

1924

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Recommended Citation

Alice D. Menken, Rehabilitation of the Morally Handicapped, 15 J. Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology 147 (May 1924 to February 1925)

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THE REHABILITATION OF THE MORALLY HANDICAPPED

A STUDY IN SOCIAL SERVICE

300 JEWISH WOMEN ON PROBATION TO THE
WOMEN'S COURT, BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

(From January 1, 1919, to December 31, 1922)

ALICE D. MENKEN¹

FOREWORD

In order to evaluate social service in the field of delinquency, it is necessary to check up the service from time to time. It is well to ascertain what results are achieved toward the readjustment in the community of the handicapped individuals whom we commonly call "social misfits."

When a human life is in danger of moral and social wreckage as a consequence of an unfortunate constellation of circumstances, or because of a warped or undeveloped personality, or as the result of the handicaps of poverty, or ignorance, or evil influence, or of any or all of these, it becomes society's interest and its obligation to provide for that unhappy human life the opportunity for reclamation, so that both the individual and the community may profit by their mutually improved inter-adjustment. Private agencies for social betterment and individuals have invested their resources in the salvaging and restoration to useful membership in society of those who have "gone wrong" and who would without such salvage but increase the already disproportionate layer of human waste. They have consecrated themselves to the task of laying safeguards about the maladjusted girl and of building up for her such opportunities as will assist her to discover for herself and to utilize life's highest possibilities.

The following studies of 300 Jewish women were made by the Department of Court, Probation and Parole of the Jewish Board of Guardians, a private agency co-operating with the New York City

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Magistrates' Courts and Probation Department.² These women were convicted in the Women's Court and placed on probation in the care of one of the staff of probation officers. A representative of the Jewish Board of Guardians is assigned to the Women's Court to assist the City Department in the supervision of these women while on probation, by supplementing the home visits, interviews at court when reporting, and the general personal service of the probation officer. In the after-care period, however, these women are followed up exclusively by representatives of the Jewish Board of Guardians so that when official probation ceases the supervision is entirely in the hands of this organization. Women placed on probation in 1919 for six months may still be in the care of this agency in 1922.

A social history of each woman is on file at the office of the Jewish Board of Guardians, 356 Second Avenue, New York City. The history includes not only the record of housing, employment, and recreation during probation and in the after-care period, but a record of the girl's early life—conditions under which she lived prior to arrest, and the effect which these conditions had upon her mind, her conduct and her personality.

The woman delinquent is a product of various kinetic factors, and only a careful study of each complete social history will reveal the true causes. Frequently she is emotional and unstable, and may be further handicapped by inherited weaknesses or lack of environmental opportunities. When arraigned in the Women's Court she is found to be a social misfit even though in some instances the parents, the school, the Settlement, the Children's Court, and the Big Sisters have made every effort to understand her conduct, and to help her make adjustments to community interests.

It has often been asked how many women are reclaimed each year and whether they constitute a number sufficient to warrant the effort spent in their behalf. To state a percentage of women reclaimed in a year would be misleading, first, because many of the cases are in the process of adjustment, and secondly, because some, encouraging at the outset, may later yield to temptation, while those discouraging at the start may respond to future healthful influences when given opportunity to overcome obstacles and discouragements.

The figures which follow are proof of the beneficent results achieved with these 300 probationers over a period long enough to

²Grateful acknowledgment is herewith tendered to Honorable William C. McAdoo, Chief Magistrate; Edwin C. Cooley, Chief Probation Officer, Magistrates' Courts; Alice C. Smith, Probation Officer in Charge, Women's Court; Elizabeth Barnett, Court Worker, Jewish Board of Guardians.

permit a considerable degree of confidence as to the final value of the effort expended.

It is hoped, also, that this analysis of so large a number of probationers will establish the value of a probation sentence for this class of offender, and will encourage those interested in the adjustment of the woman offender in the community to carry on this service with faith in its ultimate success.

These statistics, however, will lose value unless they suggest to the imagination an important as well as the most beautiful phase of this work—the service for human souls that figures inadequately tabulate.

TABLE I

THE WOMEN STUDIED ARE INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING PERIOD—
JANUARY 1, 1919, TO DECEMBER 31, 1922

Year	Number
1919	57
1920	57
1921	80
1922	106
Total	300*

*Only ten of these 300 women are known to have had a previous court record.

TABLE II

NATURE OF CHARGES AGAINST 300 JEWISH GIRLS

Disorderly Conduct—

	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
Consolidation Act, Sec. 1458, Subd. 2.....	18	8	10	6	42
Charges under one of the following subdivisions of the law:					
Loitering on the street for the purpose of solicitation.					
Soliciting on the street.					

