

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A CLARIFICATION AND DEFINITION OF THE TERM
"FAMILY DESERTION"
FOR USE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK

Being the Report of a Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Social Work.

By

Don Alan Ayre

and

Gordon Campbell MacFarlane

Winnipeg, Manitoba

May, 1958



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
ABSTRACT	i
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AND ITS FUNCTIONS	10
III. THE FUNCTION OF SOCIAL WORK	21
IV. THE NATURE OF DESERTION	29
V. SOCIAL WORK'S ACTIVITY IN RESPONSE TO THE EFFECTS OF DESERTION	38
VI. CONCLUSION	47
Bibliography	52

ABSTRACT

This study is part of a larger research project carried out by the second year students of the Manitoba School of Social Work. Desertion as a topic for research was derived from consultation with several social agencies in the community. The agencies expressed concern over the increasing number of desertion cases in their respective caseloads. In order that such a project could be initiated, it was necessary to define a "desertion case" so that the data could be collected with accuracy and consistency. The whole process of definition became a long and involved task, requiring many class discussions and using dictionary as well as legal definitions. Although the attempts at definition were prolonged and exhausting, the end results were considered somewhat unsatisfactory. It was out of this frustration and confusion that the "Clarification and Definition of the term Family Desertion for use in the field of Social Work," was chosen as a legitimate topic for separate study. Even though it could not be completed in time to contribute to the organization of the other studies, we felt that this study would provide a theoretical framework within which the total project would find a more meaningful continuity.

Our method in pursuing this clarification and definition was influenced by our belief that a term takes on different connotations when used in different settings. The total project necessarily involved two settings namely the Family and Social Work. It was necessary to examine the meaning of desertion in the family situation and to proceed from this under-

standing to Family desertion in the Social Work situation. The logical procedure in relating desertion to the family situation was to consider desertion as an activity which disrupts the equilibrium and so the functioning of the family institution. With the disruption of function the family was no longer able to meet the needs of its members. Desertion then could be related to social work through the occurrence of these needs. By examining the function of social work, we attempt to relate the activity of social work to the needs that arise out of Family desertion. Hence Chapter two, "The Nuclear Family and its Function," is a statement of the need meeting functions of the family as an institution. In like manner, Chapter three is a statement of the need meeting function of social work as an institution. Chapter four, "The Nature of Desertion," attempts to relate the activity of desertion to the family situation and thereby to point out the needs that arise out of the disruption of family functioning and defines the term "Family Desertion." Chapter six reviews the findings of the preceding chapters and makes more explicit, certain of our conclusions.

Our major conclusion is a definition of desertion for use in the field of Social Work. This definition states that desertion is a form of family breakdown which involves the decision of one partner to be apart from his or her marriage partner and/or family without wilful agreement as to the financial provision or as to marital status regardless of duration. As our study proceeded we realized that our reference material and our own thinking was subject to a middleclass bias. We concluded therefore that to find the real meaning of desertion a more accurate sociological understanding of families in the lower economic strata where desertion seemed more prevalent is required. We also concluded that insofar as social

work is a social institution concerned with the smooth functioning of social institutions it should therefore place its emphasis on prevention of family desertion and hence employ a more effective use of the Community Organization method. Finally, we hope that our study demonstrates the importance of theoretical exploration before proceeding to a statistical examination of social problems.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The practice of social work requires a theoretical understanding of the problems in which it is active. In order to obtain such an understanding the discipline of research must be applied. The fruits of research, insofar as they are a contribution to human knowledge, are the property of all of humanity. Social work will gain understanding through the research activity of all related sciences. This means that, because social work then will gain understanding through the research activity of all related sciences and because social work's theoretical interest is practically motivated, social work will have peculiar research needs, which can be satisfied not only by conducting its own research enquiries but also by adapting the findings of research done by social science. As research deepens theoretical knowledge, practice is improved. Conversely, as demands on social work practice become more pressing, the need for theoretical understanding will be intensified.

Social work's current concern around desertion arises from the increased number of deserted families in agency caseloads. This increase is most noticeable in the public assistance caseloads of the public welfare agencies. In January 1955 the programme committee of the Public Welfare Division of the Canadian Welfare Council officially recognized desertion as the "number one problem confronting public welfare people in Canada". It was noted that there are two aspects contributing to the seriousness of the problem: (1) "The social aspects of the problem - unless

public welfare can do something about desertions the entire sanctity of the family as a unit of society is threatened. Each desertion case may easily multiply itself in the coming generation. Children who do not know that a normal family is are not as likely to marry and rear a normal family. (2) The financial aspects of the problem - There are tremendous costs, relief costs, mothers' allowance costs, wardship costs, costs in training schools and so on. It should be noted that no matter how much money is spent it does not solve the desertion problem."¹

Desertion arises where a marital union exists and therefore recognition of desertion as a threat to the marital union dates back as far as marriage itself. There have been numerous attempts to study and understand desertion. The confusion around the meaning of desertion is perhaps best pointed out by the use of the modern cliché - "desertion is the poor man's divorce." This statement indicates generally that desertion occurs among the poor and is in some way similar to divorce. This statement is obviously too general to constitute any explicit understanding of desertion.

Our study is intended to clarify the meaning of desertion in the family situation and thereby derive a definition. In order to do this, we need to know the functions of family and how they are affected by desertion. In other words, we must look at desertion as a form of family break down. The first part of our hypothesis is then - that to define desertion for the family situation we must examine the activity of desertion in the context of the family situation.

Having thus achieved a definition of family desertion, it remains to

¹Minutes of the Programme Committee of the Public Welfare Division of the Canadian Welfare Council held Thursday, January 6, 1955 at 465 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario.

examine this definition in the context of social work activity. The main problem then becomes one of application. This requires an understanding of social work's function in relation to family desertion insofar as social work carries on activity in the area of family desertion. This activity will require a particular understanding of family desertion and hence give a different connotation to the term. Our hypothesis then becomes, the functional relationship of social work to family desertion is such that the term desertion acquires a peculiar connotation in the social work context. The problem then is two fold: firstly to derive a definition of family desertion; and secondly to understand the application of the term desertion in the area of Social Work concern. To do so we will first examine desertion as it appears in the context of the family and second examine family desertion as it appears in the context of social work.

In September 1957, the Manitoba School of Social Work consulted several social agencies in the city of Winnipeg in regard to a topic for a research project to be undertaken by the second year students. After considerable discussion, desertion was suggested by the agencies as a topic for research study. Significantly, the agencies most concerned about the problem were the Winnipeg City Welfare Department and the Provincial Department of Public Welfare. The concern of the agencies was based upon the increasingly large number of desertion cases in their respective caseloads.

It was decided that data for the study could be obtained from agency files. Due to the particular recording system that the agencies employed, a study of current cases, rather than of previous desertion cases, was required. The sample was therefore selected from desertion files that were open in the month of October 1957. In order to establish criteria for the selection of files to be studied, it was necessary for the class to un-

dertake the definition of desertion. So that cases could be chosen by the agencies without undue delay, a tentative definition was proposed while the class continued to concentrate on a more exact definition. This definition included apartness only.

An examination of relevant literature revealed little except that the term desertion seemingly has various connotations depending upon the particular frame of reference of the author. None of these were found amenable to the research proposed. Dictionary and legal definitions as well as relevant legislation were discussed in class. It was agreed that the term desertion incorporated two essential factors: (1) that marriage partners were living apart; (2) and that the deserted family was not receiving financial support from the designated head of the household. Having thus isolated what were considered to be the basic components of desertion, a definition was drawn up. This meant that the sample would include all cases in which couples were living apart at any time during the month of October 1957 except where they were living apart because of divorce or separation agreement. Cases of separation agreement were to be included if the agreement broke down prior to or during October 1957. It should be noted that this criteria of selection was based on a definition which took into account, non support and "apartness."

This criteria was applied to the agency files. However, difficulties encountered required a further elaboration of this criteria and consequently a revision of the definition. The main difficulty encountered was in distinguishing between the deserting and deserted parties. That is, which partner consciously created the desertion situation through his or her willful intent to live apart from his or her marital partner without financial support? A third criterion was introduced to the definition: that the

partner who left did so of his or her own free will and did not intend to supply the necessities of life. It became necessary to declare a situation a desertion case when non support, apartness and intent existed concomitantly. The study would therefore include cases where the husband was wilfully apart from the marriage or the family and there was non support; where a husband was wilfully apart and there was a court order to support; and where the wife was wilfully apart from the marriage or the family and did not follow up with court action, or she did follow it up with court action and the court ruled against her.

