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THE NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

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The diagram on page 8, which compares an estimated growth curve for the social work group with growth curves derived from census figures for various well-established professions, utilizes data prepared by the author for the President's Research Committee on Social Trends. The diagram is adapted from a figure appearing in the Committee's report, *Recent Social Trends*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1933, Vol. I, p. 300.

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IN 1930, for the first time, the federal census of occupations included in its classification a separate category for social workers. This should be a source of satisfaction to the members of this group, for it will add definitely to its prestige. Since the figures thus made available will be widely used to indicate the probable size of the group, it is one purpose of this paper to afford some commentary on their quality. A second purpose is to present data derived from this first country-wide enumeration concerning the relative number of social workers in different parts of the country in comparison with other professional or near-professional groups.

I. QUALITY OF THE CENSUS FIGURES

Credit is due to the American Association of Social Workers for convincing the Bureau of the Census of the practicability of recognizing social workers as a distinct occupational group. It also deserves credit for taking two measures which without doubt materially improved the quality of the enumeration. First, with the assistance of a special committee, a detailed list of types of social-work organizations and of social-work positions in these organizations was prepared for the Census Bureau. The schedules collected in a local census of social-work positions in 1929 by the New York City chapter of the Association, which recorded by title some 4,500 social workers, were combed for this purpose. From this list the Census Bureau selected 76 titles representing social work for inclusion in the Index of Occupations which was used in classifying the 48,829,920 gainful workers found by enumerators in 1930.¹

¹ *Classified Index of Occupations, 15th Census of the United States (1930)*, p. 190.

The Association's second step was to inform social workers throughout the country of the manner in which the occupation data would be collected, and of the importance of having the correct occupation returned for each social worker. To this end forms were distributed to social agencies which individual social workers might fill in and leave at their residences for the census enumerators. When filled in, these forms showed the worker's name, place of employment, and title of position. They also bore in print the information that the position was a social-work position.

This preparation, plus the fact that in editing the occupation returns the Census Bureau had the services of a research worker with experience in the social-work field, increases confidence in the census figures for social workers. The Bureau's definition, however, does not include all positions which might be included in social work, since other occupation categories claim some positions commonly regarded as within the field. The census figures for "social and welfare workers" must, therefore, be recognized as definitely omitting certain parts of the total social-work group, as explained below. Moreover, all the occupation figures must be accepted as considerably less than exact, because of the obvious difficulty of obtaining an accurate record of occupations in a quick population census in which untrained enumerators collect a wide variety of information in hurried interviews with one person in each household. Despite these difficulties, the occupation data can in general be accepted as sufficiently accurate to be highly useful at least, and examination does not reveal ground for believing that the attempted enumeration was less successful for social workers than for most occupations.

The occupation categories most likely to contain social workers in both the 1920 and the 1930 censuses are as shown in Table I. The figures show the total number of persons in these categories. The category "trained nurses," is not listed here, although it includes public health nurses, whose work is closely related to, if not part of, social work. The National Organiza-

tion for Public Health Nursing recorded 11,171 full-time graduate nurses employed in public health nursing in 1924, and 15,865 in 1931.

The intended content of the category "social and welfare workers" may be indicated by the following adaptation of the

TABLE I

1920	1930
Religious, charity and welfare workers..... 41,078	Social and welfare workers. 31,241
Keepers of charitable and penal institutions... 12,884	Religious workers..... 31,290
Probation and truant officers..... 2,679	Keepers of charitable and penal institutions... 15,020
	Probation and truant officers..... 4,270
	County agents, farm demonstrators, etc..... 5,597

list of titles falling under this heading in the Census Bureau's 1930 Index of Occupations:

Any charitable or welfare agency: agent, boys' or girls' worker, case consultant, case supervisor, case worker, cottage assistant, court worker, department supervisor or director, district supervisor, employment secretary, executive secretary, field worker, general secretary, health worker, home finder, house father, house mother, inspector, investigator, personnel supervisor or worker, placement secretary, registrar, research worker, social worker, supervisor, visitor, vocational advisor.

Any Catholic or Jewish charitable or welfare agency: case worker, executive secretary, social worker.

Any children's institution: matron, superintendent.

Children's aid society: agent.

Any health agency: executive secretary, field worker, T.B. worker.

Hospital, clinic or dispensary: case worker, social worker, medical social worker.

Red Cross: secretary, agent, case worker, worker.

Any social settlement: headworker, settlement worker.

Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts: executive, director, scout master.

Boys' or Girls' club: secretary.

Community center: director.

Community chest: manager or official.

Any court: investigator, juvenile court referee.

Playground: director, supervisor, instructor, play leader, playground worker.

Recreation or summer camp: camp director or manager.

Travelers' Aid worker, visiting teacher, director Americanization work, community service worker, psychiatric social worker, recreation director or leader, welfare manager, welfare worker.

Although there are some omissions, this list includes most of the positions which are commonly thought of as belonging in social work. But there are also several positions, such as playground workers, camp directors, or even scout masters, the inclusion of which occasions some doubt. Fortunately these are occupations in which relatively few persons will have been recorded.²

How many social workers in 1930 were classified in the other categories cannot be ascertained, but the question deserves some attention. The Census Bureau intentionally retains in the group "religious workers" certain social-work positions in religious organizations. The following titles under this heading will embrace many genuine social-work positions: Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., any official; Y.M.H.A. and Y.W.H.A., any official; Salvation Army, any official; any church organization, visitor; sister, charity worker; Little Sister of the Poor.

According to the census ruling, all members of the religious sisterhoods who were identified as such by enumerators and who were reported as gainfully occupied were classified as religious workers, unless they were identified also as school-teachers, music-teachers, or nurses. It seems probable that few members of the sisterhoods are included in the figures for social and welfare workers, since in view of the instructions it is unlikely that enumerators would return many as social workers without identifying them also as sisters. Yet a large portion of Catholic social work is performed by sisters, an increasing number of whom have had special training for the work. Rev. Dr. John O'Grady has roughly estimated for me that as many as 8,000 sisters may be regularly employed in Roman Catholic social-work agencies and institutions and that perhaps three-fourths are in what may be regarded as social-work positions. A good many social workers employed by institutional churches and other church organizations may also have been classified as reli-

² With a good many persons these are supplementary occupations, held during part of the year or regularly part-time. Such persons by the census rule are classified according to their principal occupations.

gious rather than social or welfare workers. Thus, all told, a very considerable number of social workers employed under religious auspices may be comprised in the 31,290 religious workers enumerated in 1930.

It seems probable that the category "keepers of charitable and penal institutions" does not include a very large number of social workers, inasmuch as the heads of all children's institutions except day nurseries are classified as social or welfare workers. Were not the superintendents of day nurseries included here, the category might properly be termed "keepers of charitable and penal institutions for adults." It includes the wardens and other officers (but not guards) of jails and prisons, almshouse keepers, overseers of the poor, proprietors or superintendents of hospitals and dispensaries, and the heads of other benevolent institutions or homes for adults.

The category "probation and truant officers" is comprised chiefly of probation and parole officers, who are usually regarded as belonging in social work. The National Probation Association recorded 3,955 regularly appointed probation officers in 1931, and since there are probably several hundred each of parole and truant officers, the census figure, 4,270, for this category in 1930 seems somewhat too small.

Among "county agents, farm demonstrators, etc.," the census includes an important group of rural social workers. They are the county agents working with rural boys' and girls' clubs and the home demonstration agents employed in the agricultural extension services conducted jointly by the federal Department of Agriculture and the state agricultural colleges. They account for perhaps 2,000 of the 5,597 persons in this census group.

Walter M. West, in his estimate of the total number of social workers in the latest issue of the *Social Work Year Book*, has added to the 31,241 persons classified as social and welfare workers by the Census Bureau all of the 4,270 probation and truant officers and 500 keepers of charitable and penal institutions, making "a grand total of approximately 36,000."³ This

³ *Social Work Year Book* (1933), p. 34.

figure does not include public health nurses as social workers, and it makes no allowance for social workers classified by the census as religious workers or as county agents and farm demonstrators. The allowance for social workers among keepers of charitable and penal institutions seems too small. Perhaps a small deduction should be made for school-attendance officers among the "probation and truant officers," as well as for camp directors and playground workers in the social-work category. But social workers under religious auspices and in the agricultural extension service should be added, so that I should estimate the total number of social workers in 1930 as at least 40,000, and perhaps 42,500, without including the 15,000 or 16,000 public health nurses. Of this total, perhaps a quarter are men. The number does not include volunteers in social work. It would be larger in 1933 because of the large increase in the staffs of relief agencies.

