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SEPARATION FROM PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT
AMONG FEMALE GRADUATES OF CANADIAN
SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

by

DAVID RALPH CASSIDY, B.A.

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Social Work, Waterloo
Lutheran University, in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

WATERLOO LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL WORK

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INTRODUCTION

There are several factors which affect the present position of social work as a profession. Historically, it is a relatively young profession. As such, there have been many changes as a state of stable professional identity is sought. From what can be forecast, social work will continue to change, to borrow new knowledge from related professions, to develop new knowledge from within, to retain a dynamic and progressive view to self-improvement, and to work toward the general improvement of social conditions.

While many things have changed, the problem of adequate manpower has not appreciably improved. The number of graduate social workers is growing slowly, but the unmet need for graduate social workers continues to grow much more rapidly. With such a need for graduate social workers, the problem of fully qualified persons leaving or separating from full-time professional employment after a few years becomes a most crucial issue.

Historical Background

Social workers have changed as the profession has changed. Consider, in contrast, the profession's pioneers.

Let us think of the earliest social worker, the earliest people employed in social work. They were employed

directly, either by public agencies, or by groups of citizens who established agencies to meet a defined need. A group of citizens came together and said, we must feed the hungry, or we must take care of the mentally ill. . . . These first social workers bore a direct relationship to the needs of people. This was before the culture of the profession intervened between people and social workers.¹

Social work as a profession has less than forty years' recognition according to United States census data. Figures prior to 1930 are lacking. The figures in Table 1, while accurately depicting humble beginnings, tend to be gross and non-specific. Table 1 makes no attempt to differentiate trained and untrained workers, but does indicate that the number of paid social workers at least doubled in each decade until the ten years between 1950 and 1960 when the increase was much more modest.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF PAID SOCIAL WORKERS
IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Total
1920	10,000
1930	20,000
1940	45,000
1950	91,000
1960	116,000

Source: Harry L. Lurie, ed., Encyclopedia of Social Work (Issue 15; New York: National Association of Social Work, 1965), p. 12.

Corresponding Canadian figures were not available,

¹Bertram Beck, "Changing Demands of Practice on the Professional Social Worker," Social Worker, XXXI, No. 2 (1963), 9.

but records of social work degrees and diplomas granted in Canada between 1931 and 1954, as shown in Table 2, indicate a similar, slow, early growth pattern. Table 3, while overlapping Table 2 in some respects, compares the number of Master of Social Work degrees awarded in both the United States and Canada between 1944 and 1963. Table 4 represents the most recent Canadian figures.

TABLE 2
DEGREES AND DIPLOMAS GRANTED IN SOCIAL WORK
IN ONTARIO AND CANADA, BY SEX,
BETWEEN 1931-1954

Year	Ontario			Canada		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1931	..	11	11	..	18	18
1936	5	25	30	6	39	45
1941	3	25	28	9	60	69
1946	2	20	22	17	95	112
1951	30	63	93	101	164	265
1953	25	61	86	70	149	219
1954	17	58	75	59	149	208

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Education Division, Ottawa, 1952-54, p. 67.

Tables have been used because it was felt that they reflect some trends which are important considerations in the development of this paper. Of special interest is the drop in persons entering graduate training in both Canada and the United States in the 1950's. Another point reflected in Tables 2, 3 and 4 is the fluctuation of the proportion of males to females entering professional training.

TABLE 3

MASTER'S DEGREES AWARDED TO GRADUATES OF
SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK IN THE UNITED
STATES AND CANADA, BY SEX, 1944-45
TO 1962-63

Year	Canada			United States		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1944-45	1	30	31	43	796	839
1947-48	25	52	77	496	1,269	1,765
1950-51	25	60	85	744	1,179	1,923
1953-54	52	85	137	566	1,085	1,651
1956-57	50	75	125	601	1,011	1,612
1959-60	63	81	144	836	1,251	2,087
1962-63	83	138	221	1,098	1,580	2,678

Source: Lurie, ed., Encyclopedia, p. 898.

TABLE 4

FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS OF
SOCIAL WORK, BY SEX, 1962-65

Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1962	291	44.4%	365	55.6%	656
1963	(no figures available)				
1964	337	43.3%	442	56.7%	779
1965	402	46.3%	467	53.7%	869

Source: Department of National Health and Welfare, "Statistical Information on Enrollment in Canadian Schools of Social Work," Research Division Memos, Ottawa, Nov., 1963, pp. 1-12; June, 1965, pp. 1-26; Feb., 1966, p. 44.