The whole process of definition was difficult and discouraging. It seemed at times that agreement around a definition was impossible. It was out of this frustration and dissatisfaction that this particular study was conceived and initiated. Due to the difficulty involved in the definition of desertion, it was considered worthwhile to devote one aspect of the total project to the clarification of this problem. Having thus isolated the problem of definition as an area worthy of study, it was necessary to locate the problem more specifically. The meaning of desertion as an activity appeared to be clear and concise - "the intentional abandonment of a formal obligation or duty."² However the connotation that this term had in the family situation was not explicit. Since "a definition should include the sum total of the essential qualities of the definiendum or that which is being defined",³ we felt that it was an uncertainty about these essential qualities that led to the difficulty with definition. Although there was agreement around certain of these qualities - apartness and non

²"Desertion," The American College Dictionary, ed. Clarence L. Barnhart, (New York: Random House, 1957).

³Swithun Bowers, O.M.I., "The Nature and Definition of Social Casework," Principles and Techniques of Social Casework, ed. Cora Kasius, (New York: Family Service Association, 1950), pp. 97-127.

support - there was nevertheless a lack of clarity as to why these qualities should be included and uncertainty as to whether or not they comprised all of the elements involved in family desertion. The project required a definition of desertion which would indicate the operation of the essential qualities of desertion in the family situation as opposed, for example, to the military situation. As the essential qualities are those which belong inherently and necessarily to the nature of something we felt that an understanding of the family, its functions and the duties implied, was needed.

In addition to difficulty in defining desertion for the family situation, we felt that the term would also take on special meaning when projected into the area of social work concern. We felt, therefore, that desertion would need to be defined so that it could be applied meaningfully in the realm of social work activity. Our efforts in this regard were frustrated by the necessity of considering desertion as a situation engendering legislative and legal activity as well as a social problem which demands the activity of social work. In other words, practical application seemed to require an understanding of the function of social work and the implication of its relationship to family and to family desertion.

The functional relationship of social work to family desertion is such that the term desertion acquires a peculiar connotation when set in the social work context. This then becomes the hypothesis for our enquiry and implies that a solution to the original problem of definition and application can be found in making more explicit our understanding of the relationship of social work to family desertion. It should be noted that the aim of this enquiry is primarily to clarify the meaning of the definition of desertion for social work research.

In order to outline our method in achieving this goal, we will briefly set out the content of the following chapters. In chapter two the function of the family and the duties implied for the family members will be specified, this to allow an examination of the disruption of family functioning and to indicate the duties wilfully abandoned by the act of desertion. In short, chapter two will respond to the question, What function does the family perform in Society? Chapter four will follow up this line of reasoning and will examine the disruption of family functioning to indicate the duties abandoned by the act of desertion so that the essential qualities of desertion may be delineated. The sum total of these essential qualities should encompass the definition of family desertion. Chapter four then will attempt to answer the question "How does desertion effect family functioning?" and from this will derive a definition of desertion. Having thus achieved a definition of family desertion, the second step, contained in chapters three and five, will be to test the hypothesis by an explication of the connotations of the definition that accrue from its use in the context of social work. Chapter three then will answer the question What are the functions of Social Work in Society? while chapter five will respond to the question How is social work related to family desertion? Thus the particular implications of the relationship that social work has to family desertion will be demonstrated.

Our analysis of this information will consist mainly of its organization into a conceptual framework which will allow us to state the relationship and examine the resulting implications of the relationship between desertion and family and between family desertion and social work. In his book "Social Causation", Robert McIver states that "unless we can discern the causal nexus of things, we do not know the way they belong to-

gether or the way they are set apart, we do not know the nearer and more inclusive systems they constitute, we do not know their behaviour or their properties or the routes they follow in their relationships".⁴

We consider society to be a social system which provides for the basic human needs of its members. This social system emanates from the interdependency of its members. It is composed of a number of organizations structured and defined according to the particular pattern of living or way of life or culture of the group. These organizations are the agents of society and operate in respect to a certain designated area of society's purpose. The sum of their functions comprehends the function of society. A social agent is a "group of persons organized according to cultural principles to carry on activities which fulfil certain of the basic individual and social needs of human beings".⁵ Once such a social agent is established in accordance with the culture of the group, it is referred to as a social institution. The social agents with which this study is concerned are the family and social work.

Society, as a system, operates in a manner congenial to its own self perpetuation⁶ and strives to maintain an equilibrium among its integral parts. The social agents, therefore, are organically related so that a disfunction in one agency necessitates some compensatory activity of one or more of the other agents so as to re-establish the equilibrium of the whole. We will use this principle to illuminate the relationship between

⁴R.M. MacIver, Social Causation (New York: Ginn and Company, 1942), p. 77.

⁵Bronislaw Malinowski, A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. 52-54.

⁶MacIver, op. cit., p. 173.

the family and social work.

A final principle is that of the "precipitant" which may be defined as "any factor disrupting a pre-existing equilibrium".⁷ This idea presumes "that a system operates in a manner congenial to its self perpetuation until something intervenes or that a system is relatively closed until something, the precipitant, breaks it open".⁸ In doing so, the precipitant evokes a series of repercussions, the significance of which may vary enormously. "The causal importance of the precipitant can be assessed only if we understand the whole dynamic system into which it enters."⁹ The impact of this thinking was such that we came to believe that only by examining the dynamic system of society and, within it, the interrelation of the social agents of family and social work could the precipitant qualities of desertion and their significance be understood. Considering desertion as the precipitant, we hope to be able to determine the repercussions that occur in relation to family function and how these repercussions effect the function of social work.

⁷Ibid., p. 163.

⁸Ibid., p. 173.

⁹Ibid., p. 171.

CHAPTER II

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AND ITS FUNCTIONS

The term "nuclear family" refers to the marriage partners and their offspring and is distinct from the term "family" which includes, in addition to the personnel of the nuclear family, relatives and kin.¹ Such a unit is recognized in every known society, its universality attributed to its social utility or to "the social functions" it performs.² Developing in response to basic human and social needs, the nuclear family functions as an agent of society to meet certain designated human needs. Although the nuclear family will change its form when these needs are altered by changing circumstances and will assume a variety of additional functions depending on the cultural or subcultural milieu in which it exists, these functions are fundamentally the same in all societies, whatever the structural differences among family types.³ The nuclear family has had "remarkable power to adapt its parts and practices to changes in its society or culture without endangering its vital functions."⁴ It is these vital functions or essential qualities, the sum total of which define nuclear family, which are our concern in this chapter. We are interested for our purpose

¹E. R. Groves, Problems of the Family (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1952), p. 3.

²John Sirjamaki, The American Family in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 5.

³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

in the nuclear family type predominant in present American Society.

"Marriage" forms the basis for the nuclear family and is founded on the complementary nature of the two sexes - hence the roles husband and wife, father and mother, breadwinner and homemaker in the nuclear family. The first area of complementary functioning may be termed "sexual" which includes the physical, emotional, and social implications of the sexual relationship. The second area may be termed "economic". Although the division of labour implicit in economic cooperation is based on the sexual differences as they are physically, emotionally, and culturally defined, this division is only the vehicle for the economic function of the family and is here of secondary consideration.

Only when sexual and economic functioning are united in one relationship does marriage exist and this combination exists only in marriage.⁵ This definition stands unaffected by society's particular formal recognition of marriage with its legal, religious and secular ceremonies and their implications. In sum, there exist sexual union without economic cooperation just as there is economic cooperation between the sexes without sexual union but when the two are combined in one relationship, marriage exists. It is incidentally noteworthy that in terms of this definition unions referred to as "common-law", insofar as they include this peculiar combination of function, may properly be called "marriages".

Obviously, the manner in which the sexual and economic functions are combined is subject to cultural and, in fact, to individual variance. Typically in American society the male is more dominant, the stronger person in the relationship. His dominance is not absolute but relative and in many instances is not real but illusory. Nevertheless, American culture

⁵Groves, loc. cit.

expects that he will assume the stronger role physically, emotionally, economically and socially.

We have said that social agencies function on behalf of society in response to certain fundamental individual and social need of society's membership. Marriage is one such vehicle for the satisfaction of human need. The "sexual" function of marriage is firstly to provide socially sanctioned and controlled satisfaction of the biological sex drive. However, the sexual relationship includes in addition and with no less importance, although subject to individual variation in emphasis, emotional and social satisfactions. Members of the opposite sex find emotional gratification and social companionship in their complementary roles. Further, partners find these satisfactions not only in the partnership but also in their community, the married set, with whom they are more apt to associate.

