1969

School Performance of Children in Families Receiving Public Assistance in Canada

Margaret Stephenson

Wilfrid Laurier University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholars.wlu.ca/etd

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/1575

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN IN FAMILIES RECEIVING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN CANADA
(An Analysis of a Completed Research Study)

A Research Essay
Submitted to The Graduate School of Social Work
Waterloo Lutheran University

by
Margaret Stephenson, B. A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Social Work

April 1969
PREFACE

The choice of this particular piece of research for analysis was to some extent influenced by the experiences of my field placements in a Children's Aid Society and in Provincial Welfare. In both settings I worked with families receiving public assistance and became concerned about the generally poor performance and adjustment in school of many children in these families. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the need for education. It is important to examine the situation in order to see why these children are not successful, so that changes can be brought about to meet their educational needs. Without adequate education and training the future for these children in our present society would appear to be rather limited in terms of participating fully in the community.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  PURPOSE AND SETTING OF THE STUDY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II RELATION OF RESEARCH STUDY TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III SELECTION AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Formulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Variables Used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of the Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V  SUMMARY OF FINDINGS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT FOR SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
PURPOSE AND SETTING OF THE STUDY

This study, School Performance of Children in Families Receiving Public Assistance in Canada, conducted by Dr. Mukhtar A. Malik of the research staff of the Canadian Welfare Council, was initiated by the Canadian Public Welfare Association and financed by grants from the Department of National Health and Welfare. The Canadian Public Welfare Association was concerned that the children of public assistance families are "being prohibited" from taking full advantage of educational opportunities. This possible educational inequality is the underlying rationale which prompted the research to be undertaken. It does not appear that the educational system was involved in the formulative stages of the research. Had this system either initiated the research or been engaged at the beginning of the study, the direction of the research might have been altered so as to focus more on the educational aspects of the study and so provide a more detailed and comprehensive assessment of the school performance of the children in the sample.

The problem which this research study wished to address was the extent to which factors associated with the receipt of public assistance influenced the school performance of the children of public assistance families. It was felt that there were factors associated with receiving public assistance
which created a self-perpetuating cycle of dependency on assistance—inadequate education leading to unemployment in adulthood. If children of assistance families are at a disadvantage in school, then the existing public welfare system is perhaps causing successive generations of people to be ill-prepared to meet the increasing demand of the labour market for skilled workers. These children are not being permitted the opportunity to achieve economic independence in adulthood.

A year-long study was conducted in four major cities across Canada—Vancouver, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Montreal—to investigate the problem. The samples in this study were composed of 399 families in the experimental group who were receiving public assistance, and 181 families in the control group who were not receiving public assistance. The control group was selected on the basis of criteria which the researcher hoped would match the two groups on the basis of socio-economic status. Data were collected from public assistance records, school records, interviews conducted with parents in the home, and questionnaires administered to the children. The children studied were in the seventh grade and up. Field interviews began in October 1965, and were completed in March, 1966.

The findings of the study indicate that children on public assistance do perform poorly in school in comparison with children in unassisted families at the same economic level, and that boys do even worse than girls. The results
from the questionnaires and interviews showed that the assisted parents' aspirations for their children were lower than those in the control group, and the children's own school plans showed the same tendency. These findings were supported by a study of the educational and occupational achievements of the oldest child out of school, as in almost twice as many assisted families as control families, the oldest child left school below the age of sixteen. Upon further examination, it would appear questionable to conclude immediately from these findings that the goals of families on assistance were more limited than those of non-recipients because of different value orientations. In a large proportion of cases, the children dropped out of school to help support the family financially. The goals and aspirations of these assisted families may not differ from those of more advantaged income groups, but rather are based on a realistic appraisal of the child's chances for advancement in view of the family's limited resources and the support it is able to offer him. The conclusions reached by the researcher could be questioned in light of the sample drawn for the study and the research instruments used.

It is important to note that in 71.4% of the assistance families, as opposed to 9.9% of the control families, there was no father present in the home. This variable, family disorganization, is not taken into consideration in explaining the overall conclusions drawn from the data. This uncontrolled variable may be directly or indirectly influencing school
performance of the experimental group as well as affecting the educational and occupational aspirations of these children.
CHAPTER II
RELATION OF RESEARCH STUDY TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH

In beginning a study of the factors associated with the receipt of public assistance which could influence school performance of children in these families, the researchers reviewed previous studies and literature dealing with factors relating to social class and identified as affecting school performance. The researchers have tended to use a socio-cultural framework for their study. Literature using this approach to explain variations in educational behaviour among school children has tended to focus on four aspects of behaviour: academic achievement, educational and occupational aspirations and expectations, and the individual's social behaviour. It is felt that educational behaviour is, to some extent, influenced by the family, peer group, the school, and the existing class structure.