As recently as 1964, the slowly rising percentage of males dropped, but recovered the following year (see Table 4). A third point shown in Table 3 is that, although the total population of Canada has usually stayed close to 10 per cent

of the total population of the United States, the percentage of Master's degrees awarded in Canada did not approach 10 per cent of those awarded in the United States until 1954, and the Canadian figure has never reached 10 per cent since that time.

The Extent of the Manpower Problem

These figures mean little unless they are considered in terms of the need for graduate social workers in Canadian social welfare services. In 1955, there were 3,986 filled welfare positions in Canada. Of this number, 30 per cent were graduates of schools of social work, 17 per cent had some courses in social work, and 52 per cent had no training.² In 1960, according to Watson, only 20 per cent of those people holding welfare positions had any graduate social work education.³ There is such a variation between the 1955 figures and the 1960 figures that their accuracy should be questioned.

As part of the 1955 survey conducted by the Department of National Health and Welfare, a questionnaire was administered which is probably the first attempt to examine the extent of the preferences for graduate social workers in Canadian welfare agencies.

²Department of National Health and Welfare, "Survey of Welfare Positions," General Series, Memo No. 8, Ottawa (May, 1955), p. 19.

³Edwin F. Watson, "Commission on Education and Personnel," Canadian Welfare, XXXVII (1961), 245.

TABLE 5
 AGENCY PREFERENCES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR
 GRADUATE SOCIAL WORKERS

M.S.W. Degree	Filled Positions	Vacancies	Future Positions
Required and Preferred	78%	86%	90%
Required	34%	59%	57%
Preferred	44%	27%	33%

Source: Department of National Health and Welfare, "Survey of Welfare Positions," General Series, Memo No. 8, Ottawa (May, 1955), p. 7.

Robinson considers the social work manpower situation to be critical. He feels this crisis is due partly to the population explosion--"more people, more problems"--and partly to the present (1961) system of social work education which cannot cope with the demands for qualified persons.⁴ Fisher agrees that there is a staff shortage, but at the same time maintains that the dimensions of the problem are unknown. He feels that "we could plan much more intelligently if we knew the dimensions of the problem."⁵ This is an interesting statement coming only five years after the study completed by the Department of National Health and Welfare, and probably reflected the need for a continuing manpower study.

⁴G. de B. Robinson, "Education of a Social Worker," Canadian Welfare, XXXVII (1961), 250.

⁵Philip S. Fisher, "A Look at Social Work Training," Canadian Welfare, XL, No. 6 (November-December, 1964), 270.

Gripton points out that "while the absolute number [of social workers] in Canada has been growing since 1958, their number per capita . . . has been falling."⁶ Blum feels that "solutions will not be found in wishful thinking, but will require major changes in practice, institutional arrangements, and methods for the delivery of services."⁷ Weed and Denham contend that "social work must broaden its concept of the helping person to include the resource of the untrained or partially trained worker." They warn that this "will require painstaking and often painful re-examination" of practice stereotypes, but the urgency of the present situation calls for action now.⁸ Gripton summarizes the acuteness of the present situation and the need for expanded technical roles and functions quite pointedly.

Concern about the future status and the role of the profession, and fears that the creation of technical positions will result in a dilution of professional practice have led the Canadian Association of Social Workers to establish more restrictive educational requirements for membership. In doing so the profession may be following the perilous career of the Whooping Crane who has achieved distinction by courting extinction.⁹

This whole area of expanded function, to include

⁶James Gripton, "Professional Social Workers," Case Work, XXXVII-XXXVIII (1961-62), 256.

⁷Arthur Blum, "Differential Use of Manpower in Public Welfare," Social Work (January, 1966), p. 21.

⁸Verne Weed and William H. Denham, "Toward More Effective Use of the Non-professional Workers--A Recent Experiment," Social Work Abstracts (1961), p. 36.

