

OUR COSTLY DILEMMA

'Out of Wedlock' - Blight On Our Welfare System

Welfare Caseworker Pleads for Action On 'Crux of Malady': Aid to Dependent Children

The following article, written by a caseworker in the Erie County Department of Social Welfare, presents a shocking view of the unwed mother situation.

It supplements and supports the data on this subject published in The News series on "Our Costly Dilemma."

It proposes drastic treatment for cases in which morality has gone by the boards and successive illegitimate children serve mainly as a means to increase welfare checks.

There will be differences of opinions as to the remedy to be applied; The News here presents the problem. The identity of the author is withheld by The News by request.

By A WELFARE CASEWORKER

May I commend you for your series of articles on public welfare. This presentation to the public of the problems of public welfare is long overdue.

May I also suggest that the article on the problems under the category of Aid to Dependent Children did not present strongly enough the viciousness of the out-of-wedlock situation.

It surely was not the intention of the Social Welfare Law to subsidize immorality. But that is exactly what is happening.

Let me preface my further remarks by saying that my experience is similar to that of many other caseworkers who have been and continue to be dedicated to social welfare.

Reality Is Harsh

We came into this department with our minds and emotions trained by the universities in the sociological approach to the problems of social welfare. We were idealists, believing that each of us, in our small way, could contribute to social betterment. We are disillusioned.

Some of us still cling to the academic teachings, but the majority have found that there are realities in the situation which the academicians never thought of.

Some of us keep fighting, to the distress of our superiors who fear that we will "upset the apple cart." We do not want to upset the apple cart; we just want to keep the apples from rotting. To most of us the crux of the malady lies in the aid to mothers of out-of-wedlock children.

Some Refuse to Marry

We find that there is a pattern among the women in a certain class of our society to "wed" the state in preference to a man. The state has proved to be far more reliable as a source of protection and support.

This caseworker knows from personal experience of many women who have had the opportunity but who have refused to marry the fathers of their children because they will not take a chance on losing state support.

Other women with only one out-of-wedlock child consider themselves incapacitated from ever working in paid employment. This is much to be desired by a class of women whose value, if they worked for wages, would be low on the market.

A Type of Clubhouse

This caseworker knows of families where the mother is receiving aid to dependent children and each daughter, as she reaches childbearing age, bears out-of-wedlock children and sets up her own establishment under ADC.

There are multi-dwelling houses where every apartment is inhabited by ADC mothers with out-of-wedlock children.

These dwellings become a kind of clubhouse inviting nightly visitations. For unemployed men, not married or separated from their wives, they become places for shelter or for housing their posterity.

Although we have laws to force these men to provide for their offspring, by the time we have obtained their names many have drifted away.

Questions to Answer

It is commonplace for these women to say that they do not know the names of the men who have sired their children. They come to the Welfare Department with an accomplished fact, an out-of-wedlock child, and with a growing aggressiveness demand that the state support them.

The sociologist may be able to explain them by pointing out that they are only attempting to achieve their procreative needs and obtain security at the same time, but there are questions before our citizenry:

Are these women, because of their need, to be exempt from the disciplines which it has taken civilization thousands of years to build up in order to achieve the good society?

A Losing Battle?

Is the philosophy of doing what comes naturally to be subsidized for a certain section of our population while the majority of our young men and women—those who pay the bills—discipline themselves in order to provide decent homes for the children they hope to have?

It is to be feared that the stalwart citizens are fighting a losing battle and will have to sacrifice their own posterity

unless something can be done, and done very soon.

As an individual caseworker who has brought these problems to superiors many times, I ask myself: Why does the department seem afraid of a direct approach?

Solutions Suggested

If it is because of mandatory procedures, let's seek to change the mandates and not continue to hide our heads in the sand.

If it is because we do not have an alternative, let's stretch our minds and imaginations and do some experimenting whereby we may find a way. Let us re-examine some of the sloppy, sentimental thinking that has brought us to our impasse.

Some of the solutions which have been suggested are:

1—Institutionalize the mothers under work conditions, and place the children in orphanages.

We may recoil from such an approach, but it should be objectively examined. From the homes that this caseworker has seen, state orphanages could not be worse places for the bringing up of children.

We cannot dismiss such a plan by saying that institutions and foster homes are not good for children. The trouble may lie in the kind of institutions and foster homes we have had.

Such a plan would cost money. But in the end would it cost as much as our present program or as much as the anticipated costs to the state of children who have been raised in a completely immoral environment?

2—Disseminate birth control information. Why should we recoil at this approach when we are advocating it for the rest of the world?

3—Having given our population the knowledge and means of birth control, make it a crime to bear an out-of-wedlock child.

4—Finally, let us hopefully suggest that as citizens we re-examine our own morals, put our own houses in order, and re-establish a healthy shame for irresponsible sexual behavior. However, this last approach will take time and the urgency for action is upon us.

Solution Is Needed

This caseworker has sometimes felt that possibly the only way the citizenry will awake to the seriousness of the problem is if every adult were required for a period to walk a welfare beat, go into the homes, see what is happening and what we are trying to do.

We are touched in our pocket-books now, but it is still easy to yield up those few dollars and hope that the problem will somehow be solved.

But the problem is not being solved!

We are up against an invasion as devastating as that of the Mongols in the Middle Ages, and woe to us as a nation if we continue to be complacent.

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A Purpose Gone Astray

This year Erie County will spend \$3,000,000 to support unwed mothers and their illegitimate children.

It is part of an estimated \$7,500,000 county expenditure for the aid to dependent children program—a welfare category designed 25 years ago to aid needy widows and their children.

Today the total ADC caseload of 4225 includes 188 widows and 47 1/2% of all cases include one illegitimate child or more.