

A CONTINUATIVE CENSUS AND REGISTRATION OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

Under our present laws and procedures only a small portion of the existing feeble-minded are ever recognized and committed. Practically all that are committed have already given rise to a variety of the most serious social problems. These problems, directly traceable to the feeble-minded at large, cost the State millions of dollars annually. But this money waste is of relatively small importance compared with the amount of human misery and other intolerable social conditions that go with it.

One of the first things the census and registration of the feeble-minded could do is to correct the gross misconception people have of the existing number. That misconception is the result chiefly of surveys and estimates made by methods that were entirely inadequate. We cannot arrive at the correct figure simply by asking different people how many feeble-minded they think exist in their respective communities. This has been essentially the method used, giving the result that less than one percent of the general population is feeble-minded. To get a correct estimate of the total existing number requires the actual mental examination of a representative section of the population. This cannot be done on any part of the population except the children attending the schools. In the schools such surveys have been made many times, including areas as large as whole counties in a few instances. The results have uniformly given a percentage of feeble-minded for a general population several times as large as were obtained in the older estimates. My own surveys cover the schools in twenty-six towns of the State, in which group mental tests were given to all the school children, followed by individual mental examinations of all who might possibly fall below an intelligence quotient of .75. These results are briefly summarized in the following tables, which will need no further explanation. (Insert)

You will notice that the percentage with an intelligence quotient below .75 is 5.79, giving a total estimated number in the State of 160,730. Since this figure is obtained from children only, and since the death rate of the feeble-minded is several times greater than for normals, the total number in

he general population is probably considerably less. It is also a diagnosis and classification by the I. Q. alone, but it is not likely that other methods would reduce the number. They would only classify some below I. Q. .75 as normal, and some above .75 as feeble-minded.

In rough round numbers, I think, we may say that there are 100,000 feeble-minded in the State. I think we may also say that no legislation has ever been passed in the State, or appropriations made concerning the feeble-minded with the idea that there were more than about 5000 or so. It is obvious that such an erroneous idea can never lead to a rational and comprehensive program for the care and control of the feeble-minded. Basic and necessary information is lacking. The census and registration would once and for all correct this.

Let us consider next what, in the absence of such a census, we are accomplishing in the line of commitments. As already noted, we are making nearly all our commitments too late. It is after they have caused trouble that we find them. This is after most of the opportunities for preventative and remedial measures are gone. And we commit between four and five hundred a year, where we should have and continue to commit about two thousand a year. We commit them not because they are feeble-minded, but because they make trouble. Our very definition of feeble-mindedness, expressed as it is in terms of conduct and social inadequacy, instead of in terms of mental conditions, greatly enhances that procedure. Temporary adequate home conditions, other favorable environmental circumstances, and lax communities prevent more than three fourths of the feeble-minded from receiving any special attention, and enable them to grow up and pass their inheritance on to the next generation.

The great majority of commitments are initiated by the County Child Welfare Boards, and various private social agencies. In nearly all instances my department makes a mental examination before or during the hearing. An analysis of the examinations we make brings to light some general trends that are quite instructive. While less than half the cases we examine turn out to be feeble-minded, largely because many are referred for examination who are not thought to be feeble-minded, the figures are much the same for all with reference to

age and sex differences. The following figures, taken from the last two biennial reports, show that from 38 to 42 percent of the cases examined were fifteen or more years old.

	Biennium	Number	% over 14 years
Co. Child Wel. Bds.	1930 - '32	2448	41
Private Agencies	1930 - '32	1880	38
Co. Child Wel. Bds.	1932 - '34	3139	42
Private Agencies	1932 - '34	1883	41

When we turn to the examinations of cases less than fifteen years old, we find again that the great majority of them are dependent or neglected, or illegitimate children, among those parents feeble-mindedness plays a very large role. Thus even with the children we commit them not because they are feeble-minded, but because of the trouble their parents make. For both children and adults we usually arrive on the scene many years too late.

These examinations are equally interesting with reference to the relative number for the two sexes, and how these relative numbers change with age. The next figures give the percentages of females for each age period. The total number for each age period is the number for both sexes together. Since there was no material difference for the two bienniums, or between the cases referred by the County Child Welfare Boards and the private agencies, all are combined.

Age	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	over 49
Number	1748	2094	1703	1301	393	438	644	339	121
% female	43	44	45	72	82	73	68	60	43

We know from numerous sources that there is no important sex difference with reference to the number that are feeble-minded. Let these figures show that during the child-bearing period females come up for mental examinations at a ratio of three to one. These are undoubtedly two reasons for this. One is that unmarried mothers are easily found, while unmarried fathers are not. Could we find the latter we might discover that they are about equally numerous and equally feeble-minded. The other reason is the deeply rooted conviction

It the feeble-minded female is more responsible for feeble-minded children than is the feeble-minded male, and that therefore preventative measures are more important for the female. Of course, this cannot be so to any great extent for hereditary cases, if the Mendelian law is applicable to the feeble-minded. It could be so only to the extent that hereditarily feeble-minded females mated with mentally normal but hereditarily tainted males more frequently than hereditarily feeble-minded males mated with mentally normal but hereditarily tainted females. It is also commonly held that a larger percentage of feeble-minded females marry than feeble-minded males, largely because normal males in general will readily marry feeble-minded girls, while normal girls use better judgment in mating. We have no statistical evidence that this is so to any large extent. It is at least not markedly true in our data giving the mental examination results of both parents. However, this data may be selective so as to cover up the true status.

