

THE NEGLECT OF CHILDREN AS RELATED TO FEEBLE-MINDEDNESS
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There is no need for me to apologize for the title of this paper as it was selected for me. It is obvious that the term "as related to" is necessary, for one cannot say arbitrarily that feeble-mindedness is a causative factor in neglect. One can only look over the field and point to the strength of the relationship.

This paper falls rather naturally and more or less definitely into three divisions. The first part is concerned with definitions, and with assumptions which we as a group of Doctors, Lawyers, Social Workers, Educators, Sociologists, Psychologists, Academicians and Theorists have been working on regarding the neglect of children of feeble-minded parents.

The second division is concerned with the findings in a very limited review of a group of families, where children are concerned, in which one or both parents were feeble-minded.

And the third section, which is very short, attempts to raise questions for analysis and discussion regarding advisable procedure and policies. I am not prepared to submit any dogmatic conclusions or any definite recommendations without time and opportunity to make a much more thorough and comprehensive study than could be made at present.

The legal definition of child neglect is as follows: "The term 'neglected child' shall mean a child who is abandoned by both parents, or, if one parent is dead, by the survivor, or by his guardian; or who is found living with vicious or disreputable persons, or whose home, by reason of improvidence, neglect, cruelty, or depravity on the part of the parents, guardian or other person in whose care he may be, is an unfit place for such child; or whose parents or guardian neglect and refuse, when able to do so, to provide medical, surgical or other remedial care necessary for his health or well being; or when such child is so defective in mind as to require the custodial care and training of the state school for the feeble-minded, neglect and refuse to make application for his admission to said institution; or who, being under the age of twelve years, is found begging, peddling or selling any articles or singing or playing any musical instrument upon the street, or giving any public entertainment, or who accompanies or is used in aid of any person so doing."

I would like to say a word here as to the interpretation of this law by our Juvenile Court as it pertains to the children of feeble-minded parents. Our Judge has held that, inasmuch as an adjudication of neglect of a child is prima facie evidence of the act of neglect on the part of the parents and places liability for criminal action against them, that a feeble-minded parent is not responsible and should not and cannot be so jeopardized.

Because of this interpretation, many children, whose situation is identical with that of children who are adjudged neglected are, in cases where court action is advisable, brought in under DEPENDENCY action, providing one or both parents are feeble-minded. It has sometimes occurred that the children in a family are adjudged neglected and the next week the mother or father is committed as feeble-minded. If the court action for neglect of these children had been brought after the commitment of the parent, it would not have succeeded. This raises a rather fine point as to what constitutes neglect. Given one child, adjudged neglected, can we say that another child in an identical situation is dependent rather than neglected simply because its parent has been found not capable of caring for it?

It might be interesting at this point to interpolate that part of the legal definition of a dependent child that is utilized as a substitute for a neglect action. "A 'dependent child' shall mean a child who is without a parent or lawful guardian able to adequately provide for his support, training and education, and is unable to maintain himself by lawful employment."

I am at this time offering a tentative definition of neglect which I believe is something very near, at least, the conception the social worker has. It would not be considered as a legal definition. The legal definition would probably be adequate if it were applied in all cases and excepted in feeble-minded cases. This is the sociological definition which I would propose. A neglected child is a child whose opportunity for a satisfactory physical, mental, moral, or emotional development is hampered to a degree that is detrimental to the welfare of the child, or that their future is menaced. Obviously my definition leaves it up to the judgment of the trained social worker.

The assumption I previously noted, which has, I believe, been pretty generally accepted by those of whom this group are representative, is that a feeble-minded parent is inadequate to care for and properly train children whether such children be normal or subnormal. There are, so far as I know, no studies on this particular phase of the problem.

In trying to arrive at a point of departure, I reviewed forty one selected cases from our feeble-minded files. They were selected on the following bases: The parents or one parent has been committed as feeble-minded and has one or more children. This selection is neither random nor scientific. It includes from our open cases in the Department for the Feeble-Minded such cases as constitute a family group. There are two other groups that would undoubtedly reveal interesting data on this subject; first, the many cases of feeble-minded unmarried mothers who have never had the children with them for any considerable period of time, or if with them the situation has been a controlled one, and second, the cases of feeble-minded children whose parents, while never tested, are believed to be subnormal. Moreover, it is obvious that those feeble-minded parents who somehow manage to keep their children from annoying the rest of the neighborhood will not be reported to our office. All in all the consideration of these cases I have to offer will merely indicate what the situation may be.

In these 41 families there are 168 children.

45 of these children were in Juvenile Court on a neglect action (Action taken before commitment of parent as feeble-minded).

106 children were alleged to be neglected by the social organization working on the case, although no neglect action was taken.

17 children - no evidence of neglect, but in each case either the child was not with the parents or the situation was adequately controlled.

Of the 45 children adjudged neglected, 9 were in Juvenile Court on a dependency action also.

Of the 106 alleged neglected children, 15 were in Juvenile Court on a Dependency action.

Of the 17 children not neglected, 5 were found dependent in Juvenile Court.

Of the 106 alleged neglected children, 18 were delinquents.