In examining the effect of socio-economic class differences on achievement and other aspects of individual behaviour, the researchers have used the results of studies carried out by Porter. He has shown that the upper social classes are over-represented in the upper grades of high school. Among the families where the father's education fell into the higher occupational classes, a greater percentage of children between
the ages of fourteen and twenty-four were in school, as compared to children whose fathers were employed in the lowest occupational classes.¹

The researchers view the educational system as being open—that is, everyone who has the ability and wishes to get an education can do so. Becker, however, in looking at education as a symbol of social position and a means of achieving higher social position, sees access to higher social position as being restricted to members of the middle class who are able to benefit from the educational opportunities available in society which permit social mobility.² Havighurst also discussed education in relation to social mobility and identifies the functional and symbolic value of education. The functional value is related to the specific purpose which education has for the needs of the labour market, while the symbolic value is only in terms of status for the individual.³ These findings tie in with Turner's theory of sponsored and contest mobility. The latter is characterized by maximum opportunity for entrance into a higher social class for all.


members of society; whereas in sponsored mobility, entrance is controlled by the existing elite and restrictions are usually placed on who shall enter educational institutions which grant credentials for entrance into the elite.\(^4\)

Rogoff states that education either facilitates upward social mobility or maintains favoured class position of the individual. Children who start life in a given social class vary in the class status they achieve as adults in proportion to the amount of formal schooling they obtain. Rogoff identified three factors which could be operating: (1) school system of rewards and punishments used to implement goals, (2) family attitude toward education, (3) community structure and norms. A link is proposed between ecological processes and processes of influencing social class position. Socio-economic position influences the type of community or neighbourhood where the family will live; ecological status affects life chances of children, some of whom will remain in the social class of their parents, while others will shift in status.\(^5\) It would appear that in selecting their sample, the researchers have not taken into consideration the third factor identified by Rogoff. The four cities selected are in four different provinces, and the researchers have attempted


to control for regional differences by including in the appendix the results of their data in the form of percentage distributions based on the findings of each city. The researchers do not, apparently, take into account the effect differences on a community or neighbourhood level might have on school performance.

Halsey, Frankel, and Coster, have in their respective studies concluded that social class and intelligence as measured by standard intelligence tests, are positively related. This social class difference is also shown in the marks received by the students. Bernstein sees differences in the type of language used among the middle and lower classes which correspond somewhat to Piaget's formal and concrete thought processes. The use of public language by the lower class, characterized by rigid syntax and restricted meanings, places the lower class child at a disadvantage in the middle class school and with children from other classes where formal language is used. Although there are numerous arguments

---

against this interpretation of the relationship between school achievement and social class, I.Q. test results are frequently used as the basis for educational decisions concerning the type of schooling and career the individual pursues. The researchers have implicitly made the assumption in measuring academic performance that the results of standard tests used in the school are a valid measurement of academic achievement.

The researchers have used income and occupational levels as two major criterion in determining social class. There is strong evidence that there is a higher level of educational aspiration among students from higher socio-economic classes. Family relationships and patterns of child rearing have been used to explain this relationship. Membership in higher occupational roles in our society requires adherence to certain values such as achievement, self-discipline, and deferment of gratification. Children whose socialization emphasizes such values and behavior will have considerable advantage over those whose socialization emphasized other values. Based on public opinion surveys, Hyman found that there is less striving for success, an awareness of the lack of opportunity, and a lack of emphasis on the value of education among lower class adults. Results of a study by Douvan showed that among students of two socio-economic

groups, achievement motivation was more highly associated with autonomy and comparison with the individual's past performance among middle class children, while achievement motivation of working class children was more highly dependent on material reward. Rosen, however, found that the relationship between high achievement motivation when found to be positively associated to the achievement of high grades operates independently of social class.

The task of socialization of the child, which is a responsibility undertaken by the family on behalf of the community involves teaching the child the dominant values, attitudes, and behaviour patterns of the community. Kahl and others support the hypothesis that educational achievement is positively associated with the emphasis and value placed on education by the parent. This is one area which is explored by the researchers, and they do attempt in their interview schedule to look at the reward and punishment system used by the parents. Middle class interest and encouragement is used as a major factor in explaining the academic superiority of these children in comparison with

---


lower class children. Middle class parents and peers expect the child to succeed and the child practice at home under the reward system operating in the middle class-oriented school. Kahn, in looking at the relationship between social class and parental authority concludes that working class parents are more likely to respond in terms of the immediate consequences of the child's actions and to use physical punishment, while the middle class parents are more likely to respond in terms of their interpretation of the implications behind behavior, placing higher value on the child's development of internalized standards of behavior.

