

Today's Children

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IN 1942 I spoke to this group of welfare agencies on the subject of "The War and the Child." The war about which we were speaking has been over for more than a decade, yet many of the problems which were discussed are still with us. Some, in fact, have been increased rather than solved during the intervening years.

Changing Population

Among the factors responsible for this, of course, is the increase in our child population. In 1942, the child population under age 18 in the United States was about 40 million. Today there are more than 56 million children in this group—an increase of 16 million in only 14 years. Should that figure not sufficiently stimulate your mind's-eye reckoning of all the increase means, let me give you a mental picture of a clock. It is a big clock and it stands in the Department of Commerce in Washington. Every few seconds, a different colored light illumines the face to tell the as-of-now population story. Every 8 seconds a light flashes to record the birth of a new American. Every 21 seconds a light shows another death. Every 2 minutes a light indicates that another immigrant has made this country his own. Every 24 minutes an emigrant leaves these shores. The end result of all this is that America gains one new citizen every 12 seconds around the clock every hour of every day.

Voluntary and public agencies cannot stand still while this population clock ticks on. The work they do, the services they provide, must expand to keep pace with the ever-expanding demand. During the next 10 years we must expand our social services for children by at least 21 percent merely to maintain the level of services we are able to offer today.

Our population has changed in character as well as in size since our

last meeting. We know that this has resulted in significant and sweeping changes in our economic, political, and social institutions, in our community organization, and in all aspects of our personal and community life. The growing number of aged people in our country, for example, has spurred the development of government and voluntary pension and insurance programs to give better protection against loss of income to the aged. Similarly, changes in the make-up of our child population have had an effect on changing the emphasis and direction of programs that affect children. We are seeing this effect highlighted at the moment in national efforts to improve educational facilities. The increase in the number of children has resulted in a shortage of school facilities, and this shortage, with other problems of the public school system, is a subject of concern in Congress and throughout this vast land.

To those of us who work with children the increasing scope of the responsibility involved sometimes seems overwhelming. As one welfare worker put it, children are growing up all around us so fast and in such numbers that our community services are being swamped by their requirements.

Americans have done a great deal in a very short while to make this country a better and a safer place in which to be born and in which to live the important years of childhood. In 1942, 40 out of every 1,000 babies born alive in the United States died during the first year of life. Today the infant mortality rate has dropped to 26 per 1,000. Babies are much less likely to be born crippled, and much more can be done to alleviate crippling conditions than seemed possible a few years ago. The childhood diseases—typhoid, smallpox, diphtheria, chicken pox, measles, mumps, pneumonia, and many others—that plagued most of today's adults have either disappeared from most communities or have been considerably lessened in incidence and severity.

This is not to say that we can be satisfied with our efforts for child health. We can never be satisfied so long as a single baby dies whose life might have been saved or a single child grows up physically or mentally handicapped or emotionally unable to lead a full and healthy adult life. We are working diligently towards our goal. Our child health programs get better every year. If progress is to continue in our school, health, welfare, and other community programs for children, we need to assess specific problems and chart a course for their solution. Let us consider, then, some of the facts about American children today and some of the implications of these facts for those of us who are interested in child welfare.

The first factor of significance is obviously the increase in our child population. Tomorrow by this time, another 11,000 babies will have been born. They, in due course, will have their babies, and so the pattern of increase will continue. And with it will come increased need for more hospitals, more schools, more welfare programs and services, more of everything it takes to help children to grow into the kind of citizens we want as Americans.

Another factor of significance is the constantly changing pattern of location of the child population. The number of young people (under age 20) living in urban areas was 18 percent larger in 1955 than it was 5 years earlier, while the increase in rural areas was only 13 percent. Today, three-fifths of the Nation's children live in urban areas—a matter that poses some problems with reference to services. Title V of the Social Security Act provides, for example, for grants-in-aid to be administered by the Children's Bureau for welfare services in rural areas. The purpose of this provision was to give children living in the country an opportunity to enjoy some of the resources available at that time only to boys and girls whose homes were located in the cities. Now the expanding population

* Commissioner of Social Security. Adapted from an address delivered at the Annual Forum of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies at the Commodore Hotel, New York City, March 6, 1956.

of the cities and the development of new satellite communities around them make us wonder whether this provision of title V should not be changed. Today, around most of our towns, communities are without adequate child welfare services, either public or private. These communities need funds for development of resources as urgently as the rural areas needed them a few years ago. This situation calls for new thinking and new planning on the part of all concerned.

