

FOREWORD

In recent years social work has applied itself with increasing earnestness to the task of evaluating its place in the life of modern society. In its pioneer stage it was largely concerned with defining the problems of social pathology and with the promotion of programs for their solution. Increasingly, as such problems were defined, programs have been drafted and organizations financed to promote them. Rapidly a varied professional technique for carrying out social work programs was developed and has been given both recognition and support.

Much pioneering remains to be done. We have arrived at a stage, however, when the critical eye must be turned not only upon conditions which require social work, but also upon the activities themselves, their appropriateness, effectiveness, and relative claims upon the public purse and attention.

An obvious part of this self-analysis is the measurement of demand for social work and of volume of service. Such measurement implies a statistical technique appropriate in two ways: One to serve the measurement of social work within its own field; the other to facilitate comparison with statistics of other public services and with the study of social life as it is reflected through the media of the various social sciences. Social work statistics have not been notably useful for either purpose, and the undertaking upon which the following report is based may be regarded as one of the exploratory steps in the direction of devising and applying methods of measuring social work in a broad perspective. Other studies must follow before the necessary material for this critical self-analysis of social work will be adequate. Some of them will have to be quantitative, others analytical or descriptive.

The selection of the particular area for this study was guided by reasons inherent in the field, as set forth by the

author. The results are especially timely now, when the unprecedented economic depression forces us to look at social work programs anew and to readjust our perspectives to the uncertain economic stability of our communities. The findings of the study may, therefore, have interest not only from the point of view of method which has been its first objective, but also from that of actual findings which happen to cover a period of more than three years, ending in October, 1931.

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