⁹Gripton, "Professional Social Workers," p. 257.

felt this experience to be a major factor in choosing social work. Altogether, almost 80 per cent of the students sampled came to graduate schools of social work from paid experiences in agencies and 59 per cent of them had worked full time. Pins feels this raises two important questions:

1. Should agencies encourage this practice?
2. Does social work experience provide a base on which the student can readily build as he comes into the professional school?¹⁰

Two questions raised by this study are: why is it necessary to work in the field before choosing it as a career, and why is social work relatively unattractive to the sons of families earning over \$10,000 a year? Put more bluntly, what is wrong with the status and image of social work as a profession?

The Status and Image of Social Work as a Profession

In a workshop involving people who were not in direct contact with the profession, Kerry found:

the public as a whole is little aware that there is a professional career to be followed in social work and for which university courses of education are available. It is aware of the social worker as a part of the community but does not recognize that his competency derives from professional training and discipline.¹¹

¹⁰Arnulf Pins, "Profile of Social Work Students," Canadian Welfare, XXXVII-XXXVIII (1961-62), 280-86.

¹¹Esther W. Kerry, "Practical Problems Confronting Schools of Social Work," Social Work, XXIII, No. 5 (October, 1955), 12.

Milstone explains this lack of awareness as a result of the bureaucratic structure of almost all social work employment. That is, the social worker works for an organization. Such bureaucratic services are less highly valued in our culture than if they are performed by an individual who is not dependent on public service for his own support,¹² and, as Eaton points out, "the social worker, like any modestly paid white collar worker, is very dependent upon continuous employment."¹³ The full frustration of this situation is described by Neiman:

When will we have enough status to be forgiven a little pomposity, should it occur, rather than having to display the humility that is so often our trade-mark? When will we be more sought for as speakers as are some professionals, and when will we be sought out as interesting social guests, and perhaps just a little lionized? . . . Needless to say, this . . . will have little stimulating effect on the lagging recruitment in this field, or on the desertion from our ranks of those many capable persons who dream wistfully of a more comfortable standard of living, or who desire to be thought of as citizens of some stature.¹⁴

Swithun Bowers' answer to the problem of professional image suggests that "As we have felt less urgency to wax wrathful about the stereotypes, maintenance of them by

¹²Eugene P. Milstone, "The Institutionalization of the Social Worker," Social Work, XXXIII, No. 1 (January-February, 1965), 10.

¹³Joseph W. Eaton, "Whence and Whither Social Work? A Sociological Analysis," Social Work, I, No. 1 (January, 1956), 20-21.

¹⁴Mitchell C. Neiman, "Obstacles to the Advancement of Social Work as a Profession," Social Worker, XXIII, No. 1 (October, 1954), 23-28.

others has become more difficult."¹⁵

Recently, the growth of private practice in social work has been heralded as an important factor that will help professionalize social work. Private practitioners enjoy the entrepreneurial status of most other professions, but they must weather financial uncertainty in order to achieve this independence. This risk is reflected in the high proportion of married to single women who are members of the Conference for the Advancement of Private Practice in Social Work. Their marital status reduces the priority of financial return.

TABLE 6

C.A.P.P. PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS IN SOCIAL
WORK IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
IN 1967

	Male	Married Female	Single Female	Total
Canada	3	4	1	8
United States	111	103	50	264
Total	114	107	51	272

Source: The North American Directory of Professional Social Workers in Private Practice, Conference for the Advancement of Private Practice in Social Work (Seattle, 1967), pp. 1-44.

While the private practitioner may be helping to change the status and image of social work in the United

¹⁵Swithun Bowers, "The Future of Social Work," Social Worker, XXVIII, No. 1 (January, 1960), 30.

States, it would seem premature to expect the same from Canada's eight members of C.A.P.P.

Social Work as a Female Profession

Perhaps the most central factor affecting the status and image of the social work profession is its identity as a female profession. The figures cited thus far in this study support this assumption without exception. Social work is a female profession. As Gripton notes, "If some recent TV dramas are any indication, the current popular image of the professional social worker is that of a pretty single girl in her early twenties."¹⁶

Available figures support Gripton's observations on all counts except pulchritude. In 1955, it was found that of all social work staff under twenty-five, 74 per cent were female and 26 per cent were male. In the twenty-five to twenty-nine age group, this changed radically to 57 per cent female and 43 per cent male. Of all social welfare staff, 18 per cent of the men and 42 per cent of the women were graduates (compare with 67 per cent men and 38 per cent women who had no training).