Vagrancy—

Code of Criminal Procedure, Sec. 887, Subd. 4..	15	9	26	63	113
Charges under one of the following subdivisions of the law:					
Clause a—offering to commit prostitution.					
Clause b—offering to secure another for the purpose of prostitution.					
Clause e—renting rooms for immoral purposes.					
Clause f—Aiding and abetting.					

Vagrancy—

Tenement House Law, Sec. 150.....	12	22	20	13	67
Charges under one of the following subdivisions of the law:					
*Subd. 3—offering to commit prostitution in a tenement house.					
Subd. 4—knowingly residing in a disorderly house.					

†*Incorrigibility*—

Chapter 436, Laws of 1903.....	12	18	24	24	78
Association with vicious and dissolute people; in danger of becoming morally depraved.	57	57	80	106	300

The purpose of this law is the protection of female minors, and complaints are made by relatives as well as police officers.

*Since July, 1922, complaints under this clause were discontinued, being taken under Code of Criminal Procedure.

†The women arraigned for incorrigibility are not finger-printed and only physically examined when so directed by the judge.

FINGER PRINTS

The finger-print system of identification is used in the Women's Court. With this remarkable scientific and infallible scheme of classification the offender is not catalogued by name. The record can be read only by an expert, and the woman is protected from those who, with idle curiosity or evil intent, would seek her identification in the rogues' gallery. This available information as to whether the woman is a first or repeated offender at the time of arrest not only assists the judge in passing an appropriate sentence, but the fear of future identification by the finger print is often a deterrent factor against a repetition of the girl's wrongdoing, thus aiding in the decrease of prostitution.

TABLE III

	NATIONALITY					Total
	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total	
Native born	28	26	46	66	166	55 3/10%
Foreign born	29	31	34	40	134	44 3/10%
	57	57	80	106	300	

These figures indicate that the proportion of those convicted and known to be of foreign birth is less than their proportion of the general population, a fact contrary to the general impression—a percentage of 30 9/10% of foreign women.

TABLE IV

	AGES				
	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
From 16 to 21.....	17	17	43	54	131
From 21 to 30.....	30	29	25	39	123
From 30 to 44.....	10	11	12	13	46
	57	57	80	106	300

The very considerable number of arraignments of girls from 16 to 21 constitutes a group in themselves and a study of their histories

forms a most interesting social problem. Effective prevention against further wrongdoing may be secured by placing them on probation and guiding them into the channel of welfare service designed in their behalf. They may need vocational guidance to fit them to be lucrative wage earners, recreation must be provided, their religious education encouraged. While an arrest may save girls from further disgrace, it is important that the underlying conditions favoring delinquency be studied and all the forces in the community utilized to lessen vice with its accompanying degradation.

TABLE V

LITERACY					
	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
Literate	53	51	71	97	272
Illiterate	4	6	9	9	28
	<u>57</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>300</u>

In the literate group only 4% had a high school education. All the illiterate were foreign born.

TABLE VI

PHYSICAL CONDITION					
	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
In general good health.....	46	32	51	48	177
Venerally diseased	11	25	29	58	123
	<u>57</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>300</u>

Physical examination of women convicted of prostitution is made under the Board of Health Law of 1918, by a woman physician, and, if diseased, the more youthful offender is sent to the Kingston Avenue Hospital in Brooklyn for treatment before being placed on probation. As those affected with venereal disease constituted a general monthly average of 53% in 1922, these figures reveal an extremely serious condition.

MENTAL CONDITION

As not all of the 300 probationers have been given mental tests, accurate figures cannot be recorded as to their mental status, which includes classification such as normal, retarded, borderline, moron, feeble-minded. Until recent surveys on the mentality of prison inmates were made in various state prisons, the tendency has been to lay too much stress on mental deficiency as a cause of sex delinquency. One of the reasons for frequently finding it among those arraigned in court is that the more intelligent are likely to avoid arrest.

The probationer visited the committee in the office from time to time, and statements made by her in the interview were verified as to home conditions and employment.

Every three months from 1919 through 1922, from the time official probation ceased, a personal visit was paid to the probationer's home and a report thereon filed in the case records at the Woman's Court and Jewish Board of Guardians.

Whenever the woman moved to communities too far distant for the worker to visit, co-operation through the probation officer's correspondence with reliable agencies in these communities was obtained, with a view to verifying the communications received from the parents or the woman as to her present status at a given period.

