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## CAUSES OF ARREST OF WOMEN COMMITTED TO THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE REFORMATORY

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MARY JEAN BOWMAN\*

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The circumstances involved in the arrests of the numerous and miscellaneous offenders appearing in the courts of this country range all the way from the activities of Mr. Hoover's G-men to the parents who complain that their children are "stubborn." In the detailed surveys which have been made of delinquents, the groups studied have sometimes been those passing through probation departments and juvenile courts, sometimes the inmates of penal institutions. Although vague generalizations are frequently made with regard to the selectivity involved in arrest, rarely is any specific investigation of this matter made. Among the studies of delinquent women no detailed information on causes of arrest has come to the attention of the writer. In a study of economic aspects of the histories of women committed to the Massachusetts State Reformatory at Framingham during the period July 1, 1931, to July 1, 1933,<sup>1</sup> careful data on causes of arrest were collected. The results are summarized in this article.

The three hundred and forty-four women studied were very similar in background and offenses to those studied by Professor and Mrs. Sheldon Glueck from the same institution in an earlier period.<sup>2</sup> The laws of Massachusetts give heavy penalties for minor sex offenses. For example, on a charge of fornication or lewdness there would be a two year indeterminate sentence, on charges of adultery or cohabitation, a five year indeterminate sentence. One hundred and sixty-four of the women were committed for a variety of sex offenses. Another forty-two cases were committed as "idle and disorderly," forty-one of them being sex offenders. Eighteen women were committed on charges of "stubborn child," eleven for "vagrancy," both groups made up primarily of sex offenders. There were thirty-seven charged with drunkenness, thirty-three

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<sup>1</sup> Bowman, Mary Jean: *Economic Aspects of the Histories of Reformatory Women*; Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor: *Five Hundred Delinquent Women*; New York, Alfred Knopf, 1934.

with property offenses. Sixteen were committed for offense against the family. The remaining twenty-three cases were committed on miscellaneous charges.

Specifications as to circumstances leading to arrest are given in Table 1. The particular charge brought against a woman within the sex classifications and the charge of some sex offense or of being idle and disorderly are closely associated with the way in which offenders came to the attention of the police. Thus behavior which led directly to police investigation was usually followed, if the woman was a sex offender, by charges of common night walking or of being idle and disorderly. When the contact was with a social agency which reported conditions to the police, the charge was more likely to be lewdness. In many cases there was a large element of chance in the way in which the offender might be or was apprehended, and hence in the exact charge which was brought against her.

The material in Table I has been classified in such a way as to bring out any economic factors which may have been involved. On most of the entries no comment is needed, but the distinction between headings III and IV, Complaint of Personally Interested Parties—Economic and Non-Economic, requires some explanation.

TABLE I—CAUSES OF ARREST

I. POLICE ACTIVITY—DIRECT OBSERVATION OR COMPLAINT OF VICTIM	
A. <i>Behavior led to police investigation</i>	
1. Drunk and noisy:	
Sex .....	9
Drunkenness .....	26
Vagrancy .....	3
2. Obvious sex misconduct:	
Sex .....	34
Idle and disorderly.....	19
Drunkenness .....	4
3. Other:	
Sex .....	9
Idle and disorderly.....	2
Property .....	1
Against the person.....	3
Vagrancy .....	4
Liquor nuisance.....	1

B. <i>Complaint of victim</i>	
Property .....	31
Assault .....	1
Vagrancy .....	1
Use auto without authority.....	1
	— 34
C. <i>Arson—Fire suspicious</i>	
All arson cases.....	6
D. <i>Abortion—Victim hospital or died</i>	
All abortion cases.....	7
	—
Total Police Activity.....	162

II. COMPLAINT OF SOCIAL AGENCY DIRECTLY CONTACTING  
OFFENDER OR FAMILY

A. <i>Contact due to behavior of offender</i>	
Sex .....	22
Idle and disorderly.....	3
Against family.....	4
	— 29
B. <i>Offender care social agency since childhood</i>	
Sex .....	5
Stubborn child.....	3
	— 8
C. <i>Agency aiding offender, her children or family*</i>	
1. Aiding offender, or family including offender, reported her sex delinquency:	
Sex .....	23
Idle and disorderly.....	5
Against family.....	2
2. Supporting children separately, reported her sex de- linquency:	
Sex .....	4
3. Supporting children separately, another illegitimate child:	
Sex .....	7
Against family .....	1
	— 42
D. <i>Agency supervising offender and children, desertion and fail-        ure to support*</i>	
Against family .....	5
E. <i>Offender appealed to social agency for care in illegitimate        pregnancy*</i>	
Sex .....	2
	—
Total Social Agency Complaints.....	86

\*Economic factor is considered as present in all starred headings in the "Cause of Arrest" Tables. Under section I.A. there is one entry which falls in this category (Co-defendant sought for non-support of his children).

