital discord resulting in separation were most prominent aspects influencing the behavior of the offenders studied. A large number had experienced emotional deprivation in early life. This factor appeared to be of singular significance as future emotional adjustments are believed to be dependent upon early life experiences.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

It would appear that Massachusetts was one of the earliest states to substitute a case work approach for a legalistic one in dealing with irresponsible parents. In the nineteenth century, progressive social agencies of this State attempted to develop and restore wholesome parental attitudes and to strengthen and maintain parental responsibilities. Prosecution in the court was used only as a final measure.

Fathers were first held responsible for the neglect of their children under the Massachusetts law. It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that mothers were held responsible also by the law. Laws protecting children from derelict parents received considerable attention up until the depression period. The great charital impulse that revolved around the child prior to 1931 was an outgrowth of the increasing recognition and acceptance of the child as an individual, of his rights and need for protection. Massachusetts has become more cognizant of its duty to safeguard the child and has become a more active participant in child welfare activities.

It is evident that attempts had been made to rehabilitate the homes of the twenty-five offenders. Most of them had been placed on probation for parental neglect but continued to disregard the welfare of their children. Many social agencies had rendered assistance. It appeared that the behavior patterns of the offenders were well established as more than half of them had experienced previous arrests. As all other expedients had failed commitment was used as a last resort in treatment.

Significantly, the social backgrounds of the delinquents revealed that many of them were denied wholesome parental example. One-third of the

parents of the mothers were reported as being immoral. As over two-thirds of the mothers were products of broken homes it is evident that they had received limited protection or affection from their own parents. Four offenders had even been adjudged neglected themselves during childhood and placed in the custody of the State.

All but six of the offenders were of Caucasian parentage. With the exception of two mothers all were citizens of the United States either by birth or by naturalization. Six of the offenders were born out of wedlock. Four-fifths of them had sixth grade education or higher and ten of these twenty offenders had reached a secondary level of education. For the most part, however, they had been employed in the unskilled classes and most frequently as waitresses and domestic servants.

The offenders were charged with and found guilty of many types of neglect. Three-fifths of the offenders had morally neglected their children by exposing them to corrupt moral influences such as alcoholism, adultery or sexual promiscuity. Eight of the offenders had physically neglected their children by depriving them of the ordinary necessities of life. The homes of these mothers were characterized by filth and squalor. One mother neglected her children medically, another abandoned a newly born infant. Still another offender subjected her child to bodily cruelty.

It appeared that parental neglect is attributable to many factors. It involves all the varied psychological, personal, marital, and economic factors which enter into all unadjusted family situations. Although emotional impoverishment seemed to predominate as a cause other contributing factors were present. The early lives of the mothers were overshadowed with much deprivation. Most of the offenders were dependent, insecure and immature as their fundamental emotional needs were still unmet when they became adults. For this reason, it was difficult for them to be

responsible parents.

The mothers' unhappy adjustment to marriage also seemed significantly related to neglect. In turn this marital discord seemed attributable to the immaturity of one or both parents. The mothers were frequently dominated by their husbands and showed little compensation on the ego level. Many of the mothers were dissatisfied with marriage because of the responsibilities it entailed. There was evidence of unfaithfulness, alcoholism and immorality. Broken marriages were prevalent and most of the mothers projected their delinquent behavior on marital dissatisfaction.

An outstanding aspect of the social situation of the offenders that contributed to neglect was economic insecurity. Many of the fathers had not supported their families adequately. In a number of cases this was a result of marital friction, personal inadequacy or the questionable paternity or the illegitimacy of the children. As a result of separation from their husbands, many of the mothers had to work to support their families. Most of them depended on relief as a means of support and some on illicit sexual activities.

Conclusions

Because of its far reaching consequences it is to be concluded that parental neglect is undoubtedly one of the greatest social evils. As the children of today are the parents of tomorrow they bear within themselves the promise of future homes and future social progress. When the standards of parenthood are raised then only can social reconstruction and advancement be assured.

Education is increasingly recognized as the strongest ally in the prevention of neglect with some emphasis on preparation for marriage. With intelligent, willing, competent parents, child abuse and neglect will

decrease.

Furthermore, social agencies can assist by making a concerted effort to understand the dynamics operating to produce parental irresponsibility. An effort should be made to see beyond parental culpability, and to recognize ignorance, incompetency, and emotional deprivation as causes. The ultimate aim should be to rehabilitate and to reconstruct home life. Fortunately, society is commencing to recognize its responsibility for wholesome community conditions. Safe and sanitary housing, adequate health facilities, and economic security to assure 'health and decency' standards of living are becoming matters of greater public concern. Social-minded individuals educated to the needs of the family can eliminate or improve conditions which are adversely affecting parent and child life through proper legislation.

There is not only a great need to relieve social ills that are interfering with parents carrying out their responsibilities to their children, but also a need to organize and plan for sound family living wherein the child may be assured a good start toward normal growth and development.

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