

AN EXPLORATION OF SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE PROVISION
OF HOMEMAKER SERVICE TO LOW-INCOME, SOLE-SUPPORT PARENTS

A Thesis

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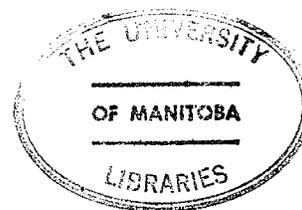
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Penelope Jane Scurfield

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The employment of women in the economic sector of society has become a widely prevalent, if not wholly accepted, phenomenon in recent years. The movement of women into paid employment, begun during the second World War, has been continuous. Today, women occupy fully one-third of the labour force (Labour Canada, Women's Bureau, 1970; 1973; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 1968).

Full participation in the economic sector still, however, remains an objective rather than a reality due to a well-entrenched discrimination against the female sex. The basis for this discrimination is the traditional belief that "a woman's place is in the home". The man, on the other hand, has long been accepted in his role as the breadwinner. While appropriate and necessary for an earlier, extended era in history, this belief is no longer applicable within the context of contemporary living conditions (Labour Canada, Women's Bureau, 1973; Women's Bureau Bulletins, July, 1965; June, 1966; Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development, 1968). That it continues to exert a pervasive influence, however, is evidenced by the reluctance of society to extend to women full human rights in all spheres of life. Examples of overt as well as subtle forms of discrimination on the basis of sex

are not rare in spite of the introduction of new and amended legislation to the contrary. In the absence of an underlying consensus as to their worth, even the best of policies created through legislation are ineffective (Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970; Working Paper on Social Services, Document 117, 1974).

It was the general concern of this study to determine whether or not discrimination against working women extended into the realm of social services. Unequal treatment of women in the economic sector has been well-documented as a salient concern not only of women, but of society as a whole. Little attention, however, has been directed towards a similar problem that may exist within social services designed to assist working parents, both male and female.

The specific intent of this study was to determine whether or not low-income, single-parent females who are members of the labour force are subject to discrimination in the provision of homemaker services. Discrimination is defined as inequality of treatment on the basis of sex. Differences in treatment may be discrete or they may be subtle. Therefore, low-income, sole support parents, both male and female, who are members of the labour force and who requested homemaker service from the Family Bureau of Winnipeg over a twelve-month period, were compared in relation to a number of variables.

The Homemaker Service offered by the Family Bureau of Winnipeg provides an example of a supplementary social

service designed to provide practical assistance to sole support families. The homemaker functions to provide personal care of children within their own homes and to assume responsibility for household maintenance. Therefore, homemaker service contributes to ease the burdens of the sole support parent who must cope with responsibilities of the home, children, and work.

Homemaker Service represents one of a variety of child-care programs and services provided under governmental and/or voluntary auspices. The demand by working parents for such services, however, far exceeds available supply and the lag between the two is increasing (Labour Canada, Women's Bureau, 1970; Canadian Council on Social Development, 1971; 1972; Health and Welfare, 1972). In view of the restricted supply, children of sole support parents are accorded priority within government funded and/or administered child-care services. This priority system acknowledges the reality that, for sole support parents, the choice of whether to stay home or to work is often absent. The available supply of child-care services, however, is still not adequate to meet demands for them by single working parents, let alone the demand which reflects the needs of two-parent families. Consequently, providers of services must themselves establish priorities to determine eligibility for service. Typically, agency policy as well as personnel serve to establish priorities through a host of eligibility requirements, conditions and restrictions. It is entirely possible that the practise of providing homemaker

service to sole support male and female parents is influenced by the exercise of discretion on the part of personnel and that this discretion favours men. It was this question which formed the central theme of this study. A series of hypotheses were formulated in order to test for the presence or absence of unequal treatment of female applicants for service. Data were collected through a review of relevant agency files which were opened over the twelve-month period between November 1, 1973 and October 31, 1974.

The utilization of homemaker service clientele as research subjects allowed for the achievement of two secondary objectives. The first was to establish whether or not homemaker service was perceived as an essential service by consumers. The second objective was to determine consumer preferences as to types and methods of delivery of child care. A series of interviews was conducted with a small sample of single male and female parents who received and did not receive homemaker service. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the opinions, impressions, sentiments, and preferences of consumers regarding these two policy-related issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Homemaker service provides an example of a social policy that has been translated into an operational program within a social welfare organization. In order to understand

this, or any other social service, it is necessary to be aware as to how and why social policy takes the shape it does. A number of leading critics in the field have provided conceptual tools to analyze and evaluate policy within the context of social change. These conceptual tools form the framework within which to evaluate Homemaker service as a supportive and supplementary social service to families with single, working parents.