What I wish to make clear in the discussion of these sex differences in the cases referred for examination is that there is no adequate reason for making this discrimination other than that with our present procedure the suspected males cannot be found as easily. The fact that this discrimination is made is proof that our procedures are at fault and need drastic revision.

The question has been asked as to what good such a census and registration would do, assuming that you had it. Part of the answer is that there is not very much you can do without it. Past experience and common sense make that very evident. On the other hand, no one claims that the census will at once accomplish everything that should be done. It will not provide the right kind of special training for all and at the right time. That requires a lot of equipment we haven't got as yet, as well as more information on what is the right kind of training. It will not institutionalize all whom at present we do not know how to handle in any better way. That would require much larger institutions than the public mind at present would tolerate. It will not bring about at once a hundred percent prevention for the next generation. That requires the enlargement and perfection of a complicated regulatory machinery and cannot be built in a day and again would not be tolerated today by the public

We could produce it. We might enumerate a great many other things that the census would not at once and in itself do.

Among the uses that we could reasonably expect from the census I would place first that of the education of the public. It seems that we are constantly forgetting that in the long run we cannot progress far beyond what the average citizen understands and accepts. That average citizen does not know how his own life and interests constantly are to the feeble-minded, because he has no opportunity to observe them. The census will tell him who they are in his own community. It will give him a chance to observe them first hand. He will learn their relation to home conditions, to neglect of children, to economic needs of the home. He will see the school problems they give rise to, the delinquencies they drift into, their continued dependency on others for a living after they grow up, and, lastly, the inevitable early marriages, large families and repetition of the cycle. Without the census we see only the effects or results of feeble-mindedness without knowing that it is feeble-mindedness that produces them. When he sees and understands this connection, and not until then, will he have laid the foundation for any substantial progress.

But before we could reach this point, which undoubtedly would take a number of years of gradual approach I believe some very important results could be achieved more or less immediately with the census. Without any material change in our equipment, we could do much simply by making a better selection in our commitments. With relatively very little extra effort we could keep them under sufficient observation to know when to commit them in order to prevent delinquencies. This alone would reduce the population of our reformatory and penal institutions by about a third, and reduce the number of illegitimate children almost one half. To accomplish all this, practically nothing more is needed than to change the date of commitment. It would not need to increase the total number we are already committing.

Another more or less immediate result we might expect from the census is special training in the schools for a much larger number than is now receiving it. I do not accept this idea that the total educational cost for

given result to be achieved is increased by this special training. I think that cost is much less. When this is understood, and when the schools know what children need this training, they will not demand or wait for a State aid for it.

A third important thing we could do with the census immediately is to commit before marriage. A considerable number of the commitments we make now are of parents with from one to a dozen children. It would cost no more to substitute for these an equal number of commitments of cases before they marry, and it would reduce the number of feeble-minded children and associated problems materially for the immediate future.

Still another thing we could accomplish immediately is vocational guidance for adult feeble-minded not requiring institutionalization. We could extend this to many times the number we are now reaching at relatively very little additional cost of supervision. This would be an effective method of relieving charity now needed, and of eliminating waste to employers.

The last question for consideration is of how the census can be maintained. My plan would be to get it through the examination of all school children of a certain age, perhaps eight to nine years, each year. Eventually this would give the census for the whole population, excepting for children of pre-school age and others entering the State after the age of eight to nine. The examination in the schools could be limited to group mental tests followed by individual mental examinations of all who did poorly on the group tests. Those presumably feeble-minded should then be registered with the County child welfare Boards for continued observation. They should be committed as feeble-minded only as and when special reasons for closer supervision arises, at which time further examinations and evidence should be obtained are needed. Then examiners could probably do all the necessary examining, at the cost not so very much greater than is now paid for this work at a time for the most part too late.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FEEBLE-MINDED IN MINNESOTA IN 1930

Based on mental test survey of public schools in twenty-six towns. From this data only children age eight to nine years were selected as best basis for an estimate. The predicted final mental ages and I. Q.'s at age sixteen were computed for all.

TABLE I

Percents at different intelligence levels—all 8 to 9 year olds in public school

M. A. at 16 not over	11-6	11-0	10-6	10-0	9-6	9-0	8-6	8-0
Maximum I. Q. not over	.72	.69	.66	.63	.60	.57	.53	.50
Percent of total 8 to 9 yr. olds	5.79	5.32	3.31	2.05	1.21	.38	.61	.33

TABLE II*

Estimated number of feeble-minded, children and adults, in general population, based on Table I.

M. A. at 16 not over	11-6	11-0	10-6	10-0	9-6	9-0	8-6	8-0
I. Q. at 16 not over	.72	.69	.66	.63	.60	.57	.53	.50
No. of cases	160730	147683	91836	57186	35590	24429	16934	7773

TABLE III

Estimated number of feeble-minded at different age periods.

Age	0-4	5-14	15-64	over 64
(M. A. at 16) Not over 11-6		32,005	77,483	33,552
I. Q. not over .72	17,744			
Not over 11-0		29,407	71,143	30,329
I. Q. not over .69	16,908			
Not over 10-6		18,297	64,264	19,191
I. Q. not over .66	16,144			
Not over 10-0		11,387	27,548	11,937
I. Q. not over .63	6,813			
Not over 9-6		6,639	16,181	7,011
I. Q. not over .60	6,408			
Not over 9-0		4,365	11,765	5,037
I. Q. not over .57	6,697			
Not over 8-6		3,371	8,159	3,555
I. Q. not over .53	1,359			
Not over 8-0		1,824	4,413	1,912
I. Q. not over .50	1,011			

*These figures are uncorrected for the higher death rate among feeble-minded. In Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded this is about four times as high as in the general population.