The researchers have not addressed the problem of family relationships in their review of the literature, particularly the parent-child relationship. Findings of one study indicated unsatisfactory relationships were related to lower aspirational levels in the student. Morrow and Wilson found, however, that high achieving students expressed more satisfaction and trust in their relationship with parents than

---


did low achievers. Teachers' expectations and behaviour have been shown to influence the school performance of the child. This is also influenced by the child's feelings toward his teacher. Although they do address the difference in social class origins which frequently occur between teacher and student, and its possible effect on performance, the researchers do not include this as a variable to be considered in designing the research instruments. Rosenthal and Jacobson, in a study, have shown that there is a possible negative effect on school achievement as a result of the attitudes held by the teacher and his or her expectations for the child. They feel that this may be operating with "disadvantaged children" in the form of a "self-fulfilling prophesy" with the child's membership in a disadvantaged group being the reason to expect him to perform poorly.

In approaching the research project from a sociological frame of reference, the researcher has not included considerations as to what psychological factors might be operating either independently of, or in conjunction with environment.


mental factors, to influence school performance.

Psychodynamic theory offers several possible interpretations of the underlying causes of poor school performance. "The psychodynamic system is a conceptual organization of interlocking mental functions . . .," the irrational and rational components of which are, "... the id, ego, the super ego and the mental representation of the body, the self, biosocial roles and reality." The child in the school setting, according to Cameron, is expected to suppress many of his individual impulses which otherwise interfere with learning. In the normal child, oedipal curiosity is replaced with general curiosity and eagerness to learn, and aggression is channelled into mastering knowledge, expanding external reality and in developing ego and super ego organization.

Josselyn sees difficulty in school as being an indication of excessive strain upon the child's ego. Unable to adapt to the restrictions of the school because of too many other demands for adjustment, the child may be restless in school, inattentive and distracting to others, and unable to learn. This ties in closely with Erikson's eight stages of normal development. Each of these is a potential crisis because of radical changes and adjustment needed to success-

---

21 Ibid., p. 82.
fully pass on to the next stage. The residues of these con-
licts are carried by every adult. The school-age years of the
child correspond with Erikson's stages of "industry vs. guilt"
and "identity vs. inferiority." In the first stage mentioned,
the child experiences both the need for a "sense of industry"
and the danger of a "sense of inferiority." He may still pre-
fer the infantile responsibilities placed on him at home to
the increased demands of school. Normally, the sexual drives
of the oedipal conflict are dormant in latency. Erikson sees
difficulties arising if the child still compares himself with
his father, arousing both a sense of guilt and inferiority.
Family life may not therefore have been adequate preparation
for school life.23

Havighurst looks at learning in terms of development-
al tasks which must be mastered at certain periods in the
individual's life. Failure to do this leads to unhappiness
in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with
later tasks. These tasks, stemming from physical development,
cultural pressures or the aspirations and values of the indi-
vidual, help in understanding the purpose of education. It is
important in adjusting the timing of the introduction of edu-
cational tasks to consider the periods in human development
when conditions are most favourable to learning these tasks.24

---


Various skills are needed in school and not all children are equally proficient in such things as memory, retention, and motor-coordination.

According to Bettelheim, both learners and non-learners often have the goal of success. Learning inhibitions may have positive motives in the child: competition is seen as wrong; wish to maintain closeness to mother; status-seeking through failure by attracting attention in a negative way. Learning difficulties may also stem from negativism resulting from a wish to defy and/or punish parents, or a general defiance of authority.25

CHAPTER III
SELECTION AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Problem Formulation

This study was conducted at a time when increasing emphasis was being placed on the importance of children continuing their education as long as possible and receiving training to meet the demands of the labour market. The study began from a concern that some children, particularly those from families on public welfare, were at a severe disadvantage in the educational system. The researchers cite statistics concerning the number of families who were receiving some form of provincial public assistance in 1963, and speculate that if in fact receipt of public assistance is a factor which can have an adverse effect on school performance, then possibly two million children may be involved in this situation. 26

Further evidence was found to support the connection between inadequate education and unemployment. It was felt that the need for uneducated and unskilled workers would decrease as automation spreads. The researchers cite figures which stated that in 1960, 70.2 per cent of unemployed males

in Canada, who were able to work, had Grade 8 education or less. It would appear, then, that the researchers had identified a serious problem area which they sought to explore in their study.

The study proposed to address two central questions: (1) how public assistance children compare with those of unassisted families in the same social stratum, both as to their school performance and their potential for it; and (b) whether public assistance families differ from unassisted families in the same social stratum with respect to goals and values that have a bearing on educational attainment.

The first question seems relevant to the problem area identified. The second, however, indicates that the researchers had already selected two variables they felt were important in differentiating these two subgroups in the same social stratum with respect to educational performance. Since the researchers themselves note the lack of previous research on the effect public assistance status has on the individual's behaviour, one would question whether by specifying these two particular variables at an early stage in the research process and apparently based on little empirical data on the subject, the researchers may not have overlooked other important variables. Other important variables which could have an influence on the school behaviour are peer group relations, attitude.

tudes and expectations of the teachers of these children.

