

MULTIPROBLEM FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

An Exploration of their Potential for the
Combat of Unruly and Delinquent Behavior

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This paper seeks to explore the potential of communities to support multiproblem or "troubled" families in their task of providing for the well-being of their children as well as in their task of socializing them toward social responsibility. Attention today shifts to the community for basically two reasons: Past experiences have shown that multiproblem families left to themselves are either too weak or incapable for carrying out many aspects of this task, and public efforts to take over where families have failed have proven to be inadequate in far too many cases.

There is no lack of evidence linking multiproblem families to disproportionate high rates of delinquency (Wolfgang, 1973, 1983), just as evidence is mounting that chronic delinquents begin to exhibit unruly behavior at a very early age. One study after another demonstrates that the progression of early childhood behavior towards disruptive and delinquent behavior is not automatic. (Gluecks, 1968; Baumrind, 1978; Hirschi, 1983; West and Farrington, 1973, 1977). Recent attempts to develop composite measures of child-rearing techniques that allow for the prediction of delinquent behavior are plausible and although in need of further testing provide a variety of valuable clues (Loeber and Dishion, 1983; Hirschi, 1983; Patterson, 1982). Most important they suggest particular practices of childrearing may contribute in no small measure to the formation of disruptive and delinquent behavior.

While logic compells us to link high rates of delinquency to aspects of child-rearing and processes of socialization within the multiproblem family itself, it is an altogether different proposition to put this type of family at the center of efforts to prevent and reduce delinquent behavior. Not only is such an approach novel and unorthodox, it also requires considerable courage. While we know a lot more today than we did twenty years ago about which programs of delinquency prevention and reduction work, and which do not, and while we are able to identify child-rearing practices that promise success as well as those that may do harm to a child's development, we know little about the potential of multiproblem families to acquire such practices that allow us to recommend a family-based approach to the prevention of delinquency. Similarly, we do have available to us today considerable information about the workings of communities, that informal network of kin, neighbors and voluntary organizations. But problem families become multiproblem families - I would argue - precisely because they lack such network and have no easy access to them. We are also cogniscant of the fact that for such informal networks to aid individuals and have meaning for them, they must emerge on the grass-roots level and cannot be imposed from above. We are still probing how this voluntaristic process can best be facilitated.

In view of the complexities of these questions as well as the novelty of a family-based approach to the prevention of delinquency, it will not come as a surprise that it has not

received any systematic attention in the relevant literature. What can be found is fragmentary, largely untested, and frequently relates only indirectly to the considerations before us. For this reason this paper has to be understood as a preliminary attempt to explore the plausability of a family-based approach to the prevention of delinquency and the role of the community in it.

Much of this paper will be concerned with making a case for such an approach . The task is to put the multiproblem family into a wider perspective, to sort out positive attitudes to child-rearing from those practices that research literature has demonstrated to be detrimental. In making use of the information that can be gleaned from educational models that have demonstrated success in the resocialization of problem children, we shall explore whether and what kind of community support can aid these families. The rationale underlying such a course of exploration involves looking at the multiproblem family within the context of recent policy efforts as well as larger social trends. There must be a working definition of this type of family its location within the wider social economic structure of American society, and an identification of those features peculiar to it that set it off from other families with whom it shares a similar location but whok in contradistinction to it, do not exhibit similarly high incidence rates of delinquent behavior.

I. Rationale for a Multiproblem-Family-Based Approach

The multiproblem family has been at the focus of considerable attention for some time. It has been the concern of professionals of this or that practice of social work and therapy just as it has been at the center of governmental policies to prevent delinquency, abuse and poverty. In recent decades attempts to shore up and supplement weak and fractured families gave way to approaches that sought to circumvent, if not replace the family itself. In almost all instances the individual and not the family (with the exception of AFDC) became the "targeted" beneficiaries of public programs and it may well be argued that the resistance of this type of family to respond to the many efforts on its behalf have contributed in no small measure to the fundamentally anti-family sentiments prevalent among social workers and family professionals. It has frequently been observed that in the history of social welfare, the same profession that brought forth new programs for child mental health has also brought forth and administered public assistance programs which eroded family structure. (Fraiberg, 1977; Berger, 1983; Murray, 1984).