Social Policy and Social Change

Social policies may be defined as collective decisions or sets of solutions that have been developed over time to meet socially recognized needs not provided through the free market or family system (Rein, 1970; Romanyshyn, 1971; Kahn, 1969). Ideally, they are designed to attack and/or prevent major problems created by economic deprivation, family instability, and a declining sense of community (Romanyshyn, 1971). In reality, however, social policies have been developed in an ad hoc, fragmented manner in response to problems that can no longer be ignored due to their serious economic and social implications.

There are a number of reasons to account for the absence of a planned, rational approach to social policy. First, social policy has always occupied a secondary position to economic policy within government priorities. As a result, social objectives are often interpreted in terms of economic programs and concentration is given to monetary and fiscal policy. Social programs tend to become ends in themselves

rather than means to achieve social objectives.

Secondly, responsibility for the implementation of social policy is assumed by, and between, several levels of government. Within each level of government, the administration of policy is further sub-divided among several departments. The net result is, not unexpectedly, a fragmented, unco-ordinated system of social provisions, programs and services (Saskatchewan Newstart, 1970).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a lack of consensus as to what constitutes a socially recognized need and to what extent society should intervene to meet this need (Romanyshyn, 1971). Social policy relies heavily on values, attitudes and sentiments and perhaps less heavily on knowledge and experience. The task of reconciling a widely disparate range of values and attitudes presents a major dilemma for political decision-makers. The dilemma is compounded by an increasingly rapid rate of change which gives rise to heightened social needs demanding government intervention (Rein, 1970).

Conception of Social Welfare

Two views of social welfare have evolved in conjunction with economic, social, political, and environmental changes in the historical development of industrial societies. Each has a different emphasis and both exert considerable influence on the shape and substance of current social policy.

The residual concepts hold that "social welfare institutions should come into play only when the normal structures

of supply, the family and the market, break down (Wilensky & Lebeau, 1965: p. 138)". The institutional conception "sees social welfare services as normal, first-line functions of modern, industrial society (Wilensky & Lebeau, 1965; p. 138)."

These disparate views of social welfare evolved as society developed through three relatively distinct stages. These include the pre-industrial era (rural agrarianism), nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism, and the complex, interdependent, urbanized, and industrial society that exists today, marked by high mass consumption and an increased awareness of needs requiring collective intervention. (Myrdal (1941)) labels the corresponding stages of social welfare as paternalistic conservative, liberal, and social democratic prevention. Romanyshyn (1971) utilizes the terms charity and corrections, welfare state, and welfare society.

The residual conception of social welfare had its origins in the Elizabethan Poor Law and became firmly established in nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism. The philosophy of charity was appropriate for a society of scarcity bent on developing its powers of economic production (Romanyshyn, 1971). Predominant values of competition, self-help, free enterprise, private property, and economic individualism endorsed government activity in the creation of conditions conducive to economic initiative and the development of a laissez-faire economy. In contrast, welfare expenditures were felt to be a burden on society, being viewed as an impediment to economic growth (Titmuss, 1968). Consequently, soc-

ial welfare provisions were short-term, minimal, and directed towards the recognized poor. Welfare was characterized as "charity to the unfortunates" who were held responsible for their plight by a "benevolent" middle-class. Titmuss describes the system as follows:

The system was redistributive but could function only by operating punitive tests of discrimination, strengthening conceptions of approved and disapproved dependencies, damaging assault of welfare recipients' sense of self-respect and self-determination (Titmuss, 1968, p. 190).

Social welfare policy functioned as a socially divisive form of social control of a minority of people designated as poor due to personal inadequacy. The major underlying premise of social control was achieved or accompanied by the denial of privacy, denial of choice, and loss of self-respect to social welfare recipients.

In sum, the concepts central to a laissez-faire economy were; the acceptance of the inevitability of poverty; an insistence on moral responsibility for destitution; and, an insistence on charity as a proper way to ameliorate the conditions of the poor (Romanyshyn, 1971).

The modern residual approach to social welfare is linked to opportunistic theories of economic growth which hold that the incidence of poverty is declining as increasing prosperity becomes more widely distributed (Pinker, 1971). From this perspective, social welfare policy functions to ensure a minimum level of well-being for those who are temporarily incapable of providing for themselves through the normal institutions of the market and family (Romanyshyn, 1971;

Wilensky & Lebeau, 1965). It is based on a value commitment to a selective form of welfare, utilizing a means-test to ensure efficient allocation of scarce resources. Titmuss (1968) does not deny the validity of selectivity, but argues that some social services should be provided as social rights based on needs of certain categories, groups, and territorial areas and not on the basis of an individual, degrading means test.

The institutional (Titmuss, 1968; Wilensky & Lebeau, 1965) or developmental (Romanyshyn, 1971) concept of social welfare is a twentieth-century phenomenon, created and influenced by rapid social change. The growth of urbanization, automation, and an economy based on high mass consumption have served to heighten the demands made on individuals in society. In the meantime, the traditional supports provided by the extended family and neighbourhood community have all but disappeared. The outcome is an increased demand for supplementary and supportive services to enable individuals and families to carry out their social roles with some competence.