The main purpose in this study, as stated in the re-
search report, was to examine the school performance of chil-
dren who are attending school concurrently with their parents
being on assistance. There appears to be some confusion, how-
ever, as to the assumptions which the researchers have based
their central questions and problem formulation on. Few of
the assumptions have been made explicit, and so the reader is
left to attempt to discover what implicit assumptions are
underlying this study. It would appear that one assumption
is that there are factors associated with public assistance
status which create a self-perpetuating cycle of dependency
on assistance, and these or similar factors also have an in-
fluence on the goals, norms and values held by members of these
families. These assumptions do not appear to have been based
upon evidence resulting from a comparison of public assistance
families and non-assisted families, but rather on comparisons
between lower and middle class. Following from this is the
apparent assumption that assistance families and low-income
families are necessarily of the same social class or stratum.

Along with other concepts used in the study, social
class has not been defined by the researchers, but it would
appear that income is used as the major index of social class.
Public assistance is defined by the researchers as "... con-
tributions of cash or goods made by a public authority to those
individuals or families who are able to demonstrate eligibil-
ity within limits of need and income set down by the authority."
This definition includes receipt of assistance based on need resulting from situational factors, such as health or physical disability. In these latter cases, the level and source of income could be as a result of factors over which the individual had no control and thus are not associated with social class.

The researchers have further assumed that children of public assistance families would associate themselves with children of low income groups. This was used as a basis for selecting the control group of families. The findings indicate, however, that there was a very wide variation in family income among the members of the control group, which would tend to place some doubt on the validity of the conclusions drawn from this study.

In their choice of measurements of school performance, the researchers have assumed that the ratings of teachers are adequate indices of the child's academic performance, and the examinations given in the schools are valid measures of academic achievement and potential. This assumption could be questioned in view of the fact that a number of schools were used in four cities. As education is a provincial matter, there is room for a wide variation, both between provinces, and further between cities. Even the grading system and organization of courses is not uniform among provinces, and the latter varies considerably among cities. It is felt, therefore, that an attempt to make explicit at least the major assumptions upon which the research is undertaken
could have added considerably to the precision of the study and thus have influenced the relevance and significance of the findings of the research and the conclusions drawn from it.

**Hypotheses**

It is not made explicit what type of design the researchers intended to employ when they began the study. Although there are elements of both the formulative-exploratory study and the diagnostic-descriptive study according to Kahn, it would appear that the research began as a diagnostic-descriptive study. Three main hypotheses were formulated by the researchers:

1. recipients of public assistance are characterized by goals and values that differ from those of non-recipients,
2. these goals and values are transmitted to the children of recipients,
3. these goals and values are associated with lower than average performance by children of recipients.

One criticism of the problem formulation is the failure to specify in advance the frame of reference within which decisions will be made concerning the methodology used in the study and the implications the findings and resulting conclusions will have for the problem area to be addressed. In

---

view of the lack of existing knowledge of the problem area, it would appear that an exploratory study would have been more appropriate, rather than attempting a more sophisticated level of research and failing to carry out the more refined techniques of problem formulation, sampling and control demanded.

The purpose of the hypotheses, according to Cohen and Nagel is to direct the search for the order among facts, and in so doing, some facts are of necessity seen as significant and others are not. Because of the lack of previous knowledge, it is questionable whether these hypotheses express a relevant connection of facts based on previous knowledge. The attempt has been made in the three hypotheses not only to establish that relationships exist, but also to attempt to specify what the relationships are and to attempt to explain them. It would seem that an attempt has been made to proceed too quickly and to explore too much of the problem area in a very speculative manner. Ripple, in dealing with problem identification and formulation, states that if relationships are found to exist research can then proceed to state these relationships as hypotheses, and ultimately to develop hypotheses that explain these relationships. Even in stating


their hypotheses, the researchers have failed to define the concepts used: values, goals, and school performance.

**Major Variables Used**

Based on the purpose of the study, the major variables were public assistance and school performance. The researchers followed the basic format of the exploratory study and attempted to investigate other variables and their possible influence on the relationship between the receipt of public assistance and school performance. Although they have attempted to gather information on the major areas which may affect school performance, some important areas such as health, general characteristics of each school used in the sample as well as teacher attitudes toward the students, have not been considered. Physical defects such as defective hearing and vision, physical retardation and general health have tended to be associated with lower school achievement. It has been found that children from lower socioeconomic groups tend to have a higher incidence of inadequate health, possibly as a result of poorer diet and hygiene.\(^1\) Rosenthal and Jacobson have dealt with the relationship between the teacher's expectations and attitudes and the school performance of the child.\(^3\)

---


In this study, public assistance is defined by the researchers as "... contributions of cash or goods made by a public authority to those individuals or families who are able to demonstrate eligibility within limits of need and income set down by the authority." Two types of assistance were distinguished for the purpose of this study. Categorical assistance to the blind, disabled and elderly does not cover the dependents of these individuals and therefore recipients of this form of aid were not included in the study. Non-categorical assistance usually falls under the categories of social allowance, social assistance, mothers' allowance and unemployment assistance. It is designed to meet the needs of families affected by divorce, separation, desertion, sickness, death, and unemployment of the principle earning member resulting in family disorganization. This latter category of assistance is a provincial responsibility, although in most provinces it is administered at the municipal level for residents of the municipality's jurisdiction.