During the past ten years, however, it has become ever more obvious that the great hopes invested in this anti-family approach to the treatment and management of the problem children of multiproblem families have not been fulfilled in many cases. And in those cases that can demonstrate success, as for instance the Head-Start Program, the family continues to be a central component

In spite of everything the government tried to do, the targeted problems not only persisted but multiplied. And that in spite of considerable professional expertise and funding. There exists today a colossal apparatus of programs spanning the country and consuming a fortune, and it does not work. In no area is this more evident than in that of the prevention and reduction of delinquency, where under the auspices of such diverse governmental agencies as the Department of Justice, the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Health and Human Services (formerly HEW), the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Labor a multitude of programs to combat and prevent delinquency has failed to produce significant results.

In recent years there has been a general rediscovery of the salutary and stabilizing role of the family in individual and social life. Research findings across the customary divide of academic disciplines confirm what has been self-evident to ordinary people for a long time: A strong family, caring and mindful of children, is still the best guarantor for a child's well-being and success in school and life after school. Although theoretical attempts to explain the intricate process of character formation vary considerably, study after study demonstrates that a complex combination of individual constitutional predispositions and family experiences largely account for adult behavior. There is also little doubt that a "strong" family involves the presence of a father and a mother, both of whom are actively con-

cerned with their child's behavior and performance, although the absence of one parent (usually the father) does not necessarily spell disaster for a child's future. To be sure, external circumstances flowing from factors of culture and socio-economic background, as well as "chance" or "luck", are influential as well. Yet there can be little doubt today that those processes of child-rearing and socialization in which individual predispositions are channeled and become sedimented into stable behavior patterns are primary.

The demonstrable linkage between delinquency and a constellation of common features of family structure and economy in the background of multiproblem families has contributed in no small measure to the controversies surrounding the analysis of causal factors in delinquent behavior. However, impressive evidence collected over the years demonstrates that an explanation of delinquency in terms of socio-economic factors can no longer be maintained (West, 1982; Wilson and Herrenstein, 1985). On the basis of a considerable body of data Travis Hirschi and others have argued plausibly that, even if their material conditions were to improve and hence the problems of their daily lives would be somewhat reduced, the ability of multiproblem families to manage the stresses of child-rearing common to all families would remain low. (Hirschi, 1983).

In view of the political and interpretational controversies surrounding public policy approaches to this type of family in past decades, it is exceedingly important to differentiate

sharply between the multiproblem family and the much larger category of families drifting in and out of poverty. As the data collected, among others, by Mary Jo Bane and David Elwood at Harvard as well as those by Martha Hill of the Michigan Survey Research Center indicate, the majority of individuals born into poverty are not permanently stuck in poverty nor, as can be demonstrated, do they become delinquent. (Bane and Elwood, 1983; Hill, 1984). The criticism of the "culture of poverty" approach that has dominated the public discourse for the past two decades is largely based upon the failure to distinguish between multiproblem families and families in poverty (Lewis, 1965; Banfield, 1966; Valentine, 1968). However, not to distinguish between these very different types of families - as Charles Murray has argued - fundamentally tends to obfuscate social reality and thus precludes any appropriate social policy. (Murray, 1984).

For the purpose of this paper it is important to note that in the multiproblem family very different sets of problems are bunched. On the one hand, we find a concentration of a broad range of problems engendered by the individual's physiological and psychological make-up (such as temperament, sickness, and mental and physical disabilities). On the other hand, we see a massing of structural factors such as family disorganization and break-up, isolation and helplessness. All of these factors are frequently aggravated further by a high incidence of alcoholism, drug-abuse and syndromes of psychiatric disorder the

ultimate sort of which cannot easily be relegated to either physical-psychological predispositions or familial and social-structural factors. Multiproblem families then appear to be trapped in a vexing tangle of individual predispositions and dysfunctions that intermesh with familial and social-structural factors in a destructive way. It has been recognized and well-documented by criminologists and psychiatrists that this combination of factors frequently leads to violent behavior, delinquency and crime. (Loeber and Dishon, 1983). What has also been recognized, though widely neglected, is that in contradistinction to "ordinary poor folks" whose experience of poverty is alleviated by their adherence to traditional family patterns as well as by networks of kin and neighborhood (R.Hill, 1971, C.Stack, 1970), one of the distinctive characteristics of multiproblem families is precisely their lack of such support.