The "economic" function of marriage, a cooperation and specialization based on the complementary nature of the two sexes, serves to increase chances of survival. Biological needs, food, clothing, shelter, body comforts, and supervision and care in ill health, stimulate this function. From economic cooperation the roles of "breadwinner" and "homemaker" are derived, for, in American society, financial means is the criterion for how well these needs will be met. American society allows that the wife can augment means of livelihood by herself working. This arises out of an economy which stresses consumption. Nevertheless, it is not usual for her to earn in excess of the husband nor to threaten his status as "breadwinner."

Finally, fulfilment of these functions and, in fact, marriage itself assumes the necessity of residential cohabitation. "Economic cooperation, like sexual association is most readily and satisfactorily achieved by per-

sons who habitually reside together."⁶ The nuances of these two functions imply that their coexistence, which is by definition marriage, is impossible without residential cohabitation.

"Marriage forms the basis for the nuclear family".⁷ The sexual function of marriage in its physical aspects implies reproduction and, once reproduction results from this relationship, marriage becomes the family. New members are added and new functions in accordance with the additional membership are superimposed on the basic unit of marriage. The major functions no longer are orientated merely towards the satisfaction of the needs of spouses but rather have as their goal the satisfaction of the needs of offspring. "In every society we find a socially recognized unit which is distinguished from all other groups in society by the fact that it is a unit held primarily responsible for: reproduction of its members; maintenance of new members during infancy and childhood; and socialization of new members into the values and skills required for adequate role playing and ability to make a living which are so necessary to independent adult living."⁸ This social unit is known as the nuclear family and the responsibilities represent the new functions superimposed on the social unit of marriage in accordance with additional membership. It should be noted that this superimposition by no means implies that the functions designated in our discussion cease to be fulfilled but rather that the marriage functions become a part of the total function of the nuclear family.

The present American family "with its paradox of unity and diversity

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

⁷Ibid., p. 6.

⁸John W. Bennett and Melvin M. Tamin, Social Life: Structure and Function (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 546.

can be only understood by the concept of the family in process."⁹ The present family is in transition moving from what we for the present term "the institutional family" with its divergent forms towards what, at present, we will call "the emergent family" which is more generic. In using the terminology "institutional" and "emergent" we do not intend that the emergent family is not an institution, an agent of society. However, the transition is from an established family towards what is at present not an established pattern. Once the emergent family becomes established, the term institution will be equally applicable to its form. Consequent to this transitional process, there are currently two philosophies of family - "against ideas of duty, loyalty and faithfulness are projected the newer cultural standards of affection, supreme love and mutual physical and psychological satisfactions of spouses."¹⁰ To understand the function of the present American nuclear family, it is necessary to fit it into this frame of reference, to examine this context and the family within it.

The historical development of American society illuminates this transition. Early American society was primarily rural. Pioneer life required a family unit that was economically self-sufficient, that would develop raw material for its own consumption. Its function was primarily economic, geared to meeting the material want of its members. It was work centered and production orientated.

As this family type became an established pattern it created "folkways that, over a sufficient period of time, issued in a relatively formal

⁹Ernest W. Burgess, "The Family in a Changing Society," Readings In Marriage and the Family, ed. Judson T. Landis, Mary G. Landis (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1952), p. 24.

¹⁰Paul H. Landis, "The Changing Family," Readings in Marriage and the Family, ed. Judson T. Landis, Mary G. Landis (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1952), p. 29.

and persistent group of approved systematic routine of social practices"¹¹ which strengthened the family, facilitating and, indeed, ensuring its function. The "systematic routine of social practices" represent the outward behavior of the family, the characteristics. Hereafter, we will refer to this nuclear family type as the "economic family" as its function would seem to indicate.

Typically, "the economic family struggled together for tangible property and the welfare of the individual was subservient to the common good of the group."¹² Economic cooperation was vital not only between spouses but among the total family membership. Offspring, too, had a designated role in the economic function, the role being defined by age as well as by sex. Emotional and social aspects of the family structure were not absent but were secondary to the economic.

As the conditions of society changed so did the demands on family function effecting a change in emphasis. The entrenched "routines of social practice," however, were slower to change and in the present transitional stage the attitudes instituted in the economic family persist despite the new demands on function. "As society developed into an urban industrial economy and multiplied in population, the family had to adapt to complex modern conditions and this came about by permutation of its functions, altered member roles, reduced family and kin group personnel and democratization of ethos."¹³ Increased knowledge in certain fields, such as

¹¹Ernest R. Groves, The Family and its Social Functions (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1940), p. 8.

¹²Landis, op. cit., p. 27.

¹³Sirjamaki, op. cit., p. 53.

medicine and education, created specializations and as these services were made available to the family, the family was relieved of certain of its functions freeing it to concentrate on the new demands.

Industrialization changed the economy of American society; transportation effected the mobility of the American society. A primarily rural population became a primarily urban society and a new family form in response to new demands began to emerge. Economically, consumption and not production is the key note. Hence the family is no longer required to produce for itself but rather to find the financial means consistent with its consumption. In addition, a high standard of living replaced previous standards. Rather than a large family membership meaning more production and so better living, a large family came to mean higher consumption and more demands on income of the single breadwinner. Families were adjusted proportionately in size.

Contemporary individualism, out of which the new family emerged, put the individual member before the family group. Life was family centered; life is individual centered.¹⁴ Whereas before there was unity in economic necessity, individual happiness is in the emergent family, of prime importance. Since, "the highly mobile industrial society is essentially a lonesome one in that men dissociate from intimate primary groups, it follows that individuals tend to seek in a mate all the qualities of intimacy and friendships and security that earlier societies gave him through the large family and neighborhood."¹⁵ As a result, providing for the happiness of individuals, the new function of family, was served by providing the intimacy, the affection individuals sought. Whereas the

¹⁴Landis, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 31.

institutional family was an economic unit, the emergent family is a romantic unit.

Characteristically, love of mates is a first consideration. Individualistic marriages place pleasure above obligation and duty. The family is geared towards the satisfaction of the individual and not that of the total group as such and child training typically tends toward self sufficiency without obligation to the family. Family membership is planned and kept small enough that it taxes neither the financial means of the family nor the emotional resources necessary to support intensely intimate interpersonal relationships. In sum, the individual does not exist for the family but the family for the member.

We see then that where offspring are added to the basic unit of marriage with its sexual and economic functions, a new concept, that of nuclear family is created, and new functions are added. The previous functions of family serve the spouse, the new functions serve the offspring and both purposes, service of needs of spouses and of offspring, are to be included in the function of the nuclear family. We have mentioned the primary new functions in the service of offspring earlier.¹⁶ We will deal with each more fully at this point.

The family is responsible for the reproduction of members. Such a function obviously serves offspring by bringing them into being. Although it might be argued that it does not, in the strictest sense, serve the needs of offspring, indisputably offspring are implicitly involved in this function. Reproduction further serves the needs of spouses. "Except in grossly abnormal situations, adults need children as much as children need them."¹⁷ It

¹⁶"Above, p. 13."

¹⁷Henrietta L. Gordon, Casework Services for Children (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 20.

seems that spouses "want the deep sense of fulfillment which comes with parenthood."¹⁸ If such were not the case, it would be difficult to understand why, with the emphasis on individual satisfaction of spouse and with methods of controlling births, there are more offspring than "accident" alone can explain. Families are smaller but children are felt important and are planned for. Finally, reproduction has an important function in society as a whole - to perpetuate its membership.

The new members are dependent for their livelihood on adult members. For human beings, this period of dependency is quite lengthy lasting from infancy to childhood. Parents are appointed guardians of their children for this period and certain guardianship responsibilities and standards are entrusted to parents. These functions are important enough that society keeps a close control over the manner in which this trust is despatched.

The first such function is economic. Like marriage, the family has particular economic responsibilities to which it owes its definition. The family must maintain new members during infancy and childhood. Economic function, for both "marriage" and "family," have greatly changed in keeping with the transition from economic to romantic type family. Not only can both spouses work but also children can work at an earlier age and therefore are economically less dependent much earlier. As with all change, certain adjustments are implied. In addition to physical care of children, economic function of family also includes matters of health: care and protection of mother in pregnancy, general health supervision for all members, and care in illness. With the advance of specialized medicine, the family's responsibility in this area is lessening.

