The Profession of Social Work in the South

Stuart K. Jaffary

Social Forces, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Dec., 1938), pp. 226-231.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0037-7732%28193812%2917%3A2%3C226%3ATPOSWI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O

Social Forces is currently published by University of North Carolina Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/uncpress.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

http://www.jstor.org
Sat Apr 28 14:10:11 2007

THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK IN THE SOUTH*

STUART K. JAFFARY
Tulane University

A CONSIDERATION of social work in the South is benefited by a brief, orienting glance at its development in the nation. This now lusty child, born at the turn of the century, was forced to meet, almost in infancy, the strenuous experiences of a great war and a catastrophic depression. Surviving both it seems to have thrived on each. From the scattered and hesitant beginnings of C.O.S., settlements, and state institutions, the profession now finds itself engaged in conducting a range of social services so varied, so broad, so large, and so new as to be at the same time inspiring in purpose and activity but awesome in public responsibility.

It is with the rapid developments of the past decade that we are now particularly concerned. The great flood of unemployment and related distress of the depression years found the nation poorly equipped to meet it. We lacked any first line of defense such as is now being built up by the reserves of unemployment insurance. The load of human need growing out of unemployment fell with overwhelming force on the private family welfare agencies of the cities; only tardily did help come from local and state governments. And, finally, urged by the mounting distress of unrelieved human suffering, came the acceptance of national responsibility for this national problem—but not without many a creak and groan, and not yet securely acknowledged at Washington.

In dealing with the human needs arising out of unemployment there came to light other areas of need, less related to the labor market. The needs of the aged, the dependent child, the physically handicapped and the sick called for separate measures for the care of these groups through a permanent program. And so most recently we have been occupied with the establishment of the various phases of the social security program on a national scale.

The national expenditures for public relief and assistance are impressive. The Second Annual Report of the Social Security Board for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1937, gives figures as shown in Table I.

Figures for total expenditures for social services in the South are not directly available. From the Social Security Board report, however, the figures in Table II are taken for federal grants to the Southeastern States for the same period—the fiscal year ending June 30, 1937. The states are those represented in the Southern Sociological Society;[1] the amounts are the federal share only of the total social security expenditures.

The total expenditures for the social security program much exceed these amounts. And, if the cost of all social services is to be considered, the figures would run into astronomical amounts, as the Social Security Board figures do not include expenditures for workman's compensation, vocational rehabilitation and unemployment compensation, nor the older services of care of juvenile and adult delinquents, the mentally defective and insane, nor the private expenditures for family and child welfare, community organization and recreation.

* Read before the third annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 1, 1938.

[1] The states included are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia.

In the national picture our attention is attracted to this recent expansion and program. But regions, like people, are different. And as a basic principle of social work calls for respecting the individuality of the client, let us differentiate the South. The case history quickly shows that the social problems of the South, while superficially resembling those of the country as a whole, have a peculiarly individual background. As we are all aware, the social problems now presenting themselves for attack in the South are neither superficial nor recent; they are deep seated and of long duration. Rather than being a resultant of the depression they long preceded it and have only been brought more into the spotlight by the social services set up to cope with it. We have glimpsed their extent through the

TABLE I

NATIONAL EXPENDITURES FOR PUBLIC RELIEF AND ASSISTANCE, 1937

1. All Public Relief excluding administrative expense		$2,369,180,500
2. Obligations incurred for payments to recipients of the special types of Public Assistance:		
a. Under the Social Security Act—Total		293,184,616
(1) Old Age Assistance	$243,718,182	
(2) Aid to the Blind	9,005,194	
(3) Aid to Dependent Children	40,461,240	
b. Not under the Social Security Act*		23,045,000
3. Obligations incurred for general relief extended to cases		403,110,000
4. Earnings of persons certified as in need of relief employed under the Works Program:		
a. Works Progress Administration		1,325,148,395
b. Other Federal Agencies**		290,422,821
5. Resettlement Administration subsistence payments		34,269,668

Source: Second Annual Report of the Social Security Board for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1937.
* State and local expenditures for OAA, AB, ADC, under plans not approved by the Social Security Board.
** NYA, REA, RA, PWA, etc., when on a relief basis.

TABLE II

FEDERAL GRANTS TO THE SOUTHEASTERN STATES UNDER THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT*

Total grants			$11,108,081
Under Social Security Board		$5,891,437	
(1) Old Age Assistance	$4,491,453		
(2) Aid to the Blind	115,588		
(3) Aid to Dependent Children	1,284,396		
Unemployment Compensation Administration		1,159,282	
Under Department of Labor		1,705,280	
Maternal and Child Health	1,035,734		
Crippled Children	400,244		
Child Welfare Services	269,302		
Public Health Expenditures, Treasury Department		2,352,080	

Source: Second Annual Report of the Social Security Board for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1937.
* The states included are Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas. If the states of Texas and Oklahoma were included the amounts would be greatly increased: Total grants, $25,212, 953; S.S.Bd., $18,659,759; Children's Bureau, $2,180,539; Health, $2,827,956.