While the absolute number of multiproblem families is undetermined, they represent a relatively small segment of the population in poverty. The rediscovery of the strong family as the ultimate source of social order puts the situation of this type of family into stark relief. Living in trying conditions, isolated from the support of those mediating structures that organize individual life and tie them into community and wider society, these families have great difficulties in managing the ordinary stresses of child-rearing. If a child should manifest behavior that is out of the ordinary - and multiproblem families have more than the average share of such children - these families tend to be overwhelmed by the daily tasks of care.

II - The Case for the Multiproblem Family as Primary Agent of
Child-Rearing

Countless studies show that there exist various styles of parenting, that these styles are linked to social class, and that a child's development is influenced decisively by styles of parenting. Much of the research, however, fails to differentiate between the parenting style of the working-class poor and that of multiproblem families. For this reason the summary of the convergence of findings from family studies and epidemiological data on delinquency prepared by Rolf Loeber for the Conference on Delinquency and Family fills a deplorable gap in the literature. Loeber's construction of four models of parenting (neglect, conflict, deviant values, and disruption) not only helps to organize a vast body of data, it also demonstrates convincingly that the development of delinquent behavior patterns is not due to one single, but to a variety of interlocking factors. While the Loeber research points to particular deficiencies in the parenting style of multiproblem families, the argument of this paper will follow a different direction. Instead of recapitulating the findings on defective parenting, this writer would argue it is equally important to identify those aspects of multiproblem family parenting that they share with ordinary families whose children do not have a tendency to become delinquent. The task here is to explore whether there exist aspects in the parenting common to multiproblem families that allow us to turn responsibly to these families as primary agents of child-care.

In the public image the children of multiproblem families are born into catastrophically disorganized homes, poverty and subcultures of violence in which uncaring, apathetic and often pathological parents endanger their lives and psyches. Chronically antisocial and pathological behavior becomes the norm in the wastelands of many inner-city neighborhoods and among such population groups as American Indians who live in discrete cultural milieus. Moreover, this type of behavior tends to be perpetuated from generation to generation.

Research data on multiproblem families confirm that this description is not entirely a figment of the imagination. Reading ethnographic descriptions of the life of these families one is struck by the degree of family disorganization, squalor and violence that characterizes their life. (Anderson, 1976; Auletta, 1982; Merry, 1981; Spradely, 1970; Susser, 1982; Wallace, 1968). A never-ending string of disasters seems to beset them at every juncture of their biography and they clearly are overwhelmed by the demanding task of caring for small children.

There is little doubt among researchers that among multiproblem families the burden of child-rearing falls upon the mother, and frequently also the grandmother, although exact figures on the proportion of children reared by grandmothers and surrogate mothers are hard to come by. The pervasive absence of fathers and the consequences of this absence are well-known, and cannot concern us here. While the presence of a responsible

father (perhaps also stepfather?) would certainly be desirable, there seems to be little we can do about this. Regardless of how conclusively the literature on parenting demonstrates that no matter what people's values, rituals, or other cultural uniqueness may be, competent parenting is best carried out in a stable home with father and mother co-present, there are few policy measure² available that bring the father back into the home. It would be interesting, however, to establish to what degree erratic and neglectful patterns of child-rearing can be ameliorated by the simple presence of a father.

A considerable number of families in trouble have given up to take care of their children, voluntarily or under the threat of prosecution. Estimates range between 400 000 and 500 000 children are found today in foster care. The data on foster-care and child-abuse - a growing and controversial phenomenon that is by no means as clearly established as one would like - suggest that either a growing number of people are unable or unwilling to take care of their children, or that a new professional and public attitude is emerging toward the defective child-rearing practices of problem families. (R.Hill, 1985, Uviller, 1977, Woodson, 1984, Berger, 1985). Important data on the linkage between foster-care and delinquency have recently become available (Hill, 1985). They should make us hesitant about the advisability of seeing in surrogate parenting a convenient method for the prevention of delinquency.