¹⁸0. Spurgeon English and Gerald H. J. Pearson, Emotional Problems of Living (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1955), p. 418.

The second functional responsibility that the nuclear family has toward its offspring is that termed socialization. In short, this entails all the learning necessary to prepare offspring for comfortable adult living - social learning involving: experience in interpersonal relationship and role learning and playing; instruction and guidance in social custom, moral values, and development of knowledge and skills of various kinds; and conditioning to the rhythm of work, recreating and rest.¹⁹

The family will assume certain other functions depending on the conditions of society, "the protective, the recreational, the educational, the religious, and that function which gives status to the individual"²⁰ are the main extra functions. In American society these functions are being assumed by other social agents and so are declining in importance for the American nuclear family.

Finally, as members of the family share in the intimate and reciprocal service of family living, sentiments of affection develop between them and weld them together setting them apart as a group from all other groups. Although this affectional quality is present in the family as an accompaniment to the exercise of its functions, we see through our discussion of the emergent "romantic" family that the emphasis on affection has caused this "affection" to become more than a quality or climate. It has become a function of the family. The demands on the family are such that this must be one of the satisfactions which it seeks to fulfil. Love, intimacy and emotional security are the qualities which family is expected

¹⁹Helen Leland Witmer, Social Work: An Analysis of a Social Institution (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1942), p. 87.

²⁰William F. Ogburn, "The Changing Functions of the Family" Readings in Marriage and the Family, ed. Judson T. Landis, Mary G. Landis (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 19.

ted to meet in its functioning. The relationship of family members takes on a new importance.

The family is a social agent functioning in response to individual need and particularly the need of marital partners and their offspring. As a universal agent it has certain essential functions. It must provide for the sexual relationship of the marriage partners and their economic cooperation as well as reproduction and care and education of offspring. The romantic family, with its emphasis on emotional satisfactions, adds to the functions of family the meeting of these affectional needs. Cohabitation is a necessary vehicle to these functions. The predominant family structure of the lower income groups appears to be of the traditional type or akin to it. In other words this family type persists due to a cultural lag or this type of family meets the demands of a lower economic sub-culture and is therefore a derivative of that culture. Although two philosophies of family exist in our society, we do not know if this is a result of an incomplete transition or if it is a necessity required by the operation of an economic sub-culture within our culture. It is sufficient for our purposes to say that the two philosophies of family are co-existent in our society.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTION OF SOCIAL WORK

In order to introduce the function of Social Work in society, it is necessary to reiterate a concept stated earlier. It has been maintained throughout this paper that society functions in order to meet basic human need. Society is able to perform this function through a system of organically related agents or institutions that are responsible for the carrying out of society's function in regard to particular areas of need. It has also been pointed out that these agents or institutions may vary from culture to culture in form, in structure and in method of dispatching their function depending on the pattern in which a particular group in society developed the agent or institution. Hence the American family unit, for instance, will differ markedly from the Chinese or Eskimo family unit. However, the essential need meeting functions of the family are common to them all. Society then operates universally to meet basic human need. The operation is carried out through agents which may vary in structure, form and method according to the culture of the group for whom they operate.

"Society is a system of interconnected human actions"¹ or is the sum total of activity of social agents. "Human actions are both consciously and unconsciously purposive which implies that human beings use

¹Edward A. Shils, "Society," Chamber's Encyclopaedia, Vol. XII (1950), 670.

means either rationally or irrationally to achieve ends."² "Means" include own skills, physical resources, material instruments, and the actions of others.³ The ends pursued by collective and individual activity of the social agents are governed by standards or rules which are culturally defined.

The American culture is strongly affected by its belief in individualism which holds that the individual has a right to the optimum opportunity to develop his potential in society and he has a responsibility to make a maximum contribution in society. This tenet is intrinsically expressed in the concept of the well being of society as a whole, that is to say, the well being of society is dependent upon the well being of its individual members and conversely. In view of this ethos, collective and individual activity of social agents must comprehend the totality of individual need.

A culture which requires such a comprehensive coverage of individual need necessarily requires the organization of services provided by the agents in response to need so that there is availability of service to need. A breakdown in an agent's service requires a compensatory scheme which will give temporary service to maintain and eventually re-establish the equilibrium of service to need. This is in keeping with our earlier statement regarding the homeostatic condition of society. Our society, then, requires an agent designed to carry out this particular function. It is our contention that social work is this agent and that it "functions as an organized system of activities through which individuals are helped to utilize other institutions' services."⁴

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Helen Leland Witmer, Social Work: An Analysis of a Social Institution (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1942), p. 121.

Witmer, applying Malinowski's definition of a social institution as "a system of concerted activities carried on by an organized, specifically designated group of people operating under a charter in accordance with rules and norms and by means of material apparatus,"⁵ indicates that Social Work is a social institution in that it embodies the essential criteria: activities, personnel a charter and norms, and material apparatus. However, Social Work differs from other social institutions in several respects and as we shall see these differences effect the organizational structure of this institution.

This dissertation is concerned in particular with the way in which Social Work differs from the family as an institution and the way in which it is related to the family due to its function in the compensatory scheme. The following discussion regarding Social Work and other institutions undertakes to enlighten this in particular.

In origin, Social Work differs from family. Sumner divides institutions into two types: the "crescive" institution, "the fruitage of instinctive efforts finally taking form in a conventional social pattern;" and the enacted institution, "a deliberate creation of rational invention and intention."⁶ We see the family then as a crescive or "natural" institution arising unconsciously in direct response to instinctual needs, whereas Social Work is seen as an "enacted" or "artificial" institution consciously created to ensure the equilibrium peculiar to our culture which demands the well being of the whole.

It follows that Social Work was developed out of our society's concern for the well being of the individual, and that its activity will be

⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁶Ernest R. Groves, Social Problems of the Family (Philedelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927), p. 8.

directed toward this end. For this reason, the definition of an institution as "a group of persons organized according to cultural principles to carry on activities which fulfil certain of their basic individual and social needs" is readily applicable to the institution of family but not to the institution of Social Work. Social Work is not organized to serve the individual and social needs of persons who are members of the institutional personnel; rather Social Work functions to meet the needs of its clientele.

"Both for their own good and for the stability and continuity of society, individuals must be able to participate in and make use of the organized groups through which human needs are met."⁷ Although this remark is ethnocentric, it points out how it can be said that Social Work serves, at the same time, the well being of the individual and of society. To do this, Social Work functions in a manner that "gives assistance to individuals in overcoming the difficulties that stand in the way of their playing their expected roles in organized groups or in making use of these groups' services."⁸ In effecting this function, the operation of Social Work is two directional, including both the individual's adjustment to his cultural milieu and the accommodation of this environment to the needs of the individual so as to be comprehensive of the total situation. In this way Social Work effects the balance between needs and services.

Further, under various circumstances, social institutions do not adequately fulfil their functions for individuals.⁹ Where institutions do break down and their function is disrupted, Social Work functions to

⁷Witmer, op. cit., p. 85.

⁸Ibid., p. 121.

⁹Ibid., p. 120.

provide temporary services while it attempts to re-establish the balance of need and service either by repairing the damaged institution or drawing on other community resources to provide a substitute. In each instance, it acts as an enabler, drawing upon the resources of other institutions.

Social Work implements its function through the specialized areas of operation, or methods: casework, group work, and community organization. These are not intended to represent the total methodology of Social Work but rather they constitute "the generally accepted essential aspects of Social Work activity."¹⁰ Social reform, social action, preventative and education work, and public welfare administration are more disputable areas and will not receive our concentrated attention.

Casework has been historically and practically an exclusive Social Work term. It forms the basis for modern day Social Work. "Social Casework is an art in which knowledge of the science of human relations and skill in relationship are used to mobilize capacities in the individual and resources in the community appropriate for better adjustment between the client and any part of his total environment."¹¹ In citing this quotation, we do not intend to deny the contraversiality regarding definitions of casework but rather wish to indicate that the casework approach is carried out on the basis of individual relationship and is a joint undertaking in which the client can and must actively engage.¹² Although

¹⁰Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹Swithun Bowers, "The Nature and Definition of Social Casework," Principles and Techniques In Social Casework, ed. Cora Kasius (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1950), p. 127.