The geographic distribution of our child population is another matter that affects the planning of services. The ratio of children to adults varies by State and by geographic section. The Southern States have a much larger ratio of children to adults than do the States in the North and the Far West. This difference has important implications for all services and particularly for those related to such programs as aid to dependent children.

Some of the most serious problems with which social agencies are concerned may be related to the fact that more than 1 out of every 4 mothers (with children under age 18) in this country has a job in addition to working at home. Today nearly a third of the labor force in the United States is made up of women. Figures from the Bureau of the Census show that almost 2½ million of these women have children under 6 years of age. In 1940, when women made up only about one-fourth of the labor force, fewer than 600,000 of them had children under age 5. (There are no Census figures on the number in the labor force with children under age 6 in 1940.) The trends that have caused this situation are varied and continuing.

Mothers of young children are, of course, much less likely to work when they are married and living with their husbands than they are when separated, widowed, or divorced. It is interesting to note that roughly two-fifths of the women in this second group are in the labor force, compared with about one-sixth of the married women living with their husbands. It is also interesting that, during the past 15 years, there has been little or no increase in the proportion

of women, with preschool age children, who are widowed, divorced, or separated and are earning income outside their homes. This can be credited to the expansion in the number of young survivor beneficiaries under old-age and survivors insurance and to the number receiving aid to dependent children. The old-age and survivors insurance and the aid to dependent children programs together are making payments today to about 1¼ million families with almost 2¼ million children under age 18 whose parents are separated or who have one parent dead or incapacitated.

Such payments enable many thousands of mothers to look after their children in their own homes. It is nevertheless important that we look frankly at this subject of working mothers and recognize the fact that a large percentage of women with children will continue to be in the labor market, and that this poses problems that Government, voluntary agencies, industry, labor unions, and other groups, as well as individuals, must tackle realistically.

Income Maintenance

Money is obviously far from the complete answer to all problems. Yet it is true that, as family income rises, children generally grow up better housed, better clothed, better fed, and with a headstart over those in less fortunate circumstances. Fortunately, full employment in the United States and an increasing national income have resulted in an ever-rising standard of living. For the many children who are, however, deprived of parental support by reason of the wage earner's death, incapacity, or absence from the home, great progress has been made through the income-maintenance programs.

First, there is the old-age and survivors insurance program. Most persons think of it as a protection for older men and women. It is. But it is also a program for youngsters. As of now, almost 1,220,000 children are receiving survivor benefits because of the death of a parent and another 100,000 are being paid dependent's benefits because of the retirement of a parent—in all about three-fourths as many as are being helped by the

Federal-State program for aid to dependent children.

At present, there are about 1,660,000 children getting payments under aid to dependent children. The purpose of this program is to provide money and services so that dependent children will not be forced to live away from their own families for financial reasons alone and to give them a chance to grow up with the same educational and other opportunities as other boys and girls in their communities.

These are noble objectives whose importance is not, unfortunately, always fully appreciated. There has been much criticism of the fact that parents whose conduct is unacceptable by our social standards are able to receive assistance payments. In aid to dependent children we try not to go to extremes of condemning, or condoning, or of visiting the sins of the parents upon their innocent children. We try to hold the middle course, believing that most people—given the chance—have the capacity for growth and change and that for every parent who lacks the inherent strength to use the program justifiably there will be dozens of parents who will not lack strength. For the sake of these parents and their children, we believe that payments and services in aid to dependent children should be increased to the point of adequacy wherever inadequacy now exists. And today inadequacy does exist. In some States, payments provide for less than a bare level of subsistence. In many States, families who need aid to dependent children are deprived of help because of restrictive policies on eligibility. And almost every State in the Union could use more skilled caseworkers and better community resources.

Family Life

As of now there are probably at least 2¼ million children under age 18, and possibly as many as 2½ million, who live with their mother in homes broken by marital discord. Because an unhappy marriage resulted in divorce or separation, 200,000 or so children live with their father only. There are other children in this country living with neither mother nor father because the parents were not

married or their marriage was unsuccessful, but there are no data on which to base an estimate of their number.

The toll this situation takes of the children is poignantly reflected in the case histories of social agencies, psychiatrists, and family counselors. No one can assess this toll in terms of heartache and damage done to personalities involved. But we can assess it to some extent in terms as mundane—but as important—as the cost. In the program of aid to dependent children alone, for about half the children on the rolls the cause of dependency is divorce, separation, unwed parenthood, or the desertion of the father. The resulting expenditure from Federal, State, and local funds is more than \$300 million a year!