Of particular interest for this paper are those parental attitudes and values common to the majority of mothers in multiproblem families which in no way distinguishes this group from economically and culturally more advantaged parents. Standing out from the scores of interviews with young mothers collected by urban ethnographers and clinicians is the expression of a pervasive degree of love and of the wish to take care of their children. At least during the early years of childhood, mothers from a multiproblem background appear to be just as interested in the well-being and progress of their children, are as desiruous to be involved with them and to have control over their lives as mothers from other walks of life are (Fraiberg,1977,Stone, 1981,Wilson and Herrenstein,1985). - (Incidentally, the desire to care for their own children may have paradoxical implications for the rising number of teen-age mothers). - A desire to "do the right thing" predominates; these mothers are preoccupied with health and safety, though what they mean by health and safety may often be different from customary middle-class understandings. They are concerned with "proper behavior" and wish to instill moral standards in their children. They insist upon obedience, as is evidenced by punishment patterns. (Wilson and Herrenstein,1985). They express a strong belief in "early education" over against notions of play (Joffe,1977). Above all, we find among them an expression of hopes and daydreams, and at times it is difficult to imagine where these hopes and dreams come from (Fraiberg,1977, Stone,1981). Far from being apathetic and uncaring, these

young mothers have been found to have aspirations, perhaps unrealistically so, for the future of their children. The findings on high aspirations, put programs aiming at the improvement of minority self-concept and self-esteem as a primary weapon against poverty and delinquency into question, as Maureen Stone in a study of Jamaican lower class-parents in London has persuasively argued (Stone-1981). In other words, many of these mothers have more than their share of self-esteem.

We have little information on the hopes and values grandmothers and surrogate mothers hold for the children in their care, just as we lack information on their motivations to take over the care of these children (Boorstein,1981) The availability of information relevant to surrogate mothering, it would seem, is essential if delinquency prevention should take the course toward surrogate parenting in the future.

In contrasting the evidently positive values, attitudes and hopes multiproblem families, in particular young mothers, hold for their young children with their loss of control, perplexity and surrender to pressures in subsequent years, we are led to inquire into the forces and experiences that set processes into motion which prevent these positive sentiments from being realized. In view of the evidence supplied by bio-medical and psychometric research, the limitations set by physiological and psychological factors can no longer be ignored (Barnum,1985;

Wilson and Herrenstein, 1985). The degree to which these factors - in particular those of low I.Q. and temperamental differences - determine a child's development toward delinquency remains yet to be conclusively determined. Two decades of research experiments, such as those carried out by Burton White, on how various kinds of experiences during the first few years of life affect a child's ability to get along, report that a given group of children, regardless of social class or race, performs much at the same as another on developmental tests until about the age of 18 months (White, 1979). How is one to reconcile these data with the equally established differences between multiproblem families and others in dealing with older children? Either changes in measured differences reflect the unreliability of early childhood measures, or ordinary families, i.e. non-multiproblem ones, must have means and techniques to structure their children's early experiences in ways that help them to make the most of whatever potential they were born with. Somewhere in between these two very different approaches to child development lie the answers to what goes wrong in multiproblem families, and I for one am inclined to take the learning experience approach in attempts to prevent delinquency. Such a direction receives further support from the data on the new trend of ordinary families to become primary "service delivery agents" for their handicapped, often very seriously handicapped, children. The new trust in ordinary families to handle severe stresses of child-care, supported by publicly mandated schooling and respite services, seems to be well-warranted. (Schoepler, 1979, Moroney, 1980).

What can be learned from this brief attempt to make a case for multiproblem families? We have learned that these parents too love their children and want to raise decent, successful children. What they are lacking are competent child-rearing practices and knowledge about how to handle and channel the natural potential of their children into acceptable and positive directions.

In recent years programs have been developed that show considerable promise in teaching parents more effective child-rearing skills. In particular the instruction of parents in systematic methods of behavior modification holds considerable promise not only to teach effective parenting, but also to restructure parents' habits and practices that may not be directly related to the task of child-rearing. (Patterson, 1982, Gordon, 1979; Loeber, 1985).

What has not received enough attention so far is the indisputable fact that the task of child-rearing must be carried out on a day-to-day, year-in-year-out basis. It is greatly facilitated by the active participation of two parents, as well as by the presence and support of kin and others relevant to the individual family. To be sure, expert knowledge, medical supervision, schooling and the availability of support services, are of importance. Yet without a stable family situation, without competent skills of parenting, and without access to informal networks to sustain the family in their many chores and crises,

no amount of expertise is likely to have a lasting effect. And this is precisely the dilemma of multiproblem families.

In this connection the gnawing question whether multiproblem families have become the scapegoats of professional failure and disappointed public efforts, the "blaming the victim" syndrome, suggests itself. This argument has triumphed in the public discourse for some time (Ryan, 1971, Ladner, 1971). As pointed out earlier, these claims, in particular inasmuch as they fail to differentiate between "the poor" and "multiproblem families", cannot be substantiated. Nonetheless, if we take the data on the disproportionate incidence rate of innate propensities and limitations seriously for the development of marginalizing behavior, the literature on "scapegoating" holds important insights.