TABLE VII

	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
Employed in factory.....	6	9	7	20	42
Housewives (19 married after being placed on probation).....	15	8	17	15	55
Boarding house proprietor.....	1	..	..	..	1
Cook in restaurant.....	..	1	..	..	1
Domestics in private families.....	2	4	5	1	12
Waitress in restaurant.....	1	1	..	1	2
Actress.....	1	1	..	..	2
Embroiderer.....	1	..	..	2	3
Manicurist.....	..	..	..	3	3
Saleswoman.....	1	3	5	11	20
Telephone operator.....	..	1	..	..	1
Business manager.....	..	..	..	1	1
Nurse.....	..	..	..	1	1
In business for self.....	1	..	..	1	2
Bookkeeper.....	1	..	1	..	2
Cashier.....	1	1	..	..	2
Clerical worker.....	2	..	5	5	12
Stenographer.....	..	1	1	..	2
					— 164
Unemployed—					
Supported by husband, living with relatives.....	1	..	..	..	1
At home, parents well-to-do.....	2	..	3	1	6
Keeping house, parents in business....	..	1	3	9	13
Temporarily laid off.....	..	1	..	1	2
					— 22
In correctional institutions and hospitals—					
Institutions.....	2	5	4	1	12
Hospitals.....	2	..	4	2	8
					— 20
Deported.....	..	1	..	..	1
Deceased.....	1	1	1	2	5
Living out of town, occupation unverified	9	5	11	19	44
Whereabouts unknown.....	9	13	12	10	44
					— 88
Total.....	57	57	80	106	300

*Apart from a normal readjustment of the individual's life to the community, there were striking improvements in many of the women in this group. When health and spirit were restored, some obtained positions of responsibility, many re-established their homes as wives or parents, and others secured employment in trades and gainful occupations.

TABLE VIII

WHEREABOUTS OF 300 PROBATIONERS AS OF DECEMBER, 1922

	1919	1920	1921	1922	Total
Living at home with parents or husband	30	27	39	66	162
Living with families as domestics.....	2	4	5	1	12
Living alone in furnished room.....	1	2	3	6	12
Living with parents out of town.....	9	5	11	19	44
					— 230
In correctional institutions—					
House of Good Shepherd.....		1	1	..	2
Inwood House .....		..	..	1	1
Wayside Home	1	..	..	..	1
Bedford .....	..	2	3	..	5
Workhouse	1	..	1	..	2
Auburn	1	..	..	..	1
					— 12
In hospitals—					
Lakeview Home .....	..	..	..	1	1
Central Islip	2	..	4	..	6
Sanitarium .....	..	1	..	..	1
					— 8
Deported .....	..	1	..	..	1
Deceased	1	1	1	2	5
Whereabouts unknown*	9	13	12	10	44
Total	57	57	80	106	300

*Because a woman's whereabouts is unknown, it does not necessarily mean that she has returned to a life of ill repute. She may disappear into other communities in order to avoid supervision.

TABLE IX

SUMMARY

*Results with 254 Probationers at Termination of Probation, Generally Six Months
(46 Were Still on Probation December 31, 1922)*

Discharged from official supervision:	
With improvement	211
Without improvement	1
Discharged because of general causes:	
*Violation of conditions of probation.....	14
Rearrested on a new charge.....	2
Absconded while on probation.....	21
Appeal of case granted and sustained.....	3
Deceased	2
	— 254

*A number of causes may be given for failure to respond to probation—

1. Lack of co-operation, and indifference of parents and guardians.
2. Inherent mental or moral weakness of the probationer.
3. Failure of court and private agency to satisfactorily meet the requirements of the probationer.
4. The need of institutional care.

The foregoing table shows that 83.3% of these probationers had been satisfactorily adjusted at the termination of their probation. The percentage is based on a total of 252, the two who are deceased not having been included.

By satisfactorily adjusted is meant, living under good home conditions, steady employment and healthful recreation.

TABLE X

SUMMARY

Results with 254 Probationers in the Follow-up Period After Termination of Probation, as of December, 1922

(46 Were Still on Probation December 31, 1922)

*Satisfactory	158
Uncertain—Living in localities outside of New York.....	40
Unsatisfactory—	
In correctional institutions.....	11
Deported	1
Whereabouts unknown	39
	— 51
Deceased	5
	— 254

*Among the satisfactory there are included those who are in hospitals or sanitariums as it is felt that they have been satisfactorily adjusted in the community by making proper disposition of their cases.

The foregoing table shows that 62.2% of these probationers were still satisfactorily adjusted at the end of December, 1922.