This problem of family breakdown is a challenge to every social agency—public and private—in the United States. It is a challenge to every professional social worker and to everyone interested in social welfare. All of us are deeply concerned about the extent of the problem, but the fact remains that we have done little in a concerted and organized way to attack it. Despite all the social agency programs of family and child welfare, the interest of sectarian groups, and other fine, worthwhile, and dedicated efforts, the average person with a serious family problem still finds skilled aid hard to get. Clinics with professional staff trained to mend hurt bodies are now mercifully within reach of most of us, but not clinics to mend broken hearts and homes. Intake in most voluntary social agencies is small. Skilled services are available for the most part only in the larger cities, and then they are limited by agency policy, personnel, and funds.

As of now, our public agencies are not equipped to give professional counseling on a wide scale. The counseling offered by well-intentioned people without adequate skill and training is not enough to help a distraught family through a crisis. It seems to me that we have to be courageous enough to recognize that we must do something on a much broader and larger scale—something much more dramatic than we have been thinking about to date—if we are

ever to heal the cankers that are eating away at the very heart of our strength as a Nation, at the stability of family life in happy homes.

If we had a plague or epidemic from a certain disease that affected several million children a year we would do something positive about it. We would enlist in the effort all our private and governmental resources, our doctors, our public health people, our schools. We would carry on educational programs. We would seek tremendous appropriations from legislative bodies at every level of government to bring about a concerted attack. Let us hope the time will come when we will be aroused enough to make a resolute and concerted attack upon the problems that cause our broken homes.

In the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare we are giving serious thought to this problem of family life and the contributions that the existing Federal programs can make in strengthening the American family. Right now we are engaged in analyzing the problem and we hope that this analysis will enable us to chart our future course. Now pending before Congress is an amendment to the Social Security Act that would state in the law what we have all assumed was the basic purpose of the program of aid to dependent children—to preserve, promote, and strengthen family life.

Physicians, social workers, nurses, and other specially qualified persons in the field of child health and child welfare have a chance to assist parents in their efforts to give their children—from prenatal days to the end of adolescence—the best possible upbringing. The child himself is invariably viewed as a member of the family group, and the family as members of the community. Even when it is temporarily necessary for a child to be cared for in a hospital or foster home, the child welfare and health staffs help parents and children keep their ties unbroken.

Adoptions

In a brief presentation such as this, it is impossible to deal with all the problems that affect children. I would, however, like to indicate some areas that need attention.

We have been reading a great deal lately on the subject of adoptions. Some of it is factual, some distorted by writers who carried their imagination into the realm of the facts. In 1954 about 90,000 adoption petitions were filed, and 21,000 of them were filed by people who had bypassed social agencies in their eagerness to obtain a child.

The adoption picture has changed rapidly in the last 30-40 years. Before the turn of the century the primary source of adoption was from the ranks of orphans. Today, the child whom death has robbed of both his natural protectors is a rarity. The number of full orphans among the total of 56 million children in the country is less than 60,000.

Indeed it is a safe guess that not one of us here knows a child under age 5 with both parents dead. The reason is simple. Fewer women die in childbirth. Fewer men die in industrial accidents or because of occupational diseases. All of us are living longer. As a result there are fewer orphans, and most children available for adoption have one or both of their natural parents still living.

The consequence often is a conflict between the interests of the adoptive and the natural parents. While the legal rights of both sets of parents must be protected, from the standpoint of the social agency it is the child whose interests should come first. It is the child who most needs protection—who cannot seek a lawyer or go to others for advice when things go wrong. We have been hearing a great deal lately about the "difficulties" encountered by would-be parents in dealing with welfare agencies on adoption. Some persons have suggested that less "red tape" and time-consuming procedure would reduce the shocking "black marketing" of babies. I think you will agree, however, that some red tape is unavoidable because society has a serious obligation when it permits a person who is not a natural parent to adopt a child. We ought to be able to guarantee to such a child, as far as this is possible through careful evaluation and study of the situation, that society is doing its duty in seeing to it that the child has a proper home.