Although the major variables do seem appropriate to the problem area, the research report does not define the major variables in conceptual terms. Since operational definitions are developed from the conceptual definition of variables, it is difficult to see how a reliable and valid instrument can be established to gather data. Academic achievement, which is not defined conceptually, was assessed in terms of good, average and poor grades attained for three years. This leaves room for subjective assessments on the
of the teachers involved, thus reducing the validity of the measurement. Other factors included in the study were: family composition, income, education of parents, occupation and employment record of the head of family, ethnicity and religion, educational and occupational data on oldest child, attitudes toward public assistance and education, educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of parent and child.
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Research Design

In view of the apparent scarcity of previous research into the relationship between public assistance, status, and school performance, one appropriate aim of a study would be to gather as much data as possible on all factors which might influence this relationship. An exploratory study could have been used to lay the groundwork to formulate hypotheses for experimental research. Although the researchers seem to have begun by designing a descriptive-diagnostic study and developed hypotheses for testing, their methodology has more closely followed that of an exploratory study. Their conclusions have, however, been based on a research design demanding a greater sensitivity to variables and more rigid sampling than has been employed in this study.

Sampling:

The four cities—Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver—were selected because of the cooperation and help offered by the local public welfare departments and school boards. It is questionable whether this represents a cross-section of the country, as three Western cities have been included while Ontario and the Maritime Provinces are not part of the study at all.
Ethnic representation, although stated by the researcher as a consideration in selecting the sample, is not apparent in the analysis of the data. No mention is made of the number of Canadian Indians included in the sample.

The experimental group was selected by a random method from lists of welfare families in each city. The criterion used for selecting these families were: (1) the family was to have been on assistance for at least six months or more, as of October 1, 1965; (2) families should have at least one child attending school who was at least twelve years old and in Grade 7 or higher. It was felt that the family should be on public assistance long enough for this experience to have some impact on it, and the children selected should be in ordinary classes and not attending special classes. The researchers acknowledge that there was a bias toward the exclusion of young families because of the age requirement for children in the sample.

The experimental families were selected from the families of the three "best friends" named by the experimental group of children in their questionnaire. The researchers appear not to have met their goal of selecting a control group of families who were not on assistance, but who were in the same socio-economic group. Income was used as one index of social class and it was found that 83 per cent of the experimental group had a monthly income of less than $300, while 74.4 per cent of the families in the control group had incomes of over $300 per month, and
about one-quarter of these families had an income over $600 per month. Almost half of the heads of the control families held low-paying, blue-collar, or semi-skilled jobs. Upon further examination it was found that in establishing their criteria for selection, the researchers had not anticipated that 42 per cent of the mothers in the control group were working, while most of the mothers in the assistance group were unemployed.

A control group of only half the size of the experimental group was used. Part of the rationale behind this decision gives an indication of how quality was sometimes needlessly sacrificed in view of resources, time, and manpower in this study. By keeping the number of families small, it was anticipated that a relatively small research team with correspondingly few controls on quality and uniformity of interviewing techniques could be applied.

Data Collection Methods

The main sources of gathering information and data were (1) Parents' Questionnaire, (2) Student's Questionnaire, (3) Family Public Assistance Records, (4) School Record Sheet.

Although the research report itself makes no mention of any pretests which were carried out, a reference is made in the Acknowledgements in the report to a pretest of the questionnaire. Pretesting is a necessary requirement for the development of reliable and valid research instruments which are relatively free from bias.
The parents' questionnaire consisted of an interview schedule which was administered verbally to the parents by trained interviewers. In most cases, the mother was the respondent, but this is not specified in the results. The questionnaire dealt with demographic information about the family, educational and occupational achievements of parents and oldest child out of school, as well as questions with respect to education achievement, occupational aspirations and expectations of the child, and attitudes toward public assistance in general.

The child's questionnaire was completed at home by the child with the interviewer present. He was not to get any help from the parents, but could ask for an explanation of questions from the interviewer.

In exploring the use of parental attitude questionnaires, it has been indicated that ideally the instrument used should be standardized on both the middle-class and disadvantaged group, if these two groups are to be compared. Problems in the administration of the test can result from such things as language difficulties; differences in connotation of words; the circumstances under which the information is gathered, such as distractions in the home setting; and the influence of class and racial differences between interviewer and respondent.33 From the results in this study,

it would appear that the latter might be operating and the experimental families identifying with the welfare worker. They seemed to express negative feelings about teachers more freely than about welfare workers, and also tended to understate the actual amount of assistance they were receiving. It is significant to note, however, that the assistance families were "requested" by the welfare departments to participate in the study and this could introduce a bias.