Erich Schoepler's writings on the parents of psychotic children have become classics in the literature of the processes that lead to parents becoming scapegoats of professional failure (Schoepler, 1979). Schoepler's description of the difficulties these parents have in the raising of psychotic children, whose developmental level is inconsistent and seemingly undeterminable, the resulting sense of perplexity, helplessness, parental insecurity and desperation, applies to the parenting efforts of multiproblem families as well. For in both cases a situation emerges that starts to feed on itself: Parents are blamed for

their children's behavior, just as children are held responsible for family break-up and destruction. A poor parent, regardless whether a member of a minority group or not, particularly if deprived of the practical assistance and emotional support of a husband, kin and neighbors, simply is not equipped to meet the demanding task of managing on a day-to-day basis. Such a parent has neither the skills nor the knowledge to channel potentially problematic tendencies in the child into tolerable directions. The child's erratic behavior feeds the already insecure and spotty parental practices to become more so; his not responding to parental efforts leads the parent to take recourse to coercive measures; the parent's initial concern for moral standards is increasingly replaced by no longer knowing "what is right"; and practices to meet the demands of the moment start to dominate. Hit by one disappointment after another, struck by frequent disasters, usually in connection with the child, the negative style of parenting is born and institutionalized that research into the causes of violent and delinquent behavior documents consistently.

III. - The Case for Community Support to Multiproblem Families

It would be comforting to be able to report that, if all we have described were made available to multiproblem families, it would propell them to flock to parent-effectiveness training programs - and that they would not only do so with alacrity and with a positive attitude, but that they would remain in such a program, and carry out the instructions received conscientiously and continuously. The recruitment of multiproblem parents into such programs, however, leaves much to be desired and their retention rate is low (Graziano and Fink, 1973; Hirschi, 1969; Elliot and Voss, 1974; Gordon, 1979). Above all, there is little assurance that what has been learned in such programs will be applied and can be maintained. Experience has shown that the effects of many targeted programs to serve this type of family have been limited. The reasons for this are well-known. These families do not actively participate in any services provided, nor do they join self-help and civic groups. If they have problem children - as many do - they have contact with case-work services, but this contact is usually not lasting or important to them (Loeber, 1985; Willie, 1981).

A whole tradition of research into the processes whereby culture external to the individual is internalized, and whereby it shapes individual habits and behavior, emphasizes the mechanisms of patterned interaction in conjunction with informal, yet powerful, systems of control without which this process is left

unfinished. Strong external support and control is necessary in the acquisition of any behavior, particularly if old behavior has first to be unlearned and new to be acquired. In our kind of society this support can only be found in the informal network of social groups in which individuals and their families are customarily embedded. As pointed out earlier, it is, however, precisely one of the most distinctive social characteristics of problem families that they are isolated from those informal networks of kin, neighbors, self-help and voluntary organizations such as churches that thrive in the urban community. Being left out from the institutional networks that are in place in their neighborhoods, it can be argued, turns families in trouble into multiproblem families. Barring a conversion experience along religious or quasi-religious lines, such a conversion to new behavior patterns of child-rearing is unlikely. As studies of religious conversions have demonstrated, individuals are automatically enveloped in an intensive community that provides guidance and practical and emotional support to the converted (Williams, 1984). Most importantly, such an intensive community alone is able to exert the tight and continuous support - if not control - required for the acquisition of new habits and practices, including those of child-rearing.

The insights provided by studies of religious or quasi-religious conversion experiences and their effect upon human

behavior - ranging from the rehabilitation of drug or alcoholism, addiction to overeating and smoking - suggest that we look at standard parent-training efforts with a degree of scepticism. While it is not the task of this paper to evaluate these customary parent-training programs, it should be noted that their rationalistic conceptualization of human nature along with mechanistic techniques of intervention appear to be far removed from the daily realities of multiproblem family life. Delinquency prevention efforts that are family based have to take the role of community networks very seriously. The effects of the lack of reliable interpersonal supports on which to depend are documented extensively in the daily annals of social-work practice. No matter how well intentioned, no professional relationship or contact can ever provide such support. Professional relationships to their "clients" are of a specific and, by definition, limited nature and are geared to the management of particular problems; they never can be of the stuff of living social reality. What is more, they are by their very nature rationalistic, quasi-scientific, "cool". But what is needed here is an intervention that is highly affective, quasi-religious (if not religious tout court), "warm". Put simply, what is called for is not a technique of adjustment but a missionary enterprise. Our professionals (even the best and most commendably motivated) are not exactly missionary types and ipso facto are unlikely agents of conversion.

