PART III

CHILD WELFARE

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INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that the term "welfare" is concerned with a state of well-being. However, there would be a difference of opinion as to what this well-being entails.

The United Nations in its "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" adopted by the General Assembly on November 20, 1959 conceived of the needs of the child in terms of:

1. the development of an identity, i.e. name, nationality, civil status.
2. the provision of love, understanding, maternal care and protection.
3. the promotion and maintenance of health.
4. the provision of adequate food and shelter
5. access to education in order that he learns social and moral values and develops his knowledge and judgement.
6. fulfilling his need for play and recreation.
7. the provision of social protection against discrimination or distinction.
8. protection from exploitation at an early age.
9. special attention for the physically, mentally and socially handicapped.

The above listing is exhaustive, but can be said to encompass the physical and emotional aspects of the well-being of children.

To the psychologist, psychiatrist and the social worker, welfare is concerned with the psycho-social development of individual and the formation of his personality. Their concern in terms of "well-being" is with the influences of socializing agents and with the social milieu itself, both of which contribute to the development of a normal, healthy personality. The specific concentration is on mental health as being essential to normality and the maintenance of a state of personal integration that would be capable of withstanding the varying conflictual situations encountered in a life time. Thus, early childhood experiences are believed to have a lasting effect upon the individual in every society, for they are believed to be responsible for the development of attitudes, morals, a scale of values and emotional maturity and stability.

To the state, welfare is promoted through the enactment of laws and the creation of social institutions to cater for the members of its society. The welfare of the child can be met through:

1. maternal and child care services
2. family counselling programmes
3. day-care facilities
4. institutional arrangements for the delinquent, those in need of care and protection or those deprived of a normal home life
5. school counselling service
6. special services for the physically and mentally handicapped.

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These are services conceived to be needed in any modern society. Today it is recognized that it is encumbent upon a nation to provide social conditions conducive to the development of a stable family atmosphere in which a child can grow to be a well-adjusted member of the society.

To the individual welfare is a subjective matter, looked upon in terms of his individual circumstances and what he conceives to be in his own best interest. To be sure, the society in which he lives and his familiar relationships determine, to a large extent, his outlook, his expectations and establish the limits within which he can pursue and promote his own welfare.

The three papers in this section of the publication throw some light upon varying conceptions of child welfare in Ghanaian society: The paper entitled "Children Without Parents—A Ghanaian Case Study" by Mrs Nana Apt gives the reader an insight into what a government department of social welfare considers as suitable clients for its child-care institutions. The reader also learns what action on the part of existing parents and/or relatives such institutions consider to be desirable as aids to minimizing the adverse effects of institutional life.

A. F. Aryee's paper, "A Study of Parent-Child Separation in Accra" pinpoints parental notions of welfare and shows a contrast in attitudes between different economic groups. Aryee suggests that present-day forms of child dispersion are variations upon earlier traditional patterns and are looked upon as being "in the best interest of the child." He poses the question of the effects this separation from parents has upon the child in terms of what western psychological and sociological literature regard as the ideal in the socialization process. One may further query if John Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation holds good in a society that practices varying forms of fostering?

The last paper of this group "Some Aspects of School Welfare in the Accra Area" by Y. Asamoah is a social worker's view of how educational institutions working in conjunction with parents and social workers can contribute to a child's welfare. The paper notes that the conception of preventive action as a means of promoting the welfare of the child appears to be absent in educational programmes. In addition, teachers have different conceptions as to what constitutes behaviour that merits remedial work.

All three of the papers give an indication that many adults in this society consider material advantages as being in the best interest of the child, e.g. access to better education, good physical surroundings, the provision of food, clothing, shelter, better moral training. Another observation made by each of the papers is with reference to the attitude of the parent once he/she has decided that the child's interest is best served by placing it in an environmental situation deemed advantageous in the eyes of the parent. Most parents look upon such arrangements as temporary. Monetary support is irregular or non-existent. Although food, clothing or gifts may be sent occasionally, visits by the parent or parents are rare. This is perhaps a broadened view which regards the fostering arrangement as being akin to the extended family system's role. Regardless of the type of fostering agent, family members or otherwise, the persons caring for the child are guardians in the fullest and most extended sense. Parental responsibility ceases so long as the fostering arrangements are considered the best that can be done for the child. Should the arrangement fail, another one may be sought.

All of the authors caution wholesale generalizations from the particular focus chosen for their research. However, the papers have the value of pinpointing possible areas which would be well worth the attention of in-depth studies by future research workers interested in the problems of the welfare of children.