The questionnaires and interview schedules were composed of both open-ended and forced choice questions. In the children's questionnaire, the Likert scale was used to explore parental attitudes and interest in school as perceived by the child. In some sections, the questions appear to be rather leading, with questions concerning attitudes toward work, following immediately those dealing with attitudes and values held toward work. The ordering of the questions seems to shift from one subject area to the next, combining questions on employment and education without any apparent logical connection. Use of a test-retest method, factor analysis and examination for response-sets would tend to increase the validity and reliability of the research instruments.

The Family Public Assistance Board was completed by the local public welfare department in each city and provided a complete record from October 1, 1962 to October 1, 1965. This information was lacking on thirty-two of the
one hundred and two families in the Montreal sample when the record sheets were lost in the mail.

The cumulative school record kept on each child by the school system proved to be a problem in the study. As children were attending schools all over the city, the record keeping system was not uniform, and in Montreal, the form had to be revised. The evaluation of academic achievement was in terms of good, average, and poor grades by the students. When based on tests and grading systems not standardized among the schools, measurement of this variable could be influenced considerably by subjective evaluation by teachers. The school records were compared with parental knowledge of the child's school performance. This comparison is questioned, since at the time of the field interviews the first report card had not been sent home, and thus parents would have to rely on their recollections of the child's school performance from previous years.

**Treatment of the Data**

Descriptive statistics have been employed in this study to analyze the data. Descriptive categories were developed from the information obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Percentage distributions were obtained both for the four-city sample as a whole and also for each city. The data were separated according to public assistance families and unassisted families.

The largely descriptive nature of the analysis and
the lack of any tests for significance of differences found in distribution would tend to place this study in the exploratory category, leaving statistical analysis to future more refined research. The researchers have, however, used the data gathered to test the hypotheses which they formulated and so have moved to a more sophisticated level of research. In order to accept or reject these hypotheses with any degree of confidence, some measure must be obtained of the significance of the results to determine whether the differences found were caused by chance or sampling error; or whether they really do represent differences which are found in the population from which the samples were selected.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The researchers concluded that the data gathered supports the three hypotheses which they attempted to test. This study does not show that being on assistance is the cause of poor school performance. The researchers suggest that assistance status and poor performance might both be the result of other factors such as the social alienation of the parents, and that a causal relationship can only be established through further study.

It would appear, then, that had the design been that of an exploratory study, in which one of the aims was to formulate hypotheses for further testing, the researchers could have drawn similar conclusions. They chose instead to use a more refined research design, but did not proceed to meet the more demanding level of sampling, data collecting methods, statistical analysis and control of variables, required in a descriptive study. Although this lack of consistency would tend to reflect upon the validity of the study and the conclusions drawn by the researchers concerning their hypotheses; nevertheless, the association of the factors identified in the study would suggest that changes both in the educational and welfare system would alter the situation of the families receiving
public assistance. Two major differences found between the research groups were related to the level of family income and family stability. In 71.4 per cent of the assistance families, as opposed to 9.9 per cent of the control group, there was no father present in the home. In both groups the families tended to be larger than average in size. The education of the father in both groups was judged to be inadequate, with financial and family problems the major reasons given for leaving school early. As compared to the experimental families, the mothers and fathers in the control families were slightly better educated.

Although receipt of public assistance for at least six months prior to being in the study was one of the criteria for inclusion in the experimental group, the data gathered suggested to the researchers that the families were chronically dependent on assistance. The great majority had received assistance for over ten months in each of the preceding three years, and over half had been on assistance for five or more years. About 35 per cent of the assistance families expressed negative reactions toward receiving welfare. Concerning the effect public assistance has had on their social relations, these families felt lacking in respect and acceptance by others and felt cut off from social activities. They felt their children were looked down upon at school because they did not possess the material goods other students had, and they suffered from the stigma attached to assistance status.
In comparing the oldest child out of school in both groups, those in the experimental group were found to have been less successful at school, earlier dropouts, employed in lower status jobs, and to have a higher incidence of unemployment than the control group. The researchers concluded from this that even if parental aspirations for children are similar in both groups, the parental example of educational and occupational levels strongly influence the child's achievement. The researchers fail to examine the question as to why parental levels are lower.

The parents in both groups had little contact with their child's teacher. The parents in the control group had higher educational as well as occupational aspirations and expectations of the children. There was a drop in the actual level they expected the child would achieve in relation to their aspirations. This same difference in educational and occupational expectations and aspirations are to some extent apparent when comparing the responses of the children in both groups. It was found that the children in the control group felt their parents showed greater interest in their school work and plans for the future; however, conclusions drawn from this can be questioned in view of the small percentage of assistance families where both parents were in the home. The researchers have failed to specify which of the parents was interviewed. In families where the father was absent, information was gathered on the most recent male residing in the household who was acting as
father or guardian to the child. This is not a valid
criteria for inclusion of data in the study, as there would
be considerable variation in stability of household composi-
tion. The researchers have interpreted the greater differ-
ence between employment aspirations and expectation in the
control group than in the experimental group as a possible
indication that assistance children have a more realistic,
almost fatalistic, outlook toward their future expectations
for employment; whereas the control group do not see their
future as being so clearly defined for them.