Recent studies on the vitality of informal social-networks in poor neighborhoods of American cities confirm that most people in these areas turn in times of need to some individual and groups in their neighborhood for help and advice (Warren, 1981, Woodson, 1981). On the basis of two decades of study of the American black family, Charles Willie describes this pattern as "the best manifestation of self-reliance in American society" (Willie, 1981). A survey of the literature found that informal supports and networks are important resources to all individuals and their families, regardless of ethnicity and class, for coping with stress, promoting psychological adjustment, and improving the quality of life. (Belle, 1982; Gottlieb, 1981; Mitchell and Trickett, 1980; Hill, 1971; Stack, 1974; Unger and Powell, 1980; Unger and Wandersman, 1985; Warren, 1981; Wilcox, 1981). Neighborhoods and their residents have been found to provide support and resources in ameliorating both individual and neighborhood problems (for a summary see Unger and Wandersman, 1985; A. Katz, 1979; Caplan and Killilea, 1976). While middle-class self-help tends to concentrate on the organization of special interest and pressure groups ("put the screws on City Hall"), working-class self-help takes a more direct and practical direction, and makes use of institutions such as the church, ethnic and other voluntaristic organizations (Shriners, Elks, Masons etc.) already in place. The history of the long tradition of self-help in America shows that self-help in some ethnic

groups has evolved into large organizations (see the history of denominationally based social services). Other ethnic groups, notably blacks and Hispanics, have continued to rely on more ad hoc and informal forms of self-help rather than developing their own ethnic supra-community structures. Among the many efforts in this direction, the novel approaches to combat delinquency described eloquently by Robert Woodson - the Fattah's of the House of Umoja in Philadelphia, Jimmy Gray and the Kennilworth Housing Project in Washington, D.C., Isolina Ferre's Dispensario San Antonio in Ponce - have to be noted (Woodson, 1980). The Washington-based National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise can be understood to be a major attempt to develop an ethnic supra-community self-help network among blacks and, to a lesser degree, Hispanics along novel lines. (NCNE).

In sum, there hardly exists any doubt in the minds of researchers, and of those who have lived and worked in inner-city communities, that the existence of natural helping networks is real and that their contributions to the life of their residents is indispensable. For in addition to supplying practical help and emotional support, they also provide those institutional structures of affective social relationships that mediate between the individual and his society and give stability and meaning to individual social life.

In this context it is of special interest to turn to that institution that has traditionally been the most prominently successful institution to perform this task - the churches.

The pivotal role of the churches.

It is of considerable importance to understand that none of the voluntaristic institutions firmly in place in the working-class neighborhoods of American cities has been as central and as influential over the generations as those of a religious nature. A great number of factors operating in intricate fashion have contributed to this special relationship and it is difficult to overestimate the function of religion for individuals and society alike. H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic The Social Sources of Denominationism (Niebuhr, 1924) described the function of lower-class sectarian religious institutions for the socialization of marginal people into mainstream American habits, practices and values that, taken together, are conducive to social mobility. As the sects succeeded in mainstreaming their members, the sects themselves were transformed into mainstream denominations. Time and again in the history of America do we see this process repeated" The needs of marginal individuals propel them toward religious groups that give expression and meaning to their lives. Once a religious group evolves and solidifies, usually under the leadership of lay-preachers, deacons and exemplary co-religionists, its members are progressively socialized into the normative values of the "respectable" working-class. Together they enter on a religious journey that has (typically unintended) social consequences for individuals and group alike in that the new values facilitate mobility in the economic and social structure of American society.