¹²Helen Harris Perlman, Social Casework: A Problem Solving Process (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 63.

the casework approach is situationally or psychosocially orientated, the focus of casework is the growth of the individual client. "Caseworkers aim to help their clients behave more happily and effectively - relative to their previous functioning - rather than to have them fit some idealistic pattern of static perfection."¹³

Usually Casework operates through structured organizations geared to effect the casework goal. Such organizations are termed "casework agencies" and are referred to by professional caseworkers as "primary setting." These agencies may be distinguished by the area of need, by the function to which they have chosen to relate. The efficacy of casework has been recognized by other social institutions. There has been an increasing trend by these institutions to incorporate casework as a part of their organization and personnel to implement their need meeting function. Professional caseworkers term this setting "secondary." The function of implementing that for which the "primary" or "secondary" organization stands, "has long been casework's."¹⁴

Social Group Work "revolves around the recognition of the importance of opportunity to develop the capacity for interpersonal relationship in a wide variety of groups."¹⁵ Group Work functions as a transmitter of culture and of knowledge and as an enabler to institutions in serving individuals and to individuals to help develop their potential group functioning. Since society was created to satisfy human need, one must live

¹³J. M. Hunt and L. S. Kogan, Measuring Results in Social Casework: A Manual for Judging Movement (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1950), p. 7.

¹⁴Perlman, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁵Arthur E. Fink, Everett E. Wilson, and Merrill B. Conover, The Field of Social Work (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955), p. 500.

within society to satisfy his wants. This social living implies social experience which group work provides under the supervision of a trained leader who, through his sensitive understanding of groups and individuals and his skills, can adapt the group situation to the individual or can use it constructively to help the individual and to further the group. The leader helps the individual to understand the function of the group and his role in the group so that he can more fully live up to the value system of the group. Thus, the aim of Group Work is that of getting the individual to function more adequately in the group. To emphasize the importance of this, we reiterate an earlier quotation: "both for their own good and for the stability of society, individuals must be able to participate in and make use of the organized groups through which human needs are met."¹⁶ Group Work is one method of Social Work to achieve this end. A second aim of Group Work arises as a corollary. As group members are helped to realize their potential group functioning, the group also will be able to consolidate and to function more adequately as a whole.

"Community Organization in its simplest sense is concerned with meeting the needs of the individuals and groups who compose the community."¹⁷ We have previously indicated that our culture requires comprehensive coverage of need and have outlined the compensatory role of Social Work where needs are not adequately met. Social Work, then, carries the responsibility of assessing need and availability of service to meet need. Community Organization carries out this function and helps the community towards an improved balance of service and need. In doing this, Community Organiza-

¹⁶"Above, p. 24"

¹⁷Fink, op. cit., p. 547.

tion operates on two levels; the inter-group level, and the grass roots level. Inter-group level of operation includes activities directed towards the provision, maintenance and coordination and cooperation of facilities through which Social Work services are rendered. Also, where other service of institutions overlap with Social Work service, Community Organization gives attention to cooperation and coordination of service. In the grass roots level of operation, the Community Organization Worker works directly with the members of the community enabling them to recognize their needs, to appraise their services and to mobilize towards a solution in keeping with their particular situation.

Social Work is a social agent which functions to ensure the well being of the individual and society. Social work differs from other social agents in that its activity begins where the activity of other social agents ceases. It is a part of the compensatory scheme of our society. Where an agent's function is disrupted, social work operates to provide a substitute and to restore the agent to its proper functioning thus to ensure the satisfaction of the individual want. Witmer expresses this as follows:

The prime function of Social work is to give assistance to individuals in regard to the difficulties they encounter in their use of an organized group's services or in their own performance as a member of an organized group. By this work not only are individuals aided but the adequate functioning of social institutions themselves is facilitated and human needs are thereby more effectively met. In a sense, then, social work is an institution that serves other institutions.¹⁸

¹⁸Witmer, op. cit., p. 121.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF DESERTION

"Family life, an adventure in adjustment in partnership, means the reconciliation of possible clashing interests in a mutual understanding. And so any stress or strain in the general social structure reacts at once upon it".¹ To accommodate the economic means of the single breadwinner and to support the intense relationship required of family function the present family has been reduced in size. With fewer children, marriage partners have fewer responsibilities and therefore can focus more on their own satisfactions. Further, the family has undergone a reallocation of function as certain areas formerly within their competence such as medicine, education, recreation and protection became specialized features of the Community and were established as social institutions. This again served to intensify the focus on the relationship of marriage partners. In addition, marriage partners began to demand more from this relationship. "Individuals in mobile society make much greater demands on marriage and on the marriage partner than ever before. Man longs for love, emotional security and finds the single outlet of marriage for it. If his marriage fails to give him this intimacy, it is bankrupt."² Hence dissolution of marriage is increasing in

¹"The Problem of Family Desertion," Canadian Welfare, January 1941, p. 27.

²Paul H. Landis, "The Changing Family," Readings in Marriage and the Family, ed. Judson T. Landis, Mary G. Landis (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 31.

frequency.

The form in which a partner chooses to dissolve his or her marriage and thus precipitate family breakdown depends on conditions such as education, economic means etc., which will dictate what the individual sees as a solution to his family problems. Dissolution of the marriage partnership precipitates family breakdown in that it disrupts family functioning. "Whenever we distinguish some factor that is introduced from outside or emerges from within so that it evokes a series of repercussions or reactions significantly changing the total situation, we call such a factor a precipitant."³ The forms of family breakdown (legal separation, divorce, death and desertion) may be termed precipitants in that they disrupt a pre-existing equilibrium of the family system.

"In order to distinguish the form of breakdown," it is necessary to explicate what are the "symptoms and sequelae of breakdown in the marital relationship."⁴ "Neither desertion or divorce actually cause the problem family. These forms of disruption are merely the informal or formal recognition of a situation existing long before the break occurs."⁵ These conflicts that precede the form may be said to cause the breakdown. Since they precede the breakdown they cannot be included in the constellation of problems arising out of the breakdown. For example, the causes of desertion may not be referred to as desertion problems for, if they

³R. M. MacIver, Social Causation (New York: Ginn and Company 1942), p. 163.

⁴Ibid., p. 154.

⁵Andrew G. Truxal, Francis E. Merrill, The Family in American Culture (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1947), p. 633.

could have been treated in their own right, desertion would not have occurred. However, an interest in the prevention of breakdown must comprehend these conflicts.

"The different ways in which the family is broken evoke different definitions depending on the real or putative threat to Social values."⁶ There are four forms of family breakdown which all involve the apartness of one marriage partner - death, divorce, legal separation and desertion. In death, the apartness is not intentional, financial provisions are usually present and the remaining partner is legally free to remarry. In divorce the apartness is mutually agreed to by both partners, is formally sanctioned by law, necessary financial adjustments are provided for and the partners are legally free to remarry. Legal separation includes the conditions of divorce except that the marriage is not dissolved and, although the partners must live apart, they cannot remarry. Desertion offers the greatest threat to social values in that the apartness does not rest on the agreement but on the decision of one partner alone. Financial provision is not made and the partners are not free to remarry and the deserter must conceal his or her whereabouts which further frustrates any solution. We are speaking here about desertion where it occurs in marriage partnerships that have the sanction and protection of civil and religious authorities. We suggest that to consider common-law desertions, the conditions differentiating marriage and common-law partnership should be clearly understood. We have said earlier that common-law unions, insofar as they include the peculiar combination of sexual and economic function, may be termed marriage. However, they are different in that they lack the formal recognition of society. There is no formal contract that

⁶Ibid., p. 631.

must be dissolved.

Desertion then is a solution to family problems. Unlike other solutions which involve separation of marital partners, desertion involves all of the following: the partners do not agree to separate, there is no financial provision, the partners are not legally free to establish another union and the deserting partner must conceal his or her whereabouts.

It has been pointed out that the current affectional family is small in size and places a great deal of emphasis on the emotional satisfactions of the individual members. Further to this, breakdown is more likely to occur when the emotional satisfactions of the members are interfered with, especially when the form of the breakdown enables the members to continue their quest for emotional satisfactions. As the demands on relationship require individual compatibility in a partner, experimentation in the form of remarriage can be expected. Although divorce can be understood in this regard, we find desertion inconsistent with this thinking in several respects. Since the marriage is not formally dissolved, desertion does not provide for remarriage. Further, this experimentation implies that the partners agree to sever their partnership. Such is not the case in desertion, rather it rests on the decision of one partner. In other words desertion does not effect a mutual solution, rather it provides an avenue of escape for one partner and the problems around which desertion centers are not the kind of problems that separation will solve - for example, poor housing, poor health, inadequate income, excessive responsibilities. We would suspect then that the type of family most susceptible to desertion is not the modern "romantic family" but rather the "large economic" family attempting to

function in the cultural milieu which has produced the "romantic family."