The policy changes suggested by the researchers,
based on the findings of the study, are directed at both
the social welfare system and the school systems. The pay-
ment of a rate of public assistance is recommended to provide
an adequate standard of living to maintain family solidarity
and encourage children to remain in school. The individual
would be encouraged to work toward economic self-sufficiency
by permitting supplementation of earnings by welfare payments.
The researchers have presented conclusions and recommendations,
based on the data they have gathered, in the same generalized
manner as they have addressed the problem area itself. They
have not stated at what level the policy changes should take
place. They have also failed to select specific target areas
for change or to identify possible change agents.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT FOR
SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

The main purpose of this study was to examine the school performance of children who are attending school concurrently with their parents being on assistance. The data gathered has identified areas which should be addressed so as to allow low income families, particularly those on public assistance, to more fully participate in and benefit from existing opportunities in the community.

The data gathered in this study and the conclusions drawn by the researchers contribute little to social work knowledge. The question of weaknesses in methodology which would tend to detract from the significance of any findings has been discussed earlier in this paper. There were, however, differences found between the two sample groups drawn from low income families which would indicate possible differences in family composition, educational and occupational aspects, as well as expectations and aspirations for the children. These differences correspond to Hollis' comments on the erroneous view which is frequently held that low income families comprise a homogeneous cultural group.34

though low income families may be characterized by family disorganization, inadequate education, and a lack of vocational skill or training, they may nevertheless differ in their response to their environment.

Meyer has stated the importance of the social worker's knowledge of sociocultural and economic forces that influence family life, family relationships, and the behaviour and ideals of each family member.35 This study has used a sociocultural approach to studying the problem of the effects of public assistance status on educational performance and adjustment, and as such has tended to focus on the social environment of these families. Stein has suggested that this type of approach directs attention to the deficiencies, strains and inequalities which may be contributing to the pressure the clients face.36 The sociocultural approach helps the caseworker to locate the family within the larger society in order to better understand the way each individual and the family as a group are affected by their social environment. Although the descriptive data gathered in this study is largely of a very generalized nature it, nevertheless, does tend to indicate that the


characteristics and circumstances associated with low income families found in research studies in the United States are also found among similar groups in selected areas in Canada. This is not a situation to be proud of, and by focusing rather superficially on rather large sample, the researchers have failed to identify precisely any specific target areas for change.

Based on the measurement of school performance used in the study, children in public assistance families do not attain the same level of academic achievement as do children in families not on assistance. In response to questions dealing with the value and importance placed on education, parents in both groups wanted their children to achieve an adequate education to meet the demands of present employment needs, and hoped their children would be more successful than they had been. The study has also indicated that a large proportion of the parents in the assistance group felt that a social stigma attached to public assistance status is reflected in their relationships with others. This is also reflected in the children's peer relationships and lack of involvement in school activities. The researchers have attempted to explain the differences in school performance in terms of value orientations, socialization absence of role models and other psychosocial factors. Behaviour must also be viewed as a response to environmental factors such as

---

income, ethnic and religious background, and place of residence. Care must be taken, however, not to see a family's life style as being influenced by only economic factors.

This research project has identified a group of individuals in the community who are faced with a situation in which they are unable to participate fully in the opportunities available in the community. It is necessary for pressure to be brought to bear on those systems and individuals which are preventing such groups from having full participation. Brager sees the social worker in his role as advocate on behalf of a client-group acting to protect the consumer interest. This calls for,

... a many faceted approach, including challenging the constitutionality of administrative rulings and statutes adversely affecting users of public services; advocating the interests of the poor directly in dealing with public institutions; exerting pressure for change to bring about greater institutional responsiveness to client needs; assisting the client to act on his own behalf, both as an effective spur to institutional response and as a means of exercising control over his life.

The researchers in their recommendations based on the findings of the study have suggested some changes which should be made in the existing welfare system. Welfare rates should be related to an adequate standard of living based on family need, rather than any arbitrary criteria. Increased family income may prevent the occurrence of family

---

breakdown, which was indicated in the research study by the high percentage of families where the father was missing. In Montreal, the maximum allowance for two adults and one dependent child was quoted by the researchers to be $155 per month. In Ontario the basic rate under the Family Benefits' Act is $116 - $129 per month, plus approximately $85 per month for shelter.39

The study also found that children in the experimental families left school at an earlier age than did children of other socioeconomic classes. This would appear to emphasize the need for added economic incentives to keep the children in school, including increased supplements for dependent children in school, and higher levels of exemption for family earnings.

