


The Problem of the Feeble-minded. 

The Hennepin County Probation Dept. comprises three major departments, and therefore sees the problem of the feeble-minded from three different angles. In the juvenile branch, children are brought in for dependency and neglect, but the case work is done almost entirely by the private agency interested, - the Childrens Protective Society or the Child Welfare Board, and there remains only the official hearing and the judicial determination of the case. But in this same branch of the court are brought also some 1100 children as alleged delinquents, - many of whom have been the subject of study and treatment by the schools and the private agencies.

Lack of funds has prevented the department from continuing to give mental tests in any large numbers, but if 1930 and 1931 are representative years, 36 children of the 138 tested, 26 per cent, were found subnormal, and referred to the Child Welfare Board for further examination or commitment. These 36 children represent about 3 per cent of the children before the court. Fortunately we have the benefit of mental tests given by the schools and other agencies, when our contacts with the children begin. Without this, and without the splendid spirit of cooperation extended by the Child Guidance Clinic, the Washburn Home, and the State Research Bureau, our department would be at a much greater loss than it now is in dealing with the feeble-minded.

Our adult probation department finds men from time to time so greatly retarded, mentally, that commitment seems the only solution. Even though not sufficiently low to warrant commitment, the borderline individuals present serious problems to the department in regard to supervision. Not only are they more difficult to place in employment, but adjustment, both of single men and married, is much more difficult than with individuals of normal mentality. In this branch also, do we appreciate the assistance of other case working agencies. In several cases our probationers have wives or children in the group of mental defectives, and while the case load of 125 prevents our supervising officers to do much constructive family case work, we can and do make reference to other agencies with better facilities. In some instances the Family Welfare Society has been active, and they have undertaken to receive our check for the family support (paid in by the probationer) and supervise the disbursement for the family.

In the Mother's Allowance branch the problem of the feeble-minded is seen from the family case work viewpoint. The initial question is that of eligibility, - and the court has never drawn any definite line or degree of intelligence above which a mother might receive an allowance, and below which she is considered ineligible. The social tendencies of the mother, her ability to keep and manage the home, the ages of the children, and the mother's ability to supervise and discipline them, are important factors in determining eligibility of the mother applying. Supervision of a mother of low grade intelligence requires much more intensive case work and more frequent visits than the four times a year required in the statute. Thus, with a case load of 90 to 100 cases, and pressure of some 25 new applications to be worked upon, it is not strange that considerable delay has to result in the latter.

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Families in which an individual has been or should be committed as feeble-minded, create a situation in which the court can often be of assistance. One mother refused to have her daughter taken to Faribault, and only upon the alternative of having her mother's allowance withdrawn did she consent to the separation. In another case a disabled father in the home takes the reins of the household and supervises his feeble-minded wife and several children. Were it not for the man's presence in this particular home, it would doubtless have to be broken up.

The limited facilities of the department mean, in many instances, that we can act only as a referring medium, and in the cases in which we have been able to take full responsibility, the assistance and cooperation of the other social agencies is gratefully acknowledged.

HOWARD R. HUSH,  
Chief Probation Officer.

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