It would seem that desertion occurs where the responsibilities placed on the individual exceed his available resources to the extent that desertion appears to him as his only recourse.⁷ The traditional economic family functioning in the modern industrial milieu of the romantic family would be susceptible to this imbalance. Economically the traditional family is production centered whereas the milieu demands that the family be a consuming unit rather than a producing unit. A large family then does not mean more production but greater consumption and, therefore, greater stress on the means of the family. Contemporary individualism places responsibility for "successful living" on the individual rather than on the family unit and particularly the success of the family is the responsibility of the individual breadwinner. In order that the family can concentrate on its new functions, many of its former functions have been allocated to other institutions. The traditional family, however, is geared to self sufficiency which may interfere with the use of outside institutions. "Stability has been the great value exemplified by the traditional family and expected of it by society. This was true because the family was the basic institution in a static society. American society is not static but dynamic. The virtue of its institutions therefore is adaptability to a rapid tempo of change."⁸

It follows from this discussion that, since the attitudes of the economic family are in conflict with the social milieu in urban society to a greater extent than in rural society, desertion is likely to be

⁷"The Problem of Family Desertion," Canadian Welfare, January 1941, p. 27.

⁸Ernest W. Burgess, "The Family in a Changing Society" Readings in Marriage and the Family, ed. Judson T. Landis, Mary G. Landis (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 25.

more frequent in urban than in rural centers. Furthermore, we would expect that, since desertion is an escape from responsibility and since the role of breadwinner assumes the responsibility for the success of the family unit, males are likely to be more frequent deserters. This discussion would also indicate that desertion will occur most often in those families showing the characteristics and attitudes of the traditional family type. Although "most families today especially in the middle class have a mixture of the attitudes of the institutional family and the romantic family types",⁹ there is reason to believe that families in the lower economic strata are most emphatically traditional in attitude, the families in upper economic strata are more romantic in attitude. One could infer that desertion then would be more common in the lower stratas and divorce in the upper. The cost of divorce, if it does not imply that it is the property of the rich, does indicate that such a solution is beyond the means of the lower socio-economic groups. One would also suspect that cultural conflict similar to that of the lower economic strata experience would appear in immigrant groups. Not so much in the original family that brings its own cultural patterns to the new society but most likely in the first generation family who experience cultural marginality.

In essence, desertion is a form of family breakdown resulting from stresses arising from within the family unit or from a situation external to the family unit. It involves apartness and unlike other forms of family breakdown involving apartness, desertion represents a solution for only one partner. There is no agreement between partners to live apart. The deserting partner merely flees his share of responsibilities leaving his or her partner with even a greater burden of responsibility. Because

⁹Landis, op. cit., p. 29.

desertion is not a mutual agreement it poses new obstacles to family functioning. It precludes provision for financial support and decision around the marital contract.

The question as to court action taken by the deserted party to obtain a financial agreement may be raised in this regard. We maintain, however, that such an agreement is forced upon the deserting partner and contradicts his wilful intent. Hence the disagreement intrinsic in the desertion situation is still active.

Insofar as desertion is described in most societies, and certainly in this community, as an offence under the law, wilfulness is necessarily an essential element in the legal definition. That is to say that the individual who deserts must so intend of his own free will. However, the function of Social Work does not require that it take cognizance of this element. The problems precipitated by desertion are present regardless of the intention of the deserter. What is important to social work is who remains in the home. As has been pointed out before, it is also important to social work to understand that the intent to separate is on the part of one partner only. Another feature used as a criterion in determining a desertion situation is the duration of desertion.

We have said previously that the deserter is running away from an intolerable situation. However, desertion is rarely permanent. "Family desertion is a means by which the deserter gains a holiday, a release from a situation which has become unbearable; but he or she has little and often no intention of either leaving his or her family permanently."¹⁰

¹⁰Frank John Bruno, The Theory of Social Work (New York: D. C. Heath Co., 1936), p. 307.

It may be for this reason that the deserter makes no definite arrangements as to finances or marital status but in the same manner he leaves equally indefinite the duration of his "holiday" and even whether he will return. To the deserted party the abrupt departure of spouse cannot be conceived of in terms of a "holiday" and carries with it the threat of permanent withdrawal. For this reason duration of desertion cannot be considered a valid criterion for a definition.

In view of the foregoing discussion, we propose the following definition of desertion as appropriate to social work's consideration of desertion. Desertion can be defined for Social Work as a form of family breakdown which involves the decision of one partner to be apart from his or her marriage partner and/or family without wilful agreement as to the financial provision or as to marital status regardless of duration.

It has previously been pointed out that where institutions breakdown and their function is disrupted social work operates to provide temporary services while it attempts to re-establish the balance of need and service either by repairing the damaged institution or by drawing upon other community resources to provide a substitute. It remains to clarify social work's interest in desertion as it precipitates a breakdown in the function of the institution of the family.

In an earlier chapter we noted the functions of the family to be: sexual, as it includes physical, emotional and social aspects of the sexual relationship; economic; reproductive; child rearing; and affectional. By viewing desertion as a precipitant, it can be seen that the apartness, lack of economic provision and indecision around marital status implicit in the nature of desertion will disrupt the above functions. Insofar as Social Work is a need meeting institution, our understanding of

the relationship between social work and desertion should derive from ascertaining the needs that arise from the disruptions of the family function precipitated by desertion. The succeeding chapter, therefore, attempts to translate disruption of function into the needs emerging as a result.

In addition the succeeding chapter will deal with the aspects of social work functioning as outlined in chapter three: that is its concern where an institution breaks down and temporary service is required in response to resulting needs and its concern for effective functioning of institutions and its activity to repair and restore the efficiency of an institution service in meeting individual need.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL WORK'S ACTIVITY IN RESPONSE TO THE EFFECTS OF DESERTION

It has previously been pointed out that the ethos of our culture requires the well being of the individual in order that the whole of society may enjoy well being and also conversely. The concept of well being or social welfare may therefore be applied to the individual or to society. The interdependency of well being for individual and society implies rights and obligations on either side. In order that the individual can contribute to the well being of the whole it is necessary that his needs are met so that he can mobilize himself to this end. Society has the obligation not only to the individual but to itself to function so as to ensure the well being of the individual. It is our purpose in this chapter to see how the well being of the individual is affected when the resources are not properly available. Well being involves the gratification of basic needs broadly categorized as physical, social and emotional.

The preceding chapters have shown that the family and social work are two social agents concerned with society's obligation to meeting individual needs. Whereas desertion in the framework of family functioning disrupts service to individuals, in the context of social work it initiates service. This we note is in keeping with our original hypothesis. In both instances desertion is a precipitant. In the family it precipitates a situation wherein the social agent is unable to perform its need meeting function; whereas in social work it precipitates a

situation in which the social agent is motivated to commence its compensatory function. As family function is disrupted needs arise and social work responds to these needs. It remains to explicate the particular way that desertion disrupts family function and to translate these disruptions into needs. It should be noted again that the aforementioned needs will not include all of the needs in the desertion situation insofar as the desertion situation was precipitated by certain needs. However, these needs result from that particular form of family breakdown called desertion. That is, the needs that are of interest to this paper are those needs that arise out of the elements of desertion namely apartness and lack of agreement, particularly around economic cooperation and marital status.

We noted the functions of marriage upon which the other family functions are superimposed as being sexual and economic. Desertion, then will effect the roles of husband and wife. The sexual function requires that marital partners cohabit, the desertion situation precludes cohabitation and so the sexual relationship. The biological sex drives of the two individuals is therefore frustrated and requires an adjustment. Marital status being unsettled in desertion this adjustment is not directly available within cultural limits. Further, the intimate relationship stressed in marriage in our culture is denied. The fact that desertion is the choice of one partner and not an agreed upon situation makes desertion a more traumatic experience than other forms of breakdown and, in fact, desertion may incur in the partners a sense of failure, bitterness or guilt and worthlessness, which may interfere with the individuals seeking a more satisfactory relationship either through reconciliation or through remarriage if marital status could

be worked out. Desertion may also affect the social life of the partners in that marriage partners tend to associate with married couples and so may lose their acceptance in the group. In addition desertion is socially disapproved and the stigma may effect the individual's community status.

Desertion also effects economic cooperation in marriage not only because of the apartness involved but also because there is no agreement as to the provision for economic cooperation. However, today with employment opportunities available to both partners the role of homemaker and breadwinner in marriage are not as clearly defined. Hence breakdown of economic cooperation will not be so serious in its effect upon the individuals and society.