In the same survey, it was found that of the 390 workers leaving the field, 28 per cent were leaving or separating from employment "to be married, or for reasons of

¹⁶Gripton, "Professional Social Workers," p. 256.

marriage", and 52 per cent were graduates.¹⁷

The implications of these figures are that a significant number of the too few graduates entering social work will separate from employment within a few years of graduation. This situation is even more serious because Reid found that the majority of married female graduates had left social work employment for full-time motherhood. Most of the employed mothers worked part-time; they had worked less than half the time available to them since graduation. Women who had married or had children prior to entering school were more likely to remain employed than women who had assumed domestic roles after beginning professional careers. The majority of graduates not employed intended to return to social work in the future on a part-time basis.¹⁸

It would seem that the priorities of married female social work graduates contribute to a lack of stability within the profession. Their top priorities are their families. Their part-time associations with agencies would tend to keep salaries down, as they are not financially dependent on their employment. Nieman summarizes this situation quite effectively.

Our salaries are geared somewhat to the requirements of

¹⁷Department of National Health and Welfare, "Survey of Welfare Positions," pp. 15-20.

¹⁸William J. Reid, "Social Work and Motherhood: Competitors for Womanpower," Abstracts for Social Workers, XXXI, No. 4 (Winter, 1967), 44.

a single woman, or one whose husband works also, and this condition stifles our recruiting. Yet, a small supply of replacements continues to arise because our work and our salaries will attract young women who work several years, at most long enough to become adequate practitioners, and who then leave the field for marriage. This inexpensive supply, although inadequate, is enough to perpetuate the popular fiction that social workers are not interested in money.¹⁹

One must challenge the inexpensiveness of this supply of professional workers, not only in relation to financial costs, but more precisely in the cost to the profession of perpetuating an unstable manpower situation, and the cost in already scarce educational facilities that are training many social workers who will soon separate from professional employment. As a profession, social work can ill afford such a high rate of attrition.

Immediate Separation among some M.S.W. Graduates

A pilot study was conducted in order to study initial separation among members of the 1968 graduating class at the Graduate School of Social Work, Waterloo Lutheran University. There were twenty-one members in the first graduating class--ten males and eleven females. Of the eleven females, only seven planned to enter full-time social work following graduation (two plan to work on a permanent half-time arrangement, two will be working in other fields). Of the ten males, all plan to enter full-time social work following graduation. A two-celled contingency table was

¹⁹Nieman, "Obstacles to the Advancement," p. 26.

set up and tested. Chi-square = 4.47. This was significant at the .05 level. Of the seven females entering employment, four felt they would be leaving the field within five years for marriage or reasons of marriage, and only two of the four planned to return eventually to full-time employment. None of the males planned any interruption from full-time employment except possibly to return for further education.

Hypothesis

With the support of graduate social work manpower figures, and the pilot project, the following hypotheses may be advanced:

1. A greater rate of separation from professional employment will be found among female M.S.W. graduates of Canadian Schools of Social Work than among male M.S.W. graduates.
2. A greater rate of immediate separation from professional employment will be found among female M.S.W. graduates of Canadian Schools of Social Work than among male M.S.W. graduates.

METHOD

This study was designed to investigate patterns of separation from professional employment by graduate social workers.

In order to accomplish this, a request would be sent to the eight Canadian Schools of Social Work asking for a list of the names and addresses of all M.S.W. graduates for the year 1958. Other possible sources of this information are the Canadian Association of Social Work and the 1958 yearbooks of the eight universities. The letter to the universities would describe the study briefly, and would mention the sponsorship of this study (see Appendix A).

The year 1958 was chosen because it was felt that ten years would allow time for stabilization of employment patterns. This has not been done in any of the past studies, and it is considered necessary before inferences regarding significant trends and patterns in employment separation could be made.

The sample population is defined as all graduates from Canadian Schools of Social Work in the calendar year 1958. Based on Table 3, this would be approximately 135 Ss. The small numbers of this class, and the expected 10 to 50 per cent replies to the information questionnaire would

obviate the need for random sampling.