Advocates of the institutional view of social welfare stress that the incidence of poverty has not been reduced in spite of increased affluence. Their claim is that social services must be established as major institutions rather than residual agencies due to the inability of the market to achieve anything remotely related to a just allocation of goods and services in industrial societies (Pinker, 1971). This approach is based on a value commitment to universalistic forms of welfare provisions supplemented where and when

necessary by selective services. As such, it extends beyond the provision of services to the needy to provisions of social services as a matter of right to all citizens in order to ensure an optimal level of well-being and social functioning. Collective responsibility for social welfare provisions, programs and services is endorsed by values of security, equality and humanitarianism.

Kahn's concept of a public social utility derives from the institutional view of social welfare. This is defined as:

a social invention, a resource or facility designed to meet a generally expressed need in social living. It is defined as so vital that the broader community suffers from the result of the deprivation faced by an individual. Because of this the provision is not left to the market economy even though some especially affluent people may continue to resort to the market (Kahn, 1969, p. 178).

Up to a certain level, education in North America provides an example of a public social utility in that it is made available to people in accordance with user option or status. It is felt, by various private and public interest groups that child-care facilities and services should be available on the same basis in view of an increasing demand for them as universal (Romanyshyn, 1971; Labour Canada, Women's Bureau, 1970; Ruderman, 1968; Canadian Council on Social Development, 1971; 1972; Vanier Institute of the Family, 1970; 1971).

It should be emphasized that the residual and institutional views of social welfare represent purely theoretical concepts that have been isolated and elaborated by lead-

ing critics in the field. It is the theorists who most closely identify with, and propound the more "pleasing" institutional view. In reality their conceptual approaches to social welfare are frequently perceived as unacceptable to the North American public due to a strong stream of individualism that runs through the North American value system. The institutional approach does not coincide with the values of individualism, private property, and free enterprise. So, in effect, such policies are not widely popular.

Values are slow to change in relation to the more rapid pace of social change. Social change, on the one hand, has produced rising expectations that require government intervention in order to be satisfied. On the other hand, the underlying conflict in values does not completely endorse collective intervention to meet widely shared rising expectations. One set of values favours redistribution while the other endorses competitive individualism. The different rates of social and value change have produced a value lag that is increasing rather than decreasing.

In contrast to North America, some Northern European and Iron Curtain countries have legislated many of the newly developed institutional approaches to social welfare (Rodgers, 1971). Ensuing problems have led many of these governments to question the wisdom of their choice.¹

1. See press report on election results in Denmark (The Winnipeg Free Press, Jan. 10, 1975).

The vast, complex, fragmented system of social welfare that currently exists in Canada reflects the uneasy co-existence of both the residual and institutional conceptions of social welfare. The prevailing system represents the historical evolution of social welfare from the notion of charity to citizen right, from special programs for the poor to universal provisions, minimal to optimal provisions, individual to social reform, voluntary to public auspices, and from welfare for the poor to a welfare society (Romanyshyn, 1971).

That the social welfare system of today has a long way to progress towards the institutional end of the residual-institutional continuum, however, is pointed out by the Poverty Report. The report states that all systems directed towards the poor are marked by a suspicious paternalism which is demeaning, inadequate, and bureaucratic. It concludes that these systems are punitive in spirit and insufficient to break the cycle of poverty (Report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty in Canada, 1971).

This observation by the Senate Poverty Committee substantiates that the pace of change in economic development and living conditions has not been matched with actual change in the conception of social welfare. The outcome is a situation wherein more and more people have developed new expectations of government only to have them disappointed. In part, too, people have old expectations but new needs. Some uncertainty exists as to whether these needs can be met and by whom.

Social Welfare Organizations

Social service organizations, which deliver services to consumers, are not required to meet the same standards of effectiveness by which other organizations providing goods and services are measured. In addition, social service organizations appear able to avoid removal, retrenchment or replacement. This is largely due to the separation of those who mandate, fund, and define the services from those who make use of them (Scurfield and Ryant, 1975).

This situation within social service organizations is a product of characteristics which serve to differentiate social service organizations from private market enterprises. The implications are significant for policy-making.

First, social welfare organizations do not seek financial profit. Services are delivered, without charge or in accordance with ability-to-pay schedules, to consumers. The primary motive of a private market enterprise, on the other hand, is the pursuit of profit through sales of goods or services.

Secondly, most social welfare organizations occupy a monopoly position with respect to service consumers. Therefore, persons requiring the service are unable to choose among alternatives since they are often unavailable. The private market enterprise, in contrast, operates in a competitive market, at least in theory. A producer is able to judge the popularity of his and competitors' products by volume of sales.