In marriages where there are no children desertion effects the well being of the individual partner insofar as there is physical, emotional, and social need. The needs arising will be, in fact, similar whether the partner is regarded as the deserted or the deserting. Social work's contact with these individuals will be mainly in the area of emotional and social need. The physical needs are sexual, which social work cannot meet and economic which social work can meet. The current pattern of economic cooperation in marriage permits both partners to be gainfully employed. This seems to suggest that social work will not be required to meet economic needs as extensively as it would if, for instance, the wife were entirely dependent on the husband's income. Social work's primary concern with the marriage partner then will be casework centered, helping the individual adjust to the trauma situation and work toward a solution. Groupwork may be involved in meeting some of the social needs described. In addition social work's contact with the marriage partner

will be basically the same whether the partner is the deserting or deserted partner.

We earlier noted reproduction as being one of the functions of family in response to the individual's and society's need for children. Although this function is disrupted by desertion it is obvious that social work can have little to do with the reproduction function per se. However, social work may enter into the realm of reproduction in situations where pregnant females are deserted. Service in the form of medical care, care for other children in the home while mother is in hospital, financial help and casework services are all part of social work's concern.

Wilfulness as mentioned earlier is not an important social work consideration in desertion but rather who remains with the children, mother or father. In considering the constellation of spouse and children separate from spouse alone, we do not wish to imply that the problems discussed for spouses are no longer active. They may in fact have a profound effect on the manner in which they carry their respective roles in the home with their children. Just as functions of family are superimposed upon marriage, problems of marriage carry over into family life. Further, since desertion is a solution for one partner the problems that the one partner runs away from remain for the other partner to cope with. The problems that desertion introduce are projected into an already burdened situation.

Although the mother may have worked to supplement the income of her family she must now assume total financial responsibility for herself and the children. Desertion makes no provision for her husband to share in this responsibility. The mother must become both the breadwinner and the homemaker and is unable to apportion her time or energy effectively to either job. In addition the responsibilities of child rearing which

were formerly shared with her husband fall heavily on her shoulders. She must be both mother and father. Individual solution of this situation is highly improbable. Mother could find employment and administer the home. However, it is doubtful that she would be able to earn as much as her husband, except in exceptional circumstances and with less time for household management it would be difficult for her to run the home as economically. She would be faced then with a decrease of income to the home and increased demands on her income. She could further attempt to care for the children but her time and energy would be very limited and the father role would not be complete. The nuance of father figure, male identification would be completely absent. To add to the improbability of the picture, mother has her own personal problems which may cripple her functioning.

The first obvious need is physical in that there is a decrease in income to the home or even a complete absence of income. In order to meet this need, social work must rely on the resources of public assistance. Ideally, financial assistance would be used as a part of the treatment plan in helping the mother to mobilize in the direction of a solution individually suited to her needs. However, due to the limits imposed on the mother's time and energies as she carries out her now dual obligations, temporary assistance may realistically become long term, continuing, in fact, until the children are able to support themselves (witness Mothers' Allowance). Financial assistance, first seen as a means to a solution, becomes realistically, the solution itself.

In considering this, the question of social need and standard of assistance becomes apparent. Assistance should be such that the financial means of the family will allow the members to participate normally

in all areas of community life, recreation and religion for example. It nevertheless can be expected that the family will experience a change in their standard of living which will necessitate a degree of adjustment.

As a parent, mother also has an obligation to educate her children. Although this function is no longer the literal function of the family, the specialization "education" having assumed this role, the family, the parents, are nevertheless expected to support and provide for their children while they attend schools. Public assistance should comprehend this need.

It may be possible for mother to supplement the family income but this should be required only insofar as it does not effect her functioning in her primary roles of homemaker and mother. We stress this point not only in consideration of the parental responsibility to give guidance and training to her children but also in consideration of the economic fact that, if the mother does not have the proper time for household management, she cannot perform this function as economically and hence the purpose of a supplemental income will be defeated. However, in order that mother does not become dependent on assistance of this type and so that her self determination and her independent strivings are respected and given expression, we suggest that mother be given the opportunity to find employment in the home through opportunities to develop her capabilities or to find employment outside the home through provision of babysitter or homemaker services. Further, employment would serve to introduce her to a new social set, would allow her contacts outside her own home, and would prepare her for the date when her children reach the age where the family is no longer eligible for assistance (as is the case with Mothers' Allowance).

Beyond the physical and social needs of the family, there are also emotional needs of the family and more specifically the mother. Reference was made previously to the trauma involved in the desertion situation. These feelings will carry over to the family situation and may become attitudes, consciously or unconsciously inflicted on the children. Further, in the normal strain of family responsibility, mother lacks the warm reward and supporting partnership of the intimate relationship with her spouse. The social work approach must recognize these needs through the media of casework in order that the mother can be helped to mobilize towards some individually satisfying solution.

The situation in which father is left with the children represents, to some extent, the reverse problematic picture in that he normally carries roles which are complementary to mother. As breadwinner, he is not affected financially in the same manner. Desertion does not mean for him the loss of a breadwinner but rather faces him with the relatively new roles of homemaker and mother. The care of children, the preparation of meals, the various necessary household tasks are added responsibilities for him. They may be somewhat foreign to him and, in fact, threatening to him. They may interfere with his leisure time activities and may not coordinate readily with his employment.

Recalling our previous discussion of family, these responsibilities will be received with individual difference depending ^{on the} defined role the father assumed in the previous family constellation. Disregarding the variations of personalities effective within the two types of family, we can speak generally of the father role in the traditional and in the romantic family. In the traditional family where the father role is authoritarian and set apart from the role of mother and more clearly de-

defined, duties imposed on father will involve a more difficult adjustment than will the same duties in the romantic family where the roles are not as clearly defined and sharing is more pervasive. It should be noted here that we previously suggested that most desertions will occur in the traditional type family in the urban setting.

In view of the foregoing, social work activity with the deserted father will center around service to allow him to continue his employment and at the same time assure the functions normally carried out by mother. Homemaker service, day nursery care and temporary or permanent foster home care will be prominent in this service required of social work. Whereas the mother will appear more frequently at public assistance agencies, the father will enroll more frequently for service from child caring agencies, such as the Children's Aid Societies. Advice to the father regarding the activities that he may have to assume is indicated as well as casework to attend the emotional needs of the husband.

Insofar as social work functions to re-establish as well as provide temporary substitutions for social institutions, reconciliation, the focus of family agencies and courts, must therefore be of paramount interest and concern of social work activity in desertion situations. In working towards reconciliation, social work must recognize the circumstances that precipitate the activity of desertion not only to establish a reconciled situation but also to maintain it. In dealing with these circumstances the activity of social work will be the same sort of activity that would be employed in attempting to prevent desertion. The pressures associated with the desertion situation must be eased. The difference between reconciliation and prevention is that in reconciliation the act of desertion has occurred and the complications effected

make a solution more difficult. This disagreement implicit in desertion and the necessity of the deserting party to absent himself in order to maintain the desertion indicates that by its very nature desertion is improbable of reconciliation. However, the problems^{of} desertion are solvable if agreement can be reached as to financial cooperation and marital status or if the partners can be brought together. The former is usually a forced agreement and, although some of the elements of desertion are rectified, the comprehensive solution hoped of the latter can not be expected.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to clarify the meaning of the definition of desertion for social work research. The hypothesis on which the study was based stated that the term desertion acquires a peculiar connotation when set in the social work context. By viewing desertion as a form of family breakdown, disrupting family functioning, we were able to derive a definition of desertion applicable in the context of social work. This definition appears in chapter four. Further, our hypothesis was found valid in that it was seen that desertion carried different connotations depending on its frame of reference. To the deserting partner desertion had meaning as a purposive act in which he or she escaped from an intolerable stress situation. On the other hand to the deserted party desertion was not a solution but only contributed to the burdens of the family situation, piling problems associated with the desertion on the already present problems. Social work as a need meeting institution was seen to view desertion not as a problem per se but as a situation encompassing a constellation of unmet needs requiring its services. Finally society viewed desertion as a threat to its own well being as well as to the individuals and expressed its concern through legal prohibitions and prescriptions.