ERA and rural rehabilitation programs. They reach back for generations, and are rooted in an outmoded and decadent agricultural economy, of which the economic dependency and emotional dependency of human beings have been cornerstones. The strenuous recent years have only brought the inevitable resultants of this system so definitely to our attention that they can no longer be disregarded. Our present and future problems of social rehabilitation are vastly increased by now having to deal with the human products of generations of this economic and social neglect. We meet it in terms of chronic attitudes of dependence, chronic poor health and invalidity resulting from earlier untreated disease, low earning power because of low physical efficiency and illiteracy, and the whole miserable way of life which has resulted from the interplay of these factors and our previous attitudes of indifference about them. We now have to pay the costs of our previous social stupidity.

These extensive and deep rooted conditions are not to be corrected by a few months or years of social work treatment. Rather they require broad and careful long-time programs which will also strike at the continuing causes of these same conditions—corrective programs which will allow family incomes sufficient for shelter better than animals' stables; food that has appeal and protective value rather than being grudgingly swallowed to maintain existence; education and social life which will allow progressive change of the present drab, gray routine of daily existence into living that has some meaning and vitality. Such programs must increasingly affect the lives of millions of our southern people.

These broad programs, of new form but old causes, require expenditures of almost staggering amounts. Here is a first reason for professional administration. Such large amounts of public funds, available to be spent on people, are a shining mark for political control and manipulation. Confirmation, if needed, is to be had from the experiences of Illinois and Oklahoma, where federal grants for Old Age Assistance had to be suspended pending housecleaning of selfish political interference. The best insurance against such a double-edged catastrophe is administration by non-political, professional personnel.

This protection is made the more imperative by the newness of the whole program and our almost total lack of previous administrative experience with public programs of such a size. If we in America had had, like England or Germany, some decades of practice with such administration, with guide posts to mark the way, our present problems would be less difficult. Or if we, like they, had a corps of civil servants with some minimum standards of training and some general administrative experience in the public service to draw upon, we again could feel more secure. But lacking both experience and personnel there is the more need for insistence upon such personnel standards as can be applied to the American schemes. And one of those standards is certainly to be found in professional training for social work.

But the social worker is more than a cold-blooded watchdog of the public funds, important as that function may be. The critical point in the whole administrative process of the social security grants comes in the exercise of discretion. To whom are these grants of public funds to be made? This is a large responsibility in terms of money, but larger yet in terms of social returns. How is the largest amount of benefit to be secured for the sums expended, within the legal framework of the respective acts and their

administrative regulations? On the very face of it there is a clear call for administrative ability of a solid kind.

However, it is in the day-to-day operation of these services that the real need for social work skills is evidenced. The variety of human problems which are presented is endless. The single requirement of destitution as a factor in eligibility in many of the categories immediately implies that all the related ills of poverty are likely to be present—neglect of children, delinquency, disease, broken morale. Most of these human situations are complicated—existence at the poverty level is not a simple affair, as any case record will show. Not a few of them call for quick action in acute situations which taxes the abilities of even the experienced social worker. The daily handling of such vital human situations is no longer a field for the amateur.

Granted that the problems of social rehabilitation which we are facing in the South do call for professional personnel, two pertinent questions follow. How many such persons are now practicing and to what extent do they meet the needs, and how are others to be obtained. Consider the last question first as the matter of training relates directly to the points just referred to.

Within the past five years these problems of personnel have been faced by the administrators of two large national programs—the FERA in 1934, and the social security programs in the past two years. A training program in both cases was worked out with the Schools of Social Work, professional schools which were members of the American Association of Schools of Social Work. This decision was not reached because the schools were the *only* training device available, but that they offered the *kind* of training which was most needed for the wise direction of these programs. What are the essentials of such training?

A prime essential is a suitable personality in the student. A person who is to be entrusted with untangling the affairs of others must himself be mature. Good intelligence, good physical and mental health, a genuine humanitarian interest in people, and a saving sense of humor are each fundamental. His undergraduate preparation should desirably acquaint him with the fields of biology, economics, government, psychology, and sociology—the sciences underlying our political and economic structure and social life. Prerequisites in these fields are specified by most schools of social work.

On this basis the schools of social work build their professional curriculum, increasingly at a graduate level. The curriculum divides itself broadly into the course material presented in the classroom, and the related field work experience. The course work is steadily broadening in scope, not only including the strictly "social work" content, but also drawing from the fields of law, medicine, psychiatry, and government.

The field work instruction of the individual student is a kind of "teaching on the job" of basic educational importance. During this experience the student becomes an integral part of a functioning social agency. In many schools his work is directed by the full time supervisors of the school itself, similar to the clinical teaching of medical schools; in both cases the student carries professional responsibility for his work, under the direction of his supervisor who is available for consultation when needed. For effective teaching this field work experience needs to be closely related to the content of course instruction; together they form a strong and supplementary educational discipline.