E. Franklin Frazier in his, The Negro Church in the United States (Frazier, 1964) describes a situation in which church and family structure became closely interlocked and highly interdependent. The black church, he showed, was central in establishing all-black institutions and schools whose chief purpose was the inculcation of mainstream American morals, work habits and aspirations. The black churches were fiercely family-centered and preoccupied with the advancement of their children. Frazier (but also others like Drake and Cayton) demonstrates that many first-generation migrants to the cities chose the intensive gemeinschaft (community) of a rich variety of store-front and Pentecostal churches; while their children in the next generation chose the opposite polar type, i.e. the huge, elaborate and prestigious black urban church. It is significant to note that urban blacks remained in the church, that the church continues to function as an important element in the organized social life of blacks, and that it continued to communicate and to reinforce dominant family values and behavior (Frazier, 1964). It is estimated that still today the overwhelming proportion of American blacks - some 80 % - remain to some extent involved with the churches.

This is not the place to analyze the place and function of the great variety of religious institutions that continues to be of importance in the life of America's inner cities, nor is

it the place to investigate the clergy's oscillating definition of their churches' role in public life. Suffice it to say that religious institutions, ranging from the small, intimate store-front and Pentecostal churches to the large complexes of organized religion, continue to play a pivotal role. There are, of course difference between ethnic groups: Among Puerto Rican migrants to mainland America the propensity to join Protestant and Pentecostal churches is analogous to that in the black community. Among lower-class whites, insofar as they are Protestants, the same dynamic appears to exist. In the case of legal and illegal immigrants from South and Central America, we continue to see and adherence to the Catholic tradition, though the way in which this tradition adapts itself to the particular needs of these newcomers implies a different process from that of the Protestant tradition. Some researchers have recently observed the successful activity of the Industrial Areas Foundation (the successors of Saul Alinsky) in the predominantly Catholic neighborhoods of Hispanic immigrants in Southern Texas and Southern California (Peter Skerry, 1985) and also in New York City (Behnke, 1985). American Indians, on the other hand, with their tribal councils and Friendship Houses, appear to follow an entirely different pattern and, perhaps for that reason will remain the hardest to reach.

Aside from religious and quasi-religious institutions there may be other institutions already in place in the communities discussed here. Associational and regional clubs come to mind.

What has not yet been analyzed, however, is whether they too can provide the kind of value-laden basis that characterizes religious institutions. By and large, the informal networks of a religious and quasi-religious type are peculiarly well-suited to respond to the problems of families in trouble because of the way in which they are experienced by the individuals and families themselves.

The unique functions of closely-knit informal institutions, be they now of a religious nature or not, for the integration of marginal or marginalized individuals and families can also be understood from a social-psychological point-of-view. What is at issue is the resocialization of adults. We know that this involves some kind of conversion experience that affects individual habits and behaviour. There must be a willingness and a preparedness on part of individuals to be open to the restructuring of their practices and norms, just as there must be, on part of groups and their individual representatives, a strong commitment to transfer through a variety of techniques and processes the norms and values that distinguish them. The process must be continuous and open-ended, stretching over a long period of time. This can best be carried out within the context of a community which is highly motivated to integrate the converted. Religious and intentional communities in the wider sense appear to be best-suited for this purpose, though there may be more secular forms of this as well (Alcoholic Anonymous, Weight-Watchers, Synanon, X-Kalay etc.) as well as various forms of psychotherapy. The latter, however, appear not to be particularly

plausible for individuals in the social stratum we are talking about.

The question as to why multiproblem families have been left out from this informal social network deserves special attention. Although systematic research on this question is not available, a great variety of ethnographic studies suggests that such reasons have to be sought in two directions - (1) reasons that lie within the individuals themselves, and (2) reasons that lie within the community.

On the level of individuals, factors that figure most prominently revolve around the frequent lack of socialization into dominant community norms, particularly those connected with the proper care of children and family obligations, attitudes to work, achievement and the general normative order of the community

On the level of the community, the normative order strongly reflecting the value system of mainstream America is fundamentally critical of the behavior pattern prevalent among multiproblem families. The black working-class family, for instance, just like its white counter-part, is an example of a household that has internalized the basic child-rearing values of middle America. The rearing of respectable and well-behaved children is perceived as their major contribution to the community. They emphasize the

the fact that they are stable, that they can be counted on and that none in their household has been in trouble with public authorities. (Willie, 1981)

Similar expressions of critical sentiments toward this "underclass" of multiproblem families and individuals can be found in all working-class neighborhoods, be they white, black, Hispanic, Oriental or whatever. It has to be observed, that there is a good deal of self-righteousness among these working-class poor of the inner city. Having themselves persevered against all the odds, they tend to blame those whose children manifest any kind of deviant behavior. As Sally Merry (Merry, 1984) points out, neighborhoods, particularly if close-knit and morally homogeneous, are not only judgmental, but have the potential for a collective response against specific neighbors who do not conform to their values. And it should be further added, that such negative responses are particularly pronounced when it comes to the unruly, violent and delinquent behavior of children.