It may be noted in passing that the census figures for the two groups "social and welfare workers" and "probation and truant officers" in Massachusetts in 1930 total 2,071, whereas a committee of the Boston chapter of the American Association of Social Workers counted only 1,775 social workers in the state in February, 1932.⁴ The Boston committee regarded its figure as accounting for more than 90 per cent of "those reasonably entitled to be included as social workers." If allowance is made for possible incompleteness of 10 per cent, the committee's total for the state would be 1,970 in 1932, but there was undoubtedly increase in the number of social-work positions between 1930 and 1932.

The census of the New York City chapter of the Association gave 4,502 as the approximate number of full-time social-work positions in New York City and Westchester County in 1929.⁵ The census of occupations figures are not available for counties,

⁴ *A Census of Social Work Positions in Massachusetts* (1932), p. 6. Pamphlet published by the chapter.

⁵ *An Approximate Count of Social Work Positions in New York City and Westchester County* (1929), p. 3. Pamphlet published by the chapter.

but the number of "social and welfare workers" and "probation and truant officers" for New York City in 1930 is 4,016, and that for Yonkers, which includes a fourth of the population of Westchester County, is 115. Allowance for the rest of Westchester County would give a figure for these two census groups very close to the number of social-work positions counted by the New York chapter committee. This comparison proves too much, perhaps, since there are many reasons why the two figures should not be expected to agree closely. In addition to those already outlined, all persons holding social-work positions in New York City do not live either within the city or in Westchester county. Yet the comparison tends to confirm the opinion that the census occupation figures are valuable approximate data for the social-work group as defined by the Census Bureau. They should, of course, be used only in the light of the definition indicated by the controlling Index of Occupations.

II. SOCIAL WORKERS IN RELATION TO OTHER PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

The remaining portion of this paper presents briefly several quantitative comparisons of social workers with other professional or near-professional groups. In Figure 1 a roughly estimated curve indicating the growth of the social-work group is compared with growth curves of other groups derived directly from the census of occupations figures. A curve for the total population of the United States is also included. The slopes of the curves are proportional to the respective rates of growth, and it is apparent that the social-work group, if its curve is at all accurate, has been undergoing relatively rapid expansion. In this diagram the figures for social workers are intended to represent all social workers, and for 1930 the foregoing estimate of over 40,000 is used.

In Table II eighteen occupational groups are compared with respect to their size in 1930, using the census of occupations figures. In this and in the following tables, the figures for social workers are those for the restricted census category "social and

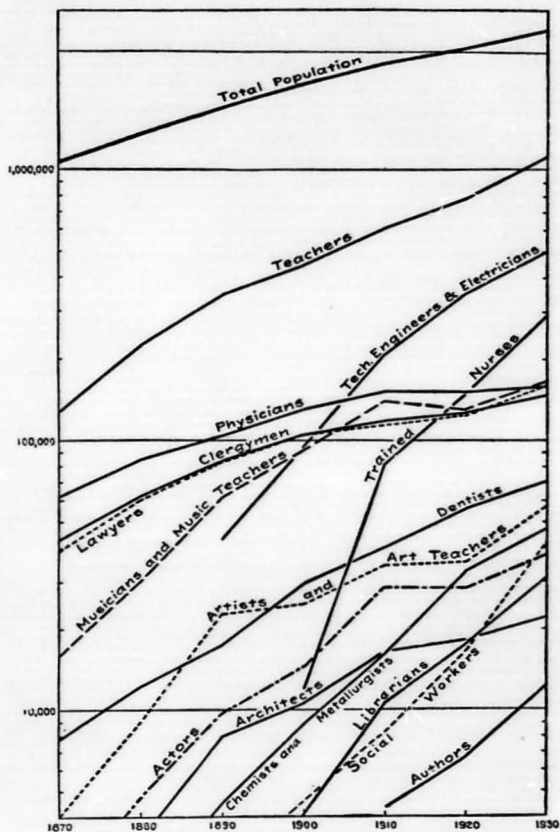


FIG. 1.—Growth curves of various professional service groups, 1870-1930. The ratio scale is used and the curves, therefore, illustrate comparative rates of growth. Actual numbers for the occupation groups may be read from the scale at the right. The scale for the total population, however, is not shown.

welfare workers" only. Table II also gives the rate of each group per 1,000 of the total population. Social workers, whether the full estimate or the count for the one census category is used, are among the smaller groups. Trained nurses are eight or ten times, and dentists something like twice as numerous. But social workers are more numerous than architects and librarians.