How many such professionally trained

people have we in the nation, and particularly in the South? The best index is found in the membership of the American Association of Social Workers, the national professional association. Founded in 1923, the Association had slow but steady growth up to the depression period, when the great expansion of social services swelled its ranks. Its membership doubled in the period 1930–1936, and stood, in October, 1937, at 10,432. It is significant that this growth continued despite a marked raising of professional standards effective in 1933.

TABLE III

American Association of Social Workers—Membership as of October 1937, for the Southern States and Certain Others

Adapted from the Annual Statement of Membership, *The Compass*, December, 1937

STATE	MEMBERS	POPULATION*	NUMBER PER 100,000 POPULATION
United States	10,432	127,521,000	8.2
New York	1,742	12,889,000	13.5
Ohio	943	6,707,000	14.0
Pennsylvania	947	10,066,000	9.4
South			
Alabama	44	2,834,000	1.6
Arkansas	28	1,999,000	1.4
Florida	57	1,614,000	3.5
Georgia	111	3,345,000	3.3
Kentucky	116	2,846,000	4.1
Louisiana	196	2,120,000	9.3
Mississippi	6	1,961,000	0.3
North Carolina	55	3,417,000	1.6
South Carolina	32	2,012,000	1.6
Tennessee	66	2,900,000	2.3
Virginia	158	2,637,000	6.0
Total	869	27,685,000	3.1
Texas	164	6,077,000	2.7
Oklahoma	63	2,509,000	2.5

* Bureau of the Census, Estimate for 1935.

For the country as a whole the number of professional social workers per 100,000 total population is 8.2 (see Table III). The distribution of membership shows a heavier concentration in the Atlantic and North East-Central states; highest rates are for Ohio, 14.0, and New York, 13.5. For the Southeastern States included here the total number of social workers is 869, with rates varying from a low of 0.3 in Mississippi, through an average of 3.1 for the 11 states, to 6.0 in Virginia, and a high of 9.3 in Louisiana. This membership is attached to city and state chapters as follows: 11 state chapters, enrolling 527 members, or 60 percent of the membership; 5 city chapters, enrolling 342 members, or 40 percent of the membership. From this analysis we may say that for the Southeastern States, the provision of professional social workers is about one-third that of the country as a whole, and one-quarter that of the states with the highest rates of professional service.

From the two situations presented above—the large and probably increasing need for trained personnel in the administration of social services in the South, and the limited number of such personnel at the present time, the conclusion can properly be drawn that the South needs more trained social workers. The question then comes: How are these trained social workers to be obtained?

The picture of professional training in the South is a relatively simple one. In the Southeastern States there are five professional schools which are members of the national accrediting body, the American Association of Schools of Social Work—Atlanta, Louisville, North Carolina, Tulane, and William and Mary. Four of these are for white students, one for colored. Their total enrolment on November 1, 1937 was 373; 330 women and 43 men. Of this group, 254 were full time students, 119 part time; 298 were at the graduate level, 65 undergraduate, and 10 special students. In transition is the new school at Louisiana State University,

organized in 1937 and now assembling curriculum and staff looking toward accredited status.

Additionally, some of the colleges and universities in most of the states here represented have offered courses in preparation for social work at various times and of various content. Some of these schools, with an eye on the expanding program of the social services, are considering what their next move should be in this field of training. On this point there are several relevant considerations.

The first is: Is it either necessary or desirable that all social workers who are to practice in the South be trained in the South? While giving general assent to this question on the grounds that finances will limit the number of students who can go elsewhere for training, and that southern schools *should* be better equipped to train southern students to meet southern problems, yet good reasons exist for the opposite view. Our experience at Tulane is that southern students as a whole have been and are a protected group with a provincial viewpoint. They know little but the South and many of them have only the vaguest ideas about the most pressing of southern problems. One of the best ways to learn about your own region is to get outside it; to see other parts and other ways; to objectively examine your problems from a distance. The opportunity of living in other places, of mixing with students from other parts of the country and of varied backgrounds, is in itself an educational and maturing experience of largest value. Moreover, with our southern students there is the additional consideration that there is less reciprocity between the South and other parts of the nation than between the other parts themselves, so that the training period of the student may offer the only opportunity which he may have to get away. Consistent with this experience, Tulane is encouraging its students and graduates to seek scholarships, interneships, and positions out of the South; and we believe the results have fully justified the policy.

There are in the United States 32 professional schools of social work enrolling 6,422 students (November, 1937). A number of these schools are located in the belt of states adjoining the South, in Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and District of Columbia. A step further away, the large schools of New York, Pennsylvania, Western Reserve, and Chicago offer broad programs to student bodies representing every state in the Union and many foreign countries. Because of the acceptance of a minimum standard program by the accredited schools, the student obtains approximately the same general content in his basic first year in any school, and may exchange his credits between them.

The real consideration, however, is the quality of training offered. The essentials are: good training, in course and field work, to mature people, at a graduate level. Undoubtedly the South can use more of such training. But unless it can meet these standards our effort is better spent on good undergraduate preparation in the social science fields. Here can be laid a firm foundation on which to build a graduate professional training of sound content and competent instruction. Such a program is our best service to the future of social work in the South.