On the other hand, if a child should suffer from visible handicaps or sicknesses whose origins are understood, working class communities, regardless of race and ethnicity, have demonstrated their capacity for support and caring to a degree that outdistances that of the middle-classes (Katz, 1979).

IV - Policy Implications

The inquiry into the strength of multiproblem families that was the focus of the first part of this paper suggests that the love and aspirations multiproblem families hold for their children may well be the starting point for the resocialization of their child-rearing practices. Their ability to perform necessary child-rearing tasks appears to be limited by a number of factors, chief among them a demonstrated lack of competent skills as well as knowledge of the parameters set by their children's natural propensities and potential on the one hand, and a lack of access to those informal networks of institutions that customarily support families in their task on a day-to-day basis, on the other. Child-rearing models for children with special needs, along with common-sense techniques and easy-to-acquire skills are available today and could be made more easily accessible through local clinics and support programs. What has not yet been put into place are those support networks that arise out of neighborhood and voluntaristic interactions and that structure and give meaning to the life of individuals. In the second part of this paper the argument was made that the acquisition of child-rearing skills, their performance and maintenance is dependent upon the assistance of these informal networks to an extraordinary degree. Hence the community must become the target of policy efforts.

The reasons why multiproblem families have been left out of these networks that exist in great numbers in the inner cities of American society are complex. The task ahead of us is to find ways and means to involve neighborhood and grass-roots groups and, particularly church-related groups, in this important effort to aid multiproblem families. Needless to say, this effort must come out of communities themselves and cannot be superimposed from without. A good argument can be made that such groups as the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, with its "Adopt a Family" program and the many grass-roots groups associated with it, are best suited for uncovering and establishing such networks. But other groups such as the churches themselves as well as such groups as the Masons, Elks, Shriners, etc. should be targeted to turn, in Robert Woodson's words, "problems into opportunities".

First steps in this direction involve three things:

- 1 - It has to be demonstrated to the respectable, concerned and motivated individuals and groups in the poor neighborhoods of the inner city that multiproblem families, though weak and in trouble, love their children, wish to take care of them and hope to make decent human beings out of them.
- 2 - It has to be demonstrated to both, multiproblem families as well as the community, that although the children of these

families may be at risk to develop unruly, violent and delinquent behavior, this does not have to happen if these potentialities are channeled by means of common-sensical special techniques into acceptable directions.

- 3 - It has to be further demonstrated that this task cannot be carried out adequately by outside agencies but is largely dependent on the active participation of informal networks and voluntaristic organizations, which either are already in place or will bubble up from within the community itself.

If such a plausible demonstration can be made, and I would think that it can, the targeted players in the effort to prevent delinquency, family and community, may well rise to the challenge.

In the establishment of such networks, individual mentors will have to be identified. In the selection of mentors, attention should be given to their staying potential as well as their ability to transmit practical skills. They have to be strongly motivated to take on such a demanding and continuous task. It would seem that such individuals can best be located within religious and intentional communities, though other grass-roots mentors (like Jimmy Gray of Kennilworth Housing, Washington) may be found outside of such organized groups.

The mentors themselves need training, guidance and emotional support. Here, it would seem, is the proper place for professionals and child-rearing experts. That is to say, professional expertise can perhaps best assist multiproblem families indirectly, by training and guiding mentors who "adopt" multiproblem families. A lot of thought will have to be given to the establishment of such a mentor support system. Information hot-lines and access to professional experts at all times seem to be indicated.

As with everything else, there is, of course, also a financial dimension to such an approach. Whatever else it can do, a community-based mentor system for multiproblem families is likely to be more cost-effective than any other. A voucher mechanism (say, for one-hour-daily mentor help) seems to be a plausible option.

A final note on a delinquency approach based on multiproblem families and the communities in which they live is in order. While it will, to my mind, be difficult to argue for direct interventions in the life style of multiproblem families in order to reduce whatever problems that may affect them, it is a different matter to argue for the kind of assistance they obviously need and want. Instead of continuing or even expanding the government

interventionist trend into the life of individuals that has marked past decades the time has come for multiproblem families and their communities to forge new ways to solve the needs of their children.

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