

THE PREVALENCE OF FEEBLE-MINDED IN MINNESOTA, the  
METHODS OF DEALING WITH THEM, and PREVENTION

F. Kuhlmann

Mental defectives are children or adults whose mental development is below normal. In practice, feeble-mindedness means mental deficiency as the main factor, plus other traits of the individual, and circumstances, which, when taken together, require State guardianship of the person in question.

A. The Number of Mental Defectives.

The degree of mental deficiency in a person can be determined quite accurately. The presence and status of other traits and circumstances to be taken into account cannot. The number of mental defectives in the state can be estimated fairly accurately, but for the number of mental defectives who at any given time should have state guardianship, that is, are feeble-minded, only certain limits can be given between which the true number probably lies.

The following figures indicate the frequency of mental deficiency in the State.

Age Periods	0-4 yrs	5-14 yrs	15-44 yrs	over 44 yrs	Total	%
M.A. at age 16 not over 11.5 I.Q. .72.	17,744	32,005	77,428	33,552	160,730	5.79
M.A. at age 16 not over 11 I.Q. .69	16,303	29,407	71,143	30,829	147,683	5.32
M.A. at age 16 not over 10.5 I.Q. .66	10,144	18,297	44,264	19,181	91,886	3.31
M.A. at age 16 not over 10 I.Q. .63	6,313	11,387	27,548	11,937	57,186	2.06
M.A. at age 16 not over 9.5 I.Q. .60	3,708	6,689	16,181	7,041	33,590	1.21
M.A. at age 16 not over 9 I.Q. .57	2,697	4,865	11,768	5,099	24,429	.88
M.A. at age 16 not over 8.5 I.Q. .53	1,869	3,371	8,158	3,535	16,934	.61
M.A. at age 16 not over 8 I.Q. .50	1,011	1,824	4,413	1,912	9,161	.33

31-PFM-FNK

These figures mean, for example, that there is a total of 160,730 persons in the state whose mental development ranges from idiocy up to, but not over, a mental age (M.A.) of 11.5 yrs. in the case of adults, and whose mental age will not exceed 11.5 yrs on reaching maturity, in the case of children. This is 5.79 percent of the estimated general population of the State. Mental ages do not increase materially after the age of 16 yrs. There are 17,744 whose ages now are 0-4 yrs whose mental age will not be over 11.5 yrs at the age of 16; there are 33,552 persons now over 44 yrs. old whose mental age is not over 11.5 yrs. The intelligence quotient (I.Q.) for an adult with a mental age of 11.5 yrs is .72.

#### B. The Number of Feeble-Minded.

In practice, any person with an intelligence quotient below .75 is likely to be committed as feeble-minded in Minnesota when appearing in court on hearing in feeble-mindedness. Probably all with an intelligence quotient below .70 should have permanent guardianship throughout their lives, from the state if it is not furnished by relatives or friends. There is no information from which a reliable estimate could be made as to the number of mental defectives not receiving satisfactory guardianship, without state assistance. The number lies somewhere between 50,000 and 75,000, probably nearer the lower than the upper figure. That is, around 50,000 would be committed as feeble-minded by the Minnesota courts if they were presented for a hearing and if the same standards were followed as are now followed for those who are presented.

#### C. Methods of Dealing with Feeble-Minded.

The effective handling of the feeble-minded requires an extensive program no part of which can be omitted without serious detriment to the whole.

1. Identification. The feeble-minded at present identify themselves for the most part by the problems they create in some form of delinquency or other intolerable social situation. Obviously they should be identified before these problems arise. The State Board of Control examines about 3000 cases a year whose mental deficiency is expected. Nearly all are already problem cases, which occasions the examination. The State has no finding agency that can take the initiative to determine who is mentally defective in time to prevent these social problems.

2. Observations of Potential Cases. Cases identified as mentally defective should be kept under observation so that proper provisions can be made when needed to prevent delinquencies. The County Child Welfare Boards already existing could render this service if the cases were identified in time.

3. Special Training. With special training many of the higher grades of mental defectives will become self-supporting and remain law-abiding. With neglect in this training very few will become self-supporting and many become delinquent. The State furnishes some special training for mental defectives in its Special Classes for Mentally Subnormal in the public schools and for inmates in State Schools for Feeble-Minded. There are at present, January 1931, forty-five towns with such classes. Together with the State School, they reach only a few thousand.

4. Segregation. Segregation has taken several forms. (a) The State Institution receiving all grades and classes for permanent care.

(b) Smaller branches or colonies more conveniently located than the central institution, and usually housing some particular grade or class of feeble-minded, but in other respects similar to the main institution.

(c) Like (b), except that the inmates are employed outside the colony home, to which they return daily.

(d) Temporary groups housed in temporary homes and similar to (c) in other respects. The temporary character of the group is determined by availability

of employment, such as a farm group during the summer season.

In Minnesota all methods of segregation are employed except (d)

5. Community Supervision. This method is fundamentally different from any form of segregation in that it deals with the cases individually and leaves him among normals.

(a) The case is removed from his own home and old environment, placed in some private home, in which or from which he is employed and partly supervised. The State's part consists chiefly of finding satisfactory homes, employment, cooperating with the home in his supervision, and keeping both home and case under observation through periodic visits and reports.

(b) Similar to (a) except that the case is not removed from his home.

Minnesota employs both methods, through the County Child Welfare Boards.

These various methods of dealing with the feeble-minded represent the modern differentiations of an older procedure under which all feeble-minded were treated more or less alike by permanent placement in a central institution. Present methods recognize different requirements for different cases, and fit the method to the case.

#### D. Methods of Prevention

The question should be divided into two: first the prevention of mental deficiency, and second, the prevention of mental defectives becoming feeble-minded in the technical-legal sense of needing State guardianship.

(a) The methods of dealing with the feeble-minded just noted constitute the chief and basic methods of prevention of both mental deficiency and feeble-mindedness.

(b) Proper home training and special occupational training would prevent thousands of cases from becoming delinquent and otherwise socially inadequate to the point where the State or private charity must take them in charge, and would fit thousands of others for community supervision where institutionalization now is needed.

(c) Progress in medical science and practice will continue to reduce the number of mental defectives due to acquired causes in a small measure at least. Possibly about a third of all cases are due to acquired causes.

(d) Sterilization is a useful procedure in certain cases. It does not decrease the need of subsequent supervision, but merely eliminates the risk of reproduction in community supervision. The indiscriminate sterilization of the feeble-minded in large numbers without subsequent supervision would create more and worse social problems than it could prevent. It cannot be regarded as a method of major importance.