A brief check-list questionnaire would be mailed to each of the sample population, along with a covering letter and a stamped return envelope (see Appendices A and B). Selltitz's six factors influencing the effectiveness of mailed questionnaires were considered and implemented in the design of both the questionnaire and the covering letter.²⁰

The check-answer format would be used as a simple, easily understood design that would yield the factual, quantitative information on total time in employment and total time separated from employment for each year. Such a format could be quickly and easily completed and analyzed.

Since this material would be sought from a relatively sophisticated population, the sponsorship or supervision of a recognized academic body would be outlined in the covering letter.

A certain amount of interest in the nature of this study by the sample population is assumed, and the offer of sending a summary of the study was added as an inducement to reply.

Some possible limitations of this approach might be found in the percentage of reply. A second follow-up letter would be sent out to those people who failed to reply,

²⁰Claire Selltitz, et al., Research Methods in Social Relations. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), pp. 241-42.

followed by a third registered letter. The advantage of registration would be in confirmation of address, and it would also serve to indicate the level of interest of the researcher.

Another possible limitation might be in finding the present address. Social workers are known for their mobility. Letters returned as address unknown would be checked further with C.A.S.W. for a more recent address.

Although it is not felt that there is any infringement of personal confidentiality in this study, it could present problems in terms of rate of reply. The proportion of male and female replies would have to reflect the proportions found in the graduating class. An unknown variable might possibly skew the replies in terms of male-female, and this would be considered in the analysis of data.

RESULTS

The returned results would be analyzed using a two-celled contingency table, first with the total data which pertains to the first hypothesis, and secondly, with the immediate employment data which pertains to the second hypothesis.

The resulting Chi-squares would be examined for levels of significance.

Expectations are that there would be a significant difference found which would support both hypotheses.

Certain other demographic data, of secondary importance to this project, would also be available for study. This would include ages of the respondents, their marital status, and some of the other reasons for separation.

Discussion of Results

It is expected that both hypotheses would be supported; that is, that there would be significant statistical difference between the employment separation between male and female social work graduates.

If, however, no significant differences are found, there are three possible explanations. First, perhaps the effect of the ten-year work period would show more females

returning to full-time employment after brief periods of separation. Second is the possibilities of some unexplained variables in general, or perhaps specifically with the class that graduated in 1958. Third, if the second hypothesis is not supported, then there are specific uncontrolled variables which apply to the class of 1968 at the Waterloo Lutheran School of Social Work which are unique.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of
Expected Results

Although the sample population was drawn specifically from the year 1958, the theoretical implications are that the results of this study would apply to the larger universe; in this case, social work graduates of all years.

Even if the results of this study were significant at only the .5 level, there are then many implications which focus directly on the practical problem of manpower. First are the implications to the lack of stability in the profession. The more male social workers, the less the separation, and the more stable the profession. A greater proportion of males to females would also have a desirable effect on the status and image of the profession. Males would attach greater priorities to improved employment conditions and this would tend to be self-perpetuating; that is, the greater the proportion of males, the better the salaries, etc., and the more males that would then be attracted to social work

as their chosen career.

Enrollment trends in schools of social work are showing a slow, gradual increase in the proportion of males entering the field.

Graduate Schools of Social Work could help ease the shortage of M.S.W. graduates, and contribute to the stability of the profession by focusing on the accelerated recruitment and enrollment of male applicants.

The fact of statistical significance in this study would add empirical support to an already obvious conclusion.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Sir,

A research project is being conducted to study employment patterns of social workers who graduated from Canadian Schools of Social Work in 1958. This project is being supervised by the faculty of the Waterloo Lutheran University Graduate School of Social Work.

A brief questionnaire has been included along with a stamped return envelope for your convenience.

I can assure you that professional confidence will be maintained in the processing and handling of this data.

The completion of this questionnaire and its prompt return would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

David R. Cassidy, M.S.W.

5. For other reasons (please specify)

--CHECK "E"

A summary of the results of this study will be forwarded to you if desired. Please indicate "yes" by filling in your name and address below.

Name

Present Address

.....

.....

APPENDIX C

ESTIMATED COST OF THE COMPLETION OF
THIS STUDY

1. Researcher's fee	\$200.00
2. Secretarial fee	50.00
3. Rental of office equipment	25.00
4. Postage and stationery	<u>50.00</u>
Total Cost	<u><u>\$325.00</u></u>

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