TABLE II
SIZE OF VARIOUS PROFESSIONAL OR NEAR-PROFESSIONAL
GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1930
(Census of Occupations Figures)

Group	Total Number	Per 1,000 Population
School-teachers.....	1,044,016	8.54
Trained nurses.....	294,189	2.40
Technical engineers.....	226,249	1.84
Musicians.....	165,128	1.35
Lawyers and judges.....	160,605	1.31
Physicians.....	153,803	1.25
Clergymen.....	148,848	1.21
Dentists.....	71,055	.58
College teachers.....	61,905	.50
Artists.....	57,265	.47
Journalists.....	51,844	.42
Chemists and metallurgists..	47,068	.38
Actors.....	37,993	.31
Religious workers.....	31,290	.26
Social and welfare workers..	31,241	.26
Librarians.....	29,613	.24
Architects.....	22,000	.18
Authors.....	12,449	.10

It is commonly recognized that social work is primarily a city calling, and it is of interest, therefore, to compare its relative distribution in urban and rural areas. Since the Census Bureau has not published detailed occupation figures for cities of less than 100,000 population or for rural areas, it is necessary to compare cities of over 100,000 population with the rest of the country. Table III gives the comparison for nine professional or near-professional groups. The final column contains an index of the concentration in large cities for each group, which

is merely the rate per 1,000 population in the large cities divided by the rate for the remainder of the country. Among these par-

TABLE III
INDEX OF CONCENTRATION IN LARGE CITIES

GROUP	NUMBER PER 1,000 POPULATION		INDEX (A divided by B)
	Cities over 100,000 Population (A)	Rest of Country (B)	
Clergymen.....	.98	1.29	.8
School-teachers.....	7.28	9.02	.8
Physicians.....	1.78	1.04	1.7
Librarians.....	.35	.20	1.8
Technical engineers.....	2.72	1.48	1.8
Dentists.....	.86	.45	1.9
Lawyers.....	2.03	1.01	2.0
Trained nurses.....	3.92	1.77	2.2
Social and welfare workers....	.50	.15	3.3

TABLE IV
GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN THE FREQUENCY OF NINE PROFESSIONAL OR NEAR-PROFESSIONAL GROUPS IN CITIES OF OVER 100,000 POPULATION

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA	NUMBER PER 1,000 POPULATION IN MEDIAN CITY								
	Libra- rians	Social Work- ers	Den- tists	Cler- gymen	Physi- cians	Law- yers	Engi- neers	Trained Nurses	School- Teachers
New England, 13 cities.....	.46	.46	.67	.9	1.4	1.3	2.0	4.9	8.8
Middle Atlantic, 18 cities....	.28	.40	.72	1.0	1.5	1.6	2.4	3.8	8.3
East North Central, 19 cities..	.42	.39	.68	1.0	1.4	1.4	2.7	3.3	7.3
West North Central, 9 cities..	.40	.52	1.08	1.3	1.9	2.4	2.6	5.0	8.6
South Atlantic, 9 cities.....	.27	.41	.64	1.6	1.8	2.3	3.0	3.7	7.7
South Central, 14 cities.....	.24	.35	.65	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.4	3.4	8.0
Mountain and Pacific, 11 cities	.53	.46	1.18	1.2	2.0	2.6	3.9	4.8	8.7
Total, 93 cities*.....	.34	.40	.71	1.1	1.7	1.8	2.6	3.9	8.1

* The numbers per 1,000 population in this line are medians for the 93 cities. They differ somewhat from the ratios for cities of over 100,000 population in Table III, which are computed from aggregate figures and are, therefore, influenced more by the larger than the smaller cities.

ticular occupational groups, the urban concentration is much the highest for social workers. Clergymen and school-teachers are relatively less numerous in the large cities than in the rest of

the country. Lawyers and nurses are twice, and social workers over three times as numerous in the large cities.

Table IV concerns the geographical differences in the distribution of these nine occupational groups in the large cities only. For each group, rates per 1,000 population were computed for each of the 93 cities in the United States having over 100,000 population. The median of these city rates for each group was then found for each geographical division with the results shown in the table. The table suggests a tendency to geographical uniformity in the distribution of each group, but there are interesting variations. Clergymen, physicians, and lawyers, for example, tend to be less frequent relative to population in the cities of the three northeastern sections. Dentists are exceptionally frequent in West North Central and Mountain and Pacific cities. The extent to which professional workers are concentrated in the larger cities varies somewhat in different parts of the United States, and this has some, although not large, influence on this comparison.