III. COMPLAINT OF PERSONALLY INTERESTED PARTIES—NON-ECONOMIC	
A. <i>Triangle situation</i>	
Sex .....	9
Property .....	1
	— 10
B. <i>Relatives of inmates or clients of house of ill fame</i>	
Sex .....	1
Keeping liquor nuisance .....	1
	— 2
C. <i>Family unable to cope with situation, complained</i>	
Sex .....	3
Idle and disorderly .....	1
Drunkenness .....	4
Stubborn child .....	8
	— 16
D. <i>Miscellaneous</i>	
Sex .....	3
Idle and disorderly .....	1
Against family .....	1
	— 5
Total Personal Complaints—Non-Economic.....	33
IV. COMPLAINT OF PERSONALLY INTERESTED PARTIES—ECONOMIC*	
A. <i>Relatives supporting</i>	
1. Offender dependent, sex delinquency and stubbornness:	
Sex .....	4
Idle and disorderly .....	2
Stubborn child .....	5
2. Offender pregnant, family wanted her away for confinement and objected to supporting illegitimate child:	
Sex .....	3
Idle and disorderly .....	1
Stubborn child .....	2
	— 17
B. <i>Wife of co-defendant complained of non-support</i>	
Sex .....	1
C. <i>Mother complained offender spending money on lover instead of family</i>	
Sex .....	1
	— 1
Total Personal Complaints—Economic.....	19

## V. COMPLAINT OF NEIGHBORS OR LANDLADY

Sex .....	6	
Idle and disorderly .....	4	
Drunkenness .....	3	
Against family .....	2	
Liquor nuisance .....	1	
		— 16

## VI. MISCELLANEOUS

## A. Court hearing on support of illegitimate child

Sex .....	1	
Idle and disorderly .....	1	
Against the family .....	1	
		— 3

## B. Accidental discovery by authorities

Sex .....	3	
Idle and disorderly .....	2	
Other .....	4	
		— 9
Total Miscellaneous .....		12

## VII. UNKNOWN

Sex .....	14	
Idle and disorderly .....	1	
Drugs .....	1	
		—
Total Unknown .....		16

A case is listed under heading IV, when those bringing the complaint, either in court or to the police prior to arrest, expressed or in other ways indicated clearly their economic interest in a change of situation. In some instances the intent was definitely to send the offender away to Framingham, in some instances it was less definite than that, but in all the cases under heading IV some economic advantage was sought by those first complaining of the offender's behavior.

The extent to which some economic factor was present in the circumstances which brought about arrest and commitment is summarized in Table II. These figures are derived from Table I, including all starred items on that table. Such factors are outstanding among those charged with offenses against the family (56%), or committed on a charge of "stubborn child" (40%), the high percentage in the former being directly connected with a high percentage of dependency. Sex offenders were arrested under cir-

cumstances in which economic factors were involved in forty-seven cases (29%), women committed as idle and disorderly in nine cases (21%). No other offenders were arrested under circumstances in which economic factors played any part. Those who appeared in other parts of the survey to act most frequently according to direct economic motivations to delinquent behavior (abortionists, women guilty of arson, property offenders) were not, apart from the motivation, the victims of any kind of economic circumstance in the actual arrest and commitment.

TABLE II—ECONOMIC FACTOR IN ARREST

Offense	Economic factor present	Economic factor absent	Percent of cases in which economic factor present
Sex .....	47	117	29%
Idle and disorderly .....	9	33	21%
Offense against family....	9	7	56%
Stubborn child .....	7	11	40%
All other offenses .....	0	104	None

Facts which are most outstanding in this material may be summarized in three main points:

1. In one hundred and sixty-two cases (47%) behavior at the time of arrest on the offense for which the women were committed to the Reformatory was such as to bring the offender to the attention of police directly. This was true of thirty of the thirty-seven women committed for drunkenness.
2. Social and economic status were such as to have involved the offender in social agency contacts through which the present arrest was brought about in eighty-six cases (25%).
3. Economic factors played a part in the arrest and commitment of some of the women sentenced on charges of "stubborn child," "idle and disorderly," and for sex offenses and offenses against the family. They played no part in the actual arrest of any of those committed for drunkenness, property offenses, or miscellaneous offenses.