The researchers saw financial dependency as a factor contributing to family breakdown and school performance. This affected the normal social role image of the male adult in the assistance families. Using Montreal and the Family Benefits' Act in Ontario as examples, there are presently few incentives for the individual to strive to achieve economic independence. Welfare payments cannot be used to supplement earned income to meet family needs for an adequate standard of living. According to the researchers, the maximum permissible income in Montreal for a family of two adults and

one dependent is $155 per month. In Ontario, the welfare recipient in this category is allowed to earn $48 per month and to retain $1 out of every $4 in excess of that amount, but may not work more than 120 hours per month.40

The social stigma attached to public assistance status felt by recipients was identified by the researchers in their findings. Policy changes to ensure that welfare allowances would permit the recipients to maintain a standard of living, in relation to that of their community, sufficient to give them a feeling of dignity and to meet physical and social needs, would help alleviate this. There is also need for an expansion of income maintenance programs on an insurance basis such as negative income tax rather than assistance on a "needs" basis.

Welfare is a provincial responsibility, and as such there are many variations in policy, administration and services provided both at a provincial and municipal level. For this reason, it is difficult to do a study of public assistance systems involving several provinces. It was evident from the findings that although reform and social action are extremely important factors in bringing about change in the existing welfare system, there was still a need for casework services with the individual or family unit. Personal problems are often a result of social deprivation and strains brought about by low income and unemployment. It

was found that those who received welfare for over six months tended to become long-term recipients. The aim of casework in the welfare department would be both to help the individual overcome the damage done to his personality as a result of long periods of dependence, as well as to attempt to restore the recipient to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. Effective casework intervention as well as financial aid at times of crises could prevent the family or individual from becoming needlessly dependent on assistance. According to Hollis, "once these poverty-induced problems have become imbedded in the individual employment alone can no longer cure them."41

The school system has been identified as another area for change. As no attempt has been made by the researchers to examine variations in specific aspects of educational performance and adjustment, there are few implications to be drawn from this study for changes in curriculum or teacher training. It is evident, however, that at present the school is not meeting the needs and abilities of children from low income families.

The Hall-Dennis report on education has proposed recommendations which address some of the problems of this group. It advocates equality of educational opportunity, rather than identical opportunity, with every child having a right to the best possible learning experience based on

interest and aptitudes regardless of social or financial position. The Report suggests that some of the difficulties resulting from variations in backgrounds could be overcome by the introduction of pre-kindergarten schooling for all children. This would help the children to acquire language and skills which middle-class children bring with them to school.42

Mobilization for Youth, identified deficiencies in verbal skills to be one of the broad substantive areas for change in attempting to have the needs of lower-income, minority group children met by the public schools. Experimental programs were designed to improve instruction in reading, focusing both on pre-school and school-age children.43

Both sample groups of parents in the research study had little contact with the school. The children in this study likewise, were not involved in extra-curricular activities at school. This lack of involvement may be a result of negative feelings the parents have of their own school experience and limited education. In order to encourage or help their children with school activities, the


parents need to have some knowledge of what is happening in the school.

Harburger, in describing the Detroit Great Cities School Improvement Project, has shown how schools can be turned into true community schools to promote involvement of the entire family. The object of the project was to increase the school performance of children with limited backgrounds. A program of interest and skill classes was begun, based on the expressed needs and wishes of the parents. It was designed to reach out and attempt to involve total families in activities centered around the schools. Parents and regular staff of the school were included in the project to foster a working relationship between parents and teachers. Community-school projects should encourage the families in the community to see the school as a resource for helping them with both individual and community problems. Success of a project of this type depends on the development of indigenous leadership if it is to succeed, as the aim is to help the individuals and local community assume their responsibilities toward the education of their children, and to exert some pressure and influence on the school system so that needs of a particular group of children will be met.\footnote{Carl L. Marburger, "Considerations for Educational Planning," in Education in Depressed Areas, ed by A. Harry Passow (New York: Teachers' College Press, 1963), p. 298-320.}

The research findings indicate that social work should be incorporated into the school system to help the child and
his family. All three methods—casework, group work and community organization could be used to involve parents in the educational plans for their children. Parents' groups could have both an educational purpose—that of informing parents about school programs and curriculum—and a therapeutic purpose to provide an opportunity for them to discuss problems they encounter with their children. Such groups could be very effective in identifying gaps in service or particular needs of their children which should be addressed by the school. Community organization would play a very important part in attempting to involve other systems such as community health and social service agencies to provide more comprehensive service to the school population.

It has been suggested that as the school is in such close proximity to the community it serves, it would provide a natural setting for a neighbourhood multi-service setting encompassing existing community social services at the neighbourhood level.45 These would include family counselling, public assistance programs, community health programs, as well as family recreational and educational services. It would be possible then to provide for an integration of service based on preventative approach to community problems.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Toby, Jackson. "Orientation to Education as a Factor in the School Maladjustment of Lower Class Children." *Social Forces.* XXXV (1957), 259-265.