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Table 2.—Contributions and taxes collected under selected social insurance and related programs, by specified period, 1940–55

[In thousands]

Period	Retirement, disability, and survivors insurance			Unemployment insurance		
	Federal insurance contributions ¹	Federal civil-service contributions ²	Taxes on carriers and their employees	State unemployment contributions ³	Federal unemployment taxes ⁴	Railroad unemployment insurance contributions ⁵
Calendar year:						
1940.....	\$637, 275	\$141, 126	\$130, 222	\$853, 832	\$105, 379	\$66, 562
1941.....	789, 298	167, 250	148, 184	1, 006, 327	98, 018	73, 644
1942.....	1, 012, 490	264, 739	193, 346	1, 139, 331	123, 515	95, 524
1943.....	1, 239, 490	432, 913	232, 247	1, 325, 421	160, 921	109, 157
1944.....	1, 315, 680	477, 196	286, 157	1, 317, 050	183, 489	132, 504
1945.....	1, 285, 486	540, 776	279, 058	1, 161, 884	184, 404	130, 415
1946.....	1, 295, 398	484, 431	315, 007	911, 835	175, 209	135, 614
1947.....	1, 556, 836	491, 264	484, 351	1, 095, 520	185, 243	140, 400
1948.....	1, 684, 569	500, 411	568, 437	999, 635	212, 087	76, 845
1949.....	1, 666, 343	651, 542	565, 091	986, 905	228, 856	14, 916
1950.....	2, 667, 077	677, 730	546, 097	1, 191, 438	223, 693	23, 356
1951.....	3, 363, 466	703, 144	708, 802	1, 492, 509	235, 073	25, 692
1952.....	3, 818, 911	748, 277	636, 061	1, 867, 675	265, 515	25, 270
1953.....	3, 945, 099	⁶ 420, 873	⁶ 628, 195	1, 347, 630	⁶ 254, 386	25, 257
1954.....	5, 163, 263	459, 961	604, 204	1, 136, 154	285, 307	24, 479
1955.....	5, 713, 045	743, 639	595, 437	1, 208, 785	277, 966	24, 268
1954						
December.....	332, 185	45, 589	64, 242	11, 560	90	4, 936
1955						
January.....	114, 438	23, 697	16, 509	63, 526	30, 902	—77
February.....	274, 568	33, 726	63, 716	120, 179	167, 245	991
March.....	562, 399	39, 872	46, 374	7, 580	19, 792	5, 349
April.....	317, 541	37, 491	19, 796	128, 198	4, 488	42
May.....	814, 133	45, 501	79, 650	232, 027	14, 896	985
June ⁷	703, 719	45, 755	51, 673	6, 886	2, 701	4, 522
July.....	217, 239	⁸ 275, 775	15, 484	116, 423	2, 433	120
August.....	923, 619	55, 204	84, 970	242, 213	15, 714	3, 554
September.....	519, 117	42, 754	59, 775	7, 065	770	2, 399
October.....	221, 517	47, 817	18, 031	87, 766	3, 855	204
November.....	704, 700	48, 721	84, 769	184, 576	14, 014	2, 038
December.....	340, 055	47, 326	54, 691	12, 346	1, 156	4, 142

¹ Represents contributions of employees and employers in employments covered by old-age and survivors insurance (beginning December 1952, adjusted for employee-tax refunds); from May 1951, includes deposits made in the trust fund by States under voluntary coverage agreements; beginning January 1951, on an estimated basis.

² Represents employee and Government contributions to the civil-service retirement and disability fund; Government contributions are made in 1 month for the entire fiscal year.

³ Represents deposits in State clearing accounts of contributions plus penalties and interest collected from employers and, in 2 States, contributions from employees; excludes contributions collected for deposit in State sickness insurance

funds. Data reported by State agencies.

⁴ Represents taxes paid by employers under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act.

⁵ Beginning 1947, also covers temporary disability insurance.

⁶ Revised.

⁷ Except for State unemployment insurance contributions, data as shown in the *Final Statement of Receipts and Expenditures of the U. S. Government for the Period from July 1, 1954, through June 30, 1955.*

⁸ Includes contributions from the Federal Government.

Source: *Monthly Statement of the U. S. Treasury* and other Treasury reports, unless otherwise noted.

TODAY'S CHILDREN

(Continued from page 5)

There are approximately 10 adoptive couples for every white infant available for adoption. Yet there are still some States where social investigation of the adoption process may be termed inadequate. In others the process is adequate enough, but the black market flourishes for other reasons. It is perhaps true, in practically every State in the Union, that a baby is available for anyone who has the purchase price.

Citizens' groups have, fortunately, been aroused by and are studying this problem, and, it is hoped, progress in this area will continue. But the field of adoption only highlights other needs just as important. It seems to

me that we stand on the threshold of expanding programs of child welfare, both government and voluntary. Citizens are expressing publicly much concern over the 262,000 children receiving foster care; they are demanding better juvenile court and probation services, skilled casework services, and other needed services, to assist families in their own efforts to rear children.