In attempting to be more explicit as to these meanings we applied our definition so as to expose the needs precipitated by desertion and

the services appropriate to their gratification. However, we found our application, and so verification of our hypothesis, limited by the ethnocentricity of our approach. It seemed inevitable that our material and our reflections upon it implied a middle class bias. Our finding on the other hand evidenced desertion to be a lower socio-economic class phenomenon. It may be that the so called lower class fosters a sub culture which supports a family structure in which desertion plays a definite and accepted role. We found in our study of family that the lower class tends to maintain a form of family known as "traditional," however we were unable to determine how this form of family operates for this class of people to merit its preservation. Rather we judged it out of step with present day society and did so by projecting middle class attitudes or standards. In short, we could not actually determine what desertion meant to this group, what needs would arise and hence what services would be required of social work. However, we suggest that our thinking is valid in principle but that more study in this area is required.

Another area of consideration in desertion not included in the scope of our study is causation. Causes of desertion were not of importance to us in considering a definition. They are associated with desertion in retrospect to the activity of desertion. Prior to desertion they exist as problems in their own right quite apart and may or may not precipitate a desertion situation. However, in considering the operation of social work in regard to desertion, causes should be noted again with the suggestion for further study. Since desertion does not represent a solution for the deserted party, the stresses leading up to the desertion will remain for the deserted party to cope with. Hence, in dealing with the desertion situation, social work will respond not only to the problems resulting

from desertion but also to the residue of problems causing desertion. Further to understand the pressure of responsibility culminating in desertion, it is necessary to take into account the totality of the individual situation - the internal conflicts affecting his ability to cope and the external pressures presented by his environment. The situational approach of social work is perhaps best suited to this understanding.

It is evident that if these problems were intrinsic in the family situation prior to desertion and in fact caused the desertion Social Work could have dealt with them prior to desertion and hence avoided the desertion situation. Our conclusion regarding treatment of desertion is therefore paradoxical. The most effective method of dealing with desertion is prevention. This means that to deal successfully with desertion is not to deal with desertion as such but rather to deal adequately with the precipitating problems to prevent the desertion situation. In so doing, the problems intrinsic in the desertion situation are avoided. Further, by thus avoiding the complications of desertion, the causative problems could have been more easily remedied.

For example adequate public assistance that would ensure a minimum standard of health and decency might mean that a partner would be relieved of various pressures for which he chooses as his solution to flee this burdensome situation leaving the deserted family to the care of an assistance programme. To keep the family together so as to ensure the institutional well being by raising the standard of public assistance, should this be necessary, might not seem economically feasible. However, the cost of supporting the family where the breadwinner is present is less costly than where he is not. The breadwinner may make some contribution to the minimum standard of living of the family unit. Further, his pre-

sence means that the intent of temporary assistance is more likely to be achieved. The cost of supporting a total family over a period of rehabilitation is infinitely less than the cost of supporting a mother and her children until the children grow up. That deserted families require a long term period of assistance is evidenced by the provincial government's policy of relieving municipalities of desertion care after a four year period. In citing this example we have assumed a male deserted. This is in keeping with our earlier statement that financial need is most apparent in situations where the male partner deserts and that the service required of social work is financial assistance.

Desertion then means more to social work than a constellation of needs requiring service, an institution in need of repair. Since proper service of need would prevent desertion it follows that the incidence of desertion gives indication of the adequacy of service. The importance of the method of community organization particularly at the intra group level becomes apparent. Social work should assure that pressure situations which may culminate in desertion do not result from unmet need due to a lack or an inadequacy of service.

Research in the field of Social Work is motivated by practical problems encountered in its operational experience. It is relatively easy to design a research programme to answer the questions posed by the problem. However, all social work research must be related to the function of social work. Unless research is conducted within the conceptual framework of social work there is no criteria to determine whether the questions asked or the answers obtained are pertinent to the field. In this study we have attempted to relate family desertion to the function of social work. We feel that in doing so we have provided a conceptual framework within which

desertion studies may be organized and understood. In addition, we suggest that we have demonstrated in principle that a preliminary exploration of the relationship of social work to a problematic situation under study is a necessary prerequisite to any research in the field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Anshen, Ruth N. The Family: Its Function and Destiny. New York: Harper Bros., 1949.
- Becker, Howard and Hill, Reuben. Marriage and the Family. Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1942.
- Bennett, John W. and Tumin, Melvin M. Social Life: Structure and Function. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949.
- Bruno, Frank J. The Theory of Social Work. New York: D.C. Heath and Co., 1936.
- English, S. O. and Pearson, G. H. S. The Emotional Problems of Living. New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1955.
- Faris, R. E. L. Social Disorganization. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948.
- Fink, A. E., Wilson, E. E. and Conover, M. B. The Field of Social Work. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1955.
- Flügel, J. C. The Psychoanalytic Study of The Family. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1950.
- Gordon, Henrietta. Casework Services for Children. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956.
- Groves, E. R. The Family and its Social Functions. New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1940.
- Groves, E. R. Social Problems of the Family. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1927.
- Harper, P. N. Problems of the Family. Indianapolis: The Babbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1952.
- Hill, Reuben. Family Under Stress. New York: Harper and Bros., 1949.
- Hunt, J. M. and Kogan, L. S. Measuring Results in Social Casework: A Manual for Judging Movement. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1955.
- Kasius, Cora, ed. Principles and Techniques In Social Casework. New York: Family Service Association of America, 1950.

- Koos, Earl L. Families in Trouble. New York: Kings Crown Press, 1946.
- Landis, J. T. and Landis, Mary G., ed. Readings in Marriage and the Family. New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1952.
- Lee, P. R. Social Work as Cause and Function. New York: Columbia University Press, 1937.
- Lindquist, Ruth. The Family in our Present Social Order. University of North Carolina Press, 1931.
- MacIver, R. M. Social Causation. New York: Ginn and Co., 1942.
- Malinowski, B. A Scientific Theory of Culture and other Essays. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942.
- Mead, Margaret. Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World. New York: Mentor Books, 1957.
- Mowrer, E. R. Family Disorganization: An Introduction to a Social-logical Analysis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927.
- Perlman, Helen H. Social Casework: A Problem Solving Process. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Queen, S. A. and Adams, J. B. The Family in Various Cultures. New York: J. P. Lippincott and Co., 1952.
- Reuter, E. B. and Runner J. The Family: Source Materials for the Study of Family and Personality. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1931.
- Sirjamaki, J. The American Family in the Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1953.
- Sirjamaki, J. The Family in Society. Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1953.
- Spence, J. C. The Purpose of the Family. London: The Epworth Press, 1946.
- Truxal, A. G. and Merril, F. E. The Family in American Culture. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1947.
- Witmer, Helen L. Social Work: The Analysis of an Institution. New York: Rhinehart and Company, 1942.

ARTICLES

- Boswell, Charles H. "Probation in Non-support Cases." National Parole and Probation Year Book, 1952.

- Colcord, Joanna C. "Desertion," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, VI (New York: The McMillan Company, 1935), 78-80.
- "Desertion," Dictionary of Social Welfare, (New York: Social Sciences Publishers Inc., 1948), 60-61.
- "Editorial," Canadian Welfare Council, December, 1954, 2-3.
- Klien, Phillip. "Social Work," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XIV (New York: The McMillan Co., 1935), 78-80.
- Lerner, S. H. "Effects of Desertion on Family Life," Social Casework, January, 1954.
- Perlman, Helen. "Freud's Contribution to Social Welfare," The Social Service Review, June, 1957. 192-202.
- "The Problem of Family Desertion," Canadian Welfare Council, January, 1941.
- Sherman, Corrine. "Racial Factors in Desertion," The Family, October, 1922.
- "Society," Chamber's Encyclopedia, XII (London: George Newnes Ltd., 1950), 670-671.
- "Society," Dictionary of Social Welfare, (New York: Social Sciences Publishers Inc., 1948), 189.
- "Society," The Encyclopedia Americana, XXV (Montreal: American Corporation of Canada Ltd., 1953), 187-191.
- "Society," Grolier Encyclopedia, IX (New York: The Grolier Society Publishers, 1953), 410-411.
- "Social Service," Chamber's Encyclopedia, XII (London: George Newnes Ltd., 1950), 665-670.
- "Social Welfare," The Encyclopedia Americana, XXV (Montreal: American Corporation of Canada Ltd., 1953), 185-186.
- Steigman, Joseph E. "The Deserted Family," Social Casework, January, 1954.
- Taylor, H. B. "Support from Absent Parents in A.D.C.," Public Welfare, April, 1956, 114-119.
- Towle, C. "Economic Aspects of the Re-united Family." Social Service Review, September, 1946.
- "Welfare," Dictionary of Social Welfare, (New York: Social Sciences Publishers Inc., 1948), 214.