If we are interested in the frequency of neglect among children of feeble-minded parents, these few figures would seem rather startling. We must always keep in mind that only those cases in which there is a social problem of some sort will be found in our files. We can only say that in the case records of the Hennepin County Child Welfare Board there appears to be a strong relationship between feeble-mindedness and neglect of children.

Considering for a moment the intelligence ratings of the parents, the mother in every case but one, the range in intelligence quotient is from 40 to 75 with a mean at 60 and an average deviation of 8, which means that fifty percent of the cases fall between 52 and 68. The number is too small to be reliable, and if it were it is only casually related to the issue.

A presentation of one of our cases, that of Martin X, will serve to illustrate that group to which I have referred as alleged neglected. This case history is fairly typical. Martin was smarter than his mother, Katie X, and soon sensed this fact. He has an I.Q. of 98 while Katie's is 50. I do not mean to imply that all children of feeble-minded parents are smarter than they are, yet it has been observed that the offspring of parents who deviate markedly in a trait from the mean of the race, will on the whole, strike a point midway between the parents and the mean of the race.

Katie has had seven children, three by her first husband, born respectively in 1915, 1918, and 1919; an illegitimate child by another man, born in 1921; Martin, born in 1923, illegitimate, although her divorced husband is the alleged father, which is admitted by him; a child by her second husband, born in 1926, which died in infancy, and to date the last child born in 1929, also the child of her second husband.

The first three children, the legitimate children of the first husband, were given to him by the court at the time of the divorce and have had excellent care, training and education. The fourth child, illegitimate, was given up for adoption.

Martin remained with the mother and was accepted by the second husband as a part of the family group. The youngest child, also with the mother and father, is rather a dull child and not having started to school as yet has not been brought to our attention as a problem. Shortly after Martin started school the reports began coming to us of uncleanness, tardiness, and absence from school. I quote one report from the visiting teacher. "She said they were having the same difficulty with Martin again this year. He is absent, tardy and dirty. She explained that when a pupil at Washington School, which is in a poor district, was labeled dirty, he was really filthy. The boy is not interested in his studies. They consider him an average child. The nurse has called at the home and considers the mother 'simply impossible'. She wonders what is to become of Martin if he continues to live with this woman in this environment.

He has no respect for his mother and is wholly indifferent to anything she says. In fact he pays little attention to anyone". Such reports as this were noted on the running file for a period of over two years until the Spring of 1933 at which time the reports of neglect became more serious and added to this were incidents of misconduct. Quoted again from the running record as of June in 1933. "The boy is irregular in attendance, appears untidy much of the time. They can get no co-operation from the mother. Boy should have tonsilectomy, also glasses. Martin has been appearing with money, sometimes with \$1.00, which he says he takes from his mother's purse. He has also been involved with a group of small boys in looting automobiles parked nearby, breaking windows, etc. This misconduct has been reported to the police department. Not brought into court as boys were so young. When the matter was taken up with the mother and she was advised to keep her money where it would not be a temptation to the boy, Martin remarked "Huh, I am smarter than her, she can't hide her money where I can't find it."

Naturally we had felt for some time that the boy was neglected and that his misconduct was the natural result of his mother's inadequacy, but it was only when there was sufficient legal evidence that we could resort to court action. Martin was brought into Juvenile Court in July of 1933 as dependent. He was adjudicated dependent and committed to our temporary custody. We placed him with Washburn Home for care and treatment and the case has been continued in Juvenile Court from time to time since then and Martin has been in a carefully selected boarding home. Suffice it to say for the purpose of this illustration that the results have more than justified our contention that the boy needed the care and training that a feeble-minded person did not provide. Martin has just now by the direction of the Court been returned to his mother and step-father for a two months trial period at the end of which time permanent disposition of the case may be made. Further developments will be noted with interest.

Had the time permitted I should have liked to present a typical case illustrating the neglect of a subnormal child in a home with a feeble-minded parent or parents, but of necessity I must curtail this article.

I would not presume on the basis of this sketchy review of cases to draw conclusions and it is of value only as it points out that the incidents of alleged neglect and of feeble-mindedness are correlated, and as it provides a basis for discussion.

To me the consideration I have given this subject indicates that there is a large field that is as yet unsurveyed and I believe we need a comprehensive and careful study and interpretation of this question. For this purpose the records of several of the agencies should be included in order that the situation may be viewed from the complete and various angles. The fact that I had in the majority of cases only the record of the feeble-minded ward at hand to review, and not a complete record of the neglect, made it impossible to make adequate findings. My first suggestion then would be - A co-ordinated study of neglect of children as related to feeble-mindedness and an interpretation of that study as a working basis.

The questions for discussion I would present are, first, the Legal Definition of Neglect - Is it Adequate? Is it advisable to rely on dependency action for relief in cases of alleged neglect when neglect action is not available on account of the feeble-mindedness of the parent or parents? If not, what would constitute a satisfactory legal definition. Second, What, if any, is the relative seriousness of the neglect of the normal as compared to the sub-normal child of feeble-minded parents as it affects the child, the parent and the community. Third, What general policies and co-ordinated procedure would contribute to the success of the program to protect the child handicapped by being born to mentally deficient parents?

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