Conclusion

I have tried to stress the importance of our income-maintenance programs, family life, and the development of broad programs of social service. I have not had time to discuss mental retardation, juvenile delinquency, or the needs of children in

migrant families. Nor have I made a serious attempt to cover the many health and medical care problems that confront children, especially those with chronic or handicapping conditions or emotional disturbances, which loom so large today—larger than ever now that acute infectious disease and most nutritional diseases have been conquered. Another whole subject that I have not even touched on is how parents may learn from doctors and nurses and other professional workers the basic elements of child rearing and their role in the growth and development of the health personality of their children.

It is trite to say that our children are our greatest asset, but nevertheless they are. They also constitute

Table 3.—Estimated payrolls in employment covered by selected programs in relation to civilian wages and salaries, by specified period, 1940-55¹

[Amounts in millions; corrected to Feb. 14, 1955]

Period	Wage and salary disbursements ²		Payrolls ³ covered by—					
	Total	Civilian	Old-age and survivors insurance ⁴		State unemployment insurance		Railroad retirement and unemployment insurance ⁵	
			Amount	Percent of civilian wages and salaries	Amount	Percent of civilian wages and salaries	Amount	Percent of civilian wages and salaries
Calendar year:								
1940-----	\$49,818	\$49,255	\$35,560	72.2	\$32,352	65.7	\$2,280	4.6
1941-----	62,086	60,220	45,286	75.2	41,985	69.7	2,697	4.5
1942-----	82,109	75,941	57,950	76.3	54,548	71.8	3,394	4.5
1943-----	105,619	91,486	69,379	75.8	65,871	72.0	4,100	4.5
1944-----	117,016	96,983	73,060	75.3	68,886	71.0	4,523	4.7
1945-----	117,563	95,744	71,317	74.5	66,411	69.4	4,530	4.7
1946-----	111,866	104,048	79,003	75.9	73,145	70.3	4,883	4.7
1947-----	122,843	118,775	92,088	77.5	86,234	72.6	5,113	4.3
1948-----	135,142	131,172	101,892	77.7	95,731	73.0	5,539	4.2
1949-----	134,379	130,131	99,645	76.6	93,520	71.9	5,113	3.9
1950-----	146,526	141,527	109,439	77.3	102,835	72.7	5,327	3.8
1951-----	170,776	162,136	132,000	81.4	118,243	72.9	6,101	3.8
1952-----	185,153	174,713	143,000	81.8	127,320	72.9	6,185	3.5
1953-----	198,559	188,210	156,000	82.9	138,657	73.7	6,147	3.3
1954-----	196,244	186,776	152,000	81.4	136,594	73.1	5,630	3.0
1954								
January-March-----	47,980	45,558	37,000	81.2	32,465	71.3	1,386	3.0
April-June-----	48,559	46,196	37,000	80.1	33,472	72.5	1,391	3.0
July-September-----	49,075	46,713	38,000	81.3	33,874	72.5	1,407	3.0
October-December-----	50,630	48,309	40,000	82.8	36,783	76.1	1,446	3.0
1955								
January-March-----	49,380	47,111	37,000	78.5	33,869	71.9	1,341	2.8
April-June-----	51,289	48,961	(⁶)	-----	36,182	73.9	1,416	2.9

¹ Continental United States, except as otherwise noted. Earnings and payroll data are before deduction of social insurance contributions. Data for 1952-55 preliminary.

² Wages and salaries paid in cash and in kind in continental United States and, in addition, pay of Federal personnel in all areas. Quarterly data reflect prorating of bonus payments.

³ Taxable plus estimated nontaxable wages paid in specified periods.

⁴ Excludes earnings of self-employed persons, who have been covered since

Jan. 1, 1951.

⁵ Includes a small amount of taxable wages for Alaska and Hawaii. Beginning 1947, includes temporary disability insurance.

⁶ Not available.

Source: Data on wage and salary disbursements from Office of Business Economics, Department of Commerce; payrolls covered by selected programs from reports of administrative agencies.

one of our most pressing social problems because they cannot wait while we solve such problems as government finance or contributions by private philanthropy. Our young people continue to grow—to need more schools, more health facilities, more social services, more of everything it takes today to give them the ability

to build a strong and vigorous Nation tomorrow.

It is heartening that government and voluntary groups recognize this. Legislators, Government officials, voluntary agencies, civic groups, women's organizations, and other interested groups in every part of the country are seeing to it that our chil-

dren are not forgotten. Their efforts may not yet be as effective and as well coordinated as we should like to have them. But they will continue bravely on, because the well-being of children is, in essence, the factor that determines whether the values that our